

THE LIFE STORIES OF 1.5 GENERATION KOREAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT  
ADOLESCENTS: EXAMINING THEIR ENGLISH LEARNING  
AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## **Abstract**

The lives of 1.5 generation Korean American immigrant adolescents are often misunderstood as they are viewed as successful, well adjusting, model students, while in reality they are going through various challenges with which they do not know how to handle. This study examines the life experiences, especially school experiences, of 1.5 generation Korean American adolescents who immigrated to the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s. This study explores how these immigrant adolescents went through their early immigrant years, how they lived through the U.S. secondary school system, how bilingual education programs and policies affected their lives, and how their experiences influenced them as they moved into their adulthood.

I conducted life history interviews with eleven Korean American immigrants who came to the U.S. as adolescents and started their U.S. education in secondary schools. The informants were from six different states (Alaska, California, Illinois, Maryland, Oregon, Washington), had been living in the U.S. at least ten years, and were in their twenties to late thirties at the time of the first interview. I have conducted two interviews with most of the informants. Because the informants resided in various geographic locations, I have conducted face-to-face interviews, and phone interviews were also completed in case it was impossible to conduct a face-to-face interview. However, each informant has taken at least one face-to-face interview.

For many informants, the time they spent in school as secondary students was quite challenging; having to learn a new language and culture, developing and accepting their new identities as linguistic and racial/ethnic minorities in school, experiencing constant social distance and isolation from the mainstream student population, dealing

with frustration due to linguistic and academic challenges and acknowledging their limited social participation in school all added to the distress they experienced in school and in their new immigrant lives.

The informants' stories also indicate that ESL programs were playing important roles in the informants' social and emotional adjustments in school and they also provided the basic levels of English instruction for them. However, many informants shared their questions and concerns about the effectiveness of their ESL programs. They were disappointed that the programs did not deliver high quality and challenging English instruction and some felt that staying in the ESL programs was actually not helpful for their English learning. At the same time, the sheltered aspect of the ESL program, although it created a comfortable atmosphere in ESL class, resulted in separation between the ESL students and the mainstream peers in school.

Focusing on adolescent immigrants, this study also sheds light on the diversity that exists within 1.5 generation Korean American population which has yet to be fully acknowledged by educators and researchers. This study has added more dimensions and complexity to understanding the experiences of 1.5 generation Korean Americans and how federal language policies become embodied through these students' lives.

*To my heavenly Father*

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“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11, NIV). It was this verse that made me decide to come to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for my doctoral study. I knew that it was going to be a training time in many ways - spiritually, personally and academically - but I did not realize how long and how difficult this training time would be. As I think about finishing up my dissertation and this phase of my life, I cannot help but thank My Lord, Jesus, for blessing me with so many wonderful people who helped me go through this long, challenging journey. Without their love, support, guidance, encouragement and prayers, I would not have this opportunity to complete my program and to write this special section of my dissertation.

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## Introduction

### My Story

I was in the tenth grade when my father told my family that we were going to immigrate to the United States. I was attending an all-girls' high school in South Korea at the time. As a tenth grader who recently started her high school life<sup>1</sup>, I was just getting used to the rules and the culture of the new school. The news of my departure for the U.S. made my classmates quite excited. "America! You get to see MacGyver there."<sup>2</sup> "How nice you are going to America. You don't have to worry about English any more. You will be very good at it!" Many of my classmates envied me for different reasons, but one of the biggest reasons must have been the thought that I could leave behind the stress of the college entrance exam which started pressuring us slowly. After spending about three months together, I said good-bye to my homeroom teacher and my classmates in my high school in Korea. It was June, 1987.

My father decided to settle in Santa Barbara, California, where one of his good friends lived. "You can make a good quiet life here in Santa Barbara," his friend suggested. That summer in Santa Barbara, my family had high hopes of living in our new country. My mother was excited at the thought of attending the Adult School to learn English. My two younger sisters and I expected to attend our respective schools in a couple of months. My father's friend, who had been living in Santa Barbara for many years, told us that we would love our new schools which were much easier academically

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<sup>1</sup> In South Korea, middle schools cover 7<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> grades, and high schools cover 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students.

<sup>2</sup> MacGyver was an American TV show that was popular in Korea at that time. The actor who played the main character was known as "MacGyver" rather than his real name.

than Korean schools and offered many great extracurricular activities. My sisters and I walked by the nearby high school's baseball field one day and we were amazed that a local high school could have such a big field. "Soon, you will learn English well. Don't worry about it. Korean students do well in American schools. Compared to Korean schools, American schools are easy. You will have no problem," said our neighbor.

My family could not stay in Santa Barbara much longer, however. The town did not have many job opportunities for my dad and after trying out several job applications and attempting to open his own tailor, my father figured that as a non-English speaking immigrant who was also not familiar with American culture, he did not have a great chance to succeed in his business in a town predominately populated by white people. After about two months, we left for Los Angeles, California, where my father opened his shop in Koreatown<sup>3</sup>. Instead of going to the Adult School to study, my mother, in order to handle the financial burden to open my dad's store, started working at a sweatshop factory in downtown Los Angeles.

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<sup>3</sup> Hurh (1993) describes Koreatown as "the center of ethnic business and sociocultural activities" for Koreans (p.59-60). Koreatown, or "K town," is a receiving area for many new Korean immigrants and it is also a place where many Korean elders prefer to live for its ample social and cultural supports (Hurh, 1993; Park, 1997, p.77). Although many Koreans live in suburban areas, they still run their business in this ethnic enclave and keep their strong "ethnic attachment to Korean culture" (Hurh, 1993, p.60). The development of K town is common in big cities such as Los Angeles, New York and Chicago where there are heavy Korean immigrant populations. According to Takaki (1996), the history of Koreatown in Los Angeles can be traced back to 1905 when a Korean Presbyterian Church was founded on Jefferson Boulevard near the University of Southern California campus. Takaki (1996) notes that other Korean churches, businesses and community organizations appeared around the area next forty years (p.105). After 1965, the number of Koreans in Los Angeles increased dramatically and a new community was formed around Olympic Boulevard around mid-1970s. By the early 1990s, there were more than 200,000 Koreans in Los Angeles county, and the concentration of various Korean businesses, which include liquor stores, gas stations, restaurants, banks and lawyers', accountants' and doctors' offices, churches, temples, and community organizations along with its *Han' gul*, Korean Alphabet, signs filled the streets in Koreatown such as Olympic Boulevard, Western Avenue, Vermont Avenue and others (Takaki, 1996, p.109-110). One Korean immigrant said, "One does not feel that one lives in America when one lives on Olympic Boulevard" (Takaki, 1996, p.91).

We moved to a small suburban city that was about half an hour away from Los Angeles. My father chose to move to this town because some of his friends lived there and the town's high school had a good academic reputation; one of the recent graduates from the school, who was a Korean American, went to Harvard University. Many of my father's friends who lived in the town told my parents that the town had a good school district, and my parents thought it would be helpful to move to a good school district for my sisters and me. Before the school started in August, one of my parents' friends who we met in this new town, unlike the friend in Santa Barbara who was quite positive about upcoming life in American school, told us that my sisters and I should expect to cry at least once in our new schools. I did not understand what she meant by that statement until I attended my high school.

The first day that I attended my new high school, I was quite terrified by just the look of the school buildings. As I walked into the big, foreboding school building that looked so foreign to me, and soon after I got my schedule from my counselor, I was escorted to my first English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) class. There were about twenty-five students sitting in their individual desks in several rows. At the back of the classroom, there was a small round table with a few more students. The classroom was not small but it looked quite crowded. My ESL teacher, Ms. Jane, took me to the back table and had me sit there. There were two more girls from Mexico who were also new that day.

I soon learned that there were several other ESL classes in our school but only one ESL teacher. The classes were divided by the students' English proficiency levels and the size of each class was quite full like the class that I was in. Ms. Jane, the only

ESL teacher, had to take care of those classes all by herself. Many of the students were from Mexico and Korea. Some were from Hong Kong, Japan and other countries. The students formed their own cliques based on their nationalities and their native languages. During recess, we heard many different languages coming from different corners of the classroom. Often the class seemed to be chaotic. It was obviously too much for just one teacher to take care of several ESL classes that were filled with young adolescents who had no English skills yet still had so much energy, curiosity and desire to express themselves in their own ways. Even to my own young eyes, the ESL class was not going well. I once thought about talking to the school's principal to let him know what was going on in the ESL classroom. I felt that our class was neglected by the rest of the school, and people did not care much about what was happening in that classroom. It was only Ms. Jane's job to know them.

The first semester I took two or three ESL classes, algebra, a choir class and Physical Education (PE). One of the most challenging classes for me was the PE class. The PE class was designed for students to play different sports games during the semester: starting with baseball, basketball, tennis, volleyball, squash, etc. Not only was I not athletic, I did not know the rules of many of those games since I was not familiar with them. By the time I understood the rules and developed the basic skills to play, the class moved to the next game event. However, there was a bigger reason why I did not like the PE class. In PE class, the isolation from other students that I was feeling in my new school was visibly and brutally revealed. I could clearly see with my eyes how much I was not welcomed in this class; I was always the last one to be picked when we made the teams. On the first day of the PE class, I sat in the gym waiting to be placed for

a team. As time went by and the teams formed, I noticed that only a few students were left out: a couple of Hispanic students and myself. I was not sure if the other students were also in ESL class, but they also looked new to the school like I was.

I could not enjoy my PE class at all. Nobody was really interested in talking to me. A few girls said “hi” to me at the beginning of the class from time to time. I wanted to make some friends in the class but it was hard to talk to anyone. Slowly my classmates discovered how unathletic I was, which did not help my situation much. I was always hoping that I did not cause my team to lose because of me. The feeling of loneliness and the pressure to play the games started accumulating inside of me although I was not consciously aware of them. One afternoon during a volleyball game, I finally broke down. A ball flew over the net and hit me directly on my forehead. The sudden blow struck me with intense physical pain and shame. The teacher told me to go to the bathroom and check if my head was all right. Everyone in my class seemed to look at me. I left the court and walked to the bathroom alone. I went into the bathroom stall, closed the door, sat down and then, suddenly tears burst out and I started sobbing. A couple of girls came to the bathroom and asked if I was all right outside the stall but I could not say anything<sup>4</sup>. I was crying because my head hurt so much but I knew I was not crying just because of the physical pain. Somehow as I was sobbing alone in that dark bathroom, I remembered what my father’s new friend told me: “You guys will cry at least once in the new school.” I thought to myself, “at least once....” It was my very first one.

**I am the problem.** I do not remember if I cried again at school after that incident, but I did see a friend of mine crying out of frustration in the ESL classroom that year.

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<sup>4</sup> I was not much aware of the racial diversity of the U.S. at the time but as I reflect upon the incident, I think these girls were Latina students.

After one year of ESL classes, I started taking regular English and other college-preparatory classes. On the surface level, I was a successful Asian student who met the typical stereotype; I was quiet and hardworking. I never caused any problems at school and earned good grades even with my problematic English. Whenever I got my report cards which had a lot of “As,” most of my teachers, my parents and their friends must have thought that I was adjusting very well. However, school for me was a very difficult place to be. I was still struggling with my English which was a constant source of stress. I was feeling isolated from the rest of the student body. Although the PE class was a more visible and direct display of what I was going through at that time, the feeling of loneliness and being neglected by others had become the theme of the rest of my high school years.

I mostly associated with my Korean friends whom I met in ESL classes. Though small in number, about four or five girls, they were the only ones who were willing to talk, study, and eat with me. I mostly talked to them in-between classes and depended on them to ease the stress I was experiencing at school. In most of my classes, however, I felt distant from the mainstream students<sup>5</sup> and not really fitting in. I rarely talked to my classmates in the regular classes. It seemed that nobody took any notice of me because I was too quiet. In Korea, although I was not the most outgoing student in my class, talking to my classmates and those around me was never a problem and I easily made friends. However, it seemed that my personality, along with my poor English, was not good enough to break the invisible wall between my classmates and me. I felt that I

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<sup>5</sup> Lee (2005), for example, defines the mainstream “American” culture as “white, middle-class culture” (p.8). By “mainstream students,” I mean students who linguistically and culturally identify themselves with the “white, middle-class culture” in school and society.

needed to be more extroverted and active in order to be accepted by them. “If I were more outgoing, it would be different...,” I told myself many times with sighs.

Not having much interaction with my classmates not only made me feel lonely at school but it also influenced my English learning. Though I could tell that my listening comprehension and writing skill were slowly improving as I attended the school, my speaking did not get better since I barely spoke to anyone in English. I lived in the U.S. but finding a chance to talk in English was a rare opportunity for me. I always thought that it was my own fault that I did not have friends and did not acquire English well. If I were more sociable and brave enough to talk to my American classmates, I would have had a lot of opportunity to make friends and to learn English better. However, I did not initiate those interactions, and therefore, I was the one to be blamed.

**Meeting other Korean students in college.** I later attended college in Washington and met more Korean students who immigrated about the same time I did. As we talked about our experiences in high schools, I found that we shared many similar experiences. Although the exact details of our experiences varied, I realized that some of the struggles that I was dealing with were not just my problems. First of all, I realized that I was not the only one who felt the deep sense of separation from other students in school. This feeling of isolation actually continued even in college where meeting new friends was harder than in high schools. One of my friends contemplated transferring to a college in Korea because she did not feel like she belonged in the university that she was attending. The extended time of loneliness was too tiresome for my friend and she wanted to go back to Korea where she believed that she would fit in.

Secondly, I noticed that we all felt very inadequate and incompetent about our English. My friends and I had taken different kinds of ESL classes for different lengths of time in our high schools, but none of us felt that we actually gained a lot from those classes and felt confident in our English-speaking ability. Although English has been the major source of stress and concern for me throughout my high school years, after coming to college, I realized even more clearly that I was not well prepared to take the college level courses with my limited English.

I also noticed that many of my friends blamed themselves for what they were experiencing in school. My friends, like I did, seemed to think that it was their introverted personality that prohibited them from interacting with others and learn more English. They also felt bad about being quiet and not being able to reach out to others as boldly as they would like to.

Lastly, I could relate to my friends who were pressured to help their parents. Many of us had to help out our parents who depended on us for our translation, interpretation, and physical labors to run their small businesses. From making hospital appointments to reading government documents for their business, I had to be there for my parents. Though I wanted to help them, sometimes I wanted to run away from such adult-related responsibilities because although I spoke a little better English than they did, I was not fluent and I was still a young person trying to make sense of things.

**Questions about my experience.** Years later as I started my graduate study, I had a chance to take an adolescent development course and learn more about the structure of American high schools. This made me realize that the high school years are a tough time for many teenagers. I learned about different high school cliques such as Clowns,

Nerds and Jocks, and how the social pressure to be accepted by others is as intense for mainstream students as it is for immigrant students. I had never understood the complexity of the social ladder in high school while I was attending it. I had no clue that being a non-English speaking student with a different dress-code, I was placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Then, I could understand why other students did not reach out to me more; they would not dare try to be friends with someone of a “lesser social status.”

This realization and my interview with other Korean American students made me think about my experiences from different perspectives. For a pilot research project during my doctoral program, I had a chance to interview some Korean American college students who came to the U.S. during their adolescence. Although these students came to the U.S. much later than I did, late 1990s, I was surprised to hear many similar stories from them. Gradually, I asked myself if what I had experienced in school was really the result of my personal inadequacy as I had always thought, or if there were other factors that were greater than an individual choice that contributed to my experiences. Were they really just my problems and my personal faults? If they were, then why did many of my friends and even some people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds identify themselves with me when I shared my story?

This is how this study has started. I want to hear the stories of others who came to the U.S. as adolescents and to understand what happened to them when they first came as immigrants. I want to know how they went through their early immigrant years, how they view their own experiences and how their experiences influence their lives today. By hearing their individual stories, I want to examine the lives of adolescent immigrants,

in particular Korean Americans, and see what kind of effect the early immigration experiences had on them as they moved into their adulthood in the U.S. Thus my research question has evolved into the following:

*What are the effects of bilingual education programs and policies on the lives of immigrant students? Specifically, how did the educational experiences of 1.5 Korean immigrant adolescents affect their lives as adults?*

My research question centers on their experiences in schools since schools are the critical and contested space where most of their conflicts and exposures to the new language and culture take place. However, I do not limit my question to the experiences at schools only, but includes and extends to their family life and community involvement; since education takes place not only in schools but through various life experiences as well. What they faced and went through in different domains of life are all important and valuable educational experiences which have shaped their lives and their identities.

### **Significance of Study**

In my effort to understand this group of people and their experiences in the U.S., I found relatively few empirical studies were conducted on this population (e.g. Danico, 2004; Hurh, 1993, Park, 1999). Although there are growing studies on 1.5 generation Korean Americans that emerged from the late 1990s, the attention to this population is still lacking. Also many studies that examine immigrant students tend to look at their problems only in the context of Limited English Proficient (LEP) issues.

By conducting life history interviews with 1.5 generation Korean Americans, my study can add several meaningful information in understanding this population. First, my study will give 1.5 generation Korean Americans a chance to tell their life stories in their

own voices. It not only lets them speak of their experiences but also helps them to reflect upon their own experiences, their lives and their identities and share their own views on such topics. Second, this study allows the informants to share their life stories from their adolescence and helps us see their life trajectories since their immigration to the U.S. The stories they share will allow us to follow how they, as adolescent immigrants, have grown up and moved into their adulthoods, and how juggling through different linguistic and cultural challenges have impacted their developmental growth after immigration.

Focusing on adolescent immigrants, this study also sheds light on the diversity that exists within 1.5 generation Korean American population which has yet to be fully acknowledged by educators and researchers. For example, the information shared in this study will help us see how the experiences of adolescent immigrants are unique and different from those who immigrated to the U.S. as children. The differences between them include the way they learn and react to their educational and social environments, and, therefore, the different needs they face in learning English and in dealing with other issues in school and beyond. Such information can also be used to understand the diversity within the Limited English Proficient (LEP) student population in schools. Overall, my study will add more dimensions and complexity to understanding the experiences of 1.5 generation Korean Americans and how federal language policies become embodied through students' lives.

## **Chapter Outline**

Following the Introduction chapter, Chapter one and Chapter two will review two important policies that impacted 1.5 generation Korean Americans: the U.S. immigration

policy and the language education policy for LEP students. Chapter one discusses the history of the U.S. immigration policy and how the policy has influenced the development of the Asian America, particularly the Korean American immigration. Then, Chapter two looks more closely at how the education policy for language minority students, particularly bilingual education policy, have been developed and impacted the lives of immigrant students including 1.5 generation Korean Americans. In Chapter three, the methodological issues are examined and I explain how life history interview can be useful in answering the proposed research question.

The data story will be divided into three separate chapters. In Chapter four, English education for adolescent immigrant students will be explored. This chapter will address how the informants learned English, what kind of programs and environments were provided for them in school, how effectively such programs helped them acquire English, and what other ways they incorporated to learn English. Chapter five will focus on the social experiences the adolescent immigrants had in school. This chapter will examine particularly what was happening to these immigrant students as they navigated to find their niche within the existing social structure in schools and how their experiences influenced their English learning. Lastly, the concluding chapter will briefly describe the informants' experiences at home and community and examine any lingering effects these experiences had on the informants' lives today along with some policy implications.

## Chapter One

### **The U.S. Immigration Policy and the Development of Asian America and Korean American Immigration**

#### **U.S. Immigration Policy**

In 1965, Congress passed the Hart-Cellar Act which abolished the national origins quota system of the U.S. immigration policy which was introduced in 1924. Since 1965, more than twenty million immigrants have come to the United States (U.S.) which indicates “almost one million immigrants per year” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p.55). Because the U.S. had not had mass immigration since the late 1920s, the impact of the 1965 Act was tremendous. It not only opened the door to a great number of immigrants, but also changed the makeup of the U.S. immigration. For example, contrary to previous immigration history, it permitted many immigrants from Asian and Latin American countries (Hing, 1993; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Although restrictionists and nativists often blame the 1965 Act for allowing too many Asian and Latino/a immigrants, the original intent of this act was not to increase Asians or Latino/as in the U.S., but to encourage the number of Southern and Eastern European immigrants whose immigration was halted by the 1924 policy (Hing, 1993; Ong & Liu, 2000; Rumbaut, 1997). The rapid increase of Asian and Latino/a immigrants was a big surprise to many politicians including those who worked on the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act.

**The beginning of the U.S. immigration policy.** It is commonly stated that the U.S. is a nation of immigrants. The flow of people coming from all over the world seeking a better life never ceased since the beginning of the nation’s history. As the flow

of immigrants continued, the debate over who and how many should be admitted have also been ongoing questions in the U.S. According to Hing (1999), the debate existed even among the founding fathers. Whereas George Washington welcomed even the “oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions” in 1783, Benjamin Franklin, another founding fathers, stated in 1751 that German immigrants should not be allowed since they were “generally the most stupid of their own nation,” and would have problem learning English (quoted from Hing, 1999, p.1).

Despite such differences in opinions, the U.S. kept an open-door policy towards the newcomers until 1875<sup>6</sup> (National Research Council, 1997; Hing, 1999). Although the Alien Act of 1798 attempted to deport harmful aliens under the president’s authority, the act was soon expired because it was so unpopular (Hing, 1999). In 1875, the U.S. set its first restrictive immigration law to ban “persons who were destitute, engaged in immoral activities or physically handicapped” (National Research Council, 1997, p.23). However, it is reasonable to state that the first major restrictive U.S. immigration law was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which was purely based on race (Hing, 1999; National Research Council, 1997).

### **History of Asian American Immigration: Before 1965**

Unlike the popular idea of Asian Americans being relatively recent immigrants, the history of Asian American immigration is more than one hundred sixty years old.

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<sup>6</sup> The open-door policy, however, was still selective in terms of the origins of the immigrants. The first U.S. census in 1790 shows that out of a population of 3,227,000, 75 percent were English, Scots, and Scotch-Irish (Hing, 2004, p.13). The majority of the rest of the population was also Europeans such as German (eight percent), the Dutch, French, Swedes, and Spanish (Hing, 2004). The number of blacks in 1790 census was 750,000 (Daniels, 2002; Hing, 2004). In 1790, the federal legislation also restricted the naturalized citizenship only to the free white men (Chang, 1993; Lopez, 1996). Although this legislation was amended for African descents in 1878, it still excluded Asians until 1952 (Chang, 1993; Daniels, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Takaki, 1989).

Though the reasons for their immigration varied, the arrival of Asian immigrants to the U.S. is quite delicately intertwined with the need for cheap labor in the U.S. economy (Hing, 1993). For example, Zolberg (1995) reports that the U.S. forced an unwilling China to a treaty in 1863 to let the U.S. and Chinese citizens to travel each others' country freely. This allowed the American merchants to openly conduct their businesses in China, but the bigger purpose of the treaty, according to Zolberg (1995), was to "procure Chinese labor for railroad construction on the West Coast" (p.120). At the same time, many Chinese were trying to escape from the poverty and political uproar in their country caused by the Opium War and the fall of the Qing dynasty (Takaki, 1989). As they faced these economic and political hardships in their homeland, the growing industrial economy in the U.S. requiring more cheap laborers from other countries must have been very attractive to many Chinese (Ong & Liu, 2000; Takaki, 1989). The first Chinese immigrants came to the U.S. around the 1840s and settled either in Hawaii as the plantation workers or in the mainland to meet the needs in railroad construction, laundries, and domestic service (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Hing, 1993; Takaki, 1989).

The number of Chinese immigrants continued to grow, and in the 1860s, about one-third of miners in the West were Chinese (National Research Council, 1997). Initially, these Chinese workers were welcomed and encouraged by the U.S. government, but soon they faced strong anti-Chinese movements among the general public. For example, there were movements against buying Chinese-made goods, many San Francisco newspapers published anti-Chinese editorials, and political parties such as the Know-Nothing party, claimed to "keep America pure" by excluding non-White immigrants in the U.S. (Hing, 1993, p.21). The main target of this racism was Irish on

the East Coast and Chinese on the West (Hing, 1993). In addition, the foreign miner's tax law, which was introduced in 1850 in order to keep Latinos from the mines, was created to target Chinese miners in 1852 (Chan, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Hing, 1993). Many of these movements were done by white workers who felt menaced by the cheap Chinese labor in the West (Chang, 1993; Hing, 1993).

According to Takaki (1989), the American employers both in Hawaii and in the mainland used Chinese workers not only for the source of cheap labor but also as the means to control the white laborers. Knowing the racial tension between white and Chinese laborers, the employers did not need to worry if they would unify and start strikes together: the employers knew that the white workers did not accept Chinese laborers. Understanding the white workers' contemptuous attitude towards Chinese, the employers also gave the white workers the control over Chinese laborers to boost their self-esteem and make them feel superior.

I think that every white man who is intelligent and able to work...who has the capacity of being something else, can get to be something else by the presence of Chinese labor easier than he could without it...After we got Chinamen to work, we took the more intelligent of the white laborers and made foremen of them. Several of them who never expected, never had a dream that they were going to be anything but shovelers of dirt, hewers of wood and drawers of water are now respectable farmers, owning farms. They got a start by controlling Chinese labor on our railroad. (Testimony of Crocker, in Takaki, 1989, p. 28)

As the organized labor movement gained more power, it resisted the capitalists' support for more Asian immigrants and influenced Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Hing, 1999; National Research Council, 1997; Ong & Liu, 2000). Even before the Exclusion Act was passed, however, several laws were approved to discourage Chinese immigration. For instance, the Nationality Act of 1790 originally mandated only "free white persons" to be the naturalized citizens. In 1870, the law was

amended to include those of African descent to be naturalized, but it still forbade Chinese (Chang, 1993; Delgado-Stefancic, 2000; Hing, 1993, p23; Takaki, 1989). In 1875, Congress also passed the Page Law that forbade Chinese women to enter the U.S. for potentials for prostitution, and this law prevented Chinese immigrants from forming families (Aarim-Heriot. 2003; Chan, 1991; Hing, 1993).

The Chinese Exclusion Act allowed to keep Chinese laborers for ten years and closed all other Chinese immigration except teachers, students and merchants with a small quota system (Chang, 1993; Daniels, 2002; Hing, 1993; Takaki, 1989). Even after creating the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Congress made sure they kept out all Chinese by developing the Scott Act of 1888 and the Geary Act of 1892 (Hing, 1993). The Scott Act banned the admission of all Chinese laborers including those who left the U.S. temporarily with the legitimate document for reentry (Chan, 1991; Hing, 1993). The Geary Act required all Chinese laborers to register with immigration officials (Hing, 1993).

As a result of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the employers needed to find other source of cheap labor and laborers from other Asian countries, such as Japan and Korea were admitted (Deldado & Stefancic, 2000; Takaki, 1989). Japanese workers, for example, were known to be fast, hard working, and willing to do the jobs the white workers were not willing to take, and they were in great need in the fruit farms of Hawaii and California (Chan, 1991; Hing, 1993; Takaki, 1989). However, when Japanese workers demanded wage increase after many years of hard work, farmers in California brought Asian Indian workers and later Mexican workers and Filipinos (Takaki, 1989).

As in the Chinese case, after a short period of appreciating their labor, the anti-Asian movement started against these other Asian groups in the West (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). For example, by the 1890s, the organized labor for white workers created “the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League,” “Anti-Jap Laundry League” and “the Anti-Japanese League of Alameda County in California” (Dealgado & Stefancic, 2000; Hing, 1993, p.28). The San Francisco earthquake in 1906 heightened the hatred toward Japanese and caused anti-Japanese rioting (Hing, 1993). Finally, a treaty was made between Japanese and the U.S. government in 1907 and 1908 (Chan, 1991; Hing, 1993). Known as the Gentlemen’s Agreement, this treaty forced the Japanese government to restrict sending its laborers to the U.S., and in return, the U.S. government allowed the wives and children of Japanese laborers who were already in the U.S. to be united in the U.S. and stopped the segregation of Japanese children in San Francisco schools (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Hing, 1993). This cycle of bringing Asian laborers to meet the need of labor in the U.S. and then starting the oppression toward them based on racial and economic nativism continued (Hing, 1993; Takaki, 1989).

In the meantime, the U.S. was also receiving massive immigrants from Europe between 1860 and 1910. By 1917, anti-Catholicism and racial nativism against the Southern and Eastern European immigrants such as Italians, Hungarians and Russians were surging in the U.S. and Congress passed an Act in 1917, which required immigrants aged sixteen or older a literacy test in English or their own language, to control the new crop of Southeastern European immigrants (Hing, 1993; Hing, 1999; Massey, 1995; National Research Council, 1997). This Act of 1917 also created the “Asiatic Barred Zone” in order to extend the Chinese Exclusion Act to other Asian countries such as

South Asian, Arabian and Indochinese countries (Hing, 1993, p.32; Hing, 1999; National Research Council, 1997).

In 1924, Congress passed the National Origin Quota Act which limited the number of immigrants based on their country of origin (Hing, 1993; Hing, 1999; Massey, 1995; National Research Council, 1997; Ong & Liu, 2000; Takaki, 1989). This act set the number of immigrants as two percent of the number of immigrants in 1890, the year before the mass immigration from the Southeastern European countries began. However, Asians were not even allowed this two percent rule and the exclusion based on the “Asiatic Barred Zone” continued (Hing, 1993). The public attitude towards Asian immigrants was still hostile and during World War II, Japanese immigrants were constantly threatened by the U.S. media and various social and labor organizations in the name of the U.S. safety. In 1942, Executive Order 9066 was issued by President Roosevelt and interned 120,000 Japanese, although two-third of them were U.S. citizens by birth (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Pak, 2002).

The end of World War II and the start of the Cold war against communism, however, changed the political situation and the foreign relation of the U.S. which affected its immigration policy. For example, during World War II, Chiang Kai Chek, the Chinese general, pointed to the Roosevelt administration that Japanese were using the Chinese Exclusion Act, which he claimed as an unsuitable action for the World War II ally, for wartime propaganda purposes (Zolberg, 1995). The Roosevelt administration offered the Chinese Repealer in 1943 which allowed 105 legal immigrants from China per year (Hing, 1993; Hing, 1999; National Research Council, 1997; Zolberg, 1995). After almost one hundred years since the first group of Chinese workers immigrated to

the U.S., the Chinese Repealer also allowed Chinese immigrants to be naturalized and become American citizens. In 1946, the immigration law also let in Chinese wives of citizens as nonquota immigration status (Hing, 1999). Similar changes were made for other war allies such as India and the Philippines, but the quota system and the anti-Asian feeling still existed (Hing, 1993).

In 1952, Congress passed the McCarran-Walter Act and created “the Asia-Pacific Triangle” which replaced the 1917’s “Asiatic Barred Zone” (Hing, 1993; Hing, 1999; Ong & Liu, 2000). This act abolished the exclusion of Asian immigrants but established the new quota of 2000 Asians from “the Asia-Pacific Triangle” zone. The zone covered “from India to Japan and all Pacific islands north of Australia and New Zealand” (Hing, 1993, p.38). This rule, however, was applied to everyone who had at least half of his/her ancestry that belonged to one of the nineteen countries within the zone regardless of the person’s birthplace or citizenship. Whereas a person whose father was Russian and the mother was Norwegian and was born in Britain was counted as an immigrant from Britain, a person who was born and had a citizenship in Britain with British father and Japanese mother would be counted a Japanese immigrant (Hing, 1993; Ong & Liu, 2000).

The history before 1965 clearly illustrates that the U.S. immigration policies have been “racial nativist laws” that were largely shaped by fear and hatred against other races, and they were explicitly expressed towards Asian immigrants (Hing, 1999, p.2). Time after time, numerous legislations were enacted to close the U.S. borders to Asian immigrants and exclude Asian Americans from U.S. society. When it seemed to open its doors to Asians in 1952, the policy makers still wanted to make sure that they had strict control over the number of possible immigrants from Asian countries.

## **Policy Changes After 1965**

When Congress tried to pass the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952, President Truman vetoed the bill because he and other critics believed that the law was not in unison with the nation's new role as a leader of democracy (Hing, 1999). They accused the national origin quota system and the development of the Asia-Pacific Triangle of basically establishing the principle that "some people are more equal than others" (Hing, 1999, p.7). Nonetheless, Congress overruled the veto and passed the bill. President Truman then appointed a special commission to examine the immigration and naturalization system, and the commission recommended many changes including the abolition of national origin quota system (Hing, 1999; National Research Council, 1997). Three presidents, Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy, advocated for a new immigration policy that did not discriminate based on race or national origin, and finally the change came in 1965 under President Johnson (Díaz-Briquets, 1995; Hing, 1993; Hing, 1999).

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the national origin quota system and allocated 20,000 immigration visas for every country, except the Western Hemisphere, regardless of the size of the country (Hing, 1999; National Research Council, 1997; Ong & Liu, 2000). Instead of the quota system based on national origin, the new immigration Act used family reunification as a main preference category for the new annual quota for each country (Ong & Liu, 2000; Rumbaut, 1997; Takaki, 1989). For example, for 80 percent of the 170,000 available visas for the Eastern Hemisphere, the preference was given to the extended family relatives of U.S. citizens and to the immediate family members of permanent residents<sup>7</sup> (Hing, 1999; Ong & Liu, 2001). The

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<sup>7</sup> The spouses, unmarried children under age 21, and the parents of U.S. citizens were considered as non-quota status.

Act also created two occupational preference categories which gave priority to professionals and skilled workers in order to recruit immigrants who were professionals and skilled in the areas such as engineering, science or health - the areas the U.S. wanted to strengthen for its changing economy (Hing, 1993; Ong & Liu, 2000; Takaki, 1989). Lastly, a non-preference category was also created for those who invested \$40,000 in a business in the U.S. (Hing, 1999, p.8).

**Factors attributed for the changes in 1965.** The abolition of the national origin quota system of 1924 was possible because of different social and political changes within and outside of the U.S. As mentioned above, the U.S. became more sensitive of its own problem of racism, especially during the Cold War era. The changing global power structure after World War II made the U.S. the new leader in the free world that would stand against the communist Soviet. For this new role of the world leader, the U.S. needed to be the example of true democracy to other countries. The continuing problems of racism against African Americans, the incarceration of Japanese Americans during the War and the explicitly racist immigration policy, however, were some of the examples that would hinder the U.S. from taking this new leadership (Hing, 1993; Ong & Lui, 2000).

At the same time, there were some major changes happening within U.S. society. The Civil Rights Movement and the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 along with the growing U.S. economy allowed empowerment of racial minorities and made more people conscious of racism in society (Ong & Liu, 2000; Takaki, 1989). These political and social changes also impacted immigration policy. Not only did the Presidents, starting from President Truman and on down to Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy,

insist on changing the immigration policy, even organized labor unions accepted the national goal to be a global leader in the free world and did not fight against the abolition of the national quota system (Ong & Liu, 2000).

After a long history of excluding Asian immigrants through various mandates, it seemed that the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 welcomed Asian immigrants at last. Some even blame that this legislation allowed too many Asian and Latino/a immigrants, which eventually started a new mass immigration in the U.S. However, unlike the popular belief that 1965 law purposefully admitted many Asian and Latino/a immigrants, the intention and the effect of the 1965 Immigration Act are often misunderstood and overstated (Jensen & Chitose, 1997; Massey, 1995; Rumbaut, 1997).

Although the 1965 Act removed the national quota system of 1924, this Act, for the first time in history, also established a restriction from the Western Hemisphere in order to limit immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>8</sup> (Massey, 1995; Rumbaut, 1997). Also, neither Congress nor even the leaders of the Asian community expected that the reform would bring many immigrants from Asian countries. Since the new Act preferred family reunification system and there were numerous European immigrants and very small number of Asian immigrants, the effect of abolition of national origin quota on Asian population was understood as more symbolic (Ong & Liu,

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<sup>8</sup> The national origin quota system of 1929 put 150,000 as the maximum number of immigration from the Eastern Hemisphere. The Western Hemisphere was consisted of North, Central, and South America as well as the Caribbean. "The rest of the world makes up the Eastern Hemisphere" (National Research Council, 1997, p.26). Since Asiatic Barred Zone prohibited immigration from Asian countries, the Eastern Hemisphere practically meant Europe. Western Hemisphere, therefore, was not under the national origin quota system. In the case of Mexican immigrants, the U.S. has a long history of using their cheap labor and many Mexicans, especially those who lived in the areas that used to be Mexican territory, such as California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and parts of Utah, Colorado and Nevada, migrated between the borders as seasonal workers based on the labor demands in the regions. Starting in 1913, there have been attempts to Americanize Mexican immigrants, but during the Great Depression in the 1930s, the Americanization program was ended, and the US government expelled about half a million Mexican immigrants to Mexico (Hing, 1999, p.5). After 1965, the Western Hemisphere received 120,000 visas per year and by 1976, about 40,000 of the annual visas were used by Mexicans (Hing, 1999, p.9).

2000). Attorney General Robert Kennedy, for example, anticipated “only five thousand immigrants from the Asia-Pacific region” (Hing, 1993, p.39). President Johnson also focused on the impact of the new immigration law on Eastern and Southern Europe and did not mention possible impact on Asian countries during his 1964 State of the Union address (Hing, 1993). These indicate that the 1965 Immigration Act did not plan nor expect the influx of Asian or Latino/a immigration. As Massey (1995) observed, the result of the 1965 Act “occurred in spite of the legislation, not because of it” (p.638).

**The unexpected outcomes.** Several factors contributed to this unexpected outcome of the 1965 Act. First of all, although the U.S. policy makers wanted to recruit more immigrants from Southern and Eastern European countries, after World War II, the situation in Europe was not the same as in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many Eastern European countries, for example, became communist and did not allow many immigrants to the U.S. At the same time, many other European countries, such as Germany and Italy, needed more workers in order to rebuild their own economy after the war, and soon they themselves became the countries that attracted immigrants from other countries (Massey, 1995). Despite the shortage of labor supply from the European countries, the U.S. still needed to bring more immigrant labors to meet the need of its rapid increase of postwar economy.

The nature of the immigration policy change also triggered the unexpected outcome of Asian immigration. The increase of Asian immigration is the result of the interaction of the family reunification and the occupational preference system which were the two major principles of the new immigration system. Though the number of Asian Americans before 1965 was small, the number of Asian foreign students studying in the

U.S. was rising since the mid-1950s. For example, according to Takaki (1989), in 1980, half of the 300,000 foreign students were from China and other Asian countries. Many of these students, under the new Immigration law, could find jobs in the U.S. and change their status as skilled workers. A few years later, they could change their legal status as either citizens or permanent residents and sponsor their extended family members under the family reunification category. As their family members arrived, the new arrivals also invited other family members under the family category.

Another important factor in the escalation of Asian immigration was the emergent Southeast Asian refugees starting in the late 1970s (Hing, 1993; Ong & Liu, 2000). As the Indochina War ended in 1975, over one million refugees and immigrants came to the U.S. from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos (Rumbaut, 2000b). The Indochinese refugees included diverse ethnic groups such as Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lowland Lao, Hmong, Mien, other Laotian and Vietnamese highlanders and ethnic Chinese from all three countries (Rumbaut, 2000b). Ong & Liu (2000) report that in 1960, the number of Asian Refugees was only nine percent out of a total of 213,000 refugees, but this number increased to 70 percent of 867,000 refugees between 1981 and 1989 (p.160). The number of Vietnamese alone was 581,902 between 1971 and 1994, and by the year 2000, Vietnamese became the fourth largest Asian groups in the U.S. (Zhou & Bankston, 1998, p. 43; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

**Diversity visa and current immigration system.** Under the 1965 Act, the number of immigrants from Asian and Latin American countries soared rapidly. For example, by the late 1970s and 1980s, they were over eighty percent of the total U.S. immigration (Hing, 1999). Noticing such change, Congress created the extra visa

program in 1986 in order to assist the countries that were “adversely affected” by the 1965 Act (Hing, 1999, p.10; National Research Council, 1997). There were thirty-six countries such as Great Britain, Germany and France that had received less number of visas than before after 1965, and Congress, since these countries were “adversely affected” by the 1965 change, issued extra 5,000 visas for these countries in 1987 and 1988 and 15,000 visas for 1989 and 1990 (Hing, 1999). However, many African countries did not benefit from this extra program because they were not qualified for the program since they did not send many immigrants prior to 1965 (Hing, 1999).

In 1988, Congress also provided extra 20,000 visas to “increase immigration diversity” through the lottery system over two year periods. This visa was designed for the countries that were “under represented” in the U.S. immigration. If the number of immigrants sent from a particular country was less than 25 percent of 20,000 preference visas in 1988, the country was qualified to apply for the diversity visas (Hing, 1999). Under such rule, the diversity program was open for every country in the world except thirteen countries including Mexico, the Philippines, China, Korea and India (Hing, 1999).

In 1990, the diversity visa program was expanded to 40,000 per year until October 1, 1994 (Hing, 1999). The 40,000 visas were reserved for the countries that were “adversely affected” by the 1965 Act with the exception of Ireland which received 40 percent of the visas<sup>9</sup> (Hing, 1999). As of October 1, 1994, 55,000 diversity visas per year were distributed through the lottery system to countries that had sent lower than 50,000 immigrants over the previous five years (Hing, 1999).

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<sup>9</sup> Ireland was perceived to be in need of building a “special seed or pipeline category” to recruit enough people in order to benefit from the family-reunification system (Hing, 1999, p.10).

The diversity program still exists under the current U.S. immigration policy. The state that has sent less than 50,000 immigrants in most recent previous five-fiscal-years is considered a “low-admission state,” but it is more complicated to determine the eligibility and the number of possible visas for each state because it also includes the regional statistic in its decision<sup>10</sup> (Immigration and Nationality Act, 2000, §1153). An applicant for the diversity visa must be at least a high school graduate or its equivalent or has two years of work experience within five years of his/her application (Immigration and Nationality Act, 2000, §1153). For the family-sponsored immigration category, the maximum number of visas for worldwide is 226,000 per year, and 140,000 annual visas are reserved under the employment-based immigrants’ program (Immigration and Nationality Act, 2000, §1151). The maximum number for diversity visas is 55,000 (Immigration and Nationality Act, 2000, §1151). The current policy also regulates that each country’s number of visas does not exceed seven percent of the worldwide quota which allows about 25,620 visas for each country per year (Hing, 1999, p.32; Immigration and Nationality Act, 2000, §1152).

### **The Impact of the 1965 Act on Asian America**

Under the family reunification and occupational preference system and the increasing Southeast Asian refugee population, the number of Asian immigrants grew rapidly after 1965. Asian immigrants made up less than seven percent of all U.S. immigration in 1965, but it rose to 25 percent in 1970 and then 44 percent in 1980

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<sup>10</sup> The United States Code lists six regions which are: Africa, Asia, Europe, North America (other than Mexico), Oceania, and South America, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. Each region is reviewed and categorized as either a high-admission or low-admission region (Immigration and Nationality Act, 2000, §1153).

(Cheng & Yang, 2000). From 1970 to 1980, Asian American population increased from 1.5 million to 3.5 million reflecting 128 percent growth (Nakanishi, 1995/2000). The number of Asian American population in 1965 was about one million, which was less than one percent of the U.S. population. But, by the year 2000, the number grew to 10.2 million which was 3.6 percent of the U.S. population (Hing, 1993; Takaki, 1989; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

The Hart-Cellar Act not only changed the size of the Asian American population but also the dynamics of the Asian American community. Before 1965, the biggest Asian group in the U.S. was Japanese, which was 52 percent of the Asian population, followed by Chinese (27 percent), Filipino (20 percent), Korean (1 percent) and Asian Indian (1 percent) (Takaki, 1989). According to the 2000 U.S. census, Chinese is the largest Asian group (24 percent), followed by Filipino (19 percent), Asian Indians (17 percent), Vietnamese (11 percent), Korean (11 percent) and Japanese (8 percent). (See the Table1.)

Table1

*The Diversity and the Distribution of Asian American Population Before and After 1965*

Ranking	Before 1965	2000 U.S. Census Data
1.	Japanese (52% of Asian Americans)	Chinese (24% of Asian Americans)
2.	Chinese (27 %)	Filipino (19%)
3.	Filipino (20%)	Asian Indian (17%)
4.	Korean (1%)	Vietnamese (11%)
5.	Asian Indian (1%)	Korean (11%)
6.		Japanese (8%)

Unlike the early immigrant Asian pioneers who came mostly from rural areas with little professional skills, a higher proportion of the new Asian immigrants came from urban areas, were middle-class and professionals who received higher education (Min, 1995; Takaki, 1989). For example, the new Asian immigrants of the 1970s and the 1980s had much higher levels of education than the general U.S. population and other immigrant groups (Min, 1995). In 1967, for instance, 59.3 percent of Asian immigrants were professionals, executives, or managers in their home countries before their immigration (Rumbaut, 1997). This number reached 67 in 1972, and stayed over 40 percent since then (47.9 percent in 1993; Rumbaut, 1997).

Also, most Asian Americans before 1965 were American-born. Due to a long history of Asian exclusion in the U.S., the number of foreign born who were recent immigrants was relatively much smaller than American-born Asian Americans who were the descendents of the earlier immigrants. However, after 1965, there have been more numbers of foreign-born Asian Americans. For example, the Chinese population had 61 percent American-born before the 1965 Act, but after the reform, 63 percent of Chinese were foreign-born Chinese Americans (Takaki, 1989).

The 1965 Act also changed the gender ratio and the characteristics of Asian immigrants. Many Asian immigrants before 1965, mostly during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, were predominantly single males who planned to stay in the U.S. temporarily to make a fortune and return back to their homeland. The new Asian immigrants, however, came as a family with the intention of being the “settlers” in the new country, and more females came as immigrants (Hing, 1993; Min, 1995; Takaki, 1989, p.421). Although California, New York and Hawaii are still the major states that most Asian

immigrants tend to settle in, new Asian immigrants spread to other states such as Texas, Illinois, New Jersey, and Washington (Min, 1995).

As the number of Asian immigrants grew, the diversity within Asian America expanded as well. For example, despite its homogeneous image, there is great educational and socio-economic diversity among Chinese immigrants: although about half of Chinese immigrants have had some form of higher education, thirty percent of Chinese immigrants still have had less than a high school education (Louie, 2001). Such educational and social differences, especially among the immigrant parents, influence the educational achievement of Chinese American students (Louie, 2001). Overall, Asian immigrants are a diverse population in terms of their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, careers and education, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, legal status and the history of their own immigration (Min, 1995). The 2000 census, for instance, categorized over forty-nine ethnic groups under Asian Pacific Americans (Pang, Kiang, and Pak, 2004; see also Trueba, Cheng, and Ima, 1993).

Lastly, the image of Asian immigrants in the general public has changed greatly. From being the group who had “undesirable qualities” in 1870 (Hing, 1993, p.23), Asian Americans are now perceived as the successful “model minority” (Lee, 1996). This successful image of Asian Americans, however, is another way of distorting Asian Americans for it was created by the U.S. media in the mid-1960s in order to contend with other minority groups such as African Americans who were more active for their civil rights (Suzuki, 1995). The quiet, hard working and successful image of Asian Americans is often used not for, but against, Asian Americans because it makes the general public overlook the problems and needs in Asian America. For example, many psychological

problems of Asian American students such as low self-esteem, achievement anxiety and communication anxiety are neglected by teachers and society as well (Pang, 1998). The need to fit into the image of “model minority” also causes many Asian American students to feel the pressure to be a high academic achiever (Fung, 1998).

### **Korean American Immigration**

One group that experienced major changes after the 1965 Act was Korean Americans. According to the 2000 U.S. Census data, there are more than 1,076,872 Koreans living in the U.S. today. This number makes Koreans the fifth largest Asian American group in the U.S. only after Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indians and Vietnamese. Like many other post-1965 immigrant groups, the number and nature of Korean immigration had changed dramatically after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, and the Korean American community has gone through many challenges and changes since then.

**Brief history.** The history of Korean immigration is generally divided into three phases: a) the early immigration to Hawaii between 1903-1905, b) the post-Korean War immigration (1951-1964), and c) post-1965 immigration (Chun, 2001, p.1-2; Hurh, 1998, p.31; Hurh & Kim, 1984; Noh, 2003, p. 20). During the first phase, more than 7,200 laborers from Korea came to work in the sugar plantations in Hawaii (Chun, 2001; Hurh & Kim, 1984). Most of these immigrants were male laborers looking for better economic opportunities in the U.S. (Hurh & Kim, 1984, p.42). Many factors such as poor economic conditions, severe famine and exploitive taxes in Korea caused these laborers to seek opportunities outside of their homeland (Chun, 2001; Hurh & Kim, 1984). The

number of Korean laborers did not grow much after this first phase because the Japanese government pressured the Korean government to stop Korean immigration in order to protect the Japanese laborers in Hawaii (Chun, 2001). Between 1910 and 1924, about 1,100 more Koreans came to the U.S., most of whom were the “picture brides” of the laborers in Hawaii (Chun, 2001; Hurh, 1998; Park, 1997).

The second phase of Korean immigration started after the Korean War. Between 1951-1964, 14,027 Koreans came to the U.S. (Park, 1997, p.8). Most of these new immigrants were Korean women who were married to American servicemen after the war and Korean war-orphans (Chun, 2001; Hurh & Kim, 1984; Hurh, 1998). The most considerable turning point in Korean immigration was the passage of the new Immigration Act in 1965 which increased the number of Korean immigrants dramatically. For example, the number of Korean immigrants admitted in 1971 alone was 14,297, which was slightly more than the number of immigrants admitted during the entire post-Korean war period (14,027 during 1951-1964; Park, 1997, p8).

**Who came?** According to Park (1997), the post-1965 immigration can be classified into two periods: early wave by 1976 and the later wave after 1976 (p.8). Before 1976, most of the Korean immigrants received their visas under the occupational and family reunification preferences (Park, 1997). This allowed many professionals, especially those in the medical fields, to immigrate and continue their professions in the U.S. For example, by 1977, more than 13,000 Korean medical professionals came to the U.S. (Park, 1997, p.15). After 1976, however, the immigration law changed its preference mostly to family reunification and it limited the number of professional immigrants. As a result, Park (1997) stated, whereas many of the pre-1976 immigrants

were middle class professionals, the post-1976 immigrants were coming from various class and educational backgrounds with different levels of occupational skills (p.16).

**Why did they come?** Some of the main reasons of immigration for Koreans were the unstable political and economic situations in Korea. Because they experienced many social and political upheavals in Korea, such as the military dictatorship during the 1960s and the 1970s, the fast changing economic conditions which widened the gap between the rich and the poor, and other social stratifications existing within the society, many Koreans believed that they could pursue a better life in the U.S. (Hurh, 1998). Park (1997) mentions that the cultural colonialism from America which is called “*mikukpyōng*,” which means “American fever,” also instigated many Koreans to believe that America was a place where they could gain economic advancement and better educational opportunities for their children through which they could achieve social mobility (p.29-32). Besides these factors, the desire to unite with other family members was another major reason for Korean immigration after 1965 (Hurh, 1998; Park, 1997).

**Characteristics of Korean immigrants.** According to Hurh (1998), many Korean immigrants came from urban middle-class backgrounds and after their entrance to the U.S., they usually settled in major metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle, and Houston (p.43). In terms of state distribution, California has the most number of Korean immigrants (345, 882 which is 32.1 percent of Korean immigrants) followed by New York, New Jersey, Illinois and Washington (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

The median age of Korean immigrants is 32.7 years old, and 24.3 percent of Korean immigrants are under the age of 18. Also, 22.3 percent of Korean Americans are

native born while 39.5 percent are foreign born naturalized citizens (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). 59.6 percent of Korean immigrants are married and the divorce rate for Korean immigrants is 4.6 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

**Occupations & ethnic enclaves.** The Census Bureau (2000) also reports that 38.7 percent of Koreans are involved in managerial, professional and related occupations, 30.2 percent are in sales and office work, and 14.8 percent are in service. Based on a community survey in the Chicago area (from Hurh & Kim, 1988), Hurh (1998) reports that about half of the Korean immigrants who participated in his survey had either professional or managerial positions in Korea before their immigration. After immigration, however, less than one-third could stay in a professional or managerial position and the number of small business owners and the low-paid workers increased considerably (p.43).

A majority of the small business owners experienced downward mobility due to their language problems and inability to apply their education and job skills in the U.S. (Hurh, 1998). M. Kim (1992) states that another reason for the high number of self-employment among Korean immigrants is the perception of racial discrimination against minorities in the U.S. By having their own businesses, these immigrants choose not to compete directly against whites and avoid experiencing a “glass ceiling” (M. Kim, 1992).

The language barrier and their marginalized position as new immigrants encouraged Koreans to build their regional ethnic enclaves near metropolitan areas, such as Koreatowns in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago (M. Kim, 1992). Many of the Korean small business owners, as well as a good number of Korean professionals, have their businesses within the Korean community (Hurh, 1998; M. Kim, 1992; Noh, 2003).

Hurh (1993) mentions that because of its relatively short immigration history, these regional enclaves are important “reception areas for most of the new immigrants as well as the center of ethnic business and sociocultural activities” (p.59). Even though a good portion of Korean immigrants (30-40 percent) now reside in suburban areas, the Korean ethnic enclaves are still important social, political, and economic centers for many Korean immigrants (Hurh, 1993).

Another important location for Korean small businesses is the minority market. Hurh (1998) reports that in the Chicago area, about 26 percent of the customers of Korean small business were African Americans and Hispanic Americans. And in Los Angeles, the ratio was more than 35 percent (based on Hurh & Kim, 1988 and Min, 1990). Because the minority market is generally not popular among the mainstream U.S. business community due to the high rate of business risk and low profit margin, Korean immigrants, who have less chance to succeed in the mainstream market, take it as their opportunity to own their business (Hurh, 1998).

**Economic condition.** Contrary to the general “model minority” image of Korean Americans who supposedly achieved high economic success in the U.S., the median family income of Korean Americans (\$47,624) is substantially lower than the median income for all families in the U.S. (\$50,046) and for all Asian families (\$59,324). At the same time, Korean Americans have a higher poverty rate (14.8%) than both total the U.S. population (12.4%) and for Asians (12.6%). In terms of home ownership, only 40 percent of Koreans own their home and 60 percent are renters. This figure is also lower than the housing tenure rate for the total population (66.2% owner-33.8% renter) and for all Asians (53.2% owner-46.8% renter). The Census report (2004) stated that Koreans

had “the highest proportion of renter-occupied housing unit” along with Hmong, Pakistani, and Cambodian (p.18).

**Current pattern.** The number of Korean immigrants has been decreasing since 1988 (Park, 1997; Chun, 2001). Besides the improved economic, political and social conditions in Korea after the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the Los Angeles Riot in 1992 changed the image of the U.S. and the reality of immigrant life quite negatively among Koreans in Korea (Chun, 2001). Since the late 1990s, however, the new economic crisis in Korea and the excessive competition for college admission for Korean students have become the new incentives for recent immigration from Korea (Chun, 2001).

### **1.5 Generation Korean Americans**

The phrase “1.5 generation,” which is read as “one point five generation” or “*il jöm ose*” in Korean, started as a colloquial term in Korean American communities in the early 1970s to indicate young immigrants who came to the U.S. with their parents (Hurh, 1993, p. 47). According to Danico (2004) and Koh (1994), it was Charles Kim, a reporter of *Koreatown*, the English edition of *Korean Times/Hankook Ilbo*, who first used the term “1.5 generation” to depict “the people like himself who are neither first nor second generation” (Yu, 1992 quoted in Koh, p. 44-45). Park (1999) also states that the term had been used within the Korean American communities in Los Angeles and New York early in the 1970s. According to S. Kim (2002), the term “1.5 generation” is now used to describe the young Korean immigrants in other countries such as Canada and Australia as well (p.60). Furthermore, as Danico (2004) points out, the “1.5 generation” is also frequently used in academia to describe the post-1965 immigrant children

population from other ethnic groups such as Vietnamese, Cambodians, Filipinos and Latino (e.g. Raumbaut, 1991).

**Who are the 1.5 generation?** The general characteristics of the 1.5 generation, which is also expressed as “1.5er – one point fiver,” (Danico, 2004; Park, 1999) is understood as the bilingual and bicultural Korean-Americans who are between the first and the second generation immigrants (Koh, 1994). However, defining who 1.5 generation really is can be much more complicated. Even in the literature, there is no clear agreement on who they are.

For example, Kim and Yu (1996) simply describe the 1.5 generation as the immigrants who came to the U.S. before they finished high school (p.xix). They added that whereas “the predominate language of *i-se*, the U.S. born second generation Korean Americans, is English, *1.5* speaks Korean and English with varying degrees of fluency” (p.xx). Yu (1992) also defines 1.5 generation as those who came to the U.S. before their adulthood regardless of their age (quoted in Koh, 1994, p.45).

On the other hand, some researchers like Chun (2001) give a specific age range to define the 1.5 generation. Chun (2001) explains that 1.5 generation are those who came to the U.S. as children at or before age twelve although he did not clearly explain why age twelve becomes the important marker. Danico (2004) also defines 1.5 generation Korean Americans with a specific age limit. She claimed that although it is not important to set the “minimum age of immigration,” setting the “maximum age” is important in defining the 1.5 generation Korean American (p.5). In her study of 1.5 generation Korean Americans in Hawaii, she defines the 1.5er as “preteen immigrants” who can “pass” as native speakers of English (p.5). Danico states that compared to preteen

immigrants, teen immigrants are more likely to have Korean accent, and therefore, have difficulty passing as native born and “less likely to switch between generational boundaries” (p.5-6). Thus, she defined the 1.5 Korean Americans as “those who immigrated with their family before 13 years of age, have memories of Korea, and consciously bicultural” (p.6).

It is interesting to note that Danico’s exclusion of teen immigrants from the 1.5 generation category is the basis for including teen immigrants as 1.5 for other researchers. For example, Hurh (1993) defines the 1.5 generation as “bilingual and bicultural Korean Americans who immigrated to the U.S. in early or middle adolescence (generally between the ages of 11 and 16)” (p. 50).

Hurh (1993) states that those who were born in the U.S. or came to the U.S. before the age of puberty “under normal conditions, will become fluent speakers of English without an accent” which will also result in other sociocultural assimilation such as having American peers, accepting social norms and cultural values (p.49). At the same time, Hurh (1993) argues that they will not be fluent in Korean as they are in English and “their knowledge of Korean will be less functional” (p.49). Therefore, he concluded that the ideal age category to achieve functional bilingualism in both languages, which is an important element of the 1.5 generation, is “generally between early to middle adolescence” (P.49). S. Kim (2002) also mentions that although the age of immigration is not the determining factor in itself, it is important to see whether the person came to the U.S. at the age “old enough to *retain* Korean cultural elements even after they immigrated to the U.S. (p.2, *italics added*).

**Immigrant adolescents.** As Danico points out, teen and preteen immigrants have different sets of understandings and experiences of Korean and American cultures, and their fluency in both languages also differ. Spending longer period of time and experiencing various sociocultural and educational practices in Korea, Korean culture may have stronger impact on the identity of teen immigrants than pre-teen immigrants. However, as they live in the U.S. and go through cultural and linguistic transitions, teen immigrants do not necessarily identify themselves as first generation. The marginalized identity of the 1.5 generation from both the first and second generation (Hurh, 1993), might be very true for teen immigrants as much as it is for the pre-teen immigrants. Moreover, because they cannot “pass” as native due to their accent and unfamiliarity of American culture, they face different kinds of problems and challenges from the preteen immigrants.

Whether we should include “adolescence” as a necessary factor to define the 1.5 generation or not is debatable. Nevertheless, adolescence is an important aspect to consider in understanding the 1.5 generation in all of its multifaceted ways. In fact, a number of researchers include adolescence in their definition of the 1.5 generation (e.g. Chee, 2003; Hurh, 1993, 1998; S. Kim, 2002; Palmer, 2001; Rumbaut, 1991; Yi, 2005).

For example, Rumbaut (1991), in studying Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian refugees in the San Diego metropolitan area, notices “a group of refugee youth” who are different from both the first and second generations (p.53, 61). He calls these refugee youth as “1.5 generation who were born abroad but are being educated and come of age in the U.S....[and they] came accompanied by one or both parents” (p. 82). Though he did not specify the age range for this group of refugees, he described that the 1.5

generation refugees must deal with both “adolescence and acculturation,” which are both major life changing experiences (p. 82). Whereas the first and second generation usually need to struggle with one of the crises -- the sociocultural transition for the first generation and adolescence for the second -- the 1.5 generation generally have to negotiate these issues simultaneously (S. Kim, 2002, p. 3; Rumbaut, 1991, p. 61).

Using Erickson (1964), S. Kim (2002) argue that adolescence is an extremely challenging time when individuals need a lot of social support to build a positive sense of self. However, because of immigration status, 1.5 generation Korean Americans do not receive enough support from their family nor school as much as they need. Rather, many 1.5 adolescent immigrants face additional challenges such as difficulty in learning English and interrupted social interaction with others due to their limited linguistic abilities and cultural understandings. These experiences sometimes can create “significant social and psychological problems” (S. Kim, 2002, p. 4). Also, they often need to serve their parents as “family representative or translator” even though they may feel they are adequately prepared to help them. This family responsibility can also be additional stress for adolescent immigrants (p. 3).

In noticing the “interlink” between the “linguistic and other sociocultural assimilations,” Hurh (1993) states that the age of immigration “characterizes not only a transition in one’s linguistic assimilation capacity, but also many other crucial developmental tasks, including the psychosocial, cognitive and moral” (p. 49). These developmental changes at the time of immigration can add additional challenges to adolescent immigrants and place them into a vulnerable position. “Being educated in two different sociocultural worlds,” as S. Kim (2002) argues, can create the opportunity to be

bilingual and bicultural for these adolescent immigrants but at the same time, the risk of being “marginalized” from both communities and cultures (p. 8).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined the history and the major changes of immigration policies in the U.S. and how they have impacted the development of Asian America as well as Korean American immigration. The rise of 1.5 generation Korean Americans clearly is one significant change that resulted after 1965, and the diversity within this population requires more careful consideration to understand who they are and how they are situated within U.S. society. Next chapter, I will observe how immigration policy changes, particularly since 1965, have impacted the lives of immigrant students. In particular, I examine the language education policy in the public schools as an example of how U.S. educational policies for immigrant students are played out in students’ lives.

## Chapter Two

### Language Policies in Schools and Its Effects on the Lives of Immigrant Students

One of the major social institutions that came into direct contact with the drastic demographic shift after 1965 were public schools. The number of immigrant students in public schools grew quickly as the nation witnessed the influx of immigrants from Asia and Latin America, and most of these students were classified as language minority students or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. The number of LEP students in the state of California, for example, increased by 150 percent during the 1980s, and out of 861,531 LEP students, more than 268,000 students were immigrant students who had been living in the U.S. three years or less (McDonnell and Hill, 1993 in Cornelius, 1995).

According to Rumbaut (2000a), immigrant children and U.S.-born children of immigrants are still one of the fastest growing populations in the U.S. In 1999, out of 48 million students who were enrolled in the U.S. elementary and secondary schools, 19.9 percent, 9.7 million students, were either foreign born or had at least one foreign-born parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Garcia (2005) also notes that twenty percent of the school-age population, five to seventeen years old which is close to ten million students, speak a language other than English at home. This figure, which is from the 2000 U.S. Census data, is a forty percent increase from the 1990 U.S. Census data (Garcia, 2005). It is reported that in states such as California, Texas, and New Mexico, about one in four enrolled students is a LEP student (MacSwan, 2000). Educating these LEP students, especially teaching English, became a new major challenge to public schools, but this task was not always handled correctly.

## **The Effects of the 1965 Immigration Act on the Public Schools**

**Lau v. Nichols.** In 1973, non-English speaking Chinese American students in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) filed a class action suit against the officials of the SFUSD in order to seek equal educational opportunity. Out of 2,856 Chinese American students who did not speak English fluently, only about 1,000 students were given “supplemental” English language instruction. The students argued that not meeting the special needs of English language instruction for these students was violating the equal educational opportunity right, and therefore, the Fourteenth Amendment (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). The students asked the Board of Education to provide educational programs to solve these problems.

Using section 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Supreme Court reversed the judgment of the Court of Appeals and ordered the Board of San Francisco Unified School District to provide the necessary English instruction to non-English-speaking Chinese American students. The Supreme Court ruled that the SFUSD, even though it received federal funding, violated the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 by not providing the necessary supplemental English instruction to these students. Section 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S. C. section 2000d, states that “any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” cannot discriminate people based on their race, color, or national origin (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974, p.569).

According to the California Education Code, English is the “basic language of instruction” and the “mastery of English” is a graduation requirement (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974, p.565-566). The California Education Code permitted bilingual instruction depending on the circumstances in order to promote the policy. Knowing that mastery of

English proficiency is required for graduation and for success in various facets of school culture, the Court reasoned that mere “provision of same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum” could not be equal treatment for these students (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974, p.566). Under such circumstances, the non-English-speaking students would not be able to understand the instruction nor participate in the school activities effectively. Requiring these students to acquire certain level of English proficiency on their own before they participate in the educational program, the Court reasoned, is “a mockery of public education” (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974, p.566).

*Lau v. Nichols* is a good example that shows how public schools were not ready, or were they not willing, to help immigrant and language minority students even after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Because of the language barrier, these students could not understand the educational instruction they were receiving and could not participate in educational activities in a meaningful way. However, the needs of the LEP students in the SFUSD were not recognized by the schools; it required a lawsuit, which went all the way to the Federal Supreme Court, to make the schools take the necessary actions for these students.

The *Lau* decision is important and meaningful since it was the first case that sought the right of language minority students after 1965 (Crawford, 1989). The decision allowed the Chinese American children to receive supplemental English instruction under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (Crawford, 1989). Because of this decision, the sink-or-swim or submersion program for LEP students was no longer legally permitted in any school district. The *Lau* decision also helped the expansion of Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which enforced the schools to

include native language and culture instruction as it was necessary for children's academic progress (Crawford, 1989; Wang, 1995). However, the *Lau* decision also left many unresolved problems, which later impacted the bilingual education legal cases and bilingual education programs in the public schools throughout the country (Felton, 1999; Gullixson, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Sekhon, 1999).

One of the most important problems of the *Lau* decision was that it did not specify how the special English instruction should be implemented for these students.

Teaching English to the students of Chinese ancestry who do not speak the language is one choice. Giving instructions to this group in Chinese is another. There may be others. Petitioners ask only that the Board of Education be directed to apply its expertise to the problem and rectify the situation (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974, p.563).

The court ruling by and large let the school officials decide what they felt the students needed. This ambiguous decision left room for various interpretations of the 'necessary program' for language minority children, and for next thirty years, this issue, the effectiveness of bilingual education programs, became one of the most debated controversies in U.S. public schools.

## **Bilingual Education Controversy**

**Terms and different bilingual education programs.** The term bilingual education (BE) often causes confusion not only for the general public but also for educators and policy makers because it includes many different special English programs, such as the Transitional Bilingual Education, the Developmental Bilingual Education, immersion programs, and ESL programs (Crawford, 1989).

***Bilingual education.*** The most widely used bilingual education program in the U.S. is the Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program, which is also called the ‘early-exit program’<sup>11</sup>. This program aims to prepare students for the mainstream classroom as soon as possible and make the transition to the regular English classroom within two or three years. The program provides some amount of subject instruction in the children’s native language and also teaches English in a special language program for second language learners (Crawford, 1989; Thomas & Collier, 1996).

Another type of bilingual education is the Maintenance or Developmental Bilingual Education. Unlike the TBE, this program aims to have children continue developing their native language as they learn English. Students in this program make the transition to mainstream classrooms later than the TBE program, after about six years, and it is therefore called the ‘late-exit program.’ Since the aim of the program is to develop both languages, this program is an additive bilingual program.

***Immersion programs.*** The basic philosophy of the immersion program is teaching the second language through subject-matter instruction. In this program, teachers provide subject-matter instruction in the second language, and as the children understand the subject content, they may recognize the grammar and vocabularies internally. The key point of the immersion program is to give ‘comprehensible input’ in the subject matter instruction. If the students do not understand the teachers, the students

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<sup>11</sup> Although this is the most funded program by the U.S. Department of Education under Title VII, the legal definition of the TBE is not clear. This means that the length of time or the type of English program is not clearly defined and there can be many variations. For example, the school may provide only a minimum amount of native language instruction such as a mere translation service or the school might actually emphasize the students’ native language development (Crawford, 1989).

may fail in both second language learning and content study (Baker, 1993; Crawford, 1989; Krashen, 1985; Thomas & Collier, 1996).

There are several different types of immersion programs. First, the examples of *enrichment immersion program* can be the Canadian French-immersion program or the Spanish-immersion program in the U.S. These are very successful immersion programs for language-majority children whose home language is English (Crawford, 1989).

Many opponents of bilingual education favor the *structured immersion program*, and they want to replace bilingual education, such as the TBE with the structured immersion program. Structured immersion is the “English-only” program, which means teaching every school subject in English only to language minority students (Baker, 1993; Baker & de Kanter, 1982; Crawford, 1989).

In the *alternate immersion program*, which is also called the *sheltered English program*, the second language instruction is “sheltered” from the input level that is above children’s comprehension (Crawford, 1989, p.176). In this program, students can receive instruction in both languages alternatively. For example, the instruction of academic subjects may be given in the students’ native language in the morning and followed by the instruction in English in the afternoon. The English instruction usually starts with a less language-intensive course, such as mathematics, and then moves to a more language intensive course such as social studies. This method is a component of many bilingual programs (Baker, 1993; Crawford, 1989).

*Concurrent translation* allows bilingual instructors to use both languages in one teaching session. They switch between languages to help the students understand each concept; after explaining a concept in English, they switch to the students’ native

language right away. However, this approach may not be effective because children may not pay full attention to English instruction, since the concept is already explained in their first language (Crawford, 1989; Krashen, 1985). Researchers also note that teachers might favor one language over the other unconsciously in this approach (e.g. Crawford, 1989).

***Submersion.*** *Submersion* is also known as a sink-or-swim approach. Submersion does not provide any service to second language learning students, and it is not legally allowed in the U.S. (Baker & de Kanter, 1982; Crawford, 1989; Thomas & Collier, 1996).

***English as a second language (ESL) program.*** The ESL program is also a component of many bilingual education programs, and it can also be practiced as the main second language program. Often this is done as a pullout class program, which means that students are attending special English classes a few times each week (Baker & de Kanter, 1982; Crawford, 1989; Thomas & Collier, 1996). The critics of this program are concerned that the students may be in the sink-or-swim situation for the rest of their schooling (Crawford, 1989).

It needs to be recognized that these different programs can be used at the same time, which might add to the complexity and confusion among different bilingual programs. Because of such complexity and confusion, the general image of the term bilingual education is the late-exit BE, which lets students use native language instruction for five to six years before they move to the mainstream English classrooms, and many people think that all of these LEP students are receiving instruction in their first language only.

In reality, however, an extensive number of LEP students have been instructed through English-only education. According to the California Department of Education data, for instance, over 70 percent of LEP students received English instruction for content-area subjects even before Proposition 227. These students did not receive any native language instruction as the general public presumed (Gullixson, 1999). Only 29.7 percent of LEP students were taught through their native language, but many of them were in the early-exit programs in which students move into the mainstream classroom within 2-3 years (Gullixson, 1999; Sekhon, 1999).

**Bilingual education controversy.** As stated above, one of the major methods that have been used to meet the needs of LEP students is bilingual education, which believes in the use of children's native language in subject teaching along with special English instruction. This method is strongly supported by Cummins' interdependence hypothesis and the threshold hypothesis (1979, 1991). Cummins' interdependence hypothesis claims that the development of children's first language is important in second language acquisition because the cognitive ability that is developed in the first language learning can be transferred to the second language. Without the adequate development of children's cognitive skills in the first language, Cummins argues (1979, 1991), children may not achieve proper competence in the second language either. Cummins' threshold hypothesis also states that for better second language acquisition, a minimum level of literacy skill in the first language is required (Baker, 1993; Cummins, 1979; Crawford, 1989; Thomas & Collier, 1996).

Many opponents of bilingual education, however, question the effectiveness of bilingual education and claim that the other method, such as the direct English immersion

program, is a better way to teach LEP students. In the immersion program, subject instruction is mainly given in the second language, English. According to Krashen's input hypothesis (1985), people acquire language only when the information given by the language is meaningful and comprehensible.

This hypothesis explains that although immigrant students do not have enough grammatical knowledge of the new language, they can understand the meaning through other sources such as context, knowledge of the world, and previously acquired language ability (Krashen, 1985). Therefore, children can learn a second language by studying general school subjects taught in the second language, if the content is adjusted to the children's comprehensible level. The key idea of the immersion program is the comprehensible input. Krashen (1985) argues that the immersion program can be successful, not simply because children have more exposure to the second language, but because of the comprehensible input factor.

Although Krashen (1985) makes it clear that the main reason why immersion can be successful is because of comprehensible input, many opponents of bilingual education misunderstand that immersion is working because it gives more exposure to the second language. Some of them simply believe that more use and exposure and practice of the second language are the best way to learn it (Baker & de Kanter, 1983). Some people, for that reason, support the ESL program or the structured immersion program, which is known as the "English-only" program (Baker & de Kanter, 1983; Porter, 1999b).

Although the main controversy over bilingual education centers on which program is most effective for LEP students, a careful examination of the history of

bilingual education and language education policies in the U.S. suggests that the controversy is not just about program effectiveness.

### **Bilingual Education Policies in the U.S. Post 1954**

Contrary to the popular belief that bilingual education is a recent educational concern, the U.S. has a long and complicated history of bilingual education. For example, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the use of bilingual education, sometimes trilingual education, to teach immigrant children was not uncommon in the U.S.<sup>12</sup> (Escamilla, 1989). However, such practice eventually lost its political and public support under the strong campaign of the nativist approach of language education which was the “English-only” movement<sup>13</sup>. The linguistic diversity introduced by immigrants was not welcomed, and the development of nationalism under two World Wars also reinforced the legitimacy of the “English-only” restriction;<sup>14</sup> bilingual education was discouraged and slowly disappeared (Cavanaugh, 1996; Mendoza, 1984; Salazar, 1993).

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<sup>12</sup> Between 1816 and 1887, German-English bilingual education was available in public schools. States such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, Territory of New Mexico-Arizona, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, Indiana, Oregon, Colorado, and Nebraska allowed bilingual education in public schools by law (Salazar, 1993). In Cincinnati, for example, English-German bilingual program was practiced in its schools for the large numbers of German immigrants in early 1845 (Mendoza, 1984). The program had German instruction on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and English instruction on Tuesdays and Thursdays (Mendoza, 1984). In 1865, San Francisco even had a trilingual program, which had French, German, and English program (Mendoza, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> After the 1890s, the influx of new immigrants, from parts of Southeastern Europe, for example, sparked the issue of English education for immigrants more seriously (Montero-Sieburth & LaCelle-Peterson, 1991). Also, many of the new immigrants were poor and illiterate, and this led Americans to think about the “Americanization” of the immigrants (Cavanaugh, 1996, p.41). Through mandatory public education, they wanted to teach immigrants the new language, English, and the new rules of the nation. As W. C. Larrabee, the superintendent of public instruction for the state of Indiana, argued in 1853, making the new immigrants, who have different countries of origin, language, and social custom, to “one people with one common interest” was important (Cavanaugh, 1996, p.41). But that “one” image was to portray a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant nation.

<sup>14</sup> During World War I, for instance, speaking a language other than English was viewed as “un-American” (Salazar, 1993).

**Bilingual Education Act (BEA) of 1968.** Bilingual education started to get attention again as many social changes in the U.S. took place in the 1950s and the 1960s. Both *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Right Act of 1964, for example, indirectly influenced the practice of bilingual education in the U.S. since these prevented discrimination in education and promoted equal educational opportunity for everyone including LEP students (Mendoza, 1984). Most importantly, the new flux of immigrants from Asia and Latin America after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the growing number of Southeast Asian refugees increased the need for bilingual education (Gifford & Gillett, 1986; Keely, 1986). For example, in 1967, the number of non-English speaking students in the U.S. ranged from 3 million to 20 million: 3 million according to the U.S. Office of Education and 20 million according to the Center for Applied Linguistics (H.R. Rep. No.915, 1967, p.3).

Another important change during this period was the revolution in Cuba, which brought many Cuban refugees to Florida in the 1950s. As the number of Cuban refugees grew, public schools in Miami began the English-Spanish bilingual program for Cuban refugee children in 1959 (Escamilla, 1989; Salazar, 1993). The English-Spanish bilingual program in Miami was evaluated positively by educators and policymakers in terms of its program effectiveness and program cost (Escamilla, 1989). For example, the House report on the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) recorded that the bilingual and bicultural program at the Coral Way Elementary School in Miami, Florida, spent as little as \$25 per pupil and expected less expenditure for secondary school students (H.R. Rep. No.915, 1967, p.4). The program in Miami also encouraged different states such as Texas, New Mexico, and California to facilitate a bilingual education program for mainly

Spanish speaking students by early 1960s (Escamilla, 1989; H.R. Rep. No.915, 1967, p.4).

By 1967, there were 35 individual bills brought into the House of Representatives to approve bilingual and bicultural education programs. In December, 1967, the Committee on Education and Labor decided to add the Bilingual Education Act (BEA), Title VII, to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 in order to provide the necessary bilingual education to children with limited English speaking ability (Bilingual Education Act of 1968).

The House recognized that in order to assist three million children whose primary language was not English, bilingual and bicultural education programs were necessary. It is important to recognize that the House made the distinction between the English as a second language and the bilingual education program. The House report stated that the English as a second language program was not a real bilingual program because “Bilingual programs proposed by this legislation would improve the child’s native language as well as English” (H.R. Rep. No.915, 1967, p.5). The House report focused on the importance of keeping the children’s native language in their instruction as well as teaching them their cultural heritage in order to assist these children the best. According to the House Report in 1967, the use of foreign languages and cultures were considered to be an asset for national unity. For example, the report stated that “One Congressman said he no longer thought of the country as a melting pot, which tends to homogenize all the various elements, but instead as a mosaic which gains its beauty and strength from variety and diversity” (H.R. Rep. No.915, 1967, p.2).

However, the impact of the BEA was still limited until the *Lau v. Nichols* decision in 1974, because it mandated bilingual education only to those who received the federal government funds. The *Lau* decision broadened the statutes of the BEA by mandating special education for any school district that had LEP students (Escamilla, 1989).

Although the Supreme Court did not clarify which English program the schools needed to use for LEP students, shortly after the *Lau* decision, Congress made an amendment to the BEA to add that the Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) needs to be the necessary teaching methodology of the special English program in order to receive funding under the Bilingual Education Act (Felton, 1999). The department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) soon created the “Lau Guidelines” to respond to Congress and, through the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), enforced schools to create either a bilingual-bicultural education program or a multilingual-multicultural program for LEP students (Crawford, 1989; Johnson, 1999).

However, the use of the TBE as the mandated bilingual education methodology was soon challenged (U.S. Secretary of Education, 1986). Even though Congress tried to enforce the Lau Guidelines and the Transitional Bilingual Education since the court ruling did not directly mandate bilingual education as the required method, the impact was not very strong (Johnson, 1999). Even after the court’s decision, for example, the board of education in the SFUSD did not develop a bilingual education program right away (Wang, 1995). Also, by the late 1970s, questions about the effectiveness of bilingual education started to emerge.

**Changing public attitudes and the amendments of BEA.** By 1977, the funds for the BEA increased to \$115 million from \$15 million in 1968, and over 425 local

educational agencies in 47 States received federal funds for bilingual education programs (H.R. Rep. No. 95-1137, 1978, p.5053). Besides the program expansion and the increase in funding, another important change was mentioned in the amendment in 1978. Congress reported on the questions and challenges of the effectiveness of bilingual education programs (H.R. Rep. No. 95-1137, 1978).

The questions about the effectiveness of bilingual education recorded in the 1978 amendment may have reflected the social conservatives' growing concern about the continuous increase of the bilingual education funding and the possibility of the rise of ethnic pride caused by the program (U.S. Secretary of Education, 1986). These concerns impacted some aspects of the bilingual education policy. For example, Johnson (1999) argues that after the report by the American Institute for Research (AIR), which showed no significant impact of bilingual education, Congress allowed OCR to withdraw the Lau Guidelines in 1977.

In the 1980s, Bilingual Education was heavily reviewed by the general public and policy makers, and the question about its effectiveness that emerged in the late 1970s became intensified. Under the Reagan administration, which cut down federal funding for various educational programs, the expense of bilingual education programs was inevitably challenged for its legitimacy (Lugg, 2000). William J. Bennett, the U.S. Secretary of Education during the 1980s, claimed that the goal of bilingual education had not been clear. According to Bennett, bilingual education had been used to keep minority students' cultural pride "at the price of proficiency in English, our common language" (U.S. Secretary of Education, 1986, p.220). This comment had mirrored the general public's understanding of bilingual education in the 1980s. Many people viewed

bilingual education as an attempt to maintain the languages and cultures of ethnic minorities, not as a teaching method that promotes LEP children's educational success (Sundberg, 1988). Some clearly supported the "English-only" policy in the U.S. because they believed that English is the common language, which would promote social unity in the U.S. (Sundberg, 1988).

Bennett believed that the goal of bilingual education should be to teach English to LEP students and that equal educational opportunity could be achieved by teaching LEP students English so that they could fully participate in American society (U.S. Secretary of Education, 1986). He argued that the previous bilingual education program had failed to do the job because it restricted its scope to the transitional bilingual education program, which required the use of students' native language in instruction (U.S. Secretary of Education, 1986). Instead of using the children's native language, Bennett proposed alternative instructional methods such as English as a Second Language or structured immersion programs, also known as the "English-only" program, to be used to teach LEP students (U.S. Secretary of Education, 1986, p.218).

Reflecting these changing attitudes towards bilingual education, Congress emphasized that bilingual education programs, especially the TBE program, were not successfully helping the children, and now supported alternative English education programs such as the structured English immersion program and the ESL program. In 1984, Congress allocated four percent of the total funding for alternative programs and increased it to 25 percent in 1988 (H.R. Rep. No. 98-748, 1984; Bilingual Education Act of 1988, p.275).

**Bilingual education and No Child Left Behind (NCLB).** The BEA was amended one more time in 1994 before it expired very quietly in 2002 (Crawford, 2002). The questioning of and the challenge to the effectiveness of bilingual education continued throughout the 1990s. In 1998, California passed Proposition 227, which eliminated all other special English program possibilities for language minority students except the one-year “English-only” immersion program (Felton, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Ferrin, 1999; Sekhon, 1999; Proposition 227, 1998). As the Bush administration launched the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) school reform movement, the BEA was terminated and transformed into the English Language Acquisition Act with wide bipartisan support (Crawford, 2002).

The new legislature requires LEP students (or English Language Learners – ELLs) to reach English fluency within three years and schools to be accountable for LEP students’ yearly English achievement through standard testing. NCLB also mandates English instruction for LEP students after three consecutive years of school (Whitehouse, 2004). The major goal of NCLB is identified as “help[ing] ensure that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English,” and the importance of learning the students’ native language and culture is no longer addressed (PL 107-110, Sec 3102). As Crawford laments, “this marks a 180-degree reversal in language policy” (2002, p.1).

## **English-only Movement and the Pressure for Assimilation**

The brief review of the history of bilingual education and language policy in the U.S. confirms that today's bilingual education controversy does not center around the program's effectiveness. If the purpose of the debate is to find the best program for LEP students, the current controversy can be a positive occurrence. Whether it is the bilingual program or English immersion program, there is no perfect program that can meet every student's needs. Just because one program works in a school in the San Diego school district, for example, it does not guarantee that the program will be the best option for a school in Chicago. The special English program needs to be chosen carefully considering various factors such as students' age, educational and social backgrounds, possible school resources, student population in the school and in the district, etc. There are many possible programs that can be developed and implemented for diverse student populations, and for that matter, the program effectiveness debate can be a positive force for the development of special English programs for LEP students.

However, the history of bilingual education policy in the U.S. tells us that the heart of the debate is not about what works the best for students. For example, the passage of Proposition 227 in California cannot be viewed as a reasonable educational remedy. Numerous research findings indicate that LEP children need more than just one year of English immersion program to learn English. Instead of considering the educational needs of LEP students, many times, language policies are established for political reasons and, more importantly, are based on white American's hostility against immigrants. The idea of Americanizing new immigrants is evident throughout the history of the U.S., and whenever an influx of new immigrants enter into the U.S.,

antagonism against new languages and new cultures flourishes and attempts to keep the “American way” such as English-only.

Sanchez (1997) points that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, anti-immigrant sentiments were intensified and expressed as anti-Catholicism and racial nativism. Today the same opposition against immigrants is manifested through the strong hostility against non-English languages (Massey, 1995; Sanchez, 1997). From the *Lau* decision to the creation of Proposition 227, except for the beginning stage of the BEA in the 1960s, the focus of bilingual education in the U.S. has mostly been on teaching English to LEP students, not on developing both English and the immigrant children’s native language (Sekhon, 1999). In the U.S., speaking English is considered normal and desirable. As in the early 1900s, when the use of German-English bilingual program was interpreted as unpatriotic, bilingual education has been continuously contested as if bilingual education is not the American way to teach LEP students since the late 1970s. The polling results before Proposition 227 indicate that 73 percent of those who were going to vote for Proposition 227 made their decision because they thought that if people live in the U.S., they need to speak English (Sekhon, 1999).

Massey (1995) comments that the U.S. public fears “whether or not the new immigrants will assimilate into the Euro-American society of the United States,” and whether the union with new immigrants will alter the existing society and its culture (p.632). In U.S. society, new immigrants are always expected to assimilate and to lose their unique ethnic identities and cultures to be a part of the host society. The recent immigrants after 1965 have been criticized for not assimilating successfully as the old immigrants of European origin did before (Massey, 1995). It is an arguable idea whether

the new immigrants, heavily Asians and Latino/as, do really resist assimilation into the dominant U.S. culture or if they are perceived as unassimilable because of other factors such as their race. Takaki (1989) and Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) argue that unlike the previous generations of immigrants who could, by changing their names and losing their accents, be accepted by the dominant society, a fourth-generation Asian American is not easily considered to be a 'real American' because of his/her race.

This strong resistance towards different cultures and languages and its negative attitudes towards immigrants are often reflected in U.S. public schools. As it was shown in the case of Proposition 227, U.S. public schools send the message to minority students and minority communities that English is the only language that is worthy to be studied and that it is not good to keep one's native language. Historically, in the U.S., bilingualism has been considered less desirable and deteriorating to one's cognitive development, and the use of a second language other than English is considered a "sign of inferiority (Ferguson & Heath, 1981, p.xxviii). Tse (2001) points out that the bilingual program that is widely used in the U.S. is often a subtractive program rather than an additive program, which encourages the dominant language, English, to replace minority students' native languages. Proposition 227 chastises minority communities, especially Hispanic and Asian communities, for speaking their native language in the U.S. and asserts that if they want to be successful in the U.S., they "should be eager to learn English" for "English fluency allows for upward mobility (Sekhon, 1999, p.1 423).

The argument here is not just to learn English but also to forget one's native language. McKay and Wong (1996) claim that language learning is often related to power and identity. Many immigrant students, especially non-White immigrant students,

often face the issues concerning power in their second language classroom where colonialist/racialized discourses are common. By colonialist/racialized discourse, McKay and Wong (1996) mean the strong “Euro-and Amerocentric attitude and superiority” of Americans toward the rest of the world (p.583; see also Pennycook, 1995). This ideology transmitted in school can influence immigrant students’ identity and self-esteem powerfully in many different ways.

### **Immigrant Students’ Experiences**

**Social isolation.** Current literature reports social isolation and the pressure to learn English as some of the major challenges of immigrant students (e.g. Coll and Magnuson, 1997; Fu, 1995; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Tse, 2001). For many immigrant students, the school becomes an important site where they experience these difficulties. At school, they learn different ways to study and participate in classes, different ways to interact with peers and teachers, different foods and different dress codes.

Their limited linguistic ability naturally hinders immigrant students from having active social interactions with other students. Considering that immigrant students also deal with limited knowledge of American culture, the difficulty they face may be much greater. Often, the unacceptability of other cultures and other languages in the general U.S. public is passed on to mainstream students<sup>15</sup>, and many times they are not willing to associate with new immigrant students who are hard to communicate with and culturally

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<sup>15</sup> Lee (2005), for example, defines the mainstream “American” culture as “white, middle-class culture” (p.8). By “mainstream students,” I mean students who linguistically and culturally identify themselves with the “white, middle-class culture” in school and society.

different from them. This often results in the social isolation of immigrant students and can negatively impact their self-esteem, especially for immigrant adolescents.

Fu's study (1995) of four adolescent refugee students from Laos who attended a U.S. high school proves this point well. She found that these students were often loners in the school and not noticed by their classmates. Because these students did not feel confident in their English-speaking ability, they were quiet and silent in their classrooms and did not interact socially with others. Fu (1995) argues that this social isolation not only hurts their social development but also hinders these students from meaningful English learning, because these students were learning English only in the context of academic works such as getting their homework done and taking tests, but not in communicating with others. They simply did not have a chance to "speak, share, and get to know others" and make the language they were learning a useful communicative tool (Fu, 1995, p.195).

**English and social status.** This social isolation of LEP students is not simply due to their communication problems. Tse (2001), from her observation of a middle school in California in which 97 percent of the student population was Latino, also reports that English fluency becomes the means that determines students' social status in school. There was a clear division between the group of U.S. born Latino students who spoke fluent English and the group of recent immigrant LEP students. The students perceived English fluency as "a badge of prestige, a membership card for entry into the mainstream" and the recent immigrant students who were learning English were "at the bottom of [their social] ladder" (Tse, 2001, p.19).

Since English is the key to higher social status in schools, it is not surprising to find that being a LEP student usually carries negative connotations. Rumbaut (1995) states “In the social system of the school, a LEP identity is also a stigmatized status that carries a heavy dose of social opprobrium” (p.44). Lee (1996) also reports that many Asian students view the ESL class as “a class for dummies” (p.65). Students understand that if one cannot speak English well, it is hard to be accepted by mainstream peers, and if one speaks one’s native language, things can go even worse.

By speaking a language other than English, especially for minority students, they may feel ashamed and sometimes even face overt racist reactions from others; “To sound different is to be different, especially for visible minorities who have physical characteristics that signal them as part of a minority group” (Tse, 2001, p.33). Tse (2001) further explains that once they are placed as an outcast, getting acceptance into the mainstream student body is very difficult, and for that reason, many minority students go through “ethnic evasion,” the intentional estrangement from learning or speaking their native language (Tse, 2001, p.33). Contrary to current criticism towards new immigrants for not being assimilated enough, these examples prove that new immigrant students learn to, and sometimes are forced to, value English more and may distance themselves from their native languages and cultures. These students are learning that who they are and their native cultures are not good enough, and that they need to learn English and be more Americanized in order to be accepted.

**Sense of self and identity.** These experiences that immigrant students go through, which reinforce them to depreciate themselves and their culture, can also affect their self-image negatively. According to Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001), children

develop their sense of self by looking at how other people perceive them. This process is called social mirroring which means that one sees oneself through the lens of others ranging from family, friends, teachers, neighbors and even the general society.

Immigrant children are not only aware of others' evaluation of themselves but also how their ethnic group is received in society. When they sense that either they or their ethnic group are evaluated negatively by important others, some become hopeless and depressed. They show "self-doubt, shame, and low aspirations" (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p.100).

Developing a positive sense of self and identity is even more challenging for immigrant adolescents because adolescence is a time of identity formation (Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). In a social context where they are different from the majority culturally, linguistically, and racially, identity formation becomes a very difficult task (Coll & Magnuson, 1997). Padilla and Duran (1995), after studying the psychological stress of recent Mexican immigrant high school students, report that immigrant status and immigrant experiences were correlated with high levels of anxiety and low feelings of self-worth, which included self-appraisals of intelligence and physical attractiveness.

The way immigrant students interpret and react to social mirroring and different social contexts they encounter are very closely related to the way these students develop their identities and how they adjust their lives (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Some, as in the case of "ethnic evasion," actively reject their ethnic heritage and acculturate themselves completely into the mainstream culture. Some, on the other extreme, reject and develop antipathy towards the mainstream culture and only accept the

native culture. Most immigrant students are in the middle of these two extremes, and they try to negotiate the different cultures they face and develop their identity (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). This identity development is a complex and challenging process for many immigrant students and involves different factors such as the number of years of residence in the U.S., age, family, availability of social and educational support, and economic opportunity (e.g. Danico, 2003).

**Racism and discrimination.** Studies show that the race factor also plays an important role that will result in a different assimilation process for new immigrants, because unlike the previous generation of immigrants, most of the new immigrants are people of color (e.g. Portes, 1995; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). For example, many immigrant students are very conscious about racism and discrimination in the U.S. It is reported that compared to recent immigrant students, second generation immigrant students are more aware of racism and discrimination in school and U.S. society (Lee, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Recent immigrant students start their school life with more positive attitudes towards school (e.g. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995), but they may experience social isolation, be ridiculed by other students, and be considered as “aliens” and hear remarks such as “go home” (Gibson, 1995, p.85). According to Tuan (1995), Korean immigrant high school students in Los Angeles believe that hard work alone would not guarantee full acceptance by the mainstream society. They mention that because of their limited English, pursuing academic aspirations such as going to a prestigious university or majoring in a certain field may not be possible. An Asian identified student on the East Coast, for example, chose not to major in Political Science but in Engineering even though he wanted to be a politician

because he believed that his English accent would hinder him (Lee, 1996). A note from a nine year old immigrant boy from Dominica states: “life is good to you if you are pretty and if you are white. If your face looks white and you are not very dark, life is good” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p.98).

### **Educational Experiences of 1.5 Generation Korean Americans**

The difficulty of learning English, social isolation, racism, and the development of negative identity seem to be general experiences among 1.5 generation Korean Americans as well. For example, one of the most important tasks for Korean immigrant students is English acquisition, and most Korean immigrant students including 1.5 generation students, usually start their U.S. schooling as LEP students. For example, according to the U.S. Census data (2000), 50.5 percent of Korean Americans reported that they speak Korean at home and their English is less than “very well,” while only 18.1 percent said they speak only English at home.

**Challenges in studying 1.5 generation Korean Americans.** According to Hong and Min (1999), researchers who studied post-1965 immigration had focused on the adjustment issues of the first generation, and it had not been very long since they started giving more attention to the “children of post-1965 immigrants or the new second generation” (p.165). In general, there have been relatively few empirical studies done on 1.5 generation Korean Americans, and the information on this population is still limited (e.g. Danico, 2004, p.5, 23; Hurh, 1993, Park, 1999, p.141). Furthermore, since the researchers have not come to a clear consensus on the definition of “1.5 generation,” the

available studies have defined 1.5 generation in different ways and focused on different populations.

For instance, Palmer (2001) examining the ethnic identity development and the acculturation process of 1.5 generation focuses on adolescent immigrant students from Korea. The 1.5 generation Korean Americans Palmer interviewed were familiar with the “traditions and values” of Korea and at the same time they accepted “elements of U.S. customs and norms” that their parents either resisted or could not acquire (p.2). Palmer (2001) also points out that these 1.5 immigrants were usually LEP students. Danico (2004), on the other hand, studied the 1.5 generation Korean Americans in Hawaii who immigrated to the U.S. before the age of thirteen. Most of her informants were in their mid-twenties and early thirties, were more fluent in English and spoke conversational Korean to communicate with first generation Korean Americans, and they also had better understanding of Korean culture than the second generation Korean Americans in Hawaii. Unlike the 1.5 generation Korean Americans in the mainland, they had to deal with Korean, American, and also local Hawaiian cultures as a part of their acculturation process after their immigration.

Although these studies examine different subgroups of 1.5 generation Korean Americans and their experiences vary in many ways, it was found that school was still a central place where most of these 1.5 generation immigrants experience new culture and learn a new language: “For the most part, the participants’ main exposure to American culture was in the school” (Palmer, 2001, p.217).

**Memories of being an immigrant.** Danico (2004) examines the experiences of 1.5ers from both working class and middle class Korean American families in Hawaii.

Most of the informants came to the U.S. when they were in elementary school in the 1970s. When her informants were asked to share their memories of coming to the new country and new school, both groups shared the same feeling of isolation and marginalization as they came to the U.S. and entered U.S. schools. Not only did they face culture shock, their inability to speak English forced them to realize that they were different, not American or local, but Korean (Danico, 2004, p.96). Many of her informants had experiences of “being picked on or ridiculed” because of their accents, the dress they wore, and limited English or pidgin comprehension:

Andy said, “Initially I felt alienated because I could not speak English. We heard people say ‘go back to your country.’” Jenny recalls being picked on because of her Korean accent and “FOBBY”<sup>16</sup> dress, . . . . Pat recalls initially feeling “out of it,” not understanding what others were saying but understanding their mocking action of “putting their fingers to their eyes, stretching them and saying ‘ching chong’” (Danico, 2004, p.97, 113).

Whether they were from working class or middle class family backgrounds, the 1.5ers in Hawaii shared these memories of shame of being an immigrant (Danico, 2004, p.112).

**Becoming a minority.** S. Kim (2002) who looked at the everyday experiences of 1.5 generation Korean American adolescents shares similar findings. Her informants, who came to the U.S. between the ages of nine and sixteen, reported that as they entered their new school, they noticed that they became the “visible minorities” who were different from their peers in many ways. They realized that their physical features as well as their limited English were distinct markers of difference in their new environment (S. Kim, 2002, p.139). S. Kim (2002) points that this was an unexpected and new experience for these students because before they immigrated, they were members of “mainstream” Korea, and therefore, experienced very little discrimination.

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<sup>16</sup> “FOBBY” or “FOB” means “Fresh Off the Boat” which has negative connotations for new immigrants.

Palmer (2001) agrees with S. Kim in that one of the first things the 1.5 generation Korean adolescent students learn in American schools is the fact that they are no longer the “norma.” Coming from an “ethnically (and racially) homogeneous environment where they were in the majority,” these students, as they entered into the new country and new school, learned that they were no longer a part of the majority, and that their culture “was no longer as highly valued as it once was” (Palmer, 2001, p.6-7). Going through these cultural changes, these students also had to learn a new language, a new school culture, and a new way to interact with others (Palmer, 2001, p.7).

**Learning about race/racism.** Palmer (2001) also notes that his informants came from Korea without much experience or understanding of the racism that exists in the U.S. Once they entered into U.S. society, however, their experiences of “race and the U.S. hierarchy of racial affiliation” affected them to “feel as though Korean culture was inferior to U.S. culture” (p.218). Palmer also states that these racial issues also made the students feel isolated from mainstream society and led them to think that they could not be a part of the U.S. Consequently, they sought and held on to Korean culture more (Palmer, 2001, p.218).

**Internalized negative identity.** The negative perception of self and ethnicity was also found in other 1.5 generation Korean Americans. For example, after having bad experiences of being immigrants in their early school years, the 1.5ers in Hawaii learned that if they want to be included in mainstream society, they needed to get rid of their immigrant status as soon as possible (Danico, 2004, p.97). At the same time, they became aware of the negative images of Koreans that was pervasive in mainstream Hawaiian society (p.139). In Hawaii, Koreans were often perceived to be “hot-

tempered,” “forward,” and “materialistic,” and due to the lack of cultural understanding and communicative skills, the first generation Korean immigrants were sometimes portrayed as “uncivilized, barbaric and irrational” by the media (Danico, 2004, p.133, 138). Internalizing these negative stereotypes of Koreans, the 1.5ers assumed that “Korean Americans are a group to be ashamed of” (p.139).

Therefore, the young 1.5 generation students tried to deny their Korean-ness and to avoid situations that might remind them of their “own foreignness” (Danico, 2004, p.112, 141). Rather, they chose to befriend non-Koreans so that they could be seen as either Hawaiian born or other Asian American (Danico, 2004). Some never spoke Korean or talked about their ethnicity in school and tried to get away from other Korean-speaking students in order to be accepted by the dominant group (p.142). These 1.5ers could have tried to “pass as native” or “be a part of the dominant group” because it was in Hawaii where there is a longer history of Asian immigrants, and certain groups of Asian immigrants are seen as native and a part of the dominant group in Hawaii. One of Danico’s informants, for example, said that when he was in intermediate school, he wanted to be Japanese because Japanese was “the respected race in Hawaii. Because everyone’s name was Japanese and Japanese were more westernized. Chinese and Koreans were refugee-like” (2004, p.143).

Danico (2004) notes that this negative image of Koreans was changed as these 1.5ers went to college, especially outside of Hawaii, and met other 1.5 Korean Americans who did not fit the negative profiles of Koreans (p.153). However, this did not happen to every 1.5er in Hawaii and some still maintained negative perceptions of being Korean Americans (p.194). One interesting finding from Danico was that the 1.5ers from middle

class families were more proud of being Korean than those from working class families because the middle class family had more cultural and economic resources to educate their children with Korean language, art and history and even had them visit Korea for study abroad programs. On the other hand, the working class families did not possess the economic means for their children to learn about Korea and Korean culture. Instead of being Korean, the 1.5 generation Korean Americans from working class families felt more proud of being locals in Hawaii which “embrace working class culture” (Danico, 2004, p.185).

**The experience of ESL.** Whether they come to the U.S. as a child or as an adolescent, most 1.5 generation Korean Americans have to learn English as their second language, and therefore, the process of learning English is a critical part of their education in U.S. schools. According to Chee (2003) who investigated the English acquisition process of Korean immigrants, ESL programs were not very helpful and had a negative impact on the adolescent immigrants. She interviewed eight 1.5 generation Korean American women who immigrated to the U.S. as teenagers during the 1960s and 1970s. From the interviews, Chee found that these women felt that they did not learn much English in secondary school because they were put on the ESL track. The informants told Chee that because of the tracking practice of ESL programs, they were not permitted to take regular English classes and sometimes even the regular content classes. This did not give the informants enough opportunity to associate with English speakers, and they had “lack of input of the ‘standard’ form of [English]” since they mostly interacted with other ESL students (p.296). Some of her informants stated: “so

much crucial time was wasted during the first several years when we could have learned much more English” (Chee, 2003, p.296).

One of Danico’s informants (2004) also stated that ESL classes or the separation of LEP students from native English speakers can create negative outcomes:

*Mark states, I think intermediate school is more of a factor. There is the age factor, like the English as a second language students stay with Korean and have less to do with Western culture. With ESL you isolate the Koreans and make them feel like they’re less worthy in class. Like they are stupid, and the negative stuff weighs more on them. If you can go to the regular classes, you’re likely to learn more and improve self-pride because you’re forced to learn. ESL is backwards; they speak Korean or their own language [in class]”(in sic) (Danico, 2004, p.145).*

Besides the ESL tracking, Chee (2003) points out that the ideology and the social practice in school also discouraged the 1.5 generation young women from learning English in school. For example, these young women did not have many opportunities to interact with other native speakers even during recess, lunch or P.E. classes because both the ESL students and the native-born American students “internalized the dominant culture’s meanings about racial/ethnic categories,” and also many different “markers of identity” such as hair style, skin color and dress codes hindered the immigrant students from going across the invisible wall between the mainstream students and themselves (Chee, 2003, p.297-298). Through these experiences at school, the adolescent immigrant students learned to take their “minority identity” which lowered their self-esteem and discouraged their desire to master the target language because “speaking “broken” English was consistent with the identity of an immigrant” (Chee, 2003, p.298).

These findings are interesting in that the ESL program which was designed to help the LEP immigrant students actually worked against the very students it was supposed to help, and it also showed that the school environment, ideology and the social

practices in school were important factors that shaped these immigrant students' English acquisition process. Considering that second language acquisition is a very complicated process and there are many other variables that influence the students' English acquisition, more research is needed to clearly understand how ESL programs and other special English instruction work for 1.5 generation Korean American adolescent students.

**Literacy practice of recent 1.5 students.** Compared to the younger aged group, the adolescent immigrants show different patterns of language problems and literacy practice. Yi (2005) states that the majority of Korean adolescent immigrant students are English language learners (ELLs) or LEP students who speak Korean at home and are in the process of learning English. Even those who seem to be fluent English speakers, Yi (2005) notes, are "likely to be incompetent English readers and make both ESL types of errors (e.g. articles, prepositions) and basic written types of errors (e.g. forms, style of writing) in their writing," and she also says that some of these students do not know the basic vocabulary in either Korean or English (p.10).

## **Conclusion**

The history and controversy over bilingual education in the U.S. show that the language education policy for immigrant students is often formed by factors such as nativistic politics and cultural and linguistic hegemony against immigrants. Rather than asking what works the best for students, the question often became how fast immigrant students should be assimilated into the existing Euro-American mainstream society (Massey, 1995). Educational policy based on such attitudes towards immigrants can send

the message to immigrant students that they have to deny their heritages and native cultures in order to be accepted in the U.S.

Under such policy and practices, the literature shows that many immigrant students experience social isolation at school which not only affects their social interaction but also their opportunities to practice and learn English. The pressure to assimilate and to devalue their own cultures also impact immigrant students' sense of self and identity negatively (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). For the recent immigrant students after 1965, many of whom are Asians and Latino/a, the challenge is even greater since they are easily perceived as foreigners because of their race (Takaki, 1989; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

The brief overview of the educational experiences of 1.5 generation Korean Americans also reveal that these challenges are true for this population. In the following data chapters, more in-depth analysis of educational experiences of 1.5 generation will be presented. The chapters will discuss how 1.5 generation Korean American adolescents deal with these obstacles, navigate within the new schools, and learn about U.S. society after their immigration.

## Chapter Three

### Life History Interview in Studying 1.5 Generation Korean Americans

#### What Is Life History Interview?

**The definition and the history of life history interview.** There are several different definitions of life history or life history interview. Titon (1980), for example, defines life history as “a written account of a person’s life based on spoken conversations and interview” (p.283 quoted in Denzin, 1989, p.41). Atkinson (1998) does not differentiate life story and life history and defines life story as “a method of looking at life-as-a-whole and as a way of carrying out an in-depth study of individual lives” (p.3). Atkinson (1998) also views life story as a “fairly complete narrating of one’s entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects” (p.8). Though life history can be defined in various ways (e.g. see Dex, 1991; Lucherthand & Wieland, 1981), it is generally considered a biographical method, more specifically autobiography, in which the subject shares “a comprehensive view of his life” either by writing or “orally (e.g. in an interview) constituted life stories, which have been transformed into writing by some person other than the narrator” (Denzin, 1989; Kohli, 1989, p.62, 64).

Life story or life history as a research method has a long history in the field of sociology (Roberts, 2002). Perhaps the two most famous studies that used life story would be *The Jack-Roller* by Clifford Shaw (1930) and *The Poland Peasant in Europe and America* by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918-20) (Robert, 2002; Weinberg, 2002). Under the leadership of many prominent sociologists at the University of Chicago, such

as Burgess, Mead, and Robert E. Park, life history was a popular research method during the 1920s (Becker, 1966/2002; Denzin, 1989).

Since the late 1930s, life history lost its status as the positivistic quantitative research methods gained more weight in sociology (Robert, 2002; Weinberg, 2002). Compared to survey method which was regarded as “more accurate and representative” and efficient, life history was viewed as problematic in terms of its time, costs, and, most of all, its lack of “scientific standards” such as validity and reliability (Roberts, 2002, p.37). After several decades of “the hegemony of a method,” the reign of experimental study, researchers in the 1970s started taking more attention back to the biographical methods including life history (Bertaux, 1991, p.90; Denzin, 1989).

**Assumptions and purpose of life history interview.** Although it is true that life history is regaining in popularity among researchers, the assumptions and the goal of using life history method are not necessarily the same as they were before the 1930s. For example, Weinberg (2002) states that the early use of life history was mainly to develop social theories. According to Becker(1966/2002), for instance, the rich details of Stanley’s life story in *The Jack-Roller* became “a negative case” that could evaluate different theories: “any theory of delinquency must, if it is to be considered valid, explain or at least be consistent with the facts of Stanley’s case as they are reported here” for “one can argue that any theory that does not explain all cases is inadequate” (p.82). Roberts (2002) states that Thomas and Znaniecki (1919-20) also viewed life stories were necessary “to form more general ‘laws of social becoming’” (p.44). In their study of early twentieth century polish immigrants in the U.S., Thomas and Znaniecki selected “a few representative cases” that could illustrate the lives of immigrants: “a typical

representative of the culturally passive mass” (quoted in Roberts, 2002, p.43). Since the life stories they collected were the representative cases that needed to be generalized to create a social theory, the individual differences, they argued, could be ignored:

In order to be able to use adequately personal life-records for the purposes of nomothetic generalizations social science must have criteria permitting it to select at once from a mass of concrete human documents, those which are likely to be scientifically valuable for the solution of a given general problem (Thomas and Znaniecki, [1918-20] 1958:1834 quoted in Roberts, 2002, p.43).

On the other hand, many contemporary qualitative researchers not only challenge the positivistic notion of social science, they also do not believe in producing a “scientific truth” through generalization of their research findings (e.g. Atkinson, 1998; Bertaux, 1981; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Denzin, 1989, 2002; Goodson & Sikes, 2002). Rather than searching for “the scientific knowledge,” many researchers focus on “representing,” “understanding” or “making better sense of” the object of their study (e.g. Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.11; Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.48). The use of life history method, therefore, should be considered as an attempt to “understand” and to “make better sense of” a person’s life and his/her life story. However, an individual’s life in life history is not examined as an independent entity separated from a society but as “a life in context... a life profoundly influenced by social, economic, historical, religious and educational circumstances” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.3).

### **Life and Society**

Though it may be difficult to find one simple definition for life history interview, the basic assumptions of this method can be stated in the following ways (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). First, life history interview starts with an

assumption that individuals' lives cannot be clearly separated into different parts. For example, a person's life at work is not completely disconnected from the person's life at home, but rather what the person goes through in one area of his/her life eventually influences other areas of the person's life (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.2). Second, life history interview is based on the assumption that an individual's personal life, the experiences and perceptions, are closely interrelated with the historical and social events (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.2). In other words, life history interview puts "a life in context" and acknowledges that a life is always "situated" in a bigger society, and without understanding the larger social and historical contexts, we cannot fully understand an individual's life (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.3). Therefore, the purpose of life history interview is to understand "the relationship, the complex interaction, between life and context, self and place" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.3). In other words, it is to understand both life and society.

**Understanding life through understanding society.** Since nothing in our lives takes place in total isolation from the larger society, understanding an individual's life and their experiences within a social context is critical (Angrosino, 2002; Roberts, 2002). Thus, in order to develop a life history, the researcher needs to not only listen to the individual's unique story but also to understand the "social histories and social geographies in which life stories are embedded" (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.17). Without understanding the contextual information, the relationship between the individual's story and the social influences cannot be comprehended clearly. Therefore, we understand individual lives better through understanding society.

**Understanding society through understanding lives: What they share in their life stories.** At the same time, life history data also allows us to understand society better by understanding individuals' lives (Atkinson, 1998). For example, Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981) collected life stories from bakers, bakers' wives, and bakery workers in France and report that the data they gathered not only helped them see each individual's life but also the "sociostructural patterns" that was shared throughout each story they collected such as the working conditions for the bakery workers, the life course of bakers and bakers' wives, and the pattern of bread production in France (p.169). Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981) claim that their life story data revealed the patterns of social practices among bakers and bakery workers and helped them understand the "underlying sociostructural relations" that existed in bread production business in France (Bertaux, 1981, p.36).

One life story is only one life story. Thirty life stories of thirty men or women scattered in the whole social structure are only thirty life stories. But thirty life stories of thirty men who have lived their lives in one and the same sector of production (here bakery workers) represent more than thirty isolated life stories; taken together, they tell a different story, at a different level: the history of this sector of production, at the level of its pattern of sociostructural relationships (p.187).

As Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981) claim, comprehending the "pattern" of relationships between the individuals' lives and their social surroundings is important (also see Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Looking at this pattern leads the researcher to ask if there is any connection between "the personal" and "the social" which is one of the ultimate questions in conducting a life history interview research (Denzin, 2002; Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

**Understanding society through understanding lives: How they narrate their life stories.** Not only is an individual's life situated in a bigger context, Goodson and Sikes (2001) argue that the wider culture also provides us "the script for the way we story our lives" (p.77; Denzin, 1989). Life history data reveal how individual informants understand and view their lives as well as the bigger society (Atkinson, 1998, p.13). According to Goodson and Sikes (2001), individuals' social and cultural surroundings influence the way they think about and construct their life stories, which means that the ideology and the social and cultural frames of the society shape the individual's way of interpreting the past and making sense of their own stories (Denzin, 1989; Tierney, 2000, p.550). Therefore, we can argue that when we hear an individual's story, we hear both that particular individual's voice and "the wider cultural imperatives" (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.77). As Denzin (1989, 2002) states, the way we understand ourselves and our lives are formed by bigger institutional influences and ideologies.

It should be noted that when the informants tell their life stories, whether they are aware of it or not, they try to create a coherent story and self that are acceptable and constructed by social and cultural norms. Through the process of conducting a life history interview, a researcher becomes aware of the "cultural scripts and narrative devices the speaker uses to make sense of their own life experiences" (Frank, 1995, p.255 quoted in Tierney, 2000, p.545). Life history interview, therefore, gives the researcher and the readers a chance to look into the bigger society through the individual's story (Coles & Knowles, 2001; Denzin, 2002).

## **Life History Interview in Studying 1.5 Generation Korean Americans**

It is interesting to note that Thomas and Znaniecki's study (1918-20), which is considered to be one of the classic life history studies, was on Polish immigrants in the early twentieth century in the U.S. Life history interview is certainly a useful method to study immigration and it has been used to study the Korean American population as well. Chee's (2003) study on the 1.5 generation Korean American women's English acquisition process, Danico's (2004) interviews with 1.5ers in Hawaii about their immigration experiences, and Kim and Yu's (1996) collection of life stories of thirty-seven Korean Americans in Los Angeles are a few examples of life history interviews conducted on Korean American immigrants.

**Voice of "others."** One of the most important strengths of life history interview must be that it gives us a chance to hear the voice of "others." As Angrosino (2002) states, "official history has, until recently, been a record of the activity and accomplishment of elites," and researchers have been excluding the voice of the others, such as women, poor people, members of minority groups and those considered "deviant" (p.38). Life history brings information that is often contrary to "what is 'known' by intellectuals in general, and sociologists in particular" by giving these excluded people a chance to talk about their lives and to share their own perspectives about the issues of interest (Becker, 1970, p.71 quoted in Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.8).

The 1.5 generation Korean Americans, as a racial and ethnic minority in the U.S., have not received much attention from educators in general and from researchers in particular. Life history interview will, therefore, give these people a chance to share about their lives and their experiences and give *us* a chance to hear their voices, their

ideas and their own perspectives about their lives which might conflict with their general conceptions of who they are. Atkinson (1998) claims that being able to share one's story is "our birthright" because "story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear" (p.7). My study, by giving 1.5 generation Korean Americans the chance to tell their own stories in their own voices, enable them to be "heard, recognized, and acknowledged by others" (Atkinson, 1998, p.7).

**Life history and 1.5 generation Korean Americans.** My research seeks to understand how 1.5 generation immigrants, who immigrated as adolescents in the 1980s and 1990s, lived through the U.S. secondary school system and in mainstream and ethnic communities as well as to assess the impact and the long term effects of those experiences into adulthood. In pursuing these research goals, life history interview will be an appropriate and useful method to explore their lives and experiences after their immigration to the U.S.

First of all, this study looks for the individual informant's immigration life experiences. Life history interviews will gather rich life stories that each informant shares regarding various aspects of their immigrant lives. By hearing these stories from each informant who had come to the U.S. and gone through the educational and immigration experiences in various geographical locations and times, this study can also examine if there are any shared or common experiences among the informants. Their shared stories will lead us to consider if any possible "pattern of social practices" exists in school and society (Bertaux, 1981, p.36). Like Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981) mention, though one person's life story stays as a single person's unique story, "several

life stories *taken from the same set of sociostructural relations* support each other and make up, all together, a strong body of evidence” (p.187).

Not only does life history provide my informants the chance to share their life stories of their secondary schooling and community life experiences in their own voices, it also allows them to think about and interpret their own experiences as they look back and remember their lives. Atkinson (1998) states that having the informants reflect upon their own story and find their own meaning is important (p.62). Without it, life history interview is not very meaningful because it is the informants’ “subjective perspective” that shows how the informants construct their own realities (Atkinson, 1998, p.5, 62). By conducting life history interviews, therefore, I can hear both their version of their life stories and the way they interpret and view their life experiences (Angrosino, 2000; Casey, 1993). This can also reveal how they make sense of who they are, their relationships with the social surroundings and the effects of the social surroundings on their lives (Angrosino, 2000; Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

**School, society and immigrant students.** The informants’ life stories will, then, be the texts of lives from which I can gain an understanding of the relationship between these immigrants and their social surroundings, which includes the school, the mainstream and their ethnic communities and their home. More specifically, the informants will be able to discuss their experiences in secondary schools, their own evaluations of the schools’ programs including English-as- a- Second-Language (ESL) classes, and their social surroundings and interactions with other mainstream peers in school. Because they share their own evaluations of their experiences in school and the programs the school offered, it will be also important to know why they give such

evaluations and what influenced them to think in such ways. Also, their life stories after their high school graduation will add an important piece of information to see if there is any relationship between their early immigration experiences and how they view their lives now. From these, I will be able to critically review the role of school and society in these 1.5 generation Korean Americans' lives, the social script under which they interpret their lives, and the "pattern of social relations" between the adolescent immigrant students and their social surroundings (Bertaux, 1981; Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.87).

### **Doing the Interview**

**Gaining entry.** The informants for this study are 1.5 generation Korean American immigrant adults who a) have come to the U.S. during their adolescence, b) started their U.S. education in middle or high school, and c) have lived in the U.S. at least ten years. Total of eleven informants from different geographical locations have been recruited for the interview: two from California, two from Illinois, one from Maryland, one from Oregon, and five from Washington, one of whom went to high school in Alaska. The informants were in their twenties to late thirties at the time of the first interview and had immigrated to the U.S. during the 1980s and 1990s. The informants were recruited through snowball sampling. The researcher asked her personal acquaintances to either participate or refer prospective participants who meet the general description of the research participants. Many of the informants are the researcher's friends or family members. Although the original plan was to have less than ten informants total, the number became eleven as I was trying to meet several criteria: gender ratio (six males and five female), diversity in informants' geographical locations (six different states),

time of U.S. entry (eight from the 1980s and three from the 1990s), and educational backgrounds (two without bachelor's degree, six with bachelor's degree, three with masters' degree).

**Interview process.** I have conducted two interviews with most informants; The initial interview with all informants was between December, 2005 and April, 2006. Because the informants resided in various geographic locations, I have performed both face-to-face interviews and phone interviews in case it was impossible to conduct a face-to-face interview. However, I was able to perform at least one face-to-face interview with each informant. The initial face-to-face interviews took place at a safe and convenient place where each informant preferred: the informant's house, their office, coffee shop or the researcher's house. Based on the availability and the informants' willingness to participate, the second interview took place in the Summer of 2007. All but two informants agreed to participate in the second interview. For the second interview, I visited each informant for the face-to-face interview and if it was not possible, phone interview was arranged.

For the first interview, I asked the informants about their experiences in their school and community when they first came to the U.S. and also about their current immigrant lives. The interview questions ranged from their evaluations of the special English classes, school environment, friendship, family life, identity, their involvement in community, and their life experiences after high school (See appendix-B). Each interview took approximately one hour and it was audio-taped with the informants' permission.

The second interview was the follow-up of the first interview and the questions ranged within the same topics as the first interview. However, for the second interview, I narrowed down the interview questions to the ones that were more relevant to the main research question, and I also tried to focus on clarifying the informants' responses if they were not very clear during the first interview. The second interview was also audio-taped with the informants' permission. After the second interview took place, each informant received a one page basic demographic survey form that was filled by a researcher based on the information shared during the interview. The form asked various questions including address, family and educational backgrounds, and immigration status (see appendix-A). The informants reviewed the information and had a chance to correct them if it was necessary.

Besides the interview data, I also looked for the informants' memorabilia from their adolescent years, such as their diaries, letters, pictures, homework assignments or school documents. I asked them if they had any of these available and if they could share those with me during the interview. Only a few informants shared their memorabilia: Hajung and Soojin shared their dairies and letters, James showed me some of his early English writings and Hunter brought some of his pictures from his high school years to the interview. By sharing those items, these informants could remember more rich details of their past experiences which added more contexts to their life stories. For example, as Hajung went through some of her old diary entries with me, she remembered what she was experiencing at school during that time and explained to me how she was feeling and dealing with the situation in more details. If necessary and helpful, I used these memorabilia as an additional data source, for example, by quoting some of the

written documents, to make the life stories more vivid and complete as I did for Hajung's story in chapter five.

Before the first interview was conducted, I asked the informant whether they preferred Korean or English for the interview and the interview was done in the language the informants felt more comfortable with. Conducting the interview in Korean and English was possible for me because I speak and understand both languages. All but one initial interview was conducted in Korean. The interview data was transcribed in Korean and they were analyzed and then translated into English, unless English was used during the interview. I chose to do the analysis in Korean first before translation into English for the accuracy of the analysis. From my previous experience when I translated the Korean data before the analysis, I noticed that there are many subtle expressions that are hard to translate directly into English. This made me wonder if translating before analysis becomes a hindrance to a more accurate analysis since the original meaning could be changed through the translation process.

The transcribed data created eleven life stories and some of their life story vignettes were presented in the data chapter. However, the main analysis and the organization of the data were made based on the emerging themes. For example, in Chapter four, English education for informants, such as the programs and the learning environment in school, was the main focus, and each life story was reviewed and analyzed under this main theme. Chapter five and some parts of the Conclusion chapter also had themes: social interactions in school and the life outside of school respectively. Although I started this study with several key themes based on the research question, I

also looked for other emerging themes as I listened to each informant's life story and considered if I could analyze the data based on the new emerging themes.

## **Methodological Issues**

**Researcher's position in the interview process.** Interviewing Korean immigrants about their life experiences in the U.S., Kim and Yu (1996) state that they chose oral history<sup>17</sup> "because it disturbs the hierarchical relationship between writer and subject, allowing us to speak not about the subject but with and besides him or her" (p.xii). Like Kim and Yu (1996), life history researchers acknowledge the role of informants in the research process and they create the life history as a "joint creation" with their informants (Atkinson, 1998; Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.45; Tierney, 2000, p.549). In this process, researchers do not stay as disinterested listeners but share their ideas and experiences with their informants and make the interview more like a conversation which can produce genuine "intersubjective understanding" (Angrosino, 2002, p.41; Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.14; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004 ; Rose, 2001, p.172).

The "joint creation" of life history not only gives the informants more power in the research process, it also changes the researchers' positions and their roles. Rather than being the objective observers who are detached from the research process, life history interview expects the researcher to be visible and more engaging with the informants in the research process (Coles & Knowles, 2001, p.13-14; Holstein & Gubrium, 2002, 2004). Considering the weight of the researchers' roles in the research

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<sup>17</sup> According to Titon (1980), an oral history focuses "chiefly on events, processes, causes and effects rather than on individuals furnish oral history with its raw data" (p.291 quoted in Denzen, 1989, p.41). Although Kim and Yu (1996) use "oral history" to describe their project, the collected stories they present are the narratives of the informants' lives, not on certain events or processes. Therefore, I include Kim and Yu's study (1996) as an example of life history project.

process, it is important to let the readers know who they are, their experiences and backgrounds and how the researchers' personal attributes influence the research process (Coles & Knowles, 2001, p. 10, 14; Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.35).

Understanding who the researchers are is important to the readers, but it is also very important to the researchers themselves. If qualitative research, or life history interview, is all about making sense of the world you study, "who you are as a researcher" really matters in almost every part of the research process: from the selection of the research topic, data collection, analysis and interpretation, etc. Wolcott (2001) mentions, for example, that researcher's personal style, prior experiences, and how to share the story are all related to the interpretation process. Understanding "who I am," therefore, is a very important step that researchers must take in order to conduct a qualitative research including life history interview.

**Being an insider.** As I shared earlier, I came to the U.S. as a high school sophomore and I started my U.S. education with ESL classes in late 1980s. I am interested in my research topic and the population more so because of my experience as an ESL student in a U.S. high school. This is a very personal matter as well as an academic interest.

Given the reason why I became interested in my research project, it is not very surprising to note that I have always considered myself as an "insider" of the group of people that I am interested in studying - 1.5 generation Korean Americans. I look at my own life and the people who are close to me, such as my friends and family who share similar life experiences as mine, and I never doubted my identity as an insider. I thought

to myself that I share their experiences, have been there where they are and I understand what they are going through.

This insider identity was beneficial for my research. It helped me and my informants, some of who are my friends and family, develop better relationships that enhanced the interview process (Atkinson, 1998, p.64). Having similar backgrounds and experiences, I was able to understand and “connect deeply” (Atkinson, 1998, 65) with their stories better since I could relate myself to their experiences. According to Bernal (1998), the researcher’s own personal experience as an insider also provides “cultural intuition” which gives the researcher “insight” to make better understanding of data (p.564). In other words, because I went through the immigrant adolescent experience myself, it gave me “cultural intuition” that helped me make better “meaning” to my informants’ stories (Bernal, 1998, p.563). My insider identity also made the informants feel more supported since they knew the interviewer was someone who was familiar with their life experiences and it helped them open up and share their stories more freely. Sharing this mutual understanding, the interviewer and the informants were able to create a vibrant “active interview process” and to participate in the “meaning-making project” together better (Atkinson, 1998, p.40; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p.150).

At the same time, I acknowledge that my insider identity also carried challenges in conducting my study. Like Rose (2001) who had difficulty in sharing his own ideas and experiences with his informants because he worried if his own perspective would “overshadow” what others want to say to him, I also asked myself just how much I should reveal my experiences and my thoughts to my informants (p.172). What I witnessed in school as a student, what I felt about the school and myself and the impact

the experiences made in my life have created my own biases about ESL programs and the U.S. school system. Knowing this, I was cautious about sharing my opinions on such matters with my informants. I questioned if, instead of creating intersubjective understanding, I was having the informants agree with me either because they felt that they had to agree with me or they were seeking my approval or coherency of their stories by creating similar accounts as mine. Since I, despite my insider identity, was still in a position where I could place the researcher's "colonizing power" over my informants, I needed to be aware of this potential problem throughout the research process (Bertaux, 1981, p.9; Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.17).

**Life history as a narrative study.** Besides the researcher's identity and position in the research process, it is also important to recognize that life history interview is ultimately a narrative analysis. According to Josselson (1995), the academy has come into "the age of narrative" (in Atkinson, 1998, p.74). Story is now acknowledged as a valid form of knowledge that allows us to face "lived experience in its purest and rawest form" (Atkinson, 1998, p.74). The word "narrative analysis" is used quite broadly in the field of qualitative inquiry. For some researchers, the term has more definite and restrictive meaning. For example, Manning and Cullum-Swan (1998) and Silverman (2001) explain that narrative shares certain important components, such as specific function of a story or the organization of a story. According to Riessman (2002), following Aristotle who defined narrative as having "a beginning, middle and end," scholars generally accept sequence as a necessary element of narrative although different scholars emphasize different type of sequence, such as chronological, consequential or

thematic sequence (p.230). For most scholars, Riessman (2002) argues, narrative is a distinct unit of analysis that has “clear beginnings and endings” (p.230).

Life history is clearly a narrative study since the data take a form of a personal narrative about his/her own life, which has “beginning, muddle, and resolution” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 19). One of the important aspects of narrative analysis is that its interpretation of life and the world is very “subjective” and “individualized” (Atkinson, 1998, p.21, 73). Researchers such as Denzin (1998) and Wolcott (1995), for example, express the researcher’s attempt to make sense of the world as “the art of interpretation.” According to this view, interpretation is a very personal matter, and instead of a set formula, the researcher’s “life and method...are inextricably intertwined” (Denzin, 1998, p.315).

**Reliability, validity and truthfulness.** Therefore, reviewing life history interview under the conventional evaluative criteria, such as validity and reliability, in a way they are used in a quantitative study would not be appropriate (Atkinson, 1998, p.59). In fact, many researchers question if concepts like reliability and validity are relevant in a qualitative study (Denzin, 1998; Wolcott, 1995, p.167). For example, Atkinson (1998) states that it is not possible that two different researchers record and analyze the life story data the same “replicable” way even if they listen to the same person’s story because there are many different ways to analyze the data based on the criteria that are most important and relevant to the researchers (p.59).

The question of relevancy in qualitative research is also applied to validity. Wolcott (1995) claims that validity is an example of “the language of quantitative researchers” that is assumed to be “the language of all research,” and he encouraged the

fieldwork researchers to think about how appropriate *validity* is for their own study and how to approach this concept (p.168-169). For example, constructivists like Guba and Lincoln pursue *credibility* and *transferability*, which can be viewed as internal and external validity (in Denzin, 1998). Their approach and understanding of validity is different from quantitative researchers, but they claim the relevancy of their alternative viewpoints. Atkinson (1998) also suggests that instead of validity in a quantitative sense, more relevant concept for life history research would be “internal consistency,” which looks for the consistency within the shared story and ensures that there is no contradiction in different parts of the story: “There *are* inconsistencies in life, and people may react one way one time and a different way at another time, but their stories of what happened and what they did should be consistent within itself” (p.60).

The question about validity in life history is also related with another issue: the credibility or truthfulness of the story. Since my informants had to remember life events that happened more than ten years ago, it might have been difficult for them to provide accurate information. Angrosino (2002), for example, states that the life history interview “should not be taken at face value” since the human memory is not perfect. He recommends that instead of using the interview data as the only evidence data source, it should be cross-checked with other possible evidences such as archival and documentary data (p.38). Roberts (2002) also warns about the possibility of fabrication of the story by the informants whether it is done intentionally or unintentionally because the informants’ memories were not accurate (p.38).

Goodson and Sikes (2001), on the other hand, state that it is not the researcher’s ability to determine whether the informants’ stories are true or not. They view that when

the informants tell their life stories in a life history interview project, they are engaged in a “creative act” of telling their stories (p.48). In this act, it is their ability to narrate and to articulate their stories, rather than their commitment to tell the truth, that determines how good they are as informants, and there is no way for life historians to guarantee the “reality” or “truth” in their research act (p.47-48). Atkinson (1998) also states that the main point of life history is not to find the “historical truth” but the informants’ subjective perspectives, their “insider viewpoints,” on their own lives: “what they remember as having happened” and how they feel about what happened (p. 59, 61). Although “internal coherence” of the story needs to be checked, life history interview will not emphasize the external or “historical truth” of the story (Atkinson, 1998, 61). By taking the life history interview, I view my informants as “the experts” of their own lives who know about their lives the best and now have “the authority” to talk about them, and I also assume that they were telling me a “truthful and thorough representation of *the story that they know*” (Atkinson, 1998, p.59 italics added).

## Chapter Four

### English Education Programs for Korean American Immigrant Adolescent Students (KAIAS)

#### General Curriculum and Programs for the KAIAS

**Policies and programs for secondary immigrant students in the U.S.** All of the eleven informants immigrated and went to public secondary schools during the 1980s and 1990s. The earliest came to the U.S. in 1982 and the latest in 1994. As stated in chapter two, during the 1980s and 1990s, the controversy over the effectiveness of bilingual education grew heavily. Although the passage of the Bilingual Education (BE) Act of 1968 recommended teaching language minority students both English and their native languages and cultures to best assist students, many social conservatives questioned if BE program was really a good way to teach the students English or if it would only help them to maintain their ethnic heritage. William J. Bennett, the U.S. Secretary of Education during the 1980s, for example, proposed that rather than the transitional bilingual education program, which uses the child's native language to teach English, other programs such as "English as a Second Language (ESL)" program or "structured immersion" program, which is also known as "English-only," should be implemented with a clear emphasis on teaching "English" to language minority students. Starting in 1984, the funding for such alternative programs increased while the controversy continued until Congress expired the BE Act itself in 2002 (e.g. see Crawford, 2002).

Although the controversy over the BE programs was fierce during those eras, providing BE program often was not an option for immigrant students in secondary

schools. According to the U.S. Department of Education data, 24.7 percent of 9-12th grade LEP students were in ESL only programs while 4.8 percent of them received bilingual only and 18.8 percent had ESL and bilingual program during the 1993-1994 school year<sup>18</sup> (Hook & Fix, 2000). Harklau (1999) also reports that in high school, students are generally placed in pull-out ESL classes for only “a portion of the learners’ day,” and most of the time, ESL classes do not use the students’ native languages for instruction but use only English to teach English. This was true for all of my informants. Although the informants’ experiences in English programs varied, all of them took some sort of ESL classes in their middle school or high school; none of them were in bilingual education programs where Korean was used along with English in their instructions.

#### **Informants’ programs and experiences in English as a second language**

**(ESL) class.** The informants attended secondary school in six different states after their immigration: Alaska (1), California (4), Illinois (2), Maryland (1), Oregon (1) and Washington (2). Three of the eleven informants came to the U.S. during the 1990s and the rest of them came in the 1980s (see *Figure 1*). The earliest immigrant, who was fifteen at the time and is now in his early 40s, came to the U.S. in 1982, and the youngest informant came when he was twelve and had been in the U.S. for 14 years at the time of the interview. Because at least ten years have lapsed since many of the informants graduated from high school and more than twenty years for some, it was difficult for them to remember detailed specifics about their particular ESL curriculum and the classes they took. However, they still remembered certain facts and their experiences in ESL

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<sup>18</sup> During the same year, 31.2 percent of K-5th grade LEP students received ESL only program while 11.1 percent received the bilingual only and 33.7 percent received ESL and Bilingual program (Hook & Fix, 2000).

classes, such as what they did in the class, how long they took ESL classes, who the other students and teachers were and what they were thinking about being in ESL as well as other school experiences.

*Various ESL settings.* Each informant has different experiences in terms of the number of years in ESL program, the programs they were in and what type of ESL instruction they received. For example, Jungmin<sup>19</sup>, who came during his 10<sup>th</sup> grade, had only one semester of ESL classes and started taking all regular classes from his second semester in his high school. When he expressed that he did not want to take any more ESL class, his ESL teachers approved him under the condition that if he could not handle the regular class, he should come back to the ESL program. Jungmin did not have to take any test to leave the ESL program. Like Jungmin, some informants also did not have to take a test to change their classes or leave the ESL program. On the other hand, Brian, Hunter, and Rob were in ESL programs in which several levels of ESL classes were offered and they had to take an exam in order to move to the higher level ESL class or to leave the ESL program. Rob, for example, was in an ESL program for about three to four years. When he became a sophomore, he was allowed to take a low level English course but he was still required to take an ESL class.

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<sup>19</sup> Pseudonyms were used for all informants. The pseudonyms are both Korean and English depending on which name each informant uses. For example, if an informant usually uses Korean name, I made up a Korean pseudonym for the informant.

Name	Gender	Year of immigration	State	Year in school	Type of ESL	Number of years in ESL
Jungmin	M	Nov., 1982	AK	10 <sup>th</sup>	Content-based	0.5 year
James	M	June, 1985	WA	9 <sup>th</sup>	Pull-out	2-3 years
Amy	F	June, 1986	WA	9 <sup>th</sup>	Pull-out	3 years
Rosie	F	May, 1987	IL	10 <sup>th</sup>	Pull-out	2.5 years
Soojin	F	June, 1987	CA	8 <sup>th</sup>	Content-based	1.5 years
Brian	M	Dec., 1987	OR	7 <sup>th</sup>	Content-based	3 years
Heather	F	June, 1988	CA	8 <sup>th</sup>	Pull-out	4 years
Rob	M	June, 1988	CA	7 <sup>th</sup>	Pull-out	3-4 years
Matt	M	Aug., 1991	MD	7 <sup>th</sup>	Pull-out	2 years
Hunter	M	Oct., 1993	CA	7 <sup>th</sup>	Pull-out	2.5-3 years
Hajung	F	Feb., 1994	IL	8 <sup>th</sup>	Content-based	2.5-3 years

*Figure 1.* Informants' immigration record and type of ESL program enrolled.

In terms of the type of ESL class, most of them were in a pull-out ESL program in which they were taken from the regular classes for one or two hours each day to learn English. Four of the informants were in content-based ESL program in which they were also studying academic contents, such as social studies in ESL class along with regular ESL classes. For example, Jungmin took one regular ESL class and one ESL social studies during his first semester in his high school. James, on the other hand, took only one regular pull-out ESL class per semester for two to three years in his high school.

Although most informants attended a school that offered at least one or two pull-out ESL classes, the quality and the size of the ESL program varied greatly as well. Rosie, for example, went to a high school in which it did not have any ESL program. Rosie and her brother were the school's very first ESL students and the school did not offer an ESL class until her second semester. During the first semester, an elderly volunteer lady was sitting in Rosie's classes to assist her. From the second semester, the school hired an ESL teacher and offered one ESL class at the end of the day, but there was no set curriculum or instruction in that class. Although she took the ESL class for

the next two and a half years, Rosie did not understand what the teacher was trying to do and was not sure if she learned anything from that class. Rosie said, “[the teacher] just sat there.”

Hunter, who went to a middle school in Southern California, took two pull-out ESL classes with about thirty to forty other ESL students. The high school he entered after two years had an even bigger ESL program. The school had over 120 ESL students and offered several levels of ESL classes. After taking the high school placement test, Hunter was required to take one ESL class. According to Hunter, all the ESL students in the program were required to take an annual test to move to the next level ESL class. Also, his high school had all students, both ESL and non-ESL, to pass its own mandatory test – writing, mathematics and swimming tests, in order to graduate. Hunter remembered that the ESL classes focused on writing and grammar to prepare the students for college admission and for the mandatory graduation tests in his school.

The variety of informants’ experiences in their ESL programs is not a big surprise, because there is no set curriculum for bilingual or ESL programs in secondary schools and literally “no two bilingual/ESL programs are alike” (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p.269). Whether it was a pull-out or content-based program, a big or small ESL program, most of the informants generally spent one to four hours taking ESL classes and spent the rest of their days in regular classes while they were in the ESL programs. Therefore, what they experienced could be good examples of learning English through “English-only” as Bennett proposed during the 1980s, and most of them were literally immersed in English in their regular classes because of the lack of school resources at the time to provide for effective second language acquisition.

## **Informants' Evaluations on the Quality and the Effectiveness of the ESL Programs**

As I discussed the informants' experiences in their ESL programs, I asked them how effective they think their ESL programs were in terms of their English learning. Since most of them had been out of school for a long time and immersed in their careers and their adult lives, I was curious how they would view their own educational experiences, especially in the ESL program, and its effects on their lives. By "quality" and "effectiveness," I strictly mean how the informants evaluated their own experiences in ESL programs, and there is no evaluation measure that I used to prove their self-assessment in any objective way. Hearing the stories about their ESL experiences, I was trying to understand how their ESL programs and the educational policies were related to their language learning and life experiences in school.

**Amy's story.** Amy came to the U.S. as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader in June, 1986. She entered high school in a suburb of Seattle, Washington, and attended the same school until she graduated. During her first year, she was enrolled in two pull-out ESL classes and three or four regular classes. She did not remember much about the details of the ESL curriculum but recalled reading books, talking about the stories she read and taking many vocabulary tests in her ESL classes. She remembered that there were about 12-13 ESL students from different countries, such as Cambodia, China, Japan, and Vietnam. She also remembered that there were two ESL teachers, who were nice, each teaching one ESL class. She was required to take two ESL classes until her sophomore year and then one ESL class during her junior year. Each year, the ESL students needed to pass the courses they were taking in order to move to the next level. After her junior year, she

passed the ESL exit test, which allowed her to leave the ESL program and take regular English class.

Amy had to take many regular classes starting from her first semester in the U.S. Although she mainly took classes that did not require much English, such as Physical Education, some classes such as History were difficult for her to handle. Facing the same requirements as other students and not understanding what was being taught, she remembers often feeling stupid and overwhelmed.

The first semester, I had to take two ESL classes and many regular classes. In my regular classes, although both teachers and the students in my classes knew that I was a non-English speaker, they did not really care much about me. There was no special arrangement made for me for the class requirements. I often just sat there in the class not really understanding what was being taught. During the small group discussion times, the other students just talked to one another and did not even bother talking to me because they knew that I could not speak English. Then, I felt stupid and wondered why I had to be there. I also felt afraid in my classes. Sometimes, the teacher would have the students take turns and read the textbook out loud. My pronunciation was terrible, but I had to read it, too. As I noticed that my turn was coming soon, I became quite nervous. I am sure the teacher understood what I was reading, but the students must have been laughing at me. (Amy, immigrated in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.)

As a teenage girl, being an only ESL student in her regular classes where most of her classmates were fluent English speakers was not an easy thing to deal with for Amy. She was sensitive about how others would think of her and laugh at her poor English pronunciation. She was also fully aware of her inability to communicate with others and the fact that she was a stranger and was not welcomed in her class. Having to face such reality and to stay in such conditions in her regular classes gave Amy much stress, and this pressure, in return, made her appreciate her ESL classes more. Amy said that ESL was the best because in that class the students were similar in terms of their English proficiencies. Meeting those non-native English speaking students who were similar to

herself, Amy did not have to deal with much pressure as she did in her regular classes. In ESL class, she did not have to be the only one who could not communicate fluently and different from others. For Amy, ESL class functioned as a “resting place, refuge or a shelter” in many ways.

**ESL as a shelter.**

*Social and emotional support.* Most of the informants who evaluated their ESL program positively mentioned similar stories; ESL was a place where they received social and emotional support. For example, Matt, who came to the U.S. when he was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, stated that ESL was helpful for him because it became a “shelter” from the rest of the school. Before his immigration, Matt recalled himself to be a hard-working and active student in Korea. In his Korean school, Matt was a student who often raised his hands during class discussions and actively participated in many school activities. After immigrating, Matt went to a middle school where he was one of the few Koreans in the midst of many African American students, and it was not easy for him to adjust in his new school environment.

First, unlike Korea where he had many friends to whom he could talk, he could not speak as freely as he wished and the people he could talk to was also limited. At the same time, he realized that academically he was not an outstanding student in his class as he had been in Korea; the only classes he could excel in were mathematics and physical education classes. Matt felt frustrated with these rather sudden changes in his school life, but that was not the only source of stress for him. During his early years in school, he confronted some unpleasant occasions with other students. For example, sometimes some students would shove him around in the hallways or cut in line right in front of him

in the cafeteria without a word of apology knowing Matt was an ESL student. When such things happened, Matt could not do much but feel helpless because he was limited in his English and did not know how else he could handle those unjust situations and constant bullying.

For Matt, like Amy, the ESL class was a shelter from all these problems he had to face. In ESL class, he met other ESL students who were in similar situations. Although he was the only Korean student in his ESL program, he developed friendships and created his own community with other ESL students. He felt like he belonged and supported from the ESL community and felt confident in that atmosphere. “Since everyone was not good in English in ESL class, I acted like a king,” said Matt.

Harklau (1999) also reports a similar finding from her three-and-a-half year ethnography in a high school ESL program. She states that the ESL class became a “haven” for the students who were experiencing a lot of stress at school, and it provided a space where they could meet other LEP immigrant students, who were going through similar challenges, and receive social support from one another. ESL program, therefore, played an important role as the ESL students adjusted themselves socially and emotionally in their new school environments.

Matt, for example, stated that the most important thing for a child is keeping one’s self-esteem. During the interview, Matt used the Korean word, “Gi” to explain this which can be translated as “one’s spirit,” “self-esteem” or “self-confidence.” Matt said that once you lose your “Gi,” you cannot do anything. What Matt experienced and faced daily in his new school definitely challenged and jeopardized his “Gi,” and Matt said that he was thankful for his ESL program because it became a “barrier” that protected him

from losing his “Gi” and being more depressed. He stated that it was amazing that they could create such a community within the ESL and without its support, it must have been too difficult for him to handle his school life and he could have eventually lost his interest and motivation to study.

*ESL teachers.* The informants also mentioned that their ESL classes were like a homeroom where they felt more comfortable receiving help from their ESL teachers. When they had a difficult time communicating with other teachers in regular classes or their counselors, many of their ESL teachers talked to the teachers and counselors on the students’ behalf. For example, Hajung, who came as a 8<sup>th</sup> grader, said that when she needed to change her schedule, her counselor would not approve her request until her ESL teacher stepped in and explained why Hajung needed to make the change and how difficult it was for Hajung to keep the original schedule. She also felt that she could talk to her ESL teachers when she faced difficult situations because they understood her more than other teachers. Her ESL teachers also invited the ESL students to their homes possibly to let them experience examples of “American culture,” and they gave out medals and awards at the end of the semester in order to encourage the students. Other informants also mentioned that they got extra help from their ESL teachers to do their assignments for their regular classes - sometimes even after they left the ESL program.

One of the informants, Brian, actually had a Korean teacher’s assistant (TA) in his high school ESL program. Brian came to the U.S. when he was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and he continued to take ESL program in his high school where there were a lot of Korean students. The Korean TA helped all students in the ESL program academically, sometimes even helping them solve mathematics problems. However, the TA also

worked as an advocate for the Korean students when they had conflict with other students or the school administrators. For example, some of the Korean ESL students got into a fight with other students, and in such situations, the Korean TA came and interpreted for the students explaining why they were involved in a fight to their school administrators. Since the students could not explain themselves in detail and had to deal with serious punishment from the school, having someone who could speak for them was a great help. Brian said that such assistance lent greater support for the students than receiving academic aid from the TA.

**ESL and English learning: Positive aspects.** Though many of the informants agreed on the social and emotional support of the ESL program, their evaluations of the ESL programs' effectiveness on their English-learning varied.

*Only place to learn English.* In Rob's case, ESL was very helpful because he practically had a personal tutor in his ESL class. When he came to the U.S., Rob finished only a part of his 6<sup>th</sup> grade in Korea, and he entered his middle school as a 6<sup>th</sup> grader. The middle school he entered had a separate school setting for the 6<sup>th</sup> graders that was like an elementary school where the students stayed in the same class for a whole day. In this class, Rob was the only student who could not speak English and had no extra assistance to understand the instruction. Rob said that he could not really learn anything in the class. After about a week, the school placed him in 7<sup>th</sup> grade classes so that he could receive ESL instruction. In his ESL class, the teacher noticed that Rob did not even possess basic knowledge of English, such as the alphabet, and had his TA teach Rob personally after regular ESL classes. For his first year in ESL, Rob took two ESL classes with other ESL students and took additional two hours with the ESL TA. During those

two hours, the TA taught Rob English pronunciation and had him talk after showing him some children's movies that he recorded. Rob said that having such a personal tutor was helpful for him to learn English.

Brian also said that his ESL program was helpful for his writing. He said that it must have been much harder and more stressful for him to learn English in regular classes. For example, Brian said that regular English class does not teach English grammar, and it is something one learns in elementary school. Since he did not have much grammatical foundation in English, Brian had no clue how to write in English and found it helpful when his ESL teachers showed him how to write. "I still do not write very well... If I had studied really hard on my own, I might have learned it too, but it was helpful to have the ESL teachers teach us how to write in the class." He also said that the three years in his ESL class was the only time he actually "learned" English in his 20 plus years in the U.S. Brian now works as a chef in a Japanese restaurant he owns. His English usage is mainly for his interaction with his customers and he said the primary language he uses in his daily life is still Korean: "With English that I know now, I can make a living. To be honest, in my case, I am [depending on] English that I learned during the first three years."

*Practice to speak with one another.* Some informants also said that having a comfortable environment in ESL not only helped the students emotionally, but also provided an atmosphere in which the students could speak out and practice English more freely. Soojin, for example, came to the U.S. when she was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and attended the ESL program for one and a half years. Soojin said that ESL was helpful not necessarily because she learned much English in the class but because it allowed her to practice

speaking English out loud with other ESL students. Because they were all ESL students, she did not have to worry a lot about making mistakes when she spoke English with them. That, in her opinion, was the most beneficial part of the ESL program: the opportunity to make mistakes while learning to speak English.

Matt also mentioned that because his ESL class served as a shelter for the ESL students, it created a “secondary English community” that provided a comfortable environment for the ESL students to speak English without fear. “As ESL students got closer to one another, they would keep talking to one another in English whether it really made sense or not, and as they kept doing that, their speaking ability improved,” said Matt. However, Matt also pointed out that this creation of the “secondary English community” had its downfalls for ESL students’ English learning which will be discussed more in-depth in the next section.

**ESL and English learning: Negative aspects.** Many informants, even the ones who acknowledged the helpfulness of an ESL program, addressed some of the weaknesses and the problems of the programs in which they were enrolled. Many of them were not very satisfied with the quality of the ESL curriculum and how ESL class was structured within the school.

*Separation of ESL students from the mainstream students.* The fact that ESL functioned as a comfortable shelter for the ESL students also became the very reason why some of the informants did not appreciate ESL as much; as it provided a safe haven for the ESL students, it also created the separation between the ESL students and the mainstream students in the school. Matt who explained the “secondary English community” in ESL said that though it helped him and other ESL students freely practice

speaking with one another, it also limited his English learning since it was happening within ESL only. Matt said that the creation of the ESL community was amazing, but, at the same time, it discouraged him and other ESL students from interacting with mainstream “American<sup>20</sup> kids.” Because his social and linguistic interaction was mainly happening in ESL only, Matt thought that he did not really get to learn American culture or everyday English that is spoken among native English speakers in school. Matt mentioned that when he talks with Americans<sup>21</sup> even these days, sometimes he wonders if he is speaking a “special version of English” that he learned from the ESL community. He said that his speaking sounds like writing sometimes.

Matt’s comment on his English versus native speaker’s English may reflect the difference between the Basic Interpersonal Communicative skills (BICS) and the Cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP). According to Cummins (1979, 1980, 1981), there are two types of second language acquisition: CALP and BICS. While CALP is “context reduced” and acquired through classroom exercises and academic instruction, BICS is “context-embedded” and acquired through personal and social interaction with other English speakers (Brown, 2000, p.246). In other words, CALP is an academic language while BICS is a social language (Haynes, 2007). For ESL students, without much social interaction with English speaking peers, their English learning can

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<sup>20</sup> By “American students” or “American friends,” most informants generally meant White Caucasian students who were usually the dominant part of the student population in their schools, but the term also indicated the native English speaking peers in the mainstream student body.

<sup>21</sup> Matt used the term “American” in this conversation to indicate fluent or native English speakers compared to himself. However, it is important to notice that a lot of informants shared that when they hear the word “American,” they often think of Whites. Although most of the informants identify themselves as Korean American, when they think of the term “American,” they would not picture themselves but automatically think of Whites. Matt, actually was the only informant who thought of various ethnic groups including African American, Native Americans, Asian Americans, etc. when he hears the word, “American.” However, he said that he still thinks of Whites when he hears the term “mainstream.”

be restricted to CALP in ESL classroom. Matt may have thought that his speaking sounds like writing because his English acquisition was mostly happened through ESL or classroom activities, but he did not receive much input for his BICS. Also, because he stayed mostly within the ESL community and practiced English mainly with other ESL students, it could have influenced his BICS and caused him to feel that he was speaking a “special version of English.”

This separation of ESL students from the mainstream students seems to be a common experience for most informants. Hajung, for example, also mentioned that though the teachers were planning different activities to encourage ESL students and boost their interest in learning English, such as giving out medals and awards at the end of the semester and throwing parties for the students, all the activities were done within the ESL classes only and there were no connections with the rest of the school. She felt that the program might have been too protective of the ESL students.

For the same reason, James, who came to the U.S. when he was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, viewed that his ESL class was not helpful at all. In his high school, he was required to take one pull-out ESL. Entering his ESL class, James soon noticed that the ESL curriculum was too elementary and all the students in the class could not speak English well. James did not appreciate such an environment and thought he could not learn English being in that class and interacting with students who seemed to know even less English than himself. James was not motivated to study in his ESL class but took the class just because he was required to and to get easy grades. James perceived that participation in the ESL community would not help his English learning and, therefore,

chose not to be a part of it although he did not have access to the mainstream student community, either.

Jungmin, who came to the U.S. as a 10<sup>th</sup> grader, actually chose to leave ESL program after one semester for that reason. He noticed the same situation in his ESL class as James, and also some of his friends who came to the U.S. earlier than himself advised him that staying in ESL might not be helpful for his English. Since his parents could not speak English and did not know much about the education system in the U.S., Jungmin did not get much input from his parents but basically made the decision by himself.

I am not sure if I had any bias at that time, but in my immature opinion, I thought I would learn English better if I make friends with native English speakers and talk with them more. But all the students I met in the ESL class could not speak English well. That was frustrating to me, although I could not speak English myself. (Laughing). So I thought it would be better for me to try the regular class and learn English there. (Jungmin, immigrated in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.)

Olsen (1997) also reports that some ESL students perceive ESL classes – both regular ESL and content-based ESL – as lower level classes than regular courses and believe being in an ESL program is not good for them if they want to go to college. Some actually leave the program for those reasons.

***Low standards and childish curriculum.*** Another big concern many informants shared about their ESL programs was the quality and the effectiveness of the ESL curriculum. For example, both James and Jungmin noticed their ESL classes, whether regular pull-out class or content based class, had low standards. Jungmin remembered that the grammar that was covered in his ESL class was too basic level and the content of the social science class was also quite scanty. Rosie's case, whose school hired an ESL teacher a semester after her attendance, is another example of an ESL curriculum that

lacked a clear structure and quality content. Rosie was not sure what her teacher was doing to teach the students in her ESL class. She said her ESL teacher did not know how to teach and the only thing the teacher did was to read the questions very slowly to her when she had exams for her regular class. Overall, Rosie said that she studied English more in Korea and nobody really taught her English in her school after her immigration.

Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix (2000) state that because there is no clear standard for ESL curriculum and ESL student performance in secondary schools, it often leaves the individual teachers to decide what instructional methods and content they would employ. This can create problems because teachers usually concentrate on the “most basic oral English and reading comprehension skills” for their ESL instruction (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000, p.4). García (1999), for example, reveals that the ESL curriculum for secondary students usually presumes that students are not able to manage the academic subjects and therefore tend to “overcompensates” for the students’ limited literacy skills: “ESL texts are thus either nonexistent or extremely easy and childish” (p.72). Also, the lack of standardization of subject content in ESL results in a vast difference in terms of the content curriculum in each school; it differs widely within and across school districts, and it is difficult to assess the quality of each program (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

Brian, although he shared that ESL was helpful for him, also said that some of the assignments were quite childish. He was told to read a comic book or a story book that was for very young children and asked to write a summary of the story he read. Brian sometimes questioned why he had to do such useless and strange activities in ESL. He acknowledged that his English proficiency was at a “baby’s level,” but he still felt the books were too childish for him. “Though my English was at a baby’s level, my mental

age was not at that level..... I asked myself if I really had to do it although I still might have not been able to interpret the stories,” said Brian. The ESL teachers might have chosen those books for Brian and other ESL students because in order to help the ESL students learn English, the content they used needed to be comprehensible to the students (Krashen, 1985). However, this discouraged Brian to be motivated to do the work because those activities were not meaningful or interesting to him.

Hajung also felt that her ESL program was too childish. When evaluating the ESL program for her English learning, Hajung did not think it was helpful or effective in acquiring English.

*When you look back, do you think the ESL program helped you a lot? Was it effective in learning English?*

[Silence] I don't know... I don't think it helped me much. I don't think I learned English because of ESL program but I got used to English with time as I continued listening to it. ESL did not provide a systematic instruction like grammar... What I remember the most about ESL was that it was fun. Not the study itself, but being in the class was fun. The teachers tried to promote our interest by... like throwing parties, it was like what the teachers do for elementary school students in Korea to get their attention and make the class fun for them. But in high school, what I was looking for was more, like Korean school, teaching English grammar more systematically, giving out more quizzes, but it wasn't like that. Then, that might be more Korean style. ... ESL was easy going and relaxed, even my social science class, if it is ESL [social science], it was very low level, I was asked to do coloring. I didn't like those [part of ESL]. (Hajung, immigrated in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.)

Hajung also said that when she was in her sophomore year, she noticed that she was reading “A Christmas Carol” in her ESL class while other sophomores read more intellectually challenging books. She had read it in Korea when she was young, but that was the level that she was taught in ESL. Then, she realized that the discrepancy in the level of knowledge between ESL and regular students must be huge. She was frustrated that she was reading “Scrooge” as a high school student although she understood that it

was necessary to learn English. Hajung saw that the students in ESL were at different academic and linguistic levels and that it must have been hard for the teachers to come up with one set curriculum to meet everyone's needs. However, Hajung wished her program was more challenging and more age appropriate for the students. In some occasions, when she was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, some class activities were to find the correct vocabularies for questionnaires and "color them" or "connect the puzzles"; Hajung felt that those activities were for kindergarten students.

Soojin, who appreciated the comfortable environment of ESL, also commented how the program could have helped her more. In discussing the effectiveness of the ESL program in English learning, she told me about her cousin who was in a Korean-English bilingual program in California.

I heard from my cousin who lived in Los Angeles, she was in a Bilingual program. She had a Korean teacher and learned both Korean and English, and it was a very challenging program that made her study very hard. I cannot imagine it because I've never seen a bilingual program, but she told me that it was very difficult. But later, because they had the students study so rigorously, let them study a lot of vocabularies, and teach them both in Korean and English, though it was hard, it helped her English tremendously and she became quite confident [about her English]. (Soojin, immigrated in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.)

Soojin wished that her ESL program was more systematic and challenging and had the students study English more rigorously like her cousin's program.

**Possible long-term effect.** Other informants like Rob and Amy who had to take several years of ESL classes in their high school later faced academic challenges in college. Amy, though she liked her ESL classes, said that she did not think that ESL taught her English effectively, and when she attended college, she had to take several ESL classes again. Rob also faced a tough transition from his high school to college. After his first year in college, he decided to drop out. Though he had several reasons for

the decision, one of the big reasons was that he could not follow the academic instruction in college. For example, writing in college was quite challenging for him and he could not earn enough grade points although he studied really hard. He decided to attend a community college and later transferred back to a four-year university.

Rob and Amy's cases make us question what happens after these students leave ESL programs and if ESL programs actually prepare students well for their next step, such as their regular classes and college. According to Hook and Fix (2000), there are "long-term LEPs" who are out of ESL or other special language program but have not fully achieved the English proficiency (p.13). Although these long-term LEPs have been enrolled in a special English program for a considerable time, they still maintain English literacy problems, especially in reading, comprehension and/or writing, several years below their grade level (Hook & Fix, 2000; Valdés, 1999).

Therefore, it is important to consider that although ESL students are out of the program, it does not guarantee that they are fully English proficient. Most of the informants spent between a half-year and four years in ESL program, but it is difficult to conclude whether they actually achieved the level of English proficiency for their grade level by the time they left the ESL program.

## **Conclusion**

Assessing the quality of secondary immigrant student education is challenging because it needs to gauge their content knowledge and English language proficiency at the same time and also because there is no set standards of curriculum and student performances for secondary LEP students. Every school creates its own ESL program

and their own way of evaluating student achievements, and LEP student assessment has been a controversial topic among educators and researchers (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

Although it is difficult to conclude the quality of informants' ESL programs in an objective sense, informants' stories still bring us some pictures of what it was like to attend secondary schools as non-English speaking immigrant students in the 1980s and 1990s. ESL programs were in fact playing important roles in the informants' social and emotional adjustments in school and they also provided the basic levels of English instruction for them. However, many informants shared their questions and concerns about the effectiveness of their programs. They were disappointed that the programs did not deliver high quality and challenging English instruction and some felt that staying in the ESL programs was actually not helpful for their English learning. At the same time, the sheltered aspect of the ESL program, although it created a comfortable atmosphere in ESL class, resulted in separation between the ESL students and the mainstream peers in school.

Hearing their stories, it is questionable if the heavy emphasis on English-only approach during the 1980s and 1990s was actually an effective way to teach LEP students English. As Harklau (1999) claims, the policy makers and the general public may have believed that students would acquire English simply because they are submerged in an English-speaking world and receive English-only instruction (see also Baker & de Kanter, 1983). In reality, the English-only approach without much resources such as funding, trained teaching staff and carefully organized curriculum, did not deliver quality English instruction. For example, only four out of eleven informants received some kind of a

content-based ESL program and the rest of them did not receive much support for their academic needs in regular classes. Further investigation is needed to find out how these ESL instructions and the separation these students experienced influenced the informants' current English usage and other aspects of their lives.

## Chapter Five

### Social Experiences of KAIAS in School and Its Impact on Their English Learning

#### Hajung's Dairy

9.4.1995

I'm beging to write diary to improve my English skill. English makes me sad and stupid. American life too. But who am I? I will face these problem and I will succeed. Weekend is almost done. Now I am waiting for another weeken. After 4 days of school. Stupid! I hate to go to school. I feel uncomfortable, scare, left out in school. I lost my fun since I have been here. Watching Korean TV is my only fun. I'm not going to read this dairy until when summer vacation start. When I read this dairy again I hope I am going to find wrong grammer and smile on face by think about this. .. Now I have to prepare for school. Hajung. You can succeed in regular classes, I know. Just I mean Let me try hard. Good night my friends in Korea.

9.12.1995

Come up with action!

Today what did I do?

There was no hardship in school today.

But I was sore of embrassing to go fittest room every day and I was the one who were sophomore in Biology class.

I miss my friends. Do they miss me?

I have to go Northwestern university and transfer to [Yeonsei]<sup>22</sup> university. I have to be a PD [producer] That's my one of a goal in my life.

I want make many American friends. But it's hard.

1.1.1996

Today is the first day of New Year. New metal attitude, new start.

I shouldn't spend this year wastfully.

I hope only happy and joyful happen would be in this year. Also unification.

School will start on tomorrow. I don't want to go but I hope I can do my best whatever I would do.

This is only the life of H.S. in my life so I should have beautiful memories.

1.7. 1996

[At the end of her long entry, she wrote, quite abruptly]

You Bester Shit Damn country, America.

(Excerpts From Hajung's diary, written in English, 1995, 1996.)

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<sup>22</sup> Yeonsei University is one of the most prestigious universities in Korea. It is ranked among the top three universities in the nation.

## **Examining the Social Experiences of the Informants**

**Hajung's story.** I met Hajung on campus when I started preparing for my data collection, and she was finishing up her master's program at that time. Though we attended the same church, I did not get to know her personally and was not aware of the fact that she was a 1.5 generation Korean American. In general, my impression of Hajung was that of a mild tempered, quiet and hard working girl - someone who could easily fit into a general picture of the model minority stereotype. One day, I ran into her in a bus to school and as we shared about ourselves more, I discovered that she came to the U.S. when she was in middle school. When I told her that I was interviewing people who came to the U.S. during their adolescence for my dissertation study, she immediately said, "I have a lot to say!"

During the interview, I asked her if she had any memorabilia such as a diary, letters or pictures from her adolescence that she could share with me, and she showed me some of her diary entries from her middle and high school years. The above diary entries were all written in English by Hajung when she was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Hajung came to the U.S. in February, 1994 as an 8<sup>th</sup> grader, and about one and a half years later, she decided to write her diary in English to improve her writing.

Most of her diary entries reveal her desire to learn English and her determination to succeed academically and pursue her dream to be a TV producer. In her diary, she seemed to try to be positive and to tell herself to do her best to adjust in her new life. However, it is also evident that she was struggling emotionally because of what she was experiencing at school such as loneliness, anxiety and fear. She said that she did not

want to go to school, missed her friends in Korea a lot and wanted to have American friends at school but “it [was] hard.”

Although Hajung tried to keep writing her diary in English afterwards, she eventually wrote her diary more in Korean or sometimes wrote in both Korean and English. She wrote the last entry listed above, January 7th, 1996, in Korean and English, and at the end of it, Hajung suddenly used English swearwords at the U.S. In the rest of the entry, she said that she did not want to write her diary in English any more but she had to, but it did not really explain why she was upset said those words. This entry, rather than showing Hajung’s character, seems to reveal how angry and frustrated she was at that time about her new school and immigrant life.

*Hajung’s friendship formation and unbearable transition.* As Hajung found difficulty in finding American<sup>23</sup> friends and felt “left out” in school, the place that became her social niche was the ESL class. In ESL, she met other non-native English speaking students who were also new to the school and American culture. In her 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, most of her classes were ESL related and she met a few other Korean, Mexican and Russian students in ESL classes. In the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade, she met Japanese, Vietnamese and European students in her ESL classes. She mostly talked to and hung out with the Japanese and Vietnamese students in her ESL classes along with her sister and another Korean girl she met in her ESL classes. I asked her if she wanted to associate with or become friends with other mainstream English speaking peers, and Hajung said “at first, I wanted to, but I realized that they did not want to.” Hajung perceived that her mainstream peers did not really want to interact with her. Hajung also

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<sup>23</sup> By “American students” or “American friends,” most informants generally meant White Caucasian students who were usually the dominant part of the student population in their schools, but the term also indicated native English speaking peers in the mainstream student body.

remembered that when there was a school event like a student assembly, ESL students were usually sitting at the back of the crowd observing rather than cheering and participating with other students; such experiences made her sad.

This feeling of isolation worsened when Hajung had to transfer to a new high school during her junior year. Hajung and her sister attended a high school that was out of their school district because there was no school that offered an ESL program within the former district. The school district provided a taxi service for her to go to her high school everyday. After the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, however, her school district ordered her to transfer to a new school within her district because they now offered an ESL program. By then, Hajung was not required to take any more ESL classes, but the district told her to transfer anyway while her sister could stay in the old school since she was a senior. This transfer to a new school became extremely difficult for Hajung since she had to leave the friends that she made at her old school and needed to start the difficulties of high school adjustment all over again. She called it an “unbearable transition.”

The new school she attended was in an affluent neighborhood and had a reputation of being an academically good school with mostly White students. Having no ESL support or connection as before, she felt tremendous pressure in her new school. Furthermore, in each class, Hajung found boys and girls with whom she felt she could never connect or feel comfortable. She said “[these were] the boys who would look like “Abercrombie and Fitch” models and the girls who seemed to be prim and spoiled. Even among American kids, there are the ones who I would feel comfortable talking to and those who I would not. These students were definitely not the ones I felt comfortable. The ones I felt that I would never be able to get close to.” During the first two weeks of

school, she cried everyday insisting that she would not go to school, which made her mother worry. “I heard that once your class schedule is set, it is really difficult to change it. I was having such a hard time, I started seeking God’s help. After two weeks, somehow my schedule was changed, and in the new classes, the students were different. They were more studious or more modestly dressed students and I felt more comfortable with them.” In her new classes, Hajung felt more comfortable talking to them if she had any questions although there was still no further development of personal relationship with them outside of classes.

During her junior year, Hajung’s friendship and her major social interactions were formed primarily with one Korean and one Japanese student who came from her previous school. She also met some Filipino students in her PE class and became friends with them. Hajung said: “The ones I could be close to were not White, but tended to be Asians and non-native English speakers” although she was not sure if they took ESL classes. Even with these Asian students, the interaction was mostly happening within a school setting. The only students with whom she spent extra time outside of school were the Korean and the Japanese friends. When she became a senior, she met more Korean students because of the school’s new ESL program and developed friendships with them.

**Unexpected isolation: Where were the informants and who were they with in school?** Hajung’s story is not atypical among the informants. Many other informants also shared stories similar to Hajung’s. Most of them had experienced difficulty in communicating and interacting with other students, which resulted in loneliness, isolation and distance from other students. As it was described in the previous chapter, many informants found the ESL classes to be their shelter where they received emotional and

social support as they started their new school life in the U.S. Given that they could not speak English well, these difficulties could be interpreted as an inevitable part of their transition into a new immigrant life. However, the separation and isolation that the informants felt from the mainstream peers did not change much throughout their school years. Even after they no longer attended the ESL classes, the students still had a hard time developing meaningful social relationships with the mainstream students. Most of their friendships were formed with other Korean students or students they had met in their ESL classes.

For instance, Amy, who came to the U.S. as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader, said that her high school years were hard because high school students were generally not mature enough to think about others, and therefore, they were not considerate towards new immigrant or ESL students like herself. Amy felt that when she went to her regular classes, she did not feel supported either by her teachers or other students and often felt left alone. Nobody really took care of or took notice of her, and she felt neglected in her class. Therefore, it was easier for Amy to associate with other ESL students whom she met in her ESL classes. Besides the ESL students, her other friends were mostly Korean speaking friends at school. Although Amy did not take the same ESL classes with them due to being in different grade and ESL levels, she still associated with those Korean friends and sometimes took a few regular classes with them.

It was common to hear that informants developed friendships with other Korean students, especially in their high school years. If the school they attended had a big number of Korean students who were also recent immigrants and Korean speaking, some informants formed their friendship exclusively with other Korean students, and if the

number of Korean students was not big enough, they associated with other ESL students who tended to be recent immigrant students from Asian countries. Matt explained that if you attend an ESL program that has a lot of Korean students, it is like a so-called “black hole.” As soon as you enter the program, you would meet a group of 30 to 40 Korean students in which everything is done in Korean and in Korean style, and you end up spending the entire day, from the first period till the 8<sup>th</sup> period, with other Korean students. “It is as if you are attending a Korean school.”

### **Social Isolation and Its Effect on Language Learning**

One of the important questions that need to be considered as we examine the informants’ social lives is whether these experiences in school were related to their English learning, and if so, how it affected their English learning process. In the previous chapter, many of the informants expressed their frustration over their ESL programs and shared that the program was not very effective in teaching them English. If their formal language learning setting was not very helpful for these informants, could they expect to find some other ways to learn English at school? For example, was it possible for these informants to learn English outside of ESL classroom? Did they have the opportunity to communicate and interact with others in school?

**Importance of social interaction in Second Language Acquisition (SLA).** The question about the relationship between language learners’ social experiences and their second language acquisition (SLA) process is not new in the field of SLA. The importance of social context and social interaction in SLA have received increased recognition among SLA researchers during the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as social

constructivists gained more credence in the field of SLA (Brown, 2000, p.12). Following Vygostky (1978), who states that social interaction is the foundation of children's cognitive development and the way they learn a new language, social constructivists started viewing the communicative aspect of a language more importantly and paid more attention to the sociocultural variables and interactive dimension of SLA (Brown, 2000, p.12, 245).

For example, under this perspective, the way the SL learners interact with their peers and teachers and the interpersonal context of SLA are as important as the way they learn grammar and sentence structures in their formal SL classrooms (Brown, 2000, p.254, 287). This means that although SLA has been mostly understood in terms of a formal learning setting, SLA can also happen in other ways.

In second language learning the basic assumption has been ... that one first learns how to manipulate structures, that one gradually builds up a repertoire of structures and then, somehow, learns how to put the structures to use in discourse. We would like to consider the possibility that just the reverse happens. One learns how to do conversation, one learns how to interact verbally, and out of this interaction syntactic structures are developed. (Hatch, 1978a, p. 404, in Brown, 2000, p.255).

Several social constructivist theorists such as Long (1985, 1996), Gass, Mackey and Pica (1998), Gass and Varonis (1994), Pica (1987), and Swain and Lapkin (1998), and Van Lier (1996) have focused on the role of social interaction and input in the SLA process. For example, Long (1985) reports that "conversation and other interactive communication are the basis for the development of linguistic rules" (in Brown, 2000, p.287). The question then is how the informants' social experiences served them in their English learning process? What kind of linguistic contexts were they in?

**Coming with the expectation.**

When I was taking the English class in Korea, you know, it's difficult to learn English, so many of my friends told me, because they knew that I was going to the U.S., "How nice! You will learn English quickly once you go to the U.S." I told them that since I was going to the U.S. I needed to study hard, but then I also thought that once I go to the U.S. I would learn English right away, so I would play around during the English class. But once I came here, I realized that it does not work as fast as I thought. (Brian, came as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader.)

According to Spolsky (1989), there are two environments in which one learns a second language: the natural or informal environment and the formal environment of the classroom. Under the natural environment, the target language is used for communication purposes and the learners have plenty of opportunities to meet and interact with native speakers of the target language. Under the formal setting, the target language is used only to be "taught" by a teacher who is the only fluent speaker. Spolsky (1989) argues that genuine communication and meaningful interactions with the target language speakers in the natural setting can really promote a language learners' second language acquisition, as apposed to learning the language in a classroom where it is practiced only through "meaningless drills" (p.171).

Before he came to the U.S., Brian and his friends who were exposed to English in a formal classroom setting in Korea thought that Brian would be a fluent English speaker soon after his immigration because they believed that Brian would be learning English in a natural setting once he immigrated to the U.S. They assumed that since Brian was going to the U.S., he would be surrounded by native speakers, thus, have a lot of opportunities to learn English.

This belief about being surrounded by fluent English speakers actually reveals Brian and his friends' embedded expectation that Brian would meet many English speaking students and would be fully accepted as their peers in his new school. They

expected that Brian would develop friendships and social interactions with other students as he did in Korea, which, then, would result in his natural English acquisition.

However, unlike Brian's expectation, English learning did not happen naturally for him or for many other informants after their immigration. Besides taking ESL classes, English learning through natural and meaningful communications with English speaking peers did not seem to occur easily for many informants.

**Unexpected challenges: New school and new culture.**

*Class schedule.* I asked the informants what they thought about those experiences and why it was difficult for them to make American friends in school. Sometimes the difficulty in developing relationships with mainstream students was created because of their class schedule. For some informants, the time they actually spent in ESL classes and with other ESL students were quite long, especially if they were in a content based ESL program. Their schedule did not provide the opportunity to interact with mainstream students. Matt, for example, said that it was easy to gather with other ESL students in his middle school because the ESL students were placed in similar level classes, which were generally lower tracked and easier. As a result, they ended up taking many classes together and shared the same lunch hour. He said for his first two years in middle school, he mostly hung out with other ESL students and consider them his inner circle friends. Hajung also reported taking many classes with other ESL students, whether they were in ESL classes or regular classes, because the regular classes were lower level courses that many ESL students were in together. Researchers note that because of linguistic limitation, LEP students tend to be placed in sheltered ESL or lower tracked classes (Harklau, 1999; Valdés, 1999). This often causes the ESL students to

spend most of their school day with one another and also restricts their opportunities to be a part of “the English speaking world” (Olsen, 1997, p.92).

*Structural challenge.* Even though the informants did not stay in the ESL classes for a long time and took more regular classes, the school structure itself presented challenges for them. I asked my informants if they had opportunities to interact with other students in their regular classes and many informants mentioned that they did not.

Q: When you were taking the regular classes, did you have opportunities to interact with or be friends with other students in those classes?

A: I... don't think so. Because, you know, if you are taking all the classes together in the same classroom, you may have the opportunity to interact with them more, but you will not socialize during the class hour, and after the class is over, everyone leaves for their next class. So..., I didn't really become friends with them. Once in a while, in my science class, or biology class, we would have to do a group project, then, I would say at least a few words. I did have friends who I said “hi” to or friends that I just greeted, but I wasn't close to them. It was not like I would ask them “how was your day?” and hung out with them during the break. (Heather, came as a 8<sup>th</sup> grader.)

A: If you had group work in your [regular] class, then you would interact with other students, but if you did not have group work, you would have very few opportunities. (Brian, came as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader.)

Like Heather and Brian, most of the informants shared that it was hard for them to interact with English speaking students in school although they took many regular classes with them. As Heather explained, being in classes with other students did not mean that the opportunity to interact and practice English was automatically available. Most of the informants expressed that it was hard to build relationships with other students in their classes and in other parts of school, and therefore, finding the chance to engage in meaningful communications with native speakers was also difficult for most of my informants. For example, the informants were used to a school system in which they stayed in a homeroom class with the same classmates for an entire school year. In such a

school environment, the informants could spend more time with other classmates and develop their friendships over the year. In the American school system, the informants were not familiar with the school schedule in which they had to constantly move to the next class. The new school system clearly added more challenges to newcomers in the school.

*No extracurricular activities.* Another aspect of the American school system that was different from the informants' previous schooling experiences in Korea was the importance of extracurricular activities. Many informants did not realize the role of extracurricular activities in American schools or how to get involved with different activities. James, who came to the U.S. as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader, did not join the tennis team until he became a senior in high school. During his early high school years, James could not find his niche in the school, not even in his ESL class, and had a tough time finding friends and connecting with others in school. James said that the American students with whom he wanted to be friends did not really recognize him or wanted to be friends with him. Being an athletic person, some suggested that James should try out for the sports teams, but neither James nor his parents knew much about those extracurricular activities – why it was important or how to get involved. James said that if he had joined a baseball team, that might have given him a better chance to get to know other students, but James did not even know how to try-out for the team. Brian, who came as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, also stated that joining his high school musical production during his junior year was a meaningful activity for him, which gave him an opportunity to interact with other mainstream students. Being an ESL student, Brian said that he did not even consider trying out for the audition, but his ESL teachers' encouragement gave him courage to

audition. Brian stated that he should have joined those activities and took more elective courses much earlier, but he found out those activities too late in his high school. Other girls such as Hajung and Soojin also joined the school orchestra or badminton club, and these club activities did provide more access to interact with other mainstream students. However, still they did not experience much personal relationship building in these activities. Only Rosie was involved with a couple of club activities such as Math club or Key club because of her teachers' encouragement, but she also said that in terms of what was going on in those clubs, she had no clue.

*Different culture.* Another factor that was addressed by an informant was the vast difference between Korean and American culture. Jungmin, who came to the U.S. when he was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, was one of the most active persons in terms of seeking American friends to learn English. He stopped his ESL program after one semester because he was told by his friends who used to be former ESL students that ESL was not very helpful and that he should learn English by interacting with others in his regular classes. Throughout his interview, Jungmin stayed positive about his high school experiences and talked about the importance of understanding culture in English learning. When I asked him how it was for him in terms of making friends in school, Jungmin said that although the students were nice and he had a good personality, it was still difficult to make friends with others. He pointed to cultural differences as the reason why. For example, Jungmin had a very close relationship with his male friends in Korea. He and his friends often formed a big group and expressed their friendship through some physical affection such as holding hands or putting arms around one another. Jungmin noticed that such close group mentality and physical proximity were hard to find in the

U.S., and also expressing his friendship in such a way could be misunderstood. Jungmin mentioned that just as he felt the cultural difference between the American students and himself, the American students must have perceived the difference from him as well. For Jungmin, the close friendship was formed with two Japanese American friends in his school. Although they were second generation Asian Americans, Jungmin said that it was easier for him to build friendships with them because they still shared some aspects of Asian culture.

### **Why was It so Hard to Interact With American Students in School?**

**“I” problem: Informants’ focus on personal, individual attributes.** Although they pointed out the school structure and different cultural values as some of the reasons why they could not make American friends in school, many informants mentioned that a more important reason was their passive and introverted personalities. They perceived that in order to learn English as a second language, they needed to be more outgoing and actively get involved with others in school. Some of them actually compared themselves with others who seemed to actively seek after interactions with others and acquired English faster, and they indirectly blamed themselves for not achieving such friendships or English proficiency.

“I am not like that anymore but I used to be very introverted. Generally, American kids are outgoing. ... I was introverted and I was also afraid of getting to know others who seemed to be so different from me,” said Heather. The emphasis on an outgoing and active personality actually continued even in their adulthood for many of the informants. Amy, for example, said that “in order to make it in the U.S., you need to

have an outgoing and funny personality. You need to speak loud whether you can speak English well or not. Otherwise, nobody is going to recognize you.” They focused more on their own personality as the main reason why they did not have many friends, but none of these informants questioned why the other students did not initiate interactions with them. They perceived that it was their responsibility to make friends and it was their fault that they did not have meaningful friendships with mainstream students at school. Therefore, many of them also interpreted that their personality was the reason why their English did not improve as much as it should: “I needed to be more outgoing and active to make friends and to speak English more.”

**General focus of SLA theory and school system on individual learners.** The emphasis on the individual learners’ attributes such as personality, attitude, and motivation is also prevailing in current SLA theories (Brown, 2000; Norton, 2000). For example, Krashen’s affective filter theory states that the level of learners’ anxiety and defensiveness influence their SLA (1985). Brown (2000) explains that the cognitive models of SLA generally focus on the importance of the learner, and he lists several affective factors such as inhibition, language ego, self-esteem, fear, anxiety and extroversion that influence learners’ SLA process. Adolescents, for instance, who are going through puberty, will more likely be sensitive about being embarrassed in front of others, and this can result in more defensive language ego which prefers the security of one’s native language rather than taking a risk of making mistakes in SL (Brown, 2000; Ehrman, 1993). An extroverted personality is also generally considered to be more positive for SLA than introverted personality (Brown, 2000). Firth and Wagner (1997) critique this heavy focus on learners’ personal traits in SLA theories as “SLA’s general

preoccupation with the *learner*, at the expense of other potentially relevant social identities” and the interactional and social aspects of language learning (p.285, 288).

The focus on individual learners’ responsibilities is not uncommon among educators, either. Olsen (1997), who conducted ethnography on immigrant students in Madison high school in California, reports that most of the teachers in that school believed that every student, including ESL students, are “equally positioned and free to participate in school,” and therefore, their school achievements, including achieving English proficiency, depend on individual students’ choices (p.11). Olsen (1997) critiques that these teachers did not realize that in this school, which had increasingly multicultural student populations due to the heavy influx of immigrants during the 1980s, students were separated both academically and socially based on their race, class and their English fluency.

The veneer of unity and the promises of diversity are only on the surface. Students are separated – immigrant from U.S. born, racial group from racial group – both socially and academically, where students who can’t speak English are shut out of opportunities to learn and make contact with their American schoolmates (p.10).

Without considering how the existing school structure impacts students’ academic and social lives, it is easy to assume that students’ school achievements depend merely on the individual student’s efforts. Reviewing these SLA theories, which underline individual traits, and school systems, which do not address the structural aspects of SLA, it is not surprising that most informants viewed that it was their own responsibilities and problems not to pursue English speaking opportunities more actively.

**Norton’s critique.** Norton (2000), on the other hand, critiques the heavy emphasis on the individual attributes among the current SLA theories and argues that in order to comprehend the SLA process accurately, the relationship between the learner

and the bigger social world must be considered, more particularly how the learners' identities and the unequal power relationship between the SL speakers and the target language (TL) speakers affect the learners' SLA process.

Norton (2000) states that since the practice in the TL is a critical part in the SLA process, "both SLA theorists and SL teachers need to understand how opportunities to practice speaking are socially structured in both formal and informal sites of language learning" (p.16). In the case of immigrant students, many different factors such as the students' race, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status may influence the nature of their social interactions with the mainstream English speaking students.

This is an important point to recognize in order to fully grasp the immigrant students' SLA process. For example, the informants also perceived that English speaking opportunity was vital for their English acquisition and the opportunity could be made through developing social relationships with the English speaking peers in school. Many shared that they had the desire to seek those opportunities but they could not find them easily, and their interpretation was that it was due to their passive personalities. Although individual learners' personal attributes are important factors in their SLA process, noticing that most of these immigrant students experienced similar difficulties in developing meaningful social relationships with native speakers in schools, we must ask if it was truly their individual traits that were only responsible for their language acquisition or if it was a bigger and systematic social practice that had greater impact on these students' SLA.

**Norton's study.** In order to understand the relationship between the learner and the social world, Norton (2000) brings a "critical approach to the field of SL education"

examining how the SL learners' race, gender, class and ethnicity, which can place them in a marginalized position in a society, influence their SLA (p.7). In her study of five immigrant women in Canada, Norton conducted interviews and diary studies to investigate how their identities as women and working class recent immigrants impacted their English learning. She reports that "the opportunities these women had to practice English were structured by unequal relations of power in the home and workplace" (p.2).

Similar to Brian and other informants who had difficulties in interacting with the TL speakers in school, the five immigrant women in Norton's study also had hard times in developing relationships with the TL speakers in their environments. In other words, Spolsky's (1989) natural SL learning did not happen to these women, either. According to Spolsky (1989), there are several conditions that allow natural language learning. Among them are: first, the use of the TL is for genuine communication. Second, the SL learner is in an environment where there are plenty of fluent and native TL speakers. Third, the learning environment is open and provides abundant "contextual clues" that allows the SL learners to comprehend the language and linguistic rules (p.172). Forth, the TL speakers make "an effort to see that language is comprehensible" for the SL speakers (p.173). This means that as much as the SL speakers want their SLA to occur through genuine communication, there is a mutual effort and desire for communication in TL speakers.

However, Norton (2000) reports that these conditions were not really the reality for the women's lives. She notes that the women's SL learning opportunity did not take place in an "open and stimulating environment" where they met many TL speakers and engaged in meaningful communication (p.113). Instead, the women lived in

neighborhoods where English was rarely used because it had many other low income, ESL immigrants. For my informants' case, although they went to school where they faced many English speaking students, it cannot be stated that they were in a linguistically "open and stimulating environment," since in their actual daily lives, the informants were mostly spending their time with other immigrant or ESL students and the authentic communication in TL did not happen easily.

Most importantly, Norton (2000) argues that for these women's case, there was a lack of or the absence of TL speakers' effort to engage in communication with the women or to help them comprehend the meaning of their conversation. Instead, whenever communication with TL speakers was interrupted, the women were embarrassed and the TL speakers were "impatient or angry" (Norton, 2000, p.112). Also, although the only chance for these women to meet fluent English speakers was at their workplace, to gain the access to TL speakers' existing social network was not easy for the women. Norton (2000) noticed that even when the women found the access to their social world, they often became listeners rather than speakers, and sometimes, some of the women actually were in situations where the TL speakers were "hostile" towards immigrants (p.111).

Likewise, the informants' stories also indicate a similar absence of effort from the TL speakers. If not in a hostile environment, the informants definitely felt "neglected" and "unnoticed" in school as James stated: "they acted as if I was not there." Therefore, for both Norton's immigrant women and the informants, natural SL learning did not occur, and this should not be simply interpreted as the SL learners' personal responsibility such as lack of motivation and failure but should be examined with the

consideration of the role of TL speakers and the learners' experience of marginalization in SLA process (Norton, 2000, p.112-113).

Norton (2000) explains the TL speakers' indifference towards the SL speakers and the resulting marginalization are due to "inequitable relations of power" (p.113). Following Foucault (1980), Norton views that power<sup>24</sup> functions not only at the macro level such as in social institutions but also at the micro level that is the everyday life relationship between people who have different symbolic and material resources. Therefore, power operates between SL speakers such as these immigrant women, who have less social capital (e.g. their language and culture) and material resources (e.g. money), and easily placed them in a marginalized position. Quoting Bourdieu, "those who speak regard those who listen as worthy to listen, those who listen regard those who speak worthy to speak," Norton argues that these women could not direct the attention from the TL speakers at work when they spoke nor gained the access to their social world because they had less symbolic power and were regarded as "unworthy" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.648 in Norton, p.8, 113).

The unequal power relation between TL speakers and SL speakers is also true for the informants in secondary schools. According to Tse (2001), English fluency becomes the means that determines students' social status in school and it is perceived as "a badge of prestige, a membership card for entry into the mainstream" (p.19). Without English fluency, the informants already lacked the social capital in school where their native language and culture are not considered as valuable social resources, and this placed them at the bottom of the social hierarchy at school. Not only are they linguistic minorities,

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<sup>24</sup> Norton (2000) defines power as "the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic [e.g. language, education, and friendship] and material resources [e.g. capital goods, real estate and money] in a society are produced, distributed and validated" (p.7)

they are also racial and ethnic minorities which also places them in a less powerful position in school in comparison with their white English speaking counterparts. Like the immigrant women, the informants had a hard time getting the attention from their TL peers and gaining access to the TL students' social network, and like the immigrant women, the informants were also considered as "unworthy" to be heard.

Consequently, although SLA theories often assume that the individual SL learner has the choice to participate in the language learning environment, a TL community, and whether s/he participates or not depends on the person's motivation, the informants' stories and Norton's report suggests that the unsuccessful SL proficiencies may not simply rest on their introverted personality or their motivation. Instead, as Norton (2000) argues, it could be because the learners have a difficult time speaking a SL due to other social factors such as marginalization (p.16).

Second language theorists have not adequately explored how inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities second language learners have to practice the target language outside the classroom. In addition, many have assumed that learners can be defined unproblematically as motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited, without considering that such affective factors are frequently socially constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in a single individual (Norton, 2000, p.5)

Therefore, in order to understand the informants' social and linguistic experiences, it is necessary to consider how their identities and the nature of their relationship with the TL students played their roles. Clearly, relationship building and creating an optimal linguistic and social context was not just the individual learners' responsibility. A more comprehensive look is required.

## **Existing Racial and Ethnic Divisions in School and Immigrant Adolescents**

Another important factor that shapes the informants' social experiences and their friendship formation in school is the existing separation among students based on their race and ethnicity. Although *de jure* segregation in school ended with the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1954, *de facto* segregation in school has not truly ended, and the challenges to reach genuine integration still awaits the 21st century U.S. school (e.g. Anderson, 2006; Ladson-Billing, 1994; Orfield et al., 2003; Tatum, 1997). In fact, according to Orfield et al. (2003), after a short period of decrease of school segregation, the problem became worse since late 1980s.

While the historical and present-day narratives of school segregation have typically been represented as a binary racial issue, between Black and White, it has always affected other racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. Furthermore, the influx of new immigrants from Asia and Latin America after the 1965 immigration act has added a great deal of complexity to the picture. Prashad (2000) notes that as these new immigrants entered the U.S., they found themselves *situated* in a society where they face the existing structural racism and the social reality that is too complicated and too firm to be challenged or to be changed, and they end up “adopting” the existing racial and social structures and stereotypes (p.164, 179). As immigrant students enter into the new school system, they soon learn that race plays an important role in shaping students' lives in school and that they need to “find a place in the racialized structures of the school.”

And as they begin to develop some fluency in English, they learn that it is not the only requirement for being accepted in their new land. They begin to see that to become American is to take one's place on the “racial map” of our nation. The task of learning English is accompanied by another major task - becoming racialized into our highly structured social order, where one's position is determined by skin color. For immigrants, this means figuring out the peculiar

meanings of racial categories in the United States, and doing so in the midst of intense negotiation among American teens about those racial places (Olsen, 1997, p. 11, 242)

Most of the informants' social experiences and friendship formation also reveal the impact of existing social and racial structures on students' lives in school. Coming from South Korea, a racially and ethnically homogenous country, the informants were not very aware of the racial tension or what it is like to be a racial or ethnic minority in the U.S., since they had always been a part of majority (see also Palmer, 2001). After their immigration and entrance in the schools, they not only became racial and ethnic minorities but they also found themselves placed in schools where invisible walls among students were already present.

**Awareness of race and ethnicity.** For example, Amy noticed that race and ethnicity are important factors that influence students' experiences in school.

I felt that, I am quite sure, that even if you didn't speak English well, if you were from Japan or Europe, you were treated differently. The [ESL] students who came from Japan were all exchange students, not immigrants. If you were the Japanese exchange students taking ESL classes, I think, the [regular class] teachers were quite generous to you, but if you were immigrants, the ones who came to live here, these students... Even the [mainstream] students, they were nice to the students from Japan. And even though the students [from Europe] didn't speak English well, the [mainstream] students were also nice to them since they were the same people. (Amy meant racially the same). (Amy, came as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader.)

Other informants also shared that white immigrant students from European countries tended to have easier time making friends with the mainstream students.

**Finding their own niche: Matt's story.** Matt's experience in middle and high school is another good example. When Matt first came to the U.S. as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, although his close friendship was still formed in and around the ESL class and with other ESL students, he still had a chance to meet and play sports with diverse students. He said

that since the middle school was small and most of the students were from the same neighborhood, he had opportunities to meet other English speaking students on the school bus and at the neighborhood basketball court. Although he was limited in his English, he said that it was still possible for him to play with these students who were Black, White, Hispanic and Asian. Although Matt spent a lot of time with these students playing basketball and got to know them better, Matt said that he was not really developing friendships with them since the nature of their interaction was mostly restricted to playing sports and there was limited personal interaction that led to the development of closer friendships.

After two years in middle school, Matt entered his high school where he noticed clear racial and ethnic divisions in his new school. He recognized that students in his high school were forming their own cliques based on their ethnic or racial backgrounds. For example, although the students he played basketball together all went to the same high school, they all separated and found their own new group; the relationships he built in his middle school did not last any more.

As soon as we went to high school, there were clear divisions among White, Black, and Asians. At least in my school, it was like that. ... Even the white friends that I used to play with in my middle school, they used to play with Asian and African-American kids, but then they would seek out other White kids. Hispanic students went to the Hispanic group, African kids to the African group. It was quite interesting... I went to the Korean group. (Excerpt from the interview with Matt.)

In the middle of such social divisions in school, the informants also needed to find their own niche, and often many formed theirs with other Korean speaking students or Asian immigrant or ESL students in school.

**Creating their own community.** Matt was one of the few informants who actually had regular social contact with mainstream peers in his middle school, and for many other informants, such an opportunity was rare to find even in their middle schools. For those who came to the U.S. as middle school students, the informants seemed to interact more freely with other students from wider backgrounds including Hispanic and European students in their ESL classes. However, some of them still formed closer friendships with other Korean and/or Asian students if there were enough Korean and/or Asian students in the school. Also, the transition to their high school generally meant stronger friendship formation with other Korean speaking students. Some informants, like Brian and Hunter, developed friendships mostly with other Korean students even in middle school, because there were many Korean students at their school. At the same time, when they had opportunities to form closer friendships with non-ESL English speaking students in school, those who were willing to interact with the informants were generally Asian American students. However, divisions between Korean-speaking and English-speaking Korean American students also existed if there was a big group of Korean Americans in their schools.

[In my middle school], there was an English speaking Asian American boy who approached me and we became very close. [Because I was close to him,] I did not experience isolation. I was not isolated. ... In my high school year, my family moved to another side of San Jose where there were a lot of Koreans. Since there were a lot of Koreans and Koreans hung out together, nobody really bothered us. (Rob, came to the U.S. as a 7th grader.)

Rob's answer was interesting because I originally asked him what he thought about being an ESL student. He responded with the above quote, which indirectly revealed that being isolated or mocked by others were some of his big concerns as an ESL student. When I asked Amy how she would evaluate her high school experience, she answered in one

word, “loneliness.” Amy appreciated the fact that she was at a new place, learned new things and a new culture and met new friends from various backgrounds, and she said that sometimes she felt amazed that she was living in the U.S. However, it was also true that she felt left out and overlooked by the rest of her classmates in school and never really felt that she was a part of her school. Amy said that she wanted to have many American friends and get involved with many school activities, but there were limitations in her high school life, which often discouraged and took her spirits away. Having Korean friends, though small in number, was a comfort for her during this time because they shared the difficulties they were going through which became a common bond. Heather also mentioned that she was close to other Korean students because they understood one another.

Since there were so many Koreans [in my school], we were not lonely at our school. Our group was big enough that I did not have to feel isolated from others. Since I had friends who I could talk to and call if I needed help and we could help one another. Even if American students ignored me, it did not bother me too much. (Brian)

There were about fifteen students in my ESL class and only three Koreans including myself and my brother. I mostly hung out with the Chinese sisters who arrived in the U.S. that summer like I did. Maybe because they were Asians? I somehow could communicate with them. The next year, I had a Cambodian friend who was also in ESL class. (Heather)

In his high school, Matt also met many other 1.5 generation Korean students who were recent immigrants like himself. Matt said that it was a very natural phenomenon that he became close to his Korean friends; he felt that he could entrust and open himself up to them because he felt that they shared something together as Koreans.

**Friendship over language.** Talking about their social experience and friendship formation in school, some informants mentioned that associating only with other ESL

students, especially with other Korean-speaking students, was not helpful for their English learning. Rob, for example, stated that after he moved to Oregon in his junior year, he met a group of Korean students who were heavily Korean-speaking in his new school. Before his move, Rob said that he was slowly becoming more comfortable with English since he had many English-speaking Korean friends in San Jose. However, after spending much time with his new Korean friends, he became more “Koreanized” and his Korean became better while his English did not improve much any more. He said that his high school was an important time for him to develop English fluency, but he missed the opportunity because he mostly associated with other Korean speaking students.

Brian also perceived that staying within the Korean community in school might have not been beneficial for his English learning process.

I've been here for twenty years, but my English is not very good. My friends, of course they are better than me, but compared to those who came during their elementary school, it was harder. Also, since we were going through adolescence, though we came to the U.S. because of our parents, we did not have a clear purpose. We just lived. It was a time when friends are important to you, you like your friends so much, you cause troubles with them, you like your friends no matter what. My friends, because we hung out mostly with the ones we could communicate with [in Korean], I think nobody from our circle ...had American friends. (Brian)

Brian explained that he chose to associate mostly with his Korean speaking friends in his high school because having friends was the most important issue to him at that time. He indirectly indicated that spending most of his time with his Korean friends and not having American friends did not really help him or his friends learn English.

Now as adults, both Rob and Brian suggested that if new immigrant students want to learn English, they should actively seek out opportunities to talk to American friends and get involved with the mainstream community so that they can learn the new culture,

which can enhance their English. Rob specifically stated that even though the students have other Korean speaking friends, they should not center their lives around the Korean students at least when they are learning English.

Brian and Rob's recommendations focus on the individual students' determination and effort to seek English language learning opportunity, which is an important and valid point. Some of the other informants also talked about those exceptional, successful cases they knew, in which the individual student actively sought after the TL speaking opportunity with the mainstream students rather than staying in the comfort of Korean friendships. However, it should also be considered that the relationship between the SL learner and the bigger social world not only affects the learners' TL speaking opportunity but also their motivation to use those opportunities (Norton, 2000). Being a racial and linguistic minority in a school where separation among students already existed, the informants experienced and perceived that it would be difficult for them to be fully accepted as meaningful members of the mainstream school community. Looking for a niche to which they could belong, they chose to create their own community even though that may conflict with their needs to practice and learn English. For them, it became a choice between English learning and keeping their friendships, and the majority of informants chose friendship.

Although Brian and Rob now consider it more important to improve their English fluency rather than choosing their friendships in school, as teenagers, both Rob and Brian did not have much motivation to seek out TL friends, especially if that meant sacrificing their friendships with Korean students. Hajung, who was so eager to learn English when she first came to the U.S., was also concerned if her friendships with other Korean

students would hurt her English learning. During her first year, she even wrote a letter to one of her first Korean friends at school asking her not to talk in Korean but English only. Soon that friend transferred to a different school and the longer Hajung attended school, the more she appreciated her Korean friends. I asked her if she wanted to have American friends so that she could learn English better, and she said at first she did but she realized that [the American friends] did not want it, and she did not want to lose her Korean friendships for the sake of English learning, either.

One of the informants, Soojin, who came to the U.S. as an 8<sup>th</sup> grader, actually chose English learning over her friendships with Koreans. When she moved to Oregon, she chose to go to a high school where there were only a few Korean instead of a school with many Korean students in order to learn English better. However, she shared that in her new school, which had only a small number of ethnic and racial minority students, rather than mastering English as she wished, she had to suffer loneliness throughout her entire high school years because she literally had no friends and not much social interaction with others.

**Making “choices.”** Examining the informants’ social experiences, it appears that they chose friendship formation and they formed their own cliques based on their ethnicity and linguistic backgrounds. However, it is critical to consider whether the choices they made were purely their own preferences and desires or if these were forced choices given the circumstances in which they were embedded. Was creating and staying within the Korean group their own active choice or was that a choice they made after they recognized the social reality that was available to them? Had they been white immigrants coming from European linguistic and cultural backgrounds, would they have had

different social experiences and made different choices? Were there other factors that influenced these students' decisions about their social and linguistic lives in school?

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I argue that in order to understand how these immigrant students learn and do not learn English, we must understand the bigger social context and how these students are situated within the existing social structure in school. Rather than just placing these immigrant students in ESL classes and expecting that the ESL teachers and ESL curriculum alone are enough and responsible for these students' English learning, and blaming individual students for not achieving and not learning English, we must ask what fundamental changes in school are really necessary in order to provide the best English education for these immigrant students.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

#### Experiences Outside of School

**Parent involvement in their children's education.** According to Park (1999), Korean parents do not actively engage in their children's school activities because they are from a culture where parents respect and trust school and teachers to educate their children (p.66). They believe that school will provide a good education for their children especially since the U.S. is known to have a better educational system than Korea. Even if they want to participate in their children's schooling, many immigrant parents are discouraged to meet teachers and discuss their concerns due to their language barriers and long working hours (Chee, 2003; Kim & Yu, 1996; Park, 1999).

Because of the language barrier and the limited cultural knowledge, many Korean parents do not know much about the U.S. school system as well. For example, Park (1999) states that many Korean parents are not aware of the ability tracking system in U.S. secondary schools. Chee (2003) also mentions that many Korean immigrant parents often do not understand the importance of extracurricular activities in American schools and have difficulty finding "the access to social capital resources" for those activities (p.307); they think that getting good GPAs and test scores is the most important for their children as in Korea.

This was true for many informants' parents. As Jungmin's example illustrated earlier in chapter four, most of the informants' parents did not get involved with the informant's schooling much because of their limited English proficiency and the lack of

knowledge about the new education system in the U.S. They simply trusted that their children would do whatever they needed to do in school and believed that school would provide what their children needed. Without much understanding of the specifics of the school system, the parents could not really get involved and give advice to their children's education.

All of the informants, except possibly James, said that their parents never told them to study hard or pressured them to go to a good university. One of the informants, Rosie, actually had parents who initially did not want her to go to college but rather stay home to help their family business after high school. However, some of the informants mentioned that their parents still expressed their wish that their children would make it in the "mainstream" society and tried to share their opinions. Jungmin, for example, said that her father and his friends told him not to major in liberal arts because they believed that it would be difficult for him to get a job in those fields as a non-native speaker. Instead, they encouraged him to major in Engineering or Business.

**Family dynamics.** The dynamics of the family relationship did not really change after immigration for most informants. They kept their close relationship with their family although there were times that the stress of immigration was hard to handle for some of the family members. However, the fact that these informants had to help out their parents as English translators and interpreters became a burden for some informants. They shared that their parents expected them to master English after a couple of years of their immigration, just because they attended school in the U.S. Heather said, "Just because I went to school, it did not mean that I mastered English right away. .... Also, even if you are a native speaker, dealing with those documents, ranging from bills,

medical and legal documents, would not be easy if you are still in middle or high school. It is just not the job for young middle school students.”

**Sharing with parents.** I asked the informants if they had ever shared some of their social or linguistic struggles in school with their parents, and most of the informants said that they did not tell their parents about the challenges they faced at school. They tried to handle those difficulties on their own knowing that their parents were busy working and carrying out their immigrant lives; they did not want to add any additional burden or worries to their parents. They also understood that their parents did not really know about the new school system and could not help them much academically and in other ways. Not hearing about these struggles the children go through, many Korean parents, including the informants’ parents, might have believed that their children were doing well and adjusting to their new lives easily.

**Community experiences: Church & second generation Korean Americans.** Most of the informants did not share much about their community experiences during their secondary school years. Besides school, the only other place where they were regularly involved was church. Almost all informants, possibly with the exception of Rosie, attended a Korean church during their secondary school years with or without their families.

According to Yu (1990), church is “the most numerous and most powerful social organization” for Korean Americans (p.26). For example, based on the Korean community survey conducted by *Korea Times* in Southern California, in 1988, 63 percent of Korean immigrant male (n=262) and 67 percent of Korean immigrant female (n=274) claimed to be Protestants (Yu, 1990). Hurh (1998) also mentions that compare to other

Asian American groups such as Chinese and Japanese Americans, the number of Korean Americans who attend a church is much greater. For example, according to a 1978 study on Asian Americans in Chicago, 71 percent of Korean Americans joined a Christian church whereas 32 percent of Chinese Americans and 28 percent of Japanese Americans did (Hurh, 1998, p.107).

Historically, Korean church has been an important part of Korean American immigration. Since the first phase of Korean immigration in Hawaii in the early 1900s, the protestant church has been functioning as a center of Korean community (Choy, 1979). It provides not only Korean American's spiritual needs but also their social, economic and psychological needs such as meeting friends and other Koreans (Hurh, 1998; Yu, 1990). For many informants and their families, church also functioned as an important social network.

However, for many informants, even at church, the separation between Korean-speaking and English-speaking students still existed. The cultural and linguistic differences the informants felt from the second generation Korean Americans often made them uncomfortable, and at church, they felt the same kind of exclusion they experienced in school again. Therefore, some informants changed their church so they could meet other Korean-speaking friends and share Korean language, culture and similar immigrant experiences with them. If the church offered different youth groups based on their language preference, the informants joined the Korean speaking group.

## **Lingering Effects of Schooling Experiences**

### **Loss of self-confidence and personality change.**

Most of my 1.5 generation friends are working after high school. They were not interested in studying to begin with, but if you immigrate during your middle or high school years, it is easy to lose your academic interest because you'd lost your confidence. They were not really interested in studying, English was hard, so they learned to drink and smoke..... I never talked about my academic interest with them. If I would bring up such subjects, they all treated me like a weirdo. Among 1.5, I am not saying that all 1.5 communities were like that, but the one that I was in, if I would study, they would call me "a nerd", "a bookworm". If you wanted to be popular, you needed to play, dress up and play..." (Matt, came in 7<sup>th</sup> grade)

Losing confidence, or "Gi-ga Juk-da" in Korean, came up many times during the interviews which could be translated as "losing one's spirit," "losing one's heart," or "losing one's energy/essence." This "losing Gi" or "losing their sprits" negatively affected not only some of their academic motivations but also how they viewed themselves and their lives as well. For example, some informants shared that they felt they were not good enough to participate in school activities and to be important members of the school because of their English barrier. Compared to male informants, female informants tended to internalize the problems more and interpreted that their lack of effort was the main reason why they did not acquire English as much or did not have many friends in school.

The experiences in school also affected some informants' personalities and their relationships with others. For example, Soojin said that before immigration she was a very active and bright person and had many friends in Korea. Her dairy entries during the time of immigration revealed her excitement and high anticipation about her new life in the U.S. and her determination to master English soon. After the first two years in junior high school where she took ESL classes, she chose to go to a high school where

there was no ESL program and less Korean students in order to acquire English fast. In this school, however, instead of gaining more opportunities to develop friendship and to speak English with native English speaking students, she became a loner. After spending three years in high school without any friend, she became quieter and more critical of herself. During her college years, in her diary she mentioned many times that she did not like herself, and she also expressed her continuing concern about her English proficiency. During the interview, she said that she still did not feel confident about her English although other native English speakers approve of her English proficiency. She said, "They think my English is good because they have not talked with me long enough."

Her social experiences in school also made her uncomfortable to open herself to others. She said that it is difficult for her to make friends even with other Korean-speaking Korean Americans. Soojin also mentioned that experiencing isolation and distance from her peers in high school, she still feels uneasy interacting with native English speaking teenagers to this day.

Hajung also mentioned that her experiences in high school, especially the separation and perceived rejection from her American peers, made it hard for her to reach out to others. When she meets a new person, she said that she first thinks that it would be difficult for her to be close to that person and she has some fear in reaching out to others. As she started working with many American colleagues at her firm, she said that she noticed those tendencies in her and was trying to change her thought and attitude.

**English fluency and academic achievement.** In terms of their academic achievement, among eleven informants, two did not graduate from college and three earned master's degrees. However, even among those who received a bachelor's degree,

some still expressed difficulty or discomfort with English - especially female informants. For example, Amy said that she majored in Art because she did not want to deal with English much. Hajung mentioned that many of her 1.5 generation Korean American friends did not seek higher education but found low-skilled jobs within the Korean community because they lost the chance to set the academic foundation during their secondary school years. Hajung said that since ESL students had to spend much time in learning English, they had to sacrifice learning other academic content which resulted in their weak academic foundations. Matt also shared that many of his 1.5 generation friends did not go to college because they lost their academic interest and motivation after their immigration.

During the interview, I also asked each informant how they would evaluate their English proficiency. Male informants were more positive about their English although they still felt more comfortable with Korean. Matt actually said that he was now confident with his English. Matt's case was interesting because during his first interview, he shared some of his concerns about his English fluency. However, during the second interview, he shared that he felt better about his English after he started working. As an engineer, one of his responsibilities in his firm was to give lectures in front of hundreds of employees most of who were native English speakers, and although it was very challenging at first, eventually he gained more confidence in his English. James also stated that although his English was very poor during his high school years, he became personally interested in reading books in English later in his life and eventually majored in English.

For female informants, most of them were not positive about their English proficiency. Many still had concerns and were not quite confident about their English fluency and shared that they were more comfortable with Korean. Among all eleven informants, Rosie was the only person who conducted the interview in English while others chose Korean. For both male and female informants, their evaluation was based on how they personally perceived their English proficiencies and not on an objective measure. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude whether the female informants' English proficiencies were actually different from male informants' or if the difference was more related to how they interpreted their English ability. More analysis is necessary to understand their current English proficiencies and why there is difference between male and female informants in their evaluations.

**Current occupation.** Among the eleven informants, Rob's career path was the most unique. After dropping out of college, Rob joined the U.S. Navy. However, he still continued taking college credit courses while he was in the Navy. After five years, he transferred back to a four-year university where he graduated with a bachelor's degree. He eventually got a job at the Veteran's office as a claim officer. Hajung, Matt, and Rosie, were working in a mainstream environment after getting their master's degrees while many other informants work in service industries ranging from owning a restaurant and a dry cleaner establishment, and working as a loan officer for which they serve both Korean and American customers. Some, like Hunter and Amy, work in Korean owned companies. Hunter, for example, worked as a customer service representative at a major hotel in California for a couple of years after finishing his college. However, he left there

because he perceived discrimination against minority employees in his hotel. He decided to work at a Korean owned export company.

**Identity.** Most of the informants now have attained American citizenship status and view themselves as Korean Americans. Defining their own identity, however, was not a simple task for many informants. For example, although they stated their identity as Korean American, when they hear the word “American,” they said that they still did not immediately picture themselves but rather, White. This does not mean that they do not acknowledge the American part of their identities. Some of them talked about their rights and responsibilities as tax-paying citizens in the U.S. However, their perception of American was still strongly White and they did not include themselves in the category of mainstream American. Chee (2003) argues that social isolation the adolescent immigrant students experience in school lead them to develop “minority identity” (p.298). Whether these informants felt as if they were the secondary American citizens because of their experiences in school – social isolation from the mainstream students and not being considered as an important part of the school community – is a topic that requires further analysis.

Many informants also shared their strong ties with Korean culture. They still valued Korean language and culture and some described themselves as very “Koreanized” Americans. However, some of them also mentioned about their changing Korean identities; although they valued their Korean culture and Korean identities, they were no longer “fully Korean” nor the same as those who recently came from Korea. Many actually mentioned that they felt most comfortable with other 1.5 generation

Korean Americans or 1.5 generation Asian Americans because they shared similar life experiences and views.

### **Emerging Questions Regarding Immigrant Student Education**

Hearing the informants' stories, it is interesting to notice that these informants had many similar experiences in school although they had come to the U.S. at different times and lived in various locations. Although the specific details of their school experiences and their English programs varied, there were common threads in their stories which bring us some important questions to consider: a) Did ESL programs provide a quality English instruction for these informants? How did ESL programs serve these informants' linguistic and other needs in school? And b) Is learning English only a personal and individual process/endeavor or is it a social process that needs to be understood in a bigger social context? What kind of environment did school provide to help the LEP students learn English and adjust themselves after their immigration?

**Evaluating the informants' ESL programs.** ESL programs were important for these informants not only because it provided basic English language instruction, but more importantly because of its emotional and social support for them. Many informants shared that the ESL class became their "shelter" from the rest of the school where they did not know how to fit in or feel welcomed. ESL became "the place" where they found belonging, met their friends and practiced their English without much pressure.

At the same time, the informants evaluated their ESL programs as not being very effective in terms of teaching them English language. Although the informants acknowledged the helpfulness of the ESL program in school, many also questioned if

they received high quality English instruction in their ESL class. Some mentioned that the ESL curriculum was not quite age-appropriate or challenging that they lost their motivation to stay and study English in ESL class.

Because of the great variety among ESL programs and the lack of ESL curriculum standards for students in secondary schools, it is very difficult to assess the quality of the informants' ESL programs objectively (Hook & Fix, 2000). However, the similar experiences and concerns many informants shared about their ESL programs still suggest the nature of the programs they received which did not have high academic standards. Why did most informants feel that they did not receive high quality ESL instruction and why were they not very satisfied with their ESL programs? Were low academic standards and simplified ESL instruction inevitable in order for LEP students to acquire English? What makes a high English program for these students?

**Some of the requirements for quality English education.** Several issues need to be addressed in order to provide quality special English programs for secondary LEP students. First, secondary LEP students need more funding and more attention from educators for their needs. According to Hook and Fix (2000), since the 1970s, the number of immigrant students has tripled “especially at the middle and high school levels” (p.9; Waggoner, 1999). However, most special English programs and resources are dedicated to the elementary school level. In the 1993-1994 school year, for example, 76 percent of LEP children in elementary schools received some kind of special English instruction whereas only 42 percent of middle school and 48 percent of high school LEP students received special instruction (U.S. Department of Education data in Hook & Fix, 2000, p.13).

For the informants, none of them could receive bilingual program and only four had some kind of content-based ESL program. This means that for most informants, there was no other academic or linguistic support for them besides the one or two hours of pull-out ESL program per day. Unlike elementary students, LEP students in secondary schools must learn both English and academic content at the same time. Providing just one or two hours of ESL classes is typically insufficient in helping them acquire English or understand their academic content especially in regular classes. This can cause students to feel overwhelmed and anxious about what they have to deal with in their regular classes as Amy described in chapter four. Without much support, students will also have difficulty in understanding and learning academic concepts in regular classes. This generally places LEP students in low tracked courses because regular class teachers perceive them as not able to handle the academic materials (Valdés, 1999).

Second, the lack of funding for secondary school generally means a shortage of teaching staff and resources which has been an on-going problem for LEP students especially at the secondary school level. Not only is there a national shortage of teachers with bilingual education credentials, it is also difficult to find teachers who are qualified to teach sheltered content-based ESL courses for secondary LEP students (Coulter & Smith, 2006; Olsen, 1997). Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix (2000) report that in California, “the ratio of fully credentialed bilingual teachers to LEP students was 1:85 for Spanish-speaking students, and 1:889 for Vietnamese-speaking students in 1996-1997 school year” (p.5). Also, only 2.5 percent teachers who were working with LEP students in their classes had any necessary training to work with them during the same year (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). Among the informants, only Brian had an ESL teaching assistant

who could speak Korean and English. In Rosie's case, although the school hired an ESL teacher, the teacher did not have much experience or ability to teach the ESL students English or other academic contents; the teacher did not really meet Rosie's academic or linguistic needs by providing quality instructions.

To this teacher and staff shortage problem for LEP students, Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix (2000) suggest that hiring new trained teachers alone will not be a solution but training the veteran teachers including regular content teachers is also necessary (p.5). This means not just the ESL teachers but the teachers who teach regular courses, administrators and counselors all need to be informed and trained to work with the LEP students. This suggestion actually brings more fundamental questions about LEP student education: is educating LEP students a responsibility of ESL teachers and ESL program only? Or are other teachers, administrators and staff also responsible for their education? Can we make the entire school, not just the ESL classroom, learning environment where LEP students can receive linguistic and academic support and feel welcomed?

These are important questions to think about especially if we consider the fact that most of the informants spent more time in regular classrooms than ESL classes (see also Harklau, 1999). The time the informants spent in ESL classes was generally one or two hours per day and for the rest of their school day, they were in regular classes. However, most of the regular class teachers do not have much understanding or information on ESL students and their learning process, and not surprisingly they choose not to get involved with ESL students much (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Valdés, 1999). This results in insufficient coverage of academic courses for LEP students because without regular teachers' knowledge and understanding of LEP students' needs and their learning process,

it is difficult to craft effective instruction for their academic contents (Coulter & Smith, 2006; García, 1999).

Although the importance and the impact of regular class teachers are tremendous, they do not often consider educating ESL students as their responsibility (Valdés, 1999). Furthermore, school itself does not usually view the programs for LEP students as an important part of its community (Coulter & Smith, 2006). As Hajung shared, most of the programs for ESL students were happening strictly within the ESL classes. In general, there is no connection between regular class teachers and the ESL teachers; no connection between the ESL program and the rest of the school (Coulter & Smith, 2006; Harklau, 1999; Valdés, 1999).

Lastly, in addition to the lack of funding and resources, there is also the lack of research on secondary LEP students. Faltis and Wolfe (1999) write:

For every one research article that focuses on topics related to secondary bilingual/ESL education, there are hundreds that deal with topics concerned with elementary bilingual/ESL education. For every secondary school bilingual or sheltered content class, there are hundreds of elementary school classrooms. For every bilingual/ESL teacher at the secondary level, there are hundreds of elementary bilingual/ESL teachers. Yet...the number of secondary school-age immigrant and bilingual students is immense and growing steadily (p.268).

The lack of research on secondary ESL students is related to other problems such as the need for more teacher training for ESL students which was discussed above. Because there is not enough information on secondary ESL students, teachers and administrators have very limited resources or curriculum standard to follow even if they want to give more attention to LEP students (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). The lack of research is also linked with the measurement problem of LEP student achievement. Schools do not know the best way to assess LEP student achievements especially when

their linguistic ability and their content knowledge are very closely intertwined, and they end up using unreliable assessment tools to measure the student performance (Crawford, 2004; Faltis & Wolfe, 1999; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; TESOL, 2003). This is a very important issue especially under the current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act since it places a heavy emphasis on measuring LEP student achievements on standardized testing (Peterson, 2002).

**Understanding English learning in a bigger social context.** Besides the quality of the informants' ESL program, another important question that emerged from the informants' stories was if English learning for these immigrant students was merely an individual endeavor or if it was a product of bigger social influences. The separation between ESL students and mainstream students seems to be a common experience for most informants. The informants experienced the distance from the mainstream students and formed their own communities with other students from similar ethnic or linguistic backgrounds. The separation happened because ESL students spent a lot of time in ESL classes and/or with other ESL students, but it also happened because they had difficulties in interacting and developing social relationships with English-speaking peers in regular classes. Although the informants took many regular classes with English-speaking students, it did not provide them with a social and linguistic environment where English acquisition could develop naturally through genuine social interaction with other students (see Spolsky, 1989).

Although many policy makers and the general public believe that "ESL students will learn English simply by surrounding them with native English-speaking peers" (Harklau, 1999, p.50), the informants' experiences and other research findings

demonstrate that simply because ESL students are physically present with English speaking peers, it does not mean that they learn English automatically (e.g. Coulter & Smith, 2006; Harklau, 1999; Olsen, 1997, Norton, 2000; Valdés, 1999). As Valdés (1999) states, there are “two separate worlds: the world of ESL and the mainstream world in which ‘real’ American schooling takes place [in school]” (p.139).

The experiences the informants shared in and outside of ESL classes and the way they were exposed to English and to their new school environments reveal the fact that there is a systematic social practice that needs to be addressed in order to fully understand these students’ English learning process. Although individual learners’ personal attributes are important factors in their SLA process, noticing that most of the informants experienced similar difficulties in developing meaningful social relationships with native speakers in schools, we must ask if it was truly their individual traits that were only responsible for their language acquisition or if it was the social practice that had greater impact on these students’ SLA. For example, when these students formed their own cliques based on their ethnicity and linguistic backgrounds, was it their own active choice to create and stay within the group or were they forced to make the choice within the given social environment that was available to them?

As Norton (2000) argues, the opportunities to speak and practice the target language with the target language speakers are “socially structured” (p.3), and in the case of informants, many different factors such as their linguistic and racial minority status influenced the nature of their social interactions with the mainstream students and their SLA process. For example, although the informants needed to be a part of an English speaking community in order to gain more natural exposure to English and American

culture, entering into the English-speaking world required English proficiency. Without having English fluency, it was difficult for the informants to gain access to the mainstream students' social networks (see Norton, 2000).

Therefore, understanding the social and political aspect of SLA is important to get a better picture of LEP students' SLA process. Without it, it is easy to place heavy focus on individual language learners' personal attributes and blame them for not achieving the level of English proficiency. For example, the existing social structure in school based on students' racial and ethnic backgrounds was not something the individual informants could change, but it still influenced the informants' social lives and eventually their English acquisition process enormously.

### **English Education Today: No Child Left Behind and the Continuing Challenges**

Reviewing English education program for secondary LEP students during the 1980s and 1990s through the informants stories and comparing them with today's condition, it is evident that the linguistic and social challenges the students face have not been changed much.

**ESL students' school experiences.** Chee (2003) investigated the English acquisition process of Korean women who immigrated as adolescents during the 1960s and 1970s. She reports the similar social isolation of these women from the mainstream peers as the informants experienced. She notes that the social separation between her participants and English speaking students in school took away the women's opportunities to practice English with the TL speakers. They also mostly interacted with other ESL students which resulted in the "lack of input of the 'standard' form of

[English]” (p.296). Chee (2003) also states that the ESL students learned the existing racial/ethnic categories in school and faced the hidden wall between the mainstream students and themselves that was caused by many markers of differences such as hair styles, dress codes and their skin color. These experiences at school influenced these immigrant students to develop their “minority identity” which also caused their low self-esteem (Chee, 2003, p.298).

Similar stories were shared from the informants who went to secondary schools in the 1980s and 1990s, and the situation does not seem to be changed much today. The *New York Times* recently published an article (3/15/09) on immigrant students’ education and assimilation. According to the article, which investigated a high school in a suburb of Washington D.C., there is a clear division and sometimes tension between non-English speaking immigrant students and English speaking students in school. Also, because the ESL students are taking classes “exclusively with one another,” they felt that the school was separating them from the rest of the school although they acknowledged that those separate classes allowed them to speak “the little bit of English [they were] able to speak” (Thompson, 3/15/09). There was “school within school” for these ESL students (Thompson, 3/15/09). The conflict between providing a sheltered environment to teach ESL students English and separating them from the rest of the mainstream students continues today.

**NCLB, limited resources and continuing challenges.** One of the major changes in language policy for LEP students in last 40 years came from the termination of the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) in 2002 and the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Crawford, 2002). The new legislature requires LEP students to reach English

fluency within three years and schools need to be accountable for LEP students' yearly English achievement through standardized testing (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, p. 3001). NCLB also mandates English instruction for LEP students after three consecutive years of school (White House, 2004). The major goal of NCLB is stated as "to help ensure that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English" and the importance of learning native language and culture is no longer addressed (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, p.3102).

Under NCLB, schools are required to set the performance objectives to assure LEP students' English development and academic achievement. However, problems arise when these students, with their limited English proficiency, are asked to take the standardized tests that are written in English (Crawford, 2004). Many critics argue that the test measures these students are using are not valid to assess the students' true ability (Peterson 2002). Although the current measures generally cannot distinguish the "language errors from academic errors," LEP students are required to take the test "in mathematics from day one and in reading/language arts after just 10 months in American schools" (Crawford, 2004, p.2). Though the native-language tests or simplified English version of the tests are allowed to be used for LEP students, these still do not accurately measure the students' ability, and often they are not available for many LEP students (TESOL, 2003).

At the same time, most teachers and principals in U.S. schools possess little knowledge about the appropriate measures and procedures to assess LEP students, and they do not have enough resources and staff to identify and implement accurate measures

for LEP students (TESOL 2000). Rather, many teachers, principals and schools are pressured to improve the English standardized testing scores and to speed up the English instruction for LEP students neglecting the fact whether or not these students are really learning what they need to learn (Dawson 2003).

Crawford points out that although NCLB does not require English-only instruction, the heavy emphasis on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on English-language standard tests creates the same result in schools (Crawford 2004, p.6). It would not be an overstatement to say that thirty-five years after the birth of the Bilingual Education Act, the language policy for LEP students in the US has gone back to English-only.

The brief review of NCLB illustrates that the heavy emphasis on English-only became even more of a powerful policy focus throughout the years. Also, although NCLB tries to give more attention to LEP students by requiring high academic standards for LEP students and including them as a part of accountability subgroups, NCLB still creates more problems than solutions for LEP students because it did not solve the fundamental problems such as lack of funding, resources, teaching staff and research for LEP students. In fact, NCLB creates more problems because though it has required the higher academic performance from every student, it failed to provide the necessary educational resources to assist the students and educators to reach the mandated goals (Crawford, 2004). This discrepancy between the academic mandates and the available resources hurts students of color, low-income students and language minority students the most because the public schools have already been systemically neglecting these students' needs throughout history (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000).

## **The Need for Further Research**

In this study, I examined the life experiences, particularly school experiences, of eleven 1.5 generation Korean Americans who immigrated in the 1980s and 1990s. For many informants, the time they spent in school as secondary students was quite challenging; having to learn a new language and culture, developing and accepting their new identities as linguistic and racial/ethnic minorities in school, experiencing constant social distance and isolation from the mainstream student population, dealing with frustration due to linguistic and academic challenges and acknowledging their limited social participation in school all added to the distress they experienced in school and in their new immigrant lives. James mentioned that it was “the worst four years” in his life and he never wants to revisit it; he said that it took him a long time to recover from the difficult memories he had gained from those four years.

The informants’ stories indicate that school did not provide quality English education for these students nor it was interested in understanding how they learned, felt, and lived within the school structure after their immigration. Leaving them in an ESL classroom for a couple of hours per day, school expected that students would learn English and other academic subjects or it simply did not have resources or desire to know whether these students were actually learning and adjusting in schools. As I close this chapter, I want to challenge school that it needs to pay more genuine and resolute attention to these student populations. Not only school needs to improve the quality of special English education program, it also needs to consider how these students’ identities as linguistic and racial/ethnic minorities in school influence their learning and their social world. Being Asian immigrants who could not speak English easily placed

these students at the edge of existing social structure in school and directly and indirectly affected their English learning process and other aspects of their lives.

As stated above, the number of research on secondary ELL students is still very limited (Faltis and Wolfe, 1999), and the number is even scarcer for Korean American secondary ELL students. The lives of 1.5 generation Korean American immigrant adolescent students (KAIAS) are often misunderstood as they are viewed as successful, well adjusting, model students while in reality they are going through various challenges which they do not know how to handle. Many informants, for example, did not know how to seek for help nor could easily share their difficulties with their teachers, counselors or even with their parents. Yet, as Hajung exclaimed when I met her on the bus, they had a lot of things that they wanted to say: the frustration, questions and the needs for more support.

This dissertation study was just a small step towards understanding the reality of 1.5 generation KAIAS and it still has many limitations. For example, although I intended to cover the impact of the early immigrant experiences on their later adult lives, this study focused more on the informants' special English programs and their social experiences in school. More investigation and analysis are necessary not only on their English learning process but also how their school experiences – both linguistic and social – influenced the informants' later lives including their career, identity, self-perception, and their English fluency. Again, the lives of 1.5 generation KAIAS require more attention and understanding from educators and researchers, and we need further studies in order to hear the rest of their untold stories.

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## Appendix A

### Information Survey

<b>Name:</b>		<b>Korean:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Birth Date &amp; Year:</b>	<b>Age:</b>		<b>Gender:</b>
<b>Ethnicity:</b>		<b>Email:</b>	
<b>Address (campus):</b>			
<b>Address (permanent):</b>			
<b>Phone: (campus/cell):</b>		<b>(permanent):</b>	

- (1) Where were you born? Korea ( ) US ( ) Other ( )
- (2) Where were you raised? Please circle your choice:  
 1. Korea only    2. Mostly Korea, some in US    3. Equally in Korea and US  
 4. Mostly in US, some in Korea    5. In US only    6. Other (Please specify)\_\_\_\_\_
- (3) How long have you been in the US? \_\_\_\_\_ years
- (4) How do you identify yourself?  
 Korean ( ) Korean-American ( ) Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- (5) What is your current occupation?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- (6) If you are a student: Bachelor's program? \_\_\_\_ Graduate program? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Year \_\_\_\_\_ Major \_\_\_\_\_
- (7) What grade were you before you came to the US? \_\_\_\_\_  
 In what country?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- (8) What is your religious preference? \_\_\_\_\_
- (9) What is your marital status? Single\_\_\_\_ Married\_\_\_\_ Divorced\_\_\_\_ Separated\_\_\_\_
- (10) Country of Origin:

(11) Age of immigration:

(12) Immigrant status:

(13) How often have you visited Korea since you came?

(14) Family: Who are they?:  
Where are they living now?  
Parents' occupation:  
Parents' length of stay in the US:  
Parents' Education:

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Memorabilia**

Old pictures, yearbooks, homework stuffs, assignments, diaries, letters things that remind of them the school experiences, etc.

#### **First Interview Questions**

##### **General:**

1) Tell me about your life when you first came to the US.  
(Your age, grade, family, where you lived before and after immigration, why you came to the US, etc.)

2) What was your first impression of the US?  
Were you happy/sad to come to the US/to leave your country?

3) With whom did you come to the US?  
How was your family life before and after you came to the US? Was there any change?

##### **School:**

4) Tell me about the school you attended after you came to the US.  
What was the school like? How did you like it? How was your experience at your school?

5) How was the US school different from schools in Korea? (Was there anything that you noticed in the US school that was different from schools in Korea?) How did you like the difference?

##### **ESL:**

6) Did you have an ESL class? What kind of program was it?

7) What kind of books/materials did you use? Who was your teacher and how many students were there?

8) What was it like to be in the ESL class?  
How did you feel about being an ESL student?

9) Did you feel “special” or “being treated special” because you were an ESL student or a non-native English speaker?

What was it like for you to be different from others? Have you ever thought about that?

10) How would you evaluate your ESL program? Was it effective? How did it help you learn English? Were you happy in your program?

**Friends:**

11) Who were your friends in school and in general? Was there any particular reason why they were your friends? (e.g. nationality, ethnicity, language, culture, etc.)

12) Who did you mostly hangout within school? Mostly talk to? Why?

13) How was it outside of ESL setting?

What kind of experience/interaction did you have with non-ESL/mainstream students?

14) Overall, how did you like your school? & Why?

**English as power language:**

15) What did you think about “learning English” then and now? Was learning English important to you? Why or why not?

16) What was your perception of American culture, American society, and Americans at the time of immigration and now?

**Education:**

17) Was going to college important to you? Why or Why not?

18) How did your parents/ family influence/ perceive your education and your life in the US?

**Identity:**

19) Have you thought about your identity when you first came to the US? Why?

20) How do you identify yourself ethnically and culturally?

21) Did your perception of your identity go through any change?

22) How do you negotiate the different racial and ethnic diversity in the US?

23) What do you think about racism in the US? Have you ever experienced it?

**Life after the Secondary School:**

25) Tell me about your life after high school.

26) What is your occupation now?

27) How do you balance your Korean and American identity and cultures?

Do you ever experience any conflict between the two different cultures?

28) Do you think the fact that you are an immigrant and having that experience during your adolescence influenced your life? Why? Why not? In what way?

29) Who are your friends or the people you interact with mostly now?

30) How do you feel about your English proficiency now?

### **Second Interview Questions**

The second interview will be the follow-up of the first interview, and it will be within the same framework and topics. The second interview will address mostly the questions that did not get asked during the first interview.