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# The Phenomenon of International Adoption with a Focus on Second Language Acquisition: A Case Study of Internationally Adopted Children and Adolescents from Russia

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# THE PHENOMENON OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION WITH A FOCUS ON SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A CASE STUDY OF INTERNATIONALLY ADOPTED CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS FROM RUSSIA

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Title: The Phenomenon of International Adoption with a Focus on Second Language Acquisition: A Case Study of Internationally Adopted Children and Adolescents from Russia

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The phenomenon of international adoption with a focus on second language (L2) acquisition of international adoptees (IA) was examined through the personal experiences of a small number of ethnically Russian children and adolescents who were in the process of adapting to a new language, culture and society in the United States. The aim of this qualitative study was to get inside the minds of six IA children and tell their stories by providing thick descriptions of their holistic experiences. The focus of this study was on answering these questions:

1. How do these IA children experience and perceive their L2 acquisition?
2. How do these IA children maintain their native language?

Data collection included interviews, school observations and analysis of students' official records (standardized tests, report cards, evaluations) as well as unofficial documents (photographs, essays, drawings). This qualitative study employed the ethnographic approach to provide detailed descriptions of six participants (ages 8- 21) and the thematic approach with focus on L2 acquisition, first language (L1) maintenance and identity construction.

The analysis of interviews, observations and artifacts resulted in the following findings. The IA students acquired English as a second language in the same stages as typical immigrant children but the process of their L2 acquisition was considerably faster. The IA children adopted at the age of 11 or earlier had a native-like American accent while the older IA students had traces of a Russian accent in their L2. All of the participants struggled with reading comprehension on their standardized tests due to unfamiliar vocabulary.

Five out of 6 participants experienced subtractive bilingualism during which their L1 deteriorated and L2 became dominant. The oldest participant experienced additive bilingualism and was able to preserve her L1 while acquiring L2.

The interviews also revealed that three older participants identified themselves with both Russian and U.S. cultures while 3 younger participants became fully Americanized.

These findings suggest that school staff need to take into consideration cultural and personal backgrounds of IA students and modify the language instruction for them to meet their needs.

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## The Choice of the Topic

The topic of this research is closely connected to my personal experiences of being an immigrant and a teacher. After moving to the United States and experiencing acculturation, I started to empathize with other immigrants and developed an interest in their stories. While teaching ESL (English as a Second Language) in the United States for a period of five years, I met many internationally adopted (IA) children from Russia. I became close to these adopted children because of their enthusiasm for learning as well as their strength when overcoming obstacles. The IA children attended my ESL classes with immigrant children from other countries (e.g. Mexico, Uruguay, China, Brazil etc.). During my teaching experience, I noticed several differences between immigrant and internationally adopted students, which inspired me to ask questions and look for answers not only in the academic research but also in non-academic texts such as memoirs and biographies.

IA children are typically adopted by U.S. parents who do not speak the children's native language; therefore, adoptees are fully immersed in an English only environment (Gindis, 1999). Since I speak, read and write Russian on an intermediate level, I was able to communicate with my Russian students and help them with their transition process. I also noticed that internationally adopted (IA) children acquired English faster than immigrant children did (DiGregorio, 2005). On the other side, IA children seemed to struggle with their native language maintenance much more than other ESL students. This increased my interest in examining IA students' English learning processes.

As a result of my experience teaching IA children, I decided to focus my dissertation research on internationally adopted children from Russia, their second language acquisition and first language maintenance. With the increasing number of international adoptions (U.S. Department of State, 2007), adoptees are becoming a unique group in many school environments. As an educator, I believe that internationally adopted children as well as other children with special needs deserve the necessary attention and instructional help from school personnel. However, oftentimes, school teachers and guidance counselors lack information regarding international adoptees and their second language acquisition since there has been only limited research written on that topic.

By conducting this study, I hoped to find answers to my research questions (see pages 9-10) not only in the research literature but also in the inspiring students' stories of perseverance, learning and adjustment. I believe this study provides necessary information about IA students' learning processes, which the school staff, adoptive parents and IA children find beneficial.

## Statement of the Problem

Many students who are in need of ESL services in today's U.S. school systems were adopted by U.S. families from various countries of origin. U.S. families have been adopting children for more than five decades from Asia, Central and Latin America and Eastern Europe, especially from Russia, Ukraine, Romania and Poland (Alstein & Simon, 1991; Brodzinsky et al., 1998)

Although IA children in the United States are placed in the same ESL classroom with other immigrant students, they usually experience the process of acculturation and second language acquisition differently than their immigrant classmates. IA children have to adjust

to a new family life versus an orphanage life, to a new culture, educational system and most of all to a new language without help from their native speaking family members and friends. It is rare that the adopting American family speaks the language of the adopted child (Freundlich, 2001; Gindis, 1997, 1999; Wilkinson, 1995).

Adjusting to a new school environment and community in a foreign country is a complicated process. Research attests that an individual's ability to identify with a new culture has a positive influence on second language acquisition, while overidealizing the mother culture decreases L2 development (Akhtar, 1995; Lambert, 1990; Norton, 2000). In regard to students' educational adjustment, various studies agree that social and family backgrounds play a significant role after migration history and English-language ability (Tienda, 1988; Kennedy and Park, 1994; Warren, 1996).

Concerning the second language acquisition of international adoptees, there are many variables influencing the process of successful language acquisition such as the age of arrival in the United States, literacy education in the first language, orphanage experiences and new family background. Depending on their age of arrival and family environment, IA students often struggle with maintaining their native language. According to Gindis (1999), many younger IA children lose their native language within six months unless adopted with a sibling or arrived to a host country at an adolescent age. Wilkinson (1995) points out that the loss of the native language may have a long-lasting impact on the immigrant's identity construction.

Although the topic of international adoption has been investigated in the fields of psychology, education and speech pathology, there is little research in the field of second language acquisition. In addition, most of the research conducted on adoptees is either

quantitative or theoretical without the much needed insiders' voice. Thus, what can assist us in understanding the phenomenon of second language acquisition of IA children is a holistic, in-depth study including the insiders (adoptees') perspectives about their experiences in acquiring a second language, maintaining their first language and constructing their new identities. Information provided by outsiders such as the adoptive parents and analyses of adoptees' artifacts can assist in obtaining alternative perspectives on the learning processes of international adoptees. By examining the variables and discovering hidden details, the school personnel, adoptive parents and perhaps adoptees themselves may begin to understand the complex process of L2 acquisition of internationally adopted children.

## Background for the Study

The topic of this study focuses on personal experiences of internationally adopted Russian children who acquired a second language in the United States; therefore, it is necessary to look at the research of second language acquisition (SLA) as well as research of international adoption.

From an SLA viewpoint, learning another language is a tremendous task, which is influenced by many variables. For example, Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis points out learners' emotions and learning attitudes influence the learning effectiveness. Sociolinguists Le Page & Tabouret-Keller make a connection between language and identity by stating that "language acts are acts of identity" (Tabouret-Keller, 1997, p. 315). Bilingual children can show preference for a language that they identify with more (Mendoza-Denton, 1999).

When examining internationally adopted children, it is essential to consider factors such as age of arrival, family environment and orphanage experiences. According to

Rumbaut (1998), the students who arrived to the United States at an earlier age developed increasing preferences for L2 and decreasing preferences for L1 during a three-year period. Interestingly, Gindis (1991) found out that IA children adopted at a young age lost their L1 and spoke only L2 while IA adolescents were able to preserve their L1 in the L2 environment. Although the family environment plays a significant role in successful L2 learning and L1 preservation, many IA children are, unfortunately, psychologically and physically influenced by the previous care of poor orphanages (McKinney, 2009).

With regards to international adoptees, insufficient conditions of orphanages have various negative impacts on the children's development. The research on L1 speech development reveals that orphans living in institutional setting of their native country (predominantly Eastern Europe) have increased developmental problems such as slow language development, physical delays and cognitive and motor impairment. Thus, second language acquisition might be slowed down due to these problems (Glennen & Bright, 2005).

The research on international adoption focuses not only on pre-adoption but also on post-adoption living conditions. Many studies deal with the adjustment of IA children to new families and environment. Some studies propose that IA children struggle with adjustment only at the initial period of adoptive placement, and other studies suggest that older children deal with more adjustment problems than younger children (Cederblad, 1982). Different group of studies, on the other hand, suggests that IA children do generally well (Kim, 1978; Simon & Alstein, 1987). Freundlich (2000) explains that research results vary due to the limited and small sample studies, variety of research designs and differences in the populations of international adoptees.

Many researchers explore the impact of international adoption on racial and cultural identity, which was overlooked in the past (Harvey, 1983; Linowitz & Boothby, 1988; Kim, 1978; Melchoior, 1986, Wilkinson, 1985). Kim who points out that the role of cultural and racial identity is crucial for IA children states:

> It is necessary for the child to be aware of personal heritage to develop his full potential or to define his place in society. Therefore, while avoiding ethnocentricity or reverse racism, foreign children can and should be instilled with a positive ethnic identity. Such a positive identity formation can furnish children a useful inclination to self-assertion, advocacy, and determination for their full socialization. (Kim, 1978, p. 485).

Working with this developmental model, Wilkinson (1985) proposes five stages of adaptation that describe the identity formation process of IA individuals. The stages consist of denial, inner awakening, acknowledgement, identification and acceptance. Freundlich (2000) points out that this adaptation process can be challenging for international adoptees if they were adopted very young and do not have any recollection of their cultures. Freundlich (2000) further explains that adoptive families play a major role in supporting their children's positive cultural identities.

Identity formation and language development are closely connected (Lam, 2000; Lustig & Koester, 2000; Joseph, 2004; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 2001). By analyzing a person's speech, we can learn something about his personality. Joseph (2004), for example, states, "It is not the case that language entirely determines how we conceive of a person. But how they speak, inseparably from what they say, plays a very fundamental role" (Joseph, 2004, p. 3). He further points out that frequently the only contact with people is purely

linguistic, especially when using the Internet or telephone, which helps us perceive people's identities. This may present significant challenges for international adoptees who need to learn a new language and adjust to a new family, community and culture. Since the linguistic contact will be limited at first, the IA children can find themselves at the margins of the new society.

The factors of past orphanage experiences, new family environment and identity formation have a noteworthy impact on the L2 learning processes of IA children. Thus, it is important to explore these variables in detail to raise awareness among educators about how internationally adopted children are predisposed to certain problems and how they experience learning a second language.

Considering the impact of past orphanage experience, new family environment and identity formation on L2 acquisition, this study examines contextually-situated stories and analyzes documents (test results and writing samples) as well as family artifacts (photographs, souvenirs, books) of international adoptees. Rather than striving for generalizing the students' experiences and their language learning processes, I portray their individual experiences as told by the IA children and analyze their progress in acquiring a second language as well as their first language maintenance. I discuss similarities and differences between the language learning processes of students who were internationally adopted at different ages. By describing IA students' stories of learning a new language and constructing their new identity, I want to raise awareness among school personnel and adoptive parents so that international adoptees receive improved services in the U.S. schools.

## Significance of the Study

International adoption has been a widely sought option for many infertile U.S. families who over the past 5 decades adopted children from more than 20 different countries around the world. Since 2002, Russia, China and Guatemala are the leading countries of international adoption. In the past 5 years (2002-2006), over 100,000 foreign children were adopted by U.S. families, and 24,358 U.S. visas were issued to Russian orphans alone (U.S. Department of State, 2007).

This significant increase of IA children in the U.S. educational system has led to a new research focus especially in the fields of speech therapy and psychology. In the field of psychology, researchers have studied various issues of international adoption focusing predominantly on psychological factors influencing the adoptees and family units (Gindis, 1999; Howe, 1946; Hoksbergen, 1997). Speech therapists, on the other hand, concentrated on the language developmental delays of internationally adopted infants and toddlers (Glennen & Bright, 2005).

There is a visible gap of research on international adoption in the field of sociolinguistics, second language acquisition and language learning. No qualitative studies specifically focusing on internationally adopted children from Russia and providing in-depth discussion of their experiences of second language acquisition (SLA), L1 maintenance and identity construction have been conducted to date.

Clearly, internationally adopted children create a unique group, which has not been accounted for in the SLA research before. Since the population of internationally adopted children is growing, it is important to examine their learning experiences in order to provide them with more effective instruction and better school services that will help such students

overcome obstacles of learning a second language and living in a new country. The parents of adopted children and school personnel agree that there is a need for more research that would help these IA children succeed in the new school environment.

The potential value of this study was in minimizing the research gap and in providing enriching descriptions of L2 learners' struggles and accomplishments in the process of second language acquisition and international adoption. The detailed descriptions not only facilitated awareness but also provided useful information for educators, parents and IA children.

## Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe the stories of second language acquisition of internationally adopted children from Russia. The phenomenon of international adoption with a focus on second language acquisition of IA children was examined through the personal experiences of a small number of ethnically Russian children and adolescents who were in the process of adapting to a new language, culture and society. The aim of this qualitative study was to get inside the minds of IA children and tell their stories by providing thick descriptions of their holistic experiences.

Through the in-depth interviews and analyses of students' test results, writing samples and personal artifacts, I captured the experiences of IA children who were adopted at different ages. The participant's personal interpretations and the understandings of their parents were implemented into the detailed descriptions of their stories. Thus, these descriptions included the *emic* (insiders') perspectives and the *etic* (outsiders') perspective.

Based on my previous research of Russian adopted students (DiGregorio, 2005) and research on migration and international adoption (DiGregorio, 2006), I formulated the following questions:

1. How do these IA children experience and perceive second language acquisition (SLA)?
    a) Does the process of SLA differ between these younger and older IA children? If so, how does it differ?
    b) What challenges have they faced in the process of SLA?
2. How do these IA children maintain their native language while learning L2?
    a) What obstacles do these IA children face in the process of maintaining their L1?
    b) What support is provided for maintaining their L1?
    c) How do these IA children position themselves in the U.S. society after learning their L2?
    d) How do these IA children perceive the process of developing their new identity?

These questions are further explained in Chapter Three, Methodology. The specific interview questions concentrating on the two major topics of second language acquisition and first language are also provided in Chapter Three.

## Limitations of the Study

Unlike quantitative studies with generalizable data results, this qualitative study examined a small number of participants; therefore, the findings are limited in the terms of objectivity and generalizability. The results of this study can be understood only in particular situations and with certain populations. The outcome of my research is a summary of gathered data analyses and contextually-grounded interpretations (Merriam, 1998).

Although the purpose of qualitative research was to share the individuals' constructed meanings of reality, researchers must be careful to generate valid and trustworthy results. In order to achieve trustworthiness of this study, I applied certain strategies to make the findings authentic. For example, I used triangulation and member checks.

# CHAPTER TWO

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## Introduction

For internationally adopted children, learning English as a second language is as significant as adjusting to the new environment. Acquiring a second language (L2) has an impact not only on these children's first language (L1) but also on their identity construction. Although international adoptees and immigrant children can be perceived as very similar in that they experience processes of acculturation and second language acquisition, international adoptees differ from immigrant children because they, in addition, must adjust to a new family that typically does not speak adoptees' first language. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what international adoptees' needs are in order to assist them better during their adjustment period.

In this literature review, I discuss the phenomena of migration and international adoption with a focus on second language acquisition, maintenance of the native language and identity construction. Furthermore, I briefly describe Russian culture, literacy and education system in order to provide a cultural background that assists in better understanding of internationally adopted children from Russia.

### *The Phenomenon of Migration*

Migration refers to movements from one place to another and can be divided into two basic types: 1. *internal migration* -within a country (commuting, seasonal movement, nomadism, and rural-urban movement); and 2. *external migration* (movement from one country/continent to another). The typical causes for migrations are economic, political, cultural and environmental, which create pull or push factors (Mayhew, 2004; Calhoun,

2002). For example, political or religious wars and diasporas force peoples away from an established homeland.

This study concentrates on the processes of external migration, specifically on *immigration* as a movement from a native country to a non-native country and factors influencing the immigrants' identity. Akhtar (1995) who distinguishes between types of immigration (permanent versus temporal, voluntary versus involuntary) states that a person's reasons for immigration, the acceptability of immigrants in a hosting country, and cultural differences between the receiving country and the country of origin play important roles in the individual's adjustment process. He builds on Volkan's statement that "moving from one location to another involves loss: loss of country, loss of friends, and loss of previous identity" (as cited in Akhtar, 1995, p. 1053). This loss makes the adaptation process and new identity search difficult and painful for all members of the immigrant family, adults as well as children. However, Akhtar does not discuss the loss of language, which has a significant impact on immigrants' children and internationally adopted children who often struggle with preserving their native tongue.

When immigrants move to a new country, they go through the process of negotiating identity in an unfamiliar society and culture. The reconstruction of identity becomes a very complex process since it occurs in the multilingual context (e.g. Russian language spoken at home and English language spoken at school). For minority speakers, a new identity search is closely connected to and influenced by the first and second languages. For example, immigrant children try to fit into English only speaking school environment on one side, and on the other side, they will be affected by home environment that might encourage them to speak only their native language.

As a major theorist, Tajfel produced work that established the field of social identity. The notion of social identity derived from his theory, which is based on group membership. He states, "we shall understand social identity as that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). Tajfel (1981) further explains that a person can change a group membership if his/her needs are not met. Influenced by Tajfel's views, many scholars (Cameron, 1990; Johnstone, 1996; Tannen, 1993, Ting-Toomey, 1999) point out that the individual's identity is expressed through language within a certain interactional context, group and culture.

Research on identity and language evolved in many different directions and dealt with issues of power relations (Norton, 2000), social identity (Lam, 2000), gender identity (Pavlenko, 2001), and cultural and personal identity (Lustig & Koester, 2000; Joseph, 2004). According to Lustig & Koester (2000), an individual's self-concept is built on three types of identities:

> 1. *Cultural identity* – refers to one's sense of belonging to a particular culture or ethnic group… and accepting the traditions, heritage, language, religion, ancestry, aesthetics, thinking patterns, and social structures of a culture.
>
> *2. Social identity*- develops as a consequence of memberships in particular groups within one's culture…. The types of groups with which people identify can vary widely and might include perceived similarities such as age, gender, work, religion, ideology, social class, place and common interests.

*3. Personal identity*- is based on individuals' unique characteristics, which frequently differ from those of others in their cultural and social groups (pp. 3-4).

The combination of these three types of identities defines a human being as a unique individual; however, if one of these identities is marginalized, the individual's self-concept might be at risk. For instance, when internationally adopted children, especially at older age, are removed from their native country, they may become self aware of their missing cultural roots as they approach adulthood.

In order to understand the process of immigrants' identity development, it is necessary to discuss the issues of voluntary and involuntary migration. Ogbu (1992) states that a positive adjustment to a new society depends on whether an individual belongs to a voluntary or involuntary minority. He claims:

> Voluntary minorities seem to bring to the United States a sense of who they are from their homeland and seem to retain this different but non-oppositional social identity at least during the first generation. Involuntary minorities, in contrast, develop a new sense of social or collective identity that is in opposition to the social identity of the dominant group after they have become subordinated. They do so in response to their treatment by White Americans in economic, political, social, psychological, cultural, and language domains. Whites' treatment included deliberate exclusion from true assimilation or the reverse, namely, forced superficial assimilation. (Ogbu, 1992, p. 9)

Furthermore, Ogbu (1992) clarifies that there is no clear cut boundary between voluntary and involuntary minorities. He believes the minority identity positions are changeable, and gives an example of Mexican immigrants who come to the United States voluntarily. However, after facing discrimination and subordination in a U.S. community, Mexican immigrants become an involuntary minority.

Those immigrants who experienced forced (involuntary) migration usually have to deal with a strong threat to their identity. Breakwell (1986), who developed the *Identity Process Theory* and who studied involuntary immigrants, explains that the structure of identity is regulated by two dimensions: *assimilation* that refers to the "absorption of new components into the identity structure," and *accommodation* that refers to "the adjustment, which occurs in the existing structure in order to find a place for new elements" (Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000, p. 356). During the study of involuntary refugees from former Yugoslavia, the results revealed that involuntary immigrants experience a significant threat to their identity when the processes of assimilation and accommodation do not comply with the "principles of continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy, and self-esteem" (Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000, p. 357).

Another study of forced migration describes what causes the identity threat. Through detailed interviews of Bosnian and Herzegovinan refugees in Australia, Val Colic-Pesker & Iain Walker (2003) discovered that differences between rural and urban refugees had a much stronger impact on their resettlement strategies than ethnic differences (e.g. Bosnian versus Muslim). One of the most significant factors causing the identity threat was the loss of professional occupation status. Refugees from rural areas adjusted easier to low status work than professionals from urban areas.

When comparing these two types of immigrants, it is clear that voluntary immigrants adjust easier to a new environment than involuntary immigrants who were forced to leave their countries. However, both kinds of immigrants (voluntary and involuntary) experience difficult cultural adaptations. They undergo the process of adjustment to a new environment, tremendous learning of a new culture and language, helplessness in unknown situations, social facilitation and cultural overload (Boekestijn, 1988). Similarly to Akhtar (1995), Boekestijn (1988) argues that an immigrant's dilemma is "the inherent tension between socio-cultural adaptation and the preservation of identity" (p. 90). These immigrants not only wish to be accepted in the new culture but also want to cherish their old values and beliefs.

### *Host Country Acceptance of Immigrants*

There are other factors contributing to the successful adjustment of immigrants and one of the major factors is social acceptance in the host country. Some citizens perceive immigrants as an economic and cultural threat while others embrace diversity (Maddens, Billiet & Beerten, 2000). The attitudes towards immigrants in the host country significantly influence the process of cultural adaptation. A negative environment can make the adjustment process more difficult for immigrants and their children.

A good example of such a negative environment is the diaspora in post-Soviet Union, which was divided into 15 independent republics in 1991. Before the break-up, schools in those republics would teach their native languages as well as the Russian language, which was the official language in the Soviet Union. As a result, many Russian citizens lived in different republics. After the break-up, ethnic Russians found themselves living in new independent states (e.g. Estonia, Ukraine, Latvia etc.), which promoted their cultural and

ethnic backgrounds and no longer supported the Russian culture. Russians were forced to either accept new citizenship, new languages and state policies or leave their homes and migrate to Russia (Heleniak, 2004). Since most residents of the 14 republics have negative feelings towards the Russian language and Russian citizens due to its former connection with communism; many Russians had to migrate back to Russia. These refugees became a part of the at-risk category, which has had a high frequency of suicides (Katagoshchina, 2002). In spite of the fact that some Russians remain in their homes in non-Russian republics and form an ethnic minority, the majority of Russians felt it necessary to resettle in Russia to preserve their ethnic self-awareness. Clearly, the formation of strong national identity caused a negative tension between the ethnic groups and resulted in the depression of Russian refugees who turned to suicides and alcohol and left behind an increasing number of Russian orphans.

For immigrants and their children, the factor of host country acceptance contributes positively or negatively to the process of identity construction, which is closely interconnected with the ongoing processes of L2 acquisition and L1 maintenance.

When an immigrant family is well accepted by the residents in the host country, it has a positive influence on family stability and children's adjustment. Immigrants' attitudes towards a new culture will also be reflected in their children's efforts to learn a second language and to preserve their native language.

### *International Adoptees and Identity Development*

For international adoptees, it is difficult to state categorically whether they are voluntary or involuntary immigrants since they are typically adopted at a young age, and therefore, they are not the decision makers. However, children adopted at adolescent age

usually need to agree with the adoption process to be considered for international adoption. Due to poor economic conditions of Eastern European orphanages, most adolescents agree to be adopted internationally (as per conversation with international adoptees, 2007).

When children are born, they start to develop their own identity, which is influenced by a variety of factors such as trust, security, and family environment (Erikson, 1950). Many adopted children deal with the insecurity of a changing environment and new adoptive parents who need to build a trusting relationship with them. In her article, *The adoptee's dilemma: Obstacles in identity formation,* Howard (1993) uses the schema of Eric Erikson's theory of identity and points out that prenatal care has a strong impact on the child's development. In addition, the infant's years of interaction with caretakers influence the child's formation of identity. According to Erikson (1950), adolescents experience identity confusion due to anxiety created by commitments to a specific set of values. Howard (1993) explains that adopted children who associate with companions of lower status, usually do so due to the lack of self-worth or the feeling of being rejected. Researchers point out that children, who associate with others of a lower social status than themselves and do poorly at school, have a tendency to become insecure parents or postpone having children. Although most adopted children experience a normal identity evolution, some adoptees become isolated (Howard, 1993). The research shows a majority of female adoptees become overly happy when they give birth to their children with whom they are biologically connected. This biological connection with their children helps international adoptees overcome the painful feeling of missing family roots.

Based on Erikson's theories and other writings, researchers in the field of international adoptions agree that it is important for adoptive parents to preserve the

children's culture of origin. The knowledge of cultural background helps adopted children build their own identity and better understand themselves. In order to understand the identity development of international adoptees, it is important to discuss Erikson's eight psychological stages. Erikson's theory is one of the major theories on identity construction; therefore, I will apply his theory in this study.

In *Childhood and Society,* Erik Erikson (1950) published his theory of eight psychological stages, which explains how each stage of person's life has a significant impact on his/her identity construction in adulthood. The first stage (basic trust vs. basic mistrusts) deals with issues of trust between a baby and a mother. Erikson (1950) states, "Mothers create a sense of trust in their children by that kind of administration which in its quality combines sensitive care of the baby's individual needs and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness with the trusted framework of their culture's life style" (p. 249). Since many orphans are abandoned by their mothers at early age, these children are dependent on their caretakers (Register, 1991). However, not many orphans develop a trusting relationship with their caretakers and their attachment disorder can become visible in their adolescent years. In her memoir, Reid (2006) describes that her adopted baby girl was the only baby crying when being separated from her caregiver in a Russian orphanage. Reid knew that it was a good thing because a baby is supposed to protest when leaving a trusted person.

In the second stage (autonomy vs. shame and doubt), Erikson (1950) discusses how a toddler experiences the autonomy of free choice on one side and shame while being observed by others on the other side. He explains that toddlers strive for autonomy, for example, by feeding or dressing themselves; therefore, parents should not be overprotective and provide the necessary freedom. On the other side, if parents are too strict and blame the child for

failures, the child will feel shameful and will learn to doubt his/her abilities. Many international adoptees might not experience the autonomy of free choice and love from caretakers, which can result in possible experiences of shame and doubt in their adolescent years.

The third stage deals with a child's initiative versus guilt where a child becomes divided in self-identification. On one side, a child can be active by undertaking new tasks and caring for others; but on the other side, he/she can become aggressive and jealous of potential rivals. According to Erikson (1950), infantile jealousy and rivalry is closely connected with the child's contest for a "favored position with the mother" and "the usual failure leads to [child's] resignation, guilt and anxiety (p. 256). Reid (2006) explains that as an adoptive mother she was waiting for her second daughter (adopted from Ukraine) to develop such an infantile rivalry. When her two-year-old daughter became jealous and refused to share her mother with other children, Reid knew that she did not have to worry about a possibility of attachment disorder.

In the fourth stage, Erikson (1950) focuses on the child's sense of industry and inferiority. He attests that when a child starts going to school, he/she develops the sense of industry by using his/her tools and skills. A child learns from older children and adults how to "handle the utensils, the tools and the weapons used by the big people" (p. 259). Erikson (1950) also warns about the dangers of this sensitive stage by stating:

> The child's danger, at this stage, lies in a sense of inadequacy and inferiority… Many a child's development is disrupted when family life has failed to prepare him for school life, or when school life fails to sustain the promises of earlier stages. (p. 260).

Concerning international adopted children, many of them are adopted at school age. During this transition of moving from a familiar school environment to a foreign school environment where they do not have their tools and skills to succeed an adoptee may develop a sense of isolation, inadequacy and inferiority. Therefore, school personnel need to pay special attention to internationally adopted students.

The fifth stage (identity vs. role confusion) is connected with the period of puberty. Teenagers typically identify with famous people as their idols and often form groups that exclude those who are unlike them. Erikson (1950) points out that young people can be cruel when excluding those with different skin color or cultural backgrounds. The issue of social group exclusion is typical for children adopted transracially and internationally as well as for immigrant children, especially from countries that are perceived negatively in the United States. Many young people also deal with role confusion. Research shows that internationally adopted adolescents with different ethnic backgrounds than their adoptive parents may undergo increased identity confusion (Simon, 2000).

Next, Erikson (1950) focuses on the young adult and his/her stage of *intimacy versus isolation*. He states that a young adult is ready to commit to intimate relationships and "to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they may call for significant sacrifices and compromises" (p. 263). He also warns that adults who avoid intimate relationships become isolated, which might lead to "character-problems" (p. 266). The ability to be part of intimate relationship goes back to the childhood when a child learns how to trust people around him/her.

The last two stages deal with mature adults. In the seventh stage, Erikson (1950) concentrates on the topics of *generativity versus stagnation*. He asserts, "Generativity is

primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation" while stagnation is a failure of providing enrichment to the community. Lastly, the final stage of *ego integrity versus despair* explains how mature adults cope with the issue of death. Erikson (1950) says that "possessor of integrity is ready to defend the dignity of his own life style against all physical and economic threats" while those with lack of integrity fear death (p. 268). The sense of integrity is again strongly connected with the sense of trust, which is the first value of a newborn child.

Erikson's theory about psychological stages and identity development had a significant influence on research of international adoption (Heimerle, 2003; Howard, 1993; Judge, 1999). As a result, international laws dealing with inter-country adoptions implemented mandatory preservation of the adoptees' heritage in order to support their identity development.

It is not only researchers but also adoptive parents who understand the importance of preserving the culture of their adopted children. In her long-term study, Roberta Goldberg (2001) focused on the social construction of adoptive families and examined eight mothers who adopted children from Romania. This study lasted seven years and the researcher's goal was to understand "how families perceive their own experiences with adoption and the choices they make in presenting themselves internally and externally" (Goldberg, 2001, p.89). The author found out that over the period of time the families in this study "shifted their focus from the experience of adopting and becoming a family to the routines of family life" (Goldberg, 2001, p. 90). During the interviews, the mothers responded that telling their children about their culture of origin was significant. To preserve the child's culture, some of the family activities included reading news from Romania, discussing the topic of

adoption, socializing with other adoptive families and going to Romanian cultural events. The mothers also explained that they felt telling school staff about their adopted children was necessary but they did not want their children to be labeled or to feel differently just because they were adopted. Goldberg (2001) points out negative social attitudes, for example in a school environment, could complicate communication between the parents and adopted children. As a result, the social construction of these adoptive families should be perceived as "an ongoing dynamic between the private and public worlds" (Goldberg, 2001, p. 100).

The negotiation of an identity is influenced not only by a family and school environment but also by the previous experiences of the adopted child. If the child is internationally adopted at a young age, the transition is easier. Internationally adopted adolescents might experience a difficult time adjusting to a new culture and positioning themselves in a new society. Based on their previous negative or positive childhood experience, they choose their direction in negotiating their identity. In my preliminary research of internationally adopted children (DiGregorio, 2005), I found that internationally adopted adolescents with positive childhood experiences (e.g. loving family members, relatives, and friends) in their country of origin have a tendency to position themselves at the periphery of the new society as a result of the identity crisis. These adolescents have a stronger motivation to maintain their native language than adolescents who had a negative childhood experience (e.g. insufficient orphanage environment, absence of family and relatives). The findings show that adolescents with a negative childhood experience usually find hope in defining themselves as a member of a new culture; therefore, their transition from one culture to another becomes easier.

### *International Adoption*

International adoption is an alternative to domestic adoption and infertility treatment for many U.S. families (Bartholet, 1993). As a result, foreign children of different ages are being adopted and enrolled in U.S. schools. Just in the year of 2006, approximately 19, 800 children were adopted from more than 20 countries (U.S. Department of State, 2007).

Research shows that U.S. families have been adopting children from other countries for more than 5 decades. According to Alstein & Simon (1991), international adoption developed in five waves and its history goes back to the post-World War II (WWII) area. After WWII (the first wave), many children from Europe, especially from Germany and Greece, were orphaned. As a result, U.S. families adopted approximately 5,814 European children between 1948 and 1953.

The second wave of international adoptions corresponded with the end of the Korean War in 1953. Wilkinson (1995) explains that in 1953 there were 53,963 orphans in Korean institutions where most of the children were abandoned. Wilkinson (1995) lists the reasons for abandonment, which include social stigma such as poverty, illegitimate birth, and neglect of children by parents. In the 1980s, however, the adoptions from Korea decreased due to changes in the Korean adoption policy.

The third wave of international adoptions is associated with Central and South America. Many U.S. families began to adopt from Latin America in 1973. A high increase was evident in 1993; however, since then the adoptions declined due to the resistance of sending countries. Those countries disagreed with the removal of children from their culture (Alstein & Simon, 1991).

The fourth wave began after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989. Couples from the United States and other Western countries became interested in adopting children from countries such as Russia, Romania and Ukraine due to a large number of available white children and the easy adoption process. In 1998, the Hague Convention signed a new treaty on international adoption, which caused the decline of out-of-country adoptions due to new strict adoption guidelines.

The fifth wave of international adoptions is associated with the China's one-child-per-family population policy. Due to supporting international adoption policies of overpopulated China and good prenatal care of future orphans, adoptions by U.S. families have been increasing from 330 in 1993 to 6, 493 in 2006 (Hollingsworth, 2003; U.S. Department of State, 2007). The fact that males have a higher social status in Chinese community caused that the Chinese children available for adoptions are mostly girls (Brodzinsky et al., 1998).

Currently, international adoptions remain popular in the United States. During a five year period (2002-2006), the U.S. Department of State issued more than 100,000 immigrant visas to internationally adopted children. China, Russia and Guatemala have been the leading countries of international adoption for these five years (U.S. Department of State, 2007).

These five waves show how international adoptions developed historically. However, it is necessary to point out that international adoptions are influenced not only by historical eras but also by new laws, which have a strong impact on sending and receiving countries.

*International Law and Identity*

The most important laws regarding international adoption are two treaties: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, and the Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption implemented by the Hague Conference on Private International Law in 1993.

On September 2, 1990, the CRC established a new human right stating that every child has the right to know his/her identity. Particularly, Articles 7 and 8 explain the child's rights. Article 7 states:

> 1. The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.
>
> 2. State Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field. (Convention on the Rights of the Child, p.4)

In her analysis of the CRC, Heimerle (2003) points out that the words in Article 7 are carefully chosen in order to offer a compromise for those nations (state parties), "which provide children with unequivocal right to know their birth parents and nations which allow for 'secret' adoption" (p. 90).

Article 8 directly addresses the identity rights and states:

> 1. States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.

2. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity (Convention on the Rights of the Child, p.4).

Many researchers feel that in spite of the convention's attempt to recognize the new human right to know one's birth identity, the CRC fails to define "identity" with one universal meaning (Heimerle, 2003; O'Donovan, 2002; Blair, 2001). As a result, the CRC leaves the interpretation of identity to individual national law, which can be rather ambiguous since there is a little common ground between nations.

After the Hague Convention was signed on May 29, 1993, the main goals were to prevent trafficking of children and adoption fraud as well as to protect the interests of adopted children, birth parents and adoptive parents during the process of international adoption. The United States signed the Hague Convention in 1994 and implemented it into a law called the Intercountry Adoption Act in 2000 (Heimerle, 2003).

Regarding the adopted child's identity, the Hague Convention, specifically Articles 16 and 30, require sending states to "prepare a report including information about his or her identity, adoptability, background, social environment, family history, medical history including that of the child's family, and any special needs of the child" (The Hague Convention, 1993, Article 16). However, the second paragraph of Article 16 states that the parents' identities do not have to be revealed in case it is prohibited by the law in the state of origin. Similarly to the CRC mandates, the Hague Convention was not able to support an absolute right to child's identifying information since it has to respect diverse laws of many nations (Heimerle, 2003).

*Adopted Children from Eastern Europe*

This qualitative study examines internationally adopted children from Russia. Adoptions from Eastern Europe accelerated in 1989 after the fall of communism, and since then U.S. families have adopted over 100,000 children from Russia, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Ukraine and other Eastern European countries (U.S. Department of State, 2007). U.S. parents adopted more than 4,639 children from Russia in 2005 and 3,706 in 2006 (U.S. Department of State, 2007). As a result of high interest in Eastern European adoptions, researchers, especially in the field of psychology, started to focus on internationally adopted children from these countries. Soon adoptive families, media and researchers noticed a striking difference between the orphanage conditions in Eastern European countries and Asian countries. The research reveals that many orphanages in Eastern Europe have a poor quality of health conditions such as limited sanitation, lack of nutritious food and clothing, and staff shortage (Albers et al., 1997; McGuinness & Pallansch, 2000).

As a result, the findings of various studies disclose that orphans living in Eastern European institutional settings have increased developmental problems such as slow language development, physical delay and cognitive and motor impairment. For example, Glennen & Bright (2005) conducted a follow –up study of 46 school-age internationally adopted (IA) children from Eastern Europe. These children were first observed at the ages of two to three years and then five years later, the same children were between ages of six to nine years old. The results showed that 17.4% of IA students were receiving accommodations or special education. Small language deficits in preschool age children became more visible during the school language-learning period. In addition, 24% of IA students were diagnosed with ADD/ADHD, a significantly higher percentage than the norm

of 16%. However, Glennen and Bright (2005) point out that although the IA children are impacted by second language acquisition, most of them catch-up in their second language development.

Another quantitative study was conducted by Howard, Smith & Ryan (2004). This research compared the level of adjustment in home, school, health, mental health and community of children who were adopted domestically and internationally. The authors divided adoptive families into three categories according to the origin of the adoption: 1. child welfare adoption, 2. domestic infant adoptions, and 3. international adoptions. The parents completed a survey rating their children's behavior, health, school functioning etc. The results revealed that "using the Behavior Problem Index (BPI) as a measure of behavior problems, welfare adoptees were rated as having a mean of 11.9 problems compared to 6.2 for birth children and 9.1 and 9.4 respectively for domestic infant and internationally adopted children" (Howard et al., 2004). The authors point out that in spite of the many emotional issues of adopted children, over 90% of adoptive parents are satisfied with their adoption experience. In conclusion, behavior problems of international adoptees are comparable to those of domestically adopted children. In spite of these problems, many adoptive families are functioning very well.

### *Second Language Acquisition and Maintenance of Native Language*

The process of second language acquisition of internationally adopted children can be greatly affected by the process of migration and international adoption as mentioned earlier. However, besides experiencing the phenomena of migration and international adoption, there are other factors (value of education, learning attitudes, family obligation and cultural

identity) that play a significant role in second language (L2) acquisition and identity development.

In his well-known Affective Filter Hypothesis, Krashen (1982) explains how learner's emotions and attitudes influence the learning effectiveness. He states:

> Those whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a high or strong affective filter-even if they understand the message, the input will not reach that part of the brain responsible for language acquisition, or the Language Acquisition Device. Those with attitudes more conducive to second language acquisition will not only seek and obtain more input, they will also have a lower or weaker filter. They will be more open to the input, and it will strike 'deeper'. (Krashen, 1982, p.31).

In other words, students who grow up in a stable and supportive family that engrains positive learning attitudes seem to have an advantage in acquiring L2 more than those students who come from emotionally unstable family environments.

Motivation and investment also have an effect on successful language acquisition. The research of Gardner & Lambert (1972) introduced the concepts of *instrumental* and *integrative* motivation. According to their work, *instrumental* motivation references the student's desire to learn a second language for useful purposes such as obtaining a good education and job, while *integrative* motivation provides students with desired integration in a social group and community. For example, internationally adopted children who desire to be part of U.S. family, will use their integrative motivation to learn English faster. This theory became very influential in the field of second language acquisition, and Gardner &

Lambert had many followers. Norton (2000), however, believes that the theory of instrumental and integrative motivation does not "capture the *complex* relationship between power, identity and language learning" (p.10). She proposes the notion of investment in which a language learner is considered to have a "complex social history and multiple desires" (p.10). Norton's notion of investment explains that, when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is changing across time and space. (2000, p.10)

McKay & Wong (1996) build on Norton' s notion of investment by stating that learning a language includes four basic skills (listening, speaking, writing and reading) and the investment in these skills can be highly selective since each skill has a different value to a learner's identity. In other words, internationally adopted children might invest more into speaking skills to communicate with family members rather than investing into writing skills, which can be rather difficult to master.

Commonly, some learners purposely distance themselves from the majority group since L2 acquisition can be perceived as a threat to their ethnic group identity (Gatbonton et al., 2005; Mendoza-Denton, 1999). In her study of Mexican American adolescents, Norma Mendoza-Denton (1999) points out that academic achievement is connected to language attitudes. Mexican American high school students who affiliated themselves with an all-girl gang called the "Sureñas" (Hispanic cultural identity) refused to improve their English skills; whereas those students who identified with a competing gang called the "Norteñas" (American cultural identity) were able to exit ESL classes and become fully mainstreamed. If

international adoptees affiliate themselves with only Russian culture, they can become very isolated in the U.S. school environment.

Many scholars believe that age plays a critical role in L2 acquisition. These beliefs are based on the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), which was first developed by Lenneberg (1967). Although the CPH was first developed and discussed in 1960s, there still seems to be acknowledgement of this hypothesis among the current researchers (e.g. Hahne, 2001; Kim et al., 1997; Newman et al., 2002). The hypothesis suggests that as the brain matures the human language mechanism declines after a certain age. Following up on Lenneberg's hypothesis, Rumbaut (1998) found that those students who arrived to the United States at an earlier age, developed increasing preference for L2 and decreasing preference for L1 during a three-year period. This study also revealed that older arrivals maintain their L1 as a dominant language despite their high L2 proficiency. There has been a continuum of similar studies with a focus on diverse nationalities of L2 learners, and the results have proved that with increasing arrival age, the proficiency of L1 increases and the proficiency of L2 decreases (Yeni-Komshian et al., 2000; Flege et al., 1995; Kohnert et al., 1999).

In spite of the fact that the arrival age plays a critical role in L2 proficiency, other factors such as the distance between two cultures, the hosting country's attitudes towards immigrants, previously learned skills and motivation to learn L2 contribute as well (Schumann, 1978). Similarly, Jia (2004) emphasizes that the arrival age of immigrant children is not the only predictor of successful L2 acquisition. She states that children's L2 acquisition is affected by multiple components (the origin of the first language, motivation, peer preference and cultural preference), but the most significant impact was the immigrant's age of arrival. Jia (2004) points out that many studies reveal a correlation between age and

language proficiency. The older the immigrants upon arrival to the United States., the higher L1 proficiency and lower L2 proficiency they have.

Regarding the dominant language switch and maintenance of L1, Jia (2004) argues that those processes differ from additive and subtractive language learning theory, which was proposed by Lambert (1978). Lambert (1990) states that in additive bilingualism, learners are adding something new to their L2 learning experience. However, in subtractive bilingualism, learners might feel that studying a new language could threaten their native language and identity. Jia (2004) distinguishes between dominant-language switch and additive learning by suggesting that these two processes are overlapping but are not identical. She explains, "dominant-language maintenance clearly indicates that an individual's L1 remains stronger than his or her L2, whereas additive learning can occur even though L2 grows stronger than L1" (Jia, 2004, p. 359).

Jia uses the terms dominant language switch and maintenance to describe "the dynamic changes of immigrants' L1 and L2 proficiency because these terms emphasize the relative proficiency of the two languages, whereas additive and subtractive learning do not" (Jia, 2004, p. 359). For example, older international adoptees may retain dominance of their native language and still improve their second language. When proficient in both languages, they can choose which language they will prefer.

Immigrants' maintenance of L1 is affected by various factors such as family motivation, community support, social value and respect of that language (e.g. Russian) in a learning setting. Milroy and Milroy (1997) describe the term *language maintenance* as "the process of consciously maintaining a particular form of a language in a population where there is linguistic diversity wide enough to make communication difficult; it is usually

bilingual situations that are involved" (p. 52). A positive family environment, encouraging heritage preservation will help a student maintain his/her native language. Internationally adopted students have less of an opportunity to preserve their native language in comparison with their immigrant peers due to the limited access to their native language (Gindis, 2009a).

As research shows, the length of stay in a host country also impacts immigrants' reasons for maintaining their mother tongue. Kouzmin (1988) focused on researching the language maintenance of Russian immigrants in Australia and compared views on ethnic identity and their continued use of Russian between two groups. One group consisted of the *second-wave* Russian immigrants who left Russia after 1945 (post-war wave) and the other group included the *third-wave* Russian immigrants who exited USSR after 1974 (1970's are called the "Brezhnev stagnation"- a period of socio-economic slowdown). The results of the study demonstrate that the length of residency in Australia played an important factor on Russian language maintenance attitudes. Kouzmin (1988) explains that the *second-wave* immigrants were "better equipped and ready to promote linguistic retention" (p. 59) while the *third-wave* immigrants were still adjusting to a new environment. The comparisons and analysis of data show that the *second-wave* immigrants used the Russian and English languages equally and supported Russian language for ideological and symbolic reasons, whereas the *third-wave* immigrants used Russian language more than English in all of the domains (home, social and cultural) and maintained their native language for general cultural and educational reasons.

Another study focused on children of second and third generation immigrants. Borland (2005) concentrated her research on Maltese immigrants in Australia because their children had worse educational outcomes in English than other ethnic minorities in Australia.

The children of Maltese immigrants had good speaking skills in Maltese but minimal literacy skills. As a result, the Maltese Education Program (MEP) was started in Melbourne and supported by the education community in Malta, which provided instructional materials. MEP is part of the Heritage Language Education, which started back in the 1950's as an oppositional reaction to Malta's British colonial heritage. The results of the study show that MEP positively influenced children of Maltese background since increasing numbers of students chose to complete their final high school exam in Maltese instead of in English. Considering the success of MEP, Borland (2005) concludes that the identification with one's heritage language and culture has a positive impact on an individual's psychological well-being. This positive impact of heritage preservation can be also applied to identity development of international adoptees.

Not preserving one's native language and culture can create communication gaps and negative family environments as is shown in Norton's (2000) study of a Vietnamese family living in Canada. The grandparents' poor English skills prevented them from communicating with their grandchildren who never learned Vietnamese since their parents were ashamed of their Vietnamese culture and wanted to be mainstreamed with Canadian culture. This unfortunate situation tore the family apart.

In summary, preservation of native language and culture helps an immigrant's family to find stability in a new environment, to define a new identity and to pass the heritage onto next generation. Similarly, international adoptees will benefit from their culture and language preservation because they will have a better understanding of their cultural roots, which will positively influence their identity development.

*Second Language Acquisition and First Language Maintenance of International Adoptees*

Researchers in the field of international adoption and language development point out that there is a variety of factors influencing the acquisition of a second language of internationally adopted children. Internationally adopted children from Eastern Europe are considered to be a "high-risk group" because of prenatal alcohol and nicotine exposure and poor prenatal and postnatal care. Many of them have cognitive, emotional and language delays (Gindis, 1999). With a focus on speech development, Glennen (2005) conducted a study on internationally adopted (IA) toddlers (12-24 months) from Russia, Kazakhstan and Romania. The statistics showed that 65% of the IA children did not need early intervention, 7% were at the borderline and 28% of IA toddlers were recommended for speech and language early intervention. As a result, orphans with speech delays in their native language typically transfer those delays into their second language acquisition process. For example, children who struggle with forming sentences in their native language will face this problem in their second language development.

Regarding the maintenance of first language (L1), bilingual psychologist Boris Gindis (1999) states he was surprised how swiftly the IA children lost their mother tongue. He explains that many of the international adoptees do not belong to a bilingual category because at the beginning they are only monolingual in their L1 and soon they become monolingual in L2. Usually this transition happens within the first year and the IA children lose their L1 much faster than they acquire L2. However, there are some exceptions with older adoptees that are literate in their native language. Gindis (1999) points out that especially those adolescents who were adopted as twins or siblings have a chance to maintain their L1. These adolescents continue to use their L1 with each other and try to find access to

L1 resources such as literature, Internet and movies. Similarly, children adopted by bicultural families have a greater opportunity to preserve their culture and language. According to Tershakovec Iskalo (2004), most of the Ukrainian U.S./Canadian adoptive parents chose to adopt from the country of their origin to continue the genetic and ethnic chain, and also to make it easier for the child's transition.

Nevertheless, a majority of IA children is not able to maintain their mother tongue, and such a loss may have a long-lasting impact (Wilkinson, 1995). For adoptees, even monolinguals, identity searching is an ongoing process; therefore, it is important to teach IA children about the culture of their origin since a majority of them lose their native language so quickly. Knowledge of their background helps IA children to define their identity and better understand themselves in adolescence when dealing with role confusion. Protection of IA children's identity is not only supported by the majority of adoptive parents but also by the international law (the Hague Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child), which contributed, in spite of its ambiguity, to improving IA children's conditions in at least some of the participating countries.

### *Russian Culture, Literacy and Education System*

To fully comprehend the second language acquisition of international adoptees from Russia, it is necessary to provide a description of Russian culture, literacy and its educational system. In this section, I give a brief overview of issues that will be discussed in more detail in chapters four and five.

The history of Russia goes back to the sixth century when the Slavic people settled in steppes of European Russia. The czars ruled the country and expanded its empire throughout the northeastern and central Asia. As a result, Russia became the largest country in the world.

In 1917 the Communists defeated the Russian czar and seized power. Russia became a member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). During communism, the economy stagnated but there was guaranteed employment, health insurance and other social benefits. In the 1980's, Mikhail Gorbachev's endeavor to restructure the country's economy (perestroika) led to fragmentation of the Soviet Union into 15 independent republics in 1991 (Flaitz, 2003).

Currently, the population of Russia is approximately 147,500,000 inhabitants, and Russians (82%) create the largest ethnic group. Smaller ethnic groups consist of Tatars, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Bashkirs, Moldavians and others. During communism, people were discouraged from going to churches; however, after the fall of communism religious traditions were revived. The largest religious groups are Russian Orthodox, Protestants and Catholics (Flaitz, 2003). In spite of that, many Russian orphans living in state institutions are not introduced to religion.

Regarding the differences and similarities between Russians and U.S. citizens, Lebedko (2003) conducted a study, in which she analyzed the linguistic representations of value concepts in U.S. and Russian cultures. She states that U.S. citizens are mostly future oriented and Russians are more present oriented, which is due to the instability in the country and a pessimistically perceived future. The findings of the study also reveal that in general, work is the most important value in the U.S. society. Russians also work hard, but they are "less persistent in their goals and are less likely to struggle for the realization of their dreams" (p. 185-6). Lebedko states that the concept of "individualism" is present in U.S. culture while Russian culture supports the concept of "collectivism" where a person is not supposed to stand out. Interestingly, she notes that monetary expressions (e.g. "Time is

money") are frequently used in English because U.S. citizens value the concept of time. On the other side, the Russian language does not have such a monetary concept of time because in Russian culture, time is less important than a person.

The Russian education system was controlled by the state during communism, but in 1992, a new law (Law on Education) changed that. Nowadays, domestic and foreign institutions as well as individuals are able to establish schools. Typically, state schools provide free education and private schools charge tuition fees. According to Gleizer (2002), private schools brought a new phenomenon of segregating children based on their social status. Only the children of elite can afford to attend private schools while other children study in poor conditions. Gleizer (2002) states that this phenomenon of selection was unknown before and it has a negative impact on Russian society. Similarly, Naumov & Puffer (2000) point out that many citizens have negative attitudes towards so called New Russians who are wealthy.

Due to the declining education budget, there is a lack of new school construction and a shortage of teachers. Gleizer (2002) explains, "Pedagogical cadres began to get out of teaching as a result of the decline in the prestige of the teaching profession and confusion in the pedagogical community, especially among teachers of the social and historical cycle of school disciplines" (p. 34). He also attests, "The best educated and most intellectually developed portion of society (the intellectual elite, leaders in science and culture, school teachers, physicians, and engineers) have fallen below the poverty line" (Gleizer, 2002, p. 27). As a result of teacher shortage, state schools operate in morning and afternoon shifts, which means less instructional time for Russian students.

Despite poor conditions in Russian education system, the literacy rate in Russia is high (98%) and attendance, which is compulsory from first grade until ninth grade, is excellent. The curriculum in preschool (ages three through six) focuses mostly on cognitive and creative abilities. Six and seven year old children begin to learn the basics of reading, writing and math in the first grade, and gradually, the curriculum of second through ninth grades starts to emphasize academic subjects such as Russian language, literature, social studies, natural sciences, technology, and health. The atmosphere in Russian schools is very formal, and strict teachers typically require memorization from their students. The special emphasis on sciences helped Russian society to produce many outstanding researchers in the fields of medicine, chemistry, physics and mathematics (Flaitz, 2003).

Regarding the Russian language, it must be noted that the linguistic distance between Russian and English is of greater significance than the distance between English and Roman languages. For example, Spanish and German languages have many similarities with English (e.g. Roman alphabet, borrowed words with the same meaning in both languages, similar phonetics); therefore these languages are of closer relation to English than Russian. On the other hand, Asian languages are very distant from English due to its abstract concepts of writing, sentence formation and speaking. Although Russian language uses the Cyrillic alphabet and linguistic features comparable to other Slavic languages (Polish, Czech, Slovak, Bulgarian etc.), it is not as distant from English as Asian languages. Internationally adopted children from Russia will need to learn a new alphabet with different phonetic sounds as well as atypical linguistic features of English language but more importantly, they will need to comprehend the U.S. culture and its language as a whole in order to communicate fluently and efficiently.

## Conclusion

When comparing immigrant children to internationally adopted children, it becomes clear that there are a number of commonalities as well as differences.

With regards to identity construction, the predominant factors influencing both immigrant and IA children are arrival age, family environment, heritage preservation encouraged by parents and social acceptance in a receiving country. A stable immigrant family that is able to adjust to a new culture, but still values its heritage, will have a positive effect on its children. In addition, the child's earlier arrival age and accepting school environment will contribute to easier adaptation of immigrant students.

The major obstacle IA children face is a new family that usually does not speak the child's native language. In addition, the family's lifestyle is very different from that of the orphanage. Adoptive parents, who understand the medical and emotional needs of IA children, are able to build trusting relationships, support the child's culture of origin, and assist these adoptees in their new identity construction.

The process of second language acquisition is influenced by many factors such as child's arrival age, distance between two cultures, identification with a new culture and the child's language and developmental delays. However, if children with a similar arrival age, similar cultural background and positive identification with a new culture were compared, it can be assumed that IA children would acquire L2 faster than immigrant children due to their complete L2 immersion and a desire to communicate with and be accepted by their new family.

For IA children, the biggest obstacle is the maintenance of their L1, which is closely tied to the preservation of their cultural identity. The majority of IA children are being

adopted by English only speaking parents who cannot use the child's L1, and in spite of the adoptive parents' encouragement for the child's native language and culture, many adoptees lose the knowledge of L1 in a short period of time. This loss of a native language might have a negative effect on the adoptees' identity formation during adolescent years and in adulthood.

Immigrant children, on the other hand, have a greater chance to maintain their native language due to a bilingual family environment. It is very common that second and third generations easily acquire L1 speaking skills but struggle with L1 literacy skills; therefore, many immigrants seek bilingual education programs for their children in an effort to maintain their language and culture. Immigrants' main reasons for preserving their native language are cultural, social and educational. This preservation of and identification with one's language and culture is of great importance since it positively influences immigrants' psychological well-being.

# CHAPTER THREE

# STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

## The Qualitative Research

> "Becoming immersed in a study requires passion: passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people. This is the contribution of qualitative research, and it can only enhance educational and human services practice." (Janesick, 1998, p.51)

My goal for conducting this study was to understand the processes of second language acquisition, native language preservation, and identity construction from the perspective of the internationally adopted students. The participants of this study were students that I had in my ESL class. These students were also internationally adopted from Russia. Knowing the students for many years, I watched their academic and cultural ups and downs and became sincerely interested in their stories of international adoption, adjustment to a new culture and especially learning a new language. Admiring their strength, perseverance and flexibility, I developed passion for these individuals and tried to help them with their academic endeavors.

Trying to create a deep holistic portrait of internationally adopted students with a focus on their second language acquisition, I decided to select a qualitative paradigm for my study. According to Creswell (1994), "Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, [and] reports detailed views of informants" (p.15). Unlike quantitative research with the large

numerical results of randomly selected cases, qualitative studies focus on "socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 8).

Concerning methodology of qualitative research, Merriam (1988) provides six well utilized assumptions:

> 1. Qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with process, rather than outcomes or products.
> 2. Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning- how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.
> 3. The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines.
> 4. Qualitative research involves fieldwork. The researcher physically goes to the people, setting, site, or institution to observe or record behavior in its natural setting.
> 5. Qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures.
> 6. The process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details.
> (pp. 19-20)

As a researcher, I am drawn to the process of exploring the meaning of the social life of individuals who share the same phenomenon but experience it in different ways. I believe that a qualitative approach for this dissertation study helped me reflect on my own

perspectives as well as the subjects' perspectives on the concepts of their second language acquisition, L1 maintenance and identity construction.

I chose the qualitative paradigm for its diversity in methods and use in multiple disciplines such as education, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) explain,

> "Qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival, and phonemic analysis, even statistics. They also draw upon and utilize the approaches, methods, and techniques of ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, rhizomatics, deconstructionism, ethnographies, interviews, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, survey research, and participant observation…" (p.5).

I believe the qualitative paradigm correlated well with the purpose and objectives of my study.

### *Using Ethnographic Methods*

Ethnography was used first by anthropologists and later became widely used in the education field. Researchers agree that when an ethnographic study is done well, readers should be able to experience deep understanding of the studied culture. The term "culture" can be formulated as "a pattern of traditions, symbols, rituals, and artifacts, all of which together relate systematically to each other so as to form an integrated whole" (Gall et al., 2003, p.487). While studying the members' culture, a researcher can choose between *emic* (inside) perspective, *etic* (outside) perspective or a combination of both. In this study, I chose to use the combination of *emic* and *etic* perspectives because it allowed me to portray a more thorough and realistic picture of a particular culture. I conducted detailed interviews

with international adoptees (emic perspective) about their learning experiences. Additionally, I interviewed adoptive parents (etic perspective) whose input provided more contextual information when portraying international adoptees' (IA) experiences.

Like any other qualitative approach, ethnographic research has its specific features. According to Atkinson & Hammersley (1998), ethnographic research needs to have "a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than set out to test hypotheses about them." The ethnographic researcher should work mostly with "unstructured" data, investigate a small number of cases and analyze data that involve "explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most" (pp. 110-111).

Basically, the traditional ethnographic approach provides explanations to what people do in different settings, how they understand their actions and what their cultural values are. By collecting IA's interpretations of their learning experiences, analyzing artifacts and interviewing adoptive parents, I hoped to provide detailed descriptions that would be embedded in a more meaningful context.

### *Artifact Analysis*

Analyzing artifacts is essential for qualitative researchers who deal with differing and conflicting interpretations (Hodder, 2000). Artifacts such as photographs, journals, drawings, and written text assist researchers in interpreting subjects' constructs from alternative perspectives. According to Rathje & Murphy (1992), people often do different things than what they say they do; therefore, it is important not to rely only on interview data but to implement artifact interpretations to develop an analysis.

Although material symbols can have many commonalities, research shows that individual objects have their own traces, which create "unique evocations" that are particular to a certain individual and his/her experiences (Hodder, 2000, p.707).

The interpretation of artifacts can be a difficult process since the objects are mute. Hodder (2000) points out artifacts need to be analyzed in a certain context. He states that "the interpretation is based on the simultaneous hermeneutical procedure of context definition, the construction of patterned similarities and differences, and the use of relevant social and material culture theory" (Hodder, 2000, p. 714). Furthermore, he explains that the interpretation of artifacts can be confirmed by following standard criteria such as coherence (parts of explanation do not contradict each other) and correspondence (arguments fit the contextual data). The written presentation of artifacts also plays an important role in how the reader will reinterpret the meaning of such artifacts; therefore, the persuasiveness of the argument is closely connected to the rhetoric of such interpretation (Hodder, 2000, p.714).

The interpretation of artifacts can vary with different types of artifacts that can be used for various research purposes. For example, Lincoln & Guba (1985, p. 277) differentiate between written *records* used for official purposes (marriage license, driving license, banking statements) and *documents* used unofficially (letters, diaries, memos), although both types of artifacts play an important role when constructing contextualized confidentiality and privacy laws.

In this qualitative study, I used *official records* (results of standardized tests for ESL students and mainstream students in the state of Pennsylvania) and unofficial documents (essays, photographs, drawings, letters, journals etc.). The copies of official records were collected from adoptive parents and school personnel. The official records included state

wide standardized tests (PSSA test results, TerraNova tests results, and Stanford English Language Proficiency (SELP) test results, which had been administered once a year), school district tests (Idea Proficiency Test for English Language Learners administered once or twice a year), and report cards. The purpose of collecting these official records was to document the participant's progress in learning English as a second language. When analyzing the official records, I looked at the time period of needed ESL services, students' progress in the second language acquisition, and students' L2 strengths and weaknesses. In order to analyze how a student was progressing with her/his academic English, I used the results of state-wide standardized tests as indicators of participants' academic improvement. The major standardized tests used were:

1. *Stanford English Language Proficiency test (SELP)* - this test is given to ESL students in grades K-12 and evaluates the listening, reading, comprehension, writing and speaking skills. The performance level of students' skills has five categories: pre-emergent, emergent, basic, intermediate and proficient (Stanford English Language Proficiency test, 2009).
2. *Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)* - this test is administered to students in grades three through eight and grade eleven. The students are being tested in reading, writing and math. The test results provide four general performance level descriptors, which are advanced, proficient, basic and below basic. The students who scored on the advanced or proficient level are considered to have satisfactory grade level performance (PSSA, 2009).

3. *TerraNova test* - this test is available for every grade level K-12; however, many school districts use it only for kindergarten, first and second grades before PSSA tests are administered. The TerraNova tests assesses mathematics, reading, spelling, language, science, and social studies (TerraNova Practice, 2009).

4. *Idea Proficiency Test (IPT)* - this test is administered in particular school districts to evaluate proficiency in English for children in kindergarten through twelfth grade. It consists of the Oral, Reading and Writing test and determines the proficiency level of ESL students (Idea Proficiency Test, 2009).

All the copies of records were collected with permission of the adoptive parents and students and all records remained confidential.

The copies of *unofficial documents* were collected from international adoptees and adoptive parents. The unofficial documents included participants' essays, family photographs, students' drawings, letters, journals, books, CDs, videos, toys and other objects. The purpose of collecting these unofficial documents was to get a better understanding of how the child was maintaining his/her Russian language skills and using English literacy skills. I collected written artifacts (books, letters, journal essays) and visual artifacts (photographs, drawings),which provided supporting details in understanding the child's adjustment process. Creswell (1994) states that this method may be "an unobtrusive method of collecting data." He points out that it "provides an opportunity for informant to share directly his or her 'reality' [and] … captures attention visually" (p. 151). I chose this method

because such artifacts can provide useful and alternative information for this qualitative study.

All the copies of unofficial documents were collected with permission of the international adoptees and their parents and all documents remained confidential. All the official records and unofficial documents were photocopied or photographed and the originals were returned to the school entity or subjects. Having sufficient knowledge of Russian language, I was able to translate the Russian essays and letters into English.

By analyzing these artifacts in a particular context, I was able to bring alternative perspectives to interpretations of subjects' experiences.

### *Setting*

Setting is an important part of the research process. For participants of any study, the setting should be a relaxed and comfortable place that makes the interviewing process informal and encouraging (Atkinson, 1998). Researchers themselves should choose an easily accessible setting that would allow continuance of the study. Marshall and Rossman (as cited in Erlandson et al, 1993) provide a description of an ideal setting:

> The ideal site is where (1) entry is possible, (2) there is a high probability that a rich mix of many of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and/or structures that may be a part of the research question will be present; (3) the researcher can devise an appropriate role to maintain continuity of presence…; (4) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured by avoiding poor sampling decisions (p. 53).

Having these factors in mind, I chose an accessible setting, which was comfortable for subjects as well as researcher. Based on the mutual agreement of my participants and

their parents, three participants and their parents preferred to be interviewed at their houses, three other participants came with their parents to my house for an interview. One parent agreed to be interviewed in an empty classroom of a public school that his children attended.

### *The Region*

The participants of this study live in the same region of a U.S. county located in eastern Pennsylvania. According to the census of 2007 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2007), the county's population reached over 209,000 people, and its racial makeup consists of 96.6% White, 2.2% Hispanic or Latino, 1.7% African American, and 0.9% Asian inhabitants.

During the 19th century, the county saw a visible increase of immigrants from Ireland, Poland, Italy and Russia due to job opportunities in coal mines and the railroad industry. As a result, there are still many ethnic churches, restaurants and museums providing services to diverse communities. The fact that this region embraces diversity helps newcomers to feel welcome and accepted.

Regarding the education services, the county has twelve school districts, three universities, and four colleges that are dedicated to offering quality education. After the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was approved in 2001, every school district was required to provide ESL instruction to English language learners. Many immigrant families were moving in from large cities because of safer living conditions and affordable housing in northeastern Pennsylvania. However, immigrant children were not the only students who were in need of ESL services. A local adoption agency whose owner is originally from Russia encouraged U.S parents to adopt children from Russia. The owner of the adoption agency has close relationships with Russian orphanages and tries to help orphans who live in poor conditions

find better homes with adoptive families. After these orphans are adopted, they usually attend local schools and are placed in ESL programs.

### *English as a Second Language Program*

As a result of NCLB requirements, nine small school districts in a particular county of northeastern Pennsylvania created an ESL consortium program, in which the districts would share ESL teachers and resources. This ESL consortium program was established in 2002 due to limited federal funding and a small ESL population in the nine rural districts. The program consisted of two ESL classrooms located at a vocational school, into which students from nine school districts were bussed for ESL instruction. Two teachers and one assistant provided ESL instruction to students in grades K-12. These students were divided into groups according to their grades and English language skills. For example, beginning English language learners (ELLs) in grades 7-12 were in a different group than intermediate ELLs in grades 7-12.

As an ESL Curriculum Specialist, my job was to teach students who were in need of ESL services and provide ESL professional development to teachers. It was while teaching and helping my students, that I became very interested in conducting this study.

Because I interviewed my former students who no longer attended ESL classes, the setting for the interviews was not my ESL classroom but the students' homes or my home. Although I was not an employee of the participants' school districts, my job provided me with an easier access to the school grounds.

### *Selection of Participants*

The ethnographic approach encourages small sampling for case studies. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), purposive sampling helps a researcher look for data that are closely

connected to the problem of the study. They explain, "The object of the game is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor. A second purpose is to generate the information upon which the emergent design and grounded theory can be based" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 210). In addition, it is important that chosen participants faced the studied phenomenon and were willing to share their experiences.

In order to create a deep study with thick description of participants' experiences, I selected only six subjects who were my former ESL students. I called the six students my major participants because I also interviewed their parents who were the secondary participants. Since my research focus was on international adoptees, I intentionally chose only students who were internationally adopted from Russia. These students were between the ages of 8- 21 years at the time of the study. There were no gender restrictions, and I recruited only students with the following criteria:

1. All participants attended and successfully exited the ESL program by passing standardized exams for English language learners.
2. All participants experienced the phenomenon of second language acquisition and international adoption.
3. All participants were comfortable sharing their experiences, completing interviews and providing a few artifacts such as photographs, drawings, letters, journals etc.

Before interviewing subjects who were minors, I made sure that their parents gave me permission to interview their children, analyze their artifacts and conduct observations. In addition, I had an IRB approval to conduct this study.

Since the purpose of my study was to provide a thick description of my subjects and their experiences, I also interviewed the parents to obtain more information about the students' learning background. Lincoln & Guba (1985) state that "The [thick] description must specify everything that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings (findings are NOT part of the thick description, although they must be interpreted in the terms of the factors thickly described)…" (p.125). Four parents of the international adoptees agreed to be interviewed. I believe that semi-structured interviews with parents helped fill the gaps on adoptees' progress of second language acquisition and provided information to better understand the research findings.

### *Research Relationships and Ethical Issues*

Many researchers point out how complex research relationships can be (Morse, 1994; Gall et al., 2003). For example, philosophical and ethical concerns can have an influence on research process and outcome. Thus, it is necessary for the researcher to select carefully his/her research site and participants and also be ready for possible breakdowns (Gall et al., 2003).

There are many advantages and disadvantages conducting research at the institution where a researcher works. One of the advantages is easy access to data and familiarity with how the institution works. On the other side, relationships with certain members of the institution can affect the research. According to Morse (1994), it is not clever to conduct research at the site of employment. However, if one chooses to do so, Morse recommends to dress informally to separate oneself from employees.

Although I did not carry out my study at the place of my employment, the participants perceived me as their former teacher, which might have been intimidating to some of them. I

taught most of the participants for one to three years, and during the instructional time, we developed friendly but professional relationships. These relationships could have created biases for my study, so I made sure that the setting and atmosphere of my interviews were comfortable and informal. I dressed casually to show them that my teacher's role had changed. During our interviews, I asked open ended questions and encouraged the subjects to describe their experiences as freely as possible. I started with unstructured interviews and then moved to semi-structured interviews.

In order to minimize any risks (psychological, legal or physical); I made sure that the research procedures were clearly explained to all the participants and their parents. I informed them that all individuals mentioned in the study had pseudonyms to protect their identity. In addition, location and names of schools were changed to maintain confidentiality of the data. The participants were notified about their rights such as refusing to answer sensitive questions or withdrawing from a study. I made sure that all participants and their parents were comfortable with the research methods (interviews, observations, written text analysis) and that all their questions were honestly answered.

Considering the risk-benefit ratio, I explained the significance of my study and the benefits this study would bring to other internationally adopted students. I offered incentives to all the individuals for their participation in my study. Tutoring or small monetary incentives were offered. The participants were informed that there was no penalty for withdrawing from my study and that school personnel in their schools would not be familiarized with the outcomes of our interviews. The parents and students were assured that there was no harm in undertaking this study and all the necessary information was disclosed on the informed consent. After subjects, who were minors, gave me their assent, I asked

their parents to sign the consent form. Participants who were over 18 were asked to sign the consent form themselves.

## Design of the Study

> "The design of a study is the attempt of a researcher to give order to some set of phenomena so that they will make sense to the researcher and so that the researcher can communicate that sense to others" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 73).

I believe that a design of any study needs to have some order and a solid base, from which research can evolve; therefore, I created a summary table of my research questions, data collection methods and data analysis methods. I expect this table to provide readers with a better understanding of what was researched in my study.

Table 1 *Table of Data Collection and Data Analysis*

| Research Question | Data Collection | Data Analysis |
|---|---|---|
| 1. How do international adoptees experience and perceive the process of second language acquisition? | Student interviews<br>School personnel/ parent interviews<br>Artifacts (records of standardized tests) | Transcription of interviews<br>Selection of relevant material<br>Identification of emerging themes<br>Artifacts analysis |
| How do international adoptees maintain their native language? | Student interviews<br>Parent interviews<br>Artifacts (letters, drawings, photographs, journals) | Transcription of interviews<br>Selection of relevant material<br>Identification of emerging themes<br>Artifacts analysis |

*Interviews*

Interviews are the most commonly used forms of data collection in qualitative research because they assist us in understanding the social and cultural aspects of the environment. Fetterman (1989) explains:

> [Interviews] require verbal interaction, and language is the commodity of discourse. Words and expressions have different values in various cultures. People exchange these verbal commodities to communicate. The [researcher] quickly learns to savor the informant's every word for its cultural or subcultural connotations as well as for its denotative meaning (Fetterman as cited in Erlandson, 1993, p. 86).

Interviews help us see the world from a participant's point of view and put the new information in a larger context.

Interviewing as a method for data collection can be perceived as an easy method; however, one must be aware of the different kinds of interviews and procedures that are involved in conducting a good interview. According to Creswell (1994), there are three types of interviews: 1. *one on one* interview, 2. *group* interview, and 3. *telephone* interview. I chose *one on one* interview as the most appropriate for my study. As a researcher, I had an opportunity to focus solely on one individual at a time, which enabled me to better record and portray the obtained information.

Concerning the types of interviews, there can be unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews in the way a researcher asks questions to the participants. I decided to use unstructured and semi-structured forms of interviews with open-ended. I believe that the open-ended questions allowed participants to share their experiences in a comfortable way.

After obtaining general information about an individual's background, I proceeded with semi-structured interviews to find the missing pieces of the puzzle. I conducted interviews with international adoptees and interviews with their parents (see appendix for specific interview questions).

To make sure that all the interviews were successfully obtained, I audiotaped the interviews and then transcribed them word from word. After transcribing all the information, I created a list of recurrent themes. The list included the following themes:

1. learning English as a second language in a U.S. school
2. acquisition of English in a new family and communication with adoptive parents
3. Russian language maintenance
4. Russian culture preservation

I extracted the remarks pertaining to each theme and analyzed them in Chapter Five. Later I conducted member checking. I went over the collected data with my participants to assure that there were no discrepancies. I also provided them with copies of transcribed interviews so they could check whether the transcriptions are correct.

### *Observation*

Multiple methods of data collection are very important in qualitative research in order to establish triangulation and validity. Observation is another form of getting valuable information. According to Marshall & Rossman (1989), observation is "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (p.79). Similarly to the interview, observation can range from unstructured to a very focused one. It is suggested that a researcher start with unstructured observation, which will give him/her an option to decide what is relevant in a particular study (Erlandson, 1993).

There are many roles a researcher can play during observation. According to Creswell (1994, p. 151), there are four types of roles:

1. complete participant-researcher role (firsthand experience with informant);

2. observer as participant role (observation is primary, participation is secondary);

3. participant as observer (participation is primary, observation is secondary);

4. complete observer (researcher observes without participating).

I conducted two unstructured observations in the participants' school settings, during which my role was observer- participant. My participation was supplementary to my observation.

Prior to my observation, I obtained a written permission from a school administrator (e.g. superintendent or principal) as well as my participants and their parents, which was part of the IRB protocol. Before I started, I talked to teachers whose classes I attended and asked them to introduce me to students as another teacher who would observe the whole class, not only one student. In order to protect my participants' anonymity, I sat in the back of the classroom so that students would not be distracted by my presence.

I wrote field notes during my observations and followed my observation checklist. Merriam (1988) as cited in Erlandson (1993, pp. 97-98) provides a list of elements that need to be addressed during observation: 1) the setting, 2) the participants, 3) activities and interactions, 4) frequency and duration, 5) subtle factors (e.g. symbolic meaning of words, nonverbal communication). I developed a checklist (see appendix) that helped me stay focused during my observations. I used this checklist during every observation I conducted.

### *Validity and Reliability*

There is a divide between qualitative researchers when discussing issues of validity and reliability. Some researchers subscribe to positivist criteria of validity and reliability focusing on the objective knowledge of the world. On the other side, those researchers who doubt that it is possible to depict the world objectively, turn to interpretive criteria of validity and reliability. These interpretive criteria became central for research dealing with constructivist, reflexive and postmodern assumptions (Gall et al., 2003).

In order to achieve interpretive validity, Altheide and Johnson (1994) provide four types of criteria and six kinds of procedures that make it possible. The criteria include:

1. *usefulness* – researcher needs to explain how useful the study will be for participants and readers
2. *contextual completeness* – it is necessary to present comprehensive context of the study to make it credible
3. *researcher positioning* – researcher needs to describe his/her position and relations to the study and also consider the effects his/her role has on the study
4. *reporting style*- researcher should report the subject's reconstruction of the phenomenon as closely as possible.

The additional six procedures that assist in creating validity and reliability are triangulation, member checking, long-term observation, representativeness check and coding check (Gall et al, 2003). I consider most of these criteria and procedures mentioned above to be essential for my study

*Triangulation*

The process called triangulation is necessary not only in quantitative but also in qualitative research to achieve validity of study findings. Gall et al (2003) state, "triangulation helps to eliminate biases that might result from relying exclusively on any one data-collection method, source, analyst, or theory" (p. 464). Qualitative researchers can implement five types of triangulation. Janesick (1994) reviews Denzin's four types of triangulation and adds on a fifth one:

1. *data triangulation*: the use of a variety of data sources in a study
2. *investigator triangulation*: the use of several different researchers or evaluators
3. *theory triangulation*.: the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data
4. *methodological triangulation*: the use of multiple methods to study a single problem
5. *interdisciplinary triangulation*: the use of other disciplines (e.g. art, history, sociology etc) to broaden our understanding of methods (p. 46-47).

For my research purposes, I chose to use *data triangulation* (interview analysis, observation analysis, and artifacts analysis), and *theory triangulation* (L2 acquisition, international adoption, psychology and human development). I believe these types of triangulation helped me achieve necessary validity of my research findings.

### *Member Checking*

The purpose of member checking is to avoid factual errors in the research, thus, it is important for participants to review the researcher's statements. Through member-checking, participants are able to fill in missing information, correct misinterpretations and make statements more accurate. I conducted member checking after my interview data were transcribed and summarized by interviewing my participants the second time to double check the given information and fill in the missing gaps. I also provided each participant with the copies of transcribed interviews and asked them to call me within five days if the information was incorrect. The adoptive parents read the transcribed interviews for the two youngest participants to make sure that they understood the text.

### *Peer Debriefing*

According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), the technique of peer debriefing assists the researcher to examine all possible angles during the process of inquiry. Therefore, I asked my colleague Ms. Lisa Chavey, M.Ed. to analyze my collected data. The data was considered objective if she agreed with a majority (75% or more) of emerging patterns and constructed realities. Ms. Chavey has been working as an ESL teacher for seven years and has conducted research on educational topics. Our peer debriefing sessions were conducted in person and also recorded through email.

### *Representativeness and Coding Check*

By including the representativeness check, one is able to determine whether the findings are typical for a particular field site. A researcher should describe "whether there was overreliance on accessible or elite informants" (Gall et al, 2003, p. 465). I provided such

representativeness check by describing how participants were selected and how this selection might have skewed the research findings.

Coding check, on the other side, keeps the interpretational analysis utilized and organized. It is recommended to establish a category system, which will assist the researcher in coding the collected data such as transcripts, field notes, and essays. In order to organize my data collections, I developed a general category system to code my data.

Table 2 *Table of Data Coding*

| Participants- International adoptees (age at the time of study) | L2 Acquisition<br>• Interviews (I)<br>• Observations (O)<br>• Standardized tests (ST)<br>• English essays (EE) | L1 Maintenance<br>• Interviews (I)<br>• Russian essays (RE)<br>• Artifacts (A) |
|---|---|---|
| Alyona Walker (19) | | |
| Alice Smith (16) | | |
| Valerie Smith (15) | | |
| Meredith Brown (14) | | |
| Alex Peters (12) | | |
| Katya Peters (8) | | |

### *Researcher's Role*

I see myself in a role of a postpositivist researcher who used various means that helped participants reveal their constructions of reality. According to Gall et al. (2003), some postpositivist researchers also include their personal experiences and reflections, which show how "their approach to data collection affected the types of findings that resulted" (Gall et al, 2003, p. 17). Throughout this study, I provided my personal constructs of experienced phenomena of migration, second language acquisition and first language maintenance. I

hope this presented readers with honest subjectivity and helped them interpret the research findings in a meaningful way.

As an educator, I obtained valuable knowledge while teaching English as a foreign language in the Czech Republic for four years and then working as an ESL teacher and curriculum specialist in the United States for seven years. My immigration experience helps me sympathize with ESL students to a certain point. I feel that I can only sympathize with internationally adopted children since I did not participate in an adoption process. Growing up in Eastern Europe, traveling to Russia and studying the Russian language for an extended time can create some biases when analyzing interviews of international adoptees. I attempted to interpret my participants' experiences without being influenced by my own perceptions of the Russian culture.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTIONS

## Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide general introductions of the adoptive families and to describe how the internationally adopted children/adolescents arrived in the United States. The explanations of the participants' adoption circumstances and the beginnings in the U.S. schools will help the reader to get a better understanding of the participants' backgrounds and prepare the reader for Chapter Five, in which the main research questions "How do these IA children perceive and experience SLA?" and "How do these IA children maintain their native language?" are discussed in detail.

The following introductory portraits of the 6 participants are grouped into four family narratives and arranged in order based on the participant's current age. I started with the oldest participant and moved towards the youngest participant to show how age influences the participants' second language acquisition and language maintenance.

All participants who agreed to join the study contributed significantly; none of the 6 subjects decided to withdraw from the study. The interviews were conducted in the comfortable environment of either my house or the participant's house. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed word for word to assure validity of the participants' descriptions. The participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity, and all the specifications that could disclose their identity (e.g. the school names or names of local places) were omitted or changed.

When describing my primary participants, I included their own statements and also their adoptive parents' comments about their adoption experience and their beginnings in the

United States. These introductory descriptions are brief since the following Chapter Five provides detailed illustrations of participants' second language acquisition, first language maintenance and cultural identity.

Table 3 *Summary Chart of International Adoptees*

| Last Name | First Name | Participants' Adoption Age | Age at the time of the study |
|---|---|---|---|
| Walker | Alyona | 14 years old | 19 years old |
| Smith | Alice | 11 years old | 16 years old |
| Smith | Valerie | 12 years old | 15 years old |
| Brown | Meredith | 10 years old | 14 years old |
| Peters | Alex | 7 years old | 12 years old |
| Peters | Katya | 4 years old | 8 years old |

Table 3 summarizes the basic information of the 6 international adoptees who were major participants in this study. The order introduced in this table is maintained in the following descriptions.

## The Walker Family

At the time of the study, the Walker family was a small family unit consisting of the adoptive mother, Ms. Walker, and two adoptive daughters, Alyona and Irina. Both girls were adopted from Russia in the spring of 2002 and spoke only their native language at the time of the adoption. Ms. Walker, who worked as a nurse spoke only English. The language barrier was a major issue; therefore, she tried to teach her adoptive daughters English during the summer before they began attending public school. During the study, the Walker family lived in a medium sized house in a predominately white community of a small town in Northeast

Pennsylvania. Each girl had her own bedroom and her own belongings, which was something they did not have in the Russian orphanage.

*Alyona Walker*

When Alyona agreed to participate in my study, I was pleased because as the oldest participant in this research, her contribution could be significant. Being adopted as a teenager, she remembered much information from her native country and was able to verbalize her experiences of learning a second language as well as her transition into a new culture in articulated detail.

During our interview, I wanted Alyona to ease a little so I started with some funny stories from the ESL classes she used to attend. Later I asked her to call me by my first name but she felt uncomfortable doing that since she remembered me as her ESL teacher. I taught Alyona ESL for one school year when she attended 9$^{th}$ grade.

Following a brief explanation of what we would do during the interview, I activated two tape recorders and started to ask open-ended questions. As we talked about her experiences, Alyona was kind enough to share her photographs, Russian books, CDs and audiocassettes with me. Although Alyona did not want to be observed during her college classes, she gave me permission to include her standardized high school test results and report cards in my study.

Alyona (who chose not to change her Russian name into an American name) was 19 years old at the time of the study and was adopted from a Russian orphanage just two weeks shy of 14, in May 2002. Alyona was adopted together with Irina, a 12-year-old Russian girl who was not biologically related. Ms. Walker decided to adopt them even though Alyona and Irina were not friends in the Russian orphanage.

Alyona could be described as an attractive teenager with constant smile and intelligent eyes. She enjoyed going to school because she learned quickly and had infectious enthusiasm for facing new events in her life. Alyona's hobbies were similar to a typical American teenager. She said, "I like music [and] running. I like hanging out with my boyfriend. I like going and buying new things."

Alyona's physical appearance did not reveal that she was adopted from another country so she blended right in with the mostly white population of the local community. It was not until she started speaking English when surrounding people noticed her slight foreign accent. Because of her happy nature, she got along well with everyone. As a result, she made many American friends who were close to her as much as her Russian adopted friends whom she treasured.

Looking through the photographs from the Russian orphanage, I could see that Alyona had many friends there and participated in many activities. Her favorite hobby was dancing and in one of the photos, I could see cheerful Alyona with another Russian girl perform a dance for the orphanage visitors. When Alyona showed me a picture of the room where she used to live with ten other girls, I was surprised to find out that the boys' room was right next door. It was only separated by furniture instead of wall. Alyona angrily said that the boys could see them especially when they were changing into different clothes, and it was rarely quiet in those rooms. Another photograph portrayed Alyona with her orphanage caretakers who were "very kind," and she had nice memories of them.

When Alyona arrived in the United States, she spoke only Russian and had some knowledge of German because she took 4 years of German in her Russian middle school. The only English word she knew was "hello."

Before they were adopted, Alyona and Irina attended a host program in the U.S. during the summer of 2001. They lived on a horse farm with 13 U.S. children for 3 weeks and participated in the program activities. Ms. Walker met the girls at the farm and decided to adopt them. In August 2001, Alyona and Irina went back to Russia and waited to be officially adopted by Ms. Walker who traveled to Russia with her father to arrange the official adoption and to bring the girls back to the United States in May 2002. Ms. Walker was not married; she was adopting the girls as a single mother. I learned that Ms. Walker had a biological daughter who had died in a car accident several years previously. However, the interview did not reveal if Ms. Walker's loss was the main reason for pursuing the international adoption.

In May 2002, Alyona and Irina arrived in Pennsylvania from Smolensk (a Russian city located at the border of Russia and Belarus, about two hours west of Moscow). Alyona did not know any English so the only people she could communicate with were her adopted sister Irina, and "Masha and Sasha", friends who were also adopted from Russia.

Alyona was looking forward to moving to the United States because her younger biological sister Yulia was also adopted by another U.S. family in a city located only 30 miles from Alyona's new home. Her sister Yulia was adopted at the age of 11, and had forgotten the majority of her Russian language by the time Alyona was adopted. Yulia was adopted 2 years prior to Alyona's adoption, and she remembered only a few Russian words and phrases because she could not practice her Russian with anyone. Gindis (1999) states that majority of international adoptees lose their L1 (first language) within the first year of living in an English only environment, especially when they cannot use it with their family

members. Yulia became monolingual within 2 years due to her young age at adoption and the monolingual environment.

In spite of the fact that Alyona's sister lived very close, the communication was rather difficult at first because Yulia spoke predominantly English and Alyona spoke only Russian. When Alyona became bilingual, they called and emailed each other in English but did not visit frequently because they were "busy with their own schedules." Alyona also talked about her siblings who lived in Russia. She explained, "I have a brother and two more sisters. I have a big family." She said she would like to visit them in Russia some day and see her nieces and nephews.

During the time of the study, Alyona had an argument with her adoptive mother, Ms. Walker, and was told to leave the house where she lived for 5 years. Alyona's adoptive sister Irina also left the house due to an argument. I found out about the situation through Alyona's email, in which she briefly explained why she never received my letter:

> im sorry to tell you but i never reseaved the letter.
>
> maybee its because i did move from my house [.] my mom kicked me
>
> and "Irina" out so we have not been there. (Alyona's email, 2008)

Alyona reported that the adoptive mother told them she did not want to "deal with them" and would not support them anymore. All of sudden, Alyona lost her health insurance, her place to live and a sponsor for a financial aid to pay for her college tuition. As a result, Alyona found a job at a local supermarket where she would work 35 hours a week to have a health insurance. She changed her status from full-time to part-time student so that she would be able to pay for her tuition. I noticed that Alyona quickly changed from a happy, carefree teenager to a young, responsible, and concerned adult.

## The Smith Family

The Smith family, unlike the Walker family, consisted of many members. Mr. and Mrs. Smith, college educated parents, who did not have their own biological children, had adopted two girls from Korean orphanages and two boys from U.S. orphanages in the past. Then they decided to pursue international adoptions from Russia and periodically adopted six Russian orphans ages 4 through 11. The Smiths lived in a large house in a mostly white community located in a small town in Northeast Pennsylvania.

Having high paying jobs, the Smiths were able to provide for all their children. When speaking with the Smiths during our parental meetings and interviews, I observed that they were well prepared for adopting international children and provided them with a good care. During the interviews and observations, I found out that the Smiths offered a friendly family environment. Mr. Smith reported that he and his wife encouraged their children to preserve their cultural roots and helped them get accustomed to the U.S. educational system.

Mr. Smith and two of the daughters, Alice and Valerie, participated in my study.

### *Alice Nadia Smith*

Alice was my former ESL student who attended the ESL program for 3 years, and I was her teacher for one school year. Over the course of 5 years, I saw Alice develop into a sociable, pleasant and attractive teenager. Three years prior to my dissertation data collection, Alice and her adopted sister Valerie were participants in my preliminary study (DiGregorio, 2005), which focused on a second language acquisition of internationally adopted children and consequently became a starting point of my dissertation research. Both girls and their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, have been very supportive and provided me with valuable information for my research over the number of years.

During our interview, which was conducted in a relaxed informal atmosphere of my house, Alice was willing to share information as much as she could. Thanks to her happy and sociable nature, it was very easy to talk to Alice about any topic and obtain much important information. As her ESL teacher, I recall Alice being very talkative, motivated to succeed, generous to her friends and happy to be in the United States. At the time of our interview, Alice was a 16-year-old high school student who was attending 9th grade in a local public school. She was adopted in April 2003 at the age of 11 and lived in the United States for 5 years. Before Alice was adopted, she attended a 4th grade in Russia.

In Russia, 3 months prior to her adoption, she took beginning English classes. Alice said, "They taught us the song *Head, Knees, and Toes* and they told us how to say basic words [such as] dog, cat, not a full sentence but words." When she was adopted, she did not have any friends to talk to in Russian but she could use her native language with her brother and other adoptive siblings. Alice was adopted together with her biological brother John who was 4 years old at that time. Six months before Alice's arrival to the United States, the Smiths also adopted two Russian girls (ages 5 and 6) who acquired some English within those 6 months and were able to translate for Alice and John. At the beginning, the Smiths called all adoptive children their real Russian names but later they asked their children to choose U.S. names. "Nadia" who chose the name "Alice" as her new name (pseudonyms), kept her Russian name as a middle name.

Alice quickly adjusted to her new family and the school environment. She also progressed rapidly in acquiring English and was able to exit the ESL program after 3 years. Alice was fully mainstreamed into a regular classroom and soon realized that she needed help

with math classes. The interview revealed that she struggled with math classes in Russian schools, too.

When discussing her academics, Mr. Smith, Alice's adoptive father, stated, "Alice is more socializing with her friends as oppose to academics. She realizes that academics is a part of growing process but right now she sees her social life as the number one issue as opposed to academic life. I hope in the next year or two that will change around. I think she's finally come to that realization this last quarter of this school year. She tells me when she comes home from school that her grades are getting better. She does seem to put more effort forward to it. She does not have to be encouraged to put more effort forward. She realizes that it is important as opposed to Valerie who has known that academics have always been very important." As Alice's former teacher, I agreed with Mr. Smith's description of Alice being sociable. I was glad to hear that Alice's focus shifted towards academics and her grades were improving.

*Valerie Katarina Smith*

Valerie was adopted in February 2004 at the age of 12 together with her biological brother Kolya who was 4 years old at that time. Mr. Smith explained that they saw them at one of the orphanages when they were adopting other children. They had to wait until Valerie and Kolya's parental rights were terminated in order to proceed successfully with the adoption. The interview with Valerie and Mr. Smith did not unveil what happened to Valerie's biological parents. However, I was glad to hear that Valerie still talks to her uncle in Russia. Mr. Smith stated, "We encourage them to have a contact with their biological family in Russia. We are very well aware of the fact that they had a family before they came.

We certainly encourage that." Mr. Smith pointed out that the occasional communication between Valerie and her uncle occurs through telephone conversations.

As a non-English speaker, Valerie was enrolled into a beginning ESL class with Mrs. Pinto, my colleague, who did not speak any Russian. As soon as Valerie found out that I was able to communicate in Russian, she would frequently talk to me after her ESL classes while waiting for the school bus. I enjoyed listening to her stories because I learned a lot about her. The next school year I became Valerie's ESL teacher and had an opportunity to work with her during one school year.

Valerie's visual appearance did not reveal that she was a Russian native; therefore, she blended right in the school population which was predominately white. Valerie was an attractive teenager, and it would be difficult not to notice her natural beauty. She was a tall and thin 15-year-old with a perfect smile, beautiful long hair and pretty eyes. Valerie had a great passion for reading but also loved math since it was easy for her to grasp the mathematical concepts. Mr. Smith, her adoptive father, described Valerie as "a very smart girl." He said, " I kind of tease her a lot when she comes home from school, she buries herself in her room and opens a book and you won't see her until dinner."

When Valerie left Russia in February 2004, she was attending 4$^{th}$ grade. However, her adoptive parents enrolled Valerie into the 5$^{th}$ grade in the middle of the school year 2004. Alice, her adoptive sister, was attending the same class and tried to help Valerie with her school work. During our interview, I questioned the reason for skipping a grade, and Valerie explained the situation by saying, "In Russia we only have 11 grades and if you are an honor student, you get out of school in 9$^{th}$ grade. Then you can start college. But since we started a grade later,… and I was an honor student, they put me in 5$^{th}$ grade." Surprisingly, Valerie

was able to catch up very quickly, and in her 9th grade, she was surpassing Alice academically.

## The Brown Family

At the time of the study, the Brown family was a middle class family who lived in a rural area of the Northeast Pennsylvania. The family unit consisted of the parents, Mr. and Mrs. Brown, two biological children John and Kim, who were young adults, and Meredith, an internationally adopted daughter who was adopted at the age of 10. Mrs. Brown and Meredith agreed to participate in the study.

### *Meredith Natalia Brown*

During the school year of 2005-2006, I got to know Meredith when she attended my ESL classes as an intermediate ESL student. I was her ESL teacher for 1 school year but I stayed in touch with her adoptive mother Mrs. Brown to see how Meredith was progressing with her English. When Meredith was no longer enrolled in the ESL program, I approached Mrs. Brown to find out if she and her daughter would be interested in taking part in my study. I was happy when they agreed. I conducted two interviews with Meredith and one interview with Mrs. Brown. Although the interviews took place in a friendly atmosphere of my house, it was difficult for Meredith to recall many things that I wanted to discuss with her. She typically answered, "I don't know" or used brief statements. Mrs. Brown provided me with missing information.

Meredith was 14 years old at the time of study. During our interview Meredith described herself as a "trouble maker" in Russia because she "talked too much." She stated that she liked having older friends in the Russian orphanage. In the United States Meredith

loved watching TV, playing on computers and playing with dogs. Working with Meredith, I got a feeling that she tried to be tough on the outside but she was very sensitive on the inside.

Meredith was adopted at the age of 10 from a Russian orphanage. First, she attended a summer host program in the United States but the family that she stayed with did not proceed with the adoption. Mrs. Brown found out about Meredith's situation from a friend and decided to adopt her because she always "wanted another child." The Browns already had a teenage boy (17-year-old) and a teenage girl (14-year-old) at the time of the adoption. Mrs. Brown stated, "She [Meredith] did come for the host program but we have not met her so we had to go to Russia actually to meet her to get the pictures taken." Mrs. Brown recalled that they needed to make four trips to Russia altogether to complete the adoption process.

Meredith remembered that she was excited to go to United States with her new dad who picked her up from the orphanage. Mrs. Brown explained, "Well, when we went together [to Russia], it was a 10 or 14 day waiting period so instead of staying there, we decided to come home [the United States]. I did not want to be away so long so we decided to come home and that's when my husband flew back. It was just flying. Everything was done so it was just to get her [Meredith], and there were actually a lot of people surprised that he came instead of me. He could not get over the number of people that told him that." During our interview, we looked at many photographs of the Browns and Meredith. The one photograph that stands out is Mrs. Brown smiling and hugging Meredith at the airport after she arrived from Russia.

The interview with Mrs. Brown revealed how her biological children were influenced by this international adoption. Mrs. Brown admitted that her son who was 17 at that time had difficulty adjusting to the situation. She stated, "My son was a little bit wary. He is 21 now.

He is the oldest and he was a little bit apprehensive of it but he could not give me a very good reason why. He has no reason why… He did not want to disturb the norm or something like that, but he's definitely come around." Mrs. Brown's daughter Kim, on the other side, had a very good bonding experience with Meredith. Since Meredith's room was not finished, she stayed in Kim's room for a couple of months. They "hung around" and played basketball, which helped them to become friends quickly.

According to Mrs. Brown, Meredith was adjusting well in the U.S. society and was able to make friends. She also stated that it was Meredith's choice to have her Russian name changed into a U.S. name.

In September 2004, Meredith was enrolled in the 3rd grade of a public school and was provided ESL services for 2 years. In her 5th grade, Meredith transferred to a private school where she studied for 2 years without ESL support. At the end of her 6th grade Meredith began to dislike the private school and switched back to a public school where she started her 7th grade.

When I met with Meredith in October 2008 (her 7th grade), I found out that her adoptive mother, Mrs. Brown had breast cancer and passed away in June 2008. It was devastating news and Meredith appeared to be deeply influenced by that loss.

It was amazing to discover that before her death, Mrs. Brown was able to help Meredith renew a connection with her Russian biological sister (4 years younger) who was adopted by a U.S. family in Ohio in 2007.

## The Peters Family

The Peters, a middle class family, consisted of four members, Mr. and Mrs. Peters and two internationally adopted biological siblings, Alex (7 years old when adopted) and Katya (4 years old at the time of adoption). The Peters family lived in a small town of a predominately white community located in Northeast Pennsylvania. All members of the Peters family agreed to participate in my study.

When I approached Mr. and Mrs. Peters, they were open to the idea of me interviewing them and their children about their experiences regarding the international adoption process. The interview of Katya and her biological brother Alex was conducted in the relaxed atmosphere of their house. The parents were present during the interviews to make their young children feel comfortable and to answer any supporting questions.

Mrs. Peters, who had unsuccessful pregnancies, decided to pursue international adoption to become a family. Katya and her older brother Alex were living in a Russian orphanage for about 3 years before they were adopted. Katya and Alex attended the host summer program in the United States in 2003 and stayed with the assigned U.S. couple (Mr. and Mrs. Peters) for a month. During that month, Katya and Alex enjoyed their summer stay with the Peters. When it came time to go back to Russia, they were scared and confused about the adoption process. They thought they would never see their new parents again.

When Katya and Alex were back in Russia, Mrs. Peters said that she and her husband often called them to tell them how much they missed them. Then in October 2003, the Peters received a phone call that the Russian adoption would be finalized and that they had to come to Russia to attend a court hearing. The official adoption process went fast, and soon Katya and Alex were going back to the United States with their new parents. The photographs,

which were taken at the time of adoption, portray Katya and Alex as two orphans with sad looks. Katya had a short haircut looking like a little boy, and her brother Alex seemed thin, probably due to the lack of nutrition. Their appearances soon changed since they were well taken care of by their new parents.

The Peters were extremely happy when Katya and Alex finally became members of their family. The family and friends had a welcome shower for the adopted children who received an abundance of toys. The adoptive mother, Mrs. Peters, also got a card with a beautiful adoption poem, which she shared with me. The card said:

*Adoption Creed*

Not flesh of my flesh,

Nor bone of my bone,

But still miraculously my own.

Never forget

For a single minute-

You didn't grow under my heart

But in it.

Mrs. Peters cherished this poem so much that she framed it and hung it on the wall.

*Alex George Peters*

At the time of the study, Alex was a 12-year-old boy who was shy and polite. According to his mother, Mrs. Peters, Alex had "nice face features," and I personally noticed that he was growing into a handsome boy. Mrs. Peters stated that Alex remembered his biological mother and sometimes asked questions about the adoption. On the other side, Mrs. Peters also pointed out that Alex "adored" his adoptive grandfather and had a nice bond with

his adoptive father, Mr. Peters. Looking through the family photos, it became apparent that Alex together with his sister Katya fit in with the Peters and all of them created a family unit.

Unlike his sister Katya, Alex had memories of his life in Russia, however, he did not want to share them with me because they were sad. He said, "I don't want to tell you." Mrs. Peters stated that Alex recalled living in bad conditions with his mother who was not capable of taking a sufficient care of Katya. As a result, Katya's poor health condition required hospitalization. The Russian social services removed Alex and Katya from the family and placed them in an orphanage. Mrs. Peters stated that while living in Russia, Alex was worried about Katya and tried to protect his little sister.

When I asked Alex what he liked about living in the United States, Alex replied, "That I have a family, a lot of friends than in Russia, a lot of stuff." He seemed to be happy in the friendly and stable environment of the Peters family.

*Katya Hope Peters*

Katya, a 9-year-old girl, had only foggy memories of her adoption because she was adopted at the age of 4. Therefore, she often answered my questions very briefly during the interview. Katya could be described as a happy little girl who was constantly smiling, and according to her mother, she started her mornings by singing. She was not shy and loved to talk to anyone usually asking many questions. I observed that Katya had a strong bond with her biological brother Alex who, according to Mrs. Peters, protected Katya in the orphanage.

In November 2003, Katya and her brother were enrolled in U.S. schools. Alex began to attend a 1$^{st}$ grade in the local public school, and Katya was enrolled in the preschool of the local YMCA.

At the time of adoption, Katya was 4 years old and she spoke only Russian. In her new home, she could communicate in Russian with her brother Alex but not with her new parents. Although Mr. and Mrs. Peters knew some basic Russian words (eat, drink, hello, good etc.), they used mostly gestures and mimics to communicate with their children. In case of emergency, they used Russian interpreters. In spite of the difficulties with communication, Katya had good memories of her first experiences after the arrival. She stated, "It was good …and the house looked nice." She also said three things that she loved to do in the backyard were "jumping, swimming and the pool." It was apparent from her enthusiasm that she loved her new home and that she was happy.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced 6 major participants and provided their family backgrounds in order to supply a necessary context for the findings that follow in the chapters 5 and 6. The goal of these brief introductions was to help the reader understand participants' personal situations, which might have an influence on their second language acquisition, first language maintenance and development of their cultural identity. The following chapter 5 discusses the findings of participants' academic progress and development over the period of 4 to 5 years.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS, OBSERVATIONS AND ARTIFACT ANALYSES

## Introduction

Chapter Five describes findings from interviews, observations and artifacts analysis. In these findings, I explore the process of acquiring a second language and its relationship to first language maintenance together with the cultural identity of six international adoptees. I focus on answering two major research questions:

1. How do IA children experience and perceive second language acquisition (SLA)?
2. How do IA children maintain their native language?

The descriptions are again grouped according to four core families: the Walkers, the Smiths, the Browns and the Peters.

When describing each participant, I chose to reference Krashen & Terrell's theory of second language acquisition stages, which is used as a common thread throughout the core narratives. Krashen & Terrel (1983) were the first researchers who proposed the five stages of second language acquisition in their book *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. Based on morpheme order studies (Dulay & Burt, 1973, 1974), Krashen & Terrell (1983) developed the following stages of second language acquisition: Preproduction Stage, Early Production Stage, Speech Emergence Stage, Intermediate Fluency Stage and Advanced Fluency Stage. The theory of natural order and developmental stages of SLA became widely used and cited among researchers in the fields of second language acquisition and ESL classroom instruction ( Hill & Flynn, 2006; Nunan, 2005; Richard-Amato, 2003; Roseberry-McKibbin, 2002; Yang, 2008). Therefore, I used Krashen & Terrel's five stages of SLA as a common thread when describing my participants' progress in acquiring English.

Hill & Flynn (2006, p.15) adapted the information from Krashen & Terrell research and utilized it into this chart:

Table 4 *Table of Five Major Stages of Second Language Acquisition*

| Stage | Characteristics | Approximate Time Frame | Teacher Prompts |
|---|---|---|---|
| Preproduction | The student:<br>Has minimal comprehension<br>Does not verbalize<br>Nods "Yes" and "No"<br>Draws and points | 0-6 months | Show me…<br>Circle the…<br>Where is…?<br>Who has…? |
| Early Production | The student:<br>Has limited comprehension<br>Produces one or two-word responses<br>Participates using key words and familiar phrases<br>Uses present-tense verbs | 6 months to 1 year | Yes/no questions<br>Either/or questions<br>One- or two-word answers<br>Lists<br>Labels |
| Speech Emergence | The student:<br>Has good comprehension<br>Can produce simple sentences<br>Makes grammar and pronunciation errors<br>Frequently misunderstands jokes | 1-3 years | Why…?<br>How…?<br>Explain…<br>Phrase or short-sentence answers |
| Intermediate Fluency | The student<br>Has excellent comprehension<br>Makes few grammatical errors | 3-5 years | What would happen if …?<br>Why do you think…? |
| Advanced Fluency | The student has a near-native level of speech | 5-7 years | Decide if…<br>Retell… |

I believe the implementation of these five stages throughout the descriptions is helpful in understanding the participants' progress of their second language acquisition because it shows how quickly international adoptees moved from one stage to another. In addition, the SLA stages can be compared to performance levels in standardized tests such as Stanford English Language Proficiency Test or PSSA test.

## The Walker Family

### *Second Language Acquisition of Alyona Walker*

When Alyona Walker (14 years old) arrived into the United States in May 2002, she was not enrolled into a local school at that time because the school year was ending. Upon her arrival, Alyona did not have any knowledge of the English language, and as a result, was experiencing the Preproduction stage or "the silent period." Based on the interview data, Alyona had minimal comprehension of English language, used gestures and facial expressions and did not verbalize her ideas in English during this stage. Krashen & Terrell (1983) suggest that this period lasts up to 6 months; however, Alyona was transitioning into the Early Production Stage after living in the United States for 4 months. She was able to produce two word phrases and frequently used words when she started her school year in the United States. According to the IPT Oral test that she took in September 2002 (her first school year), Alyona could say short sentences such as "My name is Alyona. I am 14 years old," and she knew some frequently used vocabulary such as "dog, cat, birds, eyes, nose, ears" etc.

Being fully immersed in an English only environment, Alyona began learning English and adjusting to a new environment. According to Alyona, the first English words she learned were "pajamas, milk, sneakers" and "May I go to the bathroom?" Realizing how little she learned over the summer, Alyona complained, "This didn't help me in school."

During the first summer in the United States, Alyona and her adoptive sister Irina learned vocabulary from their new family. Alyona remembered, "She [adoptive mother] made us write the words down and call somebody and tell them." She explained that usually they would call grandma, grandpa, and uncles and "we would say the words, whatever we

wrote down, like 'sneakers, pajamas, milk'." Alyona and Irina would also practice during family dinner. The mother would say, "What's this? What's that?" and the girls had to respond.

In September 2002, Alyona started the 9th grade in a local public high school. Her sister Irina enrolled into the eighth grade and began attending the ESL classes with Alyona. After assessing Alyona and Irina's language skills by the IPT (Idea Proficiency Test), a standardized test for ESL students, both girls scored as a non-English speaker, reader and writer. As a result, they were provided 9 ESL instructional hours per week, and I became their ESL teacher.

That school year was my first year teaching in the United States. I was trying to set up my own curriculum and choose the best teaching materials for my students. I picked the *ESL Scott Foresman* textbooks, which employed content based curriculum and introduced topics from science, social studies, language arts, music etc. Although the content based curriculum is highly recommended by many researchers (Chamot and O'Malley, 1994), the textbooks appeared to be too difficult for the beginning ESL students; therefore, I switched to the *Side by Side* textbook that was more appropriate for non-English speakers. Throughout the school year, both Alyona and Irina seemed to make a tremendous progress in their English.

When Alyona started her ESL classes, I asked her to write in Russian a little bit about her life, hobbies, Russian school and American school. I wanted to learn more about her and see how well she was able to compose in her native language. This is an excerpt from Alyona's Russian essay that was translated into English:

*My name is Alyona. Previously I lived in Russia in Smolensk. I lived in an orphanage. I had many friends… I lost them. Studying in Russian school was very difficult… I learned well and easily.*

*[In U.S. school] I know everything in algebra so I changed into a new class… The history teacher does not understand that I do not know what is written in the book. He gives me the same assignments like to other students.*

This short Russian essay showed me that Alyona was able to construct Russian sentences correctly, and although she had few spelling mistakes in the Russian language, it did not hinder the understanding of the words or sentences. As Alyona acquired English, it became apparent that she was able to transfer her Russian writing skills into English.

During our ESL classes, it appeared that by producing one- and two-word responses and repeating familiar phrases, Alyona began to acquire the listening and speaking skills of the Early Production stage. The IPT tests, however, showed that Alyona was not able to read and write in English yet. She began to learn the basic literacy skills in her ESL classes in September. Her informal ESL grammar and spelling tests revealed that she learned English alphabet and managed to read and write short sentences in the present tense within first two months (September, October). The ESL tests showed Alyona was able read and write sentences such as "She is smiling., I am writing the test right now., She is shorter than me." In addition, she received excellent grades on her spelling tests, which included vocabulary such as the names of animals, food, clothes, school objects etc.

At the end of her first school year in the United States, Alyona was required to take the Stanford English Language Proficiency Test (SELP), which consisted of the following

sections: listening, speaking, reading, writing conventions, writing, social, academic and productive areas. After all the sections were completed, a composite score determined what performance level an English language learner achieved. The five performance levels include the pre-emergent (the lowest), emergent, basic, intermediate and proficient (the highest) levels (SELP Student Report, 2003). It appears that the performance levels of SELP correlate well with the Krashen & Terrell's five stages of second language acquisition. The comparison of the SLA stages and SELP performance levels is utilized in the table below.

Table 5 *Table Comparing SLA Performance Stages and SELP Test Performance Levels*

| SLA Performance Stages by Krashen & Terrell | Krashen & Terrell's Explanation of student's skills | Stanford Performance Levels | SELP test-Explanation of student's skills |
|---|---|---|---|
| Preproduction | Minimal comprehension, student not verbal, use of gestures | Pre-emergent | Student does not understand or produces enough spoken and written language to perform in English |
| Early Production | One or two-word responses, use of key words | Emergent | Student uses and understands basic words and phrases |
| Speech Emergence | Production of simple sentences, frequently misunderstands | Basic | Able to read some simple words, sight words and common phrases, comprehension of simplified speech |
| Intermediate Fluency | Excellent comprehension, few grammar errors | Intermediate | Understands familiar topics, May need repetition to increase comprehension of academic topics |
| Advanced Fluency | Near-native speech | Proficient | Fluent speech, ability to read a variety of grade-appropriate English texts |

During my teaching experience, I noticed that a majority of ESL students typically scored at the emergent or basic level after attending ESL classes for one school year. Alyona acquired her language skills so rapidly during her first year of school that her SELP test results placed her at the intermediate level. This score result implied that in one school year Alyona experienced the Preproduction, Early Production, Speech Emergence Stages and progressed all the way to the Intermediate Fluency Stage. Being her ESL teacher, I observed that she was intelligent and hardworking but still I did not expect her to learn so fast. She developed her English skills much faster than her ESL classmates who were not internationally adopted and whose parents spoke their native languages (e.g. Spanish, Chinese etc) at home.

Looking through Alyona's ESL documents, I found my own evaluation from September 2003, which summarized Alyona's academic progress after the first school year. In the evaluation, I stated:

> During the last year, Alyona worked very hard to learn as much English as possible. She is a very intelligent, active and ambitious student who showed great progress in acquiring and learning the English language. During one school year, she was able to move from the beginning level to the intermediate level in the category of writing, listening, comprehension and academic performance. Surprisingly enough, she became proficient in the category of reading, speaking and social performance. [These results are based on the state wide tests for ESL students called Stanford English Language Proficiency Test].

Alyona Walker acquired her BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) but still has to master her CALPS (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills). Alyona Walker will still need help in the subject areas that use difficult academic language such as science, biology, social studies, computer studies etc. According to federal law, subject area teachers are required to modify their instructional methods so that ESL students are able to learn subject areas.

Alyona Walker expressed her concerns to me regarding her biology class. She told me that she is not able to write down the notes because of the teacher's speed and she also does not understand the academic language in the biology textbook. As the ESL teacher of this student, I would recommend that Alyona Walker take the biology class the next school year or that the instructional methods in the biology class will be modified to meet the needs of this ESL student. I am willing to discuss the necessary modifications for the subject areas with any subject area teachers.

During the interview, Alyona said that the first school year was the most difficult because she did not understand at all. She enjoyed math because it was comprehensible to her. Alyona also remembered that she was able to follow directions in gym class, but history class "was hard because he [teacher] made me [Alyona] take one of the tests" and it was an essay form test, which she was unable to complete.

Here is a segment of our interview:

Daniela: So what was it like when you went to school in M.V. [school district]?

Alyona: Ok. M.V. was a not so good school, anyway it was ... They only class I did

work [in] was math class.

Daniela: You liked math. You understood that.

Alyona: It was all numbers so… it was kind of easy. My English class did not go so well. I did not know what the teacher was talking about. I just used to fall asleep in there. She did not like that. She used to scream at me. So, I just did not know what she was saying to me. And what else did I take? Graduation project with Mrs. E.

Daniela: That was the first year?

Alyona: Yeah.

Daniela: In the 9th grade?

Alyona: Yeah. We had to take a class. And then do it senior year.

Daniela: So did you understand?

Alyona: No.

Daniela: Did you have art or music?

Alyona: I had a gym class.

Daniela: Were you able to follow the directions in gym class?

Alyona: Yeah. I went only twice a week [to gym] because I went to ESL.

History with Mr. H. was hard because he made me take one of the tests. I can't write essays.

Being provided the comprehensible input in math and gym classes, Alyona was able to follow the instruction. Thanks to her prior knowledge in math and the universal language of numbers, Alyona understood what the math class was about. She could also participate in the gym class because she was able to observe the teacher's directions and students' actions.

However, the comprehensible input was missing in history and English classes because the spoken and written language was too challenging for Alyona.

In his Comprehension Hypothesis (also called the Input Hypothesis), Krashen (2004) explains "we acquire language when we understand messages, when we understand what people tell us and when we understand what we read" (p. 21). However, Swain (1997) argues that although comprehensible input is useful, it is not sufficient on its own for successful second language acquisition. Swain proposed the "comprehensible output" hypothesis. She found the comprehensible output to be more significant than comprehensible input since the learner needs to use his/her syntax and morphology knowledge to produce language utterances.

Regarding Alyona's English language capabilities, she was able to bypass the syntactic and morphological complexities of the language and still comprehend the meaning of the math and gym instruction due to her prior knowledge and visual clues. Nevertheless, she was not able to produce comprehensible English sentences at that time because her English skills were still very limited. As a result, she failed to understand the content of the history and biology classes where only academic language was being used.

Alyona mentioned that her friends, predominately high school classmates, helped her a lot. She said, "April showed me where everything was. She had every class I had so she was kind of with me. She gave me all the notes to class. She wrote all the homeworks down for me when the teacher said it." When I asked her how she communicated with her friends at the beginning of her 9th grade, Alyona replied, " I used to write something on a piece of paper . They only asked me questions." She was afraid of mispronouncing the English words and of being misunderstood by her American friends. She admitted that the hardest thing for

her was "probably talking to people." Throughout the first year, Alyona acquired conversational English very quickly, but she struggled with academic English. Therefore, as Alyona's ESL teacher, I met with her content area teachers and tried to explain that they needed to modify their tests and instructional methods for Alyona and her adoptive sister Irina.

The report cards and test results imply that the second year (school year of 2003-04) was still a struggle for Alyona. She was able to communicate with her friends using her conversational English but she misunderstood frequently during her academic classes.

At the beginning of her tenth grade, Alyona wrote an essay, which is a good example of her writing skills after one year of schooling in the U.S. school. The students were given the following prompt to write a persuasive essay:

> *You have been offered a part-time job. You feel that this will be an exciting opportunity. Your parents object because they feel your grades may fall. What would you say to try to convince them that this is important and that you can manage your responsibilities. Write what you would say*.

Alyona wrote:

> *When my school day is over I would do my homework. After I'll finish my homework I'll go to my job. Well if my parents still want to convince. I'll tell them that I'll make some money. Then I'll take half for my self and other helf I'll put in the bank. When I'll grow up I'll have some experiments and money. They will not have to give me money for my clothing because I'll have some in my poket and in my bank. And for*

*holidays they don't have to give me money to buy them presents. I thing it's a good idea to get part-time job.*

This essay, which was written approximately one year and a half after Alyona's full immersion into the English only environment, shows that Alyona was able to acquire the standard sentence structure (subject-verb-agreement) and other grammatical structures such as present and future tenses. The essay also depicts Alyona's level of interlanguage with its morphological and syntactical errors. For example, the sentence "After I'll finish my homework I'll go to my job" contains a morphological error of having an extra "will" in the subordinate sentence. Syntactical errors are common for English learners especially when the learner's native language has a flexible sentence structure. Alyona made a syntactical mistake when she wrote "other helf I'll put in the bank." It is evident that she did not acquire the English subject-verb-object agreement yet. Alyona transferred the Russian syntax, which allows the object to stand at the beginning of the sentence. According to Selinker (1972), who proposed the interlanguage theory, the learners of L2 produce utterances that would be different from a native speaker. Typically, these interlanguage utterances include traces of L1 transfer, overgeneralization, simplification etc. In Alyona's essay, for example, her frequent use of the future tense in subordinate sentences is a typical example of overgeneralization (e.g. When I'll grow up I'll have some experiments and money). Although Alyona was not able to fully grasp the concept of writing a persuasive essay, she was able to express her opinion and get the main point across to the reader.

In her 10$^{th}$ grade, Alyona attended six instructional ESL classes per week with another ESL teacher, Mrs. Pinto, and studied English as a second language with ESL students who were on the intermediate level. Based on her ESL informal tests and essays, it

is perceptible that her reading skills developed faster than her writing skills. During our interview, Alyona made a few comments stating that some of the high school teachers were not very empathetic with her situation. It appeared that the majority of teachers modified their instruction for Alyona more during her first year (9th grade) when she did not speak any English. Her first school year grade average was 3.366 on a 4.0 scale. However, during her second school year in the United States (10th grade), her school grade average dropped to 2.44 due to her difficulties with Biology and American History. Alyona complained to me that some of the teachers did not modify the assignments for her and expected her to complete the same work like her native speaking classmates.

While teaching ESL students, I observed that many content area teachers were not able to understand the differences between acquisition of communicative language and acquisition of academic language; as a result, they made misconceptions about ESL students' language abilities. If an ESL student had good conversational skills, teachers incorrectly assumed that the student should be able to understand the academic content of their classes as well. However, according to Cummins (1982, 1983), it takes two to three years to acquire communicative language (conversational English) while academic language typically requires five to seven years to master.

Surprisingly, at the end of 10th grade (her second year in the United States), Alyona scored proficient at the Stanford English Language Proficiency Test. Even though she did so well on the test, Alyona still needed to improve her reading and writing skills to be on the academic level with her classmates. In spite of that, she was exited out of the ESL pull-out program based solely on the Stanford test results (according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education guidelines the PSSA test results were not part of the exit criteria at that time).

In addition, Alyona's current ESL teacher and I felt that it would be better for Alyona not to miss her academic classes so that she would be able to prepare for the college entrance exams.

During her third year of living in the United States, (school year of 2004-05), Alyona attended 11th grade and was fully mainstreamed in her academic classes. Her report card shows that she did extremely well in her classes. Her final grades were above 80 (on a scale of 100) in American History and Environmental Science and above 90 in Chemistry, Math, Computer Science, Health and Computer Programming. Her weakest subject was English but she still managed to pass and her final grade was 73. Alyona as well as all the students in 11th grade had to take the PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) standardized test in English and Math. The test has four scoring levels: below basic, basic, proficient and advanced. Alyona scored below basic on the Reading and Writing section and proficient in Math. The PSSA test result showed that Alyona's English literacy skills were not on her grade level. It would probably have been better if she had received more ESL instruction.

As a senior, Alyona was fully mainstreamed in her 12th grade. Although she sometimes misunderstood academic text, she worked hard and received honors for her academic work. Her GPA in her senior year was above 3.3. and her final grade in English was 81. When I asked Alyona to compare the Russian and U.S. school systems, she said that U.S. school was much easier once she learned the English language. Here is an example of our interview:

> Daniela: So did you feel when you were exited from ESL that you were good in school the last senior year? Or did you still struggle with something little bit?
>
> Alyona: Senior year was kind of a joke.

Daniela: Yeah? How come?

Alyona: At M.V. [school], I don't know, we didn't do anything.

Daniela: It wasn't strict?

Alyona: The only class I actually had to do homework for was forensics and advanced chemistry. That's because it is Ms. E. and she is the one who teaches you stuff and not when you just go to class and do nothing.

Those are the two classes that I had to do work for.

Daniela: You liked that teacher.

Alyona: Yeah.

Daniela: Did she remind you of Russian teachers?

Alyona: Actually she did. She was very strict. She told you what you need to do. If you didn't do it, she would take the points off unlike the other teachers, "Oh, you have two days after. You can do it."

Daniela: Right. It is very different. In Russia the teachers are much stricter than here.

Alyona: They are stricter. You are not allowed to talk in class,the way you raise your hand, and you have to sit like this.

Alyona also explained that she used to go to Russian school six days a week (Mondays through Saturdays) and had off only on Sundays. Some days she also had afternoon classes from three o'clock till six o'clock. As a Russian student, Alyona had mostly As and couple of Bs. It is apparent that she transferred her effective learning strategies from her native language to her second language.

In her senior year, Alyona took two standardized test exams in order to be accepted to a local university. First, she took the SAT Test, which is published by ETS (Educational

Testing System) in Princeton, New Jersey. The SAT consists of three sections: Critical Reading, Math and Writing. Each section is scored from 200 to 800 points; therefore, the lowest total score is 600 and the highest is 2400 points (About the SAT, 2008). Some universities admit students based on the total score of all three sections but other universities and colleges accept students considering only the Critical Reading and Math sections. Alyona's total score of the two sections was 760, which is below the 850 required score of the local university she applied for.

Since Alyona scored below average, she decided to take another standardized test called the ACT test in hope that she would score better. The ACT consists of four subscore areas: English, Mathematics, Reading and Science, and provides a student's composite score, which is also considered during a college admission process. Alyona's ACT test result showed that her composite score was 17, which was below the national average (27) and the state average (22). The local universities typically accept students who achieve a total score of 18 or above. In spite of the fact that Alyona's test results were below the required scores, she was eventually accepted to the local university under special conditions. The admission office took in consideration the fact that Alyona was an English language learner and she could start as a freshman with a limited academic schedule. Although Alyona was excepted to the local university, she was not eligible for any scholarships based on her low test results. Shafer (2001) criticizes the use of standardized tests for accepting students into colleges. He states, "Poor students from the most gritty and neglected parts of the state are routinely denied scholarships because they haven't learned to master a test that was supposedly designed to even the playing field. Well-off students, on the other hand, win thousands of

scholarship dollars, despite their financial readiness to attend the most prestigious colleges and universities" (Shaffer, 2001, p. 14-15).

Despite the fact of not getting any scholarships, Alyona was able to register as a Math Education major since she excelled in Math and began her college studies in August 2006. During our interview, Alyona explained she loved math because "it is easier" and "the same in both languages" For her, it is all numbers which are universal. In her freshman year of college, she took ESL classes to improve her writing and reading skills. She said, "it is like a regular English class" reminding her of high school English classes. At a college level, these ESL classes helped her receive a foreign language credit, which is required for education major. Alyona stated that she tried to take German class but it was too hard and confusing for her. She finished her freshman year as a full-time student.

The table 6 provides a summary of ESL services that Alyona received as well as her test results from the standardized tests.

Table 6 *Table of Alyona Walker's Academic Progress*

| Alyona Walker | ESL services | SELP test (April) | PSSA (March) | SAT & ACT | SLA stages |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9th grade 2002-03 | 9 hours per week | Intermediate score | x | x | Preproduction Early production Speech emergence |
| 10th grade 2003-04 | 6 hours per week | Proficient score | x | x | Intermediate fluency |
| 11th grade 2004-05 | x | x | Proficient in Math, Below Basic in English | x | Intermediate fluency |
| 12th grade 2005-06 | x | x | x | Below acceptable score | Intermediate fluency |
| College Freshman 2006-07 | 3 credit ESL course | x | x | x | Intermediate fluency/ Advanced fluency |

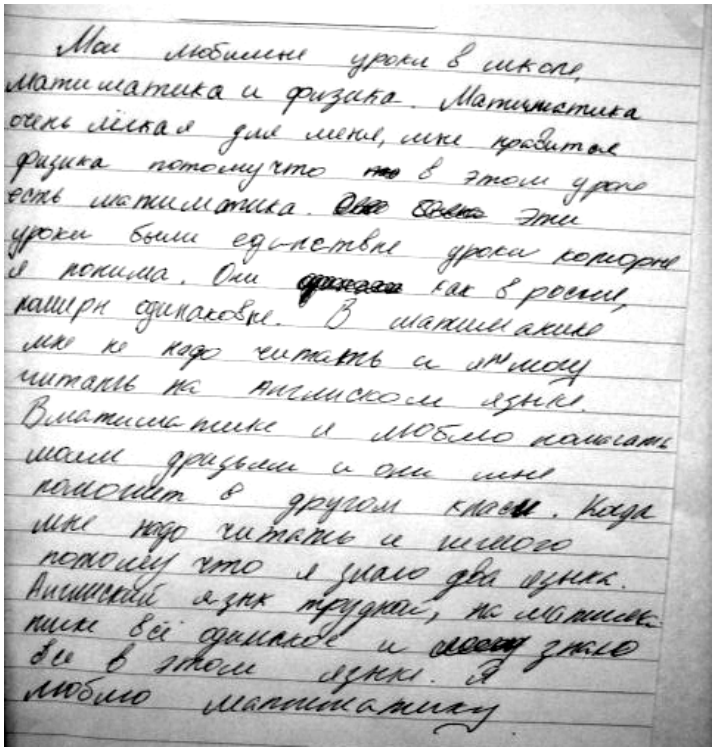
In this table, it is clear that there is a discrepancy between her 10th grade and 11th grade standardized test results. If she scored proficient on the SELP test for ESL students, how is it possible that in her 11th grade Alyona did not do well at all on the PSSA English section test? The explanation might be in the standards of the two different tests, SELP test and PSSA test. After three years of using the SELP test to measure English language skills of language learners, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) came to a conclusion that the SELP test was not sufficient enough in measuring academic English language, and as a result, it was replaced by a new standardized test for ESL students. The ACCESS for ELLs test replaced the SELP test in the school year of 2006-07. The ACCESS for ELLs stands for Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners. This test is divided into four main domains of reading, writing, listening

and speaking and its main goal is to focus on testing social and instructional language in the areas of language arts, math, science and social studies (ACCESS for ELLs Overview: Essential Background, 2008). The PDE also changed the exit criteria for English language learners making it more difficult for ESL students to exit out of the ESL program. If those criteria were implemented earlier, it is likely that Alyona would be required to receive additional years of ESL services.

### *L1 Maintenance of Alyona Walker*

During our interview, Alyona wrote two short essays for me. One was written in Russian and the second one in English. It was apparent that Alyona was still more comfortable writing in Russian than in English. She had less spelling and grammar mistakes in her Russian essay than in her English essay. It was surprising to find out that Alyona was able to write cursive only in Cyrillic which she learned in Russian elementary school. Since the English cursive handwriting is introduced in the elementary grades of U.S. schools and is not required in the high school classes, Alyona never learned how to write in English cursive alphabet.

In her Russian essay, Alyona expressed an interest in math and physics. She wrote this essay when attending freshman classes in a local four-year college.



Мои любимые уроки в школе, математика и физика. Математика очень лёгкая для меня, мне нравится физика потому что в этом уроке есть математика. Эти уроки были единственные уроки которые я поняла. Они как в России, нашем одинаковые. В математике мне не надо читать и я могу читать на английском языке. В математике я люблю помогать моим друзьям и они мне помогают в другом классе. Когда мне надо читать я много потому что я знаю два языка. Английский язык трудный, но математика вся одинаковая и я знаю всё в этом языке. Я люблю математику.

*Figure 1.* Russian essay written by Alyona Walker.

Here is the translation of the example above:

> *My favorite subjects at school are math and physics. Math is very easy for me, and I like physics because this subjects has also math. These subjects were the only ones that I understood. They are like in Russia, nearly the same. In math I do not have to read and I am not good at reading in English. I like to help my friends with math and they help me in other class. English language is difficult but everything is the same in math and I know everything in that [math] language. I like math.*

The second essay was written in English. Alyona wrote about her friends and about Russian holidays.

> *My best friends are April, Erica and Kathy. They are very helpful. When I was in highschool Amber helped me in class. She helped me in my classes*

*on how to write and she always got my homework for her. I like to go out with them they helped me to learn how to say words. She also helped me in college. I still talk to them. They were my freinds and the helped me throughout all the years.*

*There are a lot of holidays in Russia but the only one that we selebrate is Russian Christmas. We have our friends that come over and we try to make Russian foods. We like to celebrate it, since Christmas is not what its all about. They loose the true meaning of Christmas. I like it and it is a very good day… I like my Russian holidays.*

The English essay shows that Alyona still made some grammar, semantic and spelling mistakes in her second language after being exposed to English for five years. For example, her sentence "We like to celebrate it, since Christmas is not what its all about" is an example of a semantic error. Alyona could not articulate her thoughts accurately. Her spelling mistakes in this essay such as "highschool", "freinds" and "selebrate" did not hinder the meaning of the sentences but show that she did not master the English spelling. In addition, Alyona used simple vocabulary and avoided complex sentences when writing in her second language.

When comparing these two essays, it became apparent that Alyona was still more comfortable composing in Russian than in English. There were no traces of deterioration of her Russian. Her Russian handwriting was not influenced by the Roman alphabet. For example, Roman letters "g, p,b" are pronounced "d, r, v" in the Cyrillic alphabet. Alyona used the Cyrillic alphabet with ease and there were not any mistakes in her Russian writing.. Alyona made only one mistake in her Russian essay (she did not capitalize Russia), which

could have been avoided if she proofread her writing. Alyona wrote this essay five years after being fully mainstreamed in an English only environment. It appears that she was able to preserve her Russian mostly due to her continuous correspondence with family and friends in Russia as well as reading pleasure books in Russian language.

## The Smith Family

Although Alice and Valerie Smith, two adoptive sisters, shared the same home and family, their personalities were very dissimilar. Alice, who was adopted first, was very social and interested in sports. Valerie, who was younger and was adopted a year later from a different orphanage, loved to spend a lot of time alone reading. In spite of the fact that both girls attended the same ESL classes, each experienced their second language acquisition differently.

### *Second Language Acquisition of Alice Nadia Smith*

Alice, adopted at the age of 11, came to the United States in April 2003 with her younger biological brother. None of them spoke any English so they used gestures to communicate with their parents (Preproduction stage).

Since Alice was adopted at the end of the school year (in the month of April), she was not enrolled in a public school. Her parents sent her to a private school to learn English for the next couple months. Alice described her experience by saying, "It was not a private school, I don't know, it was like a campus school. It was a school… but we did learned a lot. They gave me… like… books and they told me… like… say there was a picture of cat, they told me to write what it is. And I mean it helped me to learn it but I took only like three or four months to learn. Then I started reading and writing."

Due to the extra schooling from April through June, Alice was able to move from the Preproduction stage to the Early Production stage. She knew some English words and understood few familiar phrases when she was enrolled into the public school. In September 2003, Alice began attending a 5th grade in a local public school and also started her ESL classes. After taking the IPT (Idea Proficiency Test) tests for ESL students, Alice scored as a non-English speaker, reader and writer; therefore, she was placed with beginning English language learners (ELLs). Her IPT writing test revealed that after living in the United States for 5 months, Alice transferred the Russian phonetic system into her English spelling and confused her Cyrillic letters with Roman letters. For example, the Cyrillic letter "g" produces sound [d] and the Cyrillic letter "y" produces sound [u] in Russian language. Here is an example of her short description of a boy and girl who went fishing:

*Sestar and brodar the siten goy. boe and gerll seit ang the siten.*

*laits these brene boe and gerll ondo hayse.*

It is obvious that her writing at that time was not understandable; therefore, she scored zero points on this writing section.

Being a new student in a school and not speaking English was challenging for Alice. The following conversation explains how Alice felt.

Daniela: And then you started in D. [name of school]. In fifth grade, right?

Alice: D. [name of school] was a little harder because people were different. They were just different. They knew more than me and I felt awkward.

Daniela: Yeah. It was hard.

Alice: Yeah. It felt weird being new in a school.

Daniela: Uh- hm. And you could not speak good English.

Alice: Yeah.

Daniela: So what did you do during the classes usually when you couldn't understand?

Alice: I understood a little. When I didn't understand something, I asked my teacher and they kind of like helped me out. And then the guidance counselor said that I need to go to ESL because I need help.

Based on the IPT test scores, Alice was recommended to take nine ESL instructional hours per week with other beginning English language learners. My colleague, Mrs. Pinto, became her ESL teacher and focused her instruction on teaching new vocabulary, phonics, basic grammar, and developing basic reading and writing skills.

Alice's 5th grade teacher, Mrs. Timmons, tried to modify instruction and assessments for Alice. She attended ESL teacher certification courses to learn more about ESL methodology so that she would be able to meet the needs of English language learners in her classroom. Alice did not receive regular grades (A,B,C) like her classmates due to her language barrier. The fifth grade report card showed that Alice received a passing grade -S (Satisfactory) from all her subjects except math. Her math grade was C+. It appears that all the subjects were modified for her with the exception of math.

Alice admitted that spelling was very difficult for her in the fifth grade. She said, "It's so many ways to spell a word. It's so confusing." She did not understand the differences between homophones such as "there" and "their." As a result, she considered writing in English more difficult than reading in English. Alice mentioned that three months after being adopted, she stopped reading Russian books and tried to read "easy" English books to learn

English faster. By choosing "easy" English books, Alice was providing herself with comprehensible input; therefore, she was able to understand the text she was reading.

Since Alice attended the 5th grade, she also needed to take the PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) test, which is a statewide standardized test measuring students' skills in Language Arts and Mathematics. Due to the fact that Alice lived in the United States less than a year, she was exempt from the Reading and Writing portion of the PSSA test. However, she still had to take the Math portion. As an ESL teacher who was able to communicate in Russian, I was asked to administer this Math portion to Alice and her sister Valerie. When administering this test, Alice and Valerie told me several times in Russian that they did not understand the test directions and the math problems. During the test, I was allowed to interpret only the test directions.

Alice achieved 34 correct answers out of 100 at the Math portion of the PSSA test and scored at the lowest level (Below Basic). Based on the interview information and my experience of administering the PSSA test, it appeared that the factors contributing to this low score were her limited English, a different Math curriculum in Russia (Alice was not familiar with the concept of fractions at that point) and her generally lower math skills. In her interview, Alice stated that she had difficulties with math in her Russian school.

In 6th grade, Alice got better acclimated to the school and entered the Speech Emergence stage. She explained, "It got easier when I went… to sixth grade, I kind of got along with other kids. I made more friends and I started to … talk. And now a lot of my friends want to learn Russian…" Alice said that her friends would help her learn English by explaining certain words that she did not understand. She said, "If I didn't know something

and I got confused, they would… like… guess. If I forgot a word, they would tell me what it is." Her friends were also helpful when she struggled with her reading and math homework.

Alice attended 6 instructional ESL hours per week in her 6th grade. As her ESL teacher in the school year of 2004-05, I focused my instruction on improving ESL students' reading and writing skills so that they could reach their school grade level as well as attain a proficient score on their standardized tests.

The 6th grade teachers provided many instructional accommodations and modifications for Alice which was reflected on her report card. She obtained "satisfactory" grades on the majority of her subjects instead of numerical grades. During this time, I attended many meetings with the teachers to discuss possible strategies for modified instruction for ESL students. I suggested using simplified English in the tests, providing more visuals and graphic organizers, giving Alice and other ESL students extended time to complete the tests, highlighting or rereading the directions, and shortening some of the assessments if necessary.

In my ESL classes, Alice was a successful student. She eagerly participated in our class assignments, completed her homework and did very well on her ESL tests. She improved her English significantly throughout the school year and scored at the border of intermediate and proficient levels on the SELP test. Her total score was 93 points out of a maximum number of 110 points, which is 84 %. Obtaining such a high score is rare for ESL students who have been acquiring English for only 2 years.

At the end of 6th grade, Alice also took a standardized test called TerraNova, which measures academic achievement in the areas of Language Arts and Mathematics. The subcategories of the TerraNova test were Reading, Vocabulary, Language, Language

Mechanics, Mathematics, Math Computation, Science, Social Studies and Spelling. The results were divided into three levels of achievement: Below Average (Low Mastery), Average (Moderate Mastery) and Above Average (High Mastery). Alice scored at the Average level in Language and Math categories, which was a good achievement for a student with limited English proficiency.

The SELP and the TerraNova test results imply that by the end of the 6th grade, Alice progressed from the Speech Emergence stage to the Intermediate Fluency stage. Krashen & Terrel (1983) state that it can take between 1 to 3 years for a second language learner to acquire skills in the Speech Emergence stage. However, Alice was able to master the skills of the Speech Emergence stage in only 1 school year and soon she made the transition into the Intermediate Fluency stage.

Due to her fast improvement, Alice was fully mainstreamed in the 7th grade with minimum modifications. She attended only three ESL instructional hours per week with other advanced English language learners (ELLs). Her ESL teacher was my colleague Mrs. Pinto who used the textbook *Side by Side* level four (the highest level) and concentrated on teaching advanced grammar, reading and writing skills. The results of the SELP test show that Alice achieved the proficient performance level with successful 90 %. Due to her proficient test results, Alice was exited out of ESL program at the end of her 7th grade. Considering the SELP test results, it can be stated that Alice progressed from the Intermediate Fluency stage into the Advanced Fluency stage, which expects a learner to have a native like level of speech.

However, after analyzing her 7th grade PSSA test results, it appears that Alice still struggled with reading comprehension. Her PSSA test results were below basic in Math as

well as in Reading. If the PSSA test results had been part of the exit criteria at that time, Alice would have been required to attend the ESL program for at least 1 more year.

Her 7th grade report card showed that Alice was able to pass all the academic subjects but she had many difficulties with math and barely passed the math class. The 7th grade TerraNova test results unveiled that Alice scored again below average in Mathematics section and average in Reading and Language sections. In spite of her improving English, it appeared that Alice struggled with math due to new challenging concepts she was not able to follow.

In 8th grade, Alice was fully mainstreamed without attending ESL classes and without any modifications from the 8th grade teachers. Although Alice was exited out of the ESL program, there was still a gap between the level of her academic English and the academic English she needed to succeed in classes. Therefore, I was not too surprised to find out that Alice's grades in 8th grade dropped significantly (67-73) in comparison with her 7th grades (78-81). Alice failed reading class (67) and barely passed English (70) and Pre-Algebra (72). Consequently, Alice's parents became worried about her retention of academic concepts and requested detailed educational assessments to find out whether Alice would be eligible for learning support classes. Alice was administered two major assessments: the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV) and the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT). The WISC-IV test results showed that her abilities (verbal reasoning, memory, processing speed and intelligence) were generally in the Low Average range. The WIAT results disclosed that Alice performed at the Average range on the Reading and Writing section; however, she obtained a low score in the Math section, which placed her at the

Borderline range. The team of educators came to a conclusion that Alice was not eligible for learning support classes, in which she would have received individualized instruction.

The PSSA test results of her academic skills in 8th grade correlated with the WIAT test. Alice obtained a very low score in the Mathematics section of the PSSA test placing her at the Below Basic level. She scored at the Basic level in Reading and at the Proficient level in Writing section of the PSSA test. Overall, these results show that Alice was able to draw near the academic English in 8th grade; however, her math skills remained below the grade level.

As a result of her low test scores and grades in the 8th grade, Alice was placed into the lowest academic track upon entering the 9th grade in her high school. This particular high school divided its student population into three tracks: A track = above average students, B track = average students, and C track = below average students and learning support students. It was disappointing to see Alice being placed in the lowest track where she was not challenged academically. Although she was not excelling in math classes, she was doing very well in other classes. When I asked the guidance counselor whether Alice had to attend only the lowest track classes where the curriculum was watered down, she replied that next school year Alice would be able to attend classes in both B track and C track depending on her grades.

The issue of tracking students based on their test scores has been controversial. Some researchers support it and some oppose it (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). Those researchers who support the tracking decisions believe that "particular students will benefit more from certain experiences, resources, or environments that they would from others, and that this benefit is optimized when they are taught with other students like themselves in achievement level"

(Heubert & Hauser, 1999, p. 96). Those who oppose the tracking system argue that standardized tests are used inappropriately for tracking purposes. For example, Darling-Hammnod (1991) asserts that norm-referenced multiple-choice tests are designed to place students in tracks and not to support instruction; therefore linking tests to tracking can limit students' learning. Similarly, Glaser & Silver (1994) state that students in low-track classes learn much less than they are capable of learning. In Alice's cases, I observed that she was not challenged in the C track classes; therefore she did not learn as much as she was able to. I believe the tracking system puts many English language learners into disadvantage

While Alice was attending the 9th grade, I observed her twice during the school year. These observations were part of my data collection. During my observations and brief discussions between classes, I was under the assumption Alice knew she was in the lowest C track and that she needed to improve her grades to be moved to the B track.

The English class that I observed was the lowest C track English. The class consisted of 9th grade students who were special education students or students with poor grades. The students were reading a book *The Cay*, which was, according to the English teacher, written on a 7th grade level.

During this class, I noticed that the English teacher employed many modifications so that special education students were able to follow her instructions. At the beginning of the class, the teacher reviewed the setting and events of the book before they moved onto the next chapter. The teacher wrote summary notes on the board and students copied those notes. Then the teacher started to read the next chapter out loud to the students. I was surprised that the students did not take turns reading the text out loud themselves. Instead they listened to the teacher, some of them actively and some passively. Although Alice participated actively

in class by listening carefully to the story and by writing down the notes, I believe that she could have been challenged more. During my observations, it was evident that Alice was capable of reading the story independently. After the class, Alice said that she understood most of the text. If she got confused about the difficult words, she would look them up. Alice said that reading was easier for her than writing. Alice's grades in her English class were in the low 80s.

I also conducted observations of her Civics and Communication classes. Alice was able to follow the lessons and actively participated in both classes. The classmates knew that Alice was from Russia because she talked about it a lot. During the class discussion, for example, she would say, " In Russia we have different chickens," and then she laughed. Alice mentioned that sometimes the boys tease her about being Russian but she likes that. It was usually friendly teasing. However, once a teacher made a sarcastic comment calling her a "Russian girl." She perceived it as inappropriate because she thought he was making fun of her English so she complained about it to her parents. "My mom called him and yelled at him. And then he stopped," said Alice.

Alice knew that math was her weakest subject; therefore, she worked very hard in her math classes and asked questions when she did not understand. The 9$^{th}$ grade teacher seemed to be very accommodating when I observed her math class. Alice shared with me that she attended PSSA tutoring in English and math twice a week and felt that it helped her.

During all of her classes, Alice seemed to be attentive and confident. She raised her hand frequently and actively participated in the class so that she could get good grades. When I asked her what her plans were for the summer, she replied she would like to attend

cheerleading and softball practices and also get a summer job. Alice was socially well adjusted, and her goals and dreams were not very different from typical American teenagers.

The table 7 provides a summary of ESL services that Alice received as well as her test results from the standardized tests.

Table 7 *Table of Alice Smith's Academic Progress*

| Alice Nadia Smith | ESL services | SELP test (April) | PSSA (March | Terra Nova (April) | SLA stages |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5th grade 2003-04 | 9 hours per week | Basic | Below basic in Math Exempt from Reading | x | Early Production |
| 6th grade 2004-05 | 6 hours per week | Intermediate | X | Average in Math Average in English | Speech Emergence |
| 7th grade 2005-06 | 3 hours per week | Proficient | Below basic in Math | Below Average in Math, Average in English | Intermediate Fluency |
| 8th grade 2006-07 | x | x | Below basic in Math, Basic in Reading, Proficient in Writing | x | Advanced Fluency |
| 9th grade 2007-08 | x | x | x | x | Advanced Fluency |

The summary of Alice's academic progress shows that over the period of 5 years, Alice improved her literacy skills in English and achieved near grade level academic English.

Although she attended the ESL program for 3 years and passed the SELP test in her 7th grade, Alice would have benefited from more ESL instruction to improve her reading comprehension. She scored at the Basic level in the PSSA reading section during her 8th grade, which means that she was reading below the grade level. In addition, she failed the reading class (her grade was 67) and barely passed the English class (her grade was 70) at the end of her 8th grade.

Regarding her low math scores, the interviews revealed that Alice's persistent struggles with math concepts were not caused by learning English as a second language but rather by her mathematical reasoning. Overall, Alice became an average student who was able to pass the high school grades.

*L1 Maintenance of Alice Nadia Smith*

During our interview, I asked Alice to write two essays, one in English and one in Russian. The purpose of these two essays was to compare her language skills and analyze which language she was more comfortable with when composing. Alice was attending the 9th grade and was acquiring English for 5 years when she wrote these two essays.

Here is an excerpt of her English essay:

*I like to go to school when people aren't judging you by your race. People in my school are very judgmental. So sometimes i don't like going to school. but other than that i like the teachers and now since i go to high school and i know english very well im pretty excited. my school is big and we have a lot of people. mostly I just like hanging out with my friends. im a talker which means I like to talk a lot. But I try to do my best on my*

*school work. the teachers are nice and try to help you as much as they can.*

It is apparent that Alice was careless about her capital letters as well as punctuation. Although she needed to improve her punctuation and syntax, Alice was able to express her opinions in English. It is evident that she acquired the English spelling and concept of subject-verb agreement.

The Russian essay was very short because it was rather difficult for Alice to write in her native language. She struggled with writing in Cyrillic and with expressing her thoughts. This is the sample of her Russian writing:

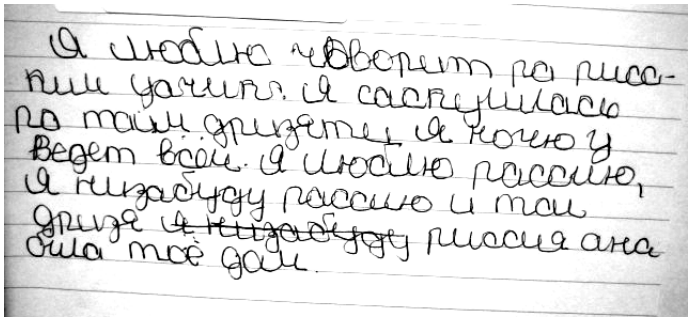


*Figure 2*. Russian essay written by Alice Smith.

Here is the translation of the example above:

*I like to speak in Russian language. I miss my friends. I want to see everybody.*

*I like Russia, I will not forget Russia and my friends. Russia was my home.*

When comparing these English and Russian writing samples, it became obvious that Alice's native language deteriorated over the past 5 years, and the English language became her dominant language. Alice had many spelling mistakes in her Russian essay, and her vocabulary was limited. Her spelling mistakes were caused by Alice's confusion of Cyrillic and Roman letters. For example, in the word "druzia" (friends), Alice used the Roman letter "u" instead of Cyrillic letter "y", which makes the [u] sound in the Russian language.

Despite her diminishing Russian literacy skills, Alice showed an effort to preserve her Russian. When Alice and I discussed how she is preserving her Russian, Alice replied that she enjoyed talking to her sister Valerie in Russian. She said, "Me and her sometimes talk. We don't like to talk in front of people because they think we talk about them. But when we are alone, we usually talk about what's happening at school. Just talking in Russian, so we don't forget it." Alice also mentioned that this year she connected with other Russian adopted girls through the Internet. They found Alice through the website My Space and emailed her. Then they started to text message each other and talk on the phone. They would sometimes text message in Russian language and they would code-switch from English to Russian. It was interesting for me to learn how innovative the girls became when using technology. Here is an excerpt from our interview:

Alice: When I saw Masha, I started talking in Russian but I went back to English because it was kind of hard, some of the words. I forgot them basically in Russian . When we instant message, we talk in Russian. We type in Russian.

Daniela: Oh, really? How can you type in Russian? [Russian Cyrillic is very different from Roman alphabet].

Alice: We use English letters but type in Russian.

Daniela: Can you tell me how you instant message?.

Alice: Let's say you want to say OK, you want to say "horosho" , we type "xorosho."

The letter "x" in Russian Cyrillic has a meaning of a special sound that does not exist in English phonetics. The pronunciation is similar to [h] sound as in the word "horse" but for native Russian there is a difference between [h] and [x] sounds . I found it interesting that they replaced only one letter because they could have changed also letter "r" into "p". The

letter “p” in the Cyrillic alphabet  equals to letter “r” in the Roman alphabet. Instead, they changed only the first letter, which sound is not correlated with a specific letter in the English alphabet.

Alice stated that when talking to her Russian friends who were also internationally adopted, she would typically start speaking “in Russian but then [she would] switch to English because it is easier.” This is an example of code-switching, which occurs in situations when one bilingual is speaking to another bilingual who will understand both languages (Fromkin et al, 2007). I was glad that both sisters, Alice and Valerie, were still able to code-switch in English and Russian even 5 years after their adoption.

Other means of Alice preserving native language became Russian books and the Internet. Alice said she brought Russian books with her when she was adopted and she read them at the beginning but later she would only read English books. Despite this transition, she still loved to download Russian songs from the Internet, especially techno music. Alice said, “I listen to Russian music like every day.” She also had many artifacts from Russia that her adoptive mother bought in Russia. The music and beautiful artifacts reminded her of the native country and its rich culture.

One of the artifacts that Alice showed me was a Bible written in the Old Russian language. Alice said, “My mom’s friend gave it to us and she said it would help us remember Russian. It is really old. Her mom had it. Her grandmother had it . She said it would be important for us to have one, so we can learn everything from it.” Alice and her sister Valerie were able to practice reading prayers in Russian. Both of them read a short prayer for me in Russian with little pauses. They said it was harder for them to read it because of the Old Russian.

The last topic of our interview was the Russian school system, and Alice was able to provide many detailed descriptions. She explained, "The teachers were actually very nice. They were always helpful." Alice mentioned that the Russian school started at 7:30 am and ended late in the afternoon. She further described her experience in Russia, "We walked to school because it was not far. And when we get to school it is actually different than here because we have to change to other shoes. We have breaks between classes and then we have lunch break. We go home to eat, then we get to come back and then the classes go on. And then we have another bell and then at four o'clock we have tutoring. All the time we have tutoring to help us. It is not optional. We have to go." Alice also stated that she had to go to school on Saturdays and Sundays for half a day from 7:30 [am] till 12 [pm]. It is evident that Russian children spent more time at school than U.S. children.

Alice had good memories of her Russian teachers and she described them as helpful and "not strict". When comparing her Russian and U.S. school experience, Alice complained, "I was a really good student there [in Russia] until I got here [the United States]. I kind of slipped because of different language but my mom was like, 'You have a language barrier. You shouldn't worry about it. You will get back on track.' So I was not really worried about it but the [Russian] teachers were not strict. I was telling the American kids how we got the [Russian] grades one through five where five is the highest." When I asked Alice what grades she usually had on her report card in Russia, Alice replied, "I had like fours," which would equal to Bs in the U.S. educational system.

Since Alice attended Russian school for four years, she had a lot of memories of her life in Russia and retained somewhat developed Russian literacy skills. She was able to read on a fourth grade Russian level and write in cursive Russian. However, during the five years

of schooling in the United States, Alice stopped reading Russian books and began reading U.S. books for school and pleasure. Fortunately, Alice had access to Russian music, books and souvenirs, which reminded her of Russian culture. Having Russian speaking friends and adoptive siblings, Alice was still able to preserve her native language to a certain point. Alice said, "I am proud of who I am. I am proud to be Russian." Hopefully, her motivation to keep her native language and culture will persevere.

*Second Language Acquisition of Valerie Katarina Smith*

When 12-year-old Valerie left Russia in February 2004, she was attending 4th grade in her Russian school. However, after her adoption, Mr. and Mrs. Smith enrolled Valerie into the 5th grade in the middle of the school year. At that time Valerie did not know any English (Preproduction stage) and as a result she was very dependent on Alice, her adoptive sister. Valerie said, "I could not speak any English and I did not understand what anyone was saying so I was dependent on my sister Alice. I tried to do the assignments at school but I could not read or write English so I needed a lot of help."

During our interview, I questioned the reason for skipping a grade, and Valerie explained the situation by saying, "In Russia we only have 11 grades and if you are an honor student, you get out of school in 9th grade. Then you can start college. But since we started a grade later because we have only 11 grades, I was in 4th grade, and if you kind of put that up, and I was an honor student, they put me in 5th grade." Surprisingly, Valerie was able to catch up very quickly and during the 9th grade, she was exceeding Alice academically.

Looking back at her first days in the public school, Valerie described her experience as follows:

> It was scary…and I couldn't speak any English… and I didn't understand what anybody was saying, so during the whole entire period of 5th grade, I was dependent on my sister [Alice] and I tried to cooperate if I thought I understood what they did. I couldn't read English. I couldn't speak English and I couldn't understand…
>
> People were trying to get to know me. They were really nice and sweet. And they were like, 'Oh, you are Alice's sister, you just came from Russia.' So they were trying to help me learn. Right now I have friends. Sometimes they are not as good as they think they are. So they gave me a little bit of back stabbing but it is not like I am going to get all emotional about it…not really.

Valerie said that she liked ESL classes because she "learned much more English than anywhere else" and she met new people. She also pointed out, "I would just learn some English from my friends. They would try to understand me and tell me what things are named, how to pronounce [them] and how to say it."

When I asked Valerie which section of English (speaking, reading, writing or listening) was the hardest for her to acquire, she responded:

> I don't think I had the hardest one. I think they were at the medium level for me. I was fine with reading because I like to read so I was not concerned about that. Writing was not hard for me because American letters are… kind of… alike with Russian letters but they are pronounced different way so probably listening to each other people. And to me,

people in America have an accent like I have an accent to them. To me, I was trying to get used to their… kind of… accent.

During my interviews and observations, I noticed that Valerie was very self-critical of her Russian accent. She mentioned a couple of times that she would like to "get rid of it." I assured her that her accent was not as strong as other foreign accents. Her adoptive father also perceived Valerie's accent as "attractive."

In the fifth grade, Valerie attended only the third and fourth quarters of the school year, and despite this fact, she was required to take the PSSA Math section test. Valerie was exempt from the Reading and Writing sections, but the attempt to complete the Math test was frustrating for Valerie whose English was still in Preproduction stage. As a result, she was not able to read any math problems. As an ESL teacher who speaks Russian, I was asked to administer this PSSA Math test to Valerie and her sister Alice. I was allowed to translate directions for them but could not help them with the actual math problems. When administering the PSSA test in their 5th grades, I told them not to worry about the test too much but both Valerie and Alice were stressed out and exhausted from trying to comprehend the math problems.

Fortunately, Valerie's 5th grade teachers were well informed about modifying the curriculum and assessments for her; therefore, Valerie was not under too much academic pressure and could focus on acquiring the English language. She also attended nine ESL instructional classes per week. Remembering her first ESL classes, Valerie said, "I came in the middle of their sessions [February] when they [ESL students] were way high. They were learning things that I didn't start learning from the beginning… I did not have that really hard time… I was catching up." Mrs. Pinto, Valerie's ESL teacher during that school year, shared

with me that she would let Valerie read in Russian at the end of ESL classes because Valerie was tired. Valerie remembered, "I could not read any English books so I was reading Russian books." She said she liked reading adventure books and she brought some books with her from Russia. Valerie was not able to read English books yet due to her limited knowledge of English phonics and minimal vocabulary. However, she was able to say short sentences and frequently used phrases such as "I don't understand, my name is Valerie, I am from Russia, I need help" etc. By the end of the 5th grade, she transitioned from the Preproduction stage (silent period) to Early Production stage of her second language acquisition.

In the 6th grade, Valerie and Alice were separated because they "talked too much." Consequently, Valerie could not depend on her sister's translations anymore. Though separated in their mainstream classes, Valerie and Alice attended six ESL classes per week together, and I became their ESL teacher. Valerie was a polite, enthusiastic and fast progressing student. She acquired the Roman alphabet quickly and used it correctly during reading and writing exercises, but she still transferred Russian sentence structure into her English essays and struggled with spelling. Here is an example of her English writing from the beginning of the 6th grade:

> *I wan to the zoo in Russia and America. I rially like zoo. I sol at the zoo alad animals! I rially like the lions, bear's or squirrels. I wan to the zoo wet my friends. [I went to the zoo in Russia and America. I really like the zoo. I saw at the zoo a lot of animals! I really like the lions, bears or squirrels. I went to the zoo with my friends.]*

This writing sample shows that Valerie's English skills were at the Speech Emergence stage. She was able to produce simple sentences in the present and past tenses but

she had many morphological mistakes (e.g. I sol at the zoo alad animals) and spelling mistakes (e.g. rially, wan).

Throughout the 6th grade Valerie studied hard and received very good grades on grammar and spelling tests. It was apparent that she was highly motivated to succeed and was able to transfer her good studying habits from her Russian education. At the end of the 6th grade, she was able to describe a picture using the past progressive tense. Here is an example of her writing:

> *The teacher got mad because Emily and Anne were playing baseball [.] Emily was throwing the ball and Anne was catching the ball. Jake and John were drawing on the board. Nicolai was writing a note. Jeromy was pretending he was a teacher. Stephanie was brushing her hair. And Victoria was reading a book.*

This example of descriptive writing reveals that Valerie dramatically improved her spelling and acquired the concept of past progressive tense using singular and plural forms. She also learned about the subject-verb-object rule in English sentences.

At the end of the 6th grade, Valerie was administered two standardized tests: SELP test and TerraNova achievement test. The SELP test divides students' results into five performance levels (pre-emergent, emergent, basic, intermediate and proficient). After attending ESL classes for 12 months and living in the United States for 15 months, Valerie did extremely well and scored a total of 87 points out of 110 points. Valerie scored proficient in the speaking subcategory and intermediate in listening, reading, writing, comprehension and academic subcategories. Her total performance level was intermediate. The SELP test

result indicated that Valerie improved so rapidly she progressed from the Speech Emergence stage to the Intermediate Fluency stage in only one school year (9 months).

Unlike the SELP test, which was compulsory only for ESL students, the TerraNova test was administered to all students at certain grades in public schools. The total score consisted of Reading, Language and Mathematics subtotals. Valerie's total score was 37 points out of 100, which is still considered an average performance level. The TerraNova test distinguishes three performance levels: below average (1-25 points), average (26-75 points) and above average (76-100 points). According to the TerraNova test, Valerie scored higher than approximately 37 % of the students in the nation, which seemed understandable taking in consideration her limited English.

Due to her fast progress in acquiring English, Valerie became an advanced ESL student in the 7th grade. As a result, she attended only three instructional ESL hours per week and had a chance to focus more on her content area subjects. The teachers in 7th grade provided small modifications for her and began to fully mainstream her into the classes. The 7th grade report card showed Valerie received numerical grades (76-85) but in 5th and 6th grades, she was scored only on pass/fail basis.

In spite of the fact that she was improving her English skills, Valerie remembered that she would still get stuck between two languages.

Valerie: During classes sometime, especially in seventh grade, I would be doing math and sometimes when I just think about Russian and when a teacher asks me questions, I would say answers in Russian.

Daniela: What did you say in Russian?

Valerie: 'Izvinite menja' which means 'I am sorry what?' And everybody said,

> ‘That’s in Russian,’ and I am like, ‘I don’t know how to say it in American now.’ I just usually forget it , especially in science class, because there are so many things similar to Russian.

Being stuck between two languages is not uncommon for English language learners. For example, Eva Hoffmann ( 1989) described similar situations in her book *Lost in Translation*.

At the end of the 7th grade, Valerie had to undergo three standardized tests: SELP test, TerraNova achievement test and PSSA test. Being highly motivated to learn, she achieved excellent results. Valerie scored a total of 103 points out of a maximum number of 110 and accomplished proficient performance level. Passing the SELP test and doing well in her mainstream classes assured the ESL teachers that Valerie could be exited out of the ESL program.

The PSSA test results reported that Valerie achieved a proficient performance level in the Reading and Math sections. According to the Pennsylvania Parent Report, the proficient level stands for “satisfactory academic performance indicating a solid understanding and adequate display of the skills included in Pennsylvania’s Academic Content Standards” (PSSA report, 2008). These results proved that Valerie was capable of succeeding in the mainstream curriculum. In addition, the TerraNova test results revealed that Valerie improved from the past 37 to current 48 national percentile. Her test results were again in the average performance level.

In the 8th grade, Valerie was fully mainstreamed and stopped attending ESL classes. Valerie said she liked Math and Reading but Social Studies became difficult for her “especially in 8th grade.” She explained:

> We studied different things like Civil War. It was really different things but the thing that was really hard for me was to understand. There were only two chapters that I understood very well and I got 100 on them. The first one was when we had the Alcohol and Drugs. That chapter was really easy for me. The second one was the World War Two. The chapter was about criminals and I want to be a criminologist and that is really interesting to me and I understood it better.

Due to the complex language and topics in Social Studies, Valerie's final grade was 72, which was her lowest grade on the 8th grade report card. She received 92 in Pre-Algebra and 82 in all other subjects (Computer, English, Reading, and Science). At the end of her 8th grade, Valerie was again administered the PSSA test and scored at an advanced level in Mathematics and a proficient performance level in Reading and Writing. The advanced performance level is the highest level on the PSSA test and it is described as "superior academic performance indicating an in-depth understanding and exemplary display of the skills included in Pennsylvania's Academic Content Standards" (PSSA report, 2008).

Based on the summary of all the standardized test results, it is apparent that with improving English literacy skills, Valerie began to perform on her grade level in content areas. Valerie's academic strengths and interests, especially in math, also became visible on the standardized tests.

During high school, Valerie became strongly motivated to make the honor roll, which had an effect on her native language. Her sister Alice complained that Valerie did not want to speak Russian with her.

Valerie explained:

> Before Alice did not want to speak any Russian when we were learning but now it is the other way. I feel like I should learn more English and keep my studies up. I feel like I am never going to forget [Russian] because I want to visit [Russia]…
>
> I am going to put my Russian away for high school because I want to make the honor rolls so I don't want to disturb it…but when the college comes around I probably just give Russian more time. I know that there are some kids from Russia. Sometimes I would just try to talk with them.

Although Valerie tried to put her Russian on hold, she was able to preserve a great deal of her native language. During our interview, she was able to answer all of my Russian questions, read a section in a Russian Bible, and recite a Russian prayer that she learned as a little girl. When I came to observe her in high school; Valerie welcomed me by talking to me in Russian.

Unlike Alice who was placed into the C track (the lowest), Valerie was in the B track (average) during her 9$^{th}$ grade. It was interesting to see the differences between B and C tracks in the class curriculum and teacher's instruction. The B track classes were more student oriented while C track classes were predominately teacher oriented. When I observed the English class, Valerie and her classmates were reading "Romeo and Juliet" which is part of the 9$^{th}$ grade curriculum. The book was written in Shakespearean English on the right side of the book and in current English on the left side so that students would see the difference and comprehend the story better. Valerie sat in the front row and participated constantly in

the discussion. The English teacher who taught Valerie (in B track) as well as Alice (in C track) stated that they were both B students and nice girls.

During my observations of her math class, I noticed that Valerie was a good student who actively participated in class and understood the content of a 9th grade curriculum. Valerie mentioned that the language in Algebra class was not difficult for her. For example, I observed that Valerie was able to use the words "parallel" and "perpendicular" correctly in the context. She also did very well on the tests and her third quarter average was 81.

Although Valerie was a good student who wanted to make the honor roll, I learned that she was struggling with Spanish class, which she started taking in September of her 9th grade. While observing the Spanish class, I noticed that Valerie was able to say key words but did not remember some basic concepts. For example, Valerie did not know that verbs in Spanish do not have articles "el" and "la". Surprisingly, I discovered that Valerie received a deficiency note for having an average of 67, which meant failing. Valerie stated that sometimes she would get confused by translating from Russian and English into Spanish. Her Spanish teacher mentioned that Valerie was good at pronouncing the Spanish words but struggled with writing while her classmates were the opposite; they had a difficulty with pronunciation. Being strongly influenced by two languages (Russian and English), Valerie stated she got confused with Spanish due to the fact that she frequently switched from one language to another. In spite of her struggles in Spanish classes, Valerie was a highly motivated and hard working 9th grader who realized that good grades would help her achieve her academic dreams.

Table 8 *Table of Valerie Smith's Academic Progress*

| Valerie Katariana Smith | ESL Services | SELP test (April) | PSSA (March) | Terra Nova (April) | SLA stages |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5th grade February - June 2004 | 9 hours per week | Basic | Basic in Math | x | Preproduction, Early Production |
| 6th grade 2004-05 | 6 hours per week | Intermediate | x | Average in Math, Average in English | Speech Emergence, Intermediate Fluency |
| 7th grade 2005-06 | 3 hours per week | Proficient | Proficient in Math | Average in Math, Average in English | Intermediate Fluency |
| 8th grade 2006-07 | x | x | Advanced in Math, Proficient in Reading, Proficient in Writing | x | Advanced Fluency |
| 9th grade 2007-08 | x | x | x No testing was conducted | x | Advanced Fluency |

Valerie was able to acquire sufficient English skills within two and a half years of attending the ESL program. After she was no longer in need of ESL services, Valerie was capable of completing the academic work on her grade level and successfully passing the high school grades. The interviews and observations revealed that she was highly motivated to achieve the honor rolls and to be accepted into a college of her choice.

*L1 Maintenance of Valerie Katarina Smith*

Regarding the preservation of her native language at the time of the study, Valerie had a good chance of retaining her L1 because she had an opportunity to speak in Russian with her adoptive sister Alice, her biological uncle in Russia, and Russian friends living in the United States. Valerie also owned Russian books, tapes and souvenirs that reminded her of the native country.

During the interviews, Valerie stated she often listened to Russian music and had a favorite song, "Krashka  Moje."  Then she explained, "I love this song. It is something to do with an army. He is going to the army and he is trying to get letters from his girlfriend but she won't write him back and he writes to her. So I understand words and everything." Although her Russian listening and speaking skills were still very good, writing and reading in her native language was becoming a problem for Valerie. When I asked Valerie if she continued to read Russian books, she replied, "Well, it is getting hard to read them. I don't recognize some things. I confuse them with American letters. Yeah, I feel really horrible when I do it so I try to go back to remember things like the letters, [and] the words. Sometimes I try to read it." Valerie attended Russian school for only 3 years and 6 months compared to 4 years and 6 months in U.S. school, which probably contributed to Valerie's diminishing reading and writing skills in Russian. She was not academically challenged in the Russian language and did not have the necessary practice to develop her reading and writing skills in Russian.

During our interview (at the beginning of her 9$^{th}$ grade), I asked Valerie to write in English about her school in the United States. This is an example of her English writing:

*What i really like about [my school] is that we have many activities, there like i would like to join the tennis team. Dislike, our uniforms. But most of the time I absolutely love D. [name of the school] but i still want to move away to study more and become a criminoliogist.*

This unofficial essay shows Valerie still needed to improve her punctuation and sentence structure. However, in her 8th grade, Valerie did very well in her writing and scored proficient on the Writing Section of the PSSA test, which means that she performed on a grade level. It can be assumed she was more careful during the tests.

Her Russian writing was very short because Valerie forgot how to write many letters in Cyrillic. She combined Roman letters and Cyrillic letters in her writing. For example, she used Roman letters "b" and "u" instead of Cyrillic letters . In addition, some of her words were not understandable. This is an example of her Russian essay :

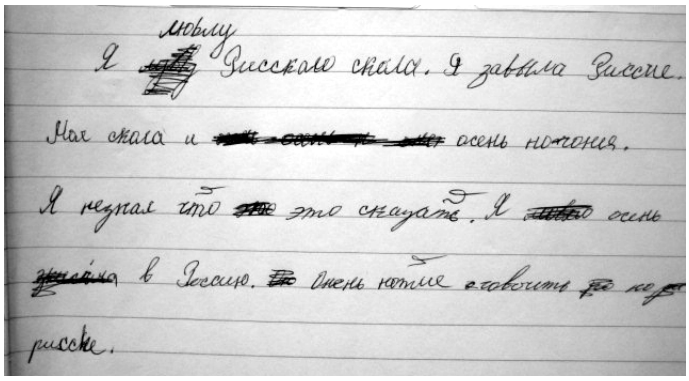


*Figure 3.* Russian essay written by Valerie Smith.

Here is the translation of the Russian essay:

*I like Russian school. I forgot Russian. I don't know what to say.*

*I [miss ?] Russia very much. I [need ?] to speak in Russian.*

Although Valerie understood spoken Russian, her Russian literacy skills were further deteriorating with every school year she spent in the United States. Valerie admitted that she

stopped reading Russian books because it was becoming difficult and she also wanted to improve her English to succeed in her high school studies.

With regard to the Russian school system, Valerie stated she had good memories. She was an honor student and had excellent grades. She said she had "very respectful [and] really nice teachers" and received "mostly fives" which equals to A grades in the U.S. schools . Valerie said, "The classes started around 8 o'clock and we would be there till 2 [p.m.]…after that we would go home and then at 4 o'clock we would come back to school." It appears that the Russian school system was very strict and based on a lot of memorization. Valerie remembered that she struggled with the Russian language classes because she had to memorize long definitions. She explained, "…the prefixes and suffixes, they weren't hard to comprehend except the definitions would be like a paragraph long. And you had to remember them and recite them and write them and memorize them." Despite this fact, Valerie was an honor student who loved math and reading in Russian schools. Based on the interviews and test reports, it became evident that she transferred her academic interests into the U.S. school system.

Overall, Valerie seemed to be well adjusted in the United States. She stated that she felt to be part of the U.S. society more than when she arrived. She had two best friends with whom she liked to talk about school and boyfriends. She knew that school was very important for her, and she did her best to achieve the honor roll listings. Her passion for reading helped her to acquire English literacy skills very quickly. Although she still made occasional mistakes and misunderstood complex expressions, Valerie was doing extremely well in mainstream classes due to her motivation and good studying habits.

## The Brown Family

As mentioned in Chapter Four, Mr. and Mrs. Brown had their own biological children, John and Kim. Meredith was the only international adoptee in this study who was adopted into a family with biological children. Meredith developed a great bond with her new sister and got adjusted in her new family.

### *Second Language Acquisition of Meredith Natalia Brown*

When 10-year-old Meredith arrived in the United States in the middle of July, she had some time to adjust in the new environment before she began attending a local public school; however, there was not enough time for her to learn basic English words. She was enrolled in a U.S. school as a non-English speaker, reader or writer (Preproduction Stage).

Although Meredith completed her 3rd grade in Russia, the Browns wanted Meredith to be enrolled in the 3rd grade again in the U.S. public school. While discussing her early school experience in the United States, Meredith admitted it was "hard." I asked her if she could talk to somebody in Russian and she replied, "No, they didn't understand." When describing her beginnings at a new school, Meredith remembered that there was a neighbor girl who helped her during the first year of school.

Daniela: So then you went to school, after you came from Russia, were you scared?

Meredith: Yeah.

Daniela: What was the scary part of going to school?

Meredith: The whole school all day. When I went to lunch, I was crying about mom.

Daniela: Oh, you missed her already. Was there anybody in school that helped you?

Meredith: Yeah, one of our neighbors…I had to sit with her every single day for lunch.

Daniela: Was she in your class?

Meredith: No, she was in 4th [grade].

Daniela: Ok, so she was a year older.

Meredith: Actually, she was 9. [Meredith was 10 years old at that time]

Daniela: Oh, she was younger than you. So did she show you the school where the things are?

Meredith: Yeah.

Daniela: Did you understand what she was showing you? The lockers, the cafeteria?

Meredith: Yeah.

Assigning peer buddy to new English language learners is one of the best methods that assists ESL students in making the transition a little bit easier.

When discussing her teachers, Meredith said she liked her 3rd grade teacher, stating, "[The teacher] gave me all the answers when I was in 3rd grade." It is typical that teachers try to modify their instruction and help students with very limited English. Since Meredith attended Russian schools for 3 years, she had basic Russian literacy skills. She was able to read basic Russian stories and write sentences in cursive. Mrs. Brown pointed out that Meredith was a good student in Russia. She stated, "As far as the Russian school, I mean it is definitely set up differently, but she [Meredith] did well there." Mrs. Brown also showed me a few samples of Meredith's writing that was done in the United States right after her adoption. These samples must have been written around Christmas time because the first writing sample said "S novym godom" [Happy New Year] in Russian. The second sample surprised me because Meredith wrote "Merry Christmas" phonetically in English but using the Cyrillic alphabet. The fact that she used Cyrillic alphabet for English words showed that

Meredith was acquiring listening and speaking skills sooner than her English reading and writing skills.

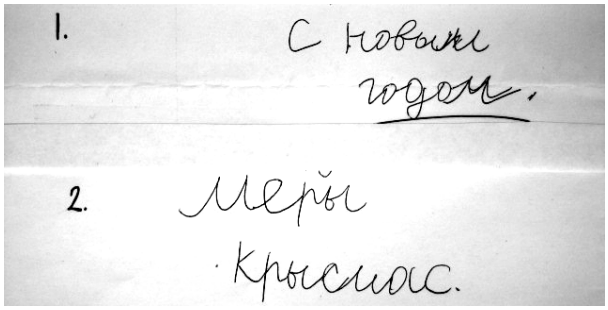



*Figure 4*. Russian writing sample by Meredith Brown.

During her 3rd grade in the United States, Meredith attended ESL classes for 9 instructional hours per week with Mrs. Pinto. In September 2004, Meredith scored as a Non-English Speaker on the Idea Proficiency Test (IPT); therefore, she was introduced to basic vocabulary and practiced beginning English literacy skills. In May 2005 (after 8 months of ESL instruction), Meredith scored as a Non-English Reader on the 3rd grade IPT reading test. This reading test revealed that Meredith struggled mostly with reading for life skills and language usage. As a result, she achieved only 22 correct answers out of 51 maximum answers, which equals to 43 %. Although Meredith made progress during the first year of schooling, she still had to continue her ESL classes in the next school year.

At the end of 3rd grade, Meredith was also administered two standardized tests: the SELP test and the PSSA test. Regarding the PSSA test results in Reading and Math sections, Meredith scored at the lowest level possible, which was Below Basic Performance Level. This level is described as "inadequate academic performance that indicates little understanding and minimal display of the skills included in Pennsylvania's Academic Standards" (The Pennsylvania Parent Report, 2008). The Pennsylvania Department of Education states that the first year ESL students should be exempt from the PSSA Language

section and their PSSA Math test results should not be counted in the school district report because, typically, ESL students with less than one year in the United States score at the lowest level (Assessment: Testing  Accommodations for the PSSA, 2008).

The SELP test disclosed Meredith scored a total of 46 points out of a maximum of 102 points (45 %) and was placed at the Basic Performance Level. The SELP test consists of five performance levels altogether: Pre-emergent, Emergent, Basic, Intermediate and Proficient. The Basic Level describes students' skills stating that "This student can slowly read very simple English texts, but often with only partial comprehension," and "This student's writing is limited and contains numerous errors" (Stanford English Language Proficiency Test, 2008). Meredith attended ESL instruction for only 7 months at the time of this test, and she advanced from the pre-emergent level to the basic level.

Despite Meredith's progress, Mrs. Brown was aware of the academic gap between Meredith and her classroom peers so she sought help in the form of summer tutoring for her daughter. The summer tutoring was sponsored by the Title III grant (ESL supplemental grant to assist English language learners) and it seemed to help Meredith, especially with her reading skills. When comparing two IPT reading tests, the improvement is visible. Meredith was administered one IPT reading test section A (3rd grade level) in May 2004 and scored only 43 %. Then the IPT reading test section B (third grade level) was administered in September 2004 and Meredith achieved 66 %. These IPT reading tests disclosed that Meredith improved 23 % in her reading skills.

During her 4th grade, Meredith attended 6 ESL instructional hours with other intermediate ESL students. Although she was the only student of Russian descent, Meredith was able to make friends with some of her Hispanic classmates. When I was her ESL teacher,

I observed that Meredith was motivated to succeed during our ESL classes. She tried her best and wanted to get good grades on her tests. However, she became easily frustrated if the lesson was too challenging for her. Sometimes she would get so frustrated that she would angrily repeat, "I don't understand this" and quickly gave up. She needed encouragement in situations like this.

When teaching Meredith ESL, I observed that she had a strong interest in computers and I was glad to see her using Disney educational websites when we had our class breaks. During our interview, Meredith admitted she loved television and computers. She said, "I am always on it [computer]." Watching English movies and playing with interactive computer games contributed positively to her second language acquisition, especially with listening and reading skills. Looking at her ESL report card in the 4th grade, Meredith received A in reading but B in writing because she still struggled with grammar, punctuation and spelling in her essays. In her IPT 4th grade writing essay written in May 2006, Meredith needed to finish the following story:

> *Everyone said that the house was haunted. My friend and I decided to find out for ourselves. We waited until midnight so we could approach the house by moonlight.*
>
> *I said, "It could be dangerous in there! I think I'll wait outside while you go in." I sat and waited and waited. Suddenly,…*

This is an example of how Meredith finished the story:

> *They heard screming. They went into the haunted house. They had flash lights in their hands. They saw a witch and scream [.] Their friend was write next to the witch. She was nice to her and to her friends [.] [They] were scared but*

*their friend wasn't scared [.] she said "All off this goast are so nice and funnie to [.] he is funny to and her they were my last year forever. This was my house then we move to a new [house] for 10 years [.] this house was haunted."*

This essay reveals that Meredith had some grammar mistakes such as the subject-verb agreement in her sentence "this goast are so nice," spelling mistakes such as "funnie, flash lights, screming" and punctuation mistakes. It was difficult to understand where one sentence begins and where it ends.

At the end of the 4th grade, Meredith was administered two standardized tests, PSSA and IPT. The PSSA test results demonstrated that Meredith scored at the Below Basic Performance Level in Reading and Mathematic sections. Such a low result on the PSSA test was surprising because Meredith had shown an improvement in her reading and speaking skills during my ESL classes. Later on while observing Meredith in 6th grade, a teacher mentioned that Meredith was a poor test taker even though she was familiar with the topic. Based on that information, I assumed that Meredith scored poorly on her PSSA test due to her limited English as well as weak test taking skills.

Unlike the PSSA testing which is strongly emphasized by the classroom teachers and administrators, the IPT test for ESL students is typically administered in a small class and in a relaxed atmosphere. This might have been a reason why Meredith did much better on the IPT test than on the PSSA test. She scored as a Limited English Reader on the IPT reading test for fourth grade, achieving 62 %. Her IPT writing test result showed that she was placed at the level of a Limited English Writer. Surprisingly, she successfully passed the IPT oral test achieving the level of a Fluent English Speaker. Passing the IPT oral test (combination of

listening and speaking skills) after 2 years of living in the United States was a great success for Meredith. Full inclusion in an English only environment and Meredith's enthusiasm for TV shows and computer games seemed to have contributed to such speedy progress.

Mrs. Brown was satisfied with Meredith's progress in her second language acquisition, but she was displeased with the local public school that Meredith attended; therefore, Meredith transferred into a private school in the 5th grade. Mrs. Brown explained her decision, "The other kids [her daughter and son] went there and it's a Catholic school. It is more disciplined. It's always been uniformed, more rigid."

Although private schools are typically chosen by the parents for their good reputations, it is common that Catholic schools do not provide individualized instruction for students with limited English and students with special needs.

The private school that Meredith started attending in her 5th grade did not provide any ESL programs but her teachers were informed about her situation and stated that they modified tests for Meredith to accommodate her needs. Meredith's 5th grade report card revealed that Meredith was able to pass all her subjects. Her final grades were: English -83, Spelling- 74, Mathematics-79 and Social Studies-74. In spite of the modifications, her final grades were still average.

Mrs. Brown stated that Meredith "kind of adapted well to it [new school]" and "has a lot of friends and she seems to be doing well." Meredith used to play soccer in Russia, and she began playing soccer at her new school too. This after school activity provided more involvement with her peers and contributed to her adjustment in the U.S. society.

Meredith continued her 6th grade at the same private school and during the school year of 2007-08, I went to observe Meredith two times. My first observation was during the

second quarter of the school year. The first class I observed was an English class. At the beginning of the class, the teacher asked the students to write in their journal what they were thankful for. Meredith shared with the class what she wrote, “I am thankful for my sister helping my mom with laundry.” After a couple of students shared their writing, the teacher moved onto the topic of the lesson, which was reviewing the direct and indirect objects, objective and nominative cases, interrogative pronouns and linking verbs. The class consisted of 20 polite students wearing uniforms, and Meredith sat at a desk in the first row of the classroom. This seating arrangement worked well for her, especially when she needed help from her teacher. When the class went over their homework, everyone was prepared including Meredith. She had four mistakes in her homework but after they reviewed the correct answers in class, Meredith understood the topic better. During the class exercises, Meredith was able to analyze all the parts of the speech in the given sentence correctly. She also felt comfortable asking questions when she did not understand. Since Meredith was doing so well in class, I was surprised to find out that her grade from English was C. The English teacher made a comment that Meredith “gets anxious” when taking tests which influenced her grades.

The second observation of Meredith was during the fourth quarter. I was able to view Meredith’s report card from the third quarter and I saw that she was failing science (67) although it was modified for her. When Meredith got 68 on a science test, the science teacher told Meredith that she might have to go to summer school if she did not improve. The science teacher pointed out that Meredith received 82 on the next science test so the teacher assumed it might have been the lack of motivation on Meredith’s part.

Before I observed her English class, I asked Meredith how she was doing and she replied, “Not very good. I don’t like the school anymore.” I was not sure if it was because of her troubles with science or whether she had any other difficult times. Later on, I found out that her adoptive mother, Mrs. Brown, was seriously sick, which may have had a strong impact on Meredith.

During the English class, the students were learning the rules for using commas. One of the rules was “Use yes or no to introduce a sentence with a comma.” Meredith was asked to give an example using this rule and her response was, “No, comma I don’t like school.” Her comment sounded very negative and Meredith did not appear to be happy. The teacher quietly acknowledged her sentence and continued in her lesson. She asked other students to produce examples for different rules. While checking their homework with comma exercises, Meredith admitted that she had three mistakes. The majority of students had one or two mistakes in that particular homework. In spite of her bad mood, Meredith participated actively in her English class and her English grades had improved since the last quarter.

After the English class, I had a chance to talk briefly to Meredith’s homeroom teacher who said that Meredith liked math but when the topic was difficult she got frustrated and angry. The homeroom teacher also noticed that there was still a little language barrier because some of the vocabulary definitions were hard for Meredith. The teacher used *Vocabulary Workshop Level A* in her English classes.

Having an opportunity to view some of the vocabulary definitions, I could see that many words and definitions were challenging not only for limited English speakers but also for native English students. For example, the Unit Five in the *Vocabulary Workshop Level A* textbook included vocabulary such as “bluster, fray, ravenous, refute, remorse, tarry.” The

definition for the word “remorse” would explain the meaning as follows, “(n.) deep and painful regret for one’s past misdeeds; pangs of conscience.” If Meredith did not know words such as “misdeeds, pangs and conscience, ” it must have been difficult for her to comprehend the meaning of the word “remorse”. In addition, many of the words the students studied in the textbook are not frequently used in common speech; therefore, ESL students have a difficulty learning and using such words.

Considering the fact that Meredith attended ESL classes for only 2 school years and was never officially exited out of the ESL program due to her withdrawal from a public school, the low test scores in reading suggest that she could have benefited from attending ESL program for longer time in order to make a better transition into a mainstream academic classes.

Table 9 *Table of Meredith Brown's Academic Progress*

| Meredith Natalia Brown | ESL services | SELP test (April) | PSSA (March) | TerraNova (April) | SLA stages |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3rd grade 2004-05 | 9 hours per week | Basic | Below Basic in Math, Below Basic in Reading | x | Preproduction, Early Production |
| 4th grade 2005-06 | 6 hours per week | Intermediate | Below Basic in Math, Below Basic in Reading | x | Speech Emergence, Intermediate Fluency |
| 5th grade 2006-07 | No ESL services (Catholic school) | x | | Below Average in Math, Below Average in Language Arts | Intermediate Fluency |
| 6th grade 2007-08 | No ESL services (Catholic school) | x | x | x | Intermediate Fluency |
| 7th grade 2008-09 | No ESL services (Public school) | x | x | x | Intermediate Fluency |

The test results of Meredith's progress revealed that although she improved her English skills, she struggled with the academic English and math. She scored below her grade level on standardized tests and had difficulties passing some of the subjects. It can be assumed that extended ESL services would have been beneficial for her academic improvement.

*L1 Maintenance of Meredith Natalia Brown*

Despite the fact that Meredith had difficulties with challenging English vocabulary and books that were above her reading level, she became monolingual in English over the course of 4 years since the time of her adoption. Mrs. Brown had noticed the language transition Meredith made over the years. Mrs. Brown explained that Meredith had Russian friends who were adopted at the same time and at the same age. When Meredith talked with them on the phone, "they would start in Russian, go into a little bit of English; and then when they got excited … they would go back to Russian." This was during Meredith's first year in the United States but during her second year, Mrs. Brown stated that Meredith started conversations in English and then went back to Russian. Mrs. Brown added, "Now it is all English." The interview with Meredith revealed that Mrs. Brown was correct about her daughter. Meredith had forgotten all her Russian. She did not understand Russian basic questions and was able to produce only three Russian words: "sabaka" (dog), "koshka" (cat) and "net" (no). Mrs. Brown explained, "She lost her Russian real fast. And we have been trying to throw some Russian words out there… but she really did not want to have any part of it." Meredith stated she did not like her Russian name and when she drew two pictures for me, I was surprised to see that the picture of her U.S. school was drawn with color pencils but the picture of her former Russian school was sketched only in black pencil and looked sad (see appendix p. 230).

Regarding Meredith's original Russian name, Mrs. Brown explained, "We asked her if she wanted an American name or keep her Russian name and she said she wanted an American name. So we chose Meredith and we kept her middle name, her Russian name as a middle name." Meredith's Russian name was "Natalia" (pseudonym) and during our

interview, Meredith said she "hates" when someone calls her Natalia. Mrs. Brown recalled how worried she was about changing her adoptive daughter's name. Here is an excerpt from our interview:

Daniela: So did you use the translator to help you ask her [Meredith]?

Mrs. Brown: We did, actually, because we were really agonizing over it. You know the funny thing is you as parents and adults agonize over everything, and for the kids it is just no big deal. We, my husband and I, were going back and forth. Shall we give her an American name or do we keep her Russian name? What will she think? How will they accept her? We were there two minutes and the Russian translator who was working with the agency went and asked her if she wants an American name or Russian name. [Meredith replied briefly] American.

They [Russians] said, 'Meredith is very odd name.' Like in Russia, they know some American names Anna, Mary …something easy like that and the stuff they know from books… but they said that Meredith was a very odd name and very hard name for them to pronounce. We did not realize that.

Daniela: So did you pick that name in advance?

Mrs. Brown: We did. It was something we just kicked around…

It was evident from the interview that Mrs. Brown wanted her adoptive daughter to have an American name so that Meredith would fit easier in the U.S. society.

During our interview, it appeared that Meredith did not miss Russia. She did not mention keeping in touch with her biological siblings who remained in Russia. Mrs. Brown stated that Meredith did not bring anything with her from the orphanage because it belonged

to the community. Not having access to Russian books or movies, Meredith did not have an opportunity to continue using her native language. When discussing Russian traditions and holidays, I found out that the Browns did not celebrate any Russian holidays. Mrs. Brown stated, "The only thing we do is the July 15, the adoption day, when she came. And we usually make that about her, anything that she wants to do that day. We go shopping or whatever she wants to do." It became noticeable that Meredith had lost touch with her Russian cultural roots and her native language. The lack of Meredith's motivation to preserve Russian language and the lack of her parents' encouragement probably also contributed to the fast transition of becoming an English only monolingual.

Mrs. Brown thought Meredith made a progress over the years and adjusted well into the U.S. society. Mrs. Brown stated that at the beginning Meredith was "a little shy. She did not want any crowds." The first time the Browns took her out to a restaurant, "it was too noisy for her." They had to leave the restaurant because Meredith was crying. Mrs. Brown noticed that although Meredith still did not like crowds, she was less afraid. When discussing her improvement, Mrs. Brown explained that Meredith was "more hesitant to do things" at the beginning but now "she is more into activities." Mrs. Brown also pointed out that Meredith was "more independent" and did not "need her mom to stay with her when she goes to a party." During the interviews, Meredith said she had many friends at school, and Mrs. Brown also emphasized Meredith's friendships with U.S. children were a good sign of her adjustment.

## The Peters Family

The Peters family adopted two biological siblings Alex and Katya who became the youngest participants in my study.

### *Second Language Acquisition of Alex George Peters*

Alex was 7 years old when he was enrolled into the 1st grade in a local public school at the beginning of November 2003. Alex did not know how to read in Russian and did not have any knowledge of the English language while all of his U.S. classmates had basic knowledge of reading short words and sentences in English. I was Alex's ESL teacher during his 1st grade. Mrs. Pinto was his ESL teacher in the 2nd and 3rd grades.

Since Alex was in the Preproduction stage (silent period) of his second language acquisition, I had to start with English alphabet , letter and sound recognition, basic numbers, days of the week, colors and shapes during our initial ESL instruction. Alex was showing an improvement, but his parents perceived it as a slow progress. Mr. and Mrs. Peters expressed those concerns at parent conferences. Alex's disadvantage was that he did not understand the concept of decoding sounds while reading short words. Alex was supposed to start 1st grade in Russia, where he would be introduced to the Russian alphabet and the concept of reading. However, due to his fall adoption he did not begin attending his 1st year in Russian school. Mrs. Peters explained:

> He would have started the school. When we were doing the adoption, he actually would have been ….gone to a boarding [Russian] school that fall but because of the adoption everything was in place. They [Russian administrators] kind of held everything up or they [Alex and Katya] would have been separated; and because they [Russian administrators] knew that we

were going to be one of the first families to come over, he [Alex] was held from going anywhere…so that we could come out and do everything together.

As a result, Alex's first school experience started in U.S. public school. During our interview, Alex stated that when he arrived, the only English word he knew was "hot dog" because that was his favorite food. At the beginning it was difficult to communicate with his new parents. Alex stated, "When Katya and I wanted to eat food, we didn't know what to say so we did this [mimes he wants to eat and points at food]." Although the Peters learned basic Russian words such as "eat, drink, water, bath, sleep" to help them with the language barrier, it was not enough so they used gestures. Alex recalled that the first English words he acquired were for toys and food.

When Alex began attending his 1st grade, he admitted that he was "scared" and that the first days were "hard" since he "just wanted to sit because he was nervous." As for the school work, Alex remembered, that the teacher gave him "small kindergarten things to do like copy words and stuff." Alex had friends who helped him during the class. He said, "I remember one time when I was …like … counting. My teacher gave me a small work. I couldn't get to the next number so my friend helped me." Alex mentioned three classmates who remained his friends over the years and who think it is "cool" that Alex was born in Russia.

The parents believed that everyone was very nice to Alex and Katya when they began attending the public school. Mrs. Peters stated, " He [Alex] was very well received in 1st grade. They were very good about when it was time for lunch…taking him to cafeteria. So the kids…hmm…it was something new for them." Mr. Peters added, "He was like a token…very popular." When I asked Alex if he felt popular his first year in school, he replied

"No." I wanted to know why and he explained, "Because I was scared and I could not make friends." Alex stated that the situation got better "when it was almost at the end of the year [first grade]" because he was able to make friends. Understandably, it must have been very difficult for him since no teachers or students in the school spoke Russian. I believe I was the only one who could communicate with him in Russian. During my instructional ESL time, I spoke English to my ESL students, but I used Russian to give Alex directions, comment on his behavior or listen to his needs. I found it helpful especially in the early stages of his language acquisition.

Alex began his 1st grade in November; therefore, he missed the first quarter of the school year when the children got familiar with each other and the teacher reviewed the basics of kindergarten curriculum before moving onto the 1st grade curriculum. In November Alex was immediately enrolled into the ESL program for 9 instructional hours per week. During the 1st grade, there were several meetings with the Peters and teachers regarding Alex's progress. The 1st grade teacher who had been teaching for at least 20 years admitted that she did not know what to do with Alex because she had never had an ESL student. As Alex's ESL teacher, I came to observe her classes and made a couple of suggestions. In spite of my observations, I still felt like most work was on my shoulders. I spent extra time with Alex after ESL classes (when children had free time and waited for their buses). We typically practiced reading and writing high-frequency words so that Alex would catch up with his classmates. The ESL report card shows that by the end of the school year, Alex learned how to name classroom objects, shapes, colors, numbers, body parts, animals, the letters of alphabet and how to write some frequency words. Alex progressed from Preproduction stage

to Early Production stage. However, his English skills were still limited, and it took Alex 3 years to be mainstreamed without ESL instruction.

In the second quarter of Alex's 1st grade, Mrs. Peters started looking for a tutor who could speak Russian and help Alex with his school work. After making several phone calls, Mrs. Peters found a "beautiful young lady" who was bilingual because both her parents spoke Russian fluently. This high school student was willing to come every Saturday for an hour and tutor Alex for free. She would focus on reading and writing but she would also explain other things. Mrs. Peters stated, "She helped explain things to him he could not understand, [for example] when he was ready to play baseball [she explained] that he did not bat every time. We could not explain it to him in English; he could not understand that. She explained that to him in Russian and he understood." This 16-year-old tutor enjoyed helping Alex so much that she continued tutoring him for 2 years and then she wrote a graduation project on what it was like to be a tutor. Mrs. Peters said, "She was almost like a family member… He [Alex] was very sad when she left [for college]." Mrs. Peters and I agreed that the tutor had a very positive influence on Alex.

At the end of the 1st grade, Alex was administered the TerraNova standardized test. Although he was exempt from the Reading and Language Arts sections, he had to take the Mathematics section. The results reported that his composite score was 40 out of 100, which was still considered to be on the average level. The TerraNova test distinguishes three major levels: below average, average and above average. Alex did well, scoring better than 40 % of the students in the nation, an accomplishment for an ESL student.

During our interview, we talked about his ESL classes. Alex remembered that he attended ESL for 3 school years. When I asked him what he liked and disliked about ESL, he

replied, “I don’t know about bad things because I liked everything. [I liked] nice teachers when I first went to ESL, nice kids.” Having taught Alex, I noticed that his ESL classmates accepted him well and admired his excellent drawing skills. When learning English, Alex admitted that saying and writing words and sentences were the most difficult for him. I asked him about reading and he thought it was difficult too. He said, “It was hard when I came to America.” Although Alex struggled with reading and writing, he excelled in handwriting. His mother pointed out, “His handwriting is beautiful. The teacher showed the other kids that this is what handwriting should look like.” His outstanding drawing skills seemed to help him to excel in handwriting. Appreciation of his drawing and handwriting skills helped Alex’s self-confidence in the insecure environment of the U.S. school during his 1st grade.

In the 2nd grade, Alex attended ESL classes for 6 instructional hours a week with Mrs. Pinto who documented his improvement on the ESL report cards. Alex’s biggest improvement was in reading aloud fluently; however, he still struggled with reading comprehension. His mother said:

> He reads it, Daniela, …but he does not fully comprehend it. He is very good with math but when it is a reading math, a mathematical problem, the teacher pointed out the difference. He can do the same ones if they are lined up, no problem, but to read it and go through it, figure out what to subtract and what to add he struggles with that.

Alex’s reading comprehension difficulties became apparent also during the standardized tests such as TerraNova and PSSA. At the end of the 2nd grade, Alex took two standardized tests: the SELP and TerraNova. Alex scored a total of 81 points out of a maximum number of 102 points at the SELP test. This placed him at the high intermediate

level of English, which was good considering that Alex had been attending school in the United States for only 2 years. The SELP test result reported that his weakest section was reading (basic level) and his best sections were listening and speaking (proficient level). When Alex took the Terra Nova test consisting of Reading, Language Arts and Math sections, his results showed that he had the most difficulties with reading comprehension. His scores were as follows: Reading composite – 54 % (reading 32, vocabulary 67), Language- 64 % and Math Composite- 72 %. The total test score was 56 % which remained in the average level. Although Alex attended the Title I Reading program in his 2nd grade, it was apparent from the test result that Alex needed more help with reading; therefore, he was enrolled in the Title I Reading program and after school tutoring in the 3rd grade as well. The Title I Reading Program is specifically designed for struggling readers with low test scores. The reading teacher focuses on teaching helpful reading strategies to improve students' decoding and comprehension skills.

During our interview, Alex shared with me that in the 2nd grade he developed an interest for science, which became his favorite subject. This is a portion of our interview:

Daniela: Ok. Very good. Tell me about your school, Alex. What subjects do you like best?

Alex: There are so many.

Daniela: There are so many. Well, tell me about all of them.

Alex: Actually, I like science the most.

Daniela: Why do you like science?

Alex: Because when I went to second grade uh… in first grade I didn't know science… in second, when I first learned about science I got interested.

Daniela: Uh-hmm.

Alex: And they said a lot of planets. Pluto, Mars, Jupiter and other stuff.

Daniela: Oh, that is interesting.

Alex: Yeah. And they showed constellations… like… to make stuff with stars…and I remember one part that I read … some people when they get lost they use the stars.

Daniela: Uh-huh. That's right. So you like stars.

Alex: Uh-huh.

Daniela: And planets, right? So it's not hard for you to read science books?

Alex: No. Sometimes they have hard words so I ask the teacher.

I was glad to hear Alex became interested in science because I knew it would help him with his academics. When I observed Alex in his 5th grade, I noticed that his interest for astronomy continued. He was reading a science book about stars and constellations during his free time, which included advanced scientific vocabulary.

In 3rd grade, Alex attended ESL classes for only 3 instructional hours a week with Mrs. Pinto. Since Alex needed more help with reading comprehension, he was again enrolled into the Title I Reading Program to improve his reading skills. His 3rd grade report card revealed that Alex received a D grade from reading during the first quarter. He worked to improve and his grades shifted to C. His grades from other subjects were average: Mathematic C+, Spelling B+ and Language Arts C+. It was not clear from the report card whether the teacher used modifications for Alex but based on his test results it was evident that he struggled with his academic classes due to his limited English.

Looking at the test results of the PSSA test, I was surprised that Alex scored at the Below Basic Performance Level in Reading section and at the Proficient Performance Level in the Mathematics section. The Below Basic Performance Level is the lowest level on the PSSA test and it is described as follows:

> Inadequate academic performance that indicates little understanding and minimal display of the skills included in Pennsylvania's Academic Content Standards. There is a major need for additional instructional opportunities and/or increased student academic commitment to achieve the Proficient Level (PSSA report, 2008)

In his reading score, Alex achieved only 17 points out of 34 maximum points (50%) in the subcategory *Comprehension and Reading Skills* and 5 points out of 12 maximum points (42%) in the subcategory called *Interpretation and Analysis of Fiction and Nonfiction Text*. When students achieve a low score in a particular subcategory, the Pennsylvania Parent Report offers parents suggestions how their child could improve. In Alex's case it suggested two activities. The first activity was called *Explore the Library* and suggested that parents take their child to a library once a month and choose a different type of book (fiction, biography) each time so that the child would learn about various elements in these types of books. The second activity was called *Recognizing Rhyme* and it proposed that parents called their child's attention to poetry and rhyming patterns.

The Peters knew that Alex needed help with reading; therefore, they enrolled him into a summer tutoring program at a local college where he received extra help from a reading specialist. The summer reading program proved to be beneficial to Alex because his 4$^{th}$ grade report card showed a significant improvement in reading. However, Alex's math grades went

down. Alex obtained a general average B from reading and C+ from math at the end of the school year.

In 4th grade Alex did not attend ESL classes and the Title I Reading Program. Since he passed the IPT Reading and Writing tests for ESL students at the beginning of his 4th grade, Alex was exited out of the ESL program. Regarding the Title I Reading Program, a majority of public schools sponsor this program only until the 3rd grade. Alex was no longer eligible for this Title I Reading program because he was attending a 4th grade.

In spite of the fact that Alex did not receive any more support services, his reading skills were flourishing. The Pennsylvania Parent Report showed great improvement between 3rd and 4th grades. Alex scored at the Proficient Performance Level with both reading subcategories at the target range meaning that his reading and language arts skills were at the 4th grade level. Although he did extremely well in the Reading section, he achieved only the Basic level in the Mathematics section (unlike in his 3rd grade when he scored proficient in math on the PSSA test). The Pennsylvania Parent Report describes the Basic Performance Level on the PSSA test as follows:

> Marginal academic performance, work approaching, but not yet reaching, satisfactory performance. Performance indicates a partial understanding and limited display of the skills included in the Pennsylvania's Academic Content Standards, and the student may need additional instructional opportunities and/or increased academic commitment to achieve the Proficient Level (PSSA report, 2008).

The PSSA test result reported that Alex's weak topics were algebraic concepts and geometry. Since Alex was exited out of ESL program and scored proficient in reading,

perhaps his lower score in PSSA Math section was not caused by his language barrier but by a lack of comprehending mathematical concepts.

At the time of my study Alex was 12 years old and attended 5th grade. I observed him once during the second quarter and once during the third quarter of the school year. During my observations I noticed that Alex sat close to the teacher's desk, which was a good spot for him in case he needed help. Alex was well behaved and participated actively in the lessons.

In English class, the students studied linking verbs, direct objects and indirect objects. While discussing a particular sentence, a teacher asked the class what the word "trotted" meant. Alex raised his hand and said that it meant "walk around". The teacher paused and then explained that it was "more like run slowly." It seemed that Alex was able to guess the meaning of the word "trotted" in the context but did not know the exact meaning of the word. Throughout the class Alex did well on the written exercises because he had time to think about them. However, when Alex was asked what the past tense of the word "teach" was, he replied "teached." When the teacher gave him a sentence "Mr. M. teached us English," Alex soon realized his mistake and corrected himself using the word "taught." From my teaching experience, I noticed that the irregular verbs can be difficult for ESL students to acquire because they have to memorize them.

During reading class, students were reading out loud about Martin Luther King. When it was his turn to read, Alex read fluently. He only stuttered on the words "segregation" and "pastor." As I listened to Alex's reading, I noticed his slight difficulty with the sound "l" and "r". I recommended Alex for speech therapy when he was back in 1st grade because he had a hard time pronouncing these particular sounds in Russian. I was under the assumption that he attended speech therapy classes in his 2nd grade, but the

interview with Mrs. Peters revealed that he was never enrolled for long term therapy. Mrs. Peters explained:

> He never had a speech therapy. He was checked in 2nd and 3rd grade by the speech teacher who said that he did not need speech therapy. He was checked in 2nd and in 3rd [grades] when we were so concerned. She checked him and she did a little bit of an assessment but again she said that he did not have speech problems. Michael [Mr. Peters] and I feel that he has some speech issues. She [the school speech therapist] feels it is a cultural thing…And even still we question it because his speech is not clear. We are very concerned and we've gone to the school and we requested that his speech be checked and they were annoyed the second time because he was already checked and he was fine. And I said, 'but he does not speak properly.' And I don't know, first they said it might be habit or cultural. I think there is something that is being missed. Alex has a problem with "l" and I think "r."

I was disappointed to hear that Alex never received the proper help he was eligible for. Knowing Alex's background, I knew his speech impediment was not cultural because he had problems with the particular sounds in his native language as well as English. Taking in consideration that Alex became monolingual and still struggled with pronunciation of the sounds "l" and "r," I suggested to the parents to pursue the speech therapy at a local speech clinic.

During my first observation, I had access to Alex's grades from the second quarter of his 5th grade. Although he improved his grades from the first quarter, the majority of his

grades was still average. He received 85 average from reading, 75 from social studies, 78 from English, and 77 from math.

When I observed Alex for the second time (the fourth quarter) , I immediately noticed his new hairstyle and could not stop thinking about how much he grew and changed since I first met him 5 years ago. He looked like a young man who cared about his appearance.

During English class, students reviewed homophones and homographs. First they checked their homework. Alex had his homework ready and responded correctly to all the questions. Then the students took a spelling test on the homophones that were placed in the context. Some of the words were "mail, male, waist, waste, pane, pain, foul, fowl" etc. Alex had 16 correct words out of 20, which is 80 %. Looking at his spelling grades, the majority were in the range between 80 and 100, which I considered to be a success for Alex.

At the end of English class, students were allowed to read a book of their choice. Alex took out his book *Meteors and Meteorites: An Introduction to Meteoritics* by David C. Knight and scanned a few pages. This was challenging for a 5th grader because of the scientific vocabulary, but Alex was reading it and pursuing his interest in space and planets. According to Roit (2006), the key to successful reading comprehension is student engagement. She states:

> When students are genuinely engaged in the comprehension process, not only are they learning about strategies and using them intentionally to make sense of text, but they are also continually using language, learning vocabulary, sharing experiences, discussing text, collaboratively solving problems, elaborating on ideas, and engaging in meaningful conversations (p.80)

Alex's engagement in reading books helped him improve his reading comprehension, which was visible on his reading test results.

Based on my observations and the test results, I concluded that Alex was well adjusted in his school. He had friends and enjoyed learning about new things, especially in science. He actively participated in classes, completed his homework and was motivated to improve his grades. I believe his parents played a significant role in his schoolwork because they checked his tests and helped him when he struggled with reading and math.

Table 10 *Table of Alex Peters' Academic Progress*

| Alex George Peters | ESL Services | SELP test (April) | PSSA (March) | TerraNova (April) | SLA stages |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1st grade 2003-04 | 9 hours per week | x | x | Average in Math, exempt from Language Arts | Preproduction, Early Production |
| 2nd grade 2004-05 | 6 hours per week | Intermediate Level | x | Average in Math, Average in Language Arts | Speech Emergence, Intermediate Fluency |
| 3rd grade 2005-06 | 3 hours per week | x | Below Basic in Reading, Proficient in Math | x | Intermediate Fluency |
| 4th grade 2006-07 | x | x | Proficient in Reading, Basic in Math | x | Advanced Fluency |
| 5th grade 2007-08 | x | x | x | x | Advanced Fluency |

It was clear that Alex received enough instructional support to acquire academic English on his grade level. Attending the ESL program for 3 years helped him achieve conversational English (BICS), improve his academic English and prepare him for mainstream classes. Summer and after school tutoring played a major role in speeding his academic progress, especially in reading. As school materials became more difficult, Alex might have needed more assistance from his classroom teachers and parents, but overall he was able to succeed in the mainstream classroom.

*L1 Maintenance of Alex George Peters*

Considering his good adjustment in his new family and U.S. school system, I was curious about the retention of his native language. Alex was adopted very young at the age of 7 and did not acquire any Russian literacy skills; therefore, I was not surprised to find out that he did not speak Russian anymore. When I asked him simple questions in Russian (What is your name?, How old are you? Do you understand?), Alex did not understand what I was saying and could not answer my questions. Since he did not comprehend the Russian spoken language, I wanted to know if there were any Russian words he still recalled.

Daniela: Ok, what can you tell me in Russian? Do you remember any words?

Alex: Yeah.

Daniela: What do you remember?

Alex: “Spat” means sleep, “dovidjania” means “good-bye”.

Daniela: Very good.

Alex: “Privet” means “hello”.

Daniela: Uh-hmm.

Alex: And ….uh ….

Daniela: How about "drink"?

Alex: No response.

Father: "Gusat" and ….?

Alex: "Pit" (drink)

Daniela: Right. And do you remember "bath"?

Alex: [No response].

Daniela: "Vana", right?

Mother: How about "thank you"?

V: Spasiba (thank you).

These Russian words were the same words that his younger sister Katya remembered. These words stayed fresh in the children's minds due to the fact that the Peters learned them in Russian and used them frequently at home.

Lastly, I wanted to find out what memories Alex had on his life in Russia. When I asked him, "What was it like?" Alex briefly replied, "Not good." I inquired why it was not good but Alex said, "I don't want to tell you." Seeing that he was apprehensive to share with me his sad memories, I did not pursue the topic. Later Alex mentioned that he had an orphanage friend that he liked and used to play with him.

After the interview, Alex drew a picture of him and his U.S. friends playing baseball by the school during the recess (see appendix p. 232). This colorful picture portrayed a peaceful and happy atmosphere of boys playing a popular sport in the United States. It was evident that Alex became fully mainstreamed in U.S. society.

*Second Language Acquisition of Katya Hope Peters*

Katya, Alex's younger sister, was 4 years old when she was adopted in 2003, and soon after her arrival into the United States, Katya entered preschool at a local YMCA. At that time Katya was at the Preproduction stage. She did not know any English words and understood only gestures. During the time spent in preschool (November 2003- August 2004), Katya was completely immersed in the English spoken environment and was able to acquire key words and familiar phrases thus transitioning into the Early Production stage of her English language.

I asked Mrs. Peters when their children began to use English, and she described the process of transitioning from one language to another as follows:

> … they spoke Russian normally when they were here for the [first] month in summer. And then when they first went to school, they still spoke Russian quite a bit. Then once he [Alex] started using some more English, their conversations were English [based] than they were Russian based.

Katya described her experience by saying, "sometimes I hear my brother speak English and then I started to say English." It appeared that Katya was learning English not only from her parents and children in the preschool but also from her biological brother who was transitioning his speech from Russian to English.

In August 2004, Katya was registered in the public school. She was 5 years old and started kindergarten. At that time, Katya was also tested for ESL services. Working as an ESL teacher, I tested her speaking skills using the IPT test (Idea Proficiency Test) in September 2004. The test result showed that Katya's speaking skills were rather limited. Even though she knew meanings of many words (clock, rabbit, apples, nurse, jacket etc.),

Katya was not able to repeat sentences correctly and she was not able to answer comprehension questions about a story that was read to her. She was still at the Early Production stage at the beginning of kindergarten.

As a limited speaker, Katya was recommended to receive 6 ESL instructional hours per week. Katya's ESL teacher was Mrs. Pinto who followed the kindergarten curriculum with a special focus on vocabulary development, letters and number recognition. After attending ESL classes and mainstream classes for one school year, Katya was able to progress through two language developmental stages, the Early Production and the Speech Emergence stages. At the end of her kindergarten, Katya took the SELP test and scored at the Intermediate proficiency level. The test results indicated that Katya achieved the Proficient Level in the Listening and Speaking sections; however, her literacy skills (reading and writing) were still at the Basic Level. In spite of this fact, Katya's ESL teacher, Mrs. Pinto, decided to exit Katya out of the ESL program due to her improvement..

However, the second standardized test, the TerraNova, showed Katya scored poorly in her first year of kindergarten. The percentile scale showed that she scored 5 % in the Reading section, 7 % in the Language section and 6 % in the Math section of the test. Based on these test results, the kindergarten teacher was concerned about Katya's weak literacy skills; therefore, Katya was recommended for a transitional kindergarten in order to be better prepared for a 1$^{st}$ grade. Her parents agreed to have Katya repeat the kindergarten curriculum by attending the transitional kindergarten. This decision proved to be the right one for Katya since she made a tremendous progress during her next school year.

In the transitional kindergarten, Katya was able to improve her reading and writing skills as well as her math skills. She also made new friendships that continued into the next

grades. Katya said, “I met Madison, Abbey and Eric,” and they remained her friends. When asked who helped her with English at home, Katya replied, “My mommy and daddy.”

The comparison of the TerraNova test results between the year 2005 (the kindergarten) and the year 2006 (the transitional kindergarten) showed that Katya had improved significantly. The 2006 TerraNova kindergarten test results reported that Katya scored 90 % in the Reading section (85 % improvement) , 99 % in the Language section (92 % improvement) and 97 % in the Math section (91 % improvement). At this point, Katya was academically prepared for 1st grade.

During 1st grade, Katya did very well. Based on her report cards and the standardized tests, Katya did better in math than in reading. Her math total composite was 68 % and her Language Arts/Reading composite was 66 % on the 2007 TerraNova test, which is considered to be on the average level. The test results also showed that Katya’s weakness was vocabulary recognition in the text. Her percentile was only 38, which was below the test average.

During the school year 2007-08, Katya was attending 2nd grade and doing fine. When I observed Katya in her classroom, it was on Friday. Typically, students had spelling tests on Friday. Before the spelling tests, the students warmed up by reviewing the spelling words and then took the test. The spelling test included the following words: littlest, even, wood, stood, bigger, become, took, shook, book and hood. Katya had all spelling words correct and received 100 on the test. After the spelling test, the students had a dictation using the spelling words in sentences. The dictation consisted of the following sentences:

1. He took the book home.
2. Put your hood up.

3. He shook the wood.

4. Mom stood in line.

5. Two is an even number.

6. That cat is bigger than mine.

7. She is the littlest one.

8. A puppy will become a dog.

Katya misspelled only one word in this dictation. Instead of writing “mine”, she wrote “maine”. After the dictation, the students reviewed the subjects of sentences that were written on the board. The teacher wanted to know a subject in the sentence “The spelling test is today.” Katya replied that the subject is “today”. Since it was incorrect, the teacher asked her, “What is today?” and Katya answered, “spelling test.” Rephrasing the question helped Katya realize her mistake. After the short review, the students had to copy the following sentences from the board and circle subjects in these sentences:

1. Three friends went to play.

2. The play was about a girl.

3. She went to a house.

4. Three bears lived there.

5. Three chairs were in the room.

Katya had one mistake in this exercise. In the second sentence, she circled “a girl” as a subject instead of “play.” During this exercise, I noticed that a lot of students struggled with identifying subjects of the given sentences.

The next topic in the language class was reviewing syllables. The students had to identify the number of syllables in these words: bubbles, tadpole, even, decide, chirpy,

beautiful. Katya had only one mistake. She wrote the word "beautiful" has only two syllables instead of three. During handwriting class, Katya did very well practicing the letter "k" and letter "h". However, in math class, she truly struggled with odd and even numbers. It seemed that she had not grasped the concept of even and odd numbers at all.

After the math class the 2nd grade students moved on to the reading. The students read a story *A Folk Hero* about Paul Bunyan. Katya read out loud fluently and completed all the comprehension questions correctly. When working on her phonics, Katya was able to work independently and follow teacher's directions.

The next time I observed Katya, the 2nd grade students were studying basic fractions in their math class. The teacher reviewed the concepts with the students and then they had a small quiz. Katya was able to complete the test successfully with only one mistake. After the math class, the students had a spelling test and Katya did extremely well. She received 100 % on her spelling test and was very happy about it.

During my observations, I noticed that Katya was still small among her classmates, regarding the fact that she was a year older than the majority of her peers. The interview with parents unveiled that Katya was malnutritioned by her biological parents in Russia and had to be taken into the hospital. After her hospitalization, she was transferred to an orphanage. The lack of nutrition in Russia seemed to contribute to her small size.

The 2nd grade classroom teacher mentioned that Katya was an average student in reading and below average in math. I found out that Katya's parents hired a math tutor because she struggled with adding and subtracting money. The teacher stated she noticed an improvement after Katya's math tutor started working with her. The classroom teacher also expressed an opinion that the TerraNova tests were rather challenging for students. Given the

fact that the TerraNova tests were administered in April instead of May (like it used to be), the students did not have a chance to master all the academic skills.Overall, Katya seemed to be happy among her peers and well adjusted in her school environment. She was able to follow the teacher's instruction and participated actively in her classes. It was apparent that there were no traces of a language barrier and Russian accent. The interview data and test results proved that Katya became a monolingual child who had a little recollection of her native language and culture. There was no connection between Katya's difficulties with math and her second language acquisition since she was monolingual. Katya mastered English literacy skills on the 2nd grade level and her struggles with math were not any different from those of native speakers.

*Table 11 Table of Katya Peters' Academic Progress*

| Katya Hope Peters | ESL services | SELP test (April) | PSSA | TerraNova (April) | SLA stages |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Preschool 2003-04 | x | x | x | X | Preproduction, Early Production |
| Kindergarten 2004-05 | 6 hours per week | Intermediate Proficiency | x | Below average in Math, Below average in Language Arts | Speech Emergence, Intermediate Fluency |
| Transitional kindergarten 2005-06 | Exited out of ESL | x | x | Above average in Math, Above average in Language Arts | Intermediate Fluency, Advanced Fluency |
| 1st grade 2006-07 | x | x | x | Average in Math, Average in Language Arts | Advanced Fluency |
| 2nd grade 2007-08 | x | x | x | x | Advanced Fluency |

The summary of Katya's data show that she attended ESL program for only one school year, which seemed to be insufficient. I would have disagreed with the ESL teacher's decision to exit Katya out of the ESL program because the standardized tests showed that her literacy skills were not on the grade level. In spite of the lack of ESL instruction, Katya was able to acquire her academic English and literacy skills during the transitional kindergarten where she had a lot of repetition and effective instruction. At the time of the study, Katya was doing well academically in her 2nd grade mainstream classes and seemed to be well adjusted.

### *L1 Maintenance of Katya Hope Peters*

During our interview, I asked 8-year-old Katya if there was anyone she could talk to in Russian. She replied, "I can talk to my mom and dad." However, when I asked her simple questions in Russian, Katya was not able to reply, which proved that after 5 years of living in the United States she had forgotten her native language. I asked her the following questions in Russian: "What is your name?, How old are you?, Where do you live? Do you understand?" Katya did not understand these Russian questions and was not able to answer them at all. Therefore, I asked her if there were any Russian words she could remember and Katya was able to recall these Russian words: "privet" (hello), "spat" (sleep), "vana" (bath), "gusit" (eat), "pit" (drink), and "katchelis" (swings). These words were frequently used at the Peters' household during the first year before Katya and Alex learned the English vocabulary. In addition, Mr. and Mrs. Peters knew these Russian words and used them to communicate with their children.

When I asked Katya if her classmates knew that she was from a different country, she replied, "They don't know. I keep it my little secret." However, her mother said that some of

her friends knew that Katya was from Russia. Given the fact that Katya came to the United States at the age of 4, she acquired the English language faster than her brother, and her pronunciation did not have any patterns of a Russian accent. She blended right in her class. The only difference between her and her peers was Katya's Russian name which was not changed by her adoptive parents. She was given the middle name "Hope" and last name "Peters."

When Katya left her Russian orphanage, she could not bring any Russian toys, books or CDs with her because those things belonged to the orphanage. Mrs. Peters stated that Katya only had clothing and a few personal things. The Peters took several photographs while visiting Russia and bought Russian souvenirs for their adoptive children. Mrs. Peters stated that she would give them those souvenirs when Alex and Katya were older. Mrs. Peters said that they kept some pictures from Russia on their fridge in the kitchen. They also tried to talk about their memories and experiences. In addition, Mrs. Peters shared with me that she kept a journal about how the children were adopted . She mentioned she would like to give the journal to Katya and Alex when they are older.

Although Katya was adopted together with her biological brother, the preservation of their native language was not successful due to their very young age. Both Katya and Alex did not experience Russian schooling because they were adopted before the starting age. As a result, Katya and Alex could not preserve their Russian language by reading books or writing letters. The spoken Russian language also disappeared from their speech because both children were fully mainstreamed in an English only environment with no contact of Russian. In spite of this fact, the children kept their Russian names and their parents were open to talk to them about their life in Russia and adoption process.

## Conclusion

The detailed summaries of participants' interviews, standardized tests, essays and other artifacts paint a complex picture of how these international adoptees developed their cultural identity, acquired English as a second language and maintained Russian as their first language. In the next chapter, I compare the differences among the participants' experiences and analyze the findings of the research.

# CHAPTER SIX

# CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

## Conclusions

It has been 4 years since I became interested in the topic of international adoptees and their second language acquisition. I conducted two preliminary studies (DiGregorio 2005, 2006) on this topic before I started writing my dissertation. I believe those two studies prepared me well for carrying out this dissertation research. At the beginning point of the study, I developed broad research questions which I have refined as I conducted my interviews, observations and artifact analysis. Now I come to revisit these research questions in order to provide comparative conclusions and analysis of my research findings.

### *The Process of Second Language Acquisition*

The first research question focused on how the six particular international adoptees experienced their second language acquisition. When I was formulating my study design, I put a major emphasis on the interviews with the participants and their parents; however, soon I realized that I needed other indicators of students' language progress. Therefore, I implemented evaluations of standardized test results and classroom observations into my research methodology. Considering the interview and observation findings as well as the analysis of standardized tests and other informal artifacts (photos, books, CDs), I was able to focus on answering the first research question:

1. How do these IA children experience and perceive second language acquisition?
    a) Does the process of SLA differ between these younger and older IA children? If so, how?

b) What challenges have they faced in the process of SLA?

Looking at the overall findings of all six participants, it is evident that these international adoptees like any other English language learners go through the same stages of second language acquisition. Krashen & Terrell (1983) proposed five major stages with approximate time frames: Preproduction Stage (0-6 months), Early Production (6 months-1 year), Speech Emergence (1-3 years), Intermediate Fluency (3-5 years) and Advanced Fluency (5-7 years). Although these international adoptees experienced all five stages of second language acquisition, the time frames of the stages became significantly different than what Krashen & Terrell proposed. The standardized tests, essays and interviews indicated that all six international adoptees acquired their English at a much faster speed.

For example, Alyona Walker, the oldest participant in my study, progressed through the beginning four stages in only 2 years of living in the U.S. (instead of the suggested 3 to 5 years) and the next 3 years she spent improving her academic English literacy skills, which would fall into the last stage of Advanced Fluency (suggested 5 to 7 years). The other 5 participants needed only 3 years (instead of three to five years) to exit ESL programs and to become independent learners in their mainstream classes. Five years after their adoption, all participants reached near-native levels of speech (Advanced Fluency) and developed sufficient literacy skills to succeed in the U.S. education system.

Considering the differences between my findings and the Krashen & Terrell (1983) research, I needed to ask what factors contributed to such a quick language acquisition. One of the major factors is the complete immersion into an English only speaking environment of the adoptive family and school setting. According to the bilingual psychologist Boris Gindis (2009), internationally adopted children acquire English faster than immigrant children from

bilingual families because they need English for survival. They need to express their basic needs on one side, and on the other side, they want to be accepted by their adoptive (typically monolingual) parents; therefore, they have no other choices than start learning English vocabulary, which can be very frustrating and intimidating, especially at the beginning stages of living in a new country.

During our interviews, my participants shared with me their challenges or I would notice them when conducting observations. For example, Alyona stated that she was so tired during her first school year that she would fall asleep in her English class and the teacher ended up "yelling" at her. Alice mentioned that she felt awkward because she did not understand her teachers, and all the students were ahead of her. Valerie remembered how confused and stuck between the two languages she would get, and instead of speaking English, she would start answering her teachers in Russian. Similarly, Hoffman (1989) described how stuck and torn she was between her native language (Polish) and English when she started to write her diary after her family immigrated to Canada.

Another participant, Meredith, dealt with frustration by giving up in her classes or by crying when she felt too overwhelmed. Alex felt as an outcast because he could not make any friends at the beginning of the school year. These are only few examples of the difficulties that my participants were willing to share with me. It can be assumed that they experienced many more struggles that were not discussed during the process of second language acquisition and cultural adaptation.

In spite of these struggles, it is apparent that IA children manage to acquire speaking and listening skills very quickly. Gindis (2009) states that other factor contributing to fast SLA of IA children is the fact that adoptive parents become role models of acceptable

English language and take extra initiative to teach their IA children new vocabulary, correct grammar and pronunciation. The interviews confirm that many parents in this study took such an initiative. For example, Ms. Walker made Alyona use newly learned vocabulary when speaking, which helped her practice English and contributed to effective retention of such vocabulary. Mr. Smith, on the other side, admitted that he helped Valerie and Alice with their homework, especially during the first year of their schooling. His patient explanations and repetitions of the topics added to his daughters' better understanding of the school topics. In addition, most of the adoptive parents in this study looked for tutors or tutoring programs that would provide necessary assistance with children's literacy skills, especially reading comprehension and math.

*Pronunciation*

Regarding the second language acquisition and differences between younger and older IA children, my findings indicate several differences among the six participants. The first noticeable difference is the presence of a Russian accent in these IA children's spoken English.

Alyona Walker who was adopted at the age of 14 has the strongest accent out of the 6 studied participants. During our interviews and when transcribing her information from a tape, I noticed that she placed stress on incorrect syllables or confused the pronunciation of long and short vowels. The most noticeable words that Alyona mispronounced were Russia /ra:sha/, ketchup /kaetchap/ or snickers /sni:kers/. It appeared that she was transferring Russian pronunciation rules into her English. Although she seemed to have the strongest accent among the six participants, her speech was easily understood and she was able to communicate successfully in the U.S. society.

The second most noticeable accent was present in Valerie's speech. She arrived into the United States at the age of 12. Similarly to Alyona, Valerie would replace short vowels with long vowels, especially in words with two syllables containing two short vowels. I observed that Valerie pronounced the word "Russia" the same way Alyona did. Valerie was self-conscious about her accent and wanted to sound more American. However, her accent was very slight and did not interfere with understanding her English speech.

When listening to my interview with Alice who was adopted at the age of 11, I did not notice any traces of a foreign accent. Unlike her adoptive sister Valerie, Alice pronounced all the words correctly and did not show any particular patterns of transferring Russian pronunciation into her English speech.

The remaining 3 participants Meredith (arrived when 10 years old), Alex (adopted at the age of 7) and Katya (adopted when 4 years old) showed no traces of a foreign accent. Although Alex had problems with pronouncing sounds "l" and "r," this speech impediment was documented also in his Russian speech; therefore, it was not contributed to learning a second language and it was not considered to be a foreign accent.

According to Gindis (2009), it is very common that IA children acquire the appropriate pronunciation quickly. He states, "Very often after less than a year in the United States the English pronunciation and word usage of international adoptees become almost indistinguishable from their peers who are native speakers. This does not mean that they have sufficient mastery of the more abstract aspects of the English language to do well academically" (Gindis, 2009, p. 2). My findings reveal that Gindis' statement applies mostly to the younger IA children who were adopted before puberty.

In spite of the fact that IA children acquire the English pronunciation quickly, the age factor had an impact on the participant's accent. It is evident that younger IA children (Alice, Meredith, Alex and Katya) were able to accomplish native-like pronunciation while IA teenagers (Valerie and Alyona) had some traces of a Russian accent. The Critical Period Hypothesis proposes that as the brain matures the human language mechanism declines after a certain age (Lenneberg, 1967). The results of Oyama's (1976) case study of 60 Italian immigrants between the ages of 6 to 20 years suggests that those immigrants who began their second language acquisition before age 10 performed native-like accents. Considering acquisition of the English pronunciation, Oyama's study results are similar to my findings. The IA children who were adopted at the age of 11 or earlier have a native-like accent.

*Reading Comprehension*

When analyzing the 6 participants' standardized test results, it became obvious that all of them acquired their English listening and speaking skills much faster than their reading and writing skills. Gindis (2009a) points out that this is typical for IA children because their monolingual adoptive parents provide extensive support for development of the listening and speaking skills. Since the standardized tests used in Pennsylvania public schools (PSSA and TerraNova tests) put emphasis on reading comprehension, the test results used in this study disclosed that five out of six participants struggled with reading comprehension during their process of second language acquisition. Valerie Smith was the only participant who swiftly transitioned from reading in Russian to successfully reading in English. After 3 years of schooling in the United States, she was able to score proficient on the PSSA tests in her 7$^{th}$ and 8$^{th}$ grades. The proficient score indicated that she achieved the grade reading level and

minimized the academic gap between her and her classmates. The interviews revealed that Valerie's passion for reading had a positive influence on her English language acquisition.

The researchers in the field of reading agree that successful reading can be accomplished by "balanced interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing skills, thus restoring the simple decoding of text to a more central role and raising doubts about the guessing game metaphor" (Hinkel, 2005, p. 565). In addition, skillful readers can process linguistic forms in print more accurately than less skillful readers (Stanovich, 1980).

With regards to the *bottom-up* reading strategy, a student is expected to decode letters into words and later words into grammatical units which will lead to a text. When analyzing my findings of IA children's processes of SLA, I needed to take in consideration the fact that 2 participants (Alex and Katya) arrived to the United States with no reading skills or knowledge of decoding, while the 4 remaining participants had sufficient reading skills in Russian (3rd and 4th grade reading levels) and good knowledge of the decoding concept. Although Cyrillic is different from the Roman alphabet, there are many similarities between reading in Russian and reading in English. Each letter represents a sound and words are read from left to right in both languages. After initial lessons of Roman alphabet and English phonics, the 4 older participants (Alyona, Alice, Valerie and Meredith) were able to decode English text within less than a year. This decoding skill however did not entail full reading comprehension in English language due to their limited English vocabulary. As these 4 participants acquired English vocabulary, their reading comprehension improved and soon, during the second school year, they were able to progress to a top-down reading strategy where the reader is able to analyze the text using predictions, summaries and applications of prior knowledge.

However, the cases of Alex and Katya are different due to their young age of arrival to the United States. It appears that the experience of learning how to read in a second language was not as traumatic for Katya as it was for Alex. Katya started to attend preschool where she was exposed to the English language and beginning literacy skills (letters and their initial sounds). These beginning literacy skills were reinforced in kindergarten. At the end of kindergarten Katya scored as a fluent English speaker which later contributed to her understanding of decoding concepts and to her acquisition of English phonics. Her reading and writing skills were reinforced in the transitional kindergarten and she became a successful English reader.

Alex, on the other side, was enrolled into the 1st grade with no prior knowledge of the Roman alphabet, decoding skills or English phonics. He did not speak any English and he was literally 6 years behind his U.S. classmates. There was pressure on his teachers, his parents and himself to speed up the process of second language acquisition. As his first ESL teacher, I recall how hard we worked on the Roman alphabet, initial sounds and decoding of the basic sight words. Learning a new language and learning how to read simultaneously was a big endeavor for this 1st grader. Fortunately, his adoptive parents took extra initiative. They found a bilingual tutor and enrolled Alex into summer reading programs which helped him acquire reading skills faster. Although he started to decode the text in 2nd grade, he still struggled with reading comprehension for the next 2 years due to his limited English. With his parents' encouragement and tutoring help, Alex started to enjoy reading science books, which had a positive impact on his attitude towards reading. His reading comprehension improved and he scored proficient on his 4th grade PSSA reading test. However, his 5th grade PSSA test results show that he scored on the basic level, which is below the grade reading

level. Gindis (2009) points out that many children who exited ESL programs may continue to experience academic difficulties and he suggests that they receive remedial services.

In conclusion, the age difference brought certain advantages as well as disadvantages for these IA students. On one side, the young age contributed to the participants' native-like pronunciation and quick acquisition of English vocabulary in their grade level. On the other side, the disadvantage for Alex and Katya was that they had no prior knowledge of literacy skills, unlike the older participants who could transfer their decoding skills and helpful reading strategies into the acquisition of English literacy skills.

The older IA students were accustomed to learning strategies and had a prior knowledge of content based subjects from their schooling in Russia. However, the acquisition of their academic English took longer because of the high standards in the upper grades. The standardized tests show that the older IA participants struggled with the reading comprehension mostly due to the use of complex vocabulary in the textbooks and tests.

### *First Language Maintenance*

The second major question of my study concentrated on the maintenance of the IA children's native language (Russian). By conducting interviews with the participants and by analyzing their speaking and writing skills, I was able to look closely at the processes of their L1 maintenance. The questions I attempted to answer are as follows:

How do these IA children maintain their native language while learning L2?

e) What obstacles do these IA children face in the process of maintaining their L1?

f) What support is provided for maintaining their L1?

g) How do these IA children position themselves in the U.S. society after learning their L2?

h) How do these IA children perceive the process of developing their new identity?

The findings of my study revealed that there are many factors contributing to maintenance as well as attrition of the native language when considering internationally adopted children.

With regards to the overall second language acquisition, Gindis (2009) points out that international adoptees learn English differently than "typical" immigrant English language learners. He calls IA children "circumstantial" bilinguals because usually they are only bilingual for a short period of time. At the beginning, they speak only Russian and within a year they swiftly loose their native language. As a result, they become monolingual again and speak only English. Gindis (1999) admits that there are exceptions. He states that IA adolescents are able to remain bilingual if they were adopted with a sibling and are highly literate in their native language. In addition, Gindis (2009) applies Lambert's additive and subtractive models of second language acquisition when analyzing SLA of IA children. According to Lambert (1990), learners who are adding something new to their L2 learning experience develop additive bilingualism, while learners who undergo first language loss experience subtractive bilingualism. Gindis (2009a) states that IA children typically use the subtractive model of English language learning. They are forced to learn English quickly to survive in the U.S. society and their native language skills diminish rapidly because they do not have use for it.

My study findings show that 5 out of 6 participants experienced subtractive bilingualism when learning English as a second language. Alyona Walker, 19 years old at the

time of this study, was the only participant who experienced additive bilingualism. Throughout the 5 years she lived in the United States and acquired English as a second language, she was able to preserve her Russian speaking, reading and writing skills without any patterns of deterioration. The samples of her Russian and English essays suggested that she was still more comfortable writing in Russian than in English. It appeared that there were several factors contributing to the additive process of her language learning:

1. adoption age - Alyona was adopted at the age of 14 and experienced full language acquisition of the Russian language;
2. high literacy skills in the native language – Alyona had attended Russian schools for 8 years before her adoption, and as an excellent student in Russia, she developed high literacy skills;
3. access to the native language- since Alyona was adopted with another Russian teenager, she was able to use her Russian language at home. In addition, she read Russian books, listened to Russian music and used the Internet to write letters to her Russian biological siblings.

Surrounding herself by her native language, Alyona was able to acquire the English language without jeopardizing her Russian. Unlike many international adoptees, she was adding on a second language, and as a result, she was able to remain bilingual.

Looking at the case of two adoptive sisters, Alice and Valerie, it is evident that they both experienced the process of subtractive bilingualism. Alice, adopted at the age of 11, as well as Valerie, adopted at the age of 12, acquired Russian literacy skills on the 4$^{th}$ grade level before arriving in the United States. Over the period of 5 years of schooling in the U.S. public schools and living in an English speaking family, Alice and Valerie slowly showed

traces of L1 deterioration. Both girls admitted in our interviews that it was getting harder for them to read in Russian because they would confuse Cyrillic and Roman letters. When comparing their Russian and English essays, it was obvious that English became their dominant language. Neither Alice nor Valerie could write a one-page essay in Russian 5 years after their adoption. Their Russian vocabulary became limited and some Russian words were not understandable. In addition, the interviews revealed that Alice and Valerie stopped reading Russian books and focused on English only books so that they could improve their English reading skills and be successful in their studies. Although they still listened to Russian music, spoke Russian occasionally, and treasured their Russian culture, it is clear that the English language became their dominant language and U.S. culture had an impact on their lifestyle.

Meredith Brown arrived to the U.S. at the age of 10 and was the only participant who was not adopted with another Russian sibling. She attended Russian public school for 3 years where she learned how to read and write on the 3rd grade level. However, the full immersion into an English only environment caused Meredith to lose most of her native language within one year. During our interview, Meredith expressed her negative feelings towards Russia, which most likely contributed to the fast attrition of her native language. Meredith and her adoptive mother stated that she did not bring any Russian books or CDs which would remind her of Russian language. At the time of the study (4 years after her arrival), Meredith was not able to understand or speak the Russian language, and her reading and writing Russian skills completely diminished. It is evident that Meredith, who was bilingual for a very short period of time, experienced subtractive bilingualism.

Lastly, Alex and Katya, the youngest participants in this study, are also examples of subtractive bilingualism. Alex, adopted at the age of 7, and Katya, adopted at the age of 4, did not attend schools in Russia due to their young age; therefore, they did not have any reading or writing skills in their native language. As a result, they began learning the Roman alphabet in U.S. schools (instead of the Cyrillic alphabet) and slowly acquired decoding skills as beginning English readers. Although they were able to communicate between one another in Russian the first year of their stay in the United States, their parents stated that they saw a transition into the English language during the first year. In one interview, Katya mentioned that she was learning new English words from her Russian brother Alex, which I found interesting. When I interviewed Alex and Katya (4 years after their adoption), they were not able to understand or speak Russian. They only had a small recollection of frequently used Russian words. The complete immersion into an English only environment and disconnect with the Russian language contributed to the full attrition of their native language.

Overall, the findings of this study revealed that 3 older participants (Alyona, Alice and Valerie) were able to maintain their native language while the younger participants (Meredith, Alex and Katya) lost their Russian completely and became English monolingual. These results correlate with Gindis' statements:

> With international adoptees who are older than 9, physically healthy, have age-appropriate language development and grade-appropriate literacy skills, have positive attitude towards their native language, have an opportunity to use it for practical reasons and receive an encouraging recognition of their special skills from peers- the maintenance and

> development of their native language are possible, and bilingualism is a real option.
>
> External reinforcement of the native language for a child who has negative attitude towards that language, who resents the status of a "foreigner", and who has no need for this language for immediate survival purposes- maybe a recipe for a disaster. The bottom line is that bilingualism is not an option for the majority of international adoptees (Gindis, 2009 b, p. 1).

Since Alyona, Alice and Valerie arrived at an older age (11 years old or above), and had good Russian literacy skills as well as positive attitudes towards their native language and culture, they were able to preserve their Russian language with certain limitations. However, Meredith, who was adopted at the age of 10, and therefore could have had a chance to maintain her native language, was not interested in preserving her Russian culture or language. She had a negative attitude towards her language and did not want to be perceived as a foreigner in the United States. She gladly changed her Russian name into an English name and discontinued any connections with her Russian roots. Alex and Katya, on the other side, were adopted at a very young age by an English only speaking family, which is an indicator that remaining bilingual would be very difficult.

In summary, the age of adoption, length of Russian schooling, access to L1 and motivation to preserve the native language played essential roles in the process of L1 maintenance. With older age and longer exposure to Russian culture and literacy, the chances were higher that IA adolescents would remain motivated to preserve their native language. The interviews disclose that other supporting factors contributing to L1 maintenance were easy access to Russian language (Russian sibling, Internet, friends, music, books) and

encouragement from the adoptive family to embrace their Russian culture. The significant factors that contributed to the attrition of L1 were young age of adoptees, complete immersion into an English only environment, minimal or no access to L1, and adoptee's negative memories of previous life in Russia, which had a negative impact on retention of their Russian language and the Russian culture.

With regard to participants' perceptions of developing their identity and being accepted in the new country, the interviews, observations and participant essays provided necessary information for understanding their situations. Most of the participants of the study stated that the beginnings in the United States were very hard. They felt insecure and intimidated because they did not understand what the teachers or classmates were saying. For example, Meredith remembered how she cried the first days of school because she wanted to be with her adoptive mother. All of the participants (except Katya who was too young to make that identification) expressed an opinion that they felt to be at the margins of the U.S. society the first year after their arrival. Alex said he was sad he could not make friends because he did not speak good English. Valerie explained that the transition was "scary" because she could not understand what anybody was saying, and as a result, she was dependent on the help of her adoptive sister. Alice stated that her U.S. school was harder because people were different. In one of her essays she wrote she did not like when people were judging her by her race, which suggests that Alice experienced some kind of social exclusion. Erikson (1950) points out that young people often exclude those who are different from them such as people of different color or cultural background.

These statements indicate that the beginning transition after their arrival was painful and uneasy. At first, they were not part of the U.S. culture nor any social group due to their

limited English skills.They were confused about what was expected of them. They were not sure how to fit in their new family, new school and new community.

Although the international adoptees perceived their beginnings as very difficult, the adoptive parents who participated in the interviews stated that the school staff and other children were welcoming and supportive of their adoptive children. The parents did not mention any cases of discrimination against their adoptive children. Based on my teaching experience and observations, I noticed that school personnel as well as students were typically more sympathetic with Russian adoptees than with Hispanic immigrant children, especially those of Mexican descent. It appears that there is still a lot of prejudice against Mexican children in the public schools of Northeastern Pennsylvania. Northeastern Pennsylvania became nationally famous due to mayor Lou Barletta of Hazelton who tried to fight against civil and human rights of Hispanic immigrants by enforcing the "Illegal Immigration Relief Act" in the city of Hazelton. This act was supposed to fine landlords who rent to illegal immigrants; however, Hazelton was barred from imposing the act (Massa & Abundis, 2007).

The fact that there is minimal negative publicity regarding Russian immigrants contributes to better acceptance of the international adoptees in the United States. This acceptance had a positive effect on their new identity formation. McKinney (2009) states, "one of the reasons Russia has attracted attention as a source of adoptable children in the industrialized West is that the children are more likely to resemble their adoptive parents than Asian and Latin American children" (p.31). IA children's appearances which are similar to the majority of the white community and their abilities to acquire spoken language quickly help the international adoptees to become part of wider social groups.

All participants said that they made friends who helped them learn the English language and adjust to U.S. culture. For example, Alyona frequently mentioned her friend April who explained English words to her, wrote down school notes for her, and helped her with her homework. Even Alice who had been sensitive to inappropriate comments about her cultural background expressed that she made a lot of friends and that she liked going to school in the United States. Based on the interview results and my observations, it became evident that during the period of 4 to 5 years, all 6 participants adjusted well to the school community and belonged to particular social groups (e.g. classroom, baseball team, soccer team), which contributed to their development of social identities.

Concerning their cultural identities, it is apparent that three younger participants lost touch with their Russian roots. Katya was too small (4 years old) to remember much about her life in Russia. During our interview, her adoptive mother, Mrs. Peters, admitted that Katya's memories blend together because Katya frequently got confused with what happened in Russia and what occurred in the United States. Alex, on the other side, had negative and sad memories about his life in Russia. He experienced living in poor conditions and nearly losing his sister Katya. When his adoptive parents mentioned that they would like to visit Russia again, Alex reminded them that he did not want to see his native country. Meredith, who was adopted at the age of 10, also did not want to have any part in her Russian heritage. She did not miss Russia and was happy to change her Russian name into an English name. She said she was happy to be in the United States.

The fact that these 3 participants were not continuously exposed to Russian language, music, holidays, traditions, and had low motivation to preserve their Russian heritage contributed to their full Americanization. The interviews revealed that these younger

participants were strongly influenced by U.S. food, religion, holidays and lifestyle. It can be concluded that Katya, Alex and Meredith became part of only one culture, which is American.

The 3 older participants, on the other side, seemed to be influenced by both cultures, Russian as well as U.S. culture. Being adopted at a later age, Alice, Valerie and Alyona were exposed to Russian culture for a longer time, which had a significant impact on their identity. Although Alice and Valerie experienced deterioration of their Russian literacy skills, they still tried to preserve their language by speaking it and by listening to Russian music. Both girls expressed in their Russian essays that they missed their friends and that they did not want to forget the Russian language. During our interviews they liked to talk about their life in Russia and were positive about the Russian schools, teachers and people they lived with. In addition, their adoptive parents were encouraging in preserving their Russian heritage. For example, Mrs. Smith took Alice and Valerie to Russia for a visit in spring of 2009. All these factors contributed to the fact that Alice and Valerie remained bicultural. By preserving their Russian heritage and embracing U.S. culture, they had an opportunity to better understand themselves and develop a healthy personal identity.

Concerning Alyona Walker, who was the oldest participant in this study, it is clear that she was influenced by the Russian culture the most. Arriving to the United States at the age of 14, Alyona had a deeply engrained Russian lifestyle. Even 5 years after her adoption, Alyona missed the Russian food, weather and music. She also continued reading Russian books, kept in touch with her biological siblings and friends through the Internet, and tutored other adopted children in speaking Russian. Although Alyona was exposed to U.S. culture and influenced by it, the interviews and observations indicated that she leaned more towards

her Russian heritage . During our interviews, she expressed a strong wish to visit her country and see her biological siblings again. In addition, her complicated and disappointing relationship with her adoptive mother, Ms. Walker, possibly contributed to Alyona's preference for her native country.

Table 12 *Summary Table of Participants' L2 Acquisition and L1 Maintenance*

| International adoptees<br>(A- age at the time of adoption)<br>(S- age at the time of study) | L2 Acquisition | L1 Maintenance |
|---|---|---|
| Alyona Walker<br>(A-14)<br>(S-19) | Received ESL services for 2 school years<br>Reached advanced fluency in about 5 years | Maintained her speaking, reading, and writing skills in Russian<br>Preserved her Russian culture |
| Alice Smith<br>(A-11)<br>(S-16) | Received ESL services for 3 school years<br>Reached advanced fluency in about 4 years | Maintained limited speaking, reading and writing skills in Russian<br>Preserved her Russian culture |
| Valerie Smith<br>(A-12)<br>(S-15) | Received ESL services for 2.5 school years<br>Reached advanced fluency in about 3.5 years | Maintained limited speaking, reading and writing skills in Russian<br>Preserved her Russian culture |
| Meredith Brown<br>(A-10)<br>(S-14) | Received ESL services for 2 school years<br>Reached advanced fluency in about 5 years | Did not maintain Russian language<br>Did not preserve her Russian culture |
| Alex Peters<br>(A-7)<br>(S-12) | Received ESL services for 3 school years<br>Reached advanced fluency in about 4 years | Did not maintain Russian language<br>Did not preserve his Russian culture |
| Katya Peters<br>(A-4)<br>(S-8) | Received ESL services for 1 school year<br>Reached advanced fluency in about 3 years | Did not maintain Russian language<br>Did not preserve her Russian culture |

The table 12 provides the final summary of the participants' L2 language learning and L1 maintenance so that reader could visualize and compare the differences of participants' progress.

## Implications of the Study

The conclusions reviewed the findings of the study and provided a summary about the complex issues international adoptees dealt with after their arrival to the United States. Considering that this study had only 6 participants, the findings are limited in the terms of generalizability. In addition, the results can be understood only in particular situations and with certain populations.

With regard to Russian international adoptees who became members of English monolingual families, the study findings imply that the IA children differ from typical immigrant children whose parents are bilingual. It is evident that the family environment has a significant impact on the IA development of second language acquisition, L1 maintenance and identity development, which needs to be taken under consideration by the school staff. The study results revealed that family literacy and parental continuous support was a key factor in IA child's improvement of the English language.

ESL teachers, especially, should understand that the English only family environment of their IA students contributes extensively to the acquisition of English speaking and listening skills; therefore, they should focus more on instruction of academic English (reading and writing) than social English (speaking and listening), which is already reinforced in the home environment. I agree with Gindis' statement that ESL teachers need to consider not only cognitive language but also language remediation when instructing international adoptees (Gindis, 2009a). Effective language remediation will help the IA

students understand abstract concepts of English vocabulary, and provide them with academic vocabulary that they need in content area subjects.

For guidance counselors and psychologists, on the other side, this study is important due to its descriptions of IA participants' struggles that they had to overcome after their adoption process. The findings show that the transition of leaving a Russian orphanage and moving into a new family that does not speak the child's language can be confusing, painful and frightening. Therefore, these international adoptees might need extra counseling from the school psychologist or guidance counselor with the help of an interpreter. The guidance counselors and psychologists should familiarize themselves with the family situation and the IA student's Russian background to fully understand the child's cultural and social experiences. Gindis (2009a) states that it is possible that due to deprivation and neglect some of the international adoptees might have apparent delays and disorders, which could have an impact on their first and second language acquisition. As a result, these IA children might need more remedial instruction.

Furthermore, the study findings show how age influences a child's first language maintenance and cultural identity, which can be helpful to many adoptive parents as well as school personnel. Based on the results, IA children who were adopted at a very young age or who have developed negative attitude toward their native country should not be pressured to become bilingual in Russian and English. However, older adoptees who are motivated to preserve their cultural heritage should be encouraged to keep up their native language and appreciate their cultural roots.

### *Implications for Future Research*

As I conclude this research, the findings of my study bring more questions that could be answered in future research.

First, this study analyzed interviews, observations, artifacts and standardized tests to triangulate the research findings. Despite the use of various data, it is apparent that standardized tests had a significant role in defining these IA students' progress of second language acquisition. The use of standardized tests is a problematic issue. On one side, researchers justify the "need for measuring student learning on a common standardized metric" (Wang et al., 2006, p. 311) while others question whether the same set of standards should be expected of all students regardless of their disability and social status (Cohen & Rogers, 2000). The future studies should look closely at the problem of high-stake testing of English language learners and propose alternative ways of assessing.

Second, future research may consider examining the acquisition of reading skills of internationally adopted children. The study results showed that a majority of the adoptees struggled with reading comprehension, which also had an impact on their academic skills in other subject areas. It would be helpful for future researchers to consider examining the cause of low reading comprehension and look at the effective teaching strategies that would provide support to international adoptees as well as other immigrant children.

Third, the findings of this study point out that international adoptees acquire English speaking and listening skills faster than other immigrant students in ESL classrooms. Gindis (2009a) suggests that ESL teachers should meet the needs of IA students by focusing their instruction on academic English rather than conversational English. Future studies could

examine the ESL curriculum and propose effective methods for differentiated instruction in order to meet the needs of IA students as well as immigrant students in ESL classrooms.

Next, the issue of additive and subtractive bilingualism could be discussed in a qualitative study with a special focus on the differences between IA adolescents and immigrant adolescents. The questions to be answered should concentrate on the main factors causing additive and subtractive bilingualism. For example, Mendoza- Denton (1999) states that affiliation with a particular cultural identity (e.g. Hispanic culture vs. U.S. culture) has an influence on the L2 acquisition. Future research could examine how cultural affiliation applies to additive/subtractive bilingualism of IA adolescents and compare it to immigrant adolescents.

In addition, it would be interesting to analyze the differences between IA children adopted by monolingual families (English only) and bilingual families. Tershakovec Iskalo (2003) conducted a study of Ukrainian Canadian and U.S. adoptive parents who adopted children from Ukraine. Her study results concluded these parents adopted children from the country of their descent to continue the biological gene and ethnic identity. A comparative study exploring the differences between monolingual and bilingual adoptive families could describe how the family environment impacts the identity construction of international adoptees.

Finally, the findings of this study, though focused on Russian IA children, can be applied in research of second language acquisition of international adoptees from other countries.

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Appendix A

Student Consent Forms

**Document of Informed Consent for Internationally Adopted Young Adults Who Graduated High School (18-21 years old)**

Thank you for your interest in the study I am conducting as part of my doctoral program. I have included the information below to explain the topics and procedures involved in this research study, so that you can make an informed decision about participation in the study.

In this study, I will explore how internationally adopted children from Russia experience the process of learning English as a second language. I plan to interview you together with your family members (parents and/or siblings), discuss some artifacts such as photos, drawings, journals etc., and observe you in your mainstream classes.

Participation in this study will involve:

- approximately one to two hours of your time during our two scheduled interviews to discuss your experiences and perceptions on your learning processes (interviews will be audiotaped),
- discussions of artifacts (photos, drawings, journals, toys, letters etc.) with me and allowing me to copy or take photographs of the artifacts,
- allowing me to make copies of your school standardized tests (e.g. PSSA, IPT, Stanford test etc.) and report cards,
- optional observations of you in the college classroom, which will be confidential (your classmates will not know that you are being observed).

During our interviews, we will discuss your experiences learning English as a second language, adjusting to a U.S. school and maintaining your native language (Russian).

There will be no risks or discomforts in this study. In order to protect your privacy, I will use a pseudonym (a different name) when writing about your experiences.
With your permission, I will audio-tape our interviews and write notes about artifacts you are willing to share with me. I will also take notes during my observations in your classroom. The audio-tapes, transcripts and notes will be securely stored.

Your consent to participate in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time by contacting me. Later withdrawal from the study is also possible and it will not have any impact on you as a former participant. All the information collected about you as a participant will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all the information will

remain strictly confidential. Your identity will be kept secret in any publication of the material generated by this study.

**Investigator:**
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**This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/ 357-7730).**

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM**

I have read and understood the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

**Participant's Name:** (please print) _____

**Participant's Signature:** _____

**Date:** _____ **Phone where you can be reached**: _____

Best days and times to reach you: _____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

**Date:** _____ **Investigator's signature:**_____

**Document of Informed Consent for Internationally Adopted Adolescents Attending High School (13-18 years old)**

Thank you for your interest in the study I am conducting as part of my doctoral program. I have included the information below to explain the topics and procedures involved in this research study, so that you can make an informed decision about participation in the study.

In this study, I will explore how internationally adopted children from Russia experience the process of learning English as a second language. I plan to interview you together with your family members (parents and/or siblings), discuss some artifacts such as photos, drawings, journals etc., and observe you in your mainstream classes.

Participation in this study will involve:

- approximately one to two hours of your time during our two scheduled interviews to discuss your experiences and perceptions on your learning processes,
- discussions of artifacts (photos, drawings, journals, toys, letters etc.) with me and allowing me to copy and photograph the artifacts,
- allowing me to make copies of your school standardized tests (e.g. PSSA, IPT, Stanford etc.) and report cards,
- optional observations of you in the mainstream classroom, which will be confidential (your classmates will not know that you are being observed).

During our interviews, we will discuss your experiences learning English as a second language, adjusting to a U.S. school and maintaining your native language (Russian).

There will be no risks or discomforts in this study. In order to protect your privacy, I will use a pseudonym (a different name) when writing about your experiences.
With your permission (and your parent's permission if you are under 18), I will audio-tape our interviews and write notes about artifacts you are willing to share with me. I will also take notes during my observations in your classroom. The audio-tapes, transcripts and notes will be securely stored.

Your consent to participate in this study is <u>voluntary.</u> You may withdraw from this study at any time by contacting me. Later withdrawal from the study is also possible and it will not have any impact on you as a former participant. All the information collected about you as a participant will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all the information will remain strictly confidential. Your identity will be kept secret in any publication of the material generated by this study.

**Investigator:**
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Ph.D. candidate of English
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**Dissertation Advisor:**
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**This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/ 357-7730).**

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM**

I have read and understood the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

**Participant's Name:** (please print) _____

**Student's signature:** _____

**Parent's signature (subject is 18 or under 18) : _____**

**Date:** _____ **Phone where you can be reached**: _____

Best days and times to reach you: _____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

**Date:** _____ **Investigator's signature:**_____

**Document of Informed Consent for Internationally Adopted Children (8-12 years old)**
**This document will be read out loud to the child and explained as s/he has questions.**

Thank you for your interest in my study about children who were adopted from Russia like you. In this study, I will talk about how internationally adopted children from Russia learn English as a second language. I would like to ask you and your family members some questions, observe you in your regular classes, look at some of your family photos, drawings, and other things that you brought with you from Russia.

Participation in this study will involve:

- two scheduled interviews, during which we will talk about you learning English. Each interview may take about one to two hours (please see the interview questions),
- talking about photos, drawings, journals, toys, and letters that you would like to share with me,
- letting me make copies of your school tests (PSSA, IPT, Stanford test etc.) and report cards,
- optional observations of you in the regular classroom, during which your classmates will not know that you are being observed.

During our interviews, we will talk about your schools in America and in Russia. When we talk about your experiences, I will record our interviews and write notes about your photos, drawings and other things that you want to show me. If there are any questions that you do not like, please tell me and we will talk about something else.

If you change your mind and no longer want to participate in my study, please let me know and I will stop our interviews and observations. When I write about your learning experiences, I will use a different name so that nobody would know that you are part of my study. You can always ask your parents or me if you do not understand or if you are unsure about something.

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Informed Consent Form

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM**

I have read and understood the information on the form and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to stop my participation at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

**Participant's Name:** (please print) _____

**Student's signature: _____**

**Parent's signature (subject is under 18): _____**

**Date: _____ Phone where you can be reached**: _____

Best days and times to reach you: _____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

**Date: _____ Investigator's signature:_____**

Appendix B

Parent Consent Form

**Document of Informed Consent for Adoptive Parents**

Thank you for your interest in the study I am conducting as part of my doctoral program. I have included the information below to explain the topics and procedures involved in this research study, so that you can make an informed decision about participation in the study.

In this study, I will explore how internationally adopted children from Russia experience the process of learning English as a second language. I plan to interview you in order to obtain supplemental information on the English learning experiences of your child.

Your participation in this study will involve:

- sharing your experiences with your internationally adopted child from Russia during one or two scheduled interviews, which will be audiotaped (please see interview questions);

- providing artifacts (standardized test results, report cards, photos, journals, drawings, books, CDs, toys etc.) that are connected to the learning experiences of your child.

There will be no risks or discomforts in this study. In order to protect your privacy, I will use a pseudonym (a different name) when writing about your experiences.
With your permission, I will audio-tape our interviews and write notes about artifacts you are willing to share with me. The audio-tapes, transcripts and notes will be securely stored.

Your consent to participate in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time by contacting me. Later withdrawal from the study is also possible and it will not have any impact on you as a former participant. All the information collected about you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all the information will remain strictly confidential. Your identity will be kept secret in any publication of the material generated by this study.

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**This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/ 357-7730).**

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM**

I have read and understood the information on the form and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to stop my participation at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

**Participant's Name:** (please print) _____

**Participant's signature _____**

**Date: _____ Phone where you can be reached**: _____

Best days and times to reach you: _____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

**Date: _____ Investigator's signature:_____**

# Appendix C

## Interview Questions

The interview questions for international adoptees:

1. What is your name and age? What grade do you attend?
2. How long have you lived in the U.S.? How old were you when you were adopted?
3. What language(s) did you speak when you were adopted? Did you know any English when you came? Who could you talk to in Russian when you came to the U.S.?
4. What was it like to communicate with your parents after your arrival?
5. How did you know what your parents were trying to tell you?
6. How much Russian do your parents know?
7. Tell me about your experience going to school right after you were adopted. Was it easy or hard? Why?
8. Who helped you learn English? How?
9. How long did you have to go to ESL classes? What did you like and dislike about ESL?
10. What was the most difficult when learning English? Speaking, listening, reading or writing?
11. Tell me who you can talk to in Russian now? Do you know friends or teachers who speak Russian?
12. Do you have any books, CDs, videos from Russia?
13. Which media help you stay in touch with your Russian friends?

14. When do you write in Russian and when in English?
15. Tell me what you remember about living and studying in Russia?
16. Can you answer my Russian questions in Russian? Do you read and write in Russian? Can you write a paragraph in Russian?
17. Tell me about your school in the US. What subjects do you like the best and why? What classes are difficult for you and why?
18. Tell me about your friends? Do your classmates/ friends know you were born in another country?
19. What do you like about Russia the best and what do you like about the US the best?
20. What holidays and customs did you observe in Russia? Which holidays and customs do you still observe in the US?
21. Tell me about your favorite Russian and American food.

The interview questions for adoptive parents:

1. Could you tell me about the experiences of your adopted child right after his/her arrival to the USA?
2. What literacy skills did your child have in Russian language at the time of arrival to the USA?
3. How did your child begin to learn English?
4. What learning strategies were effective in your child's English language acquisition?
5. Can you tell me about the transition when your child started to use the English language more often than Russian?

6. What role do you believe you played in your child's second language acquisition?
7. What aspects of English (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) do you believe were acquired faster by your child?
8. What aspects of learning English did your child struggle with the most?
9. Can you discuss the process of your child adjusting to American society?
10. Can you elaborate on your child's learning progress since the arrival time?

Appendix D

**Observation Checklist**

Student:_____

Date: _____

Place:_____

Time of observation:_____

How is the subject participating in his/her class?

How is the subject interacting with other students?

How is the subject interacting with the teacher?

How is the subject following the academic curriculum in the mainstream classes?

Other comments:

Appendix E

Permission to Copy Official Records

I give my permission to Mrs. DiGregorio to make copies of my child's _____ official school records. Mrs. DiGregorio is conducting a dissertation study on internationally adopted children from Russia and the official records will help her analyze how my child acquired English as a second language. The official records will predominately include the report cards, PSSA test results, IPT (Idea Proficiency Test) results, and Stanford English Language Proficiency test results. I am aware that Mrs. DiGregorio will make copies of these official school records and return the originals back to the school entity or parents. I was informed that all the copies would remain confidential.

Parent's Signature _____

Date: _____ Investigator's signature _____

Appendix F

Letter of Permission to Contact Parents of Internationally Adopted Students

To Whom It May Concern:

I give permission to Daniela DiGregorio who works for NEIU 19 as an ESL Curriculum Specialist to access files of her former ESL students in order to contact the parents of these students.

The purpose of contacting these parents is to find out if they are interested in participating in a dissertation study, which is being conducted by Daniela DiGregorio.
The title of the dissertation study is *The Phenomenon of International Adoption with a Focus on Second Language Acquisition: A Case Study of Internationally Adopted Children and Adolescents from Russia.*

Daniela DiGregorio will contact only adoptive parents of internationally adopted children from Russia and all the information used will remain confidential.

Please contact me on the phone number above if you have any questions.

_____
Supervisor's Signature

_____
Title

Appendix G

Site Consent Form

School District Informed Consent Form

I give permission to Mrs. DiGregorio to come to _____ school to observe a student who was internationally adopted from Russia. Mrs. DiGregorio will conduct two observations of this student in a classroom and ask teachers about the student's progress. The purpose of these observations is to collect data for her dissertation. Mrs. DiGregorio is a doctoral student at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and she confirms that all the collected data will remain confidential and that there is no harm in conducting her observations. Mrs. DiGregorio received a permission from the parents of this internationally adopted student to carry out her observations in _____; therefore, I also allow Mrs. DiGregorio to pursue her study in our school.

_____

Principal / Superintendent

Appendix H

Participants' Drawings


*Figure H1*. Drawing by Alice Smith- My hobbies.

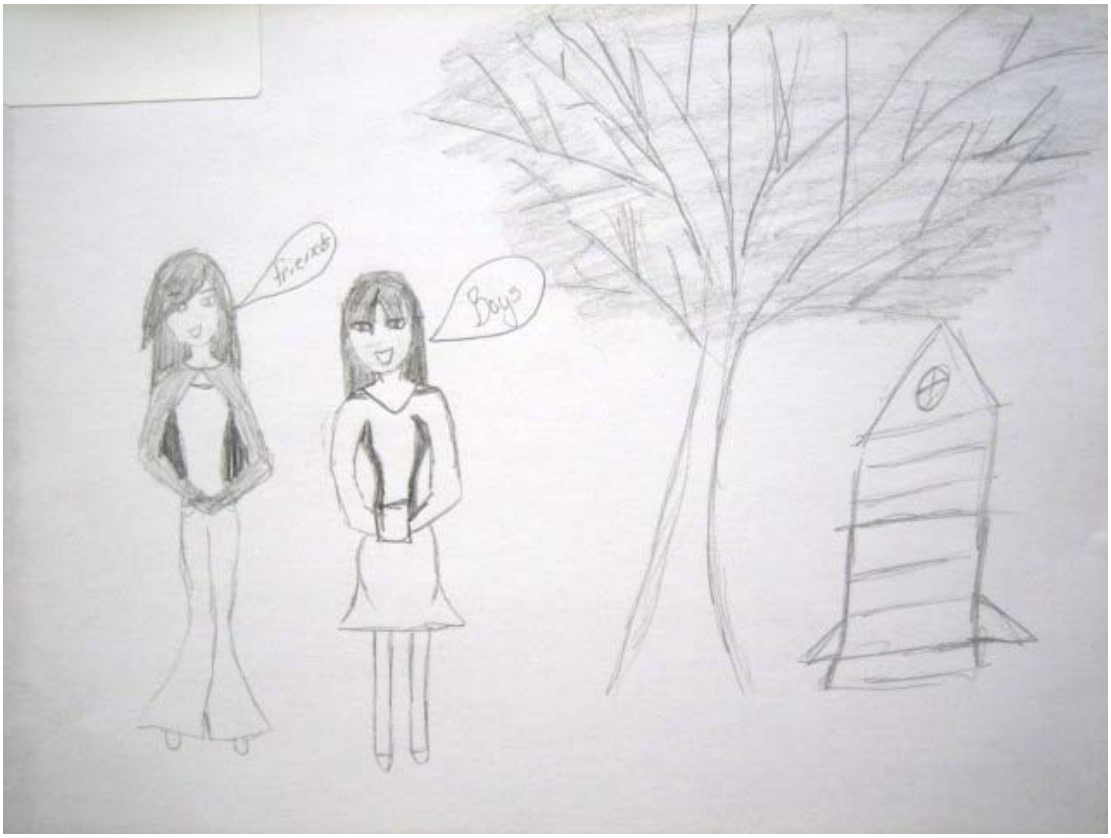


*Figure H2.* Drawing by Valerie Smith- My friend and I enjoy talking.

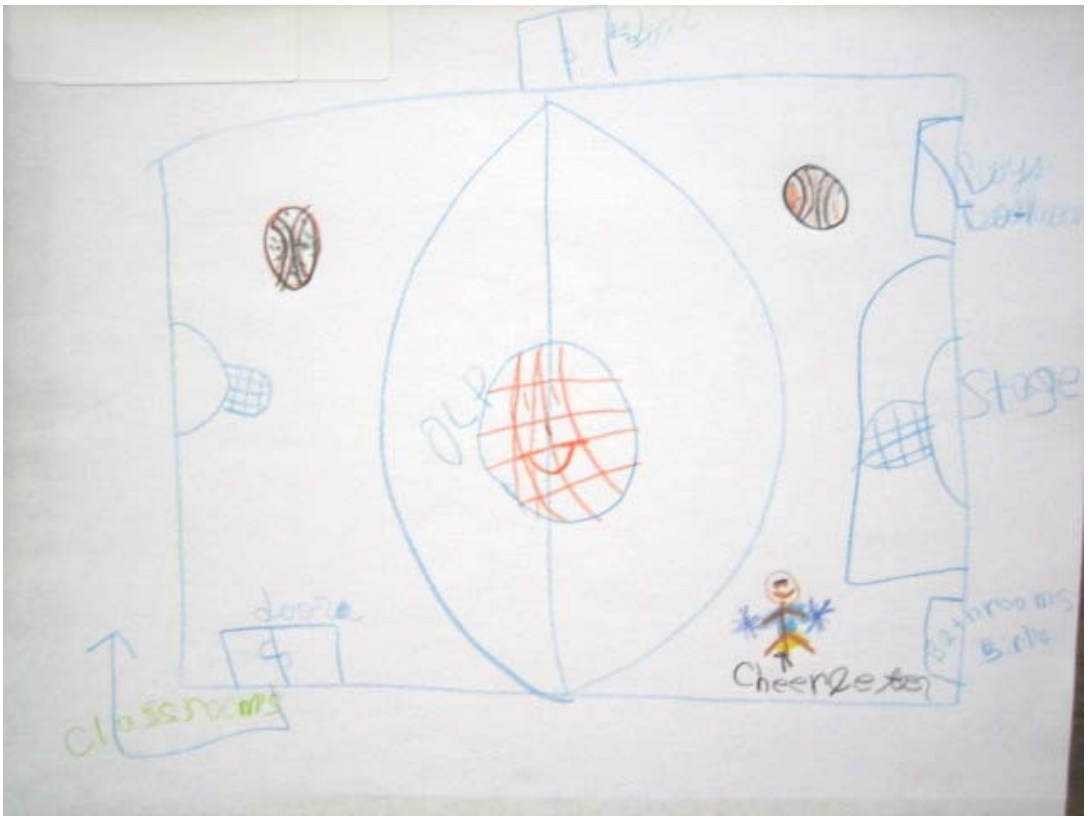


*Figure H3.* Drawing by Meredith Brown- My school in the United States.

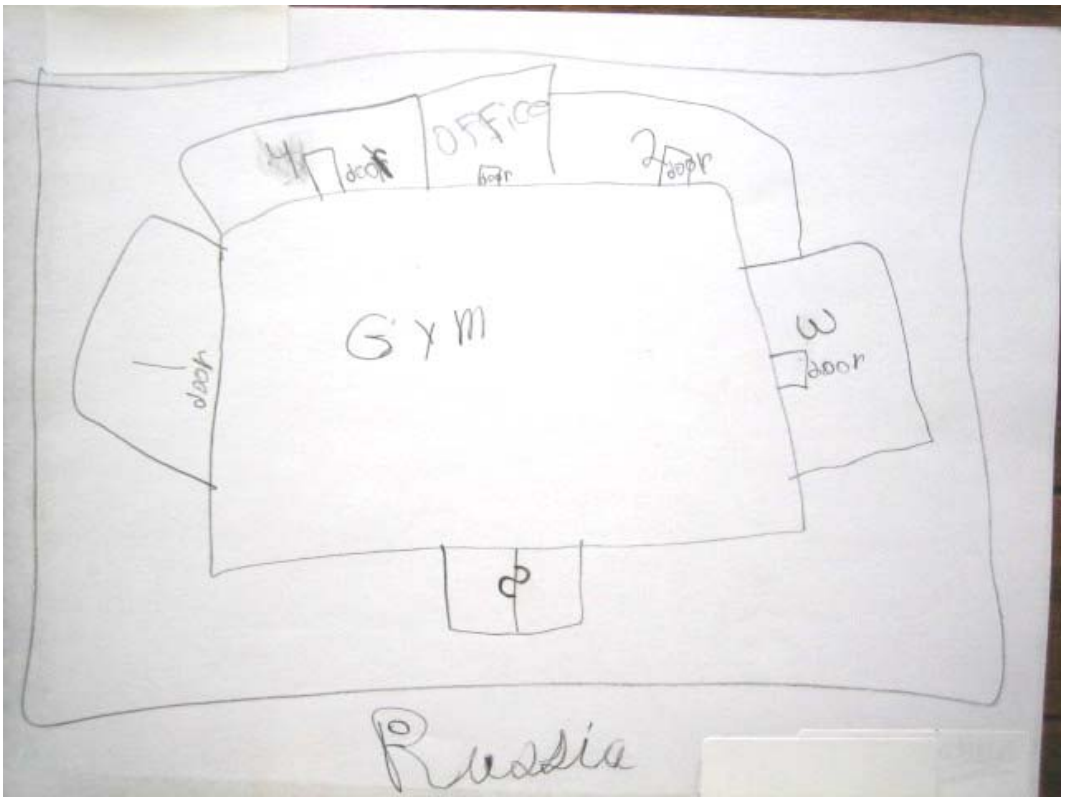


*Figure H4.* Drawing by Meredith Brown – My school in Russia.

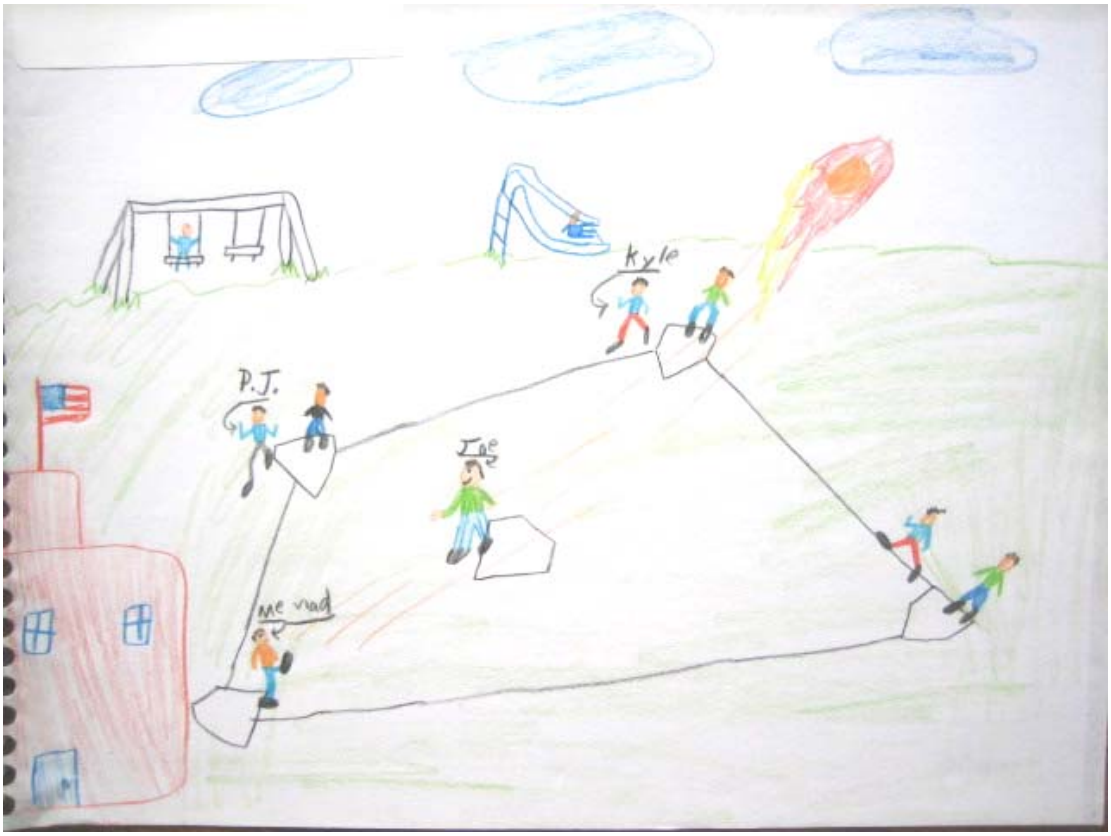


*Figure H5.* Drawing by Alex Peters – My favorite sport is baseball.


*Figure H6.* Drawing by Katya Peters- My school in the United States.