

7-11-2012

## Finding Hope in the Darkness: Stories of Two Chinese Newcomers Enrolled in a Canadian High School

Yi Li

*University of Manitoba*, dr\_yi\_li@umanitoba.ca

Denise J. Larsen

*University of Alberta*, djlarsen@ualberta.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci>

---

### Recommended Citation

Li, Yi and Larsen, Denise J. (2012) "Finding Hope in the Darkness: Stories of Two Chinese Newcomers Enrolled in a Canadian High School," *Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale*: Vol. 41: Iss. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol41/iss1/4>

This Research paper/Rapport de recherche is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact [kmarsal@uwo.ca](mailto:kmarsal@uwo.ca).

**Finding Hope in the Darkness: Stories of Two Chinese Newcomers Enrolled  
in a Canadian High School**  
**À la recherche de l'espoir dans l'obscurité:  
histoires de deux nouveaux arrivants chinois dans un lycée canadien**

Yi Li, University of Manitoba  
Denise J. Larsen, University of Alberta

**Abstract**

Hope has been described as the ability to envision a future in which one wishes to participate. A burgeoning body of research consistently points to the vital role hope plays in learning and successful change. Employing narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), in this paper, we explore two Chinese newcomer students' stories of hope as they face the many challenges of undertaking a Canadian education. Findings indicate the value of communicating teachers' belief in students, making hope more visible by inviting students to tell their stories of hope, and understanding hope as a process that evolves as students' lives unfold.

**Résumé**

L'espoir a été décrit comme étant la capacité d'imaginer un futur dans lequel il est possible de participer. Il existe un secteur de recherche en pleine croissance qui insiste sur le rôle vital que joue l'espoir, aussi bien dans l'apprentissage que dans les changements personnels positifs. Dans cet article, nous cherchons à explorer, au travers du récit (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), l'histoire de deux nouveaux arrivants chinois et l'espoir qu'ils développent tout en affrontant les défis de leur éducation canadienne. Les résultats montrent qu'il est important que les professeurs communiquent la confiance qu'ils ont envers leurs élèves, qu'il doivent rendre l'espoir visible en les invitant à raconter leurs histoires et qu'il est tout aussi important de comprendre que l'espoir se développe au fil de la vie.

**Introduction**

Hoping for a better education and future, thousands of Chinese youth leave home to study overseas. Children as young as fourteen years old arrive in Canada alone. Billed with Canadian home-stay families, this is often the first time these Chinese youth have ever lived away from home. The hopes that energized their journeys to Canada rarely match the realities encountered as these students struggle to adjust to Canadian culture, families, education, and living and studying in English. Psycho-educational research identifies hope as a key motivational and learning factor (Cheavens, Michael, & Snyder, 2005), enhancing learning and adjustment. While no research has examined the experience of hope for Chinese newcomer high school students to Canada, the importance of agency, motivation, and hope in the face of incredible adjustments is clear (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999). This narrative inquiry (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000) explores stories of struggle and hope from the perspectives of two Chinese high school students in Canada. Their stories of sources and threats to hope suggest ways in which teachers may support student hope, benefiting Chinese high school students' learning and well-being in Canada.

### **Background**

In 2006 Canada hosted over 39,000 Chinese international students, accounting for 23.4% of the Canada's total international student population (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008). Recent available statistics (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003) indicate that approximately 40% of Chinese international students attend university, 36% attend other post-secondary education institutions, and 11% seek secondary (high school) or lower education opportunities. These youngest students seek time in Canadian schools to improve their English. Their ultimate goal is to attend university in Canada since access to similar university education is very limited in China. A significant flow of Chinese international students to Canada is likely to continue due to Canadian government promotion.

North American cultures differ from Chinese cultures across virtually every aspect of life, including: food, dress, value-systems, communication styles, religions, gender differences, and family (e.g. Bennett, 1998; Brislin, 1981; McNamara & Harris, 1997; Paige, 1990; Sun & Chen, 1997; Tian, 1999; Upton, 1989). Chinese international students experience difficulties stemming from these differences when living in North America. With respect to educational experiences, they face massive culture shock, language difficulties, financial stress, identity crisis and academic problems<sup>1</sup>. While several studies document the experiences of university-level Chinese international students (Feng, 1991; Huang & Klinger, 2006; Li, 2004; Sheh, 1994; Sun & Chen, 1997; Zhang & Zhou, 2010), little research focuses on the experiences of high school Chinese international students. International students see Canada as a land of hope and possibility. The journey to Canada for higher education is fueled by a vision that often differs disappointingly and harshly from the realities faced upon arrival. Demoralized by broken expectations, massive adjustment, and pressures to perform academically, the barriers to hope seem overwhelming. Recent research indicates that hope is likely to remain an important and accessible resource for

---

<sup>1</sup> A number of studies examine immigrant high school students' experiences in North America (e.g. Chow, 2000; Goldstein, 2003; Watt, Roessingh, & Bosetti, 1996); however, these studies focus on immigrant populations, not international students. While there is some overlap in learning experiences of the two, there are also significant contextual differences.

newcomers<sup>2</sup> to Canada, though the nature of hope tends to shift and change over time. Kausar (2001) describes the importance of hope for Pakistani immigrants as they adjust to Canada, while Sillito (2009) identifies hope as fuel for engagement in learning in her study of adult English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Yohani and Larsen (2009) describe beneficial outcomes of hope-focused programming for refugee youth in Canada. Noting the role that hope is understood to play in fueling the choice for international study, supporting adjustment, and motivating educational development, as researchers, we became interested in how hope was experienced by some of the younger Chinese who choose to study in Canadian high schools. This research is intended to contribute to literature on Comparative and International Education.

### **Hope and Education**

Hope is the ability to envision a future in which one is willing to participate (Jevne, 2005) often in the face of hardship and uncertainty (Farran, Herth, & Popovich, 1995). Hope and education are often believed to be interchangeable. LeMay (2011), program developer and coordinator of Hope-Focused Service-Learning programs in over 65 public schools, comments, “The idea that hope invigorates and is invigorated by education is widely held as is the idea that education invigorates and is invigorated by hope ... yet, what is meant and understood about their connection and influence on each other is not often made explicit” (p. 21-22). Divergent theories inform understandings of hope in education. We outline three approaches below: cognitive-behavioural, critical theory, and a Deweyan inspired narrative conception of hope.

In education, Carl Snyder’s goal-focused cognitive-behavioural model dominates hope research (e.g., Murphy, 1999). Snyder’s hope theory has two key aspects. *Agency thinking* is the determination to meet specific goals. *Pathways thinking* is the ability to imagine and identify possible routes to these goals. Meta-analytic reviews of 40 years of psychotherapy and psychoeducational research identify this model of hope as one of four “common factors” that account for the vast majority of human change and growth. Hope is beneficial in virtually every circumstance which has been researched including academic, athletic, and psychological domains (Cheavens, Michael, & Snyder, 2005; Murphey & Carpenter, 2008).

---

<sup>2</sup> There are important distinctions between international students, immigrants and refugees. International students are reasonably privileged. They come from relatively strong educational backgrounds in China and have enough money to live reasonably well in Canada. For the purpose of this paper, we will use newcomers to include international students, immigrants and refugees as they experience difficulties and uncertainties in varying degrees during their adjustment process in Canada.

Critical theory approaches to hope, informed by Paulo Friere's (2004) writings, see hope as essentially social because it seeks "the flourishing existence of the other" (Godfrey, 1987, p. 29). Often critical of the individualistic focus of cognitive-behavioural approaches to hope, i.e., Snyder's model, authors such as te Riele (2010) and McNerney (2007) call attention to educational contexts and the need for social and institutional change, especially for disadvantaged youth. te Riele asserts that robust, sound, attainable hope can be learned in educational communities via cultures of learning that accentuate the positive rather than the negative. Critical theory highlights the importance of collective social action to alter existing structures of privilege, offering hope for better futures to those who have been systematically marginalized.

Most recently, a Deweyan narrative inspired conception of hope has begun to take shape, in the work of Jean Clandinin's colleague, Lenora LeMay. Through LeMay's hope-focused work in school settings over the past eleven years, she (LeMay, Edey, & Larsen, 2008) articulates an explicitly Deweyan/narrative conception of hope which "acknowledges and works with another's way of being and knowing hope by making the other's hope visible and accessible" (LeMay, 2011, p. 29). Bumping up against other conceptions of hope as described above, this hope theory calls for the need to invite and examine the multiple, diverse, complex and sometimes seemingly contradictory stories of hope for individuals living on educational landscapes. Nunn (2005) and Li, Mitton-Kukner and Yeom (2008) assert that, from a narrative perspective, hope is infused in our conversations and thoughts about our experiences as we (re)narrate our lives. Employing a Deweyan understanding of experience "as a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 39), the focus on a formal definition of hope becomes less important than attending to the stories of hope-related interactions that inform who we are and are becoming. The focus is on hope as a human-becoming process embedded in multiple contexts and stories.

### ***Cross Cultural Conceptions of Hope***

While hope plays an explicit and central role in much Western thought, scholars argue that it also holds a central implicit place in Eastern traditions (Dauenhauer, 1984). Confucian and Buddhist traditions shape conceptions of hope in the East (China, Korea, and Japan), while Western conceptions of hope rest on Judeo-Christian traditions (Averill & Sundararajan, 2005). Eastern conceptions are imbued with a focus on individual effort and situate hope as a moral endeavour which leads to good character. Western conceptions of hope contain notions of

both individual effort and recognition of life's uncertainties. In a study of Korean and American conceptualizations of hope (Averill, Catlin, & Chon, 1990), American-identified synonyms for hope included "faith", "belief", "feeling", and "trust"; whereas Koreans<sup>3</sup> indicated that hope was related to "ideal", "ambition", "pursuit", "success", "effort", and "goal". Hope was associated with action in both cultures and was a motivating force leading one to work harder and become better organized to achieve goals.

### **Methodology**

Personal narratives of language learning have garnered researchers' attention for the insights they offer regarding personal investments in language learning (e.g. Norton, 2000) and the role of hope in EFL learning (Murphey & Carpenter, 2008). These narratives encourage learners to bring their own evolving identities, contextual understandings, and meanings to the language learning context. These are all facets encouraged by an academic literacies model of language learning programming (Lea & Street, 2006). Following the Deweyan narrative inspired conception of hope, this current study was conceptualized within a framework of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as we sought understandings of Chinese international students' stories of adjustment, learning, and hope in Canada. Describing the foundational role of narrative, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) write:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful... Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (p. 477).

Central to understanding narrative inquiry is the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000): *temporality* draws attention to past, present and future; *sociality* draws attention to the dialectic between the personal and social; and *place* draws attention to the specific location(s) where the inquiry and events take place. Attending to all three dimensions simultaneously is important in a narrative inquiry. We sought to hear participants' stories as

---

<sup>3</sup> Lengthy periods of Chinese domination of Korea have led scholars (Averill & Sundararajan, 2005) to believe that Korean and Chinese conceptions of hope are fundamentally similar.

international students, to learn about their hopes, how those hopes might have been challenged, and what might have sustained hope in the face of difficulties in Canada. The strength of narrative inquiry is its ability to inform educational researchers and educators about the complexity and interconnectedness of experience within specific contexts and individual experiences. Care must be taken in making generalizations about the findings.

Two research questions guided this narrative inquiry:

1. What are Chinese international high school students' experiences? What might be the stories of hope that accompany these experiences?
  - A) What gives them hope in their studies and in their lives as international students?
  - B) What challenges their hope in their experiences as international students?
2. What can Canadian educators learn about supporting Chinese international students and their hopes by listening to the stories shared by these two youth?

### ***Research Participants***

The two research participants in this study—Lan and Peony both enrolled in an International Students Program in a mid-sized urban public high school in Western Canada. At 14, Lan came to Canada, following completion of grade eight in China. Peony moved to Canada after she had begun grade twelve in China. Both participants were over 18 years of age during this research and institutional ethics approval was secured.

### ***Data Collection***

Prior to this research, YiLi volunteered one hour/week at a high school, helping six international students from China prepare for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Only Lan and Peony attended the tutoring sessions consistently. In time they felt comfortable telling YiLi about their experiences in Canada. Five months after they met, YiLi invited Lan and Peony to participate in this research. She met with Lan and Peony individually twice for formal recorded research conversations. Each conversation lasted about an hour. Lan had more to say because she had been in Canada for four years while Peony had lived in Canada for only six months. Conversations were in Mandarin Chinese and were transcribed in Chinese by YiLi. Transcripts were returned to Lan and Peony for discussion. Neither Lan nor Peony requested any changes. YiLi also kept a research journal and took field notes.

### ***Data Analysis and Interpretation***

Using the Chinese transcripts, YiLi constructed tentative English narratives of Lan and Peony's experiences, using first person singular to tell the stories. She shared the narratives with Lan, asking Lan to read them aloud. Lan gave YiLi some responses and YiLi took notes, made changes to Lan's stories and brought them back to Lan. Piece by piece, YiLi worked with Lan in this way, co-constructing Lan's life stories in English. YiLi worked with Peony in the same manner until Peony's stories were drafted in English.

As researchers we sought narrative threads within and across Lan's and Peony's stories. Experiences of struggle and overcoming were woven through the participants' stories of culture shock, language difficulty, relationships with teachers and classmates at school, and relationships with home-stay families. We met regularly to discuss participants' stories and experiences of hope. Lan and Peony's decisions to study in Canada were driven by deep hopes for a good future. For Lan, the hope that a Canadian university education would lead her to a better future was sparked by her mother and sister. A Canadian education was Peony's own choice. It became clear to us that Lan and Peony lived and often told differing stories of hope as international students.

Before turning to the narrative accounts, we acknowledge that our understandings are influenced by our own life stories. This project is embedded in multiple cross-cultural contexts, and includes our stories as researchers. YiLi immigrated to Canada in 1998, having made the journey for graduate studies after teaching English at a university in China for many years. Denise is Canadian born. Her father, a college counsellor, regularly offered their home as a temporary residence to newcomer Chinese students. YiLi approaches this inquiry as a second language educator, while Denise brings her background in counselling psychology and hope. We recognize that every research account is situated within the place, time, and individuals involved (both participants and researchers). We believe that our stories inform our understandings of this research.

In the following section we (re)present our research "findings", that is, the lived experiences of our research participants, in poetic form based on our narrative analysis (cf. analysis of narrative, see Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p. 635-636). Our goal is to "evoke emotional responses for the reader, thereby producing verisimilitude and a shared experience" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, p. 155). Well regarded for her scholarship on the poetic representation of lives in research texts, Richardson (1997) employs found poetry, i.e., the extensive use of transcript passages, for the production, distribution, and consumption of cultural meanings. She advocates the use of poetry to privilege the cultural context and

emotional experiences which the participants understand is important. With respect to research legitimacy, Richardson argues that poetic representation also offers the reader a closer glimpse into the interactional/interview context from which the text was produced. The following two poems were constructed making extensive use of words, phrases and sentences from the transcripts, research journal and field notes. Both Lan and Peony confirmed that their poem resonated with their experiences.

## **Two Narratives of Hope**

### ***Journey of Building Hope – Lan’s Stories***

Lan,  
That’s the name I want to be called  
It sounds like nan, difficulty in Chinese  
I have lived in Canada for four years  
My life has been difficult

Shocked  
When I was told to come to Canada in August 2003  
I had just turned 14 and finished my grade 8  
My elder sister had found a school for me  
My mother wanted me to get a Canadian education

Sad and lonely  
I struggled through my first year  
Studying ESL in a private language school for newcomer adults  
I am, I was, she is...  
Being taught very basic English, I was bored to death

Homesick  
I missed my family and friends  
I complained a lot over the phone  
My mother couldn’t understand  
Why I was not happy in Canada

Relieved  
When I began grade 10 in a regular high school  
I was among students of my own age  
I could make friends  
I could finally learn something and go to university

Embarrassed

When my teachers didn't understand my English  
When my classmates asked me to repeat again and again  
I stopped talking to Caucasian students, who just ignored me  
I didn't want my Chinese friends to hear my poor English, either

Anxious  
I wanted to escape the ESL classes as soon as I could  
They were a waste of my time and money  
I didn't learn any real English there  
Until I could take English Language Arts

Confused  
I didn't know what I wanted to do for my future  
My family influenced my hope the most  
They wanted me to study accounting and then nutrition  
I kept changing my mind for my future plans

Frustrated  
My grade 12 Biology teacher was kind and patient  
She gave me a lot of extra help  
But I dropped the course within one month  
I couldn't catch up or understand her lessons

Encouraged  
I liked my teachers who had high expectations  
I worked really hard in their courses  
I appreciated teachers who gave me extra support  
They cared about me and my learning

Desperate  
I became really brave  
To meet and make friends at school  
To break out of the social isolation  
I had more and more friends by the end of grade 12

Defeated  
I am still not good at academic English reading and writing  
After four years of studies in Canada  
My reading speed is still too slow  
My teachers still don't understand my writing

Hopeful  
Whenever I talk to my mother on the phone

Whenever I spend time with my friends  
They encourage me to keep going  
I also think a lot about my own future

Horried  
I had to move six times within the past four years  
I was ripped off by the first home-stay family,  
Driven away on a cold February morning by the second  
And lived in a freezingly cold basement in the third

Determined  
I want to move to a clean and quiet place  
To concentrate on my studies and finish high school  
I no longer want to go to university and study nutrition  
I hope to study hotel culinary management and open my own business one day

Excited  
Whenever I come to talk with YiLi about hope  
I came here, following my family's hope for me  
Now I understand my hope differently  
I want to follow my own heart and live my own hope

***I Know I am Making Progress Every Day! – Peony's Stories***

Peony is my name.  
I like the beautiful flower.  
I want to study fine arts in a famous Chinese university  
But the entrance exams are so hard

I told Dad about my decision to come to Canada  
He was not convinced from the start  
Thinking that I didn't want to study  
And that's why I wanted to go abroad

Dad applied for me to study grade 12 in Canada  
I arrived in February 2007  
Hoping that I would finish high school the following June  
And study fine arts in a university here

It was hard to get basic information at the beginning  
I turned to my fellow Chinese students for help  
They understood what I needed the most  
Better than my Canadian teachers at first

I didn't know how to ask teachers questions in Canada  
I was used to not asking any questions in China  
I knew how things were done there  
But Canada is a very different place

I passed ESL, grade 12 physics and math and Grade 10 English  
I still need to pass grade 11 and 12 English  
In order to graduate from high school in June 2008  
I only have one year left. I am running out of time

I don't want to pay another 11,000 dollars for tuition  
Nor do I want to go to an upgrading school  
My parents want me to graduate as soon as I can  
But they don't understand how difficult it is to study everything in English

English is a very big problem for me  
I wonder why I have so many problems with grammar  
I question if my English writing is good enough  
I doubt if I will ever improve my marks for reading tests

People say my English is quite good  
Considering I have been in Canada for only 15 months  
Their words encourage me a lot  
I know the harder I study, the better my English will be

The students in Canada have more autonomy and choices  
And that gives me hope  
I used to follow whatever my parents or teachers told me to do  
Now I have to think about my own future

I felt really proud of myself  
When my teacher and classmates praised my artwork  
My ESL friends in Canada influence my hope the most  
We talk about where we will go for university and what we will do next

I am learning new things every day  
I couldn't speak English fluently in the past  
But now I can communicate with people  
I have got my Canadian driver's license and renewed my student visa

My home-stay family is very nice to me  
But I miss my Chinese food a lot  
I miss the structure of three meals a day

My body doesn't feel well and I often have stomach ache

My home-stay family helps me with English  
They teach me how to play Scrabble  
I sit at the dinner table to have conversations  
Even when I don't feel hungry at all

I am learning how to live on my own  
I know I am making progress every day  
I still want to study fine arts and become a designer  
But university is no longer my only goal

I came here with the hope for university education  
My hopes are so much bigger now  
I want to live a life of freedom in the future  
Talking about hope has helped me understand this

### **Discussion**

Working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, we came to understand that each participant's story of studying in Canada did not begin the day she arrived at the door of her new high school. Peony and Lan's deeply held hopes about what their lives could become drew them toward a Canadian university education. These hopes appeared to be a blend of their own dreams along with the desires of their family. Jevne (2005) asserts that every individual's stories of hope are unique. Peony's Canadian studies were launched at her own insistence. She struggled to adjust and grow into her new Canadian life. She was living a hope that she had chosen. Conversely, Lan traveled to Canada reluctantly. Her biggest wish was that Canadian lifestyles would vary little from China. At fourteen, she lived the collective hopes of her family. While both young women struggled to adjust to their new life in Canada, Lan's unhappiness and dismay at unrealized expectations seemed much more apparent. Nevertheless, both participants continued their high school education in Canada and we came to wonder about what threatened and what offered hope to each young woman during her journey.

### ***Threats to Hope***

#### ***Struggles to Learn English***

Lan and Peony's hope was threatened when pathways (Snyder, McDermott, Cook, & Rapoff, 2002) to a Canadian university education appeared blocked. The complex interplay between developing English language abilities, the need for adjustments in virtually every domain of life, and contending with unfamiliar

Canadian educational contexts set the stage for feelings of hopelessness. Lan and Peony identified lack of English language proficiency as their biggest challenge. After four years of studying in Canada, Lan was disillusioned with her inability to express her ideas clearly in English writing. She lamented that her ESL courses had failed to meet her language learning needs for academic studies. For Peony, the demands for completion of her high school English requirements felt rushed. She struggled to pass all three English courses in one and a half years when Canadian students took three years. Their struggles with English dimmed hope. What each participant sought was a learning environment that met her educational needs for English language learning and at a pace that she could manage.

#### *Challenges of Living with Home-stay families*

While many aspects of Lan and Peony's narratives are consistent with a goals-orientation to hope, their stories also reflect more multidimensional aspects of hope (affective, social, temporal, contextual) (see Larsen, Edey, & LeMay, 2007, for a review of hope construct). Home-stay experiences were a source of struggle for both Lan and Peony. Consistent with multidimensional models of hope, Lan and Peony highlighted threats to hope found in the settings and new relationships they attempted to adjust to in their Canadian homes. Peony found the space in her home-stay family very crowded and the food so foreign that her stomach ached. Lan had horrendous experiences with several home-stay families, which seriously threatened a stable home life and disrupted the hope of meeting her family's expectations for an education.

#### *Sources of Hope*

##### *Academic Learning*

Lan and Peony each noted that the opportunity to reflect and converse about her experiences helped her to recognize that she was making progress in her academic studies. During research conversations, Lan and Peony began to name the small, incremental achievements needed to realize the hope of a Canadian education. Lan remembered that being able to get credit for some of her high school subjects bolstered her confidence that she would eventually achieve her goals. Peony managed to pass ESL, physics and math within the first five months. The sense of moving forward toward their goals served as an important source of hope. From a Deweyan narrative inspired conception of hope, the opportunity to share their stories, including small stories of hope, made the presence of hope visible.

### *Stories of Relationship and Community*

Lan's and Peony's stories reveal the profound effect of relationship and community in fostering hope. It was in relationship where Lan and Peony had opportunities to tell and live their stories of hope and struggle. Where cognitive-behavioural models of hope that directly address goals seem to fit compellingly with Peony and Lan's goal of a Canadian education, models of hope which focus on the importance of relationships and the feeling of hope (e.g., Farran, Herth, and Popovich, 1995) parallel many of the sources of hope described by both Lan and Peony. Research reveals the importance of relationship in sustaining hope in the face of great personal difficulty (Larsen, Edey, & LeMay, 2007). Family, teachers, and friends became sources of hope when the participants struggled to see hope themselves.

Each young woman described feeling supported by her family in her hope for a Canadian education. Lan and Peony reflected on ways in which their parents appeared to *hope with them and for them*. This emotional support from family was important as Lan and Peony struggled with both their studies and adjusting to life in Canada. Lan described turning to her mother often to share her struggles in Canada. She believed that her family played a crucial role in helping her to remain in Canada when she had little heart for the endeavour herself.

Teachers played a key role in fostering hope. Teachers hold roles of power and influence in the Chinese culture. Lan and Peony identified personal interactions with some teachers that helped them feel they were important individuals and academic "players" worthy of teachers' support. When she had questions, Peony would turn to the ESL assistant because this teacher listened and tried to understand despite Peony's limited English. For Lan, three teachers came to her mind as she told her stories of hope. Lan recognized that these teachers made extra effort to help her. They had high expectations of her. She knew that they believed her to be a capable student. Lan and Peony took teachers' support and encouragement as objective evidence that hope for a good educational outcome was justified.

Friends were very important in sustaining hope. As her English improved, Lan's circle of friends included more Canadian students. They supported and encouraged her when she felt low. Murphey and Carpenter (2008) identify similar peer interactions as hopeful learning experiences for language learners. Within classroom social networks, learners discover that they are seen by their peers and teachers as worthy social agents. They avail themselves of the social resources of their learning communities, expanding their pathways for achieving hoped-for goals. Interaction with peers and teachers become important

locations of language learning and opportunities for the development of social support.

The role of friends was not confined to supporting goal achievement. For Peony, her ESL friends influenced her hope more than anybody else. They talked about where they would go to university and what they would become. They shared in the creation of stories of hope with one another. These stories were acts of community, conversations born of important relationships, and evidence of the support and excitement each held for the others about the future. With friends, Peony felt supported in hopeful thinking about her future.

### **Supporting Student Hope in Education**

Lan and Peony's stories illustrate the tremendous adjustments and educational pressures that students from China experience when choosing a Canadian education. Knowing that hope is considered an important motivator cross-culturally (Averill & Sundararajan, 2005) and associated with sustaining individuals during struggle (Snyder, McDermott, Cook, & Rapoff, 2002), how might Lan and Peony's stories inform educators as they engage newcomer students?

#### ***Communicating Teachers' Belief in Students***

Hope is regarded as an important precursor for change (Hanna, 2002). Believing that a desired outcome is possible is motivating. Lan took hope in her learning when she felt that her teachers believed in her as a learner. She "borrowed" hope from her teachers. Research on second language education suggests that it takes five to seven years for ESL students to develop academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2001) for success in a school setting. It is important for Canadian educators to see beyond newcomer students' current limited language proficiency, envisioning possible educational outcomes.

#### ***Reflecting on Stories of Hope***

Lan and Peony found that participating in hope research conversations invited direct reflection on hope, bringing tacit narratives of hope to more conscious awareness. As Lemay's (2011) Deweyan narrative conceptualization of hope suggests, Lan and Peony saw hope where they were not aware of it before. Numerous hope studies offer similar observations about hope from research participants (e.g., Larsen, 2009; Larsen, Edey, & LeMay, 2007; Li, Mitton-Kükner, & Yeom, 2008; Parkins, 2004).

Lan and Peony's relationships with place, peers, teachers, families, and even themselves were in transition. They were taking important steps from adolescence to adulthood in a foreign country. They lived liminal stories (Heilbrun, 1999) – stories where what had been was no more and what was to

come was unclear. Heilbrun describes this as the ‘betwixt and between’ experience of cross-cultural transition. Lan and Peony’s narratives are stories within which a rupture had occurred and familiar contexts and taken-for-granted direction became blurred. Hope does not remove the pain nor the struggle of transition, but it may offer “a forward-looking story” (Li, Mitton-Kükner, & Yeom, 2008, p. 253) to provide life with a narrative direction – something to hope for – something to *move toward* even if the steps are small and tentative.

The opportunity that this research offered to Lan and Peony has elements in common with transformative multiliteracies pedagogy (Cummins, 2009). Hierarchical educational relationships and the privileged status of English on the educational landscape were challenged in the research design itself. Lan and Peony’s experiences were sought and valued. They were treated and seen as expert on their own experience. Who they were and what they experienced was important. They were invited to share their stories in their first language, Mandarin. Participation in the research itself may have been an empowering and, thus, hopeful experience for them.

With respect to their narratives, Lan and Peony began their interviews with stories of struggle. Both described subtle shifts in their understandings as they reflected upon and discussed their stories of hope as newcomers to Canada. Rarely had they told their stories before or been invited to directly name and reflect upon the threads of hope in these stories. Over the course of their interviews, Lan and Peony believed that talking about hope with YiLi had made hope more visible in their lives. Telling their stories of hope, they began to see hope as a stronger thread in their lives.

Other narrative research on hope reflects similar experiences. In a narrative inquiry into experiences of hope for counsellor educators (Larsen, 2009), participants noted that once they began thinking about the role of hope in their lives, its presence seemed pervasive. One participant in Larsen’s study welcomed the shift, saying, “It [hope] is almost like a guiding light that you need and when the way gets dark you need to have, to be able to turn to that again” (p. 162). It is in the midst of struggle that the presence of hope and the need for it are often most apparent (Farran, Herth, & Popovich, 1995). Hope “harkens us to see life as it may become” (Jevne & Miller, 1999, p.11). As teachers, inviting a newcomer student into direct reflection on hope may provide opportunities to see his/her life as it may become.

#### ***Understanding Hope as a Process***

While their deeply held hopes for a good future through a Canadian education remained, Lan’s and Peony’s understandings of how hope might be fulfilled began to shift. Hope was a process. The hopes that drew them to Canada

immediately clouded upon arrival, making hope hard to find. For Lan, only the smallest rays of hope could be found; a kind word from a teacher, a phone call from home. Hope was notable mostly by its absence. While Peony's story differed from Lan's, her beginnings were also of struggle rather than hope. Nevertheless, both Lan and Peony named ways in which they remained open to possibility, taking small, uncertain, but important actions, such as seeking supportive living arrangements and working to build relationships with teachers. Hinds and Gattuso's (1991) foundational grounded theory research on hope with North American adolescents resonates, revealing that hope is often viewed as hard work by North American adolescents as well.

As time passed, both participants began to develop new stories of hope for herself. By the close of our research, Lan modified her original plan for a university education in favour of the hope for a diploma in hotel culinary management. Where her story of a Canadian education had begun with her family, she had come to name her own hopes more clearly. As she began to share her new dreams, she happily learned that this was a dream her family would also support. Peony's hoped-for future also evolved. During her early months in Canada, she described living a traditional Chinese educational story, a clear path to a university education and a high status career. While she did not abandon this plan, she articulated new hopes for herself - to live a life of freedom and to allow herself to follow her own interests. As this research ended, Peony applied to study fine arts in Canadian university. She wanted to be herself and live each day fully and happily. She realized that it was too narrow to have just one hope - to go to university - as her life unfolded.

Hope is as much a process as a distinct outcome. Stories and identities develop as relationships and experiences change over time (Larsen, Edey, & LeMay, 2007). We can think of this as a process of hope refinement or a part of the narrative unfolding in life (LeMay, 2011). Recognizing that hope is a process may have important implications within educational contexts. Students are often drawn to educational settings by hope, bringing with them dreams of what they may become. Hope offers powerful motivation for learning. It is also likely that students' specific dreams will become refined as they come to know themselves in relation to new educational experiences. The hopes that draw students into school are likely to shift in significant and unanticipated ways as they learn more about their chosen content, themselves, and the world. Herein may lay a source of hope for teachers. When concerned about how "realistic" a student's hope might be, teachers may consider that, like Lan and Peony, what a student hopes for at the outset of the educational process is likely to shift with experience.

## Summary

Every year thousands of Chinese youth travel to Canada alone, seeking a high school education, hoping to enhance their opportunities for a good future. It is virtually impossible for these students to anticipate the realities of living in Canada and the impact of living away from their families while adjusting to Canadian educational contexts. This research is amongst the first to examine the experiences of newcomer Chinese high school students and the hopes that animate their journeys to/in Canada. Upon arrival in Canada, threats to hope were far more evident, for participants in this research, than sources of hope. Despair rather than hope characterized much of their initial story in Canada. When given the opportunity to tell their stories and to reflect intentionally on their experiences of hope, participants began to identify significant experiences that sustained their hopes for a Canadian education and a good future. Seemingly small events became important locations of hope, especially in relation to teachers, friends, and family.

## References

- Averill, J.R., Catlin, G., & Chon, K.K. (1990). *The rules of hope*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Averill, J.R., & Sundararajan, L. (2005). Hope as rhetoric: Cultural narratives of wishing and coping. In J. Elliott (Ed.), *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Hope* (pp.133-165). Hauppauge, New York: Nova Science.
- Bennett, J. M. (1998). Transition shock: Putting culture shock in perspective. In M.. J. Bennett (Ed.), *Basic concepts of intercultural communication: Selected readings* (pp. 215-223). Boston: Nicholas Brealey.
- Brislin, R. W. (1981). *Cross-cultural encounters: Face-to-face interaction*. New York: Pergamon.
- Cheavens, J.S., Michael, S.T. & Snyder, C.R. (2005). The correlates of hope: Psychological and physiological benefits. In J. Elliott (Ed.), *Interdisciplinary perspectives on hope* (pp. 119-132). New York: Nova Science.
- Chow, H.P. (2000). The determinants of academic performance: Hong Kongimmigrant students in Canadian schools. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 32(3), 105-110.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2003). *Foreign students in Canada 1980-2001*. Retrieved December 30, 2003 from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/research/papers/foreignstudents/students.html>
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2008). *Facts and figures 2007: Immigration overview: Permanent and temporary residents*. Retrieved April 7, 2009 from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2007/temporary>
- Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Murphy, M. S. (2007). Looking ahead: Conversations with Elliot Mishler, Don Polkinghorne, and Amia Lieblich. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 632-650). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 477-487). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cummins, J. (2001). *Negotiating identity: Education for empowerment in a diverse society* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Cummins, J. (2009). Transformative multiliteracies pedagogy: School-based strategies for closing the achievement gap. *Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners*, 11(2), 38-56.
- Dauenhauer, B.P. (1984). Hope and its ramifications for politics. *Man and world*, 17, 453-476.

- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2002). *The qualitative inquiry reader*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dewey, J. (1938/1997). *Experience and education*. New York: Touchstone.
- Farran, C.J., Herth, K.A., & Popovich, J.M. (1995). *Hope and hopelessness: Critical clinical constructs*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Feng, J.H. (1991). *The adaptation of students from the People's Republic of China to an American academic culture*. Memphis, TN: Memphis State University, Department of Curriculum and Instruction. (ERIC Document  
Reproduction Service No. ED 329833)
- Friere, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of hope. Reliving 'Pedagogy of the oppressed'*. London: Continuum.
- Godfrey, J. (1987). *A philosophy of human hope*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Goldstein, T. (2003). Contemporary bilingual life at a Canadian high school: Choices, risks, tensions, and dilemmas. *Sociology of Education* 76(3), 247-264.
- Hanna, F.J. (2002). Therapy with difficult clients: Using the precursors model to awaken change. In F.J. Hanna (Ed.) *Building hope for change* (pp. 265-273). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Heilbrun, C.G. (1999). *Women's lives: Views from the threshold*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hinds, P. S., & Gattuso, J. S. (1991). Measuring hopefulness in adolescents. *Journal of Pediatric Oncology Nursing*, 8(2), 92-94.
- Huang, J., & Klinger, D. A. (2006). Chinese graduate students at North American universities: Learning challenges and coping strategies. *Canadian and International Education*, 36(2), 48-61.
- Hubble, M. A., Duncan, B. L., & Miller, S. D. (Eds.) (1999). *The heart & soul of change: What works in therapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Jevne, R.F. (2005). *Hope: The simplicity and complexity*. In J. Elliott (Ed.), *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Hope* (pp. 259-289). Hauppauge, New York: Nova Science.
- Jevne, R.F., & Miller, J.E. (1999). *Finding hope: Ways to see life in a brighter light*. Fort Wayne, IN: Willowgreen.
- Kausar, S. (2001). *Exploring the meaning of hope in the experiences of Pakistani Immigrants*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.
- Larsen, D. (2009). "It gives me a kind of grounding": Two university educators' narratives of hope in worklife. In A. Mattos (Ed.), *Narratives on Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Perspective* (pp. 151-166). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Larsen, D.J., Edey, W., & LeMay, L. (2007). Understanding the role of hope in counselling: Exploring the intentional uses of hope. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 20(4), 401-416.
- Lea, M.R., & Street, B.V. (2006). The "academic literacies" model: Theory and applications. *Theory into Practice*, 45(4), 368-377.
- LeMay, L.M., Edey, W., & Larsen, D. (2008). *Nurturing hopeful souls: Practices and activities for working with children and youth*. Edmonton, AB: Hope Foundation of Alberta.
- LeMay, L. (2011). *A narrative inquiry into teachers' experiences of working with hope*. Unpublished manuscript. Edmonton, AB.
- Li, Y. (2004). Learning to live and study in Canada: Stories of four EFL learners from China. *TESL Canada Journal*, 22 (1), 25-43.
- Li, Y., Mitton-Kükner, J. & Yeom, J.S. (2008). Keeping hope alive: Reflecting upon learning to teach in cross-cultural contexts. *Reflective Practice*, 9 (3), 245-256.
- McInerney, P. (2007). From naïve optimism to robust hope: Sustaining a commitment to social justice in schools and teacher education in neoliberal times. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(3), 257-272.
- McNamara, D. & Harris, R. (1997). *Overseas students in higher education: Issues in teaching and learning*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Murphey, T., & Carpenter, C. (2008). The seeds of agency in language learning histories. In A. Barcelos, P. Kalaja, and V. Menezes, (Eds.), *Narratives of Learning and Teaching EFL* (pp. 17-34). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Murphy, J.J. (1999). Common factors of school based change. In M. Hubble, B. Duncan, & S. Miller (Eds.), *The Heart and Soul of Change: What Works in Therapy* (pp. 361-386). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. London: Pearson Education.
- Nunn, B.V. (2005). Getting clear what hope is. In J. Elliott (Ed.), *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, (pp. 63-77). Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science.
- Paige, R. M. (1990). International students: Cross-cultural psychological perspectives. In R. W. Brislin (Ed.), *Applied cross-cultural psychology* (pp. 161-185). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Parkins, S. Y. (2004). *Hope and post-war adjustment in immigrant and refugee children*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.
- Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of play: Constructing an academic life*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Sheh, S. (1994). *Adjustment of Hong Kong students at the University of Alberta*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.
- Sillito, J. (2009). Learning about hope through hope: Reflections on the ESL enterprise. In A. Mattos (Ed.), *Narratives on Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Perspective* (pp. 177-190). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Snyder, C.R., McDermott, D., Cook, W., & Rapoff, M.A. (2002). *Hope for the journey: Helping children through good times and bad*. Clinton Corners, NY: Percheron Press.
- Sun, W., & Chen, G. M. (1997). *Dimensions of difficulties Mainland Chinese students encounter in the United States*. Paper presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference in Cross-cultural Communication, Tempe, AZ.
- te Riele, (2010). Philosophy of hope: Concept and applications for working with marginalized youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13(1), 35-46.
- Tian, G. (1999). *Chinese-Canadians, Canadian-Chinese: Coping and adapting in North America*. New York: Edwin Mellen.
- Upton, T. A. (1989). Chinese students, American universities and cultural confrontation. *Minne TESOL Journal*, 7 (1987-89), 9-28.
- Watt, D.L.E., Roessingh, H., & Bosetti, L. (1996). Success and failure: Stories of ESL students' educational and cultural adjustment to high school. *Urban Education*, 31(2), 199-221.
- Yohani, S.C., & Larsen, D. (2009). Child refugees accounts of hope from war-torn regions. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 43(4), 246-264.
- Zhang, Z., & Zhou, G. (2010). Understanding Chinese international students at a Canadian university: Perspectives, expectations and experiences. *Canadian and International Education*, 39(3), 43-58.

**Yi Li** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba. Her research interests include teaching English as an additional language, teacher education and development, international education, narrative inquiry, and hope.

**Denise J. Larsen** is a Professor of Counselling Psychology at the University of Alberta. She is also Director of Research at the Hope Foundation of Alberta, a community service agency dedicated to the applied study of hope and affiliated with the University of Alberta. Her research focuses on the role of hope in counselling and educational practice contexts.