

Generation 1.5: Potentials and Challenges

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1. Introduction

Globalization has meant an increasing trend in migration. Some families bring their children born in their families' native countries to the host countries and these children and adolescents are recently categorized as generation 1.5 immigrants since they are "in-between" the first and second generations. "Generation 1.5" has different definitions. Here, I use the term of "generation 1.5" to refer to the adolescents who were born in their home countries, moved into the host countries with their families and have received education there.

Many of generation 1.5 adolescents are reported to struggle to adjust themselves to the new circumstances and identity continuation, living in completely new environments, far from their native countries. James (1997) describes their psychosocial problems in the process of adjustment of immigration. Language acquisition has been known to be a serious challenge for them. Duffy (2003) narrates that without strong English proficiency, students confront the difficulty to deal with the complex contents in the textbooks and fail to proclaim their proper academic ability. Also, some instructions have a strict requirement to immerse students only in L2, which make them lose pride in their heritages or cause their resistance to L2 and its society/culture. Salazar (2010) shows Mexican origin young immigrants' resistance against an English-or-Nothing approach at a high school ESL classroom. In addition, Benesch (2008) points out the social partiality of this generation as "nonnative (Them) but on the way to becoming native (Us)" (298). Thus, especially for educators, such a situation would be problematic, requiring unique needs. Further, as Roberge (2002) indicates, "When the process is unsuccessful, immigrants sometimes become doubly alienated, as in the case of Latino immigrant youth who reject both mainstream American culture and Mexican culture". That is, some of generation 1.5 may lose both social groups, their home and the new community. These situations might influence their identity construction.

At the same time, generation 1.5 is associated with having an in-between status—between the first generation and the second generation of immigrants; or—between two or sometimes more than two cultures and societies. Therefore, in my view, they can have unique and dynamic characteristics, which are different both from their mother native and their L2 communities. Generation 1.5 would have powerful potentials in multicultural societies, which are increasing in many parts on the earth as globalization is promoted.

My family has been here in Canada since September, 2009. My daughters were 14 and 16 years old at that time, halfway through their secondary education in Japan. They have been receiving education here since then; so, they would be categorized as generation 1.5. They have been facing many difficulties such as insufficient L2 proficiency, unfamiliarity to Canadian culture including classroom culture, peer pressure, and declass of life quality. Somehow, they seem to have found a way to cope with these difficulties; still, they are continuously struggling and negotiating to seek who they are and who they will be. As a parent, to see them struggling is painful; nevertheless, I have noticed that this might be a necessary process or even a part of the journey to fully explore themselves. I have also realized that generation 1.5 has strong potential to have multilingual/multicultural proficiency if they are provided appropriate guidance. They might acquire both oral and literal communication skills in two, sometimes three languages, creating their uniquely hybrid culture. Also, they could be bridge builders between the first and second generation and between different societies and cultures.

Uniqueness and dynamics are strengths of the generation 1.5, which, I believe, has potentiality to contribute to build healthy multicultural society. This has motivated me to write this paper. In this paper, I review the literature on integration and language barrier of generation 1.5 and use my own experiences to explore the potentials of generation 1.5 in multicultural societies like Canada. Then I move on to suggest effective ways as a mother of two generation 1.5 teens to support them to enable them to achieve their full potentials.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Communities of practice

The first theoretical framework I employ here is Wenger's Communities of practice theory. Wenger (1998) indicates that we are social beings and that in order to become competent members of the community, obtaining knowledge or skills respected and valued in the community is inevitable. Therefore, learning is not just a cognitive process but it means social participation. Also, he describes that learning is a situated activity such that the more knowledge and skills required we gain, the more we move toward full participation in the community. Thus, we participate in the community first peripherally (Legitimate Peripheral Participation) and later more fully relating with the members of the community as we obtain required knowledge and skills there.

However, patterns of participation vary. Some participants go directly toward the centre of the community while others have possibility to be marginalized or not to be legitimated. In addition, there would be sub-communities in the main-community; therefore, some people first, enter the sub-community, move to its centre, then gradually, toward the centre of the main-community or stay in the sub-communities, which might be peripheral parts of the main-community.

2.2. Imagined communities

According to Anderson (1983), who first introduced the concept of imagined communities, we humans are capable of relating to people beyond our immediate social networks through our imagination. Norton (2001) adapted this theory into the second language learning, integrated it and Wenger's Community of practice theory, and argued that individual second language learners have images of the communities in which they want to participate in the future, and that these "imagined communities" have a large impact on their current learning.

Further, Kanno (2003) points out that parents' and schools' visions of which imagined community their children/students would join in the future would strongly affect the current learning of the children/students. She shows an example of imagined community in Chinese Ethnic School in Japan, where teachers and parents have "the hope that these students will grow up to be cultural mediators between China and Japan" (296). Moreover, individual students' imagined communities have a great impact on the schools' policy and pedagogy, though the vision of educational institutes and the social vision reflect each other. She concludes "A school vision, thus, can not only reflect social ideologies but also strive to subvert dominant ideologies by imagining an alternative future society for its children and by socializing them into that imagined community"(288).

2.3. Identity and language learning

Norton (2000) defines identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (5). Our identities are dynamic; that is, they are frequently or even always changing in our daily lives with social interaction in social structures.

We negotiate what we are with the use of language in our social interaction. Norton (2000) declares that “the role of language as constitutive and of and constituted by a language learner’s identity”. Our identity itself is constructed by using language in our thinking process and in relation with others and at the same time, it is our identity that chooses how to use and utter language. Therefore, it would be necessary for us to access to the social network, which gives us opportunity to speak through the interaction with people, by which we construct our identity; however, to do so, a certain linguistic competence is required (ibid). Also, power relationship such as gender, race, class and ethnicity is always hidden behind languages. Thus language is never a neutral medium; rather, we should pay attention to its social meaning (ibid).

2.3. Multicompetent Language Users

Cook (1999) advocates the theory of multicompetence; that is, L2 users should be viewed as multicompetent language users, “people in their own right, not as deficient native speakers” (195). Multicompetence is defined as “the compound state of a mind with two languages” (190) and as “the total language knowledge of a person who knows more than one language, including both L1 competence and the L2 interlanguage” (ibid).

He describes that multicompetent language learners are different from the monolingual native speakers and that multicompetence is naturally more complex than monolingualism. He mentions that the most remarkable difference is that there are mutual influence on L1 and L2 of the multicompetent language users since they always carry their L1 on the L2, which are not independent each other in their mind. Therefore, multicompetent language users have different language processing; for example, they are “faster and more accurate in a language-switching task than in a monolingual condition” (Hamers & Lambert, 1972 cited in Cook, 1999) and operate code-switching, which has “complex rules, partly at the pragmatic level of the speaker’s and listener’s roles, partly at a discourse level for topic, and partly at a syntactic level” (Milroy & Muyskens, 1995 cited in Cook, 1999).

In addition, he indicates that there is difference in some parts of thought processes between multicompetent language users and monolingual users. Foreign language learning is reported to stimulate learners’ recognition of cultural diversities and to boost their interests in both culture and language, which would lead them to try to contribute to societies surrounding them.

2.5. Humanizing and Dehumanizing Pedagogy

Freire (1970) presents humanizing and dehumanizing pedagogy. He analyzes the present education system as the “banking concept of education” (58). Accordingly, “in the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (ibid) and students are supposed to memorize these knowledge without being critical and are evaluated by the knowledge they have gained. Also, the required knowledge is disconnected from the reality, which, in other words, inhibits people to create power.

On the other hand, humanizing pedagogy values real communication. “Only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking” (64). Humanizing pedagogy constantly pursues the knowledge based on the reality, which empowers students.

Salazar (2010) indicates that through dehumanizing pedagogy, teachers tend to force students with multicultural backgrounds to assimilate into the mainstream culture and to put less value on their heritages, which eventually maintains them to be deficits in the mainstream society. Bartolme (1994) suggests that humanizing pedagogy “requires that teachers discard deficit notions and genuinely value and utilize students’ existing knowledge bases in their teaching. In order to do so, teachers must confront and challenge their own social biases and honestly begin to perceive their students as capable learners. Furthermore, they must remain open to the fact that they will also learn from their students. Learning is not a one-way undertaking”(179).

3. Difficulties Generation 1.5 is facing

3.1. Lack of the second language proficiency

The first difficulty which generation 1.5 face would be lack of L2 proficiency. My daughters grew up in Japan, where English is merely learned as English as a Foreign Language and seldom used in a daily communication; consequently, English education in Japan is more focused on reading and writing. While the Japanese education system is very instructive, it does expect students to follow given procedures without critical thinking. With such background, my daughters could not fully make themselves understood in English or even express their thoughts and opinions when they first attended their school here in Canada. They started ESL

classes and other subjects. Their English proficiency has improved year by year; however, looking back, they were always struggling with the gap between what they could do with Japanese and what with English, which, at times, made them lose their motivation for study.

In his article, “Why are ESL students left behind?”, Duffy (2003) shows a complex, troubling picture of performance of ESL students. The research was done at one Calgary high school between 1989 and 1997 and about 40 percent of the school’s population spoke a first language other than English. An overall dropout rate among ESL student was 74 percent, which was two-and-a half times of that of the general student population. Moreover, the rate of ESL students who arrived as beginner levels in English was 93 percent. However, many of the drop-outs later earned their high-school diplomas through adult education and the overall dropout rate comes to 71 per cent. Still it is a high number. He comments “the loss of so many academically competent learners needs to be understood as lost human and educational capital”. He, also, points out that these findings of the studies suggest that ESL high school students remain underprivileged and that graduation is still a difficult goal to catch for the vast majority of these students.

Linguistic competence would be one of the crucial skills for participation and integration into the new community/society. Our engagement in social interaction can be relative to the extent we can communicate with other social members. Generation 1.5’s participation in the school communities is peripheral or marginalized, particularly at the first stages, because of their insufficient language proficiency. However, as Norton (2000) pointed out, language learning is more complex in the relationship with issues regarding race, ethnicity, class, gender etc. Thus, some youths can access to the mainstreams acquiring the linguistic competence while others are struggling so that they stay marginalized or even sometimes look for other communities outside the schools they belong to.

Lastly, while those who move to the new countries after their L1s are already established, in their late teens, might have great difficulties to gain L2 proficiency, children coming in their early childhood could also have the possibility of not completing L1 proficiency or even either L1 or L2 proficiency, which may lead to their insufficient academic growth. Kanno (2009) reports an analysis of one JSL teachers in a public elementary school in Japan: “Students who lose their L1 may not have enough cognitive maturity to handle the age-appropriate curriculum in Japanese” (295).

3.2. The psychosocial challenges

Next, I would like to elaborate on the psychosocial difficulties generation 1.5 may confront in the process of integration. My first daughter was in the tenth grade when she came here. Although she had anticipated certain challenges on her way for adjustment to her school life due to the lack of English proficiency, she was rather optimistic to be accepted as a new member by peers and teachers at school. Nevertheless, she did not need a long time before she recognized that school culture here was very different from the one in Japan. She found that to acquire new knowledge and to memorize them are the most required in Japan while to develop her own thoughts and to present them to other people are more valued and merely to carry knowledge without effective use means nothing in Canada. In addition to being afraid of making mistakes in English, being used to be guided and instructed at school, it was difficult for her to express herself in front of her classmates. She had to give up her beliefs built in her previous learning experience. Also, being strictly disciplined and guided in Japanese society and unfamiliar to self-management, she could not understand what is behind the freedom at school here. She was completely at a loss between two different cultures: the one at school, which is based on Canadian value and the one at home, brought from Japan. She lost the sense of belonging and the interest in schooling at the same time. Soon she started showing the symptoms of depression, which required counseling and medication, and could not go to school for one year.

According to the Communities of practice theory, acquiring knowledge such as norms, values, and standards of the new community is inevitable for newcomers to enter it and to become successful there. Nevertheless, they carry their previous value system from their native countries and still belong to their original communities: their families, where they most likely keep their old culture. Consequently, young immigrants may suffer from double standards and contradictions.

James (1997) analyses the psychosocial difficulties of the young immigrants through their adjustments to the new societies and school systems. She shows how immigrant youths are struggling between two different cultures. They are obliged to and strive to adjust to the mainstream of the new society, often abandoning their native culture. They need a sense of belonging, not a sense of being different. Thus, the psychological gap between the young immigrants and their parents, who carry traditional norms and values, becomes bigger and some families are forced to

decrease parental control and authority and even family structure. As a result, immigrant children and adolescent tend to be at risk for mental health problems.

3.3. Complex process of identity formation

Their process of identity construction for generation 1.5 can be more complex than the one of other generations. After one year staying in Canada, my second daughter confessed, “In Japan, I always felt as if I was a main character surrounded by a lot of friends. I was chosen as a leader and enjoyed many activities inside and outside of schools. But here in Canada, I feel that I am just like one of the background people. Especially, in the Drama class, I am trying not to bother other people and just doing whatever they ask me”. Her description was quite surprising since it seemed that her personality had entirely changed merely in one year.

Peirce (1995) emphasizes “the complex relationship between power, identity, and language learning”, as the language learner “has a complex social identity and multiple desires” and “they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own social identity, an identity that is constantly changing across time and space”. Also, Wenger (1998) indicates, “A perspective is not a recipe; it does not tell you just what to do. Rather, it acts as a guide about what to pay attention to, what difficulties to expect, and how to approach problems” (9). “We will have to value to work of community building and make sure that participants have access to the resources necessary to learn what they need to learn in order to take actions and make decisions that fully engage their own knowledgeability” (10). They are persistently examining the meaning of the community and negotiating their identities in the community.

However, considering the period of adolescence, they might be sensitive and impressionable. They would be keen about a sense of belonging. Duff (2002) introduces interview comments about in-class participation, socialization, and attitudes across groups. One NES student mentions that “cultural walls” exist and that people don’t interact with those who are different. Also, in the same interview, a NNES student says that younger (elementary) Ss can socialize more with people from other places and that this is difficult for high school Ss. Therefore, their age would be a big factor which makes their identity negotiation more complex. Further, we see the peer pressure among the students from the same cultural background. Salazar (2010) reports how Mexican origin young immigrants groups discourage to “act White” each

other in the process of acculturation and assimilation into American society. For them, speaking English among Mexican peers means that they want to be “different—white, not Mexicans” abandoning their heritage language and cultures. In sum, these immigrant adolescents are in the process of complex identity formation in their period of puberty, being exposed to complicated pressures, which are reflecting social power relationship.

4. Possibilities of Generation 1.5

4.1. Multicompetent individual

Generation 1.5 could be competent multilingual/cultural individuals. As Hall, Cheng, and Carlson (2006) mention, “multicompetence is considered to be dynamic and variable” (224) because of its unique language system. They also indicate that multicompetent users tend to have strong features. First, they are able to make practical and innovative use of knowledge. Second, their features are context- or domain-sensitive rather than context- or domain-general”(232). Finally, their multicompetence is continuously being developed. Hence, they state multicompetence users as “multi-contextual communicative expert” (233).

Also, “challenging the NS/NNS dichotomy and embracing the new imagined community of multicompetent speakers”(Pavlenko, p.266), they could be “competent multilingual and bicultural individuals”(Cervatiuc, p.266). In other words, they would not put superiority or inferiority among different languages and cultures and accept their differences, similarities, and values. They might regard people’s ability and personality as more important than their own racial and cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, they would give great influence to people and societies as multilingual/cultural individuals. Their first-hand multicultural/lingual experiences would be “significant not only in terms of minority-majority (e.g., Asians and Whites) relations but also in terms of interminority (e.g., Asians and Blacks) and intragroup (e.g., South Asians of different religions persuasions) relations, so that on the margins do not participate in further marginalizing themselves due to divisiveness and conflict” (Asher, 2008, 18).

One of my friends’ daughter, who immigrated to Canada as a generation 1.5 is now working for an organization to support new immigrants’ adjustment. We can say that she is one of the multilingual/multicultural individuals, who have successfully used their potential.

4.2. Creation of their own hybrid cultures

The characteristic of “in-between” of generation 1.5 could be their strength. They belong to two different cultures and also, two generations: the first and second generations. They know two societies and people living there. They know the customs, standards, expectations, and taboos, of two societies. Compared with the other generations, generation 1.5 would have more capacity and capability.

Further, in the era of globalization and high-technology, they are creating their own hybrid cultures, which could appeal to people’s sense of social equality and justice. The global transportation systems, immediate worldwide information and communication systems, provided by high-technology such as the Internet, have drastically changed the situation surrounding them compared with that of a few decades ago. They can link to their original background while they are acculturating into the new environments and developing up to date social networks there. Previously, there would have been a formidable barrier between natives (Us) and non-natives (Them), and many generation 1.5 students were struggling to be accepted as natives, abandoning their original sociocultural backgrounds. However, as its population in society has been increasing, it seems that generation 1.5 today try to accept the way they are; in other words, they create their own hybrid identities and cultures, which do not need to belong to either native or non-native contexts. They even seem to enjoy and put forward their hybrid identity with a sense of solidarity—not only with people in their new domains, but also with people in their old domains.

Wan Yu Wendy Chien is one of the active Taiwanese-Canadian generation 1.5. As a visual artist, she practices unique art style, which she has named “Chinglish”, searching for possibilities that merge two cultures into a new whole. She applies Chinese traditional technique with American modern culture, using materials from both eastern and western cultures. At the same time, as an educator, she holds a Chinese club, where her students from Canada and China lively interact to pursue Chinese culture. She considers herself an agent whose task is to reflect and respond to the potential and prospect of her generation: Generation 1.5.

4.3. A bridge between the first and second generations

They could be a bridge between the first and second generations. Some of the first

generation of immigrants tend to live in their own communities and even they seldom have a chance to communicate with people outside; therefore, bringing their home criteria and standards, they might not understand the one in the host countries. On the other hand, the second generation is exposed to their native, that is “the host” for the first generation, culture and society and as long as they are not guided to be familiar to their original heritages, they would have different standards and values from the one of the first generation. Consequently, these families would suffer from the generation gap between parents and children. Especially, the first generation, who is unfamiliar to the new society, tends to be isolated and unvalued. Generation 1.5ers could bridge these generations in their communities.

There has been Japanese community in Vancouver since the early twentieth century. When the World War II took place, most of the families, including the first and second generations, were forced to return to their home country, Japan and later when the war ended, back to Canada again. It was the second generation who was the generation 1.5 in fact since they experienced two different societies and cultures in their childhood or youth that tried to connect divergent generations during this confusing period (personal communication from a colleague of mine).

5. Effective support to Generation 1.5

5.1. Support at institutional level

First of all, the academic achievement of generation 1.5 should be secured. As mentioned before, the drop-out rate of ESL students is still high and the actual situation is that ESL students from affluent families can take private English lessons and tutors while those who are from families that lack financial resources most likely drop out. Furthermore, Duffy (2003) announced that in the U.S., more detailed research on academic accomplishment of ESL students have been done and effective and supportive programs for them have been already developed while Canadian government still do not have enough information about the academic performance of ESL students to build the appropriate curriculum for them even though Toronto and Vancouver have more immigrant students than most of the cities in the U.S. (2003). It should be crucial that sufficient, well-developed ESL programs are supplied to generation 1.5.

In addition, teachers of the subjects other than ESL would “need to be knowledgeable about both the developmental patterns of their second language acquisition and also

about the language and vocabulary used in their specific academic disciplines. This awareness helps teachers tailor their instruction and classroom discourse to the students' linguistic development. English language learners are no longer solely the responsibilities of ESL or bilingual teachers but the responsibility of all teachers" (Dong, 2005, 205)

Lastly, as Macedo and Bartolome (1999) suggests that students as social capital should be valued at the institutional level. They declare that respects, trusting relationship between teachers and students, and also, academic discipline are brought into the classrooms through humanizing pedagogy. Generation 1.5 can be a great human capital of the society. As Cervantic (2009) suggests, to assist them to "create their own unique imagined community of multilingual and bicultural individuals" (266) would be the key. By doing so, they "perceive themselves as successful, in spite of still being considered by the majority group as outsiders" (ibid).

5.2. Support in families

It is necessary for parents to understand the difficulties of generation 1.5. As the first generation of immigrants, they themselves face many struggles and they might have little time to share with their children; however, by paying attention to them and having enough communication in families, they would recognize what their children face, how they feel, and what they need. When adolescents are well encouraged to have confidence, they will maintain positive and successful images toward their future, which, motivate their academic investment, and in tern, promote them to pursue their future goals to contribute to multi-societies.

Also, too rapid assimilation to the host culture might cause emotional unstableness of the adolescents. Moreover, it might be important for the young immigrants to take pride in their own heritage when they build constructive images for their future goals. Thus parents would need to provide as many as opportunities to expose their children to L1 heritages; for instance, it might be helpful to use L1 at home, orally and literally, if it is possible, and to celebrate the events and meals of their home countries. Their children would be more involved in L2 cultures outside home in the host societies. Nevertheless, when we think of foundation of their identities, they would be primarily constructed in the family whose value and standards are most likely based on L1 culture. Multilingual/cultural identity would be inseparable from L1 identity.

5.3. Social supports

Social supports to generation 1.5 would be inevitable, especially at the first stages since the families might not have enough social networks outside the families to share experiences and feelings and to support each other in the new environments.

In order to develop deliberate acculturation to the host society and to maintain their core identity and to keep pride in their heritage, sustaining their native culture, it might be helpful to join their first language community. They can maintain their L1 proficiency and have opportunities to expose themselves to their own cultures and traditions through the interaction with various generations possessing the same cultural backgrounds.

Han (2011) introduces an attempt at a Chinese church community in Canada as an institutional community. She points out important dimensions: choice of institutional language(s), regulation of code-switching, and choice of speakers there. Under the linguistic nationalism, most of the institutional settings are occupied by monolingualism which prevents the native languages of immigrant people. However, this church community thrives to separate language and politic/economic power behind it and gradually guides newcomers to adjust to the new community. This would be one of the successful examples of the community support.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored the challenges and possibilities of generation 1.5. Generation 1.5 is unique and dynamic; at the same time, they are vulnerable and unstable. Considering the globalization of today, its number will increase and its forms will vary. They are facing and will continue to face challenges. However, through the right support and pertinent guidance, they would have strong potentiality of multicompetence, which could be a remedy of imbalance and hierarchy in the societies. As an EFL teacher, and also as a parent of two daughters, I am willing to support this generation, who, I hope, would promote a healthy and meaningful multicultural society.

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