

# **Role of family, school, peers and community in the adaptation process of young immigrants.**

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Using a qualitative methodology, this study investigated the extent to which immigrant school-age children have adapted to their new “home” in Quebec, particularly in terms of development of healthy lifestyles and life skills and how their families, schools and other environmental milieus have contributed to their adaptation process. Semi-structured interviews groups were conducted with young children aged 8-13 years and their parents who have immigrated in the Mauricie region 2 to 5 years ago. Findings highlight the complementary roles of the various environments of the immigrant child. Parents, mainly mothers, have a major influence on eating habits while the school and teachers are uniquely positioned to promote physical activity, French language learning and friendship development. Children agree that the teachers encourage and help them to develop their life skills, but nevertheless credit their parents with being the primary influence. Avenues for interventions and future studies are being discussed.

*Keywords:* Family-School-Community influences; school-age immigrants; adaptation process; healthy lifestyle; life skills.

## **Introduction**

In 2010, Quebec welcomed a record number of immigrants approaching almost 53,000 individuals, which demonstrated an increase of 15% compared with the preceding year (Ministère de l’Immigration et des Communautés Culturelles [MICC], 2010). Nearly 20 % of Quebec students are from immigrant and refugee families (MICC, 2007), who must adapt to linguistic, economic, socio-cultural, healthy habits and even climate conditions that differ from those in their country of origin. American and Canadian studies reveal that

many such families cluster in low-income neighbourhoods with a higher rate of school dropout (Beiser et al., 2005, Bouchamma, 2009; McAndrew, Ledent, Murdoch, & Salah, 2009).

Some studies show a worsening of the lifestyles from a health point of view among the new immigrants and the importance to document the influence of the host environment on these health issues (Nanhou & Audet, 2008). Other studies focus on the development of life skills that may foster the adaptation process and the adoption of healthy lifestyles among immigrants (e.g., Lindcrona, 2008). At the same time, studies indicate that academic success is positively influenced by a healthy lifestyle (Koivusilta,

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Rimpelä, & Vikat, 2001; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008). These few scientific findings prompted a study of the adaptation process of immigrant children with a view to promoting school achievement and perseverance.

To our knowledge, there have been few studies to date focused on the adaptation process of young immigrants in terms of lifestyles and life skills development, and even fewer still dealing with a regional migratory context. Indeed, since immigrants do not all adapt to the host environment in the same manner (Takeuchi, 2007), it is important to examine the adaptation process of immigrant children from a perspective of prevention (Berube, 2004). The purpose of the study was thus to examine the extent to which school-age children have adapted to their new "home", particularly in terms of development of healthy lifestyles and life skills. The study also sought to verify how their families, school, and peers contributed to their adaptation process in terms of healthy lifestyles and life skills.

### **Regional and Local Migration Contexts**

The Mauricie region is located midway between Quebec City and Montréal. Its population of 259,424 inhabitants is mainly concentrated in a rural area and two urban centers, Trois-Rivieres and Shawinigan. Trois-Rivieres, the site of the study, counts some 150,000 inhabitants. In 2009, the town welcomed 138 political refugees and 106 economic immigrants (Bourassa, 2010). One of every two newcomers to Trois-Rivieres is a political refugee, that is, an individual forced to leave his country under threat of death to seek asylum for his family. Economic immigrants who chose to settle in this city had to prove they could support themselves financially for the first three months. In addition to the arrival of Africans, Chinese, Arabs and Southeast Asians, the years from 2001 to 2006 saw a sharp increase in Latin-Americans and Chinese. It is estimated that by 2017, visible minorities in the area will represent 25% of the population (Francoeur, 2008). At the same time, because of the aging of the population, 23,000 jobs will become available during the next decade. The region as a whole is looking to immigration to fill these positions and contribute to economic prosperity (Branch, 2010). Immigration is therefore viewed as a demographic and economic benefit.

### **National Immigration Perspectives**

Like other western countries in the late nineteenth century, Canada and Quebec first adopted a policy of assimilation that called for newcomers to put aside their ethnic characteristics and blend into their host society. This policy contributed to the identification of the dominant culture in the host society and the identification of ethnicity of origin in private life. In an effort to combat social inequalities and give minorities the right to maintain their own institutions, Canada and Quebec next adopted a policy of multiculturalism, defined as a multitude of communities living together. Some analysts, however, accuse this policy of helping to stress and stigmatize differences (Berube, 2004). Although Quebec prides itself on being a multicultural society, it nevertheless differs from the rest of the country in its intercultural objectives (Toussaint, 2010), which seek to protect minority cultures while fostering relations and exchanges between communities. Quebec simultaneously exhibits a tendency toward structural and cultural integration centred on a shared culture. Structural or socioeconomic integration allows newcomers to participate in the various processes of collective life (Schnapper, cited in Toussaint, 2010) while preserving elements that are essential to their cultural identity. Furthermore, cultural integration assumes integration into a shared public culture, where the host society establishes the prior conditions for entry. In Quebec, these conditions include adherence to the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, the secularity of the Quebec state and its institutions, the necessity of speaking French, and equality between men and women (MICC, 2011).

### **Conceptual framework**

According to Berube (2004), adaptation or integration within a migratory context corresponds to "the process the immigrant follows to accommodate to the socioeconomic and socio-political environment of the host society in order to ensure his social, emotional and cultural well-being in terms of his interests and ethnic identity" (p. 19). Many factors influence the adaptation process including discrepancy between the culture of origin and that of the host society, types of society, conditions of departure, and reception conditions reserved for immigrants. For example,

individuals from a traditional society must undergo major resocialization relative to norms, rules and group living if they wish to integrate into an industrialized society (Camilleri, 1989). Different world views inevitably trigger conflict or culture shock (Cohen-Emerique, 1991). The departure conditions experienced by refugees can also contribute to difficulties adapting. On the other hand, reception conditions such as the presence of individuals from the same ethnic background, a support committee for newcomers and access to the job market are only some of the factors that can facilitate successful adaptation or integration (Beisser et al., 2005).

The adaptation process appears to have different phases: functional, social and public (Lafortune & Gaudet, 2000). First and foremost, the individual must ensure his and his family's survival by finding a place to live, enrolling his children in a school, learning the language of the host society, learning how to dress for the climate, acquiring new eating habits, etc. (functional adaptation). Social adaptation involves rethinking the roles of parents and children and of men and women as well as forming relationships with members of the host society. The latter can be achieved through various sociocultural and sports activities. Public adaptation occurs when the immigrants participate in community activities, engage in volunteer work and take steps to obtain Canadian citizenship. Thus, the physical transition that requires learning new ways - weather-appropriate clothing, for example - is followed by a behavioral adaptation that comes from observing the society's social norms and ends, finally, with integration (Lafortune & Gaudet, 2000). This integration is supposedly achieved when the individual realizes that he belongs to both his host country and his ethnic group. Some young people find it difficult to learn the dominant language of the host society and experience ambivalence at times about the culture of their parents and that of the new environment (Beiser et al., 2005). If there is a large cultural distance between the two countries, the adaptation process may take longer.

Since several sources of influence intervene in the adaptation process, it becomes essential to privilege an ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This theory holds that the adaptation process of young immigrants evolves by means of their social interactions in the different environments of their day-to-day life, the family, the social and the school environments, that is to

say, with players from school, peers, and communities. Just as families, schools and communities interact as significant contributors to school achievement (Deslandes, 2005, 2010; Epstein, 2011; Pourtois & Desmet, 2007) it is the same for the adoption of healthy lifestyles among school-age children (Rivard, Deslandes & Collet, 2010; Trudeau et al., 2008) and life skills development (Deslandes, Joyal & Rivard, in press; Holt, Tink, Mandigo & Fox, 2008; WHO, 1999).

### **Brief literature review**

#### *Influences of families, schools and peers*

A number of studies highlight the role of parents in adopting healthy eating habits, whether with respect to the family environment (e.g., food availability and accessibility), parent-child socialization (values, preferences, norms) and family behaviours (encouragement, modeling and instruction) (Czaplicki, 2009; Czaplicki, Laurencelle, Deslandes, Rivard & Trudeau, 2012; Savage, Fisher & Birch, 2007). Parental influences are very much the same regarding fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity (Czaplicki et al., 2012). Children have a greater tendency to be active when their parents are active and when parents demonstrate support in the form of encouragement and teaching (Carrière, 2003; Gustafson & Rodes, 2006). The findings of the study by Trudeau et al. (2008), conducted in Quebec with 293 elementary school students and 310 secondary school students, show that in terms of eating habits, the family is the main factor of influence, followed by the school, then friends. With respect to physical activity, the school comes first, then the parents, then friends. In fact, the schools - even educators - contribute to the development of competencies which enable students to make choices that promote health through various disciplines such as science and physical education (MELS, 2005; MEQ, 2001, 2003) as well as through the implementation of activities aimed at modeling or encouraging healthy lifestyles for all young people (Deschênes et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2007; Rivard et al., 2010; Rivard, Deslandes & Beaudoin, 2011).

#### *Socio-demographic and community influences*

For some families in low-income areas, as is the case for many immigrants, economic difficulties are a primary concern, which means they are liable to influence the family's eating

habits and physical activities (Kim et al., 2007). This is even more so given that the cost of fruits and vegetables in Quebec, and in such northerly regions, is rather high out of season. It may also be that the lack of money, lack of time due to holding down two jobs, and lack of a social network encourage low-income immigrant families to regard physical activities as an unnecessary luxury. Additional discouraging factors are the ignorance of the language of the host country - which leads to problems of communication regarding the rules for practicing certain sports - and the absence of infrastructures such as parks, public spaces and organized sports and of pertinent information (Dwyer, Higgs, Hardy & Baur, 2008; Kim et al., 2007).

#### *Healthy habits and life skills development*

Healthy eating practices and physical activities are the two main determinants of healthy lifestyles (Nanhou & Audet, 2008). Research shows that healthy eating practices (mainly fruits and vegetables) and an increase in regular physical activities contribute to health maintenance (Sigfusdottir, Kristjansson & Allegrante, 2007; Strong et al., 2005). It seems that physical inactivity is greater in immigrants than in native-born Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2005). Some researchers have observed positive links between the diet, physical activity and school performance of youngsters (Rampersaud, Pereira, Girard, Adams, & Metz, 2005; Sigfusdottir et al., 2007; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008).

Rich (2008) refers to life skills in terms of megaskills and defines them as values, attitudes and behaviors that determine curricular and extra-curricular success. She lists twelve megaskills: confidence, motivation, effort, responsibility, initiative, perseverance, caring, teamwork, common sense, problem solving, focus and respect. For its part, the World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) defines life skills as personal skills, psychosocial, social, interpersonal, cognitive, emotional and universal skills. Among adult immigrants, the life skills most likely to foster their adaptation to their new environment include a solid knowledge of Western culture and the French language (in Quebec), self-confidence and the ability to obtain social support and participate in community activities (Health Canada, 1999). In brief, we know very little about adaptation process in terms of healthy habits and life skills among school-age children immigrants in

a local context. The originality of the study uses children's points of view.

### **Research questions**

It is thus imperative to consider healthy habits and life skills development among immigrant school-age children. Not only they can foster their adaptation process in their host society but they can also contribute to healthy behaviors that will last a lifetime (Hopper, Munoz, Gruber et Nguyen, 2005; Virgilio, 1996) and will impact on school achievement (Veugelers & Schwartz, 2010). The study was organized accordingly around two research questions: 1) How have school-age children adapted to their new "home" in the Mauricie region, particularly in terms of development of healthy lifestyles and life skills? 2) How have their families and schools and other environmental factors contributed to their adaptation process regarding mainly the development of healthy lifestyles and life skills?

### **Method**

#### *Sample*

The study was conducted using two semi-structured interviews groups, conducted with eight young children (girls = 3, boys = 5) aged 8-13 years and their parents (women = 2, men = 6), all either immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Congo, Argentina, Algeria or Colombia. Five families are refugees while three others have emigrated for work reasons. They have been living in the Mauricie region from 2 to 5 years. They were recruited from a list of volunteers made up by the *Service d'Accueil des Nouveaux Arrivants* (SANA) (welcome service for new arrivals) among the immigrants who had sufficient knowledge of French.

#### *Data Collection*

The 30-45 minutes interviews were conducted by the first two authors and assistants at the site of SANA situated in the center of the city of Trois-Rivieres. The protocol of the children's and their parents' interviews included three main sections connected to adaptation process based on eating habits, physical activities and life skills about children as well as on the role of school in children's adaptation process. Each section had questions on their understanding of the theme (definition), positive and negative experiences since their arrival in the region, and influences on

their choice of healthy practices, the life skills they developed, influences on their choice of healthy practices and life skills development and the role of families and schools and other environmental factors in general with respect to their adaptation process. The questions that are analyzed in this article are presented in Appendices 1 and 2.

#### *Procedures and Data analysis*

The group interviews were held in March 2010. Parents had to sign a consent form to ensure that their participation was on a voluntary basis. They were first informed of the privacy standards in force since the study had been approved by the ethics committee of the University of Quebec at Trois-Rivieres. The analysis was done using the N'Vivo software. The coding was mixed (L'Ecuyer, 1990), meaning that it was based on the sections of the interview protocols while letting new categories emerge (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Through analysis of the transcripts, two categories of items emerged from the eating habits section: (1) food similarities and differences with children's country of origin, and (2) influences on children's choice of food. Two other ones from the physical activities section also emerged: (1) types of physical activities and motivation; (2) influences on children's choice of physical activities. Findings under the life skills development that emerged as a category regarding children's adaptation process sections are discussed globally.

### **Results**

#### *Eating habits*

##### *Food similarities and differences with children's country of origin*

*Children's points of view.* Immigrant children reported many similarities between the foods in Quebec and those in their country of origin (for example fruits, vegetables, pasta, meat). They also note that Quebec grocery stores offer certain exotic foods as in their country of origin, such as couscous and mangoes, with which they are familiar. They demonstrate a solid knowledge of *Canada's Food Guide* and affirm the importance of adhering to it on a daily basis. A number of children, however, emphasize that recipes are prepared differently from one country to another, "They make soup, but in my country it's not made like that". One child states that his parents eat certain ethnic foods that he himself eats only occasionally, while another deplors the fact that fruits in Quebec are not as fresh as those in his

country of origin. The children say they like to try new foods and become used to eating many of them. Some agree that it took a while for their digestive system to adapt. As well, they note a difference in family habits relative to meals such as school lunches and snacks; they observe that students in Quebec buy food, especially sandwiches, whereas immigrant children bring home-cooked food to school.

*Parents' points of view.* Most parents consider that their children adapted very well to Quebec food. Some even say they did so very quickly and that now, they're just like Quebecers, "Everywhere they go, they adapt better than I do", "But now they really like Quebec food. For example, "they'll ask me for *pâté chinois* (Shepherd's pie)".

#### *Influences on children's choice of food*

*Children's points of view.* The mother has undoubtedly the greatest influence on her child's eating habits, followed by brothers and sisters and media advertisements. The children say their mother prepares healthy meals that always include vegetables and guides them by encouraging to eat healthy foods and try new kinds of food. For other children, the mother and father have an equal influence. The influence of siblings is also observed along with that of advertising on TV, "Every time I watch TV, they talk about 'Special K' cereal...They say it's good..."

*Parents' points of view.* According to parents, the sources of influence regarding food are mainly friends, family and the school, "...one day, while I was shopping for groceries, my daughter said, I want that, one of my friends eats it and it's very good". Some parents say they appreciate instructions sent by the school regarding suggestions for healthy snacks.

#### *Physical activities*

##### *Types of physical activities and motivation*

*Children's points of view.* The sports activities children identify and practice in summer and winter are biking, ice-skating, skiing, *ballon-chasseur* (dodgeball), soccer, swimming, hockey, volleyball, basketball, jogging, flagfootball and kinball. All school-age children said they practiced some sports, whether at home, at school or as extracurricular activities. As well, they engage in other useful seasonal activities including raking leaves in autumn, shoveling snow in winter and watering the lawn in summer. Children also say they help with the housework or work as a

newspaper boy or assistant gardener in summer. The motivation for practicing a physical activity varies from one child to another and is highly personal. Some children simply participate for the sake of doing sport activities, while others want to stay in shape and improve their appearance, "It helps you stay in good shape. Your physical condition, your cardio". The model of an athlete is also a good source of motivation, "Seeing soccer players who are really professionals, that's what motivates me to keep improving". Another child wants to become a professional player and is aware he has to train to achieve this.

*Parents' points of view.* Parents mention more or less the same sports activities as their children, with soccer at the head of the list and other sports, such as *ballon chasseur* (dodgeball), which does not necessarily exist in their country of origin. They think that a child is clearly motivated when he or she has models, such as a parent, or when other children are participating in the same activities. They believe in the training effect produced by friends. They state that when children are in a group, they are more motivated to move around and practice activities that keep them in shape.

*Influences on children's choice of physical activities*

*Children's points of view.* The school is a perfect place to engage in physical activities; at the same time, it provides the motivation for this. Then there are extracurricular activities, which also help immigrant children practice sports like soccer indoors in winter and on playgrounds in summer. The presence of friends also facilitates sports activities, "I don't like to be alone. Most of the time I invite a friend to play with me and we have fun". Likewise, the family encourages them to participate in physical activities, "She (my mother) pushes me to do that and it's good for my health". Some children from warmer countries say they find it difficult to deal with the cold of Quebec winters and, consequently, to practice outdoor sports.

*Parents' points of view.* According to parents, school with its various activities (e. g., summer carnival, competitive games) and the equipment needed to practice them apparently has the biggest influence on children. The school, for example, gives children access to ice skates, helmets and suits for playing hockey or ice-skating. Other facilitating factors in the child's environment include access to public spaces and

their proximity, "We don't live far and we have the chance to use the big pool at Expo (Municipal physical activity center), it's fantastic". In addition, certain organizations provide financial aid to give families in need access to quality sports activities. Parents also mentioned obstacles to their children's practice of physical activities including their own lack of availability. Because of busy schedules, parents have less time and energy to accompany their children in various activities. For example, a mother could not register her child in Saturday swimming courses because, as a single parent, she had to do the housework, shop for groceries, prepare for the week ahead, etc. Similarly, since financial resources are often limited, it is not always easy to enroll children in structured activities, "Well, the first problem is the cost, it's expensive" and "It's not only the registration, it is also shoes and clothing. It's that you have to travel all around Quebec". Consistent with the money aspect, some parents point out their lack of access to cost-free facilities such as a field for playing soccer or exercising. Furthermore, there appear to be gaps in the information conveyed about the various possibilities for sports activities. Newcomers say they don't know where, when and how to guide their children to become more active. Some parents feel that the school could place greater emphasis on active behavior by offering more activities and a broader variety of sports. As another obstacle, they cite the sedentary habits of children born in Quebec who, in their eyes, often prefer television, the computer and video games to practicing sports with their peers.

*Life skills development*

*Children's points of view.* All the children were able to identify life skills that are a direct part of their daily life since coming to Quebec. The skills they name include language learning, adopting new eating habits and adapting to the new environment. One child sees perseverance as very important for adapting to new foods: "I kept on eating it so I would get used to it". Learning a new language is not always easy and requires work, effort, determination, attentiveness and patience. One child said that he found language to be an obstacle to practicing a sport, because he didn't understand the coach's explanations. Consistent with learning French, the children also talk about the importance of concentration, pride and work methods. They agree that the teachers encourage them and help them to develop their skills, but

nevertheless credit their parents with being the primary influence.

*Parents' points of view.* The parents believe that their children's adaptation depends on the following skills in particular: sociability, creative curiosity, involvement and sense of responsibility. As well, they consider that their initiative, effort and desire to succeed are also contributing factors. They admit that the change in lifestyle caused by immigration sometimes promotes the development of life skills they would probably not have developed in their country of origin such as the sharing of household tasks: "By coming here there was nobody to help in the house, so the children were obliged to help out". As sources of influence on the development of life skills, parents are at the top of the list as models and value transmitters: "School aspirations are very important. This is a value you want to hand down so that they (the children) continue their studies". Secondary sources of influence are friends, then teachers.

### Discussion

The present research aims to document, based on the points of view of immigrant children and their parents in the Mauricie region, how children have adapted to their new life environment in terms of healthy life styles and life skills deployed. It also examines the environmental factors that may have contributed to their adaptation process.

Generally speaking, children, like their parents, say they have integrated into their host society. Contrary to some studies conducted with adult immigrants (e.g., Nanhou & Audet, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2005), the data from this study do not point to weight gain or a sedentary lifestyle on the part of immigrant children. The children seem to have a good knowledge of *Canada's Food Guide* and observe its recommendations. It appears easier for them to adapt since they find that the food has similarities with that of their country of origin. As well, they appear convinced of the importance of moving and being active. They are also conscious of the life skills they had to deploy to adjust to their new environment. Their comments highlight the skills required for learning French, the language essential for their adaptation to school, and new eating practices and physical activities. Some of these skills, in this case, willpower and determination, are particularly necessary for participating in outdoor activities in winter, especially for children from warmer

climates than that of Quebec. Children seem to have gone successfully through the functional adaptation process in their host society, as discussed by Lafortune and Gaudet (2000).

In keeping with the studies reviewed (e.g., Trudeau et al., 2008), the comments of immigrant children show that families, and mothers above all, have a decisive influence on food choices. Our data corroborate Berube's comments (2004) to the effect that the immigrant parent is "a pivotal actor in children's integration process, since he links the past, the present and the future, from one society to the other" (p. 33). However, although participating parents give primary importance to the mother, when it comes time to list the sources of influence on the child's eating habits, friends are mentioned first, followed by the family. As a possible explanation, we suggest that since respondents were mainly fathers, they were perhaps less conscious of the mother's central role in the purchase and preparation of food and the promotion of a healthy and balanced diet.

As regards with physical activity, parents and children agree on the primary importance of the school. These results are consistent with the observations put forth by numerous authors on the school's dominant role in health education and in the health initiatives implemented in recent decades (e. g., Rivard & Beaudoin, 2009; Rivard et al., 2010). Interestingly, parents point out barriers to the practice of physical activities, namely, financial difficulties and lack of availability and information. These data correspond to those of Dwyer et al. (2008) and Kim et al. (2007), which highlight the importance of giving immigrants and their children access to spaces and nearby, cost-free facilities offering a variety of schedules, thus allowing them to remain active. Although the children make no allusion to money problems, we may reasonably wonder if, rather than responding to the child's need to be physically active, activities such as working as a newspaper boy or assistant gardener are practiced to help with the family's financial support. They may be also the result of opportunities, encouraged by the parents, for developing life skills such as effort and a sense of responsibility.

Regarding the development of life skills, children's responses differ from those of their parents, probably because of the vague nature of these skills (e.g., Rich, 2008; Deslandes et al., accepted; WHO, 1999) and the different viewpoints of each of the two groups of respondents. In fact, children preferred to deal

with this theme based on their learning of French, while the parents seem to view the child from the standpoint of his or her overall functioning. As sources of influence for deploying these skills, adult respondents put parents forward as models in the first place, followed by friends and teachers. However, these responses cannot be compared with those of the children, because the latter ones were not asked that particular question.

Besides the role of the families and the school, the role of peers is also mentioned relative to the practice of physical activities, the deployment of some life skills and the choice of certain foods. These findings are in line with Lafortune and Gaudet's (2000) social phase of the adaptation process in a host society. The community's contribution, though less explicit, is also present when speaking of local grocery stores and eating habits in the media and of access to infrastructures such as public spaces, sports facilities and organizations that make physical activities available free of charge.

Finally, the school's welcome conditions generally reserved for immigrant children play a central role in their adaptation, which corroborates previous studies. The implementation of measures to promote language learning, the support of teachers, initial contacts with peers and access to free breakfasts also have a major impact on their integration, which corresponds to previous researches on the many challenges that immigrant families and their children must face (Beiser et al. 2005; Bouchamma, 2009; McAndrew et al., 2009).

This study is unique in its simultaneous approach to the healthy lifestyles and deployment of life skills of immigrant children and their parents living in a region of Quebec, and its use of children's points of view. To our knowledge, no study of this dyad (i.e., healthy lifestyles and life skills) has been conducted to date in the greater areas, like Montreal or Quebec. It is nevertheless interesting to observe that the findings are consistent with observations already reported in the work done on healthy eating habits and physical activity of immigrants living in large areas such as Sydney, in Australia (e.g., Dwyer et al., 2008) or Sacramento, in California (e.g., Kim et al., 2007). Our study differs from the latter, however, in so far as the comments of the children and parents are treated separately and in the parents being questioned regarding their children. This approach has made it possible to highlight the points of convergence and

divergence between the two groups. As we have already seen, the points of divergence associated with the lifestyles the children developed and deployed in their host region probably fall within a different analysis perspective. One thing is clear, the parents questioned were very proud of their children and very satisfied with their adaptation process.

The study includes methodological limits associated, among other things, with the small size of the sample and the greater participation of fathers to the detriment of that of mothers. As a result, future studies must ensure an equal number of fathers and mothers. Consideration should be given to longitudinal researches using large samples and a quantitative approach, that is, one based on questionnaires. It could be interesting to compare elementary immigrant students' responses to secondary immigrant students'. Although precautions to ensure confidentiality of results and confidence in the focus groups have been taken, the study is based primarily on perceptions of participants and may have missed realities that some of them may have not disclosed. The effect of social desirability has possibly tainted findings.

### **Conclusion**

The results put into evidence the complementary roles of families, schools and communities in the adaptation process of immigrant children regarding healthy lifestyle and life skills. Parents, friends, teachers, community facilities and media all contribute to a greater or least extent. Parents, mainly mothers, have a major influence on eating habits while the school and teachers are uniquely positioned to promote physical activity, French language learning and friendship development. These data shed light on the importance of teacher training in relation to the establishment of conditions conducive to the adaptation of immigrant students and the need to view immigrant parents as essential partners in this process of adaptation and in the adoption of healthy lifestyles. The role of school in providing sufficient amount of physical activity through physical education instruction was also highlighted in our results. Educators should thus focus their educational interventions on cultural aspects that foster the integration of these peoples and their cultural characteristics. For example, the integration of sports-specific backgrounds, or notions of history specific to these peoples could

facilitate integration of these groups. Thus, the interactions of the latter vis-à-vis established communities could be facilitated. On their part, municipalities should continue to provide easier access to spaces and facilities that promote physical activity for young school-age immigrants to improve physical activities. Obviously, there is a need for greater work together or partnerships between families, schools and communities regarding healthy lifestyle and life skills development in order to promote immigrant

children's adaptation and integration in their host society as well as their academic perseverance and success.

In conclusion, it should be noted that this study does not attempt to generalize the results to all walks of welcoming Quebec newcomers. Consequently, the contribution of other immigrant groups and community stakeholders would undoubtedly help to shed light on the more comprehensive variables inherent to the integration process throughout the Quebec territory.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol with Children

#### Eating Habits

- 1 a) Can you describe your experience (things you've learned, anecdotes or anything else) concerning your eating habits since you came to Trois-Rivieres?
- 1 b) Can you describe a specific, positive experience you had when you purchased or were given health foods, whether at school, at home or elsewhere in your neighbourhood?
- 1c) Can you describe a specific, negative experience you had when you purchased or were given health foods, whether at school, at home or elsewhere in your neighbourhood?
- 2 a) You come in contact with a number of adults at school, at home and in your neighbourhood. Do they influence your food choices? If so, how?
- 2 b) Which of these adults influences your eating habits the most? Why?

#### Physical Activity

1. Do you practice sports, activities or exercises that require physical effort (effort for your heart)? If so, can you name them?
2. What motivates you to engage in physical activity? (A few indications)
3. Does something stop you from practicing physical activities as much as you would like? (A few indications)
4. What ideal circumstances would help you be active? (A few indications)
- 5 a). You come in contact with a number of adults at school, at home and in your neighbourhood. Do they influence your physical activity habits? If so, how?
- 5 b) Which of these adults influences your physical activity habits the most? Why?

#### Life Skills Development

1. What life skills helped you adapt your eating and physical activity habits to those of your new environment? (A few indications)
- 2 a). Can you describe a specific, positive experience you had when your life skills were useful? Explain.
- 2 b). Can you describe a specific, negative experience you had when your life skills were harmful or embarrassing? Explain
3. In what circumstances did your life skills help you to adapt your eating habits? Your physical activity habits? Explain.

#### In general....

- 1) Do you think you've adapted well to your new environment, both at school and in your neighbourhood? Explain. Give examples.
- 2) What would help facilitate or improve your adaptation at school? In your neighbourhood?

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol with Parents regarding their Child**

#### **Eating Habits**

1. Can you describe your child's experience with food since you came to Trois-Rivieres?
2. Describe one positive and one negative experience your child has undergone.
3. Generally speaking, how is he/she adapting?

#### **Physical Activity**

1. Describe the physical activities your child practices regularly.
2. What motivates your child to engage in physical activity?
3. Does something prevent your child from practicing physical activity as much as he/she would like?
4. What ideal circumstances would help your child be active?

#### **Life Skills Development**

1. What life skills helped your child adapt to his/her new environment?
2. How have these life skills been useful to him/her? Explain.
3. In what circumstances did they help your child adapt his/her eating habits? Physical activity habits?

#### **In general...**

- 1) Do you think your child has adapted well to his/her new environment, both at school and in your neighbourhood? Explain. Give some examples.
- 2) What would help you facilitate or improve your child's adaptation at school? In the neighbourhood?