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Urban Schools and Immigrant Families: Teacher Perspectives

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Teachers of two urban senior high schools talk about barriers and bridges in communicating with English as Second Language (ESL) minority students and their parents. The paper focuses on student, parent, and school characteristics with respect to intercultural communication. The typical ESL student is characterized to be alienated, displaced, and in denial of other cultures. Typical parents are distrustful of Western ways, resistant to adopting new values, patriarchal, yet dependent on their children. The school system is characterized as ethnocentric and uncommitted to providing equal services to all students including ESL students. The paper then focuses on student, parent, and school needs to enhance intercultural communication effectiveness. ESL students need to feel connected at many levels of society and to develop social communication skills, self-empowerment, and greater sensitivity to other cultural minorities. Parents need a greater connection with the school system, a greater understanding of the tensions between their culture and the mainstream culture, greater collaboration skills, and less dependency upon their children as interpreters. Members of schools systems need to develop policies that reflect a greater awareness of intercultural problems and a greater commitment to equal educational opportunities.

In this paper, the author describes how teachers perceive English as Second Language (ESL) minority students and their parents in one of two grade 10–12 urban schools under study. Ogbu's classification of minorities (1990) is applied to the data, and limitations of the classification are discussed. This report represents the first phase of an overall research program. The overall program compares communication between teachers and staff of a publicly funded, non-religious school system with a publicly funded Roman Catholic school system and parents of ESL students. By the end of the overall research program, the author will have interviewed a total of 200 K–12 teachers in both systems, 40

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support staff, 15 administrators, 30 students, and 60 parents. This paper is limited to interviews of 27 of the approximately 80 senior high school (grades 10–12) teachers from the nonreligious school district.

After all the interviews are completed for both systems, a theory of communication between staff and teachers of public sector institutions and parents of ESL immigrant students will be proposed. Finally, a survey instrument will be developed to gather information from schools in the 10 provincial jurisdictions across Canada. The survey data will enable the author to provide a summary of school system strategies to communicate with immigrant parents.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Truly effective communication between staff and teachers of high schools and parents is a rare occurrence. Older children typically demand more autonomy from their parents than younger children and increasingly discourage the involvement of their parents with their schools. In addition, schools with large student enrollments present formidable barriers for parents (Carreiro, 1989; Church, 1990; Garrett, 1990). The growing numbers of immigrant children in urban schools create an additional language barrier between parents and schools (Employment Immigration Canada, 1991). Since the cultural norms of the immigrant parents are different from those of the teachers, language barriers are significant (Opper, 1985; Jacques, 1989; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1987; Hall, 1977). Thus, effective communication between high schools and immigrant parents for whom English is a second language occurs even more rarely. In light of the expected increases in immigration, it is essential to develop policies and initiatives to improve communication between high schools and immigrant parents.

Although many studies are reported in the literature on intercultural communication (Samorvar, 1988; Kim, 1986; Shuter, 1984), intercultural education (Megarry, 1981; Wong, 1972; Morris, 1989; Leung, 1984), and on immigrant children in schools (Bhatnagar, 1981; Ashworth, 1988; Enns, 1978; McNoll, 1976), little has been reported on the subject of this study. There is an established need for such investigation.

The study discussed in this paper is based on several assumptions: (1) immigration will continue at the present level or will increase; (2) there will continue to be an influx of immigrant families; (3) the schools will continue to fail to provide a systemwide response to the increased communication needs of parents of immigrant students; and (4) the lack of effective school–home communication will increase the risk of students joining ethnic gangs or dropping out of school.

Generally, four groups of immigrant students are identified in Canadian schools. They are immigrants from non-English-speaking countries who ac-

company at least one parent; immigrants from English-speaking Caribbean countries who speak creole and often join parents in Canada; refugees from war-torn countries who often bring painful memories of violence and family loss; and visa students, mostly from Hong Kong, who are sponsored by extended-family members, usually an aunt or uncle (Coelho, Handscombe, Heinrich, and McCutcheon, 1988).

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Typically, immigrants have been regarded with an assumption that immigrant experiences of mainstream culture are alike (Ogbu, 1990). However, studying minority cultures and making social policy recommendations require an understanding of how differently minority cultures respond to mainstream culture. Ogbu (1992) advances a classification of minorities and the associated different relationships that each has with mainstream culture. Ogbu's classification includes three types:

1. Autonomous minorities, who immigrated in great numbers or in groups, have a history with a mainstream culture, like the Mennonites, Hutterites, Mormons, and Jews. According to this classification, there are no nonwhite autonomous minorities in Canada or the United States.
2. Voluntary minorities, who choose to come to Canada or the United States, include the Chinese and the Punjabi Indians. They seek more economic well-being and better opportunities.
3. Involuntary minorities, who are people originally brought to Canada or the United States against their will or enslaved, conquered, or colonized, include black Americans, native Americans, and, in Canada, French Canadians. People in this classification are often denied true assimilation into mainstream society.

Ogbu argues that these minority groups have different relationships with the mainstream culture. Autonomous immigrants assimilate and learn skills and behavior patterns of the mainstream culture, but maintain an emphasis upon retaining their own culture and language within the context of home or subcultural units. Voluntary immigrants experience initial problems in adjusting to new cultural norms and different institutional expectations, but these problems are temporary, and voluntary immigrants learn quickly how to cross cultural boundaries and access institutional services to their advantage. Involuntary immigrants often consider themselves a "colonized people." Their relationship to the mainstream culture is profoundly affected by historical issues. Involuntary immigrants may regard many forms of mainstream cultural behavior as inappropriate and may value other forms of behavior that they perceive reflect their own culture. Ogbu (1992) terms this "cultural inversion." Ogbu's minority

classifications suggest to the author that, when several categories of ESL students exist in a school system, a single policy statement will not suffice to meet their needs.

Ogbu's minority classifications are only partially applicable to this study. The schools in the study have few autonomous minorities and involuntary minorities enrolled. However, they have many voluntary minorities and refugee immigrants. Refugee immigrants, those forced to leave their homeland by war, famine, political upheaval, and the like, are not included in Ogbu's classification. Ogbu (1992) explains that refugees do not perceive that their presence is forced on them by the mainstream culture. Thus, refugees do not fit into the involuntary classification.

Larger numbers of refugee immigrants are entering the United States and Canada each year, so that they are an important group under investigation in this study. Thus, Ogbu's classification will not be used in this study. A framework for describing relationships among voluntary and refugee minorities will be proposed in this paper.

When interviewing teachers, the author was careful to separate teenagers' problems that represent mainstream culture from teenagers' problems that represent minority cultures. As one teacher commented:

> When a Canadian-born student comes to us, he comes with baggage: teenager, boyfriend, problems at home, social maturity. When a non-Canadian student comes to us as an ESL student, we have to deal with the language problem too. They are often 16 years old and assertive . . . if they are not assertive we ask, Is that normal for their culture?

Another teacher commented, "Sometimes I feel the misbehaving student does not understand, and I wonder if the behavior is cultural or just bad."

The subjects discussed in this report are 27 teachers from a nonreligious urban school system enrolling over 95,000 students in Alberta, Canada. The teachers were selected from this staff because of their high involvement with second-language students in their classes. Each teacher was interviewed for 30 to 45 minutes. The interviewers used structured, open-ended interview questions to encourage the teachers to talk about the issues they felt were important regarding ESL students. Each teacher was provided a written statement of the study's goals and was asked to talk about the aspects of second-language students and their parents that seemed most important to her or him. Once the teacher started talking, the interviewer followed up with elaboration and clarification questions. Anecdotes were sought to help explain the issues more clearly. Handwritten notes were taken, to capture the major points and specific anecdotes. Care was given to making verbatim records. Rigorous coding methods were applied to these notes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). After a first reading of the notes, general categories were writ-

ten in the margins; the second reading resulted in more refined categories that used the constant comparative method. Copies of the notes were cut into natural segments and then sorted by category. Notes from each category were studied, and subcategories emerged. Each category was characterized by the content of the notes within it.

The decision to use the interview data from the non-Christian school system for this report was made because this system represents teachers in Canada and the United States more closely, since it is assumed that school context plays a role in teacher perspectives. Over 90% of these teachers were white Caucasian, middle-class, middle-aged men and women. The gender split was approximately half. On the other hand, of the 1,501 students in the school, 17% were born in Vietnam. The students came from a total of 43 countries and spoke 29 different first languages. The dominant first languages besides English were Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, and Punjabi.

FINDINGS

The teachers described the *relationships* among ESL students, their parents, and the school system. They also described the *needs* of ESL students, their parents, and the school. Six categories emerged: (1) ESL students, (2) ESL students' needs, (3) parents, (4) parents' needs, (5) the system, and (6) the system's needs. The findings are arranged under these headings.

ESL Students

According to the teachers, their ESL students feel displaced not only from their original homeland but also in their new home of choice. They feel alienated from their peers and from their parents. They reject aspects of Canadian culture as well as of the cultures represented by other students.

Students Feel Displaced

Social displacement occurs when people exclude or denounce others. Displacement is a negative experience to those seeking stability in relationships with others.

The teachers felt that their relationship with the students is stronger when students live in a natural family context than when students live in an arranged family context. As one teacher stated:

> Parents do not show up for parent meetings because often students are here as visa students and they are sponsored by friends of family and residents. The school sets up meetings for parents but they do not show up.

ESL students who have immigrated to Canada without their parents have to adjust to Canadian culture as orphans. On the other hand, they may just re-

cently have been reunited with their parents after years of living without them. They may also be living with a member of the extended family, such as their grandparents, uncles, aunts, or cousins. These students struggle to understand Canadian laws, values, attitudes, and traditions. They struggle to adapt to schools that are substantially different, and they are frequently unaware of the expectations that institutions and people of Canadian society hold for them. A teacher commented:

> Students experience posttrauma stress, adjustment difficulties. They don't know who they are. They see their values and language not appreciated in our schools. They feel isolated and lose self-esteem.

Before coming to Canada, many refugee students have experienced unimaginable pain. They have learned that lives are expendable, contingent upon luck or upon the will of others more powerful. Once in Canada, learning to act appropriately in Canadian society is difficult, for Canadians value life as precious. It is a problem for many refugees who have survived violence by being violent. In recounting the story of a student, a teacher said:

> An immigrant kid had an uncle and a friend who disappeared in Nicaragua. His best friend was later found alive, but his uncle was found executed. Life went on, and people accepted their fate. We don't understand the life these people must have lived.

This lack of understanding of people's experiences leads to displacement. Many refugee students feel displaced from a society where violence is unacceptable. They feel apart from a student body and consequently may act out inappropriately. A teacher remarked:

> Refugee students are big problems. They are from war-torn countries. They are not progressing well here. For example, they may have had four years in a refugee camp with one hour a day of learning, living on the run. They tend to be 16–17, older than other students.

Students Are Achievers

The teachers generally felt that the ESL students were higher academic achievers than Canadian-born students. Although these students did not achieve the highest grades in class, most teachers expressed admiration of their strong effort to do this. Thus, a major characteristic of second language students is that they are academically oriented, or achievers.

Several teachers knew ESL student achievers who held several jobs while attending school full time. One teacher said:

> A Vietnamese mother works day and night. The daughter works day and night. The father was killed overseas.

Another teacher commented:

> I know of ESL kids working six to eight hours a night and going to school during the day to help support themselves or their family.

Many ESL students were raised in collectivist societies where belonging to groups and identifying with group values is compelling and important. These values are often expressed in the school context in Canada. For example, after completing a school activity, ESL students expect to receive awards, even if the activity is considered minor by the school authorities. For instance, a teacher observed:

> Hong Kong kids do a swimming lesson and they expect a badge whether they learned anything or not. Whites (sic) get annoyed because they may not have learned to swim and should not get a badge.

Similarly, ESL students strive to receive scholarships. A counselor in charge of determining award recipients was surprised to discover that

> of all the scholarships given out this year, only one white student received a major one. Of over $90,000 in awards, whites received one at $1,500 and one at $500.

An English teacher talked of how highly ESL students were motivated:

> The ESL-based students seem more highly motivated. I've one girl who is at least three weeks ahead of the rest of the class.

Students Feel Alienated

When need for approval and affiliation are unmet, people may experience alienation. The teachers talked about ESL students experiencing alienation from other students, from the school system, and from their own parents.

The ease of making friends across cultural boundaries may be gender-related. ESL female students make friends with people of other cultures more readily than males. A teacher noted that

> boys tend to cluster together. Especially the Lebanese, East Indians, and Orientals. They are seen to cluster in the rotunda at lunch. I call it protective coloration.

According to the teachers, males frequently group together and behave in culturally specific ways. It is less noticeable that females cluster. Females seem to

integrate more evenly with the general student population. Males appear to be more alienated than females, perhaps because females naturally develop a sense of attachment to others.

On the other hand, female ESL students sense alienation differently from males because their parents treat them differently. The parents hold the more traditional expectations of arranged marriages and homemaker roles for daughters while appearing to holding more flexible expectations for sons. Female ESL students may strive to become involved in extracurricular or cocurricular programs at the school only to find that their parents will not let them participate in everyday events. A basketball coach was surprised to discover that one of her players had definite limitations on her freedom. She said:

> Last night we had a game with a neighboring school eight blocks away. A girl on my basketball team is East Indian and said that her father won't let her walk that far. I was surprised. She is 16, in grade 10, and seems really Canadianized. But the father has core values that he cannot accept being challenged.

ESL students experience alienation because of their dual roles at home and at school. The parents enforce traditional expectations while the children attempt to gain approval and develop relationships with Canadian children. A teacher reflected on her experiences in a careers-and-life management (CALM)[1] class:

> Kids differentiate their roles. They are role players. They say they don't talk to their parents. For example, in CALM class, sexuality is not talked about with parents. They seem to know that . . . who to talk about what to. It is like they are aware of unwritten rules.

Consequently many second-language students live lives unknown to their parents. They express sadness when they talk about their deceit but nevertheless act in ways which gain the acceptance of their peers.

Alienation occurs at another level, too. Well-educated immigrant parents who cannot work in their chosen professions often accept more menial jobs to survive. Their hope is that their children will be able to live a more prosperous life in Canada. Parents often expect the entire family to work so that one child, usually a son, may have a chosen profession. Thus the family directs its collective energy to benefit the son, who is its future hope. The son lives under conditions not understood by most Canadians and feels alienated from his Canadian-born peers. A teacher remarked:

> The son is spoiled rotten . . . (he) has to have his meals made even though he is home first. Mother has spoiled him rotten.

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[1]Career and Life Management, a compulsory life skills course.

Students Feel Denial

ESL students may deny their new culture because they do not understand it. Canadian culture rejects the use of physical threats and coercive power in daily relationships. ESL students from cultures which endorse threats and coercion have difficulty adapting to Canadian ways. Indeed, they may criticize Canadian ways. A teacher commented:

> We do not like violence, and many oriental and Lebanese students consider Canadians sissies. Lebanese kids are respectful of authority, but in peer groups it's important to be competitive, not to back peddle . . . not to resolve things.

Some students reject our system of education as well because they do not feel cared for:

> A Chinese professional recently commented that Chinese and Taiwan kids are used to being beaten in school back home. One Taiwan child must have been beaten 100-plus times before he immigrated to Canada. So it is often felt that our schools do not discipline nor care about kids if they are allowed to get away with anything without being beaten.

Other students react against the school system in order to gain a sense of self-control:

> Discipline is different here from in their homeland. They come here and figure the system out. And kids learn to abuse the system. Parents do, too—especially the Spanish speaking: they think that schools are lax.

Ironically, ESL students often act in racially discriminative ways. Since most come from monocultural homelands, ESL students are socialized to live in a homogeneous culture. Thus they relate to the world in more ethnocentric ways than most Canadians do and often act out against each other. A teacher noted:

> Immigrant students are very prejudiced concerning one another. They are frustrated and tend to take it out on each other. They revert to emotions and name calling. They come from monolingual cultures—to a culture where anything goes, with lots of other subgroups.

Another teacher commented:

> We mix kids up cross-culturally, and they refuse to talk. They may mimic each other, and fights begin. Kids learn to use swear words in the other's language first. They learn to put each other down.

Racial discrimination occurs when a person denies the validity of the differences of others. ESL students who come from monolinguistic cultures experience difficulty in adapting to several languages being spoken in class. They often have difficulty accepting the equal treatment of all students by the English-speaking teacher. Thus, students may experience a society that does not appear to value their own language.

It is common for subcultures to react defensively against the norms of other cultures. For example, if a group of students is blocking the school halls and making sexist comments to women passing by, school administrators would consider this inappropriate behavior and would take remedial action. The cultural group may feel discriminated against by the administrator. A teacher recalled such a situation:

> Behavior is cultural. Sometimes Lebanese students do not act in culturally appropriate ways. When the principal talked to them about this, we got a call from the Lebanese Society claiming that we're picking on them.

ESL Students' Needs

In the previous section ESL students were described as feeling displaced from their homeland and in their new land, as being academic achievers in school, as feeling alienated from their peers and from their parents, and as denying not only Canadian culture but also many other cultures which make up the Canadian cultural mosaic. Two questions arise: How can we enable them to contribute positively to our society? And what are their needs? In the following section four areas of need are examined.

Students Need Connection

ESL students need connection at many levels. The teachers interviewed talked about ESL students needing courses which provide a basis for understanding relational skills:

> We must help teach students. More CALM, more classes on coping skill, on communication, understanding, tolerance, acceptance, team building, working with others, self-esteem.

The teachers identified the necessity of connecting with parents more consistently. A teacher related the following story:

> A kid last semester was dropping out. He was a gangland type. I spoke to his sister, who was surprised her brother was dropping out and said, "Oh, tell me more." The parents, the sister, and the student came in for a meeting. I talked clearly with them.

> I used facial expressions and used my hands a lot. They approved of my bottom line, and the kid stayed in school. He settled down and enjoyed the course . . . got 70%.

All immigrants struggle with the loss of their homeland. Many know they have very little chance of ever returning, even for a visit. ESL students must develop coping skills to deal with the inevitable loss of their homeland:

> Kids talk about their difficulties in adjusting. If they have a job, they have to find a way to balance time. They are missing family who are not in Canada; they are missing friends.

Students Need to Be Considered Whole People

Most Canadians will agree that being an academic achiever in the narrow sense of learning to speak English and memorizing content by rote is not enough to be successful in Canadian society. Students who are without communication skills, a knowledge of social protocol, and emotional control are often dysfunctional in Canadian society. Accordingly, ESL students who focus only on narrow aspects of academic achievement may be limited in their success in Canadian society.

For example, some of the teachers interviewed felt that focusing on oral language left many second-language students with poor writing skills:

> ESL students achieve a moderate level of proficiency orally, but their proficiency in writing plateaus. I get a lot of ESL students who are integrated referred to me to get help in writing. They do not understand grammatical, contextual writing. We need to offer workshops.

The teachers felt that integrating ESL students into mainstream courses occurred too soon. They thought the students should be held longer in ESL classes to become more fluent in English as well as to become more comfortable in a multicultural society. On the other hand, some teachers thought that extended ESL classes might further isolate ESL students from mainstream society.

One teacher suggested the importance of developing more sophisticated procedures to gauge the "standards between academic courses and integrated courses, which at present are poorly judged." The teacher stated:

> At _____, College, if an applicant's first language is not English, he or she has to demonstrate proficiency by taking EN 20 and EN 30 with a minimum of 60% in each. This is discriminatory, for a student may be in Canada for 12 years and may have 58% in EN 20 and 75% in EN 30 and not gain entry, while an applicant with English as a first language would get in.

Another teacher had similar concerns about the local university. An extraordinary amount of program planning is required for second-language students to enter university. The teacher stated:

> A student who is Chinese with a high school diploma comes to our school to learn Math 30, 31, and so on in the fall. I called _____ University to access evaluation services to get entrance prerequisites. The university won't evaluate the student until the student applies, but that is in the spring. At that time, it is too late to make an adjustment in the high school program.

The available pool of bilingual people at a school is, not surprisingly, made up mostly of second-language students themselves. Therefore, school administrators are often tempted to rely on ESL students to help other ESL students with their schoolwork. Thus schools create peer assistance programs, peer ambassador programs, and work experience programs. However, the teachers interviewed thought this approach unfair, commenting that schools must remain sensitive to overburdening ESL students by expecting them to help the school meet its mandate. A teacher observed:

> There is a need to use peer translators. But for these peers, it is using up their spare time, and they have their own lives. We might hire them on work experience and reduce their need to work after hours.

Students Need Self-Empowerment

It was earlier stated that ESL students experience alienation. Gaining a sense of self-empowerment might reduce this feeling. This section briefly addresses strategies for self-empowerment.

Personal choices made by many second-language students have not been supported by their parents. Consequently, the students have made choices secretly. Here is a case in point.

> _____ is a central location for failures of the ESL system. At the highest risk are males. A Vietnamese gang ended up there. One member was a Vietnamese boy, not from a refugee camp but brought up by his grandparents. He lived apart from his parents. Now in Canada, the family unit has been re-formed because a family unit's being formed was required by immigration. This boy had two sisters who attended school with different levels of success; a brother also arrived. This boy learned to control his environment and joined a gang. Others learned to depend on him, and he was frequently in fights. The police knew him. He had a likable personality, and he used to chat with the school administration and the police. He once said that he loved the sight of blood; he liked fighting. He came to me in grade 10. He had left home and was on the streets. A good family took him in, but his marks fell and the family ended up not wanting him. He went to Toronto to be trained in gang training. He came back, and his criminal activity increased. He was under 18 and treated the

law as a joke. He was known as the "polo kid," for all his clothes carried that label.

In October of this year, the private center for ESL system failures hosted an open house and had two speakers. He was one. He told his story. The question was asked, "How did the system fail you?" In truth, the system had not failed him, but early integration had. His parents couldn't deal with it. The school couldn't deal with it. Kids feel they have lost control of their environment and move into crime—where they can get easy money.

A similar story was told by another teacher:

We called in a Czechoslovakian student's parents. The student was missing classes. He had an attendance problem and was going to fail. In Eastern Europe he had been a model student. When he came here, he learned English quickly. At junior high school, he got into drugs. His parents were very busy working hard, and the son had control over his own life. They didn't know how to get him back into school and didn't understand why he was rebelling the way he was. After a long talk, the boy seemed concerned about his parents and wanted to live up to their expectations. He started coming around. He had rebelled because he didn't know anyone, and once we asked him to be a peer tutor, helping others helped him get to know people.

In each case, the students were unable to communicate openly with their parents, who worked long hours and expected their children to work, too Although both stories had happy endings, the first story represents a failure on the school's part since success was achieved only after a private organization intervened. To be successful, students must achieve a measure of self-empowerment through school and family. Otherwise they may be attracted to gangs to secure self-empowerment.

The role of interpreter effects self-empowerment. If the interpreters represent only parental values, students may feel less self-empowered than if the interpreters are able to bridge the needs of parents, child, and school. A teacher remarked:

The Lebanese interpreter seems to pound the kids. The interpreter takes a harder line than the teachers are comfortable with. We don't expect such a strict authoritarian system as they are used to.

ESL students felt their concerns were being represented unfairly. The teacher, parents, and interpreter represented one set of values, while the ESL student represented another. The interpreter must be more empathetic to ESL students in order to enhance their self-empowerment.

Students Need to Learn Intercultural Awareness

Often, ESL students deny the cultural values held by Canadians and other countries. They need greater understanding of other cultures: intercultural awareness.

ESL students who are socialized in a climate of threats and coercion may misinterpret the nature of discipline in the schools and society in Canada. One teacher commented:

> I see mainland China to be high in structure. Kids come here, and it seems to them that in a democracy anything goes. So how do we create an atmosphere of total respect with an open atmosphere? They manipulate our system. They go to court and can manipulate it—stall proceedings, for instance, by saying they want an interpreter.

ESL students need to understand how Canadians relate to society, to internalize this understanding, and to adapt their past experiences. Many ESL students do not find the intrinsic rewards which flow out of Canadian values as important or appealing as those which flow out of extrinsic power and control. Second-language students may reject Canadian values in favor of less altruistic ones from their homeland.

Parents

An analysis of the interview data indicates that the parents of ESL students tend to be distrustful of the educational system, resistant to adapting to Canadian values in raising their children, patriarchal in orientation, and powerless with respect to controlling their children yet dependent on them because they do not speak English as well as their children.

Parents Are Distrustful

The teachers interviewed thought parents of ESL students distrusted the school system, were confused about the significance of credentials, were confused about Canadian-style teaching and learning, and felt disenfranchised by the school system itself.

The parents were also suspicious about the lack of national entrance exams in Canada and wondered what consistency schools could have without a centralized national standard. A teacher commented:

> A lot of Chinese parents think education is the school's responsibility, while the parents are responsible for food and shelter. They seem to switch emphasis on this because there is no national entrance exam . . . so once they arrive in Canada, they think that education is a matter for the school.

A teacher thought that many Canadian-born parents do not understand that their children can achieve happiness and status in Canadian society without pursuing an academic degree; they do not know that there are many other routes that

their children can take to complete higher education studies. However, many immigrant parents do not share this view:

> A Lebanese student is in the PREP program. It is too difficult for the boy's intelligence and skill ability. His father is against a vocational placement. The Lebanese community is this way. So we set up a modification program to meet both their needs.

In some countries, higher education means academic university preparation. Without a degree, people are destined to be trapped in a lower echelon of society and even to be despised by others:

> If you can't go to university then you are considered an outcast of society in some ways by the academic community. Life is centered around the National Entrance Exam in China, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Taiwan. They MUST pass this.

But Canadian society is founded on different assumptions. People can be, and are, accepted and respected without university degrees. In fact, there is less contrast between university graduates and college or technology graduates in Canada than in nations outside the Western world:

> In Canada possessing a degree does not make that much difference compared to China, Vietnam, or Japan. If you have a B.A., that is almost everything there.

Parents of second-language students expect a more rigid system of education than exists in Canadian public schools. Here are three accounts by teachers:

> As parents, I think they may feel very disappointed in the Canadian system. They do not view this as real learning.

> When working with second-language parents, their view is that whatever you say is the law. Recommendations to parents are put forth as "possibilities" to avoid making it a legal requirement.

> One Arab father was very angry. He thought the school programs were not up to snuff and made demands. Immigrants who come from academic backgrounds expect their kids to do university.

It is hard for one to trust what one has yet to experience. Two teachers spoke on this theme:

> I think a lot of these parents feel disenfranchised. They are fearful of the school. They did not finish school themselves. They have low self-esteem, and in their home country, they were wealthy.

> Parents are often intimidated. Relatives often come to the school for the parents. Or the parents bring someone to translate.

Thus the parents fear that the school system is too lax and does not serve the needs of their children well. But the parents are not certain how to intervene successfully on behalf of their children because the school system is too alien. When they do intervene, the teachers often think the intervention is inappropriate for the school.

Parents Are Resistant

Many immigrant parents appear to be resistant to the "Canadianization" of their children. This includes such everyday experiences of Canadian-born adolescents as dating, walking alone on a street, or wearing Western clothing. The teachers interviewed thought these parents denied Canadian cultural and resisted pressures felt by their children to belong to their peer group.

A teacher talked about one such family and referred to CALM 20, a life skills course offered in grade 11:

> In a patriarchal community (East Indian and Lebanese), boys hold special status. For instance, with respect to CALM 20, a brother can take it but a sister can't. The father allows independent living, budgeting, and so on for the boy and not for the girl. I thought it was the human sexuality component, but the father did not want it for her because she did not need to know about how to live independently. The father tried to get exemption on religious grounds but failed. Mom had a little bit of influence. She let the daughter dress in Western clothing and use jewelry and makeup. But because the dad was working out of the home, this was being done behind his back. They had lived in Calgary four or five years. The mom would like to loosen the father up a little and get him to agree to change. The culture itself is not the problem. Parents coming to Canada seem to want to live within their own culture, to remain the same, and not to change. Does Canada promise them that?

Mothers often understand the pressures more keenly than fathers:

> Communication with the home is a problem because of the culture. Kids are pulled by families one way and by peers and school another way. Particularly girls. Parents say no dating, restrict clothing, and demand religious observance and traditional versus nontraditional dress. The person caught in the middle is Mom, who is trying to understand how her daughter is feeling but doesn't want to ruin her. Girls can make friends with other cultures more than boys do.

Teachers feel torn watching young women succumbing to rigid parental pressures to adopt traditional values, even though the culture in which they will eventually live is nontraditional:

> How do we help students? Culturally, girls quit school to go to work; this is the parents' desire. Our culture supports further education.

Teachers fear that these girls will divorce their husbands and be unable to care for themselves.

Teachers feel uncomfortable watching parents react to their children's desires as if the children are nonpersons. A teacher talked about her discomfort with an uncle of one of her students:

> Two years ago, I had a Lebanese female student. Her uncle watched her carefully. He also attended the school. He would follow her to class. He would ask for her out of classes. He did not trust her. I was concerned for her. Arranged marriages are very dangerous for kids. If they are skipping class, their parents may react violently. I don't know how to work with this.

And another teacher noted:

> Kids are property to dads. One said about a daughter that if she leaves his house, she could be bleeding on his doorstep and he would walk over her. He would consider her dead.

Many parents of second-language students adamantly resist adopting new values:

> A Vietnamese student female confides her problems to me. There are strong cultural differences. She can't have boyfriends. She has one but can't spend time with him. Her parents demand for her to be home immediately. She has time only at school for visiting. Her parents forbid her to have a boyfriend, but she has kept him. She went to his birthday party. His parents were there, and a picture was taken. The girl's father saw the picture. She has two sisters, one at this school. They tell on her. They are top students and speak Vietnamese at home. The girls are university-bound and are expected to have a career, but they are strictly controlled with respect to boys. The youngest girl can get a driver's license and will drive the older two girls to and from university when they go. The girls are so caught up in rules made by both father and mother. The parents are so concerned about what friends in the Vietnamese community will say. The younger sister seems to be breaking out of the mold; she was younger when she came here.

Parents Are Patriarchal

Many families of ESL students are patriarchal. This is very obvious during interactions between female teachers and the fathers of students, and between fathers and their daughters.

When a female teacher feels threatened by an aggressive parent, it is usual

to call an administrator to provide support. A school counselor related the following incident involving a father:

> Here's an example of a Lebanese family. The mother was lovely. The father was abusive. He came into the school to scream at me and at the kid in the halls. He demanded to have certain books out of the library. The father is on social assistance, and he'd take the check and drink it. He'd blame all bad things on the daughter. When the mother tried to intervene, she got hit. I brought in an assistant principal, and the father got mad because a male came in and backed me. Later, the mother asked to keep the passports locked up over Christmas; she was afraid he'd take the kids back to Lebanon. We must tap into the mother's feelings of protectiveness and nurturing with the children. The father sees the children as property.

According to another teacher:

> We just integrated a specific ESL student. I'm her mentor. I put letters in the mailboxes of her teachers. Her father has very high and unrealistic expectations of her. I work with the father. He is Spanish. I have not directly talked with him, for he would accept a "no" from a male, not a female.

Many parents of ESL students do not understand what to expect from a school, nor do they understand how to exercise their rights appropriately. A teacher talked of a parent who was unusually intense about making his child succeed:

> I recall one Vietnamese parent who came in asking for more homework for his child. The student was doing a lot of work already, and I had to say no more homework.

Another teacher recalled:

> The father of a Spanish student wanted her to be in Math 10, but she preferred Math 13. The father told her to demand Math 10 and threatened her. We tried to get the father into school to help explain the situation.

Many fathers aggressively communicate their demands to the teachers and the school, and most teachers are socialized to communicate assertively; the difference is that an aggressive parent seeks to control the teacher in a win-lose situation, whereas an assertive teacher seeks to collaborate, to work out a win-win situation.

Parents Feel Powerless

In spite of parental aggressiveness evidenced in patriarchal families, many parents of ESL students seem to be powerless with their children. Their chil-

dren can choose not to be controlled any longer by leaving home. When their children leave home, the parents lose the ability to cope in the English-speaking world.

Parental powerlessness arises from dependency. The parents feel dependent upon their children to interpret mail, answer the telephone, interpret at banks, help at unemployment or social services offices, translate at medical clinics and hospitals, and interpret at parent–teacher conferences at school. In comments similar to those of others, one teacher stated:

> An Hispanic boy lived with his mother and younger brothers. The boy was perceived by his teacher to be lazy. He was 18 years old. The teacher telephoned before Christmas with the aid of the interpreter. He was working in the evenings and on weekends as an indoor house painter seven days a week. He earned $1500 a month. He contributed some to the family, but he had no bank account. He just spent it. The teacher wanted him to go to the _____ program at _____ . . . he wanted to go to _____ where he had friends. He finally agreed to stay at _____ and he was to check in with me on a regular basis. He started dropping classes. Kids have a lot of control in the home. Mom did not speak English and the kids have money and they know the "system". They really do have it over their parents at home. Once the school had his "number," he started to pull away. Kids are working for leather jackets, cars, booze. Kids are over 18 and threaten to leave the home. Parents feel vulnerable and dependent on them.

Since power lies in the hands of the children and not with parents, role reversals occur. The parents are placed in a position where they feel unable to make demands of their children for fear the children will leave home. This is particularly true of their sons:

> Chinese parents do not ask questions of their sons. Money arrives at the kitchen table on Friday night, and parents wonder where it comes from. They never ask but just accept it.

Another teacher concurred:

> Parents do not ask questions of their sons. They take things at face value.

Thus, many male ESL students gain the level of autonomy normally attributed to adults. Consequently, they often drop out of school without involving their parents in the decision.

Parents' Needs

Parents of ESL students are characterized above as being distrustful of the educational system, resistant to change, patriarchal, and dependent on their

children to make their way in an English-speaking world. Analysis of the data indicates that parents need more satisfying connections with the school, greater intercultural awareness, enhanced collaborative communication skills, and greater self-empowerment in dealing with their children.

Parents Need Connection

The parents of second-language students need to feel a connection with the school system. They need to learn about school goals and to understand how the goals are appropriate in Canadian society. One teacher said:

> We must teach parents to talk about two different cultures: schools are different from home. Kids have to learn another language. Kids from Hong Kong and Taiwan and Vietnam have higher levels of learning in math and science, but lower learning in communication and social skills.

Whereas schools in Europe and Asia tend to focus more than Canadian schools on skill development and academic rigor, Canadian schools tend to focus more on individualism, creativity, and relational skills. Thus Canadian schools have differences which are misunderstood by many parents of ESL students.

Parents need to feel more comfortable communicating with teachers. One teacher remarked:

> Parents are scared to come to schools, for their English is poor. In China, parents and teachers try to meet regularly once a month. They want to meet even when the kids are in grade 12.

Many parents had greater contact with schools in their country of origin. However, they feel uncertain about how to get access to teachers and administration in Canadian schools.

Teachers inadvertently deter parents from communicating with them. Teachers tend to focus their attempts on communicating with students and not their parents. They do not directly communicate with the parents first.

> When taking attendance I say, "Humph, still away," or "This is the third or fourth time." On the fourth time, I ask the class about the whereabouts of the kid. Then I ask when is the best time to phone. They say a sister might be around. I just ask friends in class. I do not ask the guidance or ESL teachers. This is my most powerful tool. I get the message to the parents through friends because the community still hangs in together. I have neighbors in _____ who know me by reputation.

Teachers communicate with parents using written letters and report cards. One teacher translated report cards into the parents' first language. This resulted in unanticipated consequences:

> Last year, transitional Spanish and Arabic kids in my Science 10 course took time to translate interim reports for me. They were written in the language of the parents. I didn't get appreciation for this. The parents gave me static that they spoke English at home! Two Arabic parents and one Spanish parent of 20 in total were annoyed.

Communication across cultures is made more complex when it is also across status, such as parent–teacher status.

Thoughtful teacher feedback can help establish greater connection for parents with the school. However, the quality of feedback is complicated by the number of students who are from different language groups. Thus teachers must take time to learn about the different cultural backgrounds before they talk to individual parents.

Parents Need Intercultural Awareness

Many parents resist changing their values when raising their children. But children are enormously affected by peer-group values, which are often in conflict with the values held by their parents. Parents need to learn more about Canadian culture to understand the pressures their children experience.

One teacher commented that when schools send an interpreter to parents' homes, they must see the interpreter as one more in a long line of people intervening in their lives. The teacher concluded:

> We are encouraged to use home–school workers to work with each family and connect students and parents. We can't send people into the home or demand that the family come to the school because they won't. Someone who meets with them the moment they arrive in Canada may build trust and provide consistency, so they will feel welcomed immediately.

This teacher thought that each family should be assigned to a liaison worker for the entire establishment period. The liaison worker would be capable of bridging gaps between the family and the institutions in society. In this way, families would be able to develop more trusting relationships with their workers and acquire intercultural awareness more readily.

Even so, liaison workers do manage to bridge the gap. One teacher recalled:

> Some Austrian parents I have are of a high SES and articulate speakers. Their son and daughter are doing well. The son wanted to be a welder. The father hit the roof. Try to communicate the child's expectations to the parents and the parents' expectations to the student! The father was very aggressive with the son.

The teachers interviewed talked about students straddling two cultures, one at home and the other at school. As teachers become close to ESL students, a

level of trust develops. Consequently, the teachers learn about the parents through the eyes of the students.

One teacher felt it would be better for the parents to learn thoroughly about Canadian culture, to reflect on their own culture, and to teach their children about both. "Since children cannot be controlled," she continued, "parents should empower them with information so they can make appropriate choices." The teacher shared this story:

> At Christmas, another girl got married. She probably was my best student in Math 33 last year. She was learning-disabled and learned to cope, and she succeeded brilliantly. She married and is unhappy. She won't have the education she may need in the future. Parents must be trained or informed somehow to alter their expectations. They must learn how to work with their daughter using different values. This girl is dreadfully unhappy, and therefore why not try to help these people who are caught between the responsibilities of one culture and the rights of the other? Kids often decide to go underground.

Parents Need Collaborative Skills

Many families of ESL students are perceived to be patriarchal. That is, the fathers and mothers function with different roles: the father is the provider and decision maker, and the mother is the homemaker and nurturer. Several teachers felt that parents need to learn collaboration skills, to value equality in roles, and to move away from patriarchal attitudes.

A teacher referred to the compulsory CALM course that the students took in grade 11 and thought such a course might be appropriate for parents too:

> We must tell parents where the commitments are in our society, our school culture, regular attendance, do home work; and where the freedoms are, to have spares or non-designated time in grades 11 and 12, to choose subjects. Maybe we need to include parents in the CALM program, for it includes career planning, decision making, relationships etc.

Thus parents could learn more understanding, tolerance, acceptance, team building, collaboration, and self-esteem. Many teachers expressed discomfort about talking with some parents who believed in a patriarchal model of a family. One teacher told of her experience with an Arabic family:

> We must learn meaningful ways to express achievement to people of different cultures. A girl had 60% in Biology 10, and she was just acquiring a new language and read at a grade 4 level. Her father almost beat her in front of me. What does a teacher do? He asked me how she was doing. We need warmer one-on-one family communication. We need a course on this.

Another teacher felt uncomfortable with the aggressiveness of an Arabic father at a parent meeting:

> One father had a daughter. He was very persistent in getting the details about everything she did. He wouldn't stop. He wanted us to talk about his daughter in public. We were lacking cultural information about how to proceed.

When teachers and parents are able to accept value differences without judging them against set standards, communication will become more effective. Thus, parents need to learn greater cultural sensitivity to collaborate with teachers in a more cooperative and assertive manner.

Parents Need to Feel Self-Empowered

Many parents of ESL students feel powerless because their relationship with their children is highly dependent. Thus, many parents need to feel greater self-empowerment. Self-empowerment might occur if parents learned to speak English, thus lessening their dependency on their children to interpret the English-speaking world around them.

Teachers feel awkward calling a home where nobody speaks English. One teacher said:

> I called home last semester and got stony silence. I used the kid's first name, and all I got was "No." I assumed that they were saying the kid wasn't home. I then called at another time, after a shift change, and I asked information about the kid. On opening day, I set the tone about being concerned with all people. I will call home when I need extra information.

This teacher's strategy is possible because he knows how the family functions. Another teacher is not so persistent or creative and accepts communicating with the home through the children:

> Right now, I work through the kid and hope the kid will be the channel. Direct communication with the parents is essential, though.

Teachers are saddened when they discover children sneaking around their parents. Children often break from parental control when they feel overdominated. Parents need to learn to motivate their children intrinsically as well as extrinsically to prevent them from becoming too secretive:

> Kids today have cut parents out of their lives. Parents are old-fashioned, overprotective, dominant. Kids are saddened but won't communicate with parents who won't.

Traditional ways of influencing children do not work with many refugee children who have not had consistent parental guidance in their lives:

> A Chinese refugee student had spent so long in prison camps he had lost all sense of the importance of the religious ministers. These religious leaders normally have influence over nonrefugee immigrants.

Parents (and guardians, as in this case) need to develop authentic relationships with their children. This involves becoming more connected with the school, gaining increased intercultural awareness, learning to communicate in culturally appropriate ways, and becoming self-empowered as parents.

The School System

The teachers interviewed talked about the school system. They talked about what the school did and described how the school was structured. They described the school system as ethnocentric because it essentially functions to serve white Anglo-Saxon students, and they described the school system as uncommitted because it funds the needs of ESL students outside the core budget.

Schools Are Ethnocentric

The school system is ethnocentric around the Anglo-Saxon culture. For example, teachers are generally aware of problems related to celebrating Christmas without celebrating other major religious festivals, too. School personnel are often unaware of when non-Christian celebrations are held. One teacher noted:

> We set a parent meeting one night in March. It was to explain registration procedures, but it fell on Ramadan, an Arabic celebration. Most Lebanese parents could not attend.

Another teacher warned:

> We must ask what exactly is Canadian culture and how it is manifested. At elementary schools, having Christmas concerts is debatable.

These teachers are aware of the ethnocentrism exhibited by the schools. Although most teachers in Canadian schools are of Anglo-Saxon heritage, many understand they must reflect broader values than exist within Anglo-Saxon culture.

Most teachers in urban schools in Canada have taught ESL students. Teachers normally emphasize curriculum content over language development in their classes, but when several ESL students are present, the teachers try to adjust so the ESL students can learn as much English as possible. One teacher told the following story about his grade 10 nonacademic class:

> I have 15 ESL kids in my Math 13 class of 30 students. These kids have just been integrated. I provide them with written material. The kids don't need the translated

concept sheets because they are good individual-progress students, and they work hard at the English versions.

Hiring teachers of different race and ethnicity is not a simple solution to ethnocentrism. A teacher noted:

We hired a Chinese ESL teacher, but it is more work for me. I'm spending more time observing him, telling him how things are done here, setting up a buddy system. He's teaching five linguistic groups, and if he speaks Chinese, he will offend the others. English is the neutral language. He will have more to work through.

Sometimes the teachers feel overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity of second-language students:

I communicate with kids as long as I can. We've had several individuals hauled in. (Sent to the principal's office). If change does not come after talking, then I talk with the parents. My biggest problem is learning how to pronounce names. I have a home room of "T's". Tran, Win Tran or Tran Win . . . so I feel cautious not to talk with parents when I am not sure with respect to name pronunciation etc. I keep to the kids.

A guidance teacher was more comfortable with unfamiliarity and saw humor in the sounds of names:

I am a guidance teacher responsible for students with last names beginning with *Q* to *Z*. So I get the Tings, Tangs, and Tongs.

Several formal school documents may be translated into different languages to reduce the effects of ethnocentrism. For instance, report cards, parent orientation invitations, and city service brochures may be translated into Arabic, Punjabi, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, French, and Portuguese. However, interim reports, anecdotal reports, newsletters, and newspapers are often only in English. A teacher admitted:

To communicate with the home, I had to communicate through the student, and I don't know if things are getting back home at all.

Another teacher developed a checklist report card:

I use a checklist report card for all subjects, and these are translated into the language of the parent. I use these for official midterm reports.

The level of ethnocentrism of the school systems is evident in the fact that educators have yet to devise a system for testing ESL students who are also

illiterate in their first language. These are mostly apt to be refugee students. Many refugee students have minimal language skills because they missed school in their war-torn homelands. Teachers use only culturally bound literacy tests. A teacher said:

> Refugee immigrants rarely have literacy in their own language. They do not have English either, but they are too old to go to elementary school and must attend the high school. There is no way to test them for their disabilities.

In another situation, a student was unable to vocalize certain sounds. His teachers lacked the resources to know whether this deficiency was symptomatic of all people from his culture, or if it was a speech deficiency. The teacher went to the student's home to find an answer. The teacher said:

> I have an Arabic student referred by _____ for speech therapy. There were three different sounds he couldn't make. I met with the guardian, a brother, to get specific speech, hearing, and language information on the student, by using interpreters. Looking at his place in the family constellation and so on, his speech is naturally behind.

If high levels of ethnocentrism exist, it is expected that the ratio of dropouts will be higher among members of the nondominant culture than among those of the dominant culture. One teacher stated that many more ESL students drop out of school than are reported:

> 50-70 % of kids lost to streets. Last year, we lost 50 of 260 ESL students at this school. It's really 50 of 125 ESL registered at the school. Of 125, 40 or better are advanced and not at risk. Really we've lost 50 of 75 of the beginner and intermediate ESL.

This is an indication of the high level of ethnocentrism that exists in the school system.

When ESL students enroll in a regular class, teachers must adapt their teaching styles and accommodate difficulties concerned with language acquisition. But as one teacher suggested, there is little enthusiasm for adapting:

> In math class, some ESL students are preliterate. This is extremely difficult because some are learning-disabled, but there is no way to prove it, for the tests are in English. It would be tremendous to have an interpreter . . . but I have three language groups with seven kids.

One teacher recognized that ESL students are often placed with unmotivated English-speaking students or students of less ability. ESL students who are

placed in nonacademic streams are given less curriculum content. Schools will retain ESL students in these classes until their English improves. But many ESL students become bored. One teacher said:

> Science 14 and 24 are composed of subcultures. Often, intelligent kids choose them. An ESL girl wanted to take it; she was bored. She got bored stiff. I encouraged her to switch to Biol. 10 and the Chem. 10 stream. She's now tutoring other kids. Most kids taking Sc. 14 and 24 are poorly motivated and underachievers. They are WASPs [*sic*]. Sc. 14T is a separate group.

Further evidence of the level of ethnocentrism may be found in how ESL courses are articulated with the core courses offered by the school. Little evidence exists that logical articulation values are defined between ESL courses and academic courses. One teacher said:

> We need more comprehensive programming credits. For example, ESL 10B is similar to EN 16 which is open only to slower learning English students. The ESL 10B is 5 credits and the EN 16 is 3 credits. This makes no sense.

Finally, the teachers do not deal with educational issues of major social importance. In one incident, a teacher described how ESL males react to cultural dissonance:

> The kids I worry about most are boys. Girls succumb to patriarchal cultures. Boys are not schooled and end up with a gang education.

The teacher indicated acceptance that male ESL students may join ethnic gangs and not take action.

Another teacher accepted that patriarchal fathers might be abusive and controlling. The teacher seemed to accept this possibility and suggested ways to work around it rather than intervene:

> In communication with families of girls, if you do not want to make waves, you start with the mother. If a kid alleges abuse by the father, do not send in the social worker. It makes things worse. The father gets enraged about sharing family secrets. Talk with the mother because she is at home and she probably wants to get out from under.

Attitudes held by teachers may be seen by their action. In this case, teachers deferred. Teachers seem willing to accept conditions for ESL students that would not be tolerated for students of the dominant culture. The lack of will to counter the disadvantages indicates overall institutional ethnocentrism.

Schools Are Uncommitted

The second proposition about the school system is that it is uncommitted to ESL students and their parents. Evidence supporting this proposition includes teachers in the school who are not proactive in establishing authentic relationships with parents; the limited number of weeks of English-language training provided to students, fathers, and mothers; the low status of ESL courses with respect to the academic courses; and the predominance of the use of English in most formal school–parent communication.

Several teachers said that the school does not proactively include parents in the life of the school on a regular basis. Although the parents are invited to major meetings and festivals, they are not invited to daily activities in which their children may have a part. Although a teacher said that ESL students who liked him generally wanted their parents to meet him, he did not indicate that he actively welcomed parents:

> Parent expectations are still very strong at home. Because kids are at school all day, we get to establish bridges that compensate for cultural differences. But parents find school very scary, official, and institutional even though we have translators, and so on. I have found that if I have a good relationship with a child, they generally want to have me meet their parents. I've never used an official translator; I usually use a brother or uncle. There are four of "them" meeting and only one of me. Thus they feel more power as long as whoever is translator gets along. I want to tell them the student is doing well or poorly. The problem is overresponse. Parents take the hard line and want their kid to work harder. But how to communicate academic achievement appropriately is important. Percentages are often erroneous, use of bubble forms do not provide enough detail. We haven't changed this though.

Another teacher thought that refugee students ought to receive support in learning English up to mastery rather than restricting ESL to three years. After three years, they "graduate" from ESL whether they can speak English or not:

> Refugees are welcomed by the Feds [*sic*], and the Feds ought to support this beyond the three-year language training.

Parents who are wage earners are eligible for a maximum of 16 weeks of English-language training. If the parents are at home, they are ineligible for any training at all. This policy works against effective school communication with the home. Most schools do not address this problem; for example, they do not consistently offer adult ESL for parents.

In times of fiscal constraint, the pattern of budget cuts indicates the budget areas that a school district regards as having less priority. The areas of greatest priority are considered core to an organization. ESL was vulnerable to a 30% cutback in teaching staff during a budget review. A teacher remarked:

> The system is under budgetary constraint and will elect to eliminate ESL programs.

Most formal communication with parents is in English, not in other languages. Although many documents are translated into several languages, the parents do not respond to the schools and participate in dialogue. A concerned teacher said:

> We should try to find out why there is no contact with the parents. Teachers are frustrated and communicate this. Parents may be intimidated. Should we use translators more? Is there a better way to make use of them?

Another teacher expressed concern about the computer-controlled phoning system set up to inform parents of their child's unexplained absence from school:

> The homeroom teacher meets only for special occasions, such as timetables and report cards. The phone master system is in English only.

Although one teacher listed the languages that documents are available in as Vietnamese, Arabic, Chinese, Punjabi, and Spanish, he noted:

> The school newsletter is in English only, but the special events bulletins are translated, to encourage parents to come to concerts. The article on the concert was a full page.

One teacher explained that communication with parents occurs only if something is critical.

> I don't often talk to parents. I prefer to keep it between the kids and myself. If I get to the parents, it is with a knowledge that the problem is critical.

The School System's Needs

The school system is generally ethnocentric and uncommitted to ESL students, so its needs are addressed here around these two themes.

School systems need to increase their intercultural awareness. They also need to increase their commitment to ESL students and their parents. The following discussion expands on teachers' perceptions of these needs.

Schools Systems Need Intercultural Awareness

The teachers interviewed said the school system needs to use more complex patterns of communication with parents, to increase the frequency of opportunities to communicate, and to reduce the alienation experienced by parents. These suggestions are discussed in order.

A teacher explained how communication can be encouraged to occur spontaneously and informally:

> We are hiring a bilingual teaching assistant. He will be in the hallways at lunch hours to provide a role model for students. He is 24 years old and very mature. When he was a student here, he helped us during the Iraq war. He has a lot of cross-cultural experiences. He seems open to other religions and is nonreligious himself. He will work 18 hours a week. He starts tomorrow. Then we will hire a Vietnamese and a Chinese assistant.

Using a bilingual teaching assistant provides a model for connecting with parents. A bilingual assistant acts as a liaison with families. Thus, the more spontaneous and informal communication increases the level of complexity of communication between home and school.

One teacher talked about cultural neutrality:

> We scheduled a parent night in conflict with Ramadan, a religious festival. Our staff decided to offer an afternoon, a second time, to allow the Arab parent community to attend. They made a special thing for Arabs rather than, say, an evening and an afternoon one. It is a subtle difference, but the reaction of staff was "Why have this special event for the Arabs?" It would be preferable to emphasize it as an afternoon alternative than to focus on the religious aspect. We must make the statement in culturally neutral terms.

Cultural neutrality requires intercultural awareness—in this case, a knowledge of other religions and celebrations.

One teacher reported that her school was staffed with part-time translators:

> An Arabic translator is on staff half a day per week. We use him with the ESL group. A Vietnamese and Chinese translator comes in halfdays as well.

The regular presence of translators on a school's staff serves to heighten intercultural awareness and enables communication between teachers and parents to be more spontaneous and meaningful. One teacher described the interpreters at a parents' meeting:

> At parent–teacher night, we had four or five different interpreters. We show and talk about the ESL program. We explain how to get a grade 12 diploma. We've done this for four or five years now. More and more parents show up each time. We give a slide and tape show of the school, too.

Two other examples of creating greater complexity in communication patterns were given by another teacher:

> Report cards are sent home in the first language as much as possible. Some of the cards were built through _____, some were made here. They're not as formal as we

> would like them to be. . . . We use multitcultural liaison workers out of _____ to contact parents at schools.

But teachers have not always been successful in understanding the limitations of the ESL students in their classes:

> A Vietnamese girl was acting out a traditional role in the classroom. She withdrew from the course because she could not stretch her vision to meet my expectations. Usually, I present my expectations to a student by being sensitive to their points of view. This way we can use stereotypes positively.

The teachers interviewed identified several strategies that the school uses to communicate with the parents of ESL students. One teacher said:

> What the school is doing is sending information home in different languages. ESL teachers are phoning home and so on. Skits and plays bring the parents into the school.

Teachers must be aware of how parents may react to what they say. A teacher explained:

> Get parents involved at an elementary and junior high level with the school. They are scared because of language deficiency. Parents are working in labor and support jobs for long hours. Students are scared of a parent–teacher meeting because they are afraid of what the teacher may tell the parent. Parents will say we are not strict enough. We must explain to teachers the importance of positive reinforcement and feedback when giving it to immigrant parents.

Teachers must learn to communicate in more complex ways so that the parents of ESL students are able to merge their attitudes with Canadian attitudes. For teachers to adapt, they must merge their attitudes with the attitudes of other cultures. One teacher concluded:

> We must be willing to make the changes in our system that will enable cultures to merge, like ensuring a bilingual capability in parent meetings, in notifications home, in modifying curriculum, so it's not European-oriented.

Teachers seek ways to help parents understand their relationship with the school. A teacher commented:

> We need a mechanism in place where the parents would come into the school and understand their rights and roles and our expectations of these roles. Often, parents talk to teachers only if first spoken to.

Such a mechanism might help reduce alienation and allow for increased intercultural awareness.

A teacher explained how administrators found people to translate parents' invitations to an orientation meeting:

> We invited parents for an evening, and an assistant in the library translated the invitations into Spanish, a cafeteria worker worked on the Chinese version, and a student worked on an Arabic version.

However, alienation may be unwittingly increased by the school. One teacher said:

> Meeting with Lebanese parents, the interpreter wore a suit and tie and had an education. The father was dressed in an old dress shirt, green work pants, and had less education. The interpreter seemed to put the father down.

Curious teachers may ask questions and learn more about second-language students at the school, thus reducing alienation:

> Certain last names of students indicate different places from which they originate. If teachers know these names, they might be able to understand different ways to respond to the students.

School System Members Need More Commitment

Teachers in the school system can encourage greater commitment to the school community by immigrant parents by implementing several strategies. They can integrate second-language needs, enable peer modeling, and ensure greater routinization in the school day.

One teacher said that the principal made her aware of the diversity in the school:

> I think that in hiring me, the interview zeroed definitely on how I would treat special needs. I was hired by another principal, who was very sensitive to treatment of individuals. They were not looking first for specialists or academics. It was very clear that this was the kind of teacher group here.

Teachers must learn ways to communicate effectively in order to integrate ESL students into their classes. One teacher noted:

> Teachers constantly comment that they can't understand what a student is saying, and I suggest they ask them to repeat it; say it in a different way; to guess what they are saying; to draw pictures; and to act it out by jumping up and down if you have to!

Teachers broaden their understanding of teaching when they imagine dancing and jumping up and down in a class of 30 students to communicate with students from five different language groups.

A major resource in a school is the student body. When teachers or administrators need to communicate with ESL students whose language skills are poor, they often ask bilingual students for help. But these students need time to socialize naturally with their peers. They need the opportunity to be like other students. Too much reliance on ESL students for official translation may be unfair. One teacher noted:

> There is a need to use peer translators. But for these peers, it is using up their spare time, and they have their own lives. We might hire them on work experience.

This tendency extends into the daily routine of the school day. Teachers ask students to help as peer ambassadors, which may be a mixed blessing. One teacher stated:

> Whenever language is a barrier for me, I use the peer ambassadors. They speak more than one language and help with registration. I also rely on the multicultural liaison officers.

A second teacher echoed this comment:

> There are 16 peer ambassadors in the school. We got funding from the _____ Education Trust. The purpose is to help students and families. To help socialize, to, adapt, to become more comfortable. To be a buddy or role model. They are mostly grades 11 and 12 students.

ESL students generally supplement verbal communication with contextual information to understand what is expected of them. How do ESL students keep track of the many changes made in day-to-day school routines announced over the public address system? Since poor language skills may prevent them from understanding the subtleties of coded speech (e.g., "Day 3 is changed on Wednesday to ABCDC instead of ABCCD") and contextual information is absent from public address messages, ESL students may not understand what is expected of them when going from class to class. One teacher said:

> When a long weekend comes up, Fridays are usually shortened. We need to establish a policy and systematize the shortening of Friday, making Wednesday always a full day. Kids come to school on Wednesday with no lunch but will have to stay all day when they are expecting to go home. So they end up being hungry all afternoon at school. We need to be more sensitive about that.

Even if ESL students do understand that a major change will occur, the schools fail to ensure that the parents will receive an official notification in their own language. Notices are usually published in a newsletter, but the newsletter is

most often available in English only. So ESL students remain disadvantaged. One teacher noted:

> If the school has a shortened day, how do ESL parents trust this information, and not a lie from a student. Schools communicate this in writing to English parents, but not to other parents.

CONCLUSION

Only one of Ogbu's three classifications (1992), voluntary immigrants, is relevant to this study. Neither autonomous nor involuntary immigrants were cited by any teacher interviewed. Voluntary immigrants cited in this study include families from Austria, Hong Kong, Iran, India, mainland China, and some from Lebanon and Chile. However, other immigrants cited in this study are refugees. Refugee immigrants in this study include families from Vietnam, El Salvador, and some from Lebanon and Chile. Refugee status is assessed by the department of Employment and Immigration Canada on a case-by-case basis.

Since Ogbu's classification does not extend to refugee immigrants or address the refugee immigrant's relationship to the mainstream culture, the following question is posed: What characterizes the relationships between refugee minorities and the mainstream culture?

1. Many refugee immigrants are illiterate in their own language, and this illiteracy creates difficulties for ESL teachers. Refugee students fall behind voluntary immigrant groups in their schooling as a consequence and may lose self-esteem.

2. Many refugee immigrants come from violent backgrounds. They have survived by being highly individualistic and extrinsically motivated in their homelands. Refugee immigrants cannot readily understand the morality found in Canada and the United States because being intrinsically motivated to participate in and contribute to the functioning of a democracy is highly valued. School authorities are pressed to communicate with many refugee immigrant students without giving a "big stick" message which educators find unpalatable.

3. Refugee immigrant students often come from shattered families. During their childhood, these students may never havehad socially acceptable adult role models, and as young adults, they may resist authority figures representing social institutions. These students relate to teachers and other school authorities more negatively than voluntary immigrant students.

4. Refugee immigrant students often live in refugee camps for many years. By Western standards, experiences in refugee camps are brutal, leaving humans with little more than a fading hope for a better future. Refugees' hopes soar upon arriving in Canada and the United States, only to crash when the daily realities of life become apparent. School authorities work with refugee immi-

grant students when hopes begin to crash and are confronted with mood swings and deep states of depression and anger.

Ogbu did not include refugees in his classification of minorities because their relationship to the mainstream culture is not readily explained. The relationship between refugee minorities and the mainstream culture, unlike those of autonomous, voluntary, or involuntary immigrants, is not focused on the attributes of the mainstream culture but is predominantly egocentric and ethnocentric. Social institutions are not important in their lives. School authorities must develop strategies for engaging refugee immigrant students in activities of the school in meaningful ways. They must break through the barriers of egocentrism and ethnocentrism.

The data support three propositions characterizing all groups of minority ESL students, their parents, and the school system:

1. ESL students (a) feel displaced from their homeland; (b) are academic achievers; (c) feel alienated from Canadian-born peers and from their own families; and (d) deny Canadian and other cultures.

2. Parents of ESL students (a) are distrustful of the Canadian educational system; (b) resist the new values that their children want to adopt; (c) maintain patriarchal relationships; and (d) feel powerless and dependent on their children to help them cope with their English-language environment.

3. School systems (a) are ethnocentric, supporting the English language Anglo-Saxon culture, and (b) are uncommitted to providing *equal* service to ESL students.

From these propositions come three propositions of *need*:

4. ESL students need (a) to feel connected with their homeland; (b) to be challenged physically, emotionally, and spiritually as well as academically to develop into more "whole persons"; (c) to become self-empowered and to be able to make choices openly; and (d) to grow in intercultural awareness.

5. Parents of ESL students need (a) to feel connected with the school system and to understand its values; (b) to grow in intercultural awareness and to empower their children to make informed decisions; (c) to learn collaborative communication skills and to advocate for their children in culturally appropriate ways; and (d) to become self-empowered and less dependent on their children for English translation.

6. School systems need (a) to grow in intercultural awareness and to enable more effective communication with parents and students, and (b) to increase their commitment to providing ESL students service equal to that provided English-speaking students.

That students feel displaced after they leave their country of birth, that parents feel dependent on their children for English translation, and that schools show ethnocentric values and attitudes are commonsense findings. School personnel must identify successful strategies that will enable them to adapt to

changing client needs. Only through persistence will schools be able to provide equal opportunity for students, create opportunities for greater parental self-empowerment, and enhance interdependence between the school and its clients to meet the needs of our rapidly changing society.

Future consideration must be given to the question: How do school system structures (i.e., policies) effect teachers' responses to accommodating cultural diversity in the classroom? Do teachers revise their curriculum and instruction strategies to deal with the increased numbers of ESL students in their classes? The two schools in this study were comparable in most ways (i.e., student population, ethnic makeup, grade level, and location) but were structurally different in that one had an extensive ESL department of 16 ESL teachers, whereas the other had only one ESL teacher and many teacher aides supporting teachers in regular classes. The former school used gradual integration strategies, keeping ESL students out of regular classes for up to three years. The latter school used an early-integration strategy, moving most ESL students into regular classes immediately. During the teacher interviews, the teachers who had experienced early integration talked about the teaching strategies they had used to accommodate the needs of ESL students more than did the teachers who had experienced the gradual integration of ESL students. As teachers are the core of the educational system, the effects of system wide policies on teachers' awareness and teachers' behavior merit further study.

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