The Social Construction of "Ideal Parents": A Qualitative Inquiry Into The Lives of Spanish-Speaking Families In A Toronto Elementary School

by

Suparna Nirdosh

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

© Copyright by Suparna Nirdosh 1998
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-33996-3
The Social Construction of "Ideal Parents": A Qualitative Inquiry Into The Lives of Spanish-Speaking Families In A Toronto Elementary School

by

Suparna Nirdosh 1998

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Abstract

Information on the needs, concerns, hopes and challenges of refugee families in the Canadian educational system is insufficient. Difficulties arise when educators (albeit well-intentioned) assume that parents understand how this works. Further difficulties arise when there is an assumption of a universal definition of what it means to be educated and how education 'should' be supported by families.

Schools, mirroring the structural inequities of larger society, narrowly construct families in an idealized process. Institutions that train educators are influenced by 'universalistic' frameworks which consider 'difference' as deficit. An alternative is collaborative, diversity-oriented and transformative education that responds to the experiences, values and knowledge of families served.

Through participant-observation and interviews, language-matched investigators captured the perspectives of students, parents and teachers involved. It is to be noted that while the design is naturalistic, the small number of persons sampled precludes one from arriving at any overall judgements.
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincerest thanks to the people without whom this thesis would not have made it to completion.

Grace Feuerverger, my supervisor: You encouraged me to engage in reflective practice to locate myself in this work - an invaluable gift which I will continue to use. Your gentle encouragement, support and understanding throughout my thesis journey are much appreciated!

Judy Bernhard, my 2nd reviewer: Without your continuous generosity, wise counsel and motivating conversations, I would not have seen this project to completion. You are an incredible role model!

Fidelia Torres: Through your friendship and fieldnotes you invited me into the lives of these families. Our discussions were thought-provoking and inspirational. Thanks!

The St. George-Maritime-Petawawanese Contingent, my second family: How can I thank you for the hours of crisis intervention you so affectionately (and mandatorily) offered whenever I felt "a silent scream begin inside...".

To my first and life long teachers, my dearest and most respected family. All you Pahnas and Swami Uncle, what would I do without your encouragement, prayers, blessings, long-distance stress management and faith? Jub jub jo jo hona hai, tub tub so so hota hai ... well, it finally hogyad!

Finally, Thank You, RubJi.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ...................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................... iii

Table of Contents ....................................................................................................... iv

List of Tables ............................................................................................................... vii

Introduction ................................................................................................................ 8

1.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 8

1.2 Organization of Thesis .......................................................................................... 13

Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework ...................................................... 15

2.1 Minority Student Educational Outcomes .............................................................. 15

2.2 Explanations of School Failure ............................................................................ 16

2.3 Attitudes Towards Minority Languages and Minority Language Learners ......... 19

2.4 Family Involvement .............................................................................................. 21

2.5 Values of Latin American Families vis-a-vis Education ....................................... 24

2.6 Theoretical Perspectives ...................................................................................... 27

2.7 Evolution of Research Questions For Thesis ....................................................... 31

Location in study: A Narrative Reflection ................................................................. 33

Methodology .............................................................................................................. 44

4.1 Rationale for the Method and Design .................................................................. 44

4.2 Context of Present Thesis ..................................................................................... 48

4.3 The Investigators .................................................................................................. 49

4.4 Participants .......................................................................................................... 49

4.5 The Procedure for the Larger Project ................................................................... 50

4.6 Measures and Instruments ................................................................................... 51

4.7 Perspectives Presented ......................................................................................... 51

4.8 Ethical Considerations ......................................................................................... 52

4.9 Corroboration of Data (Triangulation) ................................................................. 52

4.9.1 member checks: ............................................................................................... 52

4.9.2 inquiry audit: ................................................................................................... 52

4.9.3 stepwise replication ......................................................................................... 52

4.10 Entry Point of the Author and Procedure for Present Thesis ......................... 53
4.11 Evolution of Research Questions For Thesis ........................................... 54
4.12 Limitations ......................................................................................... 54

Case Studies .......................................................................................... 55

5.1 Carlos Marquez .................................................................................. 55
  5.1.1 Background of the Family ............................................................ 55
  5.1.2 Teacher's Assessment of Child's Situation in School .................. 57
  5.1.3 Parents' Assessments of Child's Situation in School .................... 58
  5.1.4 Child's Self Assessment ................................................................. 58
  5.1.5 Teacher's Impressions of Parental Involvement and Understanding of
        Goals .............................................................................................. 60
  5.1.6 Parents' Reports of How They Are Involved With Their Child's
        Education ....................................................................................... 62
  5.1.7 Communication Between the Two Parties .................................... 62
  5.1.8 Further Topics of Concern to the Family .................................... 63

5.2 Esperanza Jimenez ............................................................................ 64
  5.2.1 Background of the Family ............................................................ 64
  5.2.2 Teacher's Assessment of Child's Situation in School .................. 64
  5.2.3 Parents' Assessments of Child's Situation in School .................... 66
  5.2.4 Child's Self Assessment ................................................................. 68
  5.2.5 Teacher's Impressions of Parental Involvement and Understanding of
        Goals .............................................................................................. 69
  5.2.6 Parents' Reports of How They Are Involved With Their Child's
        Education ....................................................................................... 71
  5.2.7 Communication Between the Two Parties .................................... 72
  5.2.8 Further Topics of Concern .......................................................... 74

5.3 Rosita Loisa ......................................................................................... 75
  5.3.1 Background of the Family ............................................................ 75
  5.3.2 Teacher's Assessment of Child's Situation in School .................. 76
  5.3.3 Parents' Assessments of Child's Situation in School .................... 78
  5.3.4 Child's Self Assessment ................................................................. 79
  5.3.5 Teacher's Impressions of Parental Involvement and Understanding of
        Goals .............................................................................................. 82
  5.3.6 Parents' Reports of How They Are Involved in Their Child's
        Education ....................................................................................... 84
  5.3.7 Communication Between the Two Parties .................................... 85
Analysis and Discussion of Themes ........................................ 87

6.1. Theme One: L1 (first language) is regarded as being detrimental to child achievement and parental involvement by the school. ................. 87

6.2. Theme Two: There is an incongruence in the meanings that the school and the parents assign to "education" and "being educated". .................... 92

6.3. Theme Three: Parents and the school construe involvement differently; the school, in its institutional operations, tends not to take account of parental involvement in the terms of the parents. ......................... 98

Conclusion and Recommendations ........................................ 105

7.1. Conclusions ......................................................... 105

7.2. Recommendations .................................................. 107

References ........................................................................... 111

Appendix A ........................................................................ 120

Appendix B ........................................................................ 121

Appendix C ........................................................................ 122

Appendix D ........................................................................ 123
List of Tables

1. Table 1: Immigrant Landings to Ontario by Country of Last Permanent Residence and Immigrant Class 1993: Top Refugee-Producing Countries ......................................................... 11

2. Table 2: Latin-American Refugee Claimants in Toronto Office by Country of Persecution: January - December 1996 .............................. 12
Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Nearly 7,000 children enrolled in Toronto's public schools have entered Canada as refugees (Smith, 1997). Yet, little is known about how refugee families and their children fare in Canadian schools. Information on how the needs of refugee children and their families can be met is desperately lacking. Lived histories and cultural competencies of this group are often misunderstood by people in power. Thus, in order to understand their situation, it is crucial to hear the voices of refugee children and their families.

Presently, information on the needs, concerns, hopes and fears of refugee parents in the educational system is insufficient. Serious problems occur when educators, trained in accordance with mainstream perspectives, prescribe to alleged and idealized constructions of a 'standard' or 'ideal' family. By assuming that there is only one type of valid knowledge (specifically, that there is only one definition of what it means to be 'educated'), schools fail to affirm family competencies. Various researchers have found that in Toronto, refugee families expressed their lack of connection with the school system. These parents also expressed feelings of intimidation and fear (Bernhard & Freire, 1994; Kaprielian-Churchill, 1994).

The positive impact of parent involvement on minority children's educational outcomes has been demonstrated by studies such as those of Delgado-Gaitan (1990), Goldenberg & Gallimore (1995) and Trueba (1984). However, schools seem to employ a specific 'template' of what constitutes 'parent involvement' (i.e., attendance at meetings and
field trips, knowledge of how to interact with teachers, and what it means to be involved) and fail to recognize the fundamental involvement that parents are capable of having in their children's education. First hand, contextualized information from refugee parents is missing. Issues that require exploration include: what meaningful involvement is to refugee parents; parents' definition of education; parents' strategies for supporting their children; parents' assessments of the needs of their children; the 'ideal parent' as defined by (in this study Spanish speaking) refugee parents; and the lived experiences of Spanish speaking refugee parents in Toronto. These issues, with a focus on how teachers perceive the families, will be explored in this thesis. It is to be noted that this study is a preliminary analysis; the lack of generalizability of any findings or analysis is acknowledged.

The socialization process in schools mirrors the structural inequities of larger society through 'common sense' understandings and allegedly appropriate, universal norms for behaving and being. These norms also narrowly construct both parents and children; this construction exists to maintain the status quo, as already marginalized Spanish speaking refugee families may not fit this so called 'ideal'.

The issues above can best be explored through qualitative ethnographic methodology. Hence, this ethnographic study will investigate the lived experiences of Spanish speaking refugee families in the Canadian school system. Specifically, the study will focus on parent and school interactions. It is hoped that in doing so, there will be a critical exploration of the currently employed mainstream view of the 'ideal parent' and an emergence of a more inclusive one, one that responds to the experiences of immigrant and refugee families that are often socially marginalized.
Of the 30 million people residing in Canada, 15% are either immigrants or are children of immigrant parents. Canada currently accepts approximately 200,000 immigrants per annum in accordance with the 5-year plan. Almost 52,000 entrants to Canada in 1991 were classified as official refugees, nearly 5,000 of whom were children under the age of nine. Bernhard, Freire & Lanphier (1997) add:

There are additionally a great many migrants from countries known to have high levels of civil strife, military violence, and terrorism so it is reasonable to assume that they are involuntarily fleeing war, terror, and persecution (official or de facto refugees). (p. 3)

The main current sources for refugees have been summarized as follows by Bernhard, Freire & Lanphier (1997) in the table on the next page. As indicated in the table, approximately 32,339 official and de facto refugees came to Ontario in 1993, of whom almost 16,175 were children. An estimated 10% (over 7,000) of the children in Toronto's public schools entered Canada as refugees. Of this number, more than three quarters of them have required some sort of intervention from the school board. The above statistics are expected to follow a similar trend in the future.
Table 1

**IMMIGRANTLANDINGSTOONTARIOBYCOUNTRYOFLASTPERMANENTRESIDENCE**
**ANDIMMIGRANTCLASS1993:TOPREFUGEE-PRODUCINGCOUNTRIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>REFUGEE/DESIGNATED</th>
<th>FAMILY&amp;INDEPENDENT (DE FAKTO REFUGEES)</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>3,219</td>
<td>4,247</td>
<td>7,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Yugoslavia</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>4,455</td>
<td>4,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>3,163</td>
<td>4,002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>2,291</td>
<td>2,595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>2,111</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>2,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1,045</td>
<td>1,427</td>
<td>2,427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1,575</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>2,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>1,475</td>
<td>1,708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>834</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>1,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>1,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>12,015</td>
<td>20,324</td>
<td>32,339</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In: Bernhard, Freire & Lanphier (1997).
The primary sources of refugee data in Toronto have been summarized by Bernhard, Freire & Lanphier (1997) in Table 2 below.

Table 2: **Latin-American Refugee Claimants in Toronto Office by Country of Persecution: January - December 1996**:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Claims Finalized</th>
<th>Claims Pending</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>954</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,646</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,600</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Latin Americans represent 8% of all refugees (N=19,872)
Approximately 56,000 people residing in the Greater Metro Toronto area in 1991 identified Spanish as their first language. This number reflects an increase of approximately 87% (30,000) over the past ten years. Reports of U.S. statistics suggest that Latin Americans are the fastest growing minority population (Coates, Jarratt, & Mahaffie, 1990). Similarly, in Canada, statistics for those who reported Spanish as being their mother tongue almost doubled from 70,000 in 1981 to 187,000 in 1991.

Nearly 8% (2,600) of all refugee claims made in Toronto in 1996 comprised of claimants from Latin America, including those from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua - countries subjected to state terrorism and civil war. There are about 8 - 10,000 Spanish speaking students under the age of 15 in Toronto. According to a Toronto Board of Education survey (Brown, 1994), Hispanic, Black and African students had disproportionately low academic achievement as seen in their assignment to Basic level programs. Other studies based in Toronto such as those of Bernhard & Freire (1996) and Drever (1996) report that Latin American students are rapidly becoming disengaged from school.

There is a need to study each of the groups individually that are represented in the table above. The present study, based specifically on Latin American families, hopes to respond to the needs of this rapidly growing group.

1.2. Organization of Thesis

This thesis contains seven chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the topic, visits relevant statistics, and provides a background for the thesis. The literature
review is presented in Chapter Two, which includes topics such as minority student educational outcomes, explanations of student failure, attitudes towards minority language students, and family values of Latin American families vis-a-vis education. In Chapter Three, I attempt to locate myself in this work through narrative inquiry as encouraged by the proponents of narrative inquiry including Clandinin & Connelly (1990), Conle (1989) and Randall (1992). Chapter Four contains the methodology, which is followed by the results in Chapter Five in the form of three case studies. Chapter Six includes an analysis of the data, as well as a discussion of the themes that emerged. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter Seven.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

This chapter consists of a review of literature on topics including: minority student outcomes, explanations of student failure, attitudes towards minority language learners, family involvement, and family values of Latin American families. The theoretical frameworks which inform this thesis are also included in this chapter.

2.1 Minority Student Educational Outcomes


experiences of Spanish-speaking children and their families. The low academic achievement and high drop out rate of this population has lead to a construction of this group being labelled "at risk", "underprivileged", and "disadvantaged" (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). There is a need, however, to examine these labels within a framework that recognizes and challenges structural inequities which perpetuate these negative stereotypes (Fine, 1995). For instance, in Egbo's (1994) study, parents complained that stereotypes of teachers and school administrators lead to unfair classification of children as "special needs" when in fact this was unnecessary. In Canada, the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning acknowledged the challenges of minority populations:

The notion that a student, because of colour, race, or handicap might be streamed to an educational program which is not consistent with the attributes and abilities of that individual is unacceptable ... A growing number of educators and parents are raising questions about the over-representation of minority students in special education. (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1994, Vol.II, p.145)

Also well documented are attempts at explaining reasons for minority student failure. These explanations are visited in the following section of this chapter.

2.2 Explanations of School Failure

As recently as ten years ago, Dunn, primary author of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test wrote:

While it is a very delicate and controversial topic, race, as a contributing factor, cannot be ignored. It is recalled from Part I of Dunn's (1987) monograph that most Hispanic immigrants to
the US are brown-skinned people, a mix of American Indian and Spanish blood, while Puerto Ricans are dark-skinned, a mix of Spanish, black, and some Indian. Black and American Indians have repeatedly scored about 15 IQ behind Anglos and Orientals on individual tests of intelligence ... (Dunn, 1987:64 as cited in Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991)

He goes on to conclude his argument:

Therefore, based on these factors my best tentative estimate is that about half of the IQ difference between Puerto Rican or Mexican American school children and Anglos is due to genes that influence scholastic aptitude, the other half to environment. (Dunn, 1987:64 as cited in Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba 1991)

The genetic argument has been discredited for several decades. (See Cummins, 1984 for summaries of arguments against the genetic determination of intelligence, as well as the 1988 special issue of the Hispanic Journal of Behavioural Science). Aside from being classist and racist, this argument is inadequate in explaining minority student failure. Yet, other 'deficit' approaches to explaining the low academic achievement of minority students persist.

The cultural argument, for example, continues to be drawn upon by numerous researchers and practitioners (Valdes, 1996), and proponents of this argument contend that:

children succeed in school only if their many deficiencies are corrected and if they are taught to behave in more traditionally mainstream ways in specially designated intervention programs. (Valdes, 1996, p. 17)

Researchers including Baratz & Baratz (1970) and Bereiter & Englemann (1966) explain that children who historically do not fare well in school are either deprived culturally, or are culturally mismatched with schools. Language and perceived parental attitudes towards
education are examples of such 'mismatches', and are discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

The class analysis argument for explaining school failure involves an analysis of the manner in which educational institutions maintain class differences and legitimize inequalities. That schools mirror the inequities of larger society has been argued by Bourdieu (1977), Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) and Bowles & Gintis (1988). Of the educational institution Bourdieu (1977) writes that it:

... offers information and training which can be received and acquired only by subjects endowed with the system of predispositions that is the condition for the success of the transmission and of the inculcation of the culture. By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands from everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what they do not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture. (p. 494)

Deficit explanations have been refuted by numerous researchers, including Bernhard (1995), Cummins (1984), Goldenberg & Gallimore (1995), Gonzales-Mena (1993), Nieto (1996) and Valdes (1996). Nonetheless, the difference-as-deficit approach continues to be employed by educational institutions. The lived histories, competencies and cultural capital of non-mainstream families are often disregarded, as subscribers to the deficit approach base their perceptions on Anglo "norms". Families continue to be blamed for the low academic achievement of children. Despite the fact that deficit theories have been challenged and refuted, the legacy that they have left behind can be evidenced in interventions which "compensate" what is lacking at home (Nieto, 1996). For instance, many parental advice
packages are based on observations of white middle class mothers with able bodied children. Often, it is assumed that the children are male (Grieshaber, 1996; Walkerdine, 1984).

The 'difference' or 'deviation' of non-mainstream families from the so-called "norm" is not the cause. Rather, what is problematic is the perception of the school in assessing the adequacy of non-mainstream families (Nieto, 1996).

2.3 Attitudes Towards Minority Languages and Minority Language Learners

Before the 1970's, educators were encouraged to reprimand bilingual students for speaking their first language in schools (Cummins 1996). The message was that students' cultural identities and lived histories had no place at school (or elsewhere in society for that matter). Over two decades later, there is a plethora of literature that suggests that it is detrimental for students to lose their mother tongue (Cummins, 1986, 1989, 1996; Freire & Bernhard, 1997; Swain, 1990; and Wong-Fillmore, 1991).

Additionally, much has been written about linguistic interdependence. For instance, Cummins & Swain (1986) suggest that language skills in one language have transferability to another, given adequate exposure to L2 (see also Cummins, 1981). Other researchers worldwide have also examined children who are bilingual in various minority language settings. Lanauze & Snow (1989) worked with Spanish speaking elementary school children in bilingual programs. In Ontario, Canale, Frenette, & Belanger (1988) looked at Francophone youth. Skutnabb-Kangas & Toukomaa (1976) examined Finnish immigrant children in Sweden. These studies support the discourse on linguistic transfer.
As described by Freire & Bernhard (1997), L1 plays an essential role in establishing the following: a sense of self; a cultural sense of identity; a coherent sense of a bicultural-bilingual self; the emotional closeness of the family; coherent, effective family communication; socialization of the children by their parents; a less conflictive bicultural-bilingual generational gap; and the foundations for the competent acquisition of a second language or any other language the child may be exposed to or may be in need of learning later. This is corroborated by Feuerverger (1994) in an article in which she explored the development of a multicultural literacy project in a Toronto elementary school. Through the project, in which bilingual books were utilized by students and their families, Feuerverger found:

Children who made greater use of first language books had a clearer vision of their ethnicity and a greater feeling of security in their cultural backgrounds. (p. 143)

The implications for loss of L1 then, are great, and have been well documented by researchers including Wong-Fillmore (1990, 1991). Yet, while the importance of first language maintenance has been acknowledged, the knowledge that is imparted appears to be received by educators and educational institutions largely at a superficial, lip-service level. As Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba (1995), Nieto (1996), Valdes (1996) and Wong-Fillmore (1991) contend, deficit approaches regarding minority language families continue to prevail. L1 as the home language is often used as an explanation of negative educational outcomes of children. Further, assessment tools often do not take into account second language learners. Cairney & Ruge (1996) also allude to this universalistic approach of assuming all learners are
the 'same'. Thus, second language learners often do not succeed in psycho-educational evaluations (Freire & Bernhard, 1997; Valdes, 1996).

Nieto (1996) writes:

Language diversity needs to be placed within a sociopolitical context to understand why speaking a language other than English is not itself a handicap. (p. 188)

Perhaps it is seductive to fall back on ideologies that attribute the poor academic achievement of language minority students to their use of L1 despite literature that refutes this (Nieto, 1996). For example, Valdivieso & Davis (1988) cited in Nieto (1996) found that Cuban students had the highest educational achievement of all Latino students, though they were in fact most likely to speak Spanish (and not English) in their homes. Regardless of the abundant and accessible literature, however, language competencies continue to be (perhaps unintentionally) undermined by educational institutions.

2.4 Family Involvement

As alluded to in the previous sections, non-mainstream families are often blamed for the low academic performance of their children. For example, Valdes (1996) writes of Saul, a young boy whose problems are said to stem from the fact that his parents are supposedly not involved in his education. However, his parents are simply not involved in ways that his teacher recognizes. Velma, Saul's mother, shows her support and involvement by attempting to make sense of papers the school sent home, even to the extent that she erroneously signed
up for a book club thinking that she was applying for a library card. Similar findings have been documented by Goldenberg & Gallimore (1995), Swadener (1991) and Gonzalez-Mena (1993).

When regarded through the lens of a deficit framework, non-mainstream families are also assumed to be uninterested in their children's education and are said not to value education (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1995; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Ramsey, 1987; Suarez-Orozco, 1989; and Valdes, 1996). Epstein & Dauber (1991) found that differences in teacher-parent expectations toward parent involvement accounted for differences in behaviours between parents and teachers. Specifically, parents tended to wait for school to initiate contacts. Teachers on the other hand, judged parents' interest in child's education based on parent initiated contacts. They contend that teachers often mistake lack of communication for disinterest and lack of involvement. Yet, there is an abundance of literature illustrating that immigrant parents are in fact very interested in their children's education.

Goldenberg and Gallimore (1995) found that the Latino parents in their study had uniformly high aspirations for their children. Specifically, over 90% of the parents of kindergarten aged children wanted their children to obtain a university level education. Fifty-four percent of the parents expected at least a college level education. Suarez-Orozco (1989) found that teachers made unfair assumptions of the Central American parents in his study, contending that the parents were not interested in their children's education. Suarez-Orozco worked as a parent/community liaison in a high school where he was exposed daily to many parents, guardians, relatives and friends of students, especially those who had recently
arrived from Central America. Through his experience there, he found that many of the parents/guardians were in fact interested in the education of their children, and were eager to help in whatever capacity they knew how:

but felt it was presumptuous of them to take too much initiative when it came to school matters ... after all, they carried with them from Central America a deep respect for the teaching profession, and their working assumption was that teachers knew best. They would stand by and be ready to collaborate should the teacher request their involvement, but volunteering was beyond their cultural repertoire. The problem was that the teachers, used to parental volunteerism, would expect the same initiative from immigrant parents, which was not forthcoming. This cultural miscommunication was translated by many teachers as, “You see, they don’t care about schooling”. (pp. 76 & 77)

The preceding quotation illustrates the misunderstandings and misinterpretations that often occur when there is a cultural mismatch between the home and the school. Further:

When there is not a shared cultural background between teachers and parents, disagreements often reflect different social priorities, such as the relative dependence or independence of a child, importance of school achievement versus familial obligations; traditional versus more contemporary sex-roles; respect for elders versus expressions of one's feelings; direct versus indirect ways of handling confrontation; and hierarchical versus democratic views of authority. (Ramsey, 1987, p. 178)

In another example, Bernhard, Lefebvre, Chud & Lang (1995) found that parents had to change the child rearing practices they valued in order to fit their childcare centre's modes of operation. Interventions offered by educational institutions in response to mismatches often preach "parenting skills" to non-mainstream families. These well intentioned interventions are
based upon Anglo-mainstream "norms" of child rearing and parenting, and seek to "reform" non-mainstream parents. (Evans & Anderson, 1973; Valdes, 1996)

Research supports that students consistently achieve better in programs and interventions with a strong component of parental involvement. However, what is meant by 'involvement' is ambiguous. The unfortunate consequence of this is that only certain types of 'involvement' (specifically, involvement based on alleged mainstream norms) are recognized by schools; participation by non-mainstream families that transcends the 'standard' ways of being involved are not recognized. (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Gibson, 1987; Nieto, 1996; Valdes, 1996)

2.5 Values of Latin American Families vis-a-vis Education

Investigating what parental involvement denotes to families can be adequately facilitated when contextualized information from the families themselves is considered. Through their own research as well as reviews of existing literature, Goldenberg & Gallimore (1995) found that Latino families' definition of education was not the same as that of their schools. "Educación", did not directly translate to "education":

Although they are clearly related etymologically, the Spanish term refers to beliefs and practices that are not generally referents of its English cognate. Whereas in English, someone who is "well-educated" in considered schooled, knowledgable, and literate, in Spanish, "bien educado" has a different set of associations - respectful, dutiful, well-mannered. A well-educated person, in the English sense, might also be bien educado - but not necessarily; conversely, someone who is bien educado might have little formal schooling. (p. 197)
Through their research, they found that the families that they interviewed did not spontaneously make a distinction between education as academic schooling and education - or educación - as moral upbringing. This connection was so common that Goldenberg & Gallimore changed their structured interview protocol to explore whether the two concepts could be separated and prioritized. They found that 28% of the respondents did not think that academics and morals could be separated, perceiving each as a part of a larger whole leading to becoming a good person (p. 198). Forty-four percent of the respondents considered academics to be subordinate to moral development, but still claimed that the concepts were linked. For the Latin American families in their study:

> Both knowledge of right and wrong and knowing and practicing the behaviour and manners that are the result of such knowledge are key aspects of the concept of educación. Teaching respect for parents and others is one of these behaviours and one which forms an essential part of educación. (p. 199)

Concepts of respect for elders, obedience, good behaviour, politeness and helpfulness were transmitted by parents to their children through consejos. Consejos, parents felt, provided children a basis to be prepared to learn in the school setting. In the early years, parents did not prioritize literacy activities. Instead parents emphasized the following: 30% chose teaching respect and their first priority; 22% chose teaching the difference between right and wrong; 17% chose teaching good manners, and 13% engaged in dialogue with their young children (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). These findings have been corroborated by Delgado-Gaitan (1993), Suarez-Orozco (1989) and Valdes (1996).
The manner in which many Latin American parents are involved in the education of their children is not recognized by schools (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995 and Valdes, 1996). Schools, employing deficit frameworks, are not equipped to recognize the diverse ways in which non-mainstream parents are involved in their children's education (Valdes, 1996).

Individual teachers, however, are not to be blamed:

Although some teachers do indeed bear the responsibility for having low expectations, being racist and elitist in their interactions with students and parents, and providing educational environments that discourage many students from learning, most do not do so consciously. Most teachers are sincerely concerned about their students and want very much to provide the best education they can. Nevertheless, they are often at the mercy of decisions made by others far removed from the classroom ...

Teachers are also the products of educational systems that have a history of racism, exclusion, and debilitating pedagogy. (Nieto, 1996, p. 7)

Teachers are often limited by the training they receive in teacher education institutions as well as the policies and institutional philosophies endorsed in their work environment. Bernhard, Levebvre, Chud & Lange (1995) suggest that the presence of a standard model of Early Childhood Education system can be characterized as an expert or institutional approach. The same can be said about the training currently provided in pre-service institutions. Of this expert approach, Bernhard et al. (1995) write:

Administrators and teachers are the "experts" who make the decisions and are charged with the responsibility for informing and educating newcomer families of appropriate child-rearing strategies. This model transmits a dominant culture and language to the children and families and is not normally based on true collaboration between teachers and families ... Another aspect of
this standard model is its application of universal standards. Teachers made judgements of children based on universal patterns of development described in North American textbooks and journals. (p. 67)

Opposing the expert or institutional approach, Bernhard and her colleagues submit that a collaborative, cultural-contextual model, one that honours diversity (specifically, diverse developmental patterns), will allow for genuine collaboration between teachers and family members (see also the recommendations in chapter seven of this thesis).

2.6 Theoretical Perspectives

The primary theoretical framework to be employed in this thesis is that of social constructivism (Miles, 1989). In accordance to this framework, ethnic and cultural 'groups' are not pre-formed, but socially constructed as being "others". Further, these groups are perceived as being culturally homogeneous, which leads to ill-formed stereotyping. In fact, there is much diversity within the groups themselves. In this society, refugees are often portrayed as victims who are potentially dangerous and needy (Zolberg, 1991). Fine (1991) contends that out of this social construction comes the stereotyping of families and school failure of many minority children. There are multiple systemic disadvantages working 'against' refugee families, namely: gender, class and race (Apple, 1992; Ng, 1993). In everyday practices of society, as well as in institutions, power is seen as diffused. According to Richmond (1992), many refugee groups, lacking power, fail to gain broad access to
mainstream structures. Tragically, for many minority individuals and groups (especially non-white), encounters with the school system increase disempowerment instead of lessening it. (Apple, 1992).

A second theoretical notion utilized in this thesis is that which is proposed by Cummins (1996). Cummins believes that "human relationships are at the heart of schooling" (p. 1). What is central to student success is the interaction that takes place between student and teacher. Historically, however, it has been shown that relationships established in schools can be disempowering for students, their families, and communities. For example, Cummins cites a study carried out by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1973 in the American southwest which reports as follows: Euro-American students were praised or encouraged 36% more often than Mexican-American students and their classroom contributions were used or built upon 40% more frequently than those of Mexican-American students. (Cummins, 1996)

Cummins goes on to say that negotiating identities are "fundamental to the academic success of culturally diverse students" (p. 2). When students' lived histories and cultural competencies are neglected, students are placed at a severe disadvantage, and are expected to learn in what Cummins calls an "experiential vacuum". Teachers often misdiagnose student silence and non-participation as a lack of academic ability, and consequently:

... this devaluation of identity played out in the interactions between educators and students convinces many students that academic effort is futile. They resist further devaluation of their identities by mentally withdrawing from participation in the life of the school. (p. 2)
As schools mirror the structural inequities of larger society, teachers, students and communities must challenge the historical pattern of subordination. Cummins contends that when there is a genuine partnership between families of culturally diverse backgrounds and educators in children's education, the "partnership repudiates the myth that culturally diverse parents are apathetic and don't care about their children's education" (p. 3).

Discourse on power relations is relevant when examining the negotiation of identities. Cummins describes coercive and collaborative relations of power, which are of great relevance to this thesis:

Coercive relations of power generally operate to maintain the division of resources and status in the society, i.e., the societal power structure. They frequently invoke a particular form of discourse which William Ryan (1972) has called blaming the victim. The school failure of subordinated group students is attributed to alleged intrinsic characteristics of the group itself (e.g. bilingualism, parental apathy, genetic inferiority, etc.) or to programs that are seen as serving the interests of the group (e.g. bilingual education).

Collaborative relations of power, on the other hand, operate on the assumption that power is not a fixed pre-determined quantity but rather can be generated in interpersonal and intergroup relations. In other words, participants in the relationship are empowered through their collaboration such that each is more affirmed in her or his identity and has a greater sense of efficacy to create change in his or her life or social situation. Thus, power is created in the relationship and shared among participants. The power relationship is additive rather than subtractive. Power is created with others rather than being imposed on or exercised over others.

In discussing coercive and collaborative relations of power, Cummins contends that in order for change to occur, there must be a fundamental shift from coercive to collaborative relations of power: "the structure of macro- and micro-interactions needs to shift so that
these interactions generate power for all participants rather than increase the disparities of power". (p. 11)

The process of negotiating identities requires reflection of role definitions, thus, the framework of reflexive critical theory is also employed herein. Paulo Freire (1972) has stressed the necessity for researchers to engage and collaborate with those researched. Participants are to be treated reciprocally as active human beings who have knowledge that is worth taking into account.

Ogbu's (1983, 1987) distinction between immigrant minorities and caste like minorities (those with histories of slavery or colonialism) is also relevant. Newly arrived immigrant minorities, he contends, are more apt to achieve success in ways that caste like minorities do not for two reasons: they are not aware of the constraints dominant society will place upon them, and they aspire to doing better than their co-nationals who did not emigrate. Caste like minorities are quite cognizant of their social situation - of the many disadvantages they face - and thus (justifiably) reject education, as often in their reality, education does not yield social or economic mobility.

Finally, this thesis is informed by Nieto's (1996) conceptualization of multicultural education presented in her book Affirming Diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education. Of this conceptualization, Cummins (1996b) writes:

Sonia Nieto's book ... provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the multiple causes of school failure among subordinated group students and, on the basis of this analysis, suggests creative intervention strategies that are supported by research and theory. The collectivity of these educational strategies are labelled "multicultural education", which is viewed as an umbrella term encompassing more specific programs and
pedagogical orientations such as "bilingual education", "anti-racist education", and "critical pedagogy". Viewed in these terms, the construct of multicultural education is rescued from the perception that it concerns itself only with the surface manifestations of culture divorced from societal power relations; multicultural education, on the contrary, becomes a central and essential element in any consideration of educational reform. (Nieto, 1996, pp. xv & xvi).

Nieto posits that a broad conceptualization and implementation of multicultural education can have significantly positive impacts on the educational experiences of most students. Her conceptualization is grounded in the following assumptions:

i. multicultural education is for everyone regardless of ethnicity, race, language, social class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability and other differences;

ii. individual teachers are not to be blamed for the failure of students as they are at the mercy of decisions made by others;

iii. decisions about education are treated as being politically neutral when they are never politically neutral, as they are bound up with the social, political, and economic structures that frame and define society; and

iv. multicultural education is considered as fundamental to educational equity. (pp. 2-10)

2.7 Evolution of Research Questions For Thesis

There is a paucity of ethnographic literature in the Canadian context dealing with the educational experiences of Spanish-speaking refugee and immigrant families. This inquiry was driven by the desire to understand how teachers and Spanish-speaking refugee parents in a Canadian school made sense of their own situations (Pierce, 1995). The research questions for the present thesis emerged from qualitative data which tapped into multiple sources (see
the Methodology chapter of this thesis). The information therein inspired the emergence of the following research questions:

A) Teachers' / school's perspectives:

1) How do teachers see the families?
2) What does family/parent involvement mean to teachers/school? (how is it defined)
3) What does a good/ideal parent look like to the teacher/school?
4) What factors go into deciding who is an effective parent?

B) Parents' perspectives:

1) In what ways do parents value the education of their child?
2) What does 'parental involvement' mean to parents?
3) What does 'education' mean for parents? (What does it mean to be educated)

With the theoretical landscapes described above in mind, I invite the reader in the following chapter to understand how my personal / cultural narrative is situated in my thesis journey.
Chapter Three

Location in study: A Narrative Reflection

Voice is meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community. The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself, and feeling heard by others are all a part of this process. Voice suggests relationships: the individual's relationship to the meaning of her/his experience and hence, to language, and the individual's relationship to the other, since understanding is a social process.

Britzman (in press).

Recently, there has been much research asserting the value of narrative inquiry in education (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Conle, 1989; Diamond, 1991; Eisner, 1991; Goodson, 1991; Pinar, 1988; Randall, 1992; Schon, 1991; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1993). The telling of the subjective realities of teachers and students are now not only being emphasized and valued, they are being recognized as catalyzing agents in empowerment and developing 'voice' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). No longer are authors and educators forced to conform to a supposed 'objective' norm, oblivious to the lived histories and experiences which have arguably shaped the authors' and educators' lives.

Hunt (1987) encourages educational researchers and theorists alike to draw upon their knowledge - both personal as well as practical - rather than to rely solely on theories, as this allows for a common basis for improved relations with others. Further:

Although we have thousands of specific experiences in dealing with individuality, we are not aware of what we know about it and are likely to feel inadequate. Consequently, we seek expert advice about diversity from "Outside-In". (Hunt, 1987, p. 38)
He suggests, instead, that we gain confidence in ourselves and embrace an "Inside-Out" approach; this is done by "beginning with ourselves". Additionally:

Personal practical knowledge is a moral, affective and aesthetic way of knowing life's educational situations. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1993)

Thus, narrative inquiry not only influences the way I make sense of my own lived experiences, but also the way I hear other peoples' stories on both an intellectual and an emotional plane.

The experiences I had as a newcomer child in the Canadian public school system strongly influenced my current research interests as well as my personal philosophies on the education of newcomer children. My interest in examining how institutions (specifically, schools) construct the 'ideal' or 'standard' parent stems from the (negative) perceptions my teachers had of my parents and their (assumed lack of) involvement in my education, for my situation at home was quite the opposite. The experiences I had with racism as well as the reality that my teachers did not acknowledge my lived history also inform this inquiry. In this reflective chapter I will share some of these experiences.

I was born in Northern India on February 11, 1970. Two years after my birth, we relocated in Birmingham, England for three years, where my father attained his Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering, and where I learned English. In December 1974, we resettled in Dundas, Ontario where my sister was born. Shortly after her birth, my sister, my mother and I went to India for what we thought would be a short visit. Our 'visit' ended up being three years long; my father joined us for most of that time.
In October of 1978, we moved back to Canada and resided in Hamilton East, in an area where many cultures were represented. In fact, those considered visible minorities were a majority in this particular area. Perhaps a mere reflection of the 1970's era, we were received with a tremendous amount of racism, and the hatred which goes hand in hand with it. The word "paki" rang through my ears more than my own name. When I did hear my name, it was terribly mispronounced. It was quite a lonely and frightening world for an eight year old.

Before I move on and share my Canadian educational experiences, I shall backtrack and provide brief history of my educational experiences in India. For the three years I was there, I attended a private British convent school. The curriculum was delivered in both Hindi and English. The school, an all girls' school, was run in a highly structured, teacher-centred and authoritative mode. I was required to wear a uniform, with no choice even in what colour ribbons to wear in my hair. The learning was rigorous, the physical discipline was quite intense. Students were expected to know the correct answer to all questions the teachers asked. We spoke only when spoken to, and when we did, we were to stand at attention at our desks. In deference to my teachers, my parents did not challenge them on the strict discipline policies, though at home they strongly disapproved of physical discipline.

Prior to being placed in a classroom here in Canada, I was given an aptitude test. In corresponding with the test results, I was skipped one grade. As in India students "belong" to the school from 8 am to 4 pm, my parents were not aware that they had a say in whether

---

1 The experiences I am sharing are those seen through the eyes of a young child. Although "technically" I may have heard my name more times, the effect was disproportionate to the frequency.
or not they wished for me to jump from grade 1 to grade 3. They trusted and respected the
decisions that the teacher and the school made with the faith that the 'experts' in education
would make a decision which was indeed in my best interest.

I came to Canada speaking English with an Indian accent. My accent was regarded as
a language deficit, and as a result, I was placed in speech therapy so that I may learn how to
speak English "correctly and properly". While the rest of the class had music period (my
favourite class), I was plucked out of the classroom to attend my speech therapy sessions.
Aside from being stigmatizing, it seemed silly (in reflecting on the situation later) that I was
skipped a grade for aptitude, yet at the same time, considered to have a language deficit in
the very language that the tests were administered. While my parents would not have
questioned the school's decision to place me in 'speech therapy', they do not recall being
involved in this decision.

I was introduced to my Canadian classmates as "the new girl from India". George
Dei (1993, 1994), Sonia Nieto (1994) and Sherene Razack (1993) discuss the value of
acknowledging the lived experiences and inner histories of students. My teacher did not do
that. I recall vividly some of the experiences I had in her classroom:

During a geography lesson one day, she pulled down a map of the world. She
pointed to Asia with a ruler, turned to me and exclaimed, "Suparna, surely you know what
continent this is?" I fearfully stood up in my chair. I had no idea how to say "Asia"! I
remember her looking back at me with a blank expression on her face. I remember more,
however, the children in the class laughing and saying, "stupid paki, go home".
Trembling with fear that she would make me stand on my desk with my hands suspended above my head for ten minutes, or that she would slap me across my face as a teacher in India had once done when I answered a simple math question incorrectly, I ran outside the classroom crying. Later the teacher approached me, informing me that it was inappropriate to go outside the classroom without permission. It is to be noted that the racist comments that my peers were making were not addressed.

Situations like these occurred a number of times. She did not inform me that I need not stand at my desk to speak. She did not console me when I was upset. She did not even support me when I was teased. I would have preferred the physical discipline over the humiliation I suffered in her classroom. My classroom was not safe.

Beverly Tatum (1992), a clinical psychologist and instructor of a course entitled "The Psychology of Racism" writes:

... when students are given the opportunity to explore race-related material in a classroom where both their affective and intellectual responses are acknowledged and addressed, their level of understanding is greatly enhanced. (p. 2)

Had I been welcomed into this type of an environment, perhaps my feelings and experiences may have been validated (the systems in place seemed to invalidate them) (See also Cummins 1986). Further, if my peers had had an understanding of race-related issues, this would possibly have yielded a friendlier, less stressful environment for all.

My parents used to leave for work before I left for school. When I was ill, I called my teachers to inform them of my absence, as my grandmother (who lived with us) spoke

3 Please note that I am not "whining about my condition" as Trin Min-ha states (Razack 1993), I am merely sharing my experience.
Hindi and Punjabi. I recall two distinct responses to this, one from my teacher and one from the principal. My teacher expressed her pity for me, for not having parents who were "there for (me)". The principal's response came when she awarded a certificate to my classmate for perfect attendance, praising her parents for being responsible for ensuring that she came to school everyday, "unlike those parents who just don't care that their children call in sick themselves to skip school". I do not know whether I was the only student in the school that did that, however I felt she was talking only to me.

1979 was the International Year of the Child. Multicultural awareness [in the "politically correct" context of the time, namely, the "Tourist Approach to Multiculturalism" (Chud & Falhman 1985)] was becoming a reality in my school. I recall watching a film on India and being so incredibly embarrassed throughout. I was hoping that by closing my eyes, I would become invisible. After the film was over, the teacher turned to the class and said, "Class, this is what Suparna's family is like". I was paralyzed by the invalidation of my own identity. My family was not like that! I had never eaten those foods, worn those clothes, heard that music ... I could not relate. Why is my teacher telling the class what my family is like; he doesn't even know us! Not wanting to draw any more attention to me, I said nothing.

My thoughts were sincere - I really could not relate to the film. How can one possibly interview one family in a village in South India, and claim that it is representative of India as a whole? In my situation, misrepresentation was far worse than no representation at all. Misrepresentation left me defenceless. When I relayed this story to my parents, they consoled me, but discouraged me from disrespecting my teacher by speaking negatively about him.
It is relevant at this time, to share in some detail the cultural and familial values related to education that have permeated my life. These values help contextualize my family’s involvement in my education. I shall begin with the consistent blessing my grandmother continues to communicate to us:

May all your educational endeavours be successful; may you work hard and prosper; may God bestow much happiness upon you and keep you healthy; may the Lord be with you always.

Through such blessings and sanskar or charitra shiksha (character building or ethical advice and teachings), the elders in my family (including parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles) relay the values of respect, obedience, good behaviour and polite speech. These values stem from scriptures. For example, in the Vedanta it is written:

Be one for whom the Mother is as worshipful as God;  
Be one for whom the Father is as worshipful as God;  
Be one for whom the Teacher is as worshipful as God;  
Be one for whom the Guest is as worshipful as God.

"We learn from our teachers when we respect them", I was told. "The more we respect, the more we learn. By disrespecting our teachers, we render ourselves unprepared to accept any knowledge our teachers may have to impart on us; we leave little room for our teachers to reach us. Thus, the less we respect, the less we learn". It is to be noted that Mother, Father and Teacher are not mutually exclusive, indeed parents are our first teachers.

Another Vedic influence in my family strongly valuing education originates from the four stages of life as described in the Vedanta. The four stages are, namely, brahmacharya ashram, grihastha ashram, vanprastha ashram and finally, sanyas ashram. The first one,
brahmacharya ashram, is the stage where remaining celibate, one attains knowledge or education - including professional (academics, trades), religious / philosophical, character building, ethical, and moral education (which encompasses 'proper' behaviour).

It is during the second stage of life, grihastha ashram that one marries and raises children. Part of the duties of parents during this stage include supporting their children's education and the building of their character. Parents are to live as examples, modelling respectful behaviour and seva (service or homage) towards others: elders, guests, teachers and the like.

In the third stage of life, vanprastha ashram, parents (who are likely grandparents at this time) continue to perform their duties as family members (i.e. mother, daughter, grandmother, father, brother, spouse, etc.) while attempting to decrease attachments to worldly things as they prepare for union with God. In the final stage, sanyas ashram, one renounces both family and material life and sets out on religious or philosophical pilgrimages in search of Divine Truth. Though these stages (especially the latter two) have not been taken literally by my family, they remain quite influential and illustrate the deep rooted value of education - and more importantly - the essence of what it means to be educated.

I will now share some of the ways in which my family has been involved in my education. Included among my earliest memories as a young child in England are images of my mother and father telling me bedtime stories (that almost always contained a moral), reading both with and to me, doing arts and crafts activities with me, helping me memorize (and later write) the Hindi and English alphabets as well as math tables ...
As I got older, one or both of my parents would sit with my sister and I every night as we did our homework, consistently reminding us of the value of getting a good education. Whenever we whined about school (which in my case was quite often), we would hear: "Your hard work now will pay off later - with education you will be able to become somebody". They also continued to impart shiksha (as aforementioned) which would become successively and appropriately sophisticated as our understanding increased, and continued to act as role models for respect, proper behaviour, polite speech and seva.

Prior to any exam or test, mom would prepare "brain candy" consisting of almonds and raisins to stimulate the mind. Further, mom and dad would bestow blessings upon us that God grace us with the fruits of our studying, and encourage us to "Take the Lord's name before you write your test tomorrow. Do your best, and leave the rest to God".

These are some of the ways in which my parents supported my education. Clearly, most of these ways were not recognizable to my Canadian schools.

In 1981, we moved from Hamilton to Thunder Bay, Ontario. As one can imagine, I was one of the two visible minority children in the entire school. Again, I was introduced to class as "the new girl from India". (It is of importance to note here, that I had been in Canada for three years at this time, and through years of speech therapy had lost my Indian accent). My courage was so feeble⁴, that I did not even care to correct the teacher when he misspelled my name on the blackboard. I feared having to go through the name calling all over again. I recall getting 100% in a few consecutive math tests. While I wasn't being

---

⁴ It is not fair to attribute the entire loss of my self esteem to the racism I had encountered. Many factors must be taken into consideration. However, these factors (which go beyond the scope of this paper) are complicated by the racism.
called a paki, soon enough, I was classified as being the 'geek' of the class (our teacher read out loud students' tests, beginning with the one who attained the highest mark). I did not want any more negative attention. I just wanted to blend in.

My interest in school continued to decrease. During a parent-teacher interview, the teacher told my parents that they needed to support my education at home or I simply would not succeed. Thinking that perhaps I may respond better to a different tutor, my parents enlisted the help of family friends to tutor me. Of course, this did not work either. From grade 7 through to grade 10, most of my grades fluctuated from being just below average to well below average. My parents recall being told at parent teacher meetings that "children do better when their parents are involved" by different teachers in the two different schools I attended during those grades. They were confused, because they were as involved as they knew how to be. Further, they were asked by my concerned teachers if "everything in (our) home (was) alright?" Though they valued education greatly, and were quite involved in their view, there was no space for their initiatives to be recognized. It wasn't until I switched schools for grade eleven, when the possibility of not being accepted into university was a reality that I began paying attention to school again. In my opinion, the fact that all of a sudden it was 'cool' to have 'a culture' also influenced my performance in school.

My parents were born and primarily educated in India, where the system was quite different than the one here in Canada. They came from a background where teachers were to be greatly respected. Questioning teachers would mean showing great disrespect and a lack of trust. (And why would they question the "experts" on children?) As a natural result of their background, my parents were forced by the limitation of their understanding and
knowledge of the Canadian public school system to provide uninformed consent to the interventions the school suggested. Unfortunately, their involvement at home was foreign to the school, as perhaps the school was also limited in its one-dimensional view of what parental involvement should look like.

I do recognize that individual teachers are not to blame. My teachers were well-intentioned as is evident from their concern for me (when they pitied me) and their advice to my parents (though they misinterpreted my home situation). Arguably, the systems in place at that time were not adequately equipped to provide well intentioned teachers the tools necessary to best respond\(^5\) to my family's situation (See also Masemann & Mock, 1986). In reflecting on my experiences and through my formal studies, I realize that schools are microcosms of larger society; schools collaborate in enforcing the structural inequities of society by prescribing to alleged universal norms.

There is a need for schools to employ collaborative, diversity-oriented and transformative education, one that responds to the lived histories, experiences and values of the children and families it serves. In this thesis, contextualized information will be presented first hand (see Methodology chapter). The objective of this thesis is not to present any 'generalizable findings', rather it includes sharing the stories of three Spanish speaking refugee families. What kind of involvement do they have in their childrens' education? How does the school construe this involvement? These questions will be explored in depth.

---

\(^5\) It is acknowledged that the 'best' response is not only subjective, it is also dynamic. As Maya Angelou writes, "You did then what you knew how to do. When you knew better, you did better".
44

Chapter Four

Methodology

4.1 Rationale for the Method and Design

The present study attempts to address a need identified by The Canadian School Trustees Association (1989) upon reviewing programs for immigrants and refugees in the Canadian school system:

What is still needed is description and evaluation of particular programs, ethnographic description of children, families and teachers ... Research needs to be carried out with students, teachers, and families instead of on them ...
(p. 26)

Hammersley & Atkinson (1993) interpret the term 'ethnography' as primarily referring to a particular or set of methods. They write:

In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research. Equally, though ... there is a sense in which all social researchers are participant observers; and, as a result, the boundaries around ethnography are necessarily unclear. (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1993, pp. 1 & 2)

Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to gain insights from multiple, socially constructed realities. Researchers "regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (Patton, 1990). Ethnographic inquiries endeavour to acquire empathic understandings (Stiles, 1993) as well as "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1974; Lincoln & Guba, 1984) of
situations, which can shed light on "socially meaningful action" as defined by the participants themselves (Neuman 1994). This allows researchers to improve (their) understanding of a people's culture, exposing their normalness and rendering them accessible. (Geertz, 1974)

Pierce (1995) identifies six tenets of critical research which, she suggests, helped her ask questions that she might not otherwise have posed in her research. As a result, there was an increase in opportunities for participants in her research to share learning experiences which may have otherwise been regarded as having no relevance. She contends "the greatest challenge for educational researchers is not how to solve problems but how to frame them" (Pierce 1995). These tenets have applicability to the research design utilized in this study:

Tenet #1: Critical research rejects the view that any research can claim to be objective or unbiased.

Tenet #2: Critical researchers aim to investigate the complex relationship between social structure on the one hand, and human agency on the other, without resorting to deterministic or reductionist analyses.

Tenet #3: Critical research assumes that inequities of gender, race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation produce and are produced by unequal power relations in society.

Tenet #4: Critical researchers are interested in the way individuals make sense of their own experience.

Tenet #5: Critical researchers are interested in locating their research within a historical context.

Tenet #6: Critical researchers believe that the goal of educational research is social and educational change.
One of the main issues in ethnographic/qualitative inquiry is the lack of generalizability. In responding to this limitation, Geertz (1973) writes: "the methodological problem of ethnography is to be resolved by realizing that social actions are comments on more than themselves. Small facts speak to large issues" (Geertz, 1973). While it is recognized that insights gained from this methodology may indeed speak to larger structural issues, it is emphasized that the present thesis is based on exploratory work. The intent of this thesis is not to generalize any 'findings'.

As first hand, contextualized dimensions from the Spanish speaking refugee children, their parents and respective teachers at a Metropolitan Toronto public school were desired, a qualitative, ethnographic methodology was employed. Spradley (1979) in Glesne & Peshkin (1992) contends: "Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people". This methodology allowed for a generative, naturalistic and interpretivist paradigm "which portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and everchanging." (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992)

In her article Oasis of Peace: A Community of Moral Education in Israel (1995), Feuerverger utilizes case study and narrative methodology, and summarizes the importance of qualitative inquiry:

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are consonant with interpretivists such as Geertz (1988) and Denzin (1988) who offer an understanding of theory not as explanation or prediction but as interpretation or "the acts of making sense out of a social interaction". Indeed, they see theory building as focusing on the "lived experience" instead of abstract generalisations. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992) "the 'lived experience', originating in phenomenology, emphasizes that experience is not just cognitive, but also includes emotions. Interpretive scholars consider that every human situation is novel,
emergent, and filled with multiple, often conflicting meanings and interpretations" (p. 19). One of the major aims of this study is to give the participants a voice and to construct meaning for their texts. I searched for the patterns and narrative threads that would bring together their lived experience into a collective story. As participant-observer, I was concerned with the interaction between personal life histories and the shaping of assumptions about the teaching-learning experience in relation to cultural and linguistic diversity, indeed to a situation of conflict between two peoples in a land which they must learn to share.

It is to be noted that while the design is naturalistic, the small number of persons sampled - as well as the exploratory nature of this thesis - precludes one from arriving at an overall judgement about either the degree of satisfaction in the families or the adequacy of the schools' response to their needs. The intent here is not to lay blame on any stakeholders, indeed it is to share the stories of the participants in their own terms in order to give them a voice and to validate their lived experiences.

A case study methodological approach is employed in this thesis. This approach has been defined as being "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (Merriam, 1988 cited in Nieto, 1996). Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, heuristic and inductive in nature. Further, case studies provide descriptions and analysis of examples rather than samples of (in this thesis) families (Nieto, 1996). Nieto writes:

It is important to underscore that no case study of a single individual can adequately or legitimately portray the complexity of an entire group of people. Not all Mexican Americans learn cooperatively, and not all African Americans perceive school success as "acting White" ... To reach such conclusions contradicts the very purpose of the case studies, for gross stereotypes are the inevitable result. Rather, it is important to
understand each of the case studies as *one example* of the ethnic experience within the United States rather than as *the model* by which all students of a particular group should be understood. (Nieto, 1996)

Thus, the case study in no way is intended to be representative of the other families in the study. Further, it is stressed that this thesis presents exploratory information. The intention is merely to invite the reader into the lives of three selected families and their involvement with the school.

4.2 **Context of Present Thesis**

The present thesis evolved out of a larger three part project. The aims of the latter study included:

(i) understanding how refugee children succeed or fail in their encounter with schools, and,

(ii) developing a theoretical framework for contextual understanding based on the views of the participants themselves.

Over a three year period, the micro-environment of two classrooms and the related domains (namely: teachers, children and families) were investigated.

Collaborative methodological approaches including observations and in-depth interviews were utilized in the three part study. Further, the following four principles proposed by Lather (1986) were honoured in all investigatory procedures:

1. There should be equal status and mutual respect between investigators and participants.

2. Knowledge is to be developed out of and congruent with the experiences of participants.

3. Participants' contributions are part of an overall process of healing and empowerment.

4. Interpretation is to be a cyclical process between academics and participants.
4.3 The Investigators

The data is drawn from a larger study, the principle investigators of which include an Early Childhood Education professor and a psychiatrist. These investigators were responsible for the research design and data collection; data collection preceded this thesis. The author of this present thesis was responsible for analyzing the data presented here-in. With regard to the topic of this thesis, see "Evolution of Research Questions" included in the latter part of the Literature Review chapter.

4.4 Participants

Through participant-observation, field notes, and semi-structured interviews, language-matched investigators captured the perspectives of 9 Spanish speaking students (between grades KG and 6), their parents and their teachers (including the Heritage language teacher). For the purposes of this thesis, three families were identified based on the school's perception of their effectiveness in their children's involvement. The first family was considered effectively involved in their child's education, the second family was considered both effectively and ineffectively involved, and the final family was considered to be ineffectively involved in their child's education. Definitions of 'effectiveness' are provided in the case studies. The detailed stories of these selected participants are presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

The criteria for participant selection in the larger study included that (i) the participants be Spanish speaking refugees and (ii) be interested and willing to participate in
the study. With the help of the principal, 20 Spanish speaking families were identified. The principal then referred the primary investigators to two classrooms in which 4 Spanish speaking students were enrolled. She felt that the teachers in the two classrooms would be supportive and willing to participate. A ninth family was added after a third teacher in the school expressed interest in being involved in the project. Families of these children were invited to participate in the study. Letters of introduction and consent (see Appendix A for Spanish form for parents, Appendix B for English form for parents and Appendix C for form for teachers) were delivered to selected families and returned with 100% rate of response.

4.5 The Procedure for the Larger Project

A language matched investigator carried out ethnographic, participant-observations twice per week in the students' classrooms over a period of 8 months (November - June). The visibility of the investigator over time in the natural setting of the students and teachers (classrooms) provided the opportunity for acquiring trust (Lincoln & Guba 1984). This also seemed to help build a rapport with the parents, as is evidenced in the field notes.

The observations were neither driven nor limited by a specific research problem or question. This allowed for the evolution and emergence of issues from the participants as constructed by the participants themselves. (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990).

The participant-observation ranged across the continuum postulated by Glesne & Peshkin (1992) from complete observer to full participant (observing children and teachers, participating in group activities, formal and informal conversations, one on one tutoring).
Observations, conversations, and insights were recorded in journals or on a dictaphone, and later documented in typed field notes. Situations and conversations were reconstructed where it was not deemed appropriate to journal or use a dictaphone (i.e. where it may have affected the comfort level of the participants involved). The detailed field notes that were documented were both descriptive and analytic. Further, they included analysis of "meaning and evidence of personal bias" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). This supports one of Pierce's aforementioned tenets of critical research: "Critical research rejects the view that any research can claim to be objective or unbiased". (Pierce, 1995)

4.6 Measures and Instruments

Teacher interviews took place at the end of the school year, in June. Interview questions evolved throughout the observation stage. Parent interviews were conducted in Spanish, in family homes to ensure comfort. The research questions for the parent interviews were influenced by the field work observations. All interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed.

4.7 Perspectives Presented

The data which were generated tapped into multiple sources, and the perspectives of the following people were presented: students, their parents, their teachers (including the Heritage Language teacher), and the investigators.
4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical review protocols were approved by Ryerson Polytechnic University and the Toronto Board of Education prior to the data collection stage of the study. In keeping with ethical codes required in research (Anderson, 1990; Bogdan & Bilken, 1992) letters of informed consent were delivered to prospective informants.

4.9 Corroboration of Data (Triangulation)

Lincoln and Guba (1984) contend: "the technique of triangulation is (a) mode of improving the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible". They also describe the four models of triangulation postulated by Denzin (1978): "the use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories" (emphasis in original).

4.9.1. member checks: Drafts of the documented data were shared with participants to ensure there was no misrepresentation of the data, and to ensure that the participants were comfortable with the presentation of the data.

4.9.2. inquiry audit: (one asks a third party to review the research process, data and data analysis to authenticate the findings). An inquiry audit was done on a sampling basis.

4.9.3. stepwise replication: In order to ensure dependability, two researchers acted independently in coding samples of field notes and interview transcripts. This process also yielded the refinement of coding categories.
4.10 Entry Point of the Author and Procedure for Present Thesis

As aforementioned, the author entered the study after the completion of the data collection stage. After debriefings with the original investigators, the author visited and revisited all documented data. This data included observation field notes (prepared as outlined by Merriam, 1990); teacher interviews, and child profiles (brief summaries prepared by the participant-observer).

As the heritage language teacher and parent interviews were conducted in Spanish, the primary investigators were interviewed informally to access the information therein. Further, some portions of the Spanish data were translated into English. This also allowed accessibility to the Spanish data.

Themes emerged from the several readings of the data. Subsequent reviews led to the identification of preliminary coding categories for micro-analysis (Seidman, 1991). As it seemed overwhelming to examine the data in its entirety, charts of individual children were produced by the author, comprising data which had been coded and then entered into the charts under specific headings. There was a refinement of coding categories throughout this process. This on-going process was collaborative in nature; preliminary codes and thematic descriptions were reviewed and critiqued by the primary investigators as well as the staff at the school. Upon the completion of the charts, the primary investigators examined them for accuracy of information and cultural context, and to ensure that all the relevant information was captured.
4.11 Evolution of Research Questions For Thesis

This inquiry was driven by the desire to understand how the teachers and the parents themselves made sense of their own situations. In particular, the following main issues emerged from collaboration with the participants and were identified for the analysis of this thesis.

A) Teachers' / school's perspectives:

1) How teachers see the families.
2) What parental involvement means to the school (how the school defines it).
3) What the 'ideal' parent looks like to the school.
4) Factors involved in deciding who an effective parent is.

B) Parents' perspectives:

1) The ways in which parents value the education of their child.
2) What 'parental involvement' means to parents.
3) What 'education' means to parents (what it means to be 'educated').

4.12 Limitations

There were a number of limitations to the study, namely, the length of the study, the small sampling of participants in only one school, and the lack of generalizability. To reiterate, however, the information presented in this thesis contains an exploratory analysis. It represents only the stories of three Spanish-speaking refugee families, and the teachers involved in the education of their children. Thus, while these stories are not intended to stand as generalizations to other populations, they may contain lessons to be learned, and can serve to be a base for further research.
Chapter Five

Case Studies

This chapter presents the case studies of three children and their families: Carlos Marquez, Esperanza Jimenez, and Rosita Loisa. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

5.1 Carlos Marquez

5.1.1. Background of the Family

Carlos' parents came to Canada individually with their families of origin. Carlos' mother is Ecaudorian and his father is Colombian. They met in Canada while they were late teenagers. At the time of their marriage, Carlos' mother was divorced and had two young children from her first marriage. Carlos is the fourth child in his family. He has two older sisters and one older brother. He lives at home with his mother, father and fifteen year old sister. His older brother (who is 20 years of age) has recently moved back home from living on his own. He had dropped out of high school for a period of time, but is now enrolled in an alternative school. Carlos' oldest sister (she is 19 years of age) is married and lives with her husband.

Carlos' mother revealed that Carlos was a welcome addition to the family, and grew up being very close to his relatives. She reported that Carlos was a happy child, who was very precocious and learned to walk and talk very early. Aside from being a little shy and clingy during the first few weeks of school, she reports that he had never had any difficulties in the school system.
According to Carlos' mother, he learned to speak when he was one. As the Marquez's had made it a rule that only Spanish was to be spoken at home, he spoke only Spanish. They had enforced this rule so that Carlos would be able to learn the language and communicate with his grandparents. By the time he started school, Carlos had some knowledge of English but the home's main language remained Spanish. Carlos started speaking more English when he started junior kindergarten. Carlos' mother said she did not receive any complaints from the teachers about his English. After Carlos started attending school, the home language became English again. Mrs. Marquez reports that currently English is the family's main language with some use of 'Spanglish'. During the student interview Carlos preferred to speak English and had difficulty understanding Spanish.

Carlos' mother reported that she had studied in Ecuador at a school where her father was the school's principal. She married shortly after coming to Canada and did not continue her studies here.

Carlos' father studied in Colombia and attended high school in Canada as well. He dropped out for a while after marrying Carlos' mother to help her with the two children from her first marriage, but went back to school and took computer courses after graduating from high school. At the moment he works as a computer programmer in a computer company. There are three computers in the Marquez family home; one belongs to Carlos.
5.1.2. Teacher's Assessment of Child's Situation in School

Carlos' teacher, Mrs. Smith, reported that academically Carlos was doing very well. In fact, he was said to be ahead of level in several areas. Though at the time of the observations Carlos was in grade two, he was reading at the "late grade three level".

Mrs. Smith: Ok. Yeah it's good Carlos academically is doing very well, actually you know ahead of level in several areas. He's at the end of grade two now and he's reading at... late grade three level... so he's substantially you know ahead of where he should be in um language his writing is very good his listening is very good in most areas of math his ahead of where he should be as well so everything is you know either very solid or above grade level. (Teacher Interview, p. 1)

At the beginning of the school year, Mrs. Smith found Carlos to be a bit clingy. However, by December of that year, he was seen to have made much improvement. Mrs. Smith saw Carlos as being "a good solid student" who consistently did his homework (Observations, pp. 8 & 11).

Mrs. Smith attributed Carlos' situation to two factors. First, Mrs. Smith saw Carlos as being more developed than his chronological age:

Interviewer: ...what do you see as the [reasons] why you think he's doing so well?

Mrs. Smith: Carlos seems unusually mature for a kid of his age. I mean, he's much bigger than kids his age, so he seems to have that physical maturity. He also seems to be a very solid kid emotionally, just sort of more mature, stable, thoughtful than a lot of the other kids at the grade two level. And so, corresponding with that, he seems to have academic abilities that are somewhat above what you'd expect. (Teacher Interview, p. 1)
A second explanation that Mrs. Smith gave for Carlos' current situation was the fact that the Marquez's home language was English:

Mrs. Smith: Carlos' parents speak English at home and I think that's one of the big helps there. (Teacher Interview, p. 2)

Mrs. Smith as well as the Spanish Heritage Language teacher reported that they have no concerns regarding Carlos' performance or his family's ability to support him.

5.1.3. Parents' Assessments of Child's Situation in School

Mrs. Marquez, Carlos' mother reported that Carlos was doing very well at school. She was very pleased with his achievement at school and said that his marks had been mostly above average. She described him as being a good hearted, concerned person who looked after others.

Mrs. Marquez attributed the fact that Carlos was doing well partly to the fact that the family had always done a lot of reading at home, and this in turn had helped Carlos value reading. She also commented that she felt that Spanish children's educational problems were due to wrong parental expectations.

5.1.4. Child's Self Assessment

During his interview (where he preferred to speak in English given the choice of English or Spanish), Carlos said that he was doing fine at school. He mentioned that he was "having a little bit of problems with division" but this was not a major problem. He considered reading and writing to be his better subjects; he liked reading and writing.
Despite the fact that he did well, Carlos seemed to be concerned about his marks. He shared that he was a little anxious about checking his own report cards:

**Interviewer:** Do you remember what mark you received in your last report?

**Carlos:** No I don't check my own report card.

**Interviewer:** How come?

**Carlos:** Because I just do my homework and then go watch TV.

**Interviewer:** Then you don't like looking at your own report card?

**Carlos:** Uhmm I am afraid I might get a bad mark.

**Interviewer:** ... What about your parents - do you think that they look at your report card?

**Carlos:** Yeah and then I found out even my sister does.

**Interviewer:** ... And what sort of things have they told you ... because you said that you are afraid of [looking at your report card]?

**Carlos:** They always say that I am doing good and I am still afraid I might get a bad mark sometimes. (Interview, p. 3)

He reported that he enjoyed coming to school and did not like being absent even due to illness:

**Interviewer:** ...How much do you like coming to school?

**Carlos:** A lot ... Yesterday I wanted to come to school but I was too sick (Interview, p. 4)
Carlos said that he would eventually like to be a video game designer, as he likes video games:

**Interviewer:** ...When you grow up, what sort of thing do you think you would want to do?

**Carlos:** I want to be a video game designer.

**Interviewer:** How did you think of that?

**Carlos:** I like it because I like video games. (Interview, p. 19)

5.1.5. **Teacher's Impressions of Parental Involvement and Understanding of Goals**

Mrs. Smith reported that Carlos' family placed a high value on education, and that his mother was very supportive of the school. Mrs. Smith said that Mrs. Marquez attended meetings and field trips, and took an active interest during interviews (Observations, p. 2; Teacher Interview, p. 2). Mrs. Smith also reported that Mrs. Marquez stopped by once in a while to see how Carlos was doing. She worked with Carlos at home, and when Carlos was not doing his homework, she took the initiative to call Mrs. Smith to make sure that they worked together:

**Mrs. Smith:** ... I've met just with his mother I don't think I met with his father. But his mother is certainly is very supportive of school. I mean, she seems to be quite busy and doesn't come in a lot, but she certainly takes an active interest when she comes in at interview times, and once in a while will stop by just to find out he's doing. My sense is that, you know, they work with him at home and they really value what's happening at school so in the ____ times when he's not doing his homework or something, his mother will call me and, you know, just make sure that we're working together... And they seem to place a high value on schooling and do what they can to support it. (Teacher Interview, p. 2)
Mrs. Smith hypothesized that perhaps Carlos received more support from his family than his Spanish-speaking female classmates because there may be a greater "trust on academics with the boys". She does go on to say that the involvement of Carlos' family in his schooling was facilitated by the fact that they spoke English at home:

Mrs. Smith: One thing that I noticed when we were dividing things here is the ones who are having difficulty are female and the one who's not is male.

Interviewer: What do you think this is - parents give him extra attention because he's male?

Mrs. Smith: ... that's a possibility. I guess that's one question that comes up because I know for some families and some cultures there is a real trust on academics with the boys not with the girls - and kids tend to ... to rise to the expectations. So that's just a question ... Carlos' parents speak English at home and I think that's one of the big helps there ... and my sense is that, partly as a result of that, they're are more involved with the school and willing to find - or able to find out what's going on and offer support and that sort of thing - and what help is needed. I mean, there could be some additional parental support particularly with [student x] and [student y] and I think that if there were more of that, that might help them to get a greater sense of the value of school and the value of academics which I'm not sure is very strong for either of them. I get the sense of [parents' value of academics] being strong for both Carlos and [student z] and so they're putting and effort for that. (Teacher Interview, p. 3)

The Marquez's were seen by the teacher as a family that supported the education of their child and took the initiative to be involved. They were seen as being effectively involved in their child's education in that they were able to affect outcomes.
5.1.6. Parents' Reports of How They Are Involved With Their Child's Education

Carlos' mother reported that there was always a lot of support for Carlos at home, though he did not need it, as he liked doing homework and worked independantly. His mother also mentioned that the family had always read to him at home, and this in turn helped him value reading. Mrs. Marquez attended meetings and field trips, and kept in close contact with Mrs. Smith to ensure that both of them were working together where Carlos' schooling was concerned.

Mrs. Marquez used to volunteer at the Spanish Heritage Language classes. Further, she used to attend meetings with Spanish speaking parents and a Board member, where she liked meeting other Spanish speaking parents.

5.1.7. Communication Between the Two Parties

According to Mrs. Smith, there were no language barriers to communication; there was no need for an interpreter:

Interviewer: [The Marquez's] speak Spanish at home ...?

Mrs. Smith: I believe they speak quite a bit of English at home as well ... I believe they speak both languages at home, but I think there's quite a bit of English they speak as well ... so for example when his mother comes in we don't need an interpreter we just speak in English. (Teacher Interview, pp. 2 & 3)

From the interview with both Mrs. Smith and the family, it appeared that there was agreement in terms of each party's academic goals for Carlos. Further, Mrs. Smith reported that Mrs. Marquez kept in contact so that she could work in partnership with Mrs. Smith.
5.1.8. Further Topics of Concern to the Family

Mrs. Marquez expressed her concern about the general situation of youth in Canada. She felt there was no consistency in the values between elementary and secondary school. Her experience was that in elementary school, teachers followed up with students but did not do so at secondary school. Carlos' mother found that the teachers' lack of authority was a disservice to children who in turn did not learn to have respect for or value their school. She also mentioned that in her opinion, social policies fostered the wrong ideas in youth - giving them too much freedom - a responsibility which they were not ready to handle.

Carlos' mother also shared a negative experience she had with a teacher and her fifteen year old daughter. She said that since her daughter was too advanced for her class, the teacher had ask her husband to tell her (the daughter) to slow down in class. The Marquez's felt that telling their daughter something like this was going to make her lose motivation to study. Instead, they discussed this matter with the teacher.

During a conversation documented in the observation field notes, Mrs. Marquez stated that she feels Spanish children's educational problems are due to wrong parental expectations. (Observations, p. 18)
5.2. Esperanza Jimenez

5.2.1. Background of the Family

Esperanza's family came to Canada from Ecuador when Esperanza was two years old. After her arrival, she was cared for mainly at home by her parents and relatives who all spoke Spanish. During her pre-school years she was cared for by an English-speaking baby-sitter for a period of two to three hours daily. Esperanza's mother said that she had a normal development; she reports that Esperanza learned to speak early. Mrs. Jimenez said that when Esperanza started Junior Kindergarten at the age of four, she seemed to pick up English without difficulty and adapted quite well to the program. She has a sister who is four years younger than her, and a number of extended-family members living in Canada. In the past five years, Esperanza has travelled to Ecuador twice.

At the time of the observation Esperanza was 7 years old and was attending grade 2 in a combined 2-3 class. Up to this point Esperanza remains quite fluent in Spanish.

The parents plan to move back to Ecuador when Esperanza turns 10 years old because they do not like the societal values children learn in Canada.

5.2.2. Teacher's Assessment of Child's Situation in School

At the time of the observation period, Esperanza was attending grade two in Mrs. Smith's mixed grade two-three class. She described Esperanza as a dedicated worker who always completed her homework and "tries really hard but has quite a bit of difficulty learning the process of reading" and "recognizing words" (Observations, p.23; Teacher Interview, p.1). Mrs. Smith reported that Esperanza was having problems in all academic areas, but
specifically in reading: she was at the end of grade two reading at the late grade one level.

Though she could sound most letters, "she has a hard time putting them together". As far as math was concerned, Mrs. Smith reported that "she understands concepts but is very slow", and "needs more practice on things such as mathematical reasoning" (Teacher Interview, pp. 1 & 14; Observations, pp. 14 & 15).

During her interview, Mrs. Smith said (and another teacher in the school agreed) that Esperanza had "virtually ideal behaviour" and was very cooperative and conscientious (Teacher Interview, p. 1). Mrs. Smith spent most of the year helping Esperanza develop reading strategies. She recognized that "she works as hard as she can" (Teacher Interview, p. 3) but was concerned that despite her diligent efforts, Esperanza may be heading towards a remedial program:

**Interviewer:** Is she in special program at all ... in a kind of remedial [program]?

**Mrs. Smith:** No she isn't in a remedial program ... but you know if she continues to lag behind she may, she may need to be referred to that type of program. (Teacher Interview, p. 2)

Mrs. Smith hypothesized that Esperanza's difficulties with literacy may lie in fact that her home language was Spanish, which may confuse or slow down the learning process of English:

**Mrs. Smith:** .... it's just the ... difficulty she's had with vowels in English as opposed to vowels in Spanish ... And ... so being able to like learn both the sounds in English and be able to try both out to find out words, that sort of thing. And I think that her home is almost entirely Spanish spoken ... very little English so ... I mean I'm not sure directly what sort of impact
that has but I think that may well may make it more difficult for her to be picking up the reading English ... than for someone who speaks both English as well at home ... I mean if you could say to a kid, you know, in Spanish the way you are used to reading this always makes the same sound but in English it makes two sounds, and they are this one and this one ... I mean, a kid when you're teaching vowel sounds, may kind of pick that up or get a sense of that, but I think if you could make that explicit to a kid ... (Teacher Interview, pp. 1 & 2)

A bicultural teacher attributed Esperanza's difficulties to her traditional socialization which limited her an environment where assertiveness was required to succeed:

Teacher: With Esperanza I think is a combination of factors, you see. She's Spanish, she is a girl and she is too good. Her parents have brought her up to follow what the teacher says, to behave well in the class, to not interrupt, if she doesn't understand something she is not going to ask, you see. In this system if the children are not assertive they get behind. (Observations, p. 27)

5.2.3. Parents' Assessments of Child's Situation in School

During the parents interview with the research team, Esperanza's mother disclosed that Esperanza had good manners, enjoyed school, and was very dedicated to her work. She said that Esperanza was motivated to learn, and was happy at school, and wanted to go to university. Esperanza's mother recognized that Esperanza may have had some difficulties with reading, but did not consider these difficulties to be major. She did not consider Esperanza to have a real academic problem.

Esperanza's parents seemed to be puzzled regarding Esperanza's achievement at the school. They believed that she was capable, yet her efforts in school did not appear to be reflected in her marks:
Mr. Jimenez: This is what I wanted to show you (showing participant-observer the report card). We help Esperanza with everything she brings home, but look at her marks...Here in mathematics for example, she has 1. In reading she has 2. Here in the area of hygiene they worked on the issue of smoking, and the teacher writes she doesn't have a clear understanding on what is good and what is bad [about smoking]. And then she brings me home a diploma she won for drawing a picture about smoking. Then if she can draw a picture she has to have understood, right? And when I ask her at home, she can tell me the pros and cons. (Observations, p. 13)

Further, Esperanza's father felt that the school did not recognize that Esperanza's first language was Spanish:

Mr. Jimenez: With the English well..., they have to understand that my daughter is Ecuadorian, she is Spanish. And at home we only speak Spanish. She is just learning how to read in English. (Observations, p. 13)

He also mentioned that he did not believe that Esperanza's teacher was very fair:

Interviewer: When I mentioned (to Mr. Jimenez.) about the math test and Mrs. Smith's suggestions for practice, he responded bitterly: "Yes she told me the same thing at the interview, but she never sent that type of exercise home. She only explained in class once, and then she asked her for it in the test, how is she going to know? That's no fair." He mentioned that Esperanza's mother was a teacher in Ecuador. He said, "she knows what she is doing." (Observations, p. 16)

Esperanza's mother attributed Esperanza's supposed difficulties to unreasonable expectations from the school. She reported that a combined grade class (such as the one Esperanza was in) created confusion for the teacher as to what to expect from the younger
children. She felt that the problem with Esperanza was not that she was behind, but rather that the younger children were being compared against the standard of the older children in the class.

5.2.4. Child's Self Assessment

During her interview (which she wanted conducted in English when given the choice between English and Spanish), Esperanza talked about some of the reasons why she liked school:

**Interviewer:** Esperanza, how do you like school?

**Esperanza:** I like it.

**Interviewer:** What sort of things do you like about the school?

**Esperanza:** Ummm ... they teach you things ... (you can) eat ... you can go on trips ... you can do exercises ... Um you can go where you ... you can learn, .... when you go up for Heritage ...(Interview, pp.1 & 2)

She recognized that she had some difficulties with reading "hard words", and shared some strategies she had learned to decode words:

**Interviewer:** What about reading? Is that a problem for you sometimes?

**Esperanza:** Ah ... sometimes ... When they're hard words ... some hard words I just found them out and then um ... then um .... then I can figure out the words if I don't the teachers says sound them out and I say I sound them out ... (Interview, p. 6)
She mentioned that if she needed help with school work at home, she had a number of people to support her:

**Esperanza:** Yeah, my uncle, my mom, my aunt, my dad, who else ... my other uncle my aunt that's not my aunt but sort of my aunt because she's gonna get married with my uncle whose more older than my other uncle.

**Interviewer:** Then there are a lot of people at home that can help you. Does anybody mind if they have to help you with your school work?

**Esperanza:** No, nobody minds. (Interview, p. 5)

Esperanza reported that she liked school, enjoyed talking, and "never ever" got in trouble at school (Interview, pp. 1,6,10). She had many aspirations about her future, but showed some feelings of discouragement:

**Esperanza:** ... First I thought I was gonna be a ballerina. Then I, then I thought I was gonna be a singer. Then I thought I was gonna be a painter. Then I thought I was gonna be a doctor for people. Then I was gonna think I uh .. I was gonna be a doctor for pets. Then I thought I was not gonna be nothing. (Interview, p. 11)

5.2.5. **Teacher's Impressions of Parental Involvement and Understanding of Goals**

Mrs. Smith saw Esperanza's parents as being very supportive of her education.

During her interview she mentioned that they attended meetings at the school, and followed up with her suggestions at home:

**Mrs. Smith:** I think that my sense of the family is that they're very supportive and, you know, they do what they can, and I mean, anything that I send home, you know, some list of words just for her to learn and recognize, they practice those with her everyday. (Teacher Interview, p.2)
She mentioned a suggestion she provided the parents as to how they could help her with math at home:

**Mrs. Smith:** ...I asked her father to work with her at home. It does not have to be complicated, maybe helping setting the table and things like that. (Observations, p. 15)

Mr. Smith perceived Esperanza's family as having a good sense of how to support her, and was aware of some of their practices at home:

**Mrs. Smith:** ... My sense is that they have a really good sense on how to work with her so they, you know, work with her on a regular basis and they, you know, have reward systems so she's always really keen to do her spelling test ... (Teacher Interview, p. 2)

Esperanza's parents, according to Mrs. Smith, understood what was going on at the school with regards to Esperanza. While she recognized how supportive and concerned they were, she felt that Esperanza's parents were at a loss as to help her. She attributed this loss to the fact that Esperanza's family spoke Spanish, though she did not discourage them from speaking Spanish at home:

**Interviewer:** ... So what about this issue with the academics ... do the parents know understand what's going on ...?

**Mrs. Smith:** Yeah they do and, I mean, they're concerned and, you know, want to do what they can to work with her at home but are in that difficult situation of wanting to help the child in a language which they don't' know and not really quite sure what to do about that. I've done what I can to encourage them you read, discuss things with her in Spanish ... because I think it's important for them to see that sort of thing does have, you know, cross over. But for the specific skills of reading and
decoding in English, I think they feel a bit at a loss as to how to help her.  
(Teacher Interview, p. 2)

Esperanza's teacher saw her parents as concerned, supportive parents who were willing to do whatever they could to support the education of their daughter: "the parents are putting in the effort" (Teacher Interview, p. 3). Mrs. Smith's perception of the parents' situation was that they wanted to be more involved, but did not know how to be. Thus, they were perceived to be both effectively and ineffectively involved in their daughter's education.

5.2.6. Parents' Reports of How They Are Involved With Their Child's Education

According to Esperanza's parents, they were quite involved in the education of their child, and did whatever they could to support it. Esperanza's mother reported that despite the fact that she did not speak English very well, she was very involved in helping Esperanza with her school work at home. Mr. Jimenez reported that they always helped Esperanza with everything she brought home from school.

The family also reported that they enlisted the help of bilingual family members to help with Esperanza's school work when they could not help her.

Despite their desires to help their daughter, Esperanza's parents reported having difficulties understanding what it was that their child needed in order to be successful at school:

Mr. Jimenez to Participant-Observer: I would like help for that, with the homework. I would like to know...What is it that Esperanza needs? Her report cards she gets from her teacher say that she needs to practice
mathematics and reading, and despite that we don't speak English very well, we always help her with everything. She always does her homework and she knows everything we ask her, but her report card always comes saying that she needs more (practice/help). (Observations, p. 10)

Further, another teacher mentioned that Esperanza's parents advised her to "follow what the teacher says", to "behave well in class" and "not to interrupt". (Observations, p. 27)

5.2.7. Communication Between the Two Parties

The communication between the school and Esperanza's family was strained on a number of levels, including a language barrier. Both the teacher as well as the family recognized this barrier, and the complications that followed. For instance, Mrs. Smith, mentioned that she sensed the parents being a little reserved (especially Mrs. Jimenez.), and attributed this to the language barrier:

Mrs. Smith: ... I have the sense of them being a little reserved and I think that's mainly just the language issues. Esperanza's mom is here everyday she'd drop her off and pick her up but ...is reluctant to make contact with me because it always needs to be through her child as the interpreter. (Teacher Interview, pp. 2 & 3)

Mrs. Smith reported that the language barrier was minimized during parent-Teacher Interviews, (which were attended by Esperanza's father), as Mr. Jimenez "comes to the interviews with another family member" who did the interpreting. (Teacher Interview, p. 3)

During these meetings, though the language barrier was minimized, Mrs. Smith sensed a bit of dissatisfaction with the communication:
Mrs. Smith: Well yes, I had an interview with Esperanza's father before Christmas. He came with a relative who translated for us, but it was one of those interviews in which a lot gets said in Spanish and I only get a few words in English. I could feel there was some dissatisfaction. (Observations, p. 14)

Her perception of the situation was that Mr. Jimenez was a little discontented or uncomfortable with something. Mrs. Smith was not certain what the issues were, as she did not feel that Mr. Jimenez was willing to vocalize these concerns:

Interviewer: So you're not quite getting through sometimes?

Mrs. Smith: Well I think that he's understanding what I'm saying ... you know, the communication that way is working, but it seems to be that he sometimes has certain questions or uncertainties which he's not quite willing to voice and that's my perception. (Teacher Interview, p. 3)

Mrs. Smith's perceptions were supported by reports of the parents feeling that the teacher did not communicate effectively with them about school work in order for them to better support their daughter at home. Further, Mr. Jimenez was worried about offending Mrs. Smith by stating his concerns regarding the teacher:

Mr. Jimenez: But it worries us how the teacher is going to react. We don't want our girl to be penalized because the teacher may get annoyed that we are talking about her. (Observations, p. 13)

Both the parents as well as the teacher disclosed being dissatisfied with the quality of communication they had. Both parties wanted more information to be provided: the teacher wanted to know what was making the family feel uncomfortable, and the family wanted to know from the teacher what their child needed in order to be successful at school.
5.2.8. Further Topics of Concern

Mrs. Smith mentioned her discontent with the grading system which she felt did not allow the flexibility to provide a fair mark to students like Esperanza, whose efforts and interest did not translate to higher marks. Further, she remarked that the assessment tools (report cards) did not properly suit children like Esperanza.

Mrs. Smith pointed to the fact that neither the institutions that train teachers nor the school boards offered much to teachers regarding the issues of second language learners.

The Jimenez's and the school did not seem to have an understanding about the different levels of language competency and their influence in the learning process. Both parents and teachers seemed to assume that if a child was able to be relatively fluent in a second language then he or she should be able to perform as well as a native speaker.

The teacher was partly compassionate and accurate in saying that Esperanza did not have a learning disability. However, she was caught in a system which used universal standards to assess children. According to the school standards, Esperanza was below grade level. However, this assessment did not take into consideration that she was a second language learner.
5.3. Rosita Loisa

5.3.1. Background of the Family

Rosita, the youngest daughter of Nicaraguan parents, was born in a refugee camp in Honduras. Her parents and 2 older siblings lived in the camp for a period of three years. During those years, her father worked for the World Relief organization at the camp. They had to flee Honduras because Mr. Loisa was being harassed by contras members operating in Honduras. Rosita was 6 months old when the family came to Canada as refugees through the Manpower program. (Parent Interview, p. 6; Profile, p. 1)

The Loisas had no family members living in Canada when they arrived. During one of the parent interviews, Mrs. Loisa disclosed that it was very difficult both living in the refugee camp and coming to Canada in the winter with three young children and no acquaintances. (Parent Interview, pp. 5 & 6)

The Loisas registered their children at the daycare located in Rosita's current school shortly after their arrival. Rosita started attending daycare at the age of 9 months. Mrs. Loisa shared that Rosita's development as an infant and toddler was normal. Rosita's first language was English; the family's home language is also primarily English.

**Interviewer:** She (first) learned to talk in English?

**Mrs. Loisa.:** In English, yes, because from early age, since she was nine months, I put her in daycare

**Interviewer:** And do you speak English?

**Mrs. Loisa.:** At home yes I do (Parent Interview, pp. 4 & 5)
5.3.2. Teacher's Assessment of Child's Situation in School

When the data collection phase of this study commenced, Rosita was in grade 5, in Mrs. Green's mixed grade 5-6 classroom, and attended Learning Centre on monitor status. Aside from needing help for having "a few problems with spelling", Rosita was said not to have problems academically. During the teacher interview, Mrs. Green disclosed that Rosita's academic concerns "pale in comparison to the behaviour problem" (Teacher Interview, p. 27), which according to the Spanish heritage language teacher, had been going on for a number of years. (Observations, p. 13)

Mrs. Green's main concerns for Rosita lay not in her academic work, but rather in her behaviour at school. She was seen at the school as a 'difficult' child. Throughout the teacher interview, Mrs. Green expressed her concern regarding Rosita's (bad) behaviour and "very bad attitude". She described Rosita as being a "very cruel child ... not in her actions but in her words". Mrs. Green reported that Rosita had reduced some of her classmates to tears by "the tone of her voice, the attitude that she says it with, the look she gives, the body language she gives ...". During the interview, Mrs. Green also described instances where Rosita had used racist and homophobic language. (Teacher Interview, pp. 2 - 4)

What Mrs. Green shared during the interview was similar to that which she shared during the field observation period. Field notes contain entries such as the following:

Mrs. Green: She doesn't think before she says something. She can be very mean with other children. Like that girl with the green shirt (whispering and pointing towards a chubby girl who was playing 'jumpies' with Rosita and other girls), she's called her fat and ugly many times ... She is so mean with the other children. I can't take that she even makes them cry. (Observations, pp. 16 & 26)
According to one of her teachers, Rosita was not trying her best at school. Rather, she was more interested in socializing with her friends. Rosita was seen as a student who hated school and did not care about school. During the interview, Mrs. Green reported that Rosita was a "very angry kid ... who takes it out on everybody else" and made them feel bad. In Mrs. Green's opinion, Rosita was in need of some kind of outside intervention. (Teacher Interview, pp. 2-6)

The information in the field notes and teacher interview showed that Mrs. Green was quite frustrated and had exhausted all the resources known to her in attempting to reach Rosita. During the interview she said:

**Mrs. Green:** I tried everything, *everything*. I tried little discussions in the hall, not sending her to just doing it myself talking to her in the hall. Doesn't work. I tried talking about her behaviour in front of the rest of the class, she couldn't care less. And she never changed ... (Teacher Interview, p. 2)

She remarks that she herself was not a "health care person", and hypothesized that Rosita may respond to a social worker. Her views were shared by many of the other teachers in the school. Mrs. Green intimated that everyone in the school tried and failed to reach Rosita. Further, she shared the other teachers' reactions when they saw Mrs. Green walking down the hall with her class at the beginning of the school year:

**Mrs. Green:** ... you know many of the teachers you know they watched me walk down the hall with my classroom in September and stood outside their classrooms going 'oh my god ' ... Well not just her, she's got all of them. Yeah I think it's the general knowledge that Rosita has not been the greatest child all the way through. (Teacher Interview, pp. 7 & 8)
Mrs. Green speculated that perhaps Rosita's problems were related to self-esteem. When asked what she thought Rosita needed, Mrs. Green responded by stating "she needs some kind of outside help" (Teacher Interview, p. 6). Concerned that "this kid needs a major intervention psychologically", Mrs. Green initiated a meeting with the Loisas. The principal and vice-principal of the school were also present during the meeting in which the school staff suggested to the Loisas that Rosita be assessed physically as well as psychologically:

Mrs. Green: And so we suggested that she had her hearing tested that she had her eyesight tested and that ... you know we have services in the school, we have a social worker, we have a psychologist ... Well we suggest that because if she can't hear what's going on well how else is she gonna behave, you know she's gonna try and cover it up with this kind of behaviours or if she can't see. (Teacher Interview, pp. 2 & 3)

5.3.3. Parents' Assessments of Child's Situation in School

Mr. and Mrs. Loisa's major concerns about their daughter's situation in the school were not about her academic work, rather they were related to the school staff's attitudes towards their daughter. Mr. Loisa reported that Rosita had a good command of English, and that she was doing alright at the beginning of the term. However,"now the teacher has already started to complain about her" (p. 6). Rosita's parents felt that their daughter was being singled out at the school as being "the bad one", and was unfairly punished for "little things".

Rosita's parents were not in complete agreement as to why their child was in the situation that she was currently in. Mrs. Loisa, for instance, believed that Rosita's behaviour may have been related to the fact that she was anemic:
**Mrs. Loisa:** Yes, I even took her to the doctor because at the school they told me she may have problems with her hearing or she may need glasses, and yes she was a bit sick. The doctor told me she was low in iron and I told N. (Spanish-English bilingual secretary at the school) and she said she knew because she couldn't be so low without a reason because she is right one minute and then she's bad at the next. (Parent Interview, p. 3)

Mr. Loisa, on the other hand, did not agree with the school's assessment of Rosita. Instead, he believes that the problem was with the school itself. During the interview he said:

**Interviewer:** And what about that (suggestion) to take her to the doctor?

**Mr. Loisa:** Oh all that they wanted to send her with the people (who deal with) problems, people who help children with mental problems.

**Interviewer:** A counsellor?

**Mr. Loisa:** Yes, counsellor ... or some kind of problems that may be disturbing her ... the problem is that the teachers are bugging her too much. (Parent Interview, p. 24)

It was not possible to corroborate Mr. Loisa's view, as there was a lack of evidence in the data to either support or refute this.

### 5.3.4. Child’s Self Assessment

Though she "gets bored easily" (Interview, p. 3), Rosita saw herself as an average student. During her interview she said that while she did not like writing, her reading skills were at her grade level:

**Interviewer:** What seems to be the problem with writing and reading for you?
Rosita: It's just that I don't like writing too much, it's that you know, it gets me bored and there's nothing really exciting about it. Because we just sit there and be quiet.

Interviewer: Let's focus on writing. You are eleven and you are in grade six. We're going to try to work on a scale from one to ten, and we are going to talk about all the children in grade six. 'One' are those children that have a lot of problem with reading and writing. And 'ten' are those that are the best. No problems at all. Where would you put yourself?

Rosita: In the middle.

Interviewer: Then you see yourself about number 5. Then ... you have a little bit of a problem with reading and writing.

Rosita: Writing, yeah.

Interviewer: What about reading?

Rosita: Reading I'm in my own grade level, it's not a problem. (Interview, p. 4)

Regarding her behaviour difficulties, Rosita was aware of her 'bad attitude' and acknowledged this during a conversation she had with the participant-observer. She attributed her "bad attitude" to the fact that she was being treated unfairly:

Participant-Observer: What do you think is the problem?

Rosita: Me.

Participant-Observer: What about you?

Rosita: I have a bad attitude.

Participant-Observer: What does that mean for you?

Rosita: I'm disrespectful with the teachers. I talk back and stuff.

Participant-Observer: ..... Why do you think you have a bad attitude?
Rosita: Sometimes I get mad with the teachers because they are not fair.

Participant-Observer: What do you mean?

Rosita: Well if I get in an argument with someone because they're being mean, it's always my fault. I'm the only one that gets in trouble. For example if S. says something to me and I answer, the teacher just yells at me. She doesn't tell her anything.

Participant-Observer: I've been in the classroom a couple of times when you've got in trouble and I've seen that sometimes you tease other people or you keep talking loud after everybody is quiet. Do you think that the teacher is not fair if she gets mad then?

Rosita: No. She has the right to be mad if I talk back. (Observations, p. 37)

Rosita's main concern at school appeared to be her teachers' attitudes. During the field observation period as well as her interview, she talked about her teachers being 'mean':

Interviewer: Are there things about school that you don't like?

Rosita: The teachers.

Interviewer: Is there a particular type of teacher that you don't like?

Rosita: Um ... mean teachers.

Interviewer: What other things are there ... that you don't like about the teachers?

Rosita: That's the main thing ... that they are mean. (Interview, p. 1)

No specifics about mean incidents were volunteered by Rosita. Thus, there was no evidence found to support Rosita's view. Rosita's ideal teacher is one who "understands the kids", is an "active teacher", is not mean, does not yell at the students, and is "goofy". (Interview, pp. 12-13)
While she did see herself graduating from high school one day, she reported wishing she was smarter.

5.3.5. **Teacher's Impressions of Parental Involvement and Understanding of Goals**

Evidenced through the teacher interview (and the teacher's dialogue in the field notes) was that the Loisas did attend meetings at the school, and had an understanding of what it meant for Rosita to be in learning centre on a monitor basis [as "they have to sign" for it (Teacher Interview, p.26)]. However, Mrs. Green did not see Mr. and Mrs. Loisa as being equally supportive of the school's initiatives. Mrs. Loisa was seen as being supportive of the school's initiatives and interventions, while Mr. Loisa was not. During the interview Mrs. Green said:

**Mrs. Green:** ..... The mother is a very nice woman, very soft spoken, supportive of her daughters, probably sometimes too much you know and lets them get away with things and then we got the other extreme the father ... very strict figure in fact I think that if she you know she does something wrong at school and if we phone the mother, the mother covers up ... that's the way you get to Rosita, you threaten to phone her father and she stops right away ...

**Interviewer:** What does he do?

**Mrs. Green:** [He gets mad] because I don't call him every time his daughter does something [Hitting the table with her fist]. I'd be calling that guy sixteen times a day ... and so I don't know I just sat back and I thought this guy is gonna just go like this and lean across and grab my neck ... I was really intimidated by the man ... And I feel sorry for Rosita because this is was she has to go home to and I can understand why the mother tries to protect ... the kids. (Teacher Interview, pp. 18-20)
Mrs. Loisa was described by Mrs. Green as being genuine and soft-spoken, as evidenced in the aforementioned interview excerpt. Mr. Loisa was described as "a difficult man" (Observations, p.17). Mrs. Green talked about a meeting she had with the Loisases:

**Mrs. Green.** You know the father [is intimidating] ... and it was kind of heated so when the rest of us walked in he was already ready to kill. And I said look I have tried everything I know and I cannot get to this child I cannot and you know he turns the whole thing around and he tries to tell us 'well there's gotta be something that's making her do this'. Yes I agree there's something that's making her do this but ... what is it. I don't know what it is .....Ok. then so what does that tell you, you know but ... the mother is genuinely concerned but I don't know how much you can do with the father there you know, like I don't, I don't know. (Teacher Interview, pp. 21 & 26)

At one point, Mrs. Green alluded to the idea that Rosita may fare better with a male teacher who could be a positive male role model for her (unlike her father) (Teacher Interview, p. 11). Mrs. Green was worried that the Loisa family structure may not have been the most positive one for Rosita (Teacher Interview, pp. 18-20). The perceptions that Mrs. Green had of Mr. Loisa, coupled with the school's opinions of his lack of support [for example, the school did not receive the required support from the Loisases to proceed with the psychological and physical assessments the school suggested (Teacher Interview, pp. 3-4)] rendered the Loisa family as ineffectively involved in their child's education. Despite their efforts or involvement, they were not able to have an effect on the outcomes of their child's situation in the school.
5.3.6. **Parents' Reports of How They Are Involved in Their Child's Education**

The Loisas were involved in supporting the education of their daughter in a number of ways. For instance, Mrs. Loisa followed up on the school's suggestion to have Rosita physically assessed. The doctor found that Rosita had anemia, which Rosita's mother believed (as aforementioned), may have had an influence in the way she behaved. Mr. Loisa consistently inquired about Rosita's behaviour at the school (and asked the school to notify him when Rosita misbehaved), and sought reasons for her behaviour so that he could be able to counsel her accordingly. Further, Mr. Loisa reported that he always gave 'consejos' (advice) to his children. The Spanish Heritage Language teacher shared what the parents disclosed to him:

**Teacher:** ...That is a hard working family who cares about their children. The father comes and tells me, Don Valverde, I come home from work tired at eight o'clock. At that time the t.v. goes off, the radio goes off, and everybody sits at the table to do their homework. I sit to see that they work. If I can help I help them. (Observations, pp. 12 & 13)

Regarding educational goals for their child, Mr. and Mrs. Loisa were not in agreement regarding Rosita's participation in the Learning Centre. Mr. Loisa was strongly opposed to it, arguing that it was an unnecessary waste of time. He felt that eventually Rosita would learn to read without extra help, just as her siblings did. Mr. Loisa did not think that Rosita needed to go to Learning Centre and was not aware that Rosita still attended the program. Further, he did not want her to miss out on the regular program. He said by attending the Learning Centre, Rosita was not learning what was important to learn at
school, namely, math and science. Mrs. Loisa, however, appeared to be supportive of the Learning Centre attendance. She was cognizant of Rosita's attendance in the learning centre, and did not seem troubled by Rosita missing certain classes as long as they were not difficult subjects like math.

Finally, during her own interview with the research team, Rosita disclosed that her parents talked to her about education being important (interview p. 5). Further, they helped her with her homework if they were able. When her parents could not help her, Rosita sought the assistance of her sister (Interview, p. 6).

5.3.7. Communication Between the Two Parties

While there was no language barrier to communication, there was a contextual one. For instance, Mr. Loisa said that he required an explanation from the teachers that would help him understand the behaviour of his daughter. Specifically, he said that he sought information regarding events that preceded the incidents that lead to Rosita's misbehaviour so that he may be able to talk to her about it. The school was frustrated by Mr. Loisa's constant demands. In Mr. Loisa's opinion, the school's responses to his inquiry were not adequate.

There seemed to be miscommunication regarding what was actually happening with Rosita at school. This was complicated by the fact that the expectations and goals held by the parties involved (i.e., Rosita, her parents and the school) were not congruent. The school's main concern was that Rosita behave in accordance to the school's rules. Her parents, while wanting her to behave well, did not want her to miss important subjects in the
regular program - like math. Rosita wanted to be smarter. Finally, there was a lack of agreement on what was actually happening with Rosita at school.

Both parties - the school as well as the family - acknowledged there were difficulties with their communication. Mr. Loisa admitted having lost his patience at the school on occasion. The school staff limited the provision of information regarding Rosita's behaviour (i.e. the information that Mr. Loisa sought) as they were concerned that he would physically reprimand her.
Chapter 6

Analysis and Discussion of Themes

This chapter involves the discussion of three themes that emerged during the analysis of the data. They are as follows:

• Theme One: L1 (first language) is regarded as being detrimental to child achievement and to parental involvement;

• Theme Two: There is an incongruence in the meanings the school and the parents assign to "education" and what it means to be educated;

• Theme Three: Parents and the school construe involvement differently; the school, in its institutional operations, tends not to take account of parental involvement in the terms of the parents.

The stories of Esperanza and Rosita are those of children and families who are constructed as being "at risk" (Swadener 1995). Yet, these are stories of parents who are doing the best they know how to support their children's' education. However, according to these parents, their initiatives are not recognized by the school; they are involved in ways that the teachers appear not to understand. These stories are also those of concerned and well-intentioned teachers. Confused and frustrated, they have exhausted all of their resources in attempting to make sense of these 'perplexing' cases.

6.1. Theme One: L1 (first language) is regarded as being detrimental to child achievement and parental involvement by the school.

In this section, I will describe how Spanish, the families' first language, is regarded by both the school as well as the families themselves. Specifically, I will describe what meanings
the participants involved assign to L1 with regard to child achievement and parental involvement. Following this will be a brief discussion regarding L1.

Mrs. Smith, Carlos Marquez's teacher, reported being quite pleased with Carlos' situation at the school. Recall that Carlos was said to be academically ahead of level in several areas. Mrs. Smith attributed his high academic achievement to the fact that the Marquez family spoke English at home: "Carlos' parents speak English at home and I think that's one of the big helps there" (Teacher Interview, p. 2). Mrs. Smith saw the Marquez's as providing a good language model at home.

Mrs. Marquez, Carlos' mother also hinted that English at home may have been a contributing factor to Carlos' success at school.

Esperanza Jimenez, also a student of Mrs. Smith, was considered to be experiencing difficulties in all academic areas, but specifically in reading. Though she was not in any remedial program currently, Mrs. Smith was concerned that Esperanza may be heading towards one. Mrs. Smith hypothesized that Esperanza's difficulties with literacy may lay in the fact that her home language was Spanish. Thus, Mrs. Smith did not see the language approach of the parents as being adequate.

Esperanza's parents, on the other hand, did not feel that Esperanza has an academic problem; they reported that she was a capable student. Instead, they saw the school as not honouring the fact that Esperanza's first language was Spanish.

There are many reports on schools failing to contextualize the performance of minority language children, as well as failing to utilize assessments that are not (dominant) culture bound. Paralleling Esperanza's story, Valdes (1996) for example, also found that the
school in her ethnography did not provide any special consideration to the minority language students.

In Carlos' case, aside from influencing Carlos' academic achievement, Mrs. Smith considered the fact that English was spoken in the home facilitates Carlos' parental involvement with the school. Mrs. Smith was quite pleased with the relationship that the Marquez family had with the school. Mrs. Smith attributed the Jimenez's inability to be involved in their daughter's education to the fact that there was a language barrier, specifically, to the fact that they spoke Spanish at home. Yet it is important to recognize that Mrs. Smith did not discourage the family from doing so. While recognizing that the Jimenez's were extremely supportive of their child's education and were willing to support her as best they could, Mrs. Smith saw the Jimenez's as being "at a loss" to help Esperanza with her school work. She attributed this 'difficult' situation, at least in part to Spanish being spoken at home.

But, Mrs. Jimenez did not consider her first language as being a hindrance to her involvement in Esperanza's school life. She reported that despite the fact that she did not speak English very well, she was very involved in helping Esperanza with school work at home.

That families and school are often placed at odds on issues such as the preceding one has been documented in numerous studies, including those of Valdes (1996). Cairney & Ruge (1996) write of the universalistic type of perceptions that schools have regarding literacy (what it means to be literate) and how literacy should be supported at home (specifically, that the school assumes that all learners are the same and need to be supported
at home in the same way). Through examination of these texts, it is possible to explore the different meanings each party assigns to the same issue; it is possible to see how reality is constructed by each of the stakeholders. In visiting Esperanza's story, it is clear that there are two distinct interpretations to the issue of language. The Jimenez's did not consider Spanish as being a hindrance to Esperanza's education or their involvement at the school. Mrs. Smith saw the situation in a different, somewhat conflicting manner.

Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) write:

educators often assume that [minority] children's low achievement is explained by their lack of the English language and communication etiquette expected in school ... however, this assumption fails to recognize the native skills of Spanish-speaking children. (p. 27)

Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba's contentions are also supported by Cummins (1986), Valdes (1996), and Wong Fillmore (1990). Esperanza's well meaning teacher did indeed recognize the "important crossover" between English and Spanish. Despite her good intentions and effort however, the present evidence suggests the possibility that Mrs. Smith may be unknowingly framing the Jimenez's situation within the contexts of a deficit model described in the literature review.

Feuerverger (1994) writes about the nature of the psychological conflict that numerous minority language children encounter as:

...they are caught between two cultures often with competing values. Moreover, their parents may feel powerless in a new society where the burden of economic survival takes precedence over all matters. The schooling of their children usually is a process to which they feel alien and inferior, especially if that process excludes the language and culture that defines them. Such conflict creates a potentially dangerous situation whereby the status, self esteem and vitality of entire ethnocultural groups may be diminished. The maintenance of home language skills may be
instrumental in creating an appreciation and sense of pride for minority students and thus help to maintain a balance within the family. (p. 124)

Perhaps the above quotation helps explain the tensions that Rosita may be experiencing with her situation at school.

Though the school supports a Heritage Language program, attitudes expressed in the data indicate that there is much need for improvement. It is emphasized that blame is not to be laid on particular teachers, rather, larger institutional structures need to be examined. Mrs. Smith's approach may serve as a reminder of the fact that neither the institutions that train teachers nor the school boards offer in-depth training to teachers around the cultural issues of second language learners. According to the present evidence, Mrs. Smith appears trained in mainstream approaches and philosophies; one may suggest that she is making sense of the situation in the best way she knows how.

Cummins (1986) posits a theoretical framework for analyzing minority students' school failure in his article Empowering Minority Students: A Framework for Intervention. Implementation of Cummins' approach would certainly yield a movement beyond that of lip service most often paid by educational institutions. Of this framework, he writes:

... the educational failure of minority students is analyzed as a function of the extent to which schools reflect or counteract the power relations that exist within the broader society. Specifically, language-minority students' educational progress is strongly influenced by the extent to which individual educators become advocates for the promotion of students' linguistic talents, actively encourage community participation in developing students' academic and cultural resources, and implement pedagogical approaches that succeed in liberating students from instructional dependence. (p. 33)
One of the teachers in this study expressed her concerns regarding the lack of information that teacher training institutions offer to pre-service teachers on the issues of minority language students. It is proposed that if these institutions further developed their curriculum and adopted cultural-contextual philosophies rather than the currently employed universalistic type of ideologies (that are in fact, culture-bound), teachers would be better prepared to meet the needs of newcomer families. Further, as Cummins (1986) suggests, teachers can attempt to persuade school boards to redefine existing educational philosophies as well.

6.2. Theme Two: There is an incongruence in the meanings that the school and the parents assign to "education" and "being educated".

While doing their best to help students' cognitive development, well-meaning teachers are trained to presume that there is a universal definition of 'education' and thus are likely to make incorrect assumptions about some families. Families, also well-intentioned, behave within the context of their understanding of what 'education' is, and often do not understand why teachers appear unsupportive in the education of their children. The preceding stories of Esperanza and Rosita's families' involvement with the school present a picture of misunderstandings and discontinuities, of blame laying and seemingly incongruent values. In order to fully understand the situation, it is significant to consider the continuity. Both parents and the school have in common concern for the care and well being of children's education. The discontinuities seem to lie in the fact that 'education' is not defined in the
same way for both stakeholders. Thus, there is a need to explore what education means to the parents.

For all families in this study, education transcends 'academic' boundaries: it encompasses learning how to be a respectful person (including not challenging authority), learning the difference between right and wrong, and behaving correctly. This finding supports those of Delgado-Gaitan (1991), Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba (1991), Goldenberg & Gallimore (1995) and Valdes (1996).

Clearly, the concepts to be presented below - namely, respect, good/correct behaviour and discipline - are fundamentally interrelated; fragmenting them seems artificial. For the sake of this discussion they are presented individually below, yet, their profound interplay is recognized. It is hoped that the discussion below will illustrate how central these concepts are to the lives of the families and how they interact with the school.

At the heart of education for Latino families is the notion of respect. This concurs with the work of researchers including Bernhard, Kilbride & Nirdosh (1994), Gonzalez-Mena (1993) and Harry (1992). The data in the present study corroborates this finding. Throughout the texts of the data, one can see how Rosita brings the values that have been instilled in her at home to the school.

The value of respect is also found in Esperanza's story. Despite the fact that she was a "dedicated worker" and had "virtually ideal behaviour", she was lagging behind at school. She was not in any remedial program; however, one should recall that her teacher felt that if she continued to lag behind, she would be headed in that direction. During a conversation a
bicultural teacher in the school had with the participant-observer in which they were discussing possible reasons for Esperanza's assessment, that teacher said:

With Esperanza I think is a combination of factors, you see. She's Spanish, she is a girl and she is too good. Her parents have brought her up to follow what the teacher says, to behave well in the class, to not interrupt, if she doesn't understand something she is not going to ask, you see. In this system if the children are not assertive they get behind. (Observations, p. 27) (italics added)

This teacher's insight is significant in that it illustrates how incongruence in values may contribute to a negative outcome when behaviour is not linked to the context inspiring it. In Esperanza's case, this teacher suggested that for her to interrupt (challenge authority) may be disrespectful. This excerpt also alludes to another significant tension: independence at school versus interdependence at home. Goldenberg & Gallimore (1995) write that the independence taught at school is in direct conflict with the interdependence valued at home.

Mrs. Smith reported that Esperanza's parents were "supportive" and "genuinely concerned", yet sensed that her father was dissatisfied with regards to what was happening to his daughter. Mrs. Smith's perceptions were accurate indeed, as indicated in a conversation Mr. Jimenez had with the participant-observer in which Mr. Jimenez discussed his concerns regarding report cards. He felt that his daughter's report cards reflected neither her abilities nor her effort. However, Mr. Jimenez shied away from discussing his concerns with the teacher, fearing that she may get annoyed (and thus penalize Esperanza).

Mr. Jimenez's views of the repercussions of disrespecting the teacher hindered him from communicating openly with Mrs. Smith. Parents often bring with them the values and
expectations they presumably experienced in their lived histories. For many parents, their view is that challenging or even questioning 'experts' (teachers) is not seen as conducive to the education of their children.

In Rosita's story it is evident that behaviour (specifically good or correct behaviour) is valued highly. Throughout Rosita's story there are several references to behaviour.

Mr. Loisa considered it part of his duty to ask the school how his child behaved, as this fell in the realm of his parental responsibility. For him, good behaviour, along with respect and obedience, was at the heart of education. For this reason, he sought information regarding his daughter's behaviour. Further, he conveyed to teachers that if Rosita did not "behave", she should be disciplined. He offered a suggestion to Rosita's teachers as to how to respond to her misbehaviour. However, the school considered Mr. Loisa's methods of discipline to be harsh. In the framework that affirms parents' backgrounds and knowledge, however, Mr. Loisa's actions are consistent. The teachers are not to blame; their judgements were driven by genuine concern for Rosita, though limited by their misinterpretations of Rosita's home context. It would follow then, that teachers trained to consider authoritarianism as being universally 'wrong' may see Mr. Loisa through the lens of a 'deficit' model; hence his feeling, from interactions with the school, that his parenting is considered inappropriate. Further, this mismatch may lead to a misdiagnosis of family dysfunction.

As discussed above, when Mr. Loisa sees that his child is not honouring the values that are fundamental to the family, he responds by disciplining her. Likely out of respect for the teacher, Mr. Loisa tells Mrs. Green how to succeed in encouraging Rosita to behave
("make her kneel at the corner of the classroom and write two hundred times I shouldn't misbehave. You'll see how she listens"). His approach is seen as dangerously harsh.

There is often a divergence in views regarding child rearing between schools and newcomer families (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1995). Ramsey (1987) found that this divergence is one of the most common causes of misunderstandings between parents and educators. For example, a harmful chain of events occurred which was fuelled by educators withholding concerns regarding children's behaviour from their parents, as they feared the parents' response would be too harsh. Parents interpreted this as reflecting teachers' lack of caring for children. When there is a mismatch in cultural background between parents and teachers, "there is an increased likelihood for mutual misinterpretation of each others' intentions and actions with regard to social values and child rearing" (Ramsey, 1987, p.170). Ramsey further stated,

Teachers often feel angry at what they perceive as neglect, abuse and disruptions that affect the children in their classrooms. While teachers should be alert for signs of abuse and neglect, differences in child rearing priorities are often misinterpreted as pathological. .... In the eyes of people trained to avoid punitive approaches, corporal punishment is interpreted as abuse. (p. 183)

Teachers' attitudes stem in part from their training in a mainstream view that there is one type of valid knowledge on child rearing. Thus the intent here, is not to single out any teachers, but to determine the basis for their constructions. Likely informed by the mainstream, universalistic mode in which they were trained, the teachers have not been given proper preparation to challenge the deficit paradigm, in particular, to affirm the parents' knowledge.
Goldenberg & Gallimore (1995) write that the school is often a threat to families when their knowledge is not affirmed. The families in their study rely on family unity, respect, interdependence, parental authority and kinship networks. This parallels the stories of the families in the present thesis. When the school does not affirm family knowledge or interferes with it, these systems are threatened (i.e., in Rosita's case, where the school is concerned because her father is authoritarian).

Harry (1992) writes that 'respeto' (respect) is that "quality of self which must be presented in all interpersonal treatment and without which no Puerto Rican is considered properly socialized". For these Latino families, "una persona bien educada" is "a person who understands the importance of interacting and relating to other humans with respect and dignity" (p. 29)

In the cases of the Jimenez's and the Loisas, the parents and school are not in agreement of educational goals for children. Each stakeholder is assigning different meanings to education and what it means to be educated. When parents perceive negative feedback (or no feedback as in the case of Rosita) from the school in fulfilling what they see as their roles in their children's educational process, they find themselves in the precarious situation of redefining the self - of redefining the core values that are at the very heart of a way of life for these families (an example includes the independence versus interdependence conflict).

Goldenberg and Gallimore (1995) write that cultural models are static. In their research they found that many Latino families' definitions of education were moving beyond 'morality' to include formal education. Perhaps this framework has applicability to Carlos'
case. Yet, for many other families, the costs of this reinvention are great, as they compromise family unity and integrity (Rodrigues, 1982).

6.3. **Theme Three:** Parents and the school construe involvement differently; the school, in its institutional operations, tends not to take account of parental involvement in the terms of the parents.

Parents and school agree that parental involvement is crucial to children's success and achievement at school. The present data, corroborated by research findings elsewhere, may suggest that schools often subscribe to narrowly constructed and universalistic notions of what involvement should look like. As a result, the school is on this account rendered ill equipped to recognize the ways in which some parents are in fact involved in their children's education. Thus, parents who do consider themselves to be involved may be blamed for the low academic achievement of their children (Valdes, 1996) and may be seen as being uninterested in their children's education. Breakdowns in communication occur due to incorrect assumptions (i.e., schools often misdiagnose lack of initiated communication from parents for lack of involvement). The present evidence suggests that family competencies may not be properly affirmed, as the school is involved in a mainstream approach that assumes there is one standard way of being and knowing.

These assumptions are based on mainstream "normalized" conceptions of what ideal or standard involvement 'should' constitute. When schools and parents are placed in opposed positions, the learning of children suffers (Richardson, et al., 1989). Responding to the need for partnerships with parents, currently employed interventions offer apparently common-
sense solutions to bridge the gaps of incongruence between the home and school. Speaking in general, the difficulties with these solutions are three-fold. First, there is an assumption that 'partnership' holds the same meaning to the two stakeholders. Second, schools assume that parents may already have the power and tools to unlock the secrets that will yield effective partnerships - specifically - partnerships that the school will recognize and validate. Third, parent information sessions often include recommendations on how to parent, based on a culture-bound model. This approach unintentionally does not have the effect of affirming family knowledge, competencies and cultural capital. Instead, it yields empowerment discourse that does not result in actual power being exercised by the parents. Individual teachers are not to blame - they are motivated by good intentions. They are limited by the structures in which they act and by the training they received, which is grounded in norms of the dominant culture. Valdes (1996) writes:

parents do know how to "parent", but because their styles are the product of their class, culture and experiences, they are unlike those of the American model of the "standard" family.

Instead, there is a need to question the underlying roots of alleged 'normal' or 'standard' ways of being involved. Schools need to recognize family competencies; there is a need to engage in dialogue that helps uncover the 'mysteries' from the perspectives of schools and families. This negotiation must begin at the pre-service level, and must be nurtured at the in-service levels.
In this section, I will describe the ways in which the parents in this study are involved in the education of their children. I will also describe teachers' reports on the parents' perceived involvement. Next there will be a discussion of the overall theme.

Mrs. Smith regarded the Marquez's as having a high value on education. She said that Mrs. Marquez attended meetings and fieldtrips and took an active interest during interviews. Further, Mrs. Smith shared that Mrs. Marquez stopped by once in a while to see how Carlos was doing. She worked with him at home, and when he was not doing his homework, she took the initiative to call Mrs. Smith to make sure they worked together. The Marquez family was regarded as a family that took the initiative to be involved. They were seen as effectively involved in their child's education.

Carlos' mother reported that the family had always done a lot of reading with Carlos, and this in turn had helped him value reading. She reported that there was always a lot of support available at home to Carlos, though he did not require it, as he liked doing homework and worked independently. Mrs. Marquez reported keeping close contact with the school to make sure they were working together in partnership. Further, she reported being a volunteer in the Spanish Heritage class, and attending meetings with Spanish-speaking parents and a Board member. Though there was no information in the data to expand on this point, Mrs. Marquez did comment that Spanish children's educational problems were due to wrong parental expectations.

Consider the Jimenez family. Mrs. Smith recognized that the Jimenez's were supportive of the school, as they attended meetings and followed up with her suggestions. Mrs. Smith reported that the Jimenez's worked with Esperanza on a regular basis and used
the reward system. Though the Jimenez's were seen as willing, they were viewed by the school as "at a loss" to involve themselves effectively, apparently because of their language. Thus, they were seen as being (in different respects) both effectively and ineffectively involved in their child's education.

Esperanza's parents had a different assessment of their participation with the school. Mrs. Jimenez said that despite the fact she did not speak English very well, she was very involved in helping Esperanza with her school work. Esperanza's parents talked about helping her with everything she brought home from school. For instance, Mr. Jimenez had consistent conversations with Esperanza regarding the things she did at school (e.g. activities), as illustrated in the case study.

The Jimenez's felt that the teacher was unfair, for she did not send the types of exercises home that Esperanza was tested on at school. They desired more information from the school yet were not receiving it. Further, the Jimenez's felt that the school was undermining their efforts. Mr. Jimenez reported that Esperanza's mother was a teacher in Ecuador and "she knows what she is doing". Thus, family knowledge was not experienced as being affirmed by the school. In situations where her parents were unable to support Esperanza, they enlisted the help of relatives. She said during her interview: "my uncle, my mom, my aunt, my dad ... my other uncle ..." help her with homework. She added when asked, "nobody minds" [i.e., objects to helping her] (Interview p.5). So, according to the Jimenez's, they were quite involved in their child's education and did everything they knew how to in order to support it.
Consider the Loisa family. According to her teacher, Rosita's parents attended meetings at the school, though these meetings were often strained. Mr. Loisa was not generally regarded by teachers as being supportive of the school, rather, he was seen as being uncooperative. For example, the school did not receive his signature to proceed with the psychological and physical assessment the school suggested. Further, the school was frustrated with his constant queries regarding his daughter's behaviour. This coupled with the school's view of Mr. Loisa being too authoritative (specifically at home) rendered him ineffectively involved in his child's education.

Mr. and Mrs. Loisa, however, did consider themselves to be involved in their child's education. Mrs. Loisa did follow up with the school's suggestion that Rosita should have a physical. Mr. Loisa constantly inquired about how his child was behaving (recall the previous theme). He reported that he always gave consejos to his children. One teacher's impressions corroborated what the parents said. He considered the Loisas to be a hard working family who valued the education of their children. He shared a conversation he had with Mr. Loisa, where Mr. Loisa said:

I come home from work tired at eight o'clock. At that time the t.v. goes off, the radio goes off, and everybody sits at the table to do their homework. I sit to see that they work. If I can help I help them."
(Observations, pp. 12 & 13)

During her interview, Rosita talked about the fact that her parents engaged in dialogues with her about the value of education (consejos). She reported that they helped her with homework if they could, and when they were unable to, she asked her sister for help.
What one sees in the stories of Esperanza and Rosita corroborates similar to the findings of Goldenberg & Gallimore (1995) and Valdes (1996) regarding how parents support the education of their children. For instance, both Esperanza's and Rosita's parents provide their children with consejos. Recall also, that Rosita's father's queries to the school regarding her behaviour are quite explicit. To these families, consejos and counsel regarding behaviour are (forms of) academic support. Unfortunately, based on the present evidence, the school does not recognize these efforts as such; the school's perceptions and evaluations of 'appropriate' involvement are framed within their own institutional approach and are limited to models of parent involvement that include the following: backing up the teacher (expert), ensuring assigned homework is completed, keeping track of day to day incidents, telephoning the school and offering to help. It is important to note that it is assumed by the school that these activities will be initiated by the parents - as in Carlos' case.

As illustrated in a previous theme, the families in this study are involved in ways that they know how to be - in ways that are consistent with their interpretations of what education entails. The Jimenez's, the Marquez's and the Loisas all consider themselves to be involved with the school. It is unfortunate that the school in its institutional functioning does not properly take into account these families' efforts. Carlos' teacher states quite explicitly what is 'recognizable' involvement: attending meetings and fieldtrips, taking an active interest during interviews (asking questions and taking the initiative to do so), stopping by to see how Carlos is doing, working with him at home on homework and taking the initiative to call the school to ensure that the school and the family are working together. Although Esperanza's parents are also visible in the school, attending meetings for instance, they do not ask many
questions because they do not want to disrespect the expert teacher and interfere in her domain. Rosita's father, though visible in the school as well, is seen as interfering by demanding answers to his questions regarding his daughter's behaviour. Both families consider themselves to be involved in their childrens' education. Based on the families' narratives, their efforts, if recognized, are not seen as effective. Once again, it is to be noted that individual teachers are not to be blamed. They have good intentions, but are limited within the present institutional framework.
Chapter 7

Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1. Conclusions

From the examination of the preceding information and from the literature reviewed, there is evidence that schools' construction of parental roles within the framework of a deficit model negatively affects the education of newcomer children, as well as the interaction of the school and the parents. Richardson et al (1989) contend that if the school and parents disagree or are placed in opposing situations, learning of the children suffers. When there are communication breakdowns, provision of information from both sides is limited and precious moments to build allies are uncaptured. Richardson et al (1989) suggest that schools can build on knowledge parents have of their children and how to educate them. For example, translations should be not only linguistic, but cultural-contextual. Teachers should act as advocates and challenge existing structures. Unfortunately, many initiatives that strive to support partnerships with parents assume that parents have the power and the tools already to be in a position to know how to share their perspectives. Further, as Valdes (1996) points out, these interventions do not show respect for the deeply ingrained values and cultural capital that the parents bring with them. Rather, they collaborate with existing structures to devalue, unintentionally, the social and linguistic competencies of newcomer families.

Knowing little of how the Canadian school system works, families' initiatives to support their children's education are profoundly complicated by the lack of affirmation of their cultural capital, values, good intentions and knowledge. Implicit in the analysis of the
schools' view of the families in this thesis is an alleged model of a 'good', 'ideal', or 'standard' family. Based on the data analysis in this thesis, the 'ideal family' is apparently assumed to be one operating within "mainstream" Canadian norms: i.e., one whose members are aware of how the Canadian school system works (how to make sense of report cards, what parent-teacher interviews should be like, how to interact with teachers, how visible parents should be in the school, etc.), see their role as complementing teachers in developing childrens' academic abilities (Valdes 1996) and know how to interact with teachers (unlike Esperanza and Rosita's fathers). Further, the 'ideal parents' do not discipline their children 'harshly'. As aforementioned, empowerment, in these cases, is not genuinely effective. The discourse on collaborative power posited by Cummins (1996) and reviewed in the theoretical framework section may offer a solution that is more productive.

Wong Fillmore (1990) has argued,

Educational programs that treat children as if they were incapable of learning, programs that begin with the assumption that the children's parents are incapable of preparing them for school, programs that see Latino children as being in need of remediation before they can be taught the things that the school is supposed to teach them (are a problem).

Nieto (1996) adds "schools need to foster all of the ways in which parents are involved in order to stress parents essential role in their child's educational process". It is essential to examine the ways in which parental involvement is framed within the structures of the school. Without assigning blame to individual, well-intentioned teachers, it is crucial to challenge the institutional processes in which the teachers frame their actions. A shift from a universalistic approach to a transformative, cultural-contextual approach can facilitate needed changes.
Not all parents are on equal footing; not all newcomer parents have the tools to unlock the 'common-sensical' secrets that will give them accessibility to and voice in currently employed mainstream ideologies. This shift must begin at the teacher training level, and must be nurtured through the in-service development. Starting with the assumption that all parents care about their children - and know how to parent in their own ways - can help build an alliance rather than a hierarchical, expert-novice relationship. Alongside being advocates for newcomer parents as researchers have suggested, educators, with institutional support, could maximize opportunities for inviting parents into an alliance in a manner that affirms their rich cultural competencies, knowledge and identities.

One-on-one congruence between homes and schools is not a necessary condition for beginning the negotiation of genuine collaboration. Rather, safe spaces must be created through which reflective practice, mutual respect, an ongoing sharing of diverse beliefs, and alternative ways of learning, being and effort can be nourished. By keeping dialogue alive, change is possible.

7.2. Recommendations

Some of recommendations which I propose have been woven throughout this thesis. To summarize, they include the following (and are not presented in any order of priority):

- It is possible that non-mainstream parents are involved in their children's education in ways that schools may not recognize. Educators and schools need further support to foster the ways that parents are involved in their child's education to honour the essential role parents play in their child's educational process.
Educators must have accessible training and resources to validate and become familiar with perspectives which affirm the backgrounds and lived histories of the individuals (children and families) they serve.

There is a need to re-evaluate the present, often narrow construction of newcomer children and families; rather there is as a need to view parental involvement within a cultural-contextual model. Teacher training institutions need to employ such a model that is consistent with the multicultural education framework (presented in the literature review chapter of this thesis) in making sense of newcomer families' experiences and affirming family histories and knowledge.

Teacher-training institutions should do more to promote on-growing, reflective practice for pre-service teachers. This must be encouraged through in-service development as well.

Schools can foster spaces for bi-cultural teachers / community liaison members, and provide them the necessary administrative support to facilitate dialogue between home and school.
Further,

- Teachers and student-teachers need to be trained to use qualitative methods to study household knowledge and draw upon this knowledge in the development of participatory pedagogy (see also Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzales, 1992).

- Through support from colleagues and board members, educators must redefine their personal and professional roles (as in Cummins, 1986) and challenge the structures within the school that reproduce the inequities of larger society. These structures include the following: policies and practices such as tracking; testing, limited and ethnocentric curricula; the physical structure of schools; discipline; and the lack of proper student, parent, and staff engagement (Nieto, 1996).

Finally,

- Teacher training institutions should endorse the goals proposed by Bernhard, Lefebvre, Chud & Lang (1995) in *Paths to equity: cultural, linguistic and racial diversity in Canadian early childhood education*. This material supports some of the recommendations earlier proposed by Bernhard based on her examination of minority students in Early Childhood Education (see Bernhard & Freire, 1996 and Bernhard & Smith, 1997). These goals are included in Appendix D of this thesis.
How does it come about that the one institution that is said to be the gateway to opportunity, the school, is the very one that is most effective in perpetuating an oppressed and impoverished status in society? (Stein, 1971, p.178)

If schools continue to fail in their attempts to educate students whose communities have been subordinated economically and socially for generations, everyone in society will pay the price ... human relationships are at the heart of schooling ... When powerful relationships are established between teachers and students, these relationships frequently can transcend the economic and social disadvantages that afflict communities and schools alike ... (Cummins, 1996)
References


INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARENTS (SPANISH)

Estimados padres:

Las personas que subscriben son dos profesionales Latinoamericanas que trabajan en Toronto en las áreas de educación y salud. Están particularmente interesadas en saber cómo los niños latinos refugiados se están adaptando al sistema escolar en las escuelas Canadienses. Este conocimiento permitirá posteriormente formular sistemas de ayuda para asegurarles una experiencia escolar positiva. Este estudio está dirigido exclusivamente a niños que asisten en este momento en guarderías infantiles. Para realizar este proyecto necesitamos su cooperación, la de los niños, y la de sus profesores por dos o tres horas.

La información solicitada se utilizará en un estudio medico-educacional y será absolutamente confidencial y anónima. Esto significa que aparte de las que subscriben, no habrá acceso a esta información para nadie y los nombres de los participantes no serán mencionados. Esta información no va a los profesores ni al gobierno.

Este estudio ha sido aprobado por el Instituto Polytechnic Ryerson (Consejo Etico). Si durante el periodo de participación usted necesita acclaraciones con respecto al mismo, sírvase contactar a la Doctora Judith Bernhard al teléfono 979-5306, o a la Doctora Marlinda Freire al 397-3751, o al Sénor Robin Sleep al 979-5000 ext 6160. Usted puede retirarse de este proyecto en cualquier momento. Agradecemos sinceramente su participación. Su colaboración permitirá obtener información útil para el futuro escolar de sus niños.

---

Nombre de padre o guardián legal del niño

Firma

---

Apellido del niño

Nombre del niño

---

Apellido del niño

Nombre del niño
Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARENTS (ENGLISH)

Dear parent:

As two professional Hispanics working in Toronto in the areas of health and education, we are interested in how children of refugee families are doing in Canadian schools. This knowledge will allow us to eventually find ways of helping to ensure a positive school experience. This study is aimed at children who presently attend daycare centres. We are asking you to agree to let us talk to you, your child, and to the teachers at the daycare for two or three hours.

The information is for medical and educational research and is absolutely confidential and anonymous. This means that no one other than the researchers has access to the information, and the participants' names will never be revealed. The information does not go to school or government authorities.

This work has been approved by Ryerson Polytechnical Institute (Ethics Review Board) as protecting you and your child's rights and privacy. During the study if you have any worries about the research or what is happening please telephone Dr. Judith Bernhard at 979-5306 or Dr. Marlinda Freire at 397-3751. You may address any further questions and complaints to the Robin Sleep, Chair of the Ethics Review Board at Ryerson at 979-5000 ext. 6160. You can leave this project at any time without penalty but we don't expect any problems. In fact, your cooperation will allow us to obtain information that will be useful for your child's educational future.

Name of parent of legal guardian

------------------------------------------
Signature                                      Date

------------------------------------------
Child's last (family) name                       Child's first name

------------------------------------------
Child's last (family) name                       Child's first name
Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS

Toronto, September 15, 1995

Dear educator:

As professionals working in Toronto in the areas of health and education, we are interested in how children of refugee families are doing in Canadian schools. This knowledge will allow us to eventually find ways of helping to ensure a positive school experience.

We want to establish a collaborative relationship with you and work out issues related to refugee children. We would record information in the form of field notes, classroom observations, and discussions with children. Since we are particularly interested in your evolving views as the year progresses, we want to interview you six times over the year for approximately two-hour each time. We will then transcribe the data and share it with you to clarify issues and ensure common understandings.

The information is for educational research and is absolutely confidential and anonymous. This means that no one other than the researchers has access to the information, and the participants’ names will never be revealed. The information you give us will not be shared with the family.

This work has been approved by Ryerson Polytechnic University (Ethics Review Board) as protecting you and your child’s rights and privacy. During the study if you have any worries about the research or what is happening please phone me, Dr. Judith Bernhard, at 979-5000 ext 7647. You may address any further questions and complaints to Dr. David Checkland, Chair of the Ethics Review Board at Ryerson at 979-5000 ext. 6164. You can leave this project at any time without penalty but we don’t expect any problems. In fact, your cooperation will allow us to obtain information that will be useful for refugee children’s educational future.

Name of educator

Signature

Date
Appendix D

Excerpts of the recommendations proposed by Bernhard, Lefebvre, Chud & Lang (1995) in *Paths to Equity: Cultural, linguistic and racial diversity in Canadian Early Childhood Education.*

I. National Collective Action Plan

1. National ECE associations should facilitate links between and among post-secondary initiatives around the need for diversity education. This should include providing information on available resources.

2. National ECE associations should assist in developing a formal system of support for ongoing dialogue among faculty on the subject of diversity.

II. Development and Implementation of Policies

3. ECE training programs should develop specific policies in areas such as recruitment and retention of minority students and faculty, curriculum and classroom-climate issues, and field-practicum requirements.

4. Colleges and universities should take immediate steps to recruit students and faculty members who speak the languages increasingly represented in the ECE and broader community.
5. Colleges and universities teaching ECE programs should develop and implement policies to ensure that the theme of family language maintenance is sequentially elaborated during the program.

6. Faculty with a background in facilitating change processes and an understanding of the complexities of change in the area of education for diversity should provide leadership for ensuring the implementation of policies.

III. Support for Faculty Development

7. Schools of ECE and professional associations should recognize and support the extensive commitment needed on the part of faculty members to educate themselves and their students about children and child-rearing issues in cultures other than their own by:

   a) Encouraging faculty members to build databases of cross-cultural knowledge through their own fieldwork in communities and through student projects designed to support students in learning about other cultures and documenting alternative approaches, perspectives, and belief systems, or childcare practices;

   b) Inviting professionals with expertise on diversity issues to provide workshops for faculty on approaches to and issues in "infusing" diversity-related issues into curricula, including racism and bias in adults and children, first- and second-language acquisition, and patterns of bilingual and bicultural development.
IV. Links with Community

8. Community involvement and accountability to community groups should be recognized as essential factors in the process toward equity of outcomes and included in the mission statement of the ECE program.

9. Advisory committees should include community representatives; the committees should not be merely consultative but have a significant voice in determining what happens in ECE programs.

10. Faculty members should develop sufficient collaborative contact with diverse communities to enable the development of culturally relevant curricula.

V. Planning of Frameworks Which Honour Diversity

11. Colleges and universities offering ECE programs should integrate ("infuse") diversity themes throughout core courses in order that students:

a) explore the meaning of culture and understand the diversity of human culture;

b) address issues of bilingualism and second-language development;

c) understand the history of oppression and inequities based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender, and how these factors affect academic performance;

d) respond proactively to bias, prejudice, discrimination, and racist behaviour of children or adults; and

e) develop skills for social advocacy.
VI. Partnerships with Families

12. Colleges and universities offering ECE programs should stress the essential nature of parental input and collaboration in the planning and delivery of education for young children. There should be formal institutional mechanisms for such collaboration.

Models of ECE training should stress:

a) understanding patterns of childcare in other cultures;
b) appreciating patterns of cross-cultural communication styles;
c) understanding second-language acquisition;
d) promoting family language maintenance;
e) interpreting family information;
f) the value of early childhood educators learning/having a second language; and
g) the importance of family centred, culturally responsive caregiving.

VIII. Placement Issues

13. The role of the practicum component of ECE training should be recognized as critical in preparing graduating students to work in diverse settings.