SILENT VOICES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF CARIBBEAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS’ AND CHILDREN’S INTERACTION WITH TEACHERS IN TORONTO

by

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Abstract

One of the challenges that Caribbean immigrant parents and children face as they settle into their new environment is interacting with teachers using their variety of English. This study seeks to explore the experiences of Caribbean immigrant parents and their children in their interactions with teachers in Toronto and the perceptions that they have about these interactions. The author’s purpose is to bring voice to their language encounters.

Qualitative analysis is utilized throughout the general discussion of the study. Using Colaizzi’s (1978) phenomenology approach, data was collected through semi-structured interviews from a sample of six immigrant parents and seven children within Toronto. The central themes that emerge from the data are organized under the four research questions. The results of the research may assist policy makers, educators, teachers, and support staff who plan and implement programs geared towards enhancing the interaction between themselves and Caribbean immigrant students and parents.
Acknowledgements

This thesis project has been a profound yet challenging experience for me. I have spent innumerable hours thinking about this research and ways in which it could be improved. It has certainly impacted the manner in which I execute my duties as a teacher.

Firstly, a huge depth of gratitude goes out to God for giving me the strength to pull through and for reminding me through scripture that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”.

My sincere gratitude goes out to the participants in the study. Without your effort, time and willingness to participate, this research would not be possible. Thanks for putting up with the many phone calls and many questions of clarification.

A special word of thanks goes to Professors Antoinette Gagné and Linda Cameron for providing steady support for me as I embarked on a journey that was absolutely new to me. Through your inspiration, I was able to grasp a deeper meaning of this work and put on a researcher’s cap. Your questions and insightful comments helped to chart the way and enhanced the richness of the study.

To the Minister of Religion, Rev. Hezekiah Campbell, who gave me the opportunity to solicit participants from his congregation and consented to the use of his facilities to host some of the interviews, your generous spirit and support are appreciated.

I must also extend gratitude to my husband, Charles Reid. Without your support and understanding I would have succumbed to the challenges. I appreciate your nudges and words of encouragement while preparing this work more than you can ever realize. You have granted me valuable family time so that I could focus on the task at hand.

Finally, I must express heartfelt thanks to my friend Janice, my family members and church family who were my sounding boards. You have all made this thesis a reality.
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The demographics within both the elementary and secondary schools in Toronto have been evolving over the years with a diverse blend of immigrants from around the world. The Caribbean immigrants who are the focus of my research are only one of many groups who have enriched Toronto and given rise to various interesting cultural and linguistic issues in education. According to Statistics Canada (2007), most Caribbean immigrants reside in urban areas including Toronto and Montreal. In 2001, the records showed that Toronto was home to about 60% of all those who reported being of Caribbean origin. The number of Caribbean immigrants in Toronto is not insignificant -- about 280,000 in 2001 and undoubtedly more now. Schools -- as a microcosm of society – constantly reflect the changing demographics within our society. As new immigrants flood our schools, their rich linguistic diversity cannot go unnoticed. Within the academic community, not all the effects of this linguistic diversity are positive. Many Caribbean immigrants are placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes upon their arrival in Toronto on the premise that they are deficient in the use of English language. However, Nero (1995) affirms that these students are not English language learners, rather; they are speakers of a variety of English.

Some immigrant parents are concerned that their linguistic diversity (as well as their children’s) places them at a disadvantage from native speakers. Regardless of how immigrants view their linguistic diversity, there are those who have put out tremendous efforts to establish communication between themselves and their children’s teachers. They have usually been successful while others faced additional challenges. New immigrants in the Growing New Roots and ESL Infusion (2007-12) video series reflected on the fear and pressures that they experienced while participating in whole class discussions and activities in the classrooms. Other students would often speak down to them. Despite their willingness to ask and answer questions, they often lacked the confidence to do so.

Similarly, the immigrant parents experienced challenges in getting their intended messages across to teachers. One parent reported that a Grade One teacher became irritated as a result of a misunderstanding that occurred when the parent was speaking to the Kindergarten teacher regarding her goals for her child. When she was misunderstood, she found it difficult to
explain to the Grade One teacher what she really meant (Growing New Roots in the Community). This research will highlight both the success stories of Caribbean immigrants as well as the challenges that they encountered when interacting with teachers in Toronto.

**Rationale**

While there may be many studies on Caribbean immigrants within the schools, there is little research that provides an avenue for Caribbean immigrants to recount their experiences and to share their perceptions on interactions with teachers. The research will therefore give voice to the experiences and thoughts of Caribbean immigrant parents and children. This study will help teachers who work with Caribbean immigrants in the elementary/secondary schools gain insight on the linguistic and cultural diversity that these students bring to the classroom. It will help them understand the scope and impact of their interactions with these students and their parents. The study is intended to provide meaningful information that will help promote more professional development sessions to expand teachers’ knowledge about effective practices of interacting with immigrant students and their parents. It has the potential to influence policymakers at the Ministry of Education, Ontario (MEO) as it embraces their policy on inclusion that was launched in 2009. *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* clearly states that one of its aims is “to help the education community identify and remove discriminatory biases and systematic barriers in order to support the achievement and well-being of all students.” In order to accomplish the goals of the strategy, the ministry places strong emphasis on diversity. It defines diversity as:

> the presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not exclusive to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical intellectual ability, race religion, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status. (p. 6)

Presenting a description of the experiences and perceptions of Caribbean immigrants will encourage stake holders to carefully examine the definition of diversity and the Ministry’s policy on inclusion and ultimately enact positive changes.
Research Questions

My overarching research question is: What are the experiences and perceptions of Caribbean immigrant parents and their children with regards to the use of a Caribbean variety of English when interacting with teachers in Toronto? I approached this question by addressing the following sub-questions:

(1) How do Caribbean immigrant parents describe their interactions with their children’s teachers?

(2) How do Caribbean immigrant children describe their language use in the classroom?

(3) What factors do Caribbean immigrant parents report that facilitate or impede effective interaction with their children’s teachers?

(4) What meanings do Caribbean immigrant parents give to their language encounters with teachers?

To begin, I introduce myself to the readers by highlighting my motivation and the cultural lens which has shaped my perceptions on this subject. Chapter 2 reviews the literature and phenomenology which shape my study. The information is organised into themes, including the historical context of the Caribbean variety of English and the current attitude towards its use. It highlights factors that promote and impede effective interaction with classroom teachers and presents literature supporting the experiences and perceptions of Caribbean immigrants regarding interactions with teachers. Chapter 3 describes the research design, context, participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures that were employed in the study. Chapter 4 presents a portrait of the participants as well as their narratives. In Chapters 5 and 6, the findings are discussed with reference to the literature. Chapter 7 concludes with recommendations and implications for future research. A list of references and appendices holding all the schedules and forms used throughout the research are also included.

Positioning Myself as a Researcher

My interest in the study of West Indian language within classrooms in Toronto began with my immigration to Canada from Jamaica, the land of my birth. This experience presented
new sets of challenges and I became extremely conscious of my accent as it differed from that of other people. My pronunciation of some English words was different. For example, I often placed emphasis on the second syllables of many words which deviated from Canadian English pronunciations. In Jamaica I would be considered an acrolectal speaker (fluent speaker of Standard English). I was an educator who had obtained a Diploma in Teaching and a B. Ed degree in Literacy Studies at the University of the West Indies and was pursuing a Master’s degree in Language Education. However, after relocating to Toronto, Canada, my competence in English was assessed and I felt that the way I spoke was always under scrutiny. A struggle emerged to effectively appropriate the English language in a mainstream environment despite the fact that I had obtained my first degree in that language.

With this conscious evaluation of the way I spoke, I felt the necessity to code-switch whenever the situation arose. This was possible because I was fluent in both Jamaican Standard English and Jamaican Creole. When speaking to my colleagues (teachers), I used Jamaican Standard English that differs somewhat from Canadian Standard English but still allowed me to communicate effectively with them. Whenever I conversed with people of a Caribbean background (who often spoke using their dialect), I tended to switch to my Jamaican dialect in order to help them feel at ease and communicate more effectively with them. I was resolved however, not to adapt to the Canadian Standard English but to maintain my Jamaican accent despite the fact that I was occasionally asked to repeat or clarify what I had said.

I was appalled at the number of Jamaican students who were placed in ESL classes upon their arrival in Canada. There was one incident that occurred about four years ago that is foremost in my mind as it evoked a sense of responsibility with me and the need to enlighten misled colleagues. Being an occasional teacher with the Toronto District School Board at the time, I had the opportunity to travel to different schools across Toronto. As I sat one day in the staffroom at lunch, a teacher came in, sharing her woes with her colleagues. Apparently a Kindergarten student had recently immigrated to Canada, and based on the teacher’s diagnosis, the child had a speech defect. I made it my duty to meet this student who, as it turned out, spoke Jamaican Creole very fluently and in a comprehensible manner. Was the defect really the student’s ability to communicate with the teacher or the teacher’s ability to understand the student?
Subsequently, I realized that the Caribbean variety of English (which I will refer to as CVE) is often seen as an inferior language in part because it may not be easily understood. I therefore resolved to embark on research that would increase my knowledge and understanding of what happens in the process as students and parents interact with teachers using the CVE. My research could shed some well-needed light on this interaction process. Ultimately, I would like to make a difference in the lives of students with Caribbean backgrounds. I hope that the lessons learned from this research are applicable to students from other diverse backgrounds as well.

As a Special Education teacher working with the TDSB I am privileged to work with students who hail from many diverse backgrounds, including a few from the Caribbean. At the commencement of the study, I was employed as a Special Education teacher. However, at the start of the 2012 school year I was given the opportunity to teach a Grade 4/5 class. This provided me a wider span of Caribbean immigrants with whom to interact. This also piqued my interest in this area of research as I embraced the students’ dialect and interacted with their parents in meaningful ways due to my vantage point. It is through my own cultural lens that I hope to conduct this research. However, as a researcher, I endeavour to “suspend” my experiences as much as possible in order to bring voice to the experiences of Caribbean immigrant parents and students when interacting with teachers in Toronto.
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There are many varieties of English that currently exist in the world. Such variation in English provides an opportunity for investigation and exploration. The research of English dates back to the 19th century and has evolved greatly over the years. One of the early researchers, Daniel Jones (1881-1967), focused on the pronunciation of British and American words while another, Charles Talbut Onions (1873-1965), emphasized grammar. Henry Wyld (1870-1945) wrote the Universal Dictionary of English Language and charted the way for discussions in English studies. Work in this field was deepened by other scholars like Randolph Quirk (1962) who was one of the first to discuss varieties of English. He notes:

English is not the prerogative or “possession” of the English….Acknowledging this must – as a corollary- involve our questioning the propriety of claiming that English of one area is more “correct” than the English of another. Certainly, we must realize that there is no single “correct” English, and no single standard of correctness. (pp. 17-18)

This sparked a prolonged debate between Randolph Quirk and Braj B. Kachru who was among the first academics to coin the term “World Englishes” (WE). More contemporary scholars like Burchfield (1985) delved into the inquiry by discussing the varieties of English in Britain and overseas. Tom McArthur’s (2003) work drew heavily on the complexities of English. The terms most often used to describe these varieties are “global English(es)”, “international English(es)”, “new Englishes” or “world Englishes”, “new varieties of English” or “non-native varieties of English” (Bolton 2006). Kachru’s (1992) defence of the term (WE) is that:

The term symbolizes the functional and formal variations, divergent sociolinguistic contexts, ranges and varieties of English in creativity. And various types of acculturation in parts of the Western and non-Western world. This concept emphasizes ‘‘WE-ness’’, and not the dichotomy between us and them (the native and non-native users). (p. 2)

Yet McArthur (2003) argued that these terms do not sufficiently define these varieties of English and these terms are limited in their perspectives. However, Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008) suggested that the use of the plural form of the word English was indicative of the diversity of
the language and also suggested that no language can be viewed as having the base of authority, prestige, and normativity. In contrast, McArthur (2003) proposed a more appropriate term called “English Language Complex” (ELC, p. 56) which included all subtypes that are distinct based on their history, form, and functions. The ELC is considered complex in light of the various overlapping categories. Some examples of the subtypes of ELC are: Metropolitan standards, Colonial standards, Regional dialects, Social dialects,Pidgin Engishes, English as a Second Language, English as a Foreign Language, Jargon Engishes and Creole Engishes. McArthur (2003) further advised research linguists that one should not discuss world English or English in the Caribbean without looking closely at Creole. Therefore, depending on the context, there are many other names that may be given to these varieties of English. Like other countries, English in the Caribbean region exists in many forms; hence, the Caribbean variety of English (CVE) will be the term used to reflect the linguistic speech of the subjects of this research.

Caribbean Variety of English in the Caribbean Context

The use of the CVE in the Caribbean is usually described through the use of a creole continuum with the acrolect being considered the acceptable European English form. There is also the basilect, the largest group, which is more conservative and is considered to be the other end of the spectrum from the acrolect. Then, there are the intermediate varieties which are called mesolect (Winer and Jack, 1997). They further pointed out that Caribbean speakers possess the ability to glide across the continuum, hence making it difficult to identify boundaries between each variety. On a similar note, Devonish (2003) pointed out that “there is no visible line which differentiates language varieties but there exists what is called ‘a gradual shading’ off from the most ‘English’ varieties towards those that are most deviant from English” (p. 159). Therefore, speakers may utilize various ranges along the continuum.

Commonly, the more formal the situation, the more likely the speaker will use the forms approximating English while in less formal situations, the speech will approximate the basilect or Creole. Some speakers who speak only the acrolect may blatantly refuse to recognise the informal slangs used by the speakers of the basilect as proper English. Similarly, basilect speakers may consider colloquial slangs or expressions as an indicator of being local which may constitute tacit acceptance of the individual into the community. Consequently, there is a mixture of varying attitudes towards language use even among speakers of the CVE.
However, the idea of the language being on a continuum was not embraced by Roberts (1988). He argued that the entire continuum should not be referred to or treated as English. His rationale was that the concept of a continuum challenged the definition of a language; these two varieties differed dramatically but were treated as belonging to the same family or language.

Baptiste (2002) informed us that there were five variations of English within the Caribbean: Creole English, Erudite English, Foreign English, Rasta English and Standard English. In the USA, the language spoken by the Caribbean immigrants is referred to as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), while in other locations it is referred to as Caribbean English Creole (CEC) or Caribbean Creole English (CCE). However, for the purpose of this research, these terminologies will be used interchangeably. Nero (2000), in a study on Caribbean Creole English (CCE), summarized some of the main differences between CCE and standard American English in terms of syntax, vocabulary, and pronunciation. He pointed out that in CCE there was a syntactic flexibility as to what type of word can function as a verb. This is illustrated in the example below:

For e.g., in the sentence, “That boy tief the books”, the word tief (thief), normally a noun, functions as a verb (meaning stole). Also in CCE, adjectives are subcategories of verbs (e.g., He rich), and CCE verbs are not subject to rigid inflection rules of SAE. (p. 5)

The use of high-frequency verbs (e.g., does) in CCE is also different from SAE. In terms of vocabulary, the CCE uses many other words in place of the SAE words. However, these words may denote the same meaning (for e.g., the word “next” is used in place of “another”).

Nero (2000) described Creole English as having its phonology, morphology, and syntax of West African and its lexicon mainly from British English. Thus, there is a close resemblance to a form of Standard English, which results in it being portrayed as a “deformed” version of Standard English. With a similar view McArthur (2003) defined Creole English as:

Creoles are fully developed speech forms, which show so much restructuring as to bear little resemblance grammatically to their lexifiers. These languages are ‘mixed’ in the sense that typically their grammars and lexicons come from different sources—see Singler and Kouwenberg (in press) for recent debates over terminology in this field. Although a
variety like Jamaican Creole is structurally an independent language, it has overlapping membership with the ELC in terms of its vocabulary and the possibilities of being influenced by English, which is the ‘authorised’ language of the education system. (p. 5)

Edwards (2010) denounced the idea of Creole English being an inferior variety to Standard English as he stated:

Any deficit view of linguistic behaviour is incorrect: no language, or language variety has been shown to be more accurate, logical or capable of expression more than another. Further, it is wrong to claim that some variations constrain basic intellectual or cognitive functioning. Rather, different language groups and subgroups develop speech patterns that differ in their modes of expression, vocabulary and pronunciation. (p. 117)

In comparing Caribbean Creole English with American Standard English, Nero (2000) presented tables highlighting the pronunciation features, syntax and vocabulary features of CCE. Here are some examples that he adopted from Allsopp (1996), Rickford (1997), Roberts (1998), using a modification of Rickfords’ system for comparing CCE and SAE.

**Table 1**

**Pronunciation Features in Caribbean Creole English and Standard American English**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Caribbean Creole English</th>
<th>Standard American English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Consonant</td>
<td>(t) ting</td>
<td>(th) thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) dat</td>
<td>(th) that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Consonant</td>
<td>(n) sometin’</td>
<td>(ng) something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vowels</td>
<td>(e) mek</td>
<td>(a) make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final (a) faddah</td>
<td>(er) father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

London (1980) in Nero (1995) proposed that effective interaction was possible between American educators and speakers of the Caribbean variety of English when teachers familiarized themselves with features of the CVE as well as other supporting systems. The following table
has been adopted from Nero (2000) and displays some features of the Caribbean Creole based English.

**Table 2**

*Syntax and Vocabulary Features of Caribbean Creole English (CCE)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactic CCE Feature</th>
<th>CCE Form</th>
<th>Corresponding SAE Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero inflection for subject-verb agreement</td>
<td>she tell me everything</td>
<td>She tells me everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero marking for possession</td>
<td>Paul house</td>
<td>Paul’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero copula if predicate is an adjective</td>
<td>He strong</td>
<td>He is strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary Items</th>
<th>Meaning in CCE</th>
<th>Meaning in SAE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hand</td>
<td>Part of the body from the shoulder to the fingers</td>
<td>Part of the body from the wrist to the fingers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>Any hot beverage - may include coffee</td>
<td>Specific beverage made from tea leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A next</td>
<td>Another (e.g. I want a next one)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Caribbean Variety of English (CVE) in the Canadian Context**

Since the United States of America (USA) and Canada are close neighbours, it would be logical to expect that the prestige given to CVE in the USA would be similarly reflected in Canada. In America, the African American Vernacular English is often stigmatized as being inferior while “Standard English” is considered the language of prestige and superiority. Given that hierarchy, it would suggest that Standard English would be the desired level of competence. On the contrary, studies (Speicher, 1992, and Winford, 2003) in Makoni et al. (2003) have shown that African Americans value their language and associate it with who they are as a people, thus preserving AAVE as a variation of English.

In the North American context, students’ inability to communicate effectively to their teachers results in one of two approaches that are usually employed to assist them. These are the
mainstream model (“sink or swim”) or remedial model (special education or ESL programs) (Winer, 2006). The mainstream model is usually used for students when other resources are not available and these students’ language is perceived as bad language; consequently, they are not given adequate instructions. Winer (2006) further purported that the remedial model clearly indicated to parents and students that their language was deemed to reflect underlying cognitive deficiencies. She also argued that referral of a student who spoke CEC to a speech therapist implies that linguistic differences are an individual’s pathology. She recognised that these children may have had learning or speech disorders. However the diagnosis should have been carried out by qualified people who could identify the difference between a speech variety and a speech impediment. Students placed within these contexts usually resent the idea of wearing the label as non-English speakers. Dismissing or eliminating an immigrants’ language from the classroom is an example of the “coercive relations of power” that need to be challenged by schools (Cummins, 2001, p. 20). He argued that the first step in validating the immigrants’ home language is to recognise that even an attempt to eliminate it is unacceptable.

This section explores the dominant themes of the research questions: immigrant parent and teacher interaction, immigrant students and teacher interaction, factors that promote/impede effective interaction between Caribbean immigrants and teachers and lastly, the perceptions of Caribbean immigrant students and parents regarding their interaction with teachers.

**Immigrant Parents and Teachers Interact**

While some Caribbean speakers defined themselves as speakers of English (Coelho, 1988 and Nero, 2000) and thought highly of their language as a variety of English, there were others whose perception was influenced by the dominant ideology. Winford (1994) described this as a public attitude versus a private attitude, where the CVE speaker was proud of and celebrated the CVE. This is considered to be their private attitude toward their language and CVE is usually used in an informal context. Simultaneously, Canadian English is elevated above the CVE so as to meet the standard of the public. The latter is considered to be the public attitude which is adopted in a more formal context. Nero’s (2000) study of four Caribbean university students who had recently migrated to New York corroborated the findings of research done by Winford (1994) as it highlighted the participants’ awareness of their use of a public and a private
language. According to Nero (2000), this type of language use suggested that the speakers were aware that they were bidialectal.

**CCE speakers and receptive skills**

Nero (2010) asserted that “CCE speakers have varying degrees of receptive and productive knowledge of standardized forms of Caribbean English, which is merely different and part of the family of the English languages” (p. 215). Devonish (2003) also spoke of the undefined difference between the varieties. With this in mind, CCE speakers who possess the ability to move along the continuum are familiar with the acrolectal speech which must be considered a variety of English. Hence they have a greater ability to interact and communicate effectively with speakers of Canadian English. In light of this, Nero (1997) asserted that, “creole speakers’ receptive knowledge of Standard English far exceeds that of true nonnative speakers of English” (p. 7).

**Code-switching**

One of the first pioneers in the research of code mixing was Gumperz (1977). He fittingly defined conversational code-switching as:

the juxatapostion of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems, within the same exchange. Most frequently the alternation takes the form of two subsequent sentences, as when a speaker uses a second language either to reiterate his message or to reply to someone else’s message. (p. 1)

In addition, Field (1997) clearly stated that code-switching was a mental translation process that occurs in people who are bilingual or bidialectical. “Code-switching allows a person to both understand and convey thoughts in either language” (p. 18). This definition requires the speaker to apply cognitive processes to determine the appropriateness of the language situation.

Gumperz (1977) and Field (1997) viewed the interchange as occurring between two different language systems or dialects. However, Nero (1997) would have us know that there was no “sharp cleavage” (p. 586) between Standard English and CVE. Therefore, this means that the differences are barely noticeable. It is this gradual shading on the continuum -- from the
varieties that are most like English to those that are farther from the English -- to which Devonish (2003) alluded. In light of Field’s (1997) definition, Gal (1988) posited that some people can be unaware of their code-switches while others are able to monitor their code-switching.

Linguistic genocide

Linguistic genocide -- as Day (1985) coins it -- is the death of a language which involves a shift from one language to another by the people of a given culture. He further argued that this results in the specific group of people using a different language as their first language. The quotation from St. Hilaire’s (2003) research on the assimilation of St. Lucia highlights a 40 year old female participant’s view of the death of the Patois/Creole.

I think less Patois is spoken now than when I was a child. Because I could remember when I was a little girl going to school, all the children would be speaking Patois on the road to school. But now you hardly have any child that speaks Patois ... The parents are not speaking Patois like that... time by time, you see, Patois is decreasing ... from the old generation that's dying out and the young generation that's coming in. The old generation speak Patois to their children. The children speak English to their children, you understand? So, therefore ... my great grandmother died already. And she speaking Patois alone. So, she died already. My grandmother can speak it (English) a little. And then my mother speak it to me fluent. So, then I have to speak it to my children, too, you know? So, therefore, the Patois died. So, you hear the children on the way to school speaking English, you understand? (p. 16)

Day (1981) observed that linguistic genocide can be voluntary as well as involuntary. He further pointed out that when there are no more native speakers of the indigenous language, then the language faces the possibility of extinction. These deaths are not considered voluntary. However, there are circumstances under which an individual’s status may change resulting in a shift in language patterns. These language shifts may not cause language deaths.
Immigrant Students and Teachers Interact

Many studies have been conducted which focus on interaction in various learning contexts with diverse learners such as English Language Learners (ELLs), English as a Second Language Learners (ESL), at-risk, or behavioural students. However, the classroom remains a place of importance to Caribbean immigrant students as it is where they become cognizant of their language patterns in relation to the society. Nero (1995) aptly described the proposed participants of this research as speakers of other Englishes.

In a study conducted in a US second grade classroom by Rhymes and Anderson (2004), the findings revealed a teacher’s attitude to an African American student during a classroom exchange and also emphasised the need for multilingualism within the classrooms. Classroom instructions were delivered in English; however, the students predominantly spoke Spanish and some of the students spoke African American English (AAE). According to the researchers, Rhymes and Anderson (2004), there have been limited attempts to embrace AAE within the classrooms and these students are usually marginalized. This was disclosed as the bilingual speakers revealed the marginalization of the AAE students. While the teacher made overt attempts to engage the bilingual student in the discussion and used his native language to facilitate the discussion, there were times when the AAE student’s response was not acknowledged. Instead of following the lead, the teacher hastened to rephrase the question. It was interesting to note that this child (Danny) was not the only speaker of AAE but the researchers became interested in why his responses were viewed as off-topic. From the report that they presented, Danny’s AAE seemed to have been the reason for this rejection; his speech was deviated from standard English as there was some deletion of consonants and the replacement of the ‘th’ sound with ‘d’ sound. The exchange also highlighted the teacher’s inability to deal with this linguistic variation. Consequently, she refused to interact with him in the same manner as she did with the other child, Rene.

Pratt-Johnson (1993) put forward excerpts from teachers in New York City who openly shared the challenges that they faced in interacting with students from Jamaica. These excerpts included the following quotes:
One of the difficulties I have with Jamaican students is in understanding their oral language.

It is difficult for me to understand my Jamaican students who have a heavy accent, and of them write as they speak.

I truly feel bad that I cannot offer them [Jamaican students] help in overcoming their language problems as I can with other students, but, honestly, I don’t know where to begin. It’s all new to me I wish I could give my Jamaican students confidence. The most difficult part is that you are trying to change something that has been the only way that they’ve known for so long. (p. 259)

*Small talk in the classroom*

Within many classrooms, immigrant children may experience a feeling of apprehension when communicating orally with their teachers who are seen as the seat of authority. Usually, the content of their communication solely relates to academics and they experience a sense of fear if they were to speak about topics informally. However, Luk (2004) affirmed that small talk could be valuable within the classroom. He viewed small talk as non-institutional although it took place within an institutional context. He further noted that this type of interaction was informal in nature and, according to Biggs and Edwards (1994), geared towards enhancing interpersonal interaction in the classroom (p.86).

According to Pratt-Johnson (1993), one factor that contributed to Caribbean students not speaking about non-academic topics with their teachers was timidity as it related to their language. In her study of Jamaican immigrants in a New York City public school system, she stated that since these students speak a variety of English, they often felt intimidated, threatened, insecure and uncomfortable within the classroom. There was also the need to meet the expectations of the teacher which they felt might not be possible. This usually resulted in a lack of participation in the academic classroom which could be transferred to their social lives as well. Rivers (1993) explained that genuine communication cannot take place under these conditions. Another contributing factor was the teachers’ attitude towards CVE. If the students’ language was embraced by the school system, it would minimize the level of discomfort and
intimidation that Caribbean immigrants experience and ultimately progress will be made in their learning (Cummins, 2001).

*Correction in the classroom*

When students engage in reading or oral exercises, constant correction by teachers promotes an awareness of the teacher’s or school’s perception of students’ language. One of the findings of Gill’s (1994) research indicates that the difference between teacher’s accents and that of students’ accents is an important factor in the classroom: as the difference increases, teachers have less favourable perceptions of their students.

Through a report on the linguistic training given to teachers of Apache speakers in White Mountain Apache schools, Riegelhaupt and Carrasco (2005) broaden our understanding of this subject. Prior to training, the teachers were embedded in a world of negativity and a deficit concept of the students’ language. Like Creole, Apache English is also considered a variety of English and has many negative associations. The following statements are evidence of the misconceptions that they had:

**Teacher A:** I had been guilty in the past, of thinking of “reservation English”, as “bad English”. It had not occurred to me that “reservation English” had value and that it had value as a form of communication. (p. 111)

**Teacher E had this to say after the training:** My job as an English teacher is not only about teaching right vs. wrong -- “Standard” English -- but about teaching my students different forms of appropriate English along with when, where, and how to use them. This allows me to still teach standard English while it removes the negativity of don’t say/write that way because it is wrong. (p. 114)

Cummins (2001) asserted that:

While students may not be physically punished for speaking their mother tongue in the school (as they previously were in many countries), a strong message is communicated to them that if they want to be accepted by the teacher and the society, they have to renounce any allegiance to their home language and culture. (p.2)
Clarifying, rephrasing and request to repeat responses, according to Harmer (2007) were strategies used to correct errors in the classroom. Jakobsson’s (2010) research highlighted the views of teacher educators and teachers regarding error correction during oral communication. Their views varied but Sandra, a teacher with four years experience, explained that she did not correct students if they combined British and American English but would correct them if they used a combination of many accents. It is therefore likely that CVE speakers in Sandra’s class would have been corrected for any perceived “errors” as they communicated using a range of varieties along the continuum. However, Sandra refrained from correcting students in whole class discussions but rather used a one-on-one strategy to inform them of their errors. The students would more readily accept this form of correction as it was not done in a method that would embarrass them in front of others. Two of the teacher educators had had negative experiences of error correction that made them feel ashamed and thus did not want their students to have similar experiences. Anna, one of the teacher educators, viewed error correction as a form of discipline and reflected that it sometimes could be hurtful to the students.

**Negotiating identity**

“The way we express our identity is partly through language,” (Pahl and Roswell 2005). They argued that these identities are complex. They spoke to who the students were. Caribbean students spoke a language at home and spoke a different one at school, therefore they possessed multiple identities for the various speech communities within which they engaged. According to Cummins (1997), these micro-interactions took place between educators, students and the communities and formed an interpersonal and interactional space where identities were negotiated. He further posited that they were never neutral and therefore had an impact on the students, by either reinforcing coercive relations of power or promoting collaborative relations of power. In the latter, power was shared between the educator and the student with the result that the students’ identities were reaffirmed. In contrast, when coercive relations of power were exercised over the students, the result was their disempowerment and questioning of identity. With the classroom being a microcosm of society, each teacher-student interaction represents the structures of the society within which the students live. Therefore, embedded in the classroom interactions are both subtle and overt messages of the dominant language. Cummins (1997, p.
109) stated, “Thus educators are constantly sketching a triangular set of images in their interactions with pupils”. He added:

- an image of their own identities as educators;
- an image of the identity options that are being highlighted for pupils; consider, for example, the contrasting messages conveyed to pupils in classrooms focused on critical inquiry compared with classrooms focused on passive internalization of information;
- an image of the society into which pupils will graduate and to which they are being prepared to contribute. (p.6)

The teacher therefore has the choice or power to communicate messages that will validate students’ language, experience and culture and consequently reaffirm their identities.

*Students’ perceptions of their use of Canadian English*

Coelho (1988) affirmed that students with a Caribbean background usually regarded themselves as English speakers and did not usually perceive language to be a major problem in their adjustment to school life in Canada. Nero (2006), in support of Coelho’s view, emphasised that:

most CE speakers identify with English, and more importantly, think of themselves as speakers of English. In many cases, the first challenge to CE speakers’ identification with, and use of, English is when they enter school or college in North America or England where standardized American and British varieties of English are privileged. (p. 11)

With Cummins’ (1997) view of the micro-interactions that take place between the educator and the student, there are some Caribbean immigrant students whose perception of their language use rests solely on the expectations or assumptions of the teachers. Nero (2006) asserted that when teachers come in contact with CVE students, they were challenged by three main assumptions. According to Cummins (1997), these were also communicated to the student via the micro-interactions. These assumptions were:
(1) the assumption of the so-called “native speaker” as inherently tied to race/ethnicity
(2) the assumption that English is monolithic
(3) the assumption that only standardized English counts as English. (p. 4)

First, the assumption existed that only people of European heritage were ascribed the title “native speaker”. Therefore, when Caribbean students said that they spoke English, it was usually met with surprise. Second, there existed a standard of what English should sound like and look like in the eyes and ears of North American teachers. So when Caribbean students spoke, it was not considered to be real English. Native speakers placed a claim on English indicating that they were the only speakers of that language and that other varieties were deficient forms. Shannon (1999) recognised how popular some of these assumptions were as well. She stated that, “it is not “normal” to speak a language other than English nor is it “normal” that, if you do, that you will continue after having learning English” (p. 184). In her debate on language ideologies in the bilingual classroom, she affirmed that when a language policy is not in place, teachers within the bilingual classroom context tend to rely on language ideologies to inform their practice.

My accent hurts

Souto-Manning (2009) posited that a different approach honouring students’ contributions, perspectives, and languages -- rather than sponsoring one language, one accent as the norm -- should be promoted in the learning environment. She recounted a narrative of George who was an African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speaker who entered her first grade class. She had preconceived assumptions about George based on information that she had received from his previous teacher. He would always get in trouble for many things, one of which was his use of the AAVE. Whenever he tried to make a contribution to class discussions, he was always corrected and the interaction between George and his classmates would be characterized by corrections and ridicule. This action brought about a negative reaction (physical action) from George who the teacher thought was “acting out”. However, in order to reach out to George, his new teacher pushed aside what she heard, i.e., her assumptions and preconceived notions, and made an effort to value George’s language and his meaningful contributions. These assumptions influence how students view their language in relation to Canadian English and will determine how they interact when Canadian English is a requirement.
Writing with an accent

Nero (2006) posited that the written work of Caribbean English speakers was usually marked with great scrutiny. She further cited several reasons why Caribbean English speakers were at a disadvantage. One of the reasons was the use of grammatical features which carried different meanings in each context; mainly the use of the word “does” and the word “would”. This can best be illustrated with the following example using the word “does” and its meaning in both contexts.

My friend does go to Syracuse University (which means “My friend goes to Syracuse University”). In SAE, does is generally used to emphasise contrast, e.g., does go as oppose to does not go. (p. 507)

During Nero’s (2006) research on Caribbean students’ writing, she found that the teacher corrected the word “does” before the verb in the Caribbean English speaker’s work. Nero conferred with the teacher about the correction and she explained that “the students’ use of does struck her as an unnecessary emphasis (p. 507). Nero also pointed out that the teacher and the student were not on the same page regarding the use of the word “does”.

In another study conducted by Nero (2010) involving four English Language Arts (ELA) teachers, the findings gleaned pertinent information to the field of writing as it pertained to Caribbean English speakers in a mainstream context. The teachers reported that the CCE speakers wrote the way that they spoke. They placed great emphasis on correctness which the teachers considered a negative trait. Interestingly, the teachers believed that the emphasis on correctness was a result of the type of “internalised philosophy of education in the Caribbean that focused on getting things right in a very structured and formulaic way, and a notion that teacher, invested with absolute authority, is always right” (p.228).

Another study conducted by Nero (1997) aimed at investigating the spoken and written language of four Caribbean college students. It revealed that many features in their writing were verb related, with zero inflection for subject verb concord, participles and tense. This characteristic Nero attributed to the influence of Creole. Another finding revealed that all participants expressed themselves in the narrative writing assignment with a high degree of
effectiveness but to a lesser degree in the research paper and expository writing. This was attributed to the culture of storytelling which exists in the Caribbean.

**Similar vs. dissimilar accents**

There exists a plethora of research (Edwards, 1982, Nero, 1997) which indicates that people with the same accents usually approve of each other more than people with dissimilar accents. The fifteen participants in Gill’s (1994) research, who all spoke standard American English, were randomly assigned to one of six tasks. The tasks that were pertinent to my study involved listening to a lecture from a presenter with an accent (American, British or Malaysian), answering five factual information questions about the lecture and responding to an open recall task. Gill confirmed that the North American listeners considered the presenter with similar accent to be more favourable. Although the Malaysian speaker’s accent was the most dissimilar of the three, the Malaysian speakers and the British speakers were given similar ratings. Despite this anomaly, Gill believed that the hypothesis was partially confirmed. Based solely upon similarity of accents, a stricter interpretation of Gill’s hypothesis would have had the Malaysian speaker ranked as rated least favourable.

Coelho (1988) commented on the frequent mismatch between teachers and learners in terms of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds as follows:

… teachers are more effective if they are knowledgeable about the cultural/linguistic backgrounds of their students. Although this statement did not express the view that the teachers need to be of similar background, she further argues that, Caribbean students (and their parents) have been accustomed to teachers who share the same cultural background. In Canada most teachers have no experience of their West Indian students’ major life experiences, such as immigration and family separation. Moreover, they often do not perceive the cultural background of Caribbean students as significantly different from that of the Canadian English speaking society; what differences are perceived are usually evaluated negatively. Very few of the teachers are of Caribbean background, and those who are, many prefer to deny commonality between themselves and West Indian students who are of the lower class. (p.143)
Similarly, Henry (1996) presented a teacher’s perspective on being able to communicate effectively with her students due to sharing similar linguistic and cultural background.

The child feels good [and knows], "My teacher is like me. She understands when I speak." And I understand, I can get down to whatever level it is and talk to them in the way that they are perhaps spoken to at home. So they're getting the same sort of messages……What I think, I am somewhat like them, and not looking down on them in any way. I understand when they speak the dialect. I understand, and I let them know that I understand. I understand it, and sometimes I use it and explain it to the other kids in the room. So I think what it does for them is to affirm for them that their thing is OK too. You don't have to have a Canadian accent to be OK. You can speak with your West Indian accent, and it's still OK. Those things are important to them. (p.10)

In conjunction with their policy on diversity, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has recently taken on a new initiative which is consistent with findings made by Henry (1996). According to Global Mail (February 19, 2013), a confidential memo claimed that the TDSB was seeking to hire more male and racial minority teachers. Though this was not confirmed or denied by the board, a statement reflecting their stance on the matter was issued:

Through our employment equity policy, we encourage a number of different groups to apply so that our staff may better represent our school communities; however, it is not to the exclusion of any other groups. (TDSB spokesperson)

Comprehensibility

The research of Gill (1994) tested another hypothesis: “As accents of the teacher become more dissimilar from students' accents, comprehension will be adversely affected” (p. 350).

The findings revealed that the participants recalled more information from the North American English speaker. However, Gill (1994) hastened to identify the limitation of the study in that the messages were really short and suggested that more research needs to be done in this area. She claimed that:
Although this study is limited to standard North American English speaking students' abilities to comprehend accented speakers, any mixture of students' abilities to comprehend teachers because of accents jeopardizes the educational process. Therefore, it is essential that students and teachers seek ways to minimize any potentially negative effects of accents on the learning process. (p.357)

There are many teachers of Caribbean immigrant students who are challenged by the variety of English that other students speak and therefore encounter difficulty understanding what these students are trying to say. A teacher from a New York City high school in Cummins (1983) study admitted to not understanding a student from Grenada. Furthermore, when she asked the student if she was speaking German, this comment had a negative impact on the student and resulted in the child refraining from participating in class discussions again.

**Misunderstandings**

Smith (1992) posited that the more familiarity that an individual (native or non-native) has with the variety of English being used, the greater the understanding between members of that speech community. In this situation, there needs to be more familiarity of varieties between the two speakers. Winer and Jack (1997) argued that teachers do not need to be fluent in Creole but suggest that teachers work with the students in order to identify the differences in each variety. They further noted that the least understood aspect of the Caribbean Creole is the accent. The following example gives a clear indication of how the difference in accent can cause confusion and misunderstanding. Consider the simple phrase “Take it.” If this is said in Creole, it is said with a “non-falling accent” which could be for emphasis. However, the English speaker might perceive that the speaker is angry (Winer and Jack, 1997) and react negatively when, in fact, the speaker did not intend to communicate anger.

On the contrary, not all teachers of CVE speakers hold the view that the language is inferior. The teachers in Henry’s (1996) research demonstrated how they effectively used the CVE to validate and to empower their students. However, one could argue that the teachers in Henry’s (1996) research shared similar linguistic and cultural background with the students. Conversely, reports from bilingual teachers in Conteh (2007) countered that assumption. One of the teachers (female Urdu/Punjabi-speaking class teacher and Leading Literacy teacher in a
‘mainly white’ school) who did not share linguistic or cultural background with the student reports:

I have recently had a child from Jamaica who speaks patois. Allowing her the freedom to use her language in the classroom and using Jamaican authors/poets in the curriculum has enabled her to access English with greater confidence and has raised her status in the eyes of other pupils. (p. 465)

ESL, by choice or forced?

The misunderstandings mentioned above sometimes resulted in students being placed in ESL classes or placed two grades below the normal grade for their age. Coelho (1988, p. 132) cited that, “it is likely that mistakes in placement are made when Caribbean background children first enter the school” in Canada. Nero (2000, 2001), Winer, (2006) and Pratt-Johnson (1993) affirmed that this was not the solution to the linguistic needs of the Caribbean immigrant students. A Jamaican student in Pratt-Johnson’s (1993) research reported that she was placed in an ESL class which was geared towards students with behavioural problems. She reiterated that she was placed there because “the principal didn’t know where to put her”. The student confessed to learning nothing or speaking in class because most of the time was spent disciplining the other students. Sontang (1992) in Nero (1995) echoed the views of Nero, Winer (1997) and Pratt-Johnson (1993) as she argued that it was a mistake when Jamaican students were placed in ESL classes. They should not be denied the opportunity to learn in mainstream classrooms as this is clearly not the solution. However, she maintained that the challenge comes about when teachers are not equipped to deal with linguistic diversity in the classroom (p. 261).

Factors that Promote/Impede Effective Interactions Between Immigrant Parents and the Teachers of Their Children

When dealing with parents from different cultures, Eberly, Joshi, and Konsal (2005) emphasized the need for the lines of communication to remain open. In a study conducted by Peterson and Ladky (2007), principals and teachers of 32 schools situated in Southern Ontario encouraged the involvement of new Chinese immigrant parents in the literacy learning of their children. The findings revealed some of the barriers of effective communication with new immigrant parents and educators. They maintained that language was one of the main barriers to successful parental involvement. One of the principals reported that the parents felt that they
were not proficient in English and preferred to interact with the teachers informally. Having this type of anxiety hindered them from effectively helping their children. This anxiety also affected their interaction with the teachers of their children. While the participants in Peterson and Ladky’s study were English Language Learners, most people from the West Indies consider themselves to be proficient in English (Coelho, 1988 and Nero, 1995). Hence they are not faced with a challenge when communicating with speakers of Standard English.

Another barrier that surfaced from the survey was the perception of teachers towards the mother tongue of immigrants. Two teachers who participated in the survey were concerned that some immigrant parents could not read in their mother tongue and made no attempts to learn English, while another teacher became frustrated and clearly expressed herself in this manner: “There comes a responsibility on the part of the parents to learn English and of course, many of the parents are not even schooled in their own country. For us to help them, it becomes very difficult” (Peterson and Ladky, 2007, p. 894).

Another teacher argued that due to parents’ inability to speak Standard English, their children were at a disadvantage. The teacher explained that “these parents want their children to succeed, but it puts their kids at a distinct disadvantage because often, they don’t have someone who can help them (Peterson and Ladky, 2007, pp. 894-895). Hence, the mother tongue of immigrants as seen in the study is not embraced by some teachers.

**Interpersonal communication between teachers and parents**

Lasky (2000) affirmed that there was a difference between mere interaction and relationships. She viewed the latter as a deeper level of interaction which was loaded with emotions. She stated that:

> Emotions are an important form of communication between individuals. They are also a referent point for self-understanding. They help us discern when we feel safe, threatened, satisfied with a job well done, or frustrated because our purposes cannot be met. Exploring the emotions that are elicited during interactions between individuals can provide a window to help us understand the more subtle, often unspoken elements in human interaction. (p. 843)
In support of Lasky’s (2000) view, Graham-Clay (2005) pointed out that parents are not looking for cold professional approaches from school staff but emphasised that teachers who apply that “personal touch” experience effective school relationships. She further cited that “communicating a genuine care for people, building rapport, conveying interest and empathy, reflecting affect, and using clarifying statements to ensure an accurate understanding of parental views are all highlighted” (p.121).

The immigrant parents who participated in Mapp’s (2003) study advocated for a partnership between themselves and the school officials. The study highlighted three major practices which were executed by the Patrick O’Hearn Elementary School. These practices involved welcoming the parents, honouring their participation and connecting with the parents through a focus on their children’s learning. When sharing their narratives, the parents reported that they felt a sense of belonging as the principal teachers and staff interacted with them in ways that made them feel a part of the school community. Parents reported feeling honoured as the school requested and provided information about their children’s learning in a caring and respectable manner. They also felt validated when their comments, concerns, and suggestions were heard by teachers. It was a shared partnership where respect was reciprocated. The following quotations are shared by some of the parent participants in Mapp’s (2003) study;

I chose the O’Hearn School because it was clearly the only public school available to me where parents got any respect and counted, and where teachers and parents and kids really worked together in a genuine way. (Kitty Jacobs)

The O’Hearn School asks for [parents’] participation and advice all of the time. It seems like the school lets the parents make the decisions and that makes the parents become more involved. [Parents] feel like they’re really a part of it. At the meetings, it’s just like a family. Issues [are] being discussed, parents talk about what we feel is best for our child or for the school as a whole. Then [we] vote on it. If you have any suggestions, they’re always open to that. (Betty Washington) (p. 57)

Through high expectations of the children, a caring attitude, and common goals for the children, the parents experienced a connection with the school. Parents and school officials found the common element -- the improvement of students’ learning -- as a thread that connected
them and capitalized on this. One parent in Mapp’s (2003) study articulated her feeling of connection with her son’s school by stating:

They made me feel like they were there to teach my son. They were always giving me little insights that they saw about him. I knew they were paying attention to my son, that they knew my son. That made me feel good. They knew what his strengths and his weaknesses were. They were telling me things about him that I would have told them, which was so cool. Before the words were coming out of my mouth, they were telling me about his strengths and weaknesses and what should and shouldn’t be done. I said to myself, “They know my son.” (Barbara Fisher) (p. 58)

However, Caribbean immigrant parents were not exempted from the preconceived notions of teachers when it came to the use of Caribbean Variety of English. Coelho (1988) warned that:

Teachers are aware of the non-standard English spoken by the parents of many of their Caribbean background students, and frequently make value judgements about those parents’ level of intelligence and education, and about the students’ chances of success on the basis of perceptions formed by the teachers’ unexamined attitude toward the language. (p. 145)

With the walls of misperception fully established by some teachers, parents were often treated based on these sub-conscious judgements.

While we do not know if interactions with the parents in Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel’s (2001) research were based on any preconceived judgements, the parents clearly articulated their feelings from attending parent conferences. The following are the views of some of those parents:

Okay, when you go to school for a school meeting, you feel like, it’s uncomfortable.

When you’re sitting in a room with everybody around you, or sitting in a straight row you’re uncomfortable, and you can’t really say what you want to say. You feel tense, like the army or something. Make us feel that we’re a part of something.
The key is, if you’re related to somebody, but there is no fellowship, that relationship is going to come apart. A lot of people don’t think that the parents are related to the school, but they are. In order to get this relationship stronger, they must build a fellowship — academic, social, whatever. (a father of four children) (pp. 94-95).

Furthermore, Seefeldt (1985) argued that teachers since treat each student as individuals, calling each by name, respecting each child’s rights and observing their interests, these attributes should also be applied when relating to parents. This is synonymous to the statement above which was made by the father of four children and implies a deep level of relationship which, according to Lasky (2000), should exist between parents and teachers.

Understanding the cultural and linguistic background of the parents can foster greater interpersonal skills at parent-teacher conferences. The Latino parents in Colombo’s (2007) research did not share linguistic or cultural background with their children’s teachers. This situation created a communication barrier between them. However, through a PAL (Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy) workshop, cultural bridges were constructed which provided the mainstream teachers with the cultural competence needed to effectively work with Latino parents.

Open communication and frequent visits by parents

Newman (1997) affirmed that parents should not wait until there is a problem to visit the school but suggested that frequent visits provide opportunities for the parent to get to know the child’s teacher. He further stated that while the school may have scheduled interview dates, a phone call could also be made at other times to discuss any concerns that may arise throughout the school year.

Time constraints

While language remains a barrier in the interaction of immigrant parents and teachers, the Latin American parents in Bernard and Freire’s (1999) study attempted to engage in meaningful interaction with their children’s teachers but were faced with other challenges, such as the allotted time for interviews. They reported that parent interviews lasted for a limited time of 5 minutes where teachers made scripted questions and comments and dominated the conversation.
Some parents felt that the scheduled parent-teacher conference was the appropriate time to talk with teachers but were restricted by time constraints. There were others who expressed the view that if they communicated with teachers longer than this scheduled time, they felt that they would be wasting the teachers’ time unnecessarily. Thus, they would only do so when they had important matters to discuss. In light of this, the interaction becomes ineffective and trivial as in the case of one student’s mother who commented:

I only had contact with her the first day …. when each parent was asking whose child is that and then the new teacher introduced herself to us. Since then I went up to her twice, once to tell her Liliana had to go to the hospital with me and then to tell her Liliana had brought home someone else’s book. (p. 82)

The immigrant parents in Bernhard and Freire’s (1999) study mirrored the parents in Ladky and Peterson’s (2008) study as they too expressed a desire for communication with teachers but instead preferred interaction in an informal way. Interaction in this regard would take the form of notes in agenda, newsletters and the signing of homework. They saw this as a medium through which fluency in English could be achieved. Ladky and Peterson (2008) purported that “Parent comfort level with the school system and, more directly, their own confidence interacting in English will likely increase as a result” (p. 87).

Graham-Clay (2005) viewed the time constraints as a significant obstacle to effective parent-teacher communication. She observed that these 15-20 minutes slots offered limited time for meaningful communication regarding the child’s academic and social performance to take place. Walker (1998) conducted a study on parents’ evening at four secondary schools in Norfolk. The results reinforced Graham-Clay’s argument that the time allotted for teacher-parent interviews was inadequate to discuss issues that may require delicacy or diplomacy. The findings of his research revealed that both teachers and parents view these interviews as “farce” or “a public relations exercise” (p. 171).

**Comprehensibility**

According to Bernhard and Freire (1999), communication failed in both respects as there was a lack of comprehension on the part of the teachers to understand the parents and parents to
understand the teachers. The parents in the study reported that the teachers would present incomprehensible information at parent conferences even with the aid of a translator. The lack of understanding would embarrass the parents who felt that they should understand. As a result, they would not respond to the information presented to them. At this point, the teacher may open the discussion for questions but the parents were unable to contribute to the discussion due to their lack of understanding.

The matter of comprehensibility surfaces in Dyson’s (2000) study where some of the Chinese immigrants reported a lack of understanding of the communication between themselves and their children’s school. Of the 21 immigrant parents, only four reported that they were unhappy with their communication due to lack of English-speaking skills. While four may seem like a small number, it represents an inability of 20% of the parents to communicate with their children’s school and is significant and serious.

One parent mentioned, “I told the teacher at the very beginning that my English is not so good. So he could use easy words to talk to me” (p. 464). This being the case, one could argue whether or not choice of words makes the immigrant parent competent in English. However, some of the parents did not experience any difficulty understanding what was being communicated and attributed this to the use of a translator.

Specialized language

Berger and Riojas-Cortez (2012) argued that “specialized language gets in the way of communication” (p. 132). They further stated that the new terms and acronyms which are familiar to educators can “freeze communication when used with people not familiar with the terms” (p. 132). The perceptions of Lawler (1991) with regard to the use of technical terms correlate with Berger and Riojas-Cortez (2012). Lawler (1991) stated that “using technical terms and educational jargon may irritate and confuse parents” (p. 29).

Teacher-dominated interaction

Lawler (1991) encouraged a dialogue as oppose to a monologue and proposed a “sharing process” between parent and teacher (p. 30). He further argued that the teacher should be the facilitator but should not dominate the discussion. In addition to Lawler’s point, Graham-Clay (2005) clarified the difference between two-way communication and one-way communication.
She pointed out that one-way communication involves the teacher sending a note home, using notebooks or other communication books, report cards and any other means of written communication. Conversely, two-way communication takes place when teachers and parents dialogue together. Examples of this type of communication would be the regular phone calls home and parent teacher conferences.

Based on the findings of Walker’s (1998) research, the teachers felt as if the parents were the ones benefiting from the interview and there was no purpose for them. As a result, the teacher dominated the discussion without providing opportunities for the parents to share their knowledge about their children. For many of the parents according to Walker, “it felt like a one-way information conduit” (p. 172) when it should have been the two-way exchange as proposed by Graham-Clay (2005). Thus, parents left the room feeling unrecognized and undervalued. Walker (1998) emphasised that the parents in her study viewed the teachers as gatekeepers wielding the power of their children’s future. This invoked in them a greater need for the teacher than the teachers’ need of them.

Finally, teachers should refrain from too finely grained comparisons between students in the class. Poulsen (2008) proposed that a quartile ranking be considered as an alternative, e.g., Johnny is performing in the top quarter of the class. It is likely that this approach would be wholeheartedly embraced by some parents rather than an approach which compared two students directly.

**Parent-student-teacher conference**

Stephens (2006) and Countryman (1996) embraced the idea of children leading the conferences. Stephens postulated that clear communication took place when all three of the most important stakeholders were involved; the student, the parent, and the teacher. One of Stephens’ strategies for effective conference was to include students and give them a role to play. Likewise, Countryman and Schroeder (1996) presented a model (preparation, conferences and evaluations) for moving away from the frustrations of the traditional conference style and moving toward more effective conferences by involving students. They pointed out that:

Our middle school students, like most, struggle between wanting adults to make decisions for them and wanting to wrest control from those in charge so they can be responsible for
themselves. We wanted our students to learn to exercise choice, take responsibility for their learning, and do their best work. We saw an opportunity to help them reach these goals by implementing student-led conferences, enabling students to be directly involved in their assessment process. (p. 64)

Conversely, some students might find these meetings disempowering or devaluing and would prefer not to be there. This was the case for an 8 year old boy during a parent teacher conference. As he left the room, he recounted, “My mum was being interviewed and I was shaking so I came away” (Walker 1998, p. 173). An older female student who waited outside with her dog commented, “I’m looking after the dog while my mother goes round. I would rather be with the dog. Teachers are better if you aren’t there…. It’s not really about what you want, it’s what the teachers want” (Walker 1998, p. 173).

In the excerpt above, the student also recognized that the parents’ opinions and feedback were not valued; the teacher was the dominant figure in the interaction process.

**Perceptions of Caribbean Immigrant Students and Parents Regarding their Interaction with Teachers**

An interesting study conducted by Gagné and Soto-Gordon (2007) in Toronto captured the voices of students as they shared their experiences as immigrants. Some of them expressed their opinions that some teachers had difficulty understanding what they were talking about. Pratt-Johnson (1993) in Nero (2000) also looked at the perceptions of many Jamaican students in New York City public schools who confessed that they felt threatened and intimidated in classrooms because of their accents. Alluding to the same research conducted by Pratt-Johnson (1993), Winer and Jacks (2002) shared quotations from these students such as:

“I was scared in class. One day in my math class, my teacher asked me to read a paragraph. I came across the number “338”. Because of my accent, I said “tree-tree-hate.” My classmates laughed at me and I felt so embarrassed, you see? My hands started to shake, and got sweaty and my heart started racing then my mouth started trembling. I tried to finish my paragraph but because I was nervous, I made even more mistakes. The teacher stopped me from reading. (p. 328)
Similarly, some parents also faced challenges when communicating with the teachers of their children. Gagné (2007) brought to light some of the challenges that parents faced, one of which was language. The study focused on the experiences and perceptions of several groups of immigrants -- Somalian, Indian and Caribbean immigrants -- as well as others. In the video clip, a Somalian parent mentioned that all immigrants experienced the same challenge and that was the challenge of not mastering Canadian English to the same level of proficiency as the teachers. In their views, they saw language as a barrier to effective communication with their children’s teachers. One of the participants stated that some teachers took advantage of the fact that they were not “proficient” in the Standard Canadian English. Hence, they believed those parents who were able to speak and understand the language spoken by the teachers established a better relationship with the teachers.

The video clip did not show the interview with Caribbean immigrants, but there was a common element that they share with other immigrants: the language barrier. The response of one of the Caribbean immigrants with regards to communication showed that she would like her child’s teacher to call, even to say “hi”. She also mentioned that some teachers would not call. This gives an insight into her perception of effective teaching. While the obvious conclusion is that immigrant parents wish to have ongoing communication with their children’s teachers, this is probably common to parents of all students. Here it is obvious that there is another factor that inhibits this communication unless it is initiated by the teacher in a number of cases. It is easy to see how the parent’s lack of proficiency in English could have this effect.

Research carried out by Ramirez (2003) with Latino immigrant parents revealed that the parents were dissatisfied with the lack of communication at their children’s school and felt that teachers had lower expectations of immigrants. They complained that “as new people to this country, we feel we cannot ask questions (of the teachers or school officials) if we do not understand the question” (p. 102). Ramirez (2003) further stated that the parents were sensitive to language issues and felt as if they were little children because of the way that teachers spoke down to them. With tear-filled eyes, one parent lamented:

The schools make me feel stupid because I have trouble with English, and all I want is for my children to do well in school. To become something better than I. All I
wanted was for the teacher to write down what was due [homework], and they wouldn’t do it for me. (p. 102)
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents an outline of the research design and a description of the participants and research context. It also highlights the data collection methods and the procedures used in the analysis.

This study is designed to explore and understand the experiences and perceptions of Caribbean immigrant parents and their children regarding the use of a Caribbean variety of English when interacting with teachers in Toronto. To explore this topic, the following four questions framed the data collection:

(1) How do Caribbean immigrant parents and children describe their interactions with their teachers or children’s teachers?

(2) How do Caribbean immigrant children describe their language use in the classroom?

(3) What factors do West Indian immigrant parents report that facilitate or impede effective interaction with their children’s teachers?

(4) What meanings do West Indian immigrant parents give to their language encounters with teachers?

The research draws heavily on a qualitative research methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) aptly define qualitative research as:

a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researcher study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, and phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p.3)
In light of this definition, the selected methodology is considered appropriate for the study as the principles that it highlights are embraced throughout this research. With one of the focuses being on a naturalistic context, it emphasises the need to understand the participants as they engage in everyday interactions with teachers and how they understand the complexity of the process. The qualitative researcher seeks to understand the phenomena from the participants’ viewpoint or perspective. This, according to Johnson and Christensen (2008, p.36), is ‘empathetic understanding’. However, to Weber (1968) in Johnson and Christensen (2008, p. 37), it is “verstehen” which has the same meaning to what we commonly refer to as ‘putting ourselves in someone else’s shoes’.

One of the approaches to qualitative research employed in conducting this research is phenomenology. Phenomenology, developed by Husserl (1859-1938), is a theoretical view that focuses on the direct experience of individuals. One of the main tenets of Husserl’s view is to assess the consciousness by freeing the mind and finding out how things appear to us. He suggested that we do this by looking beyond everyday activities and focusing on the heart or the driving force that underlies them, thus dismissing our perceptions of everyday events. He coined this method as “epoche” or “putting the world in brackets” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 22).

From Husserl’s theory, many researchers in various disciplines have taken phenomenology in different directions and it has been widely used in the field of education. Phenomenology, “an alternative approach in conducting educational research”, “is a movement toward recognizing human awareness, conscious-ness and perceptions within the realm of one's own lived experience as the core of a person's reality” (Stone, 1979, p. 4). In highlighting the relevance of phenomenology to early educational research, Stone (1979) discussed an investigation of outcomes in open education completed by Christopher Stevenson. In this investigation, he explored the experiences of former students at the Fayerweather Street School (an informal institution). Through oral history interviews, the participants’ perceptions were collected, documented, and analysed by identifying the phenomena, always bearing in mind the aim which was to explore the participants’ “personal dimensions and levels of meanings” in order to increase the credibility of the findings (Stone, 1979, p. 18).
There are two approaches to phenomenology. The first is hermeneutic phenomenology (Manen, 1990) and transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Like many other researchers, Manen (1990) viewed phenomenology as “attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld” (p. 11). Thus, phenomenology for Manen (1990) focused on research which involved the researcher making an interpretation. He maintained that there were a number of activities that constituted phenomenological research. First, researchers must turn to a phenomenon with which there is a deep concern which seriously interests them. They then look for themes relating to the nature of the lived experience and subsequently they write a description of the phenomenon. They keep the topic of inquiry at the focus and balance all the parts of the writing to the whole.

On the other hand, transcendental phenomenology (Moustaka, 1994) emphasized the description of the experiences of the participants as against the interpretation of the researcher. Embedded in his view was Husserl’s idea; epoche (bracketing), in which the researcher sets aside his/her experiences or views, as much as possible, to find a new perspective to the phenomenon that is being examined. Like Manen (1990), Moustaka, (1994) outlined the activities that constituted a phenomenological research. Though some similarities existed between the activities presented by both proponents, there were some differences as well. Moustaka stated that there should be an identification of a phenomenon to study, the suspension of personal biases, the collection of data from people who have experienced the phenomenon and an analysis of the data by reducing the content into significant themes. The experiences of the participants should be described (textural description) including how they experienced the phenomenology in terms of the context or situation (structural description). He suggested that a combination of the textural and structural descriptions would provide the essence of the experience.

With this in mind, I consider Moustaka’s (1994) transcendental approach to be quite relevant and appropriate to the study. It helped me to understand and describe the interaction of the Caribbean immigrants with teachers through various lenses, while enabling me to distance myself from my personal views.
Meet the Participants

I am primarily interested in understanding how immigrants, who are fairly new to Canada, interact with teachers and gain some insight on how they view these interactions. I am also interested in whether or not the Caribbean variety of English is used by the new immigrants to interact with teachers. In light of the nature of the study, it was important to select Caribbean immigrants who had been living in Canada for at least a year so they had had the opportunity to interact with teachers in the school system. Toronto was an ideal location for recruitment due to the high concentration of Caribbean immigrants. The researcher’s location was also in Toronto which would facilitate data collection.

Caribbean immigrants include individuals who hail from the following English speaking Caribbean islands and are part of the West Indies: Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda. Throughout the study the terms Caribbean immigrants and West Indian immigrants will be used interchangeably. Although desirable, a study involving participants from all these islands was not feasible. As a result, three Caribbean countries -- Jamaica, St. Vincent and St. Lucia -- were represented in the study.

The participants were six Caribbean immigrant parents and seven children enrolled in schools in the Toronto District School Board. There were three males and four females with the oldest participating child being 17 and the youngest 8 years old. Among the seven participants, two were teenagers in Grade 10 while the others attended elementary schools in Grades 3-5. There were six parent participants, five females and one male. All but two of the six parents had been living in Canada for more than a year but these two parents are caregivers to children who had been in Canada for less than one year. They demonstrated an interest in the research so they were recruited. There is some commonality between the age groups of each parent participant as most of them are between 30 and 40 and one who is between ages 40 and 50.

Procedure

A letter of permission (Appendix A) was given to the Reverend of the religious institution seeking permission to recruit participants and host the interview sessions at the facility. Through the distribution of flyers (Appendix B) at the Holiness Worship Centre located
at Eglinton and Weston Road and an announcement made at the end of the service, interested participants made contact with the researcher via telephone calls. These first two participants were referred to me by members within the congregation. During these calls the researcher gave a brief overview of the research and listed the criteria to be able to participate in the research. Since they met the requested criteria, an appointment was scheduled to begin the research with one-on-one semi-structured interviews. At the initial meeting the researcher engaged the participants in small talk about the weather and other topics. I reminded them of the nature of the research and outlined the ways in which anonymity would be maintained. They were then asked to fill out consent forms (Appendix C) indicating their willingness to participate in the study and giving consent for their children to participate.

The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with six parents and seven children who consented to participating in the research. These sessions were audio-taped, the data transcribed verbatim and used for analysis. Three interview sessions were held in the quiet Sunday school classroom at the religious institution. The other three sessions were held at the participants’ homes on different Saturday mornings at their convenience. At the end of each interview session held in the Sunday school classroom, the participants were offered light refreshments.

**Problematizing the Recruitment Process**

The participants in the study were from the western area of Toronto. These included immigrants from the Caribbean who have been living in Canada for a maximum of five years. However, the recruitment process -- which commenced in July, 2012 -- became extremely arduous and did not progress as smoothly as I had anticipated.

My main recruitment strategy for the study was the distribution of flyers at designated churches, one at Jane and Wilson and a smaller congregation at Weston Road and Eglinton. The church at Jane and Wilson was selected due to its large congregation and its demographics. My initial assumption was that most, if not all of the participants, would come from this congregation or referrals from this congregation. A phone call was immediately made to the Reverend, a Caribbean immigrant, who appeared to embrace the idea of learning about the Caribbean immigrant’s perspective when interacting with teachers in Toronto. I followed up with an email requesting permission to use his facility to host the interviews on alternate
Saturdays between 2 and 4 p.m. and to publish my flyer in their newsletter (Appendix B). Anxious to begin my research, I eagerly waited for his response. When I received a response, to my surprise it was a negative one denying me the privilege to solicit participants from the congregation. It was followed up with an email confirming this decision.

I also contacted my local congregation where the Reverend, who was also a Caribbean immigrant, was delighted to grant permission to use the facility to host interviews and to make an announcement at the end of the service to inform the congregation of my research. This got things rolling. The people from the local church jumped on the bandwagon and started making contacts on my behalf.

Continuing to solicit potential respondents from several avenues, I had my niece post the flyer on her Facebook page for people who fit the research criteria. A community centre at Jane and Wilson was also selected and permission received to post flyers in the building. Flyers were also posted on bus sheds in the Jane and Eglinton vicinity and randomly given to people. Contact was also made through other OISE graduate students. In retrospect, the announcement made at the church and people making contact on my behalf proved much more successful than the distribution of flyers. It is obvious that participants needed a personal connection to the research project.

I was of the opinion that since I also was a Caribbean immigrant I would have relatively easy access into this community but the roadblocks were many. Many immigrants were forthwith in asking if I needed legal or illegal immigrants to participate in the research. The aspect of immigration surfaced. This happens to be a very sensitive issue within the Caribbean community as many have migrated but have not been documented as permanent residents. The term “immigrant” is sometimes perceived as a label with a negative connotation. There was not enough trust established to motivate them to participate in the study and my study was conducted with only legal immigrants. While the experiences of the illegal immigrants may be the same, it cannot be inferred from this research.

Gaining access to the community proved challenging as an educator. The immigrants viewed me as an authority figure and had difficulty finding common ground. Realizing this, there were instances when I relinquished that power authority and related to them by using
familiar terminologies and Caribbean experiences in order to break down the barriers and by encouraging them to participate.

It was not until January 2013 that I made contact with my first participant. With my initial contacts, I took the opportunity to have them help disseminate the word and to pass on my flyers. This process, according to Potter (1996) is referred to as the snowball technique where the initial participants are asked for names of additional people who fit the selection criteria. My husband, also seeing my frustration, made contact with other potential contacts through his friends. This proved successful as well. Having the strict criteria as set out in the study limited my recruitment process. The criteria -- a) Caribbean born, b) living in Canada for a maximum of five years, and c) having children who attend public school in Grades 3-12 -- were simple, yet they closed the door to some participants who were really interested in the research. In the end, I included Camille who was eager to share her story. She did not qualify as a ‘new’ immigrant as she had been living in Canada for a little over ten years. However, she had adopted a daughter from St. Vincent who fit the parameters of the study. Dahlia, who demonstrated similar interest in the study, had also been living in Toronto for approximately ten years but was a caregiver to her niece and nephew who recently migrated to Canada. Her niece fit the criteria of the research and was also included. The intended number of participants (eight parents and eight children) was reduced to (six parents and seven children) due to the many challenges that I had in the recruiting process.

**Data Collection Instruments**

In order to ascertain information regarding the participants’ use of, and attitude towards Caribbean variety of English, each participant was asked to fill out a questionnaire (Appendix D) and participate in two interviews. The questionnaire sought background information from each participant. The first interview session lasted between one and two hours and was audio-taped using a digital recorder. The researcher took notes where possible during the interviews. The notes pertained mainly to participants’ expressions and body language which helped me to put things in perspective when I analysed the data. The second interview sessions was brief and lasted for less than an hour as the participants engaged in the process of member checking (Creswell 2007, p.208) in order to check the authenticity of the narratives.
Like other research of this nature, the study employed a semi-structured interview process that consisted of 24 questions for the children and thirteen 13 questions for parents (Appendices H and I respectively). During these interviews, participants were engaged in conversations as opposed to a formal structure of interviews. Thus, the conversations evolved based on the experiences that seemed important to the participants. Through active listening, I was able to detect the need for further clarification, asking additional questions to expand their explanations and fill in important background information. The one-on-one interviews were held at locations that were convenient and appropriate for each participant. Three family interviews were held at the religious institution which had granted me permission to use their facility and the other three interviews were held at their respective family homes. Most interviews lasted for approximately 1½ hours with the exception of the interview with Donette that lasted for about two hours. With the permission of all the participants, all the interviews were audio-recorded. Each interview started with small talk to get participants relaxed. This proved successful in most instances. The data collection instruments will be discussed in more details below.

**Interviews**

In exploring the interactions between Caribbean immigrant parents, children and their teachers, collecting data through interviews is quite appropriate. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) affirmed that if we want to know how people understand their world and their lives, we should talk to them, as conversation is the basic mode of human interaction. It was through these relaxed conversations that the researcher was able to gain deeper understanding of the experiences of these Caribbean immigrants. Conversations of this nature may take place on a one-on-one basis where the interviewer meets face to face with the participant. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) further projected that an “interview goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views in everyday conversations, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge” (p. 3).

**Semi-structured interview**

One of the benefits of semi-structured interviews as proposed by Horton, Macve and Struyven (2004) is that they allow the participants the freedom to express themselves in their own way and to emphasise points that are of great interest to them. This research employed a semi-structured form. While the basic structure was a series of prepared questions, the
researcher had flexibility to follow the various conversation threads and to provide prompts in relation to responses of the interviewees (Wengraf, 2004).

*Open-ended interview questions*

Open-ended questions are carefully thought about questions which are designed to garner information on the desired topic or interest of the researcher. The questions in the research are arranged so that they flow more like that of a natural conversation. Questions asked in the initial stage require more general response, and specificity is achieved gradually as the interview progresses (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Open-ended questions eliminate yes/no responses and offer opportunities for the participants to provide detailed responses. Utilizing this process was effective in understanding the participants’ experiences in this study. The Interview Guides can be found in Appendices H and I. While the questions at the beginning of the interview gave the participants three or four potential responses such as Always, Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, or Never, their responses gave the interviewer a chance to ask follow up questions. As the interview progressed, the questions became more specific and required elaboration.

*Complexity of moving forward with interviews*

Based on the availability of each participant, organizing participants into focus groups as originally conceived proved difficult. Consequently, participants were interviewed individually. The amount of time that parents had available for the study varied as well. Although all the parents were supportive of the research, the everyday commitments of family life complicated both the scheduling of sessions and length of sessions in a number of instances.

Though the parents were within the same age range, they were all at different stages of life with numerous commitments. Consequently, many appointments were cancelled and rescheduled for more convenient times. Some parents had more time available while others struggled to make time to accommodate me. It was reflected in the type of responses that I gathered in the interviews. Donette was passionate about my research and was therefore very forthcoming in her responses. She gave detailed information regarding her experiences with her daughter and her son’s teachers in previous years. The conversation extended outside the scheduled questions of the interview because Donette had so many interesting experiences to share. Conversely Evelyn, a mother with a young baby, tried to accommodate me after
rescheduling several appointments. As a result, her responses were short and did not provide as many details. I was mindful of the fact that she needed to take care of the baby so I limited the number of exploratory questions. The only male participant was somewhat reserved at the initial stage of our meeting. Speaking with him on the telephone proved different from speaking to him in person and I quickly resorted to using my Caribbean variety of English to establish trust. It was necessary to prompt the other parents occasionally, but they willingly cooperated with me.

Another layer of complexity manifested itself when I interviewed the younger children. The two oldest male participants (teenagers) were more focused and open about their experiences while the younger children were easily distracted. Eva, who had a new sister, preferred to pay attention to the baby and play with her toys than speak to me. In another instance, an energetic and outspoken sibling (Fionna) wanted to fill in the gaps for her younger brother while he was doing his interview. In another interview with a child named Donna, questions that required a direct answer -- like describing what goes on in her class -- elicited a bowed head and a shy response, “I don’t know”. Her mom explained that her daughter thought that she would get in trouble if she responded differently. Even attempts to go back to these questions and rephrase them did not prove successful. The younger children had to be prompted and these interviews lasted longer than expected. Consequently, the amount of information obtained from the children’ interviews varied.

**Data Processing and Analysis**

The information that was deemed pertinent to the study was transcribed verbatim by the researcher and analysed inductively. Inductive reasoning, according to Creswell (2007), consists of the researcher working back and forth between themes or issues in order to establish a comprehensive set of themes. Therefore, through careful examination and comparison of the data, the researcher obtained an overall feeling for the content, observing statements or significant phrases that were critical to the research and also identifying recursive issues. These were highlighted, labelled and emerged as themes. As each theme emerged they were placed on a spreadsheet using the Microsoft Excel program. There were also some statements made by some participants, though not recursive, but were pertinent to the research and to help the researcher in understanding the experiences of the participants. The following are themes that emerged from the data:
• Small talk within the classroom
• Parents perception of interaction with their child’s/children’s teacher
• Linguistic genocide
• Advocates for code-switching
• Parents affirm good receptive language
• Negotiating identity
• Students’ perception of their use of Canadian English
• My accent hurts
• Writing with an accent
• Similar vs. dissimilar accent
• Comprehensibility
• Misunderstanding
• Misplaced

A write-up was done based on each theme in order to present thick and rich descriptions of the participants’ perceptions pertaining to their use of the CVE when interacting with the teachers. The four research questions provided the guiding framework in organizing the themes under specific heading. These questions were:

(1) How do Caribbean immigrant parents describe their interactions with their children’s teachers?

(2) How do Caribbean immigrant children describe their language use in the classroom?

(3) What factors do West Indian immigrant parents report that facilitate or impede effective interaction with their children’s teacher?

(4) What meanings do West Indian immigrant parents give to their language encounters with teachers?

The format of the interviews and the subsequent analysis of the data provided the researcher with insight into the experiences of some of the participants as they interact with teachers.
Limitations of the Study

Despite the careful planning and execution of this research, I am mindful of its limitations. This study did not include interviews with the teachers; hence, their perspectives of their interactions with immigrant parents and children are missing throughout the study. As a result, assumptions or inferences were made in certain situations. However, the focus of this research was to capture the voice of the Caribbean immigrant parents and children. The sample size of six parents and seven children is a small number and encompasses only three Caribbean islands. Thus, the results showcase the voices of only a limited number of Caribbean immigrants in Toronto.

Two other limitations surfaced as the recruitment process became more challenging. One was the criterion for a ‘new’ immigrant which I had defined as 1-5 years that the participant should have lived in Canada. The second was the geographic base of the study (Toronto GTA). It was apparent that the number of respondents could be expanded if these parameters were relaxed. There were people assisting with the recruitment process who knew of Caribbean immigrants who expressed an interest in the research but thought the research scope was limited. They suggested that I change the criteria to include other locations and widen the length of time the participant should be living in Canada.

Although I considered these changes, there were legitimate reasons not to change. The time criteria was not changed as the length of time a Caribbean immigrant spends within a foreign country would certainly impact their use of the CVE as they improve both their language skills and adapt language use over time (code switching). This might affect the validity of the responses. The focus of the research was the use of CVE for new immigrants and thus it was important to have a sample that only included respondents from this category. It was also not practical from a logistical standpoint to expand the geographic area and Toronto has a high enough concentration of Caribbean immigrants that should have been able to provide an adequate sample size for the research.

Another limitation to the study is the fact that only three Caribbean countries are represented in the research: Jamaica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent. Therefore it cannot be considered to be truly representative of all the Caribbean countries or Caribbean immigrants.
Based on the nature of the research that explored the experiences of these Caribbean immigrants within a certain context and conducted within a particular time frame, the data collected is unique to these individuals and it is therefore difficult to generalize the findings due to these factors. In all probability, many of the unheard voices would reflect many similar themes but undoubtedly there would be more themes and more experiences worth noting with a larger and more diverse sample size.

There were no recordings of parent teacher conferences, documented statements or written pieces of work to support what participants said. The researcher had to rely on recollections of each participant, thus the information received is accurate only to the degree with which the participants’ memories are accurate and unbiased.

Finally, I am aware of the potential bias as I analyzed the data based on my role as a teacher and as a Caribbean immigrant. Regardless of my effort to suspend my assumptions, they cannot be totally erased and they may have impacted the way I interpreted the data.

**Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

The proposal was approved by the University of Toronto Ethics Review Board on July 16, 2012, which gave me the green light to commence my research. Following this approval, the informed consent of each participant was obtained and the anonymity of participants was protected through the use of pseudonyms. Prior to the submission of the thesis for review, the researcher hosted final brief interview sessions where information was fed back to the participants for verification to ensure that what was recorded accurately reflects participants’ views, a process Creswell (2007) referred to as member-checking. All these channels enhanced the trustworthiness and reliability of the study.
CHAPTER 4 PORTRAITS OF PARTICIPANTS

All student participants attend schools within Toronto and are governed by the policies of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). A brief overview of the TDSB is presented as well as a description of each family unit within their specific contexts. These family units are referred to as Family 1 to Family 6, with each parent and child/children having names with the same initial letters beginning at A through to F. The chapter concludes with a description of the researcher’s teaching context through the lens of the researcher.

As an elementary school teacher who shares a similar ethnic background to many of the parents and students with whom I interact regularly, I was privileged to make connections with other Caribbean parents within the larger community. It also gave me the opportunity to objectively view my practice as a teacher based on the responses of those parents and children who are participants in my research.

Toronto District School Board

The TDSB is the largest school board in Canada. It is situated in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. It has approximately six hundred schools which include elementary, middle and high schools as well as adult learning institutes. The board educates over 250,000 students annually and has many policies that govern its operation. This student population consists of a diverse group of learners who speak many different languages. Below are two of its policies that specifically relate to the diverse parent groups which it serves.

4.1. The TDSB believes that education is a shared responsibility among parents, the community, students, staff and the Board. By working together we all contribute to the improvement of our schools and to the success of our students. The Board shall provide parents with the information they need to support their children’s education and shall involve them in decisions, which affect their children and their schools. The Board is committed to ensuring that all parents and members of our diverse communities have opportunities to participate in the school system, and shall provide the support necessary to achieve that goal.
4.2. A variety of communication procedures shall be developed and maintained at the school and system levels to ensure access to educational information needed by diverse parents and communities, and to facilitate two-way communication between parents and schools, and among parent groups.

It is evident from these policies that there is a great emphasis on communication between parents and the school board. However, it has been my observation through informal communication with my colleagues both at the elementary and secondary levels and parents, that the larger the schools or the higher up one goes in the level of education within the board, the communication between teachers and parents becomes less effective. Parents seem to see less of teachers when their children have different teachers for each subject (rotary subjects) as there are multiple teachers that each parent has to meet to keep fully abreast of their children’s progress. Time allotted for the parent-teacher interview may not be sufficient to host quality meetings, especially when there are issues that need to be addressed.

Communication may also break down at these levels because the onus may be on the students to be the mediator between teacher and parents, but often their role is neglected and the communication gets lost along the way. With more autonomy being given to the students, the role of the parents in the parent-teacher relationship is diminished and the only communication initiated by the teacher is when the child/children is/are experiencing difficulties. Within the TDSB, parents are usually not invited to a second parent-teacher conference for the school year unless there are some concerns regarding the child’s academic performance or behaviour or if the parents make a special request to see the teacher. It is not unusual for parents to resort to a phone call to the school if they cannot attend a meeting at the school. A phone conference is better than no communication, but it does not give the same opportunity for the same full rich interaction between the parties available with in-person interviews. Given all these factors, some parents usually have limited interactions with their children’s teachers.

**Participants’ Overview**

The participants consisted of six immigrant parents and seven immigrant children. This included one male and five female parents under the pseudonyms Audley, Babette, Candice, Donnette, Evelyn and Faye. The children consisted of three males and four females and under
the pseudonyms Andrew, Bobby, Connie, Donna, Eva, Fabian and Fiona. A brief overview (Tables 3 and 4) of each participant will be provided based on their gender, age group, place of birth, current region of residence, occupation, mother tongue, length of time residing in Canada and school. Table 3 will present information on the parents. Table 4 will present information on the children. Then the participants will be presented as family units.

Table 3

Overview of Immigrant Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile Characteristics</th>
<th>Audley</th>
<th>Babette</th>
<th>Candice</th>
<th>Donette</th>
<th>Evelyn</th>
<th>Faye</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>30-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Birth</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of time in Canada</td>
<td>1 year 2 months</td>
<td>1 year 10 months</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region of Residence</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Etobicoke</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>General Labour</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Health sector</td>
<td>General Labourer</td>
<td>Clerical Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Tongue</td>
<td>Broken English</td>
<td>Caribbean English/Caribbean Creole/Patos</td>
<td>English &amp; Caribbean Creole</td>
<td>Caribbean English</td>
<td>Caribbean English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

Overview of Immigrant Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Andrew</th>
<th>Bobby</th>
<th>Connie</th>
<th>Donna</th>
<th>Eva</th>
<th>Fabian</th>
<th>Fiona</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Technical High School Gr. 9-12</td>
<td>High School Gr. 9-12</td>
<td>Elem. Junior Kindergarten/ Senior Kindergarten - Grade 5</td>
<td>Elem. &amp; Middle Junior Kindergarten/ Senior Kindergarten - Grade 8</td>
<td>Elem. Junior Kindergarten/ Senior Kindergarten-Grade 5</td>
<td>Elem. Junior Kindergarten/ Senior Kindergarten-Grade 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of School</td>
<td>Downtown Toronto</td>
<td>Downtown Toronto</td>
<td>Weston &amp; Jane</td>
<td>Downtown Toronto</td>
<td>Weston &amp; Jane</td>
<td>Weston &amp; Jane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of School</td>
<td>App. 2000 students</td>
<td>App. 1000 students</td>
<td>App. 300 Students</td>
<td>App. 200 students</td>
<td>App. 400 students</td>
<td>App. 400 students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher's Ethnic Background</td>
<td>Rotary teachers</td>
<td>Rotary teachers</td>
<td>Caribbean Background</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Birth</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>St. Vincent</td>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Time in Canada</td>
<td>11 months</td>
<td>1 year 10 months</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>1 year 2 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Tongue</td>
<td>Caribbean English</td>
<td>English/Patois</td>
<td>Caribbean English</td>
<td>Caribbean English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family 1

Family 1 is comprised of Audley, his wife, his son Andrew and three younger children. Only two of these children are Audley’s biological children. Audley, a 40 year old general labourer, lives in the Weston Road vicinity of Toronto. It was difficult at first to make contact with Audley as he was going through a very busy period at his job. However, after a few attempts we managed to meet. He and his son Andrew hailed from Jamaica and have been living in Canada for just over a year. The languages spoken at home are a combination of Canadian English, Caribbean English and Caribbean Creole. In reference to the continuum, Audley would be considered predominantly a basilect speaker. He also refers to his language as being broken English. His son attends a public school in Toronto and is a participant in the research. Audley completed high school and considers his ability to understand and speak Canadian English as fair while his ability to read and to understand written material is excellent. He rates his ability to write Canadian English as good. He expresses that he is closely connected to his home language. At the initial stage of the interview, Audley appeared very reserved. In order to gain his trust, I quickly switched to my CVE and specifically my Jamaican dialect. Instantly, the atmosphere changed and he appeared more relaxed and was ready to speak with me. Audley has not had many occasions to interact with teachers in Toronto via parent-teacher conferences as he is a recent immigrant. He recalled being invited to about two conferences.

Andrew, a 17 year old student of Jamaican descent, has lived in Canada for almost a year and is in Grade 10 at a technical school. The average size semstered school is located in the heart of downtown Toronto and provides education to a diverse group of about 2000 students. It has a major focus on technical skills which helps prepare students for employment. Approximately 54% of the school’s population speak languages other than the dominant language. Andrew had completed high school in Jamaica but was placed in Grade 9 when he arrived in Canada. When asked why he was placed in Grade 9, he responded, “I don’t know. They just put me there.” His favourite subject is English and he can be considered a basilect speaker based upon his linguistic abilities, although some of his utterances were sometimes close to the mesolect. English is the language spoken at home and Andrew believes that his receptive language is excellent but his written expressive language is poor. He is an average reader and thinks that he speaks Canadian English fairly well. He is not enrolled in an after school
programme due to the current situation with teachers but he is interested in playing football as it is one of his interests. As is the case in most high schools, Andrew has a different teacher for each of the four subjects that he studies on a daily basis. This poses many challenges when Audley attends parent-teacher conferences. In the time allotted for parent-teacher interviews, it is difficult to speak to all of Andrew’s teachers and even those opportunities to speak are not open-ended but limited in duration.

*Family 2*

Family 2 comprises Babette, her husband and their only child Bobby. Babette is of Jamaican descent and has been residing in Canada with her son Bobby for one year and ten months. She is the oldest participant and is within the age group of 40-50 years. She is a graduate of the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. Her studies have earned her a Master of Education Degree in Literacy Studies. She is a qualified teacher still seeking employment within that sector. Her eloquent speech would place her at the acrolect end of the continuum. Currently she works various shifts in a retail store. The dominant language spoken at home is Standard English or Caribbean Creole/Patois, but when she is speaking with coworkers she uses Standard English. She has an excellent grasp of Canadian English and experiences absolutely no challenges understanding, reading, writing or speaking it. On parent-teacher night, Babette did not usually meet with all Bobby’s teachers as she was aware of how he is progressing. She makes an extra effort to keep in touch with his teachers if she has any concerns; however, this is not normally the case. She usually went to the first interview to meet all the teachers, an endeavour that proved difficult since he had a different teacher for each subject. In raising her son Bobby, Babette is guided by her own strong religious and moral upbringing.

Bobby, a very confident 15 year old, has adjusted nicely to life in Toronto. He attends high school in the downtown region of Toronto and is in Grade 10. The school is situated in a neighbourhood with many residential homes and hosts a population of about 1000 students, many of whom come from diverse ethnic backgrounds. It spans Grades 9 to12, and as a result of the non-semestered approach, students are exposed to seven or more teachers for the entire school year with a different teacher for up to eight or nine subjects. Many students at his school are particularly strong in the sciences, math and languages. Bobby is very active in extracurricular activities at his school. He plays soccer and is a part of the Black Heritage and
the Science clubs at his school. The guitar is one of his favourite musical instruments and he works very hard in school to be successful. The languages that he speaks at home are English and Patois. However, he added that he speaks English both in and out of class at school. Like his mother, Canadian English does not pose a challenge as he is excellent at reading, understanding, speaking and writing in Canadian English. Bobby’s speech reflects an acrolectal position on the continuum.

**Family 3**

Candice migrated from St. Lucia over ten years ago and is the caregiver to her niece Connie (10 years old) and nephew (5 years old) who have been living in Toronto, for approximately 6 months. She is within the age range of 30-40 years old and holds a college certificate. She currently works in a telemarketing sales department. Though she has been living in Canada for a number of years, the dominant languages spoken in the home are Caribbean English and Caribbean Creole. Candice is a mesolect dominant speaker. Her nephew, who is in Senior Kindergarten and has a Canadian teacher, was too young and therefore not eligible to participate in the research. However, during the interview Candice kept making a comparison between the two school interviews that she attended. Occasionally, Candice would visit the school just to check in on the children, especially the younger one who is in Senior Kindergarten (SK). She does not speak with the teachers on all occasions but just passes by as the school is in close proximity to where she lives.

Connie, who is 10 years old, appears to be very shy when speaking to adults. She hails from St. Lucia and has been living in Toronto for 6 months. The elementary school that she attends is located in the community of Jane and Weston and is host to approximately 300 students. The majority of the student population is of African Canadian and Caribbean Canadian background. In fact, her teacher is also of Caribbean descent. Classes in the school span from Junior Kindergarten (JK) to Grade 5 and it is considered a Model School for Inner Cities (MSIC). Consequently, it has special programs geared towards meeting the needs of students living in the seven “inner cities” in Toronto. According to the TDSB, these schools face a number of challenges like poverty, neighbourhood violence and culture shock. As a Grade 5 student, she has a homeroom teacher and three other teachers for French, Music and Library/Research. She considers the language that she speaks to be English; however, she rates
her ability to speak Canadian English as only fair. Her variety ranks closely to the mesolect and carries with it a sing-song tone. She is an excellent reader of materials written in Canadian English and demonstrates good understanding when reading. Her ability to express herself using Canadian English is good. Connie is not involved in any after school programmes but enjoys singing and dancing in the privacy of her room.

*Family 4*

Donette is a Jamaican born, no nonsense lady who never leaves a teachers’ presence without expressing herself freely and ensuring that she is understood. She is within the age range of 30-40 years old, has three children and has been living in Toronto for over 10 years. However, two of the three children did not meet the criteria for this study as they are Canadian born. Donette is known to most of the teachers in Donna’s school; she has had previous encounters with some of them -- not all of which ended on a positive note. Word has travelled around the school about her – a fact which does not bother her. Donna, who is from St. Lucia, recently joined the family and is enjoying the company of her new family. Donette’s college training has landed her a job in the health profession. The dominant language spoken at home is Caribbean English and she rates her ability to speak, understand, read and write Canadian English as excellent. Based on the language continuum, Donette is a shade above the mesolectal variety, with instances where she would switch to the basilect. Donette works flexible hours and spends a lot of time at the school. After going to the initial parent meeting at the school, the teacher did not invite her to other meetings because she “lives at the school”. Her presence in the school is felt as she volunteers at the lunchroom some days.

Nine year old Donna would rather be drawing than having the interview. Her answers came in short phrases and she avoided discussion by responding, “I don’t know”. Her mom was happy to inform me that when she thinks she will get in trouble if she tries to avoid the questions. She has been living in Canada for the past three years and is currently a Grade 4 student at a community school close to the heart of downtown Toronto. The school serves a diverse population of about 200 students with a focus on the Arts. Donna goes to a few rotary classes daily but has one homeroom teacher who is Canadian. These rotary classes include French, Physical Education, Music and ESL classes which she attends on alternate days for half an hour at a time. Donna was born in St. Vincent and immigrated to Canada at the age of six. She does
not enjoy watching TV and is not interested in any after school programmes. The language spoken at home is English and her ability to read, write and understand and speak Canadian English is good. Donna, can be classified as falling between the basilectal and the mesolectal varieties.

**Family 5**

This family consists of Evelyn and two children. Evelyn is between the ages of 30-40 and hails from St. Lucia. She has lived in Toronto for the past two years and is the mother of two children with ages of 5 months and 8 years old. Her 8 year old daughter Eva is in third grade and is a participant in the current research. Evelyn is employed as a general labourer in a factory but is currently on maternity leave. She is extremely busy with the baby and does not have the time to meet with her child’s teacher as regularly as she would like to. After several attempts via telephone, I was finally able to meet with her. I made contact through a friend of Evelyn who had recommended her for the research. I called her and identified myself quickly to eliminate any concerns that I was an immigration officer.

The interview was somewhat rushed because she had a lot of things she wanted to accomplish that day. Although she has had much exposure to the dialect (patois) in her country, she defines herself as having a good command of English. Her primary language is Caribbean English and this is the language spoken at her home in Toronto. Her highest level of education is a high school diploma but she prides herself on being able to understand Canadian English as well as to speak and write it well. Her speech variety classifies her as a basilect speaker.

Eva is a very shy but pleasant girl who has been living in Toronto for two years with her mom. She is enjoying the new addition to her family, her baby sister. She was more eager to play with her sister than to have a conversation with me which resulted in very sparse and brief responses from her. Eva immigrated to Canada from St. Lucia when she was six years old. She is now 8 years old and attends an elementary school in the community of Jane and Weston. Although she did not have much to share, her speech variety is considered to be closer to the mesolect. Her Grade 3 class is lucky to have such a pleasant student who says that she enjoys spending time with her friends who share the same classroom space with her. As a Grade 3 student she has a homeroom teacher with whom she spends most of her school day. Her teacher
is of white Canadian heritage. The school serves a diverse population with majority of the students being African Canadian and students of Caribbean background. In her opinion, her ability to read, write, speak and understand Canadian English is good.

**Family 6**

Family 6 consists of Faye, her husband and two children, 8 year old Fabian and 9 year old Fiona. The family migrated to Canada a year and a month ago. Faye is a native of St. Lucia but at the age of 33, she left her homeland to reside in Toronto where she is employed as a clerical worker. She works 3 days per week which provides her with flexibility to attend parent-teacher conferences. There are times when she is also on call and unable to give me a definite time when she is available to speak with me. Faye’s primary language is English and this is the only language spoken at her home. Her speech variety lands closer to the acrolectal variety. She is generally at her children’s school at the beginning and end of each day to drop them off and pick them up. During these times she does not necessarily talk with the teachers unless she really has to, but the other kids will inform her if her kids are having problems. It is clear to her that there is a marked difference between the English that she speaks and Creole. During the interview she hastened to differentiate between the two. In her opinion, Creole was seen as a language for adults when she was growing up. She explained, “When the adults were speaking, they would speak Creole so that we wouldn’t understand them. I have heard it so many times that I know what they were saying but I never spoke Creole to my kids.” Having been raised and taught to speak English only, she has had no connection with the dialect (patois). She has an excellent understanding of Canadian English and her ability to speak and write it is good.

Both Fabian and Fiona attend the same community school situated near Jane and Weston. It is host to approximately 400 students with the majority being African Canadian and Caribbean Canadians. This school is also classified as a Model School for Inner Cities. The grades span from Junior Kindergarten (JK) to Grade 8, with Fabian and Fiona attending elementary classes. They both have white Canadian teachers but Fiona was uncertain of the nationality of the other teachers for subjects such as French and Music. Fabian is a reserved but observant boy who was born in St. Lucia and immigrated to Canada before his 7th birthday. He is now 8 years old and is currently in Grade 3. He is with his homeroom teacher for most of the day with the exception of Physical Education classes. He has been living in Canada for one year and two months. He
speaks English and rates his ability to understand and speak Canadian English as good. Both children can be placed between the mesolectal and the basilectal variety on the continuum with their variety carrying a sing-song tone. He is an excellent reader of materials written in Canadian English and rates his ability to write Canadian English as good. Fiona is a very vibrant child who usually greets you with a broad smile and a giggle. She often speaks for Fabian, her brother, and enjoys explaining things. She is 9 years old and immigrated to Canada when she was eight. Like Fabian, Fiona has been living in Canada for just over a year. She is currently in Grade 4 and in addition to her homeroom teacher, she has different teachers for subjects such as French and Physical Education. Her ability to speak and understand Canadian English is good, while her ability to read and understand materials written in Canadian English is excellent. Like her brother, her ability to write Canadian English is good.

**Personal Location**

Although the participants are all newcomers from the Caribbean, they are a very diverse group of individuals. Therefore, the type of interaction that occurs is unique to each participant within their specific context. As a Caribbean immigrant and an elementary teacher working in the community of Jane and Weston, which is predominantly an area with many immigrant parents, I have the opportunity to interact with colleagues and parents from a range of backgrounds.

Engaging in this research over the months has made me more cognizant of how I interact with the parents of the students that I teach and those with whom I interact within the larger school community. Quite recently, a parent of one of my students thought that I was picking on her son. However, we were not able to connect in the initial stage of the school term to resolve the issue. Our interaction was further complicated by the fact that there were other outside stresses -- she was about to undergo an operation -- and our relationship had a rocky start. I was always calm, greeted her warmly and listened keenly to her as she aired her concerns. I made her aware that I understood her concerns and invited her suggestions as to how we could resolve the issues. With each encounter, a layer of her defence began to peel away and we developed a mutual understanding to the point where she was comfortable enough to share detailed and personal medical information. In fact, she now comes by my room just to say hi quite frequently. This ‘connection’ – broadening the parent-teacher relationship outside the confines
of the classroom – benefits all parties, including the student. It demonstrated to me the challenges that exist in establishing positive interactions with parents but also the benefits that accrue when you do.

The agenda is the most popular means of communicating with some parents. At the end of each day, I usually sign each student’s agenda. There is the expectation that after the homework is completed, parents will affix their signature. Sadly, approximately half of the class will return the following day without the homework completed or the agenda signed.

There are times however, when written communication may not be effective and a phone call becomes necessary. At these times, there is usually a dialogue taking place but I would love to meet those phone parents. It is now April and we have a few months remaining before the school year comes to a close and there are some parents whom I have never met. I have tried endlessly to set up an appointment but close to the date it is cancelled. Communication in these cases is uni-directional resulting in pertinent information being lost through the cracks.

As I interact with many of the parents of children in my class, and those who I meet around the school, I perceive that there is an assumption which is common among the parents of Caribbean background. This assumption rests heavily on the premise that their children will get a good education if they are placed in my class or in classes with teachers who share similar ethnic backgrounds. Their utterances are usually punctuated with phrases such as “you know how it is back home”. Whenever I interact with them using my Jamaican dialect to which they can relate, there is usually a difference in their expressions as they appear more relaxed.

My parent-teacher conferences usually extend beyond the scheduled time because I find that 15 minutes is just not enough time to really discuss the progress of each child. Consequently, I usually have parents waiting in the hallway as I hurriedly try to wrap up the meeting. There is considerable pressure placed on me as the teacher. I respect and appreciate the fact that the parents have made it out for the meeting, but do not wish to have parents waiting and getting angry before they get to see me. Meanwhile, the parent with whom I am speaking may sense that I am in a hurry to conclude the discussion and feel shortchanged without all of their children’s issues being fully discussed. At the end of the evening both parents, the one waiting in the hallway and the other who is interacting with me, leave with different perceptions.
While I cannot control their perceptions, there is a great deal I can do to ensure effective communication between myself and the parents of the children I teach.
CHAPTER 5 INTERACTION THROUGH THE EYES OF IMMIGRANT PARENTS AND STUDENTS

The themes and the research sub-questions will be pivotal throughout the discussion with the overarching question being: What are the experiences and perceptions of Caribbean immigrant parents and their children with regards to the use of a Caribbean variety of English when interacting with teachers in Toronto? Sub-questions 1 and 2 are listed below.

(1) How do Caribbean immigrant parents describe their interactions with their children’s teachers?

(2) How do Caribbean immigrant children describe their language use in the classroom?

Question 1: How do Caribbean Immigrant Parents Describe Their Interactions with Their Children’s Teachers?

The themes that follow in this section of the discussion will seek to answer the question stated above, giving specific descriptions of the experiences of the participants when interacting with teachers. I rely heavily on the direct quotations of the participants and at times, I highlight similarities and differences between the responses. This question focuses on the actual conversations that parents have with their children’s teachers.

Table 5 provides a summary of Caribbean immigrant parents’ descriptions of their interactions with their children’s teachers. While there are differences, one aspect that stands out is the requests for clarification. When a parent doesn’t ask for clarification, it could mean one of two things – they understand or they don’t understand and there are reasons why they won’t ask (embarrassment, etc.). It is here that the varieties of English come into play. As noted earlier, “creole speakers’ receptive knowledge of Standard English far exceeds that of true nonnative speakers of English” (Nero, 1997, p. 7). Most of the responses where the parents did not ask for clarification can be assumed to represent an understanding of the material being communicated.
Table 5

*Summary of Caribbean immigrant parents’ descriptions of their interactions with their children’s teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Parents’ Reported use of English during Interactions with Teachers</th>
<th>Parents’ Level of Need for Clarification during Interactions with Teachers</th>
<th>Code-switching</th>
<th>Linguistic Genocide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audley</td>
<td>Broken English</td>
<td>Never asked for clarification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babette</td>
<td>English/Caribbean English</td>
<td>Never asked for clarification</td>
<td>I have never had a problem being understood due to my ability to switch registers in my communication (i.e. I choose my language style based on the background/educational level of the person I am having dialogue with)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candice</td>
<td>English/Caribbean English</td>
<td>Did not ask for clarification even though she did not understand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donette</td>
<td>English/Jamaican Dialect</td>
<td>Asked for clarification regularly</td>
<td>To me when I am speaking to someone from Jamaica, I speak my Jamaican language. I know when to use my Jamaican and when not to</td>
<td>When she started school her first day teacher said I need to talk her out of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>English/Caribbean English</td>
<td>Never asked for clarification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Asked for clarification occasionally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents’ reported use of English during interactions with teachers

All parent participants in the research define themselves as speakers of English which is consistent with the research of Nero (2006) and Coelho (1988) who affirmed that Caribbean speakers thought of themselves as speakers of English. They tended to only recognise a problem when they entered North American schools or where other forms of English were considered superior to their variety. Although Audley considers English to be the language that he speaks, during the interview Audley added,

……… I might say something sometimes because I don’t speak proper English. So I will say something sometimes, they don’t really ask me to repeat myself but they kinda pause so it tells me they don’t understand what I am saying and they take a little while to process what I am saying. (Audley)

He hastened to differentiate between proper English and broken English to which he stated, “proper English is like straight English.” When asked if this is similar to how Canadians speak, Audley responded affirmatively. “Broken English is like a mixture of the Canadian English, Jamaican Creole, a mixture.”

Interviewer: Is Jamaican Creole a form of broken English?

Audley: yes, that’s my perspective. Comparing the two it is obvious. Canadian English and Jamaican Creole, I have experienced the Canadian and Jamaican and it is obvious. We even say the same words but the spelling is different. We say a word it’s like the shorter version. The Canadian would say a word I would say something in my language and it means the same thing.

Interviewer: So when you go to these meetings, do you find yourself trying to move away from the Jamaican Creole and speaking more Canadian English?

Audley: I would like to represent myself proper so I try to speak but not really to say move away from the Jamaican Creole because I love my Jamaican Creole.

As Audley’s interview progressed, I asked the following question:

Interviewer: When you speak the Jamaican Creole, are you representing yourself proper?
Audley: Possible for society, because society categorize it and they say Canadian English is the more appropriate one than the Jamaican. But they serve the same purpose.

According to the literature (Winford, 1994 and Nero 2000), there was both a public and a private attitude being demonstrated by Audley. He was proud of, and celebrated his CVE (private attitude) but at the same time he elevated Canadian English above the CVE so as to meet the standards of the public (public attitude). Audley’s language use, according to Nero (2000), suggested that he was aware that he was bidialectal.

All parent participants demonstrated great comfort as they expressed themselves using CVE, although each participant had his / her own position on the continuum. At the initial stage of each interview, participants were somewhat nervous and would try to speak using language that was more acrolectal. However, as the interviews progressed, and as participants began answering questions that required more details, they became more relaxed and they moved closer to the basilect. Audley, in particular, became extremely comfortable when I started using CVE and this allowed him to divulge more information than he was giving at the beginning of the interview. Some participants were not totally comfortable when using Canadian English. Babette --who seemed to be the most proficient in the use of Canadian English -- appeared to be in her comfort zone as her variety was at the end of the continuum (acrolet).

Parents’ level of need for clarification during interactions with teachers

Audley and Babette stated that they had never asked for clarification which suggests that they understood the content the teachers transmitted or it is possible that they did not understand but were too embarrassed to ask questions. However, the former seems more likely as both participants mentioned how comfortable they were when interacting with their children’s teachers. On the other hand, four parent participants reported that they would occasionally ask for clarification. Although Audley and Babette are at two different ends of the spectrum (the former having a high school certificate and the latter a graduate degree), both participants claim understanding of the language used by their children’s teachers and do not need to ask for clarification. Audley alluded to the point of speaking with teachers (nationality not known, but it is clear that they are not from the Caribbean) who met him at his level. Audley stated, “They meet you at your level”.


When he was asked to clarify what that means. He responded by saying,

No sophistication. But you know at times teachers are of a profession and lot of teachers act a certain way, like a cut above the rest and they use language above my head, but it wasn’t like that. I was very comfortable. The teachers made me feel comfortable. (Audley)

Donette emphatically stated that she asked for clarification regularly. When asked the reason for this she stated in no uncertain terms, “I talk to her teacher frequently because the teacher is from a different culture in order to know what’s going on.”

Donette’s reason for asking for clarification frequently is to keep abreast of things within that classroom due to cultural differences. Similarly, Candice who had two interviews in one evening did not ask for clarification in her first interview even though she did not fully understand what was being said. She attributed this to a difference in accent. In contrast, Candice recounted feeling a sense of connection when speaking to her niece’s teacher whom she said had a similar accent.

I think the other teacher was Canadian so it was a little difficult for me to understand what she was saying because of a different accent.

My niece’s teacher is black and she has a totally different accent from the Canadian teacher. Because I am from the Caribbean, I could understand her better than the Canadian teacher.

The cultural and linguistic differences (barriers) that these parents/guardians experienced while interacting with their children’s teachers are not unique. Research emphasises that people usually favour others with similar accents (Edwards, 1982, Nero, 1997, Gill, 1994). It is natural that Candice would sense a connection when talking to the teacher who had a similar accent or cultural background. Similarly, Donette felt good as a parent when there was mutual understanding between her and her child’s teacher.
**Code-switching**

This was Donette’s explanation of code switching. “To me when I am speaking to someone from Jamaica I speak my Jamaican language. I know when to use my Jamaican and when not to.”

As Donette interacted with Donna’s teachers and others, she was able to negotiate between the two varieties of language. There was no evidence of the exchange between Donette and the teacher to determine whether the switch was made between utterances or between languages. However based on the statement above, we can assume that she may have used the variety that is closer along the continuum to Canadian English which, according to Fields (1997), is “code-switching”.

Like Donette, Babette was also able to monitor her code-switching strategies. She said, “I have never had a problem being understood due to my ability of switch registers in my communication; i.e., I choose my language style based on the background/educational level of the person I am having a dialogue with”. Gal’s (1988) argument that some people were aware of their code switching practices is consistent with Donette’s and Babette’s speech patterns. They seemed fully aware of moments when they needed to make a linguistic choice and they utilised the strategy of code-switching.

**Linguistic genocide**

The quotation below from St-Hilaire (2003) parallels the statement made by a parent participant concerning the gradual loss of the CVE. Despite the fact that this statement was made years ago, some degree of “linguistic genocide” (Day, 1981) still continues and Donna’s experience is a reflection of that. As is evident in Donna’s situation, she is gradually losing her accent to the dominant language. With regret, Donette recounted:

She (Donna) is actually losing her St. Vincent accent. When she first came she would say, “di bwoy or di gurl” and when she started school her first teacher said I need to talk her out of it. That was when she was in Grade 3. Next few years from now I can guarantee you that she will forget her culture. I am letting her
hold on to something but the counsellor is telling me the best thing is to let it go. Clean it, memory and everything.

Donette reported that Donna experienced a “rough” life back in St. Vincent which supports the reason that the counsellor wants her to forget about her past. Donna’s language, however, is inextricably intertwined with her past. Consequently, if they require a deletion of her “language, past memories and everything”, they are deleting a portion of her identity.

Unfortunately for Donna, this is an involuntary language shift proposed by her Grade 3 teacher and counsellor which, according to Day (1981), will contribute to the erosion of the CVE and eventual linguistic genocide. Donna, who is currently in Grade 4, has little evidence of her past life in her language. To this end, Donna was placed in an ESL class to assist her with increasing her abilities to communicate in Canadian English. One of the effects of this is that it will replace much of her St. Vincent language so that this part of her heritage and culture will be lost.

It is interesting to note however, that this request was made by her mother (Donette). Donette reported that her Grade 4 teacher said she (Donna) will get over it but Donette was adamant to sign her up. Donette clearly stated:

When I ask for help for ESL, she (the teacher) didn’t see a problem with Donna’s speech. The teacher was saying that she would catch-up other people and she was telling about other children. But I didn’t want to hear about other children. I told her I want to hear about my child.

From the teacher’s perspective, there was not a serious problem with Donna’s language abilities and she felt that Donna would catch-up with her peers. Implicit in this statement is that Donna’s language skills lag and catching up to her Canadian English peers is anticipated. We should note here the similarity between Donna’s and Andrews’ experience which was mentioned earlier. Andrew’s teacher told him he speaks really good English but he needs to speak more English. His comments follow: “My teacher say I speak really good English. But I need to speak more English because sometimes I need to say something and I can’t say it the Canadian way and I come out with it in Jamaican.”
While we do not include the teachers’ perspective in this research, the statements indicate a philosophy of Canadian English being the dominant language, while the CVE is denigrated. Donette’s decision to place Donna in an ESL class was influenced by the dominant language ideology highlighted by the teacher and the students within that class and by her previous teacher. The decision also demonstrates the desire any mother would have for her child to integrate within the classroom. She confessed that she did not want her to lose her language because like her, she wants Donna to be able to code-switch. Donette expressed, “She (Donna) was born there (St. Vincent) that’s who she is. At the end of the day she has to know who she is when her back is against the wall.”

Donette also spoke of how the family enjoyed Donna’s accent but due to the ridicule at school, she thought it was best to get her the ESL help. Donette went a step further:

I spoke to the principal, if you know she is going to read this story tomorrow morning, then you tell her the day before and groom her or send her home and let her talk to me. You don’t just call on her and when she makes a mistake the kids laugh at her because if she say zinc she says sink. Then everybody apologised to her.

She is currently enrolled in a pull out programme where she attends ESL classes for a maximum of two hours per week.

Making meaning

As an elementary school teacher in Toronto and a Caribbean immigrant there are various thoughts that gripped me as I engaged in the research. I have consistently reflected on my interactions with parents during the study and no doubt this will continue throughout my practice as a teacher. The research reveals that immigrant parents in the study are speakers of a variety of Caribbean English and generally do not experience difficulty in understanding Canadian English when interacting with teachers in Toronto. Some of them proudly celebrate their language and use it when they deem it appropriate. It is this linguistic choice that they make from time to time and one that they would also like their children to be able to make. However, my belief is that teachers should refrain from asking students to abandon their home language to adopt the dominant language. They should embrace the rich language of the Caribbean – or the home language of any other students -- and integrate it into the instruction for students wherever
possible. By doing this, teachers would be showing respect for the language and culture of the students while teaching Canadian English. To illustrate, when Caribbean students use their home language in my classroom, I try to interpret for the other students and take time to validate the children’s responses. The Caribbean students usually experience a sense of affirmation whenever this happens and the other students, just as importantly, come to learn and appreciate the linguistic differences between the varieties of English in the classroom.

**Question 2: How do Caribbean Immigrant Children Describe Their Language Use in the Classroom?**

Classrooms in Toronto are unique contexts where diverse varieties of English are spoken and written. The information in this section portrays the individual experiences and perceptions of Caribbean immigrant students’ language use in the classroom.

Table 6 gives an overview of children participants’ responses under the recursive themes as well as themes that emerged from specific participants. Participants’ names are arranged alphabetically from A-F.
Table 6

Caribbean Immigrant children’s description of their language use in the classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Andrew</th>
<th>Bobby</th>
<th>Connie</th>
<th>Donna</th>
<th>Eva</th>
<th>Fabian</th>
<th>Fionna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small talk</td>
<td>Non-academic topic- I was feeling sick over the weekend</td>
<td>We talk about school work</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>Play-ground conflict</td>
<td>Problem with other kids</td>
<td>Play-ground</td>
<td>I never had any conversation at all. Just school work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to Correction</td>
<td>I think it’s okay</td>
<td>I just do it confidently</td>
<td>Good, so I could understand</td>
<td>I feel like I’m getting in trouble, okay</td>
<td>I feel okay</td>
<td>I feel better for next time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating Identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I tend to forget that I’m talking normal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Perceptions of their use of Canadian English</td>
<td>Fair speaker</td>
<td>Excellent speaker of English</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Accent Hurts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I feel sad</td>
<td>People laughed at me</td>
<td></td>
<td>It makes me sad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing with an Accent</td>
<td>Not good at writing</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar vs. Dissimilar Accents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Similar accent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstandings</td>
<td>She said something but I didn’t understand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misplaced</td>
<td>Placed in Grade 9 upon arrival in Canada</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Small talk in the classroom

From, Fionna, age 9: “I never had any conversation at all. I really don’t have anything else to talk to my teacher about just school work”.

All but one participant in the research expressed that the topics about which they spoke to their teachers were academically based. During the interview, Fionna stated that the conversations that she had with her teacher were based on the topics discussed in class, while other participants mentioned that they rarely discussed problem solving techniques with their teachers regarding conflicts that occurred in class or at recess. There was little evidence of students engaging in conversations that were not school related. Students might have been given opportunities to engage in these types of conversations (small talk), however, there may be other critical factors as laid out by Pratt-Johnson (1993) which may thwart such progress.

I feel bad that I can’t offer them (Jamaican students) help in overcoming their language problems as I can with other students, but, honestly I don’t know where to begin.

I wish I could give my Jamaican students confidence. The most difficult part is that you are trying to change something that has been the only way they have known for so long. (p. 259)

It was evident that from the teacher’s perspective, there was a problem with the students’ language and there was a need for a change. In support of this view, Gill’s (1994) research indicated that as the difference between teachers’ accents and that of students’ accents increased, teachers have a less favourable perception of their students.

Contrary to the findings of Pratt-Johnson (1993) and Gill (1994), not all teachers share a negative perception of CVE. In this research, Andrew enjoys speaking to his Gym and Drama teachers and there is an apparent reason for that, which he willingly shares. He reports, “My Drama and Gym teacher has friends who are Jamaican so they understand me but my English teacher would say guys remember to practice on your English. You can speak it (CVE) but when you come to English class I don’t want you to speak it.”
Reaction to correction

Of the seven participants in this research, six of them accepted the corrections given to them by their teachers when they speak and did not have a negative reaction to it. Instead, they thought they would be able to understand the language better and people would more easily understand them. The quotation from Andrew reflected the shared view of the other five participants. Andrew, in response to how he felt when he was being corrected by his teacher, stated that “I think it’s okay because I can speak my normal way and I’m learning to speak the Canadian way that people can understand.”

However, Donna believed that she was getting in trouble when her teacher corrected her because she was not meeting the expectations of the teacher. She stated, “I feel like I’m getting in trouble.”

The way Donna felt was consistent with the views of Cummins (2001) who stated that a strong message was being communicated to students when they were being corrected. They felt that if they wanted to be accepted by their teacher, they needed to renounce their home language and culture. Andrew and the other participants might have viewed the correction of the teacher as being okay, because this may have been accompanied by a feeling of acceptance as they tried to insert the corrections. Anna, one of the teacher trainers in Jakobsson’s (2010) research, echoed the view of Donna as she also saw correction as a form of discipline and reflected on the fact that it can be hurtful to students.

Negotiating identity

One major challenge for some of the student participants echoed in the research is that of negotiating their identities so that they can be accepted in their classrooms. Therefore, they develop several identities and sometimes find it challenging to figure out which one is needed in which situation. These identities are sometimes constructed based on the perceptions of their teachers and peers or family.

With a confused expression, Fionna -- who thought that she was speaking “normal” because that was the language that defines her – remarked, “I tend to forget that I’m talking
normal. Sometimes they don’t understand me and I have to remember to put a little Canadian into it.”

What was evident from her comment is the coercive relations of power, where power is exercised over the student which results in his or her disempowerment or questioning of identity (Cummins 1997). Fionna had to make a conscious effort to remember how she should speak when she was in class.

Audley was told that he should not speak the Jamaican dialect in the classroom but Rahl and Roswell (2000) remind us that Andrew’s identity is expressed partly through his language. If he is not allowed to speak the language that he knows, then there may be some negative effects. Cummins (2001) reminds us how problematic this can be in the development of one’s identity.

*Students’ perception of their use of Canadian English*

Five of the seven students believed that they were good speakers of English while the other two were rated excellent and fair speakers of Canadian English.

Andrew’s perception of how he uses Canadian English was largely based upon his teacher’s expectations and beliefs. According to Nero (2006), these expectations were based upon three main assumptions and Cummins (1997) noted that these were communicated to Caribbean immigrants as they engaged in micro-interactions with educators.

When asked about his language use, Andrew rated himself as a fair speaker of the Canadian English. Andrew recounted, “My teacher say I speak really good English. But I need to speak more English because sometimes I need to say something and I can’t say it the Canadian way and I come out with it in Jamaican.”

Implicit in this statement is the importance of Andrew learning how to say “it” the Canadian way. In light of this view expressed by Andrew, there exists an ideology within the Canadian classroom contexts of Canadian English being the more correct of the two languages, CVE and Canadian English. Andrew has started to second guess his ability to speak the
language and now places himself on the continuum with the sense that with more practice ("speak more English"), he can develop his ability to speak Canadian English.

Shannon (1999) stated that this view seems to be shared by many in the United States that, "it is not normal to speak a language other than English nor is it normal that, if you do, that you would want to continue after having learned English" (p.184).

In her debate on language ideologies in the bilingual classroom, she affirmed that when a language policy was not in place, teachers within the bilingual classroom context tended to rely on language ideologies to inform their practice.

Andrew continued to articulate his point by stating that, “I can speak my normal way and I’m learning better to speak the Canadian way that people can understand me.”

Here the use of the word normal attracts two different meanings. Shannon’s (1999) normal as expressed by others -- connoted a deficit language -- while Andrew’s normal intimated the way in which he was comfortable speaking. Hence, his CVE was viewed as normal in his world. This supports the argument proposed by Shannon (1995) in Shannon (1999) that where more than one language or language variety exists in the same context, one will be “perceived as superior, desirable, and necessary while the other is seen as inferior, undesirable and extraneous (p.176)”.

Like Andrew, Fionna’s use of the word ‘normal’ in her response mentioned earlier suggested the use of CVE to be the acceptable form in her world. It defined her as an individual and in her perspective it was the norm. However, in light of Shannon’s statement, “it is not normal to speak a language other than English nor is it normal that, if you do, that you would want to continue after having learning English” (Shannon, 1999, p. 184). Consequently, Fionna struggled with her use of CVE as her normal way of speaking and the use of Standard Canadian English.

Andrew’s normal appears to be losing its normalcy as it comes in contact with Canadian English. This speaks to the argument proposed by Nero (2006) that the first challenge Caribbean English speakers face with the use of their language is when they enter schools in North America or England. Other forms of English are privileged over the form of English that they speak.
My accent hurts - Is it what I say or how I say it?

I try speaking the Canadian because when I speak St. Lucia people don’t get me and they laugh at me and stuff like that. It makes me sad. (Fionna)

Donna recollected a time when she mispronounced a word and everyone corrected her. “The first time I came and went to school, I used to make mistakes and say ‘sinc’ and people would start laughing at me and say that’s not how you say ‘zinc’ and stuff like that.”

Donna was not quite thorough enough in her response about her teacher paraphrasing her responses. However, her mother alluded to it in her responses which are quite fitting in this section of the research. Donette recounts: “In the classroom, when it’s Donna’s time to read like if she should say ‘colour’, she was saying ‘cola’. The teacher had to be rephrasing it for her. She was upset about it.”

It would appear that these participants have experienced hurt due to their accents and their peers and teachers have contributed to this pain. The research does not give the teachers’ perspectives but only one of the participants mentioned that the teacher dealt with this issue. Connie said she felt sad when she played with her classmates in the gym and they laughed at her accent. She sadly shared her story. “When I said, “Don’t let them out you”, they laughed. I felt sad.”

Connie reported that her teacher -- who also has a Caribbean accent -- intervened when the students laughed at her by telling them that their behaviour was inappropriate. She felt better after the teacher intervened and continued the game.

Writing with an accent

Six of participants in the research expressed their ability to write and to understand materials written in CVE. In fact, Bobby defined himself as an excellent writer who does not have a problem understanding the Canadian English. Fabian on the other hand, expresses his excellent ability to understand Canadian English but refers to his ability to write Canadian English as only fair. The other four participants defined their ability as fair, both in writing and understanding Canadian English. In light of Nero’s (2006) research, one possible reason for
most of the students’ perceptions of their abilities to understand and write Canadian English is the use of grammatical features which carry different meanings in each context.

Writing samples were not collected as part of the data for this study, therefore, an assessment of the participants’ writing in different genres cannot be made. According to Nero (1997), the Caribbean students in her research performed better on narrative writing pieces than on expository and research papers to which she attributed the emphasis on the storytelling culture in the Caribbean. Therefore, the participants’ projections of their abilities to understand and write Canadian English as being fair may have attracted different responses if they were asked about specific writing genres.

Andrew, however, repeatedly articulated that writing was a major challenge for him as evidenced by the following quotes:

I don’t have a problem speaking but it’s the writing. I need to improve on that. When I write no-one understands what I write. I have to be there to explain what I write.

Even when supply teachers come to the class they always told me you have good English. So it make me feel happy and ok but the only thing is that when I write something they call me to show them over. I am not good at the writing so.

Andrew’s teacher told him that his English is really good but why is it that when he writes he needs to be there to explain what he has written? The English Language Arts (ELA) teachers in Nero’s (2010) research on Caribbean English speakers in mainstream classrooms reported that the CCE speakers tended to write the way that they spoke.

_Similar versus dissimilar accents_

My teacher has the same accent as me. I don’t have a problem. I understand her.

(Connie)

These were the words of Connie as she responded to the question regarding what variety of English her teacher speaks. Connie’s response is somewhat consistent with the findings of Gill’s (1994) research, though partially confirmed, where the North American listeners considered the presenter with a similar accent to be more favourable.
Given the TDSB’s new initiative to hire more male and racial minority teachers is successful, it would then support the findings of this research where Connie reported not having a problem understanding her teacher because of the similarity in accents. The positive aspects of this initiative would place more culturally diverse teachers in the classroom in Toronto. These teachers would likely be familiar with the linguistic and cultural needs of immigrants and may foster an inclusive classroom atmosphere. This cultural compatibility may enhance or create a connection between immigrant students and their teachers.

**Comprehensibility**

All participants but one claimed to have an accent that was similar to the teacher’s. On the surface, the findings of this study seem to contradict the data from Gill’s (1994) study where the presenter with similar accent was considered most favourable and those with dissimilar accent least favourable. In my research, all participants claim to have no issues with comprehension despite dissimilar accents among their teachers. The participants’ responses ranged from fair to excellent regarding their ability to understand written and oral communication in Canadian English. This may suggest strong receptive skills by the participants but there are no comparative rankings that are directly comparable to Gill’s (1994) studies.

**Does my teacher understand me?**

Five participants said they were asked by their teachers occasionally to clarify their responses, while Bobby reported that he has never been asked. Donna expresses that when this happens, she feels like she is getting in trouble. However, when asked if the teacher asks other kids to do the same, she responded with her head bowed, “I don’t know.”

“I liked it when she said it the first time.”

All participants responded positively to the teacher’s rephrasing of her questions and statements when talking to them. Andrew’s response points to his ability to comprehend what his teacher is communicating.

Sometimes it (teacher rephrasing her question) make me feel better because like if I ask her something I don’t know it she will try to explain it to me a different way so
sometimes it make me feel better and sometime it don’t because sometime I really like it when she said it before like the first time so (Andrew).

*Should I change my accent?*

Sometimes she just ask me to repeat myself, so I say that when she does that maybe I should be changing my accent a little bit so she can understand me. (Fionna)

The view of one of the teacher trainers in Jakobsson’s (2010) echoes the view of one of the participants in this research. As was mentioned above, Donna views her teacher’s clarification as a means of telling her she is in trouble. Similarly, Anna, the teacher trainer in Jakobsson’s research, views error correction as a form of discipline that sometimes can be hurtful to students. However, there is no evidence that the teachers’ use of the strategy of rephrasing or clarifying questions or statements is indicative of a preconceived perception that the CVE speakers lack the ability to communicate effectively and were more subject to teacher correction than other students. While the teacher’s perceptions were not included in this research, all five participants mentioned that they were not singled out as individuals; this strategy was used with everyone in the class.

*Misunderstandings*

The teacher said the reason why I failed is because I rude to her but I didn’t rude to her. Like she said something to me and she said it was about my mom. I didn’t really understand what she was saying. It’s like she pushed me to say something bad to her. She said she is not going to let me pass from before. So I apologise to her. (Andrew)

While we do not have access to the exchange between Andrew and his teacher, the quote above suggests that there was obviously some misunderstanding between the student and the teacher. It would appear as if the consequence for Andrew’s inappropriate comment was failure.

Another critical factor that surfaces from the interaction between Andrew and his teacher -- keeping in mind we have no knowledge of the teacher’s perspective -- is that Andrew may have been evaluated academically based on the misunderstanding which he claimed was due to his use of his Jamaican dialect. Henry (1996) agrees that these misunderstandings or misinterpretations can produce negative consequences for students in terms of school success. The
misunderstanding between Andrew and his teacher can be likened to the comments the teachers in Pratt-Johnson’s (1993) research made about understanding the Jamaican students that they taught.

*ESL, by choice or forced?*

While Donna was placed in an ESL class upon her mother’s request, Andrew was placed there by school authorities but was encouraged by his teacher in a positive way. Andrew recounted his experience prior to ESL without mentioning any input from his parents on the matter;

> I did a test and place me in the school. They say I have to go to the school because I not really good at writing. I don’t remember the place and after they place me at the school I wasn’t speaking to them at the place because I was shy. Then they place me in the ESL class for a week and after a week the teacher was with me and said you are not suppose to be in this class. Then I have to move from that class. More I think there was something in that class that I really want to learn about but they still move me. Then I meet Miss X (pseudonym) and she told me I will make it in life nothing will stop me and she help me and I write like five paragraphs today (Andrew).

Andrew wanted to remain in that class because he thought that there was something that he could have learned but he was removed after a week. This underscores his acceptance of the placement into the ESL class but also illustrates his desire to succeed. While we have no information on the circumstances regarding his removal from the ESL class, the teacher’s perspective on the placement and removal might prove valuable to understanding some of the complexities in this issue from another vantage point.

*Misplaced*

The data reveals that though Bobby and Andrew are in the same grade (Grade 10) they are of different ages. Bobby is 15 and Andrew is 17 years old. Bobby has been residing in Canada (1 year and 10 months) for a longer time period than Andrew who has been living in Canada for only 11 months. Andrew explained that he had 6 months remaining for the completion of high school in Jamaica. When he immigrated to Canada he was placed in Grade 9. Once again this decision was embraced and not challenged by his parents. According to
Coelho (1988), “it is likely that mistakes in placement are made when Caribbean background children first enter the school (p. 132).” No reason was evident to the research to justify Andrew’s placement so it is a possibility that could have been a mistake.

*Making meaning*

Each morning as I stand and greet my Grade 4/5 students at the door with a smile, I observe the many expressions as they enter the room. There are those students who are happy to be there while others are still sleepy or would rather be elsewhere. As a Caribbean immigrant, I place myself in my students’ position and I try to make conversations with them about activities that may have transpired the evening before or on the weekend. This opens the door for ‘small talk’ and eases them into the activities of the day. This type of interaction may not be possible in middle or high school as students have different teachers for each subject. However, due to the many layers of complexity involved in the education of immigrant students, teachers should be cognizant of the climate that is created within the classroom.

Based on the experiences of the children participants, it appears that these Caribbean students are not being given much opportunity to interact with their teachers on a social level. There needs to be an atmosphere of trust and openness established in the classrooms. The barriers of fear need to be eradicated when these students enter the school system to reduce the negative effects on their learning. Caribbean immigrant students need to perceive their teachers as individuals with whom they can share simple everyday experiences or share ideas relating to non-academic topics and feel comfortable. Even though most of the student participants did not regularly engage in small talk in the classroom, the atmosphere was such that they were not perturbed by the correction of the teachers when they used their CVE. The description of their experiences led me to believe that they embrace this as a means of improving their learning and to co-operate with their teachers.

While a definitive conclusion cannot be made from these findings, certain issues were raised which led me to infer that some of the Caribbean immigrants in the study were experiencing a sense of discomfort when using their CVE in the classroom. There appeared to be constant negotiation of their identity; hence, they may not have always felt relaxed enough to
express themselves freely using the CVE. Consequently, it is likely that they may aspire towards mastering Canadian English with the notion that their language is inferior.

Reflecting on my experiences as a Caribbean immigrant teacher, and the findings of the research, it is possible for a teacher who shares similar linguistic and cultural background with his/her students to have a positive impact on students. One of the participants revealed that she understood her teacher because they had similar accents. An example of this occurred recently in my class; as a student of Jamaican background explained to a teacher of a non-Caribbean background why he needed to keep his cap on. He had mentioned that he had a “co-co” on his forehead. This seemed interesting to me as I listened. Her expression told me that she did not understand what he was talking about. So I intervened by asking her if she knew what he referred to as a “co-co”. It was a moment where I took pride in my language and eagerly explained the meaning. I told her a “co-co” is a round kind of root plant that grows underground. When we hit our forehead and a swelling comes in that area we say it’s a “co-co” but in North America, you would say a bump. Then I asked the student to show me the “co-co” and he pulled the cap off. I assured me that the “co-co” was not that visible and no one would notice. He took the cap off without a problem. I could relate to and understood exactly what he was trying to communicate. Caribbean students – like any other immigrant student -- would benefit from their teachers being able to understand them better if they were familiar with their culture and language.

It is not unusual for elementary, middle or high school teachers to be faced with different language situations or language needs in their classrooms in Toronto. There are many immigrants from homes where languages other than English are spoken and learning a new language proves challenging. These students may be accommodated via the ESL program and are sometimes paired with students with whom they share similar language. In some cases, their teacher may share the same linguistic background. There are also some students who have limited proficiency in English but may be kept in the mainstream class throughout the day. Then there is also another group of immigrants who speak different varieties of English who in some cases may be kept in the mainstream classroom throughout the day as well. This diversity has implications for planning and executing the curriculum so as to create an inclusive, trusting and
respectful classroom climate. Each group of students should be seen as different and taught accordingly.
CHAPTER 6 FACTORS AFFECTING EFFECTIVE INTERACTIONS WITH TEACHERS

This chapter continues the discussion on parents’ perspectives and experiences as they interact with teachers in Toronto. The themes and sub-questions 3 and 4 will be woven into the discussion to provide insight into the participants thought processes and how they responded to the questions asked at the interviews.

Question 3: What Factors Do West Indian Immigrant Parents Report That Facilitate Or Impede Effective Interaction With Their Children’s Teachers?

Table 7 presents the views of Caribbean immigrant parents on factors or conditions that enhance or impede effective interaction between them and their children’s teachers.

Summary Table 7

Factors Facilitating or Impeding Effective Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Atmosphere during Interview</th>
<th>Open Communication &amp; Frequent Visits</th>
<th>Time Constraints</th>
<th>Comprehensibility</th>
<th>Teacher Dominated Interaction</th>
<th>Parent-Student-Teacher Conference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audley</td>
<td>Teachers made me feel comfortable</td>
<td></td>
<td>Good understanding of content communicated  No sophistication</td>
<td>I dominated one of the interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babette</td>
<td>Felt welcomed but address me by my name</td>
<td>There is effective two-way communication</td>
<td>Excellent understanding</td>
<td>Teacher dominated interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candice</td>
<td>Teacher wasn’t welcoming/uptight feeling</td>
<td>What’s the rush?</td>
<td>Good with the teacher I had a connection with</td>
<td>Teacher dominated interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donette</td>
<td>The communication is open and good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Teacher dominated interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>Warm welcome received</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Teacher dominated interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>It was only 15 minutes</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Teacher dominated interaction The kids are there with me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the experiences shared by the parent participants, many factors that can enhance or impede effective communication between teachers and parents emerged. Some of these factors are the atmosphere during the interview, time constraints, comprehensibility, and teacher dominated interaction versus parent dominated interviews – just to list a few. This section will highlight and discuss these factors using quotes from the participants.

*The atmosphere created by the teacher during parent-teacher conferences*

Coelho (1988) postulated that some teachers were aware of the linguistic background of their students and tended to judge their parents’ intelligence and educational level accordingly. However, there was no evidence among the five parent participants in my study of any treatment based upon preconceived value judgements. The parents expressed that they experienced a warm greeting and they were comfortable with the language used by the teachers. Audley was quite pleased with the parent teacher contacts he has had with his child’s teacher. He commented, “It is outright normal, no sophistication. Just a warm greeting. The teachers make me feel comfortable.”

While Audley and the other parents were satisfied with the reception they received, Candice expressed dissatisfaction at the exchange which occurred between her and her child’s teacher. “The teacher has to make you feel warm. If you at ease you have a better feeling communicating with the teacher.”

When she was asked what this would look like, she (Candice) hastened to explain:

You shouldn’t feel uptight. But the teacher should greet you and even ask you how you are doing and try to make you feel comfortable so you can ask questions. I don’t want to be a little bit racist but then when I go to the interview, there was a parent before me and the feedback I got from one parent to the teacher it was different from mine. At the end of the interview it’s like she said have a good day. But my interview, she never gave me the chance to ask questions. So I said it’s ok. It depends on the parent.
A little bit racist

I don't want to be a little bit racist but then when I go to the interview, there was a parent before me and the feedback I got from one parent to the teacher it was different. ....... So it depends on the parent, I don’t know. (Candice)

In order to clarify the feedback to which Candice alluded, she explained in more detail: At the end of the interview, the teacher was like she said have a good day and be safe. My interview she just said went right into it and never gave me a chance to ask any questions, there was no warm greeting at the beginning nor at the end so I was like, “It’s o.k. It’s alright.”

Candice wanted to experience that personal touch from her child’s teacher and to be treated fairly as a parent. The uncomfortable feeling that Candice experienced during her interaction with her nephew’s teacher is inconsistent with the experiences of the immigrant parents in Massachusetts whose children attended Patrick O’Hearn Elementary School in Mapp’s (2003) study. These parents reported feelings of being welcomed and validated as they interacted with teachers and other school staff. They also expressed feelings of validation as the school heard and accepted their comments and suggestions. Therefore, positive interaction between teachers and immigrant parents is not a remote idea, but a realistic attainable one based on the success stories that are available in the literature.

Address me by my name

I also like when I am addressed by my name. (Babette)

Babette -- like Candice -- appreciated the personal touch in her interaction with teachers. Her statement above parallels that of Seefeldt (1985) where he posits that the same level of respect given to each child as an individual should also be applied to parents. Therefore, if Bobby’s teacher addresses him by his name, then Babette would appreciate it if she is also addressed by her name.

Faye, on the other hand, spoke of the empathy and care that her child’s teacher demonstrated when her son got hurt at school. A smiling mother recounted her exchange with
her child’s teacher via the telephone: “I got a call from my child’s teacher late in the night. I am appreciative because she called at that time of night. It showed that she really cared and that meant a lot to me. (Faye)

Myriads of research support the claim that when teachers display and create a safe and caring atmosphere for parents, teacher-parent relationships can be enhanced (Graham-Clay, 2005, Lasky, 2000). Sharon’s positive encounter will no doubt increase trust and build stronger relationships with the teacher and the school community. Graham-Clay (2005) cites that parents are not looking for cold professional approach from school staff but rather a personal touch. She points out that teachers who create that caring atmosphere will experience effective school relationships.

*Open communication and frequent visits by parents*

The communication is open and good. It is usually face to face interaction. I go in once or twice per week. It has to be o.k. because I am a no-nonsense person (Donette).

There is always effective two-way communication; acknowledging that I do not have a problem decoding during our dialogue (Babette).

In line with Newman’s (1997) assertion that parents should not wait until there is a problem to visit the school and frequent visits are necessary, Camille visits her child’s school frequently. She does not wait until there is a problem but visits regularly in order to build a relationship with the teacher. As the scope of this research did not include the teacher’s views, we cannot make any definitive assessment about the relationship that developed between Camille and her child’s teacher but the frequency of contact can help in the development of a positive relationship.

The other parent participants may not have the time for face-to-face interaction with their children’s teacher like Camille. Newman (1997) asserts that while the school may have scheduled interview dates, a phone call can also be made at other times to discuss any concerns that may arise throughout the school year. Although Evelyn does not make frequent visits to her child’s school, she would like to be kept informed. Babette alluded to the need for effective two-way communication, which implies her preference for a dialogue with the teacher as
opposed to a teacher monologue. Consistent with Babette’s belief is that of Graham-Clay (2005) where she clarifies the difference between two-way communication and one-way communication. One-way communication involves the teacher sending a note home, notebooks or other communication books, report cards and any other means of written communication. Conversely, two-way communication occurs when teachers and parents dialogue together. Examples of this type of communication would be the regular phone calls home and parent-teacher conferences where the parents / guardians have the opportunity for a genuine conversation.

There are times when parents or teachers try to utilize written documents such as agendas as two-way communication documents, by writing short questions in them for the other party to answer. While these technically qualify as two way communication since there is a contribution from both parties, they do not provide the rich opportunities for understanding and building relationships that other methods of two way communication provide. They are not a substitute for proper two way dialogues between teachers and parents.

Send a message

Donette visits her child’s school twice per week. Whenever she misses one of these visits the teacher sends a message home. Although by our definition above, this is ‘one-way’ communication, it serves to help build the partnership with the parent by keeping the lines of communication open. The efforts of the teacher to communicate regularly strengthen the relationship established by the two-way communication with Donette’s visits. The last segment of Donette’s quotation speaks to the good relationship between her and her child’s teacher. “I don’t see where there is a problem. If I don’t go to the school her teacher sends a message to say she didn’t see me today. We have a good relationship.”

Time constraints

In light of the literature (Graham-Clay, 2005), there cannot be a meaningful discussion, within the allotted 15-20 minutes time frame. This appears to be a challenge for all parents and especially those who have children with special needs. They usually require longer time so as to meaningfully engage in discussions regarding the needs of their children. Candice’s experience mirrors that of the parents and teachers in Walker’s (1998) study of parents’ evening at four
secondary schools in Norfolk. It appears Candice merely accepted the expert knowledge of the teacher within that 5 minutes time slot and left disappointed. Fortunately, Candice’s evening ended on a more positive note when she was given an opportunity to feel appreciated and she left with a better understanding of her child’s performance. The following are the expressed views of two parent participants in the study.

*What’s the rush?*

I am not sure if she was in a hurry and I was not late too. So it was just like whatever, she just went on explaining right away. She didn’t elaborate. The interview was very short. I don’t know what’s the rush. (Candice)

It was only 15 minutes. Sometimes they are busy when you try to see them during the day, I think they could also make the time if it’s even at lunch. (Faye).

*Thoroughness required*

Due to limited time allotted for each interview, one parent in the study complained that the information she received regarding her child was sparse.

She didn't really explain. She just said everything briefly. Certain interview you go and it last for 5 minutes. But other interview you want to dig and dig. I’m like o.k. she just said everything briefly but with the other interview I had to ask more question because it’s like I’m getting more involved in what the child is doing. (Candice)

*Comprehensibility*

All parent participants reported that they have absolutely no problems understanding the content of what is being communicated to them by their child’s teacher. Audley was quite frank in his explanation,

No sophistication. But you know at times teachers are of a profession and lot of teachers act a certain way, like a cut above the rest and they use language above my head, but it wasn’t like that. I was very comfortable. The teachers made me feel comfortable.
Audley’s perception of the teacher’s language at the parent-teacher interview echoed what others have postulated regarding the teacher’s use of understandable language. For example, “Using technical terms and educational jargon may irritate and confuse parents” (Lawler, 1991, p. 29). However, Littleton (1985) shared a different view. He coined the term “educationese” with regard to the technical terms teachers sometimes utilize in conferences. He argued that “some of the most mistrusted physicians and attorneys are those who use terminology and jargon that laypeople do not understand” (p. 29).

Audley spoke of the likelihood of teachers using specialized language. However he clearly stated that the interaction was devoid of any such language. This resulted in effective communication between his child’s teacher and himself.

Babette, a qualified teacher, experienced no challenge in understanding the language used by her child’s teacher. We can assume here that Babette is familiar with the jargon used by the teacher as her teaching degree gives her an advantage.

Teacher-dominated versus parent-dominated interaction

Of the six parent participants, only one expressed that he dominated the interview. Audley explained how this came about. “The gym teacher was a bit laid back so I dominated the interview.”

Audley’s reason for dominating the discussion was due to the teacher’s stance. It is admirable that the teacher applied his listening skills, but according to Lawler (1991) there should be a dialogue between the teacher and the parents. Lawler’s (1991) statement that the teacher should be a facilitator but not dominate the discussion counters Audley’s belief. He believes that the teacher is the expert who has all the knowledge to share and his job is to simply listen. Audley was asked which interview he preferred; the one that was teacher dominated or where he dominated the discussion. He replied, “The one where the teacher dominated.” He was then asked to justify his response, to which he added,

I have gone there for information concerning my child, I am not there to give them information concerning my child so they are the ones who are gonna tell me what. If I need to ask I ask but the teacher suppose to dominate that.
Faye commented on her parent-teacher interview with the following statement. “I had other things to add to it actually. I would prefer to steer the discussion because of the type of parent I am I would prefer to ask the questions.”

No comparison: Tell me about my child, not other children

The teacher was saying that she would catch up other people and she was telling me about other children. But I didn’t want to hear about other children, I want to hear about my child. (Donette)

Donette applied a louder register and her expression changed as she shared that:

She (Donna) was good at her timetable and hand writing. But they were teaching her a new technique of how to write and I wasn't having that. When I went to the school, the teacher was saying she wasn’t understanding it and I said she was here not even a year yet. So I was upset and she was saying that her son was like that too and now he was in university. So I told her don’t tell me about your son. I don’t even want to hear about the child sitting beside her in the classroom. I am here for her and not for anyone else.
The teacher told the principal that I was a little aggressive. So the principal called a meeting to resolve the issue.

The interaction between Donette and the teacher took a negative turn because of the comparison being made of her child with other children. While the teacher did not compare Donna with another student in the class, a comparison was made. Poulsen (2008), in his research on parent-teacher conferences, warned against this. He proposed grouping in quartile rankings as an alternative; e.g., Johnny is performing in the top quarter of the class. Parents may be more likely to embrace this approach.

The research does not focus on the perspective of the teacher, but from Candice’s perspective she claimed that she was treated unfairly. Often times it takes just a single incident to ruin the relationship between parents and teachers. Obviously, the absence of the warm greeting that was extended to the other parent at the conclusion of the interview was not extended to Candice at any point throughout her interview with her child’s teacher. This
disturbed her deeply and she departed the kindergarten classroom with that lasting impression of her child’s teacher.

Conversely, there are parents with whom teachers may have developed a relationship for one of many reasons, possibly because they have taught a number of their children or relatives and already know the parents. Thus, some parents may receive a more jovial greeting than other parents meeting the teacher for the first time. Teachers may demonstrate this behaviour innocently but it can easily be misconstrued, even potentially as an act of racism.

**Parent-student-teacher conference**

The kids are there with me and I will ask them why they are behaving like that. So I talk to them. (Faye)

Stephens (2006) and Countryman and Schroeder (1996) support Faye’s idea of having her children with her at interviews but extend this by suggesting that they should be given an opportunity to lead the conferences. In reference to the literature, Stephens stated that clear communication takes place when all three people involved are present -- the student, parent, and teacher. According to Countryman and Schroeder (1996), a conference which involves the students and evaluation should lead to effective conferences.

Within the TDSB, this may or may not be a common practice throughout as there does not appear to be a policy which governs these conferences. However, there may be some teachers or principals who have embraced it, thus making it a practice within their classrooms or schools respectively. Another point to consider within the middle and high schools is that students have different teachers for each subject. Therefore, while the thought of having student led conferences might be the ideal, it might not be feasible in all schools. Some students who attend middle and high schools are also at the age where they struggle with the parents being so involved in their school life and would rather take responsibility for themselves. Consequently, they would rather not be there with their parents but collect information and resources independently.
Generally, most of the parent participants seem to be comfortable when interacting with the teachers. They seem cognizant of the pitfalls as well as the bridges to effective interaction with their children’s teachers. Thus, whenever they are presented with mediocre levels of interaction, these are easily identified. The findings suggest that the Caribbean immigrant parents in the study desire to establish relationships with their children’s teachers and do not appreciate an aloof stance. They would like to be partners in the teaching and learning processes and do not seem to think that the CVE or Canadian English is a potential barrier.

Seemingly, there is a cry for longer scheduled parent-teacher conferences and for teachers to provide greater details about their children. The research indicates that there is a need for restructuring of parent-teacher conferences within schools so that Caribbean parents (and parents in general) can be more satisfied with the time spent with their children’s teachers. One parent felt that there was some perception of inequity in the time spent by teachers with parents of different ethnicities but this perception is not shared by the majority of participants.

**Question 4: What Meanings Do West Indian Immigrant Parents Give To Their Language Encounters With Teachers?**

The lens through which West Indian immigrant parents in this study interpret and understand their language encounters determines the types of interactions that they engage in with the teachers of their children. The experiences that they have had interacting with their children’s teachers -- whether positive or negative -- chart the way forward and influence successive interactions. Consequently, each participant possesses different perspectives but some might carry similarities. This section presents the perceptions of West Indian immigrant parents and how they make sense of their experiences when interacting with their children’s teachers.

West Indian immigrant parent participants have learned to negotiate between two varieties of English which has consequently taught them to inhabit a hybrid identity. It is with the construction of this hybrid identity that they are able to negotiate with ease various linguistic transactions within the two worlds. They call on their intuition and sometimes the societal pressure to determine which variety is appropriate for a given situation. From their perspective,
being able to use language to negotiate offers a sense of empowerment as opposed to a challenge or barrier. “My dialect connects me to my culture. As a Jamaican I am able to switch from Standard English to Caribbean dialect/patois because this is exactly what I practised whilst in Jamaica.” (Babette)

The CVE speakers who participated in the research celebrate the fact that their receptive skills enable them to communicate with the speakers of the dominant language. They do not perceive Canadian English as a barrier to effective communication with the teachers of their children. For example, Babette recounted, “I am usually quite comfortable or confident when interacting with my child’s teacher (s). There are no obvious barriers, so the time shared is usually well spent.”

Donette expressed a great feeling when she interacted with her child’s teacher. “Because she heard about me from other parents, and because I am so involved in the community centre at the school, the overall feeling is good. She knows not to go there. So I would say great.”

In fact, the perceptions held by both Babette and Connie were feelings of pride. “I tend to feel a sense of pride whenever I am asked to clarify or repeat what I am saying due to an accent/jargon difference, knowing that I have a unique accent or dialect.” (Babette).

“I really feel good speaking my Caribbean Language as an individual.” (Candice). While Connie mentioned that she was proud of her language and her identity, she was cognizant of the existing perceptions of some native speakers where Creole is sometimes viewed as an inferior language. She had come to terms with the notion that as a CVE speaker, she would sometimes be judged or treated unfairly based upon the variety of English she spoke.

Another meaning that some West Indian immigrant parents affixed to their language encounters was the need to protect their children from the damaging forces associated with Canadian English. Donette was a force to reckon with as it related to protecting Donna from the vehement ridicule that was supposedly caused by her “non-native” variety of English. She was willing to take whatever means necessary to put a stop to such denigration. “I was upset and I tell the principal how I feel. I told the principal that I will speak to her boss if I don’t get what I want.”
Her drive to challenge authority is propelled by her belief that her child should not be chastised because of her language.

*Making meaning of their meaning*

Some Caribbean immigrant parents celebrate the language that they speak while there are others who perceive that it is not a language that represents who they are in a “proper” way. As a Caribbean immigrant, I celebrate my linguistic background and also recognize and appreciate my role as an elementary school teacher in creating that connection between myself and Caribbean immigrant parents and students. The Caribbean immigrants in this study do understand and are able to speak Canadian English. They also boast the ability to negotiate in a variety of linguistic situations. The negative encounters that they may experience are not the determining factors in how they interact with teachers in general.
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

In summary, the study presents a description of the experiences and perceptions of Caribbean Variety of English speakers as they interact with elementary and secondary school-teachers in Toronto. It attempts to answer the following overarching question and sub-questions: What are the experiences and perceptions of Caribbean immigrant parents and their children with regards to the use of a Caribbean variety of English when interacting with teachers in Toronto? I approach this question by addressing the following sub-questions:

(1) How do Caribbean immigrant parents describe their interactions with their children’s teachers?

(2) How do Caribbean immigrant children describe their language use in the classroom?

(3) What factors do West Indian immigrant parents report that facilitate or impede effective interaction with their children’s teachers?

(4) What meanings do West Indian immigrant parents give to their language encounters with teachers?

While many interesting issues were raised through the interviews, I highlight a few points in concluding.

The interactions between Caribbean Variety of English speakers and teachers in Toronto range from unscheduled classroom visits, scheduled parent-teacher interviews, notes, verbal messages, to telephone calls. Their experiences and perceptions vary and are unique to each participant. Both parents and children participants express having meaningful interactions with the teachers, suggesting that the community of CVE speakers is interacting with teachers in the public school system in Toronto. This study provides encouraging findings that parent participants have a wealth of experience, knowledge, and perceptions that they are willing to share provided that an inclusive environment is created by their children’s teachers and schools.
This study allowed their voices to be heard as they celebrated the fact that they’re able to negotiate between the two varieties of English. They appear to have strong receptive skills and are empowered with rich linguistic and cultural backgrounds to rise above challenges that face them due to the use of the CVE. Notwithstanding, there are a few negative encounters and issues which provide implications and direction for future research for many people involved in the education of Caribbean immigrants.

From the immigrants’ perspectives, there are many factors that facilitate and impede the interaction between CVE speakers and teachers. These include the atmosphere created by the teacher during parent-teacher conferences, open communication and frequent visits, time constraints, comprehensibility, teacher dominated versus parent dominated interviews and parent-student-teacher conferences. With this information, we can infer that more work needs to be done in order to embrace Caribbean immigrants in the classrooms and the wider school communities.

**Recommendations for Policy Makers, Administrators, and Educators**

A longitudinal study of the experiences and perceptions of Caribbean Immigrant parents and children would be useful as the demographics of immigration from the Caribbean will likely continue to change. It would provide useful information to gatekeepers, policy makers, educators, teachers and support staff to plan more appropriately for Caribbean immigrant students in our public school system. Such a study might lead to more appropriate programming for these immigrant students who are sometimes placed in programs that are not geared to meeting their linguistic needs. Ongoing research in this area, might also provide greater insight on ways to improve interaction between speakers of CVE and school officials. Cultural community centre workers could plan programs which could benefit the Caribbean immigrant families.

With more inclusive educational practices, Caribbean immigrant families would feel more appreciated, validated, and more welcomed into the school community and the society at large knowing that their language is embraced. CVE speakers would also appreciate the fact that they have a voice in matters that concern them.
There is sufficient research that speaks to hosting effective parent-teacher interviews but many teachers do not possess the competence to effectively carry out these meetings with Caribbean immigrant parents. Therefore, training sessions could be developed within the schools to facilitate same. Future research with training is necessary as educators need to be knowledgeable of the various issues involved in an immigrant’s experience and how to use the wealth of linguistic and cultural knowledge they bring to the classroom to validate and empower them.

Implications

One of the major implications of the study is that the teaching of Canadian English should not be at the expense of the Caribbean variety of English. It is an important part of the students’ heritage and the linguistic differences should be embraced, not rejected. There is the fear among some Caribbean immigrants that if CVE continues to be given low prestige by some people, there may be a loss of language and culture of Caribbean immigrants in Toronto. CVE speakers should not be academically assessed based on their ability to speak or write Canadian English since that is not a true assessment of their academic credentials. It would be more appropriate for speakers of the CVE to be given additional opportunities to learn Canadian English to supplement – not replace – their current linguistic competencies.

Implicit in the findings is that an inclusive environment would be beneficial for Caribbean immigrant parents and children. This environment should be fostered in the classrooms and during parent-teacher encounters. Thus, reviewing curricula to address the needs of Caribbean immigrants and ensuring that these needs are met would increase the comfort level of the Caribbean immigrants in the study. Similarly, these adaptations would be applicable to other immigrants and offer them similar advantages.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research is therefore needed to capture the perception of immigrants from the other English-speaking Caribbean countries. It would be beneficial to research the criteria used to both place Caribbean students in ESL classes as well as the criteria that sees their departure from these classes. Another topic of possible interest for future research would be to gather more information on the writing skills of CVE speakers in the elementary, middle and high
schools in Toronto. Capturing the perspectives of both principals and teachers in Toronto with regards to their interactions with Caribbean immigrants in their schools would add new insight into this field of research.

Additionally, the uniqueness of Caribbean variety of English speakers poses a challenge for administrators and educators. While interpreters are provided for those immigrant parents whose mother tongue is not English, CVE speakers are usually not provided with any special accommodations. Yet, it appears they are not understood by some educators. Therefore, more research is needed on the linguistic and cultural characteristics of CVE and also on teaching varieties of English and this should be implemented as part of the curricula of teacher education. This study also provides a springboard for more in-depth research into other varieties of English.
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http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500015499


February 26, 2012

Dear Rev. ……………...:

I am a researcher affiliated with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). My research title is Silent Voices: The Experiences and Perceptions of Caribbean Immigrant Parents and Children regarding the use of a Caribbean variety of English when Interacting with Teachers in Toronto. The research seeks to explore the experiences and the perceptions of Caribbean immigrant parents and their children regarding the use of the Caribbean variety of English when interacting with teachers in Toronto. My sole purpose is to describe and to bring voice to the language encounters of the Caribbean immigrant parents and children; their thoughts and feelings relating to these encounters and the meanings they affix to them.

I have selected your church to host my focus group meetings because of its location and due to the fact that a number of people who attend your services have indicated their interest in my research. With your permission, I would like to host the meetings at a quiet area on the compound on alternate Saturdays between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. Each focus group will include four participants. At the end of each session, light refreshments will be served. At the end of the research, I would also like to offer suggestions on ways the parents in general can support their children at school and in particular how the Caribbean parents can effectively interact with the teachers of their children. With your permission I would like to share these suggestions through your weekly bulletin. I can assure you that no damage will be done to your property and that these parents and children will benefit from the findings of this research. This gesture would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

Karlene Stewart-Reid
Appendix B – Flyer Recruiting Participants

OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) Graduate Student

Seeks Caribbean Parents for Research Study

➢ Lived in the GTA for 2 years or less but not more than 5 years?

➢ Child in public school (Grades 3-12)?

➢ Willing to commit to 1 meeting per week on a Saturday?

If you answered “yes” to any of these three questions……

You can contribute greatly to our understanding of the use of Caribbean variety of English when interacting with teachers in the Toronto area.

Please contact Karlene Stewart-Reid for more information

416-XXX-XXXX/416-XXX-XXXX

XXXXXXXX@xxxxxxxx
Appendix C- Information and Consent Letter for Adults

Supervisor: Antoinette Gagné (XXXXXXXX) /416-XXX-XXXX

OSE Ethics Review Board: ethics.review@utoronto.ca /416-XXX-XXXX

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to voluntarily participate in a research project. The purpose of this letter is to give you the information you need to make an informed decision about whether or not you would like to participate. My name is Karlene Stewart-Reid and I am an OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) graduate student embarking on a research with the title, Silent Voices: The Experiences and Perceptions of Caribbean Immigrant Parents and Children Regarding the use of the Caribbean Variety of English when Interacting with Teachers in Toronto. You have been asked to participate because I believe that you can provide information that is deemed pertinent to this research.

The purpose of the research is to describe and bring voice to the language encounters of the Caribbean immigrant parents and their children; their thoughts and feelings relating to these encounters and the meanings they affix to them. If you take part in this study you will participate in filling out a Background information questionnaire independently and responding to interview questions within a focus group with three (3) other immigrants. There will be total of four (4) interview sessions on alternate Saturdays and each session may last approximately 2 hours. It will be audio-taped and a typed transcript will be made of the taped.

There are absolutely no risks involved in this research. You are free to decide not to participate and if you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without affecting your relationship with me, the researcher. Your participation will be anonymous and all information will be kept confidential.

Some of the benefits associated with participating in this research are; you will be privy to the findings presented in the study and you will get the opportunity for your voice to be heard through this research. If you have any questions please feel free to ask them whether before participating or while you are participating. I may be contacted at 416-xxx-xxxx or email me at.
If you would like to further discuss your rights as a participant you may also contact the Ethics Review Board at ethics.review@utoronto.ca /416-xxx-xxxx.

Yours Truly,

……………………………

Karlene Stewart-Reid (Researcher)

**Consent Form**

I agree to take part in this research that has been explained to me. A copy of this consent form will be given to you for your records.

_______________________                                      ________________________
Signature of Participant                                               Date
Appendix D - Information and Consent Letter for Children

(to be signed by parents)

Supervisor: Antoinette Gagné (xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx) /416-xxx-xxxx

OISE Ethics Review Board: ethics.review@utoronto.ca/416-xxx-xxxx

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a student at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and I am conducting a research on the topic, Silent Voices: The Experiences and Perceptions of Caribbean Immigrant Parents and Children Regarding the use of the Caribbean Variety of English when Interacting with Teachers in Toronto. My interest is in giving your child a medium through which he/she can share his/her experiences regarding interaction with teachers. I am therefore writing to ask your permission for your child to participate in this research.

The selected group will meet alternate Saturdays for approximately two months at the West Toronto Church at Jane and Wilson and from 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. or at the Holiness Worship Centre at Weston Road and Eglinton. The research in which your child is invited to participate is expected to be an enjoyable one but the decision about participation is yours. To help in this decision, a brief outline of the research will be provided. The child will be a part of a focus group with three other children. They will meet with the researcher; fill out a short questionnaire and respond to interview questions which will be audio-recorded. The sessions will last between 1 and 2 hours. At the end of each session the group will be served light refreshment.

The information shared by your child will be considered confidential and will be used for the sole purpose of this research. You may withdraw your permission at any time during the study without penalty by indication this decision to the researcher. Let me assure you that there are no risks involve in participating in this study.

Should there be any questions, concerns or comments, resulting in your child’s participation in the research please do not hesitate to contact me at; 416-xxx-xxxx/xxxxxxxx. We would appreciate it if you allow your child to participate in the research as he/she will become a
contributor to the body of research regarding the perceptions of immigrant students about their interaction with their teachers.

Having made the decision to allow your child to participate please complete the attached permission form and return it to me as soon as possible.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

……………………..

Karlene Stewart-Reid

**Consent Form**

I give permission for my child …………………………. to participate in this research. A copy of this consent form will be given to you for your records.

_________________________  __________________________
Parent’s Signature          Date
Appendix E - Background Information Sheet (Children Grades 7-12)

Thesis Title

Silent Voices: The Experiences and Perceptions of Caribbean Immigrant Parents and Children Regarding the use of the Caribbean Variety of English when Interacting with Teachers in Toronto

Instruction: Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge. All information will be handled with strict confidence.

Warm-up questions

1. What is your favourite subject in school? __________________________________________

2. Are you on a sports team at your school? ______________________________________
   If yes, which one? __________________________________________________________
   If no, why not? __________________________________________________________

3. Are you a member of a club at school? ______________________________________

4. Are you learning to play/can you play any musical instrument? ____________________
   If yes, which one? _________________________________________________________

5. Name three things that make you happy at school; ________________________________
   ________________________ and ______________________

6. What after school activities are you involved in?__________________________________

7. What are your hobbies? ______________________________________________________

8. During the week, how many hours per day do you usually spend watching TV?
   a. I don’t watch TV____, b. Less than 1 hour a day____, c. 1-2 hours a day____,
   d. 3-4 hours a day____, e. More than 4 hours a day____

Instruction: Please respond to items 1-10 below by filling in the relevant information in the blank spaces.

1. What is your age? ______________

2. What area of Toronto do you live in? __________________________________________

3. How long have you been living in Canada? Years ________ months _________________

4. Name of your School: _______________________________________________________
5. What Grade are you in? ______________________________________________________

6. Do you currently receive any kind of additional language support at school? Yes___ No___
   (6a) If yes, what kind of support do you receive? __________________________________

7. How many students are in your homeroom? 25 _____ 25-30 _____ more than 30 ______

8. Are there any other Caribbean immigrants in your class? Yes _____ No ______
   (8a) If yes, how many? 1 ______ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ More than 4 _____

9. What language do you speak at home? ________________________

10. What language do you speak at school? _________________________

11. How would you rate your ability to understand Canadian English? (Choose one answer)
    ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ___ Good, _____ Excellent

15. How would you rate your ability to speak Canadian English?
    ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ___ Good, _____ Excellent

16. How would you rate your ability to read Canadian English?
    ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ___ Good, _____ Excellent

17. How would you rate your ability to understand written Canadian English?
    ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ___ Good, _____ Excellent

18. How would you rate your ability to write using Canadian English?
    ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ___ Good, _____ Excellent
Appendix F - Background Information Sheet (Children Grades 3-6)

Thesis Title

Silent Voices: The Experiences and Perceptions of Caribbean Immigrant Parents and Children Regarding the use of the Caribbean Variety of English when Interacting with Teachers in Toronto

Instruction: Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge. All information will be handled with strict confidence.

Warm-up questions

1. What is your favourite subject in school? ____________________________________________
2. Are you on a sports team at your school? __________________________________________
   (2a) If yes, which one? ___________________________________________________________
   If no, why not? _________________________________________________________________
3. Are you a member of a club at school? ___________________________________________
4. Are you learning to play/can you play any musical instrument? ______________________
   (4a) If yes, which one? ___________________________________________________________________________
5. Name three things that make you happy at school; ________________________________
   _______________________________________ and ________________________________
6. What after school activities are you involved in? ________________________________
7. What are your hobbies? _________________________________________________________
8. During the week, how many hours per day do you usually spend watching TV?
   a. I don’t watch TV____, b. Less than 1 hour a day____, c. 1-2 hours a day____,
   d. 3-4 hours a day____, e. More than 4 hours a day____

Instruction: Please respond to items 1-9 below by filling in the relevant information in the blank spaces.
1. What is your age? ______________
2. What area of Toronto do you live in? ___________________________________________
3. How long have you been living in Canada? ________ years _____ months
4. Name of your School: ______________________________
5. What grade are you in? __________

6. Do you leave your classroom and go for lessons at another class when you are at school?
   Yes ________ No ________ Sometimes ________
   (5a) If yes, how often? Everyday _____ 2 days ______ Other __________

7. Are there other Caribbean students in your classes? Yes _____ No _____
   (6a) About how many of these students are in your class? 1___ 2___ 3___ 4.__ More than 4___

8. What language do you speak at home? ________________________________

9. Do you speak the same language at school? ________________________________

10. How would you rate your ability to understand Canadian English? (Choose one answer)
    ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ____ Good, _____ Excellent

11. How would you rate your ability to speak Canadian English?
    ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ____ Good, _____ Excellent

12. How would you rate your ability to read Canadian English?
    ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ____ Good, _____ Excellent

13. How would you rate your ability to understand written Canadian English?
    ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ____ Good, _____ Excellent

14. How would you rate your ability to write using Canadian English?
    ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ____ Good, _____ Excellent
Appendix G - Background Information Sheet (Parents/ Grandparents/ Caregivers)

Thesis Title

Silent Voices: The Experiences and Perceptions of Caribbean Immigrant Parents and Children Regarding the use of the Caribbean Variety of English when Interacting with Teachers in Toronto

Instruction: Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge. All information will be handled confidentially.

1. Age Category: 20-30 _____ 30-40 _____ 40-50 _____ 50-60 _____ Above 60 _____

2. Gender: Male_______ Female_______

3. How many children/grandchildren do you have? _______________

4. Identify the area in which you currently live ___________________

5. Country of Origin: ___Barbados, _____ Jamaica, ____Guyana, _____ Antigua, ______ Barbuda, _______Trinidad and Tobago, _____Dominican Republic, ______ St. Vincent, _____Grenadines, ______ Cuba, ______ Grenada, ______ St. Lucia

6. Number of children (age 9-17) residing in your home who attend public school. (Circle one)  
   1  2  3  4  5  More than 5 (please specify number) _______________

7. Age and Grade of each child: Child 1: Age _______ Grade ________, Child 2: Age _______ Grade ________, Child 3: Age _______ Grade ________, Child 4: Age _______ Grade ________, Child 5: Age _______ Grade ________ Note: Please use the back of the page if more than 5 children.

8. How long have you lived in Canada: Years_______ Months_________

9. How old were you when you came to Canada? _______________


11. Highest Level of Education completed: (Choose one)  
   __Elementary, ___High School, ____Junior Secondary, ____Vocational Trade School,  
   ____College, ____Certificate, ____Undergraduate Degree, _____Graduate School, _____Other

12. Occupation Type:  a. General labour (e.g. nanny, waitress, cashier), b. Clerical worker (e.g. filing, book keeping, receptionist), c. Sales representative (e.g. telemarketing, retail sales representative), d. Health profession (e.g. nurse, dental assistant, etc.), e. Stay at home, f. Education & training (e.g. teacher, vocational instructors, college teachers, educational assistant),  g.
Automotive technician (e.g. mechanic, parts distributor), h. Hairstylist, i. Other

13. What language do you speak when talking with the following people?
   a. close friends ___________________, b. co-workers ____________________, c. family members
      __________________, d. teachers ________________________

14. How would you rate your ability to understand Canadian English? (Choose one answer)
   ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ___ Good, _____ Excellent

15. How would you rate your ability to speak Canadian English?
   ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ___ Good, _____ Excellent

16. How would you rate your ability to read Canadian English?
   ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ___ Good, _____ Excellent

17. How would you rate your ability to understand written Canadian English?
   ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ___ Good, ______ Excellent

18. How would you rate your ability to write using Canadian English?
   ___ Poor, ___ Fair, ___ Good, _____ Excellent

19. How closely connected is your language to who you are as an individual/?
   ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________

   Thank you for your time!
Appendix H - Interview Guide for Children

1. When talking to your teacher, is it the teacher who usually starts the discussion?

2. Do you willingly ask questions or start the conversation?
   
   (2a) If yes, how frequently? Very often? _____ Sometimes? ______ Rarely? ______

3. Does your teacher sometimes rephrase her questions when she is talking with you? (E.g. changes the way she said it first and say it another way)
   
   (3a) If so, how often have you noticed that your teacher does this?
   
   ___ All the time?
   ___ Frequently?
   ___ Sometimes?

4. How often does your teacher use gestures (e.g. movement of hands) to explain what she/he is saying? Frequently?.................... Sometimes?................... Occasionally?..........................

5. How often do you ask for clarification? (E.g. you don’t understand and you ask the teacher to explain).
   
   ___ Very often?
   ___ Occasionally?
   ___ Never? (Why is it that you never ask for clarification? Is it that you always understand what is being said?)

6. Have you ever been asked by your teacher to repeat yourself?

7. How frequently does this happen?
   
   ___ Very often?
   ___ Occasionally?
   ___ Never?

8. How does this make you feel?

9. Tell me about a conversation you’ve had with your teacher that stands out in your mind/that you’ll never forget?

10. Have you ever felt like you’re being ignored by your teacher?

11. What variety of English does your teacher speak in the classroom?

12. When responding to questions in class, do you speak using the dialect? (E.g. Do you speak the way you normally speak or do you try to change the way you speak?)
12. In your opinion, where do you feel more comfortable speaking the Caribbean variety of English?

13. How would you describe your home language?

14. How would you describe the way the Canadians speak English?

15. How frequently have you been asked to clarify what you are saying? (E.g. you are being asked to explain what you are saying)
   __ Very often?
   __ Occasionally?
   __ Never?

16. What is your reaction when this happens?

17. How does this make you feel?

18. Do you speak to your friends using Caribbean dialect?

19. Describe a situation you were able to speak using Caribbean English in class?

20. Describe a time your teacher had to rephrase your response?

21. Do you get frequent opportunities to respond to questions in class?

22. Does your teacher sometimes compliment (praise) you when you answer questions correctly?

23. How would you rate your ability to understand and speak Canadian English?
   __ Excellent?
   __ Good?
   __ Fair?
   __ Poor?

24. How would you rate your ability to write Canadian English?
   __ Excellent
   __ Good
   __ Fair
   __ Poor
Appendix I - Parents’ Interview Guide

1. How frequently do you interact with your child’s teacher?
   __Very frequently?
   __Occasionally?
   __Never?

2. Describe an encounter that stands out in your mind that you’ve had with your child’s teacher. Describe how you felt.

3. How frequently do you ask for clarification?
   __Very frequently?
   __Occasionally?
   __Never?

4. How frequently have you been asked to clarify / repeat what you are saying?
   __Very frequently?
   __Occasionally?
   __Never?

5. What is your reaction when this happens?

6. How does this make you feel?

7. Describe how you feel when you are being understood by your child’s teacher.

8. Describe how you feel when you are not being understood by your child’s teacher.

9. State some ways in which your child’s teacher interacts with you, that you are happy with?

10. Describe some ways in which you think your child’s teacher could be more effective when talking with you.

11. How would you rate your understanding of the content of the communication regarding your child?
   __Poor?
   __Fair?
   __Good?
   __Excellent?

12. Describe what a parent-teacher interview you have been to sounds like.

13. Describe your overall feelings about interacting with your child’s teacher. (E.g. Do you get nervous / anxious?)