

**PARENTS-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS: THE CASE OF
CHINESE CHILDREN IN FRENCH IMMERSION IN
VANCOUVER, BC**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between minority language parents and schools. The research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with the parents to collect their thoughts and preferences in regards to their experiences and involvement at their children's schools as well as their perspective on the inclusion of their culture and language as a part of the school program. The themes which emerge from the data include the language barrier, logistics, the role of parents and teachers, the school as an authority and the importance of the relationship with the teacher. Different cultural and language inclusion models for schools are discussed as possible ways of improving the relationship between home and school, a particular focus is given to incorporating a plurilingual and pluricultural approach to education.

Keywords: home-school relationships; minority-language parents; language barriers; role of teachers; plurilingualism

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Overview

This document began as a question, which is formulated from my experience as a professional educator, faced with the challenge of trying to understand how minority-language parents communicate with the school staff in a French Immersion setting. This introduction includes a description of the context surrounding the communication between minority-language parents and school staff, a review of the problem along with the conceptual framework and the methodology used to investigate this issue; and an overview of the organizational structure and writing process involved in drafting the chapter.

The relationship between individuals in schools and families is well researched and the findings are clear: a strong family-school relationship leads to student success (Epstein & Saunders, 2000, Marcon, 1999, Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Henderson and Mapp's (2002) summative review of findings from 51 studies of family, school and community relationships entitled "A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement reports a positive relationship between family-community participation in school life and student success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). However, in my personal experience as a French Immersion teacher of students who are generally successful in school, I often observe that some families are very involved with school functions and activities and other families are not

actively engaged. I wonder how families that struggle with English are included in school life, more specifically in a French Immersion program. Upon reflection of my own teaching practice I realize that I do not know how to best include these families and I question whether other teachers in my school district are facing the same challenges.

The project described in this study is a part of a program of research initiated by Hoskyn, Moore, and Dagenais entitled “Multilingual Development of Children in Early French Immersion Programs”. This larger project examines the multilingual linguistic development of 40 Chinese speaking families who enrolled their children in French Immersion. Thirteen of the forty families volunteered to participate in a semi-structured interview to gather information that contributes to a better understanding of the literacy practices within the home and the community. A portion of the interview, that which was used for this project, probed the nature of the home-school relationship.

Findings from research previously on the involvement of minority-language parents and cultural-linguistic inclusion, present an interesting dilemma. On the one hand, the results suggest that it is essential to have parent involvement in school life to promote student success, at the same time, it seems that there is a general lack of agreement within the academic community on how this should be done. Furthermore, how a teacher could include minority-language parents if there was a distinct lack of home-school communication is unclear.

For me, this project presents a unique opportunity to examine the application of past research findings to a specific case: Chinese families with

children in French Immersion. In this case study, I also want to know about how Chinese families view their communication and involvement with the school. I was also interested in finding out what parents would like to see in terms of communication, as well as cultural and linguistic inclusion (as discussed further in chapter 2) within the classroom. The questions that I then formed centered on this comparison.

1.2 The organization of the thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. The following chapter is the conceptual framework from which I formulated my questions and anchored my thinking around the topics of communication between minority-language families and schools and cultural-linguistic inclusion. In this chapter, I elaborate the differing perspectives from the academic community on whether and how minority-language families should communicate and be involved in their children's schooling.

The conceptual framework behind this paper focuses on research previously conducted that informs us about the communication between parents and educators, specifically from the perspective of the parents. I have used research based on both traditional forms of communication between school educators and families, as well as less common forms of interaction. While I would prefer to use research that looked at the same cultural group as the participants in this study, that being Chinese families, there is limited work in this area and so I have expanded my review to research done on a variety of

minority-language groups and the challenges they encounter in their communications with the school educators.

Some studies in the literature describe the importance of parent involvement at school for student success (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). Other theorists and research findings explain how commonly used models for parent involvement can be problematic for serving the communicative needs of minority-language families (Epstein, 1995, Daniel-White, 2002). Additionally, research is available that highlights the experiences of various minority groups in their involvement, or lack thereof, with their school community (Pena, 2000, Lee, 2005, Lahman & Park, 2004). These areas are elaborated on in more detail in the chapter that follows.

Chapter three explains the methodology used to uncover what Chinese families want in terms of their cultural and linguistic inclusion at school as well as their perceptions of how they communicate with the school. I chose to follow a methodology that would integrate an “explicit purpose, ethnographic explanations and ethnographic questions” (Spradley, 1979). The methodology for this project is based on an ethnographic case study approach, as elaborated by Karsenti and Demers (2004) and Spradley (1979). The method of using semi-structured interviews to probe these issues is consistent with a methodology used by Dagenais and Day in their research on home language practices of trilingual children in French Immersion (Dagenais, 2003, Dagenais & Day, 1999).

In chapter four, I present the findings of the research grouped by themes consistent with the conceptual framework discussed in chapter two. While there

are some similarities between the findings from research on families from this study and those found in the literature from chapter two, there are some important differences. Some of the similarities include the significance of the language barrier as an impediment to home-school communication, the logistical difficulty for working parents to find time to be involved in the school community, and the ambiguous nature of the role of parents and teachers in education. One significant difference between the families in this study and those in other studies of this nature was the importance of the relationship with the teacher and how it influences the way in which minority-language parents view their relationship to the school.

In chapter five, I present three different approaches to moving forward in the area of home-school communication with minority-language families. It is important to highlight findings from the study within different theoretical perspectives on the issue of minority-language inclusion in schools. As such, I initially include an overview of different philosophies. Thus, I attempt to use a multitude of perspectives to guide my conversations with participating parents. One such perspective is taken from Daniel-White's (2002) research on minority-language parent inclusion, where she cautions against using a blanket model of parent participation in school life based on white middle class families. Instead, she suggests a model more inclusive of minority-language parent beliefs and goals for their children's learning as outlined in chapter 2.

Another body of research indicates, similar to Daniel-White's perspective, that to better include minority families, their culture and language need to be

integrated as a part of school and more specifically, classroom life. Delpit (2006) encourages teachers to include the language and culture of all students in the classroom as a way of bringing relevance to the curriculum and valuing the cultural identity of individual students. Moll, Amanti, Neff et Gonzalez (1992) introduce the notion of 'funds of knowledge' which was based on the inclusion of minority community members knowledge and skills into the school as a way of validating the community.

However, not all research in this area is supportive of minority culture inclusion in the classroom. Gee (2001) offers the notion of discourse as an identity kit (a representation of self) and adds that unless all the pieces of the kit are intact, minority students will never be a part of the majority group. Au and Raphael (2000) caution similarly against cultural inclusion by arguing that minority parents may send their children to school to acquire majority language, culture and knowledge.

I will suggest that the degree and manner in which immigrant minority language families interact respectfully with the majority culture, in the context of French Immersion school programs, depends primarily on the development of a plurilingual and pluricultural approach. In order to achieve this, the school actors must consider the backgrounds and self-perceptions of immigrant students and their families, and must develop a sensitivity to their specific needs.

In summary, my ethnographic case study based on interviews, which focused on minority-language parent involvement in French immersion schools, reveals findings around the importance of language barriers and teacher-family

relations. This data, together with findings from previous research, lead me to identify important factors in moving forward to improve communication between minority-language parents and French immersion schools.

CHAPTER 2 - CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Importance of Parent-School Communications

The association between a strong family-school relationship and student success is well researched. Findings from the vast number of studies in this area clearly indicate that parent involvement at school can take many forms and takes place across race, socio-economic status, and levels of education. Furthermore, parent-involvement has an impact on student success regardless of the age of the children. Below I have highlighted a few key studies that demonstrate these findings and the variety of situations to which they apply.

Phillipps, Smith, and Witted (1985) study parent involvement in schools situated in 22 districts in the Milwaukee area. The findings indicate that parent involvement is associated with higher school performance after the variance due to factors related to socio economic status, grade level of the students, or location within the area is taken into account. Similarly, Marcon's (1999) 3 year study of parent involvement, defined as parent teacher conferences, home visits, volunteering at school, and extended class visits among 708 pre-schoolers in Washington, D.C. found that when parents are highly involved at school their children perform better on a variety of school-related skills including verbal, math/science, social/work habits and physical.

Findings from other studies support the notion that parent involvement at school promotes the academic success of children. Miedel and Reynolds's (1999) longitudinal study of school involvement of 704 parents of eighth graders found that the degree to which parents participate during the preschool and kindergarten years of their child's education is associated with their children's ability to read. Additionally, in this study, parents with high levels of involvement have children who are more likely to be promoted to the next grade and less likely to require special services. In their conclusion, Miedel and Reynolds suggest that "parent involvement programs can be a protective factor in overcoming risk conditions such as poverty". (p. 397).

In the same vein, Epstein and Sanders' (2000) review of research affirms four general findings which taken together, indicate that school, family, and community partnerships are facilitative of children's success in school. The relationship between school staff and families indicates a lack of communication and awareness on the part of both parties as to what the other values. Epstein and Sanders report that teachers are generally unaware of parents' goals for their children. Similarly, most parents are unfamiliar with the programs at their child's school and what teachers expect of them. Typically, better-educated families are more involved at school. However, families with less education or a lower income become equally involved if schools employ effective programs to support and sustain this involvement.

Henderson and Mapp's (2002) summative document of research in family, school and community relationships came to a similar conclusion in that family-

community participation in school life is positively associated with student success. According to Henderson and Mapp, much of the research focuses on school-centric concepts of parent involvement whereby the school defines appropriate and productive parent involvement. Parents' interpretation of what involvement should look like is generally not considered. Indeed, an area of further research involves focusing more on culturally appropriate parent involvement.

2.2 Involvement Defined

2.2.1 School centric involvement

While it is clear that parent involvement gives children a greater chance for academic success, the structure for involvement can take many forms. Edwards and Warin (1999) suggest that schools enlist the help of parents to meet the school's needs, not the inverse. Schools know what type of involvement they would like to have to support the learners and would prefer if all families supported the school and learning in a consistent, similar way. The authors mention the need for schools to use parents as a way to meet the pressures of teaching the curriculum and achieving government standards.

If parents could be home tutors the effort of teachers in encouraging parental involvement would be worthwhile. If that expectation was unrealistic, at least barriers between home and school could be eroded to the extent that parents could value the efforts of the school, ensure attendance and demonstrate their support of the school to their children so that pressure on hard-pressed teachers could be eased. (Edwards & Warin, 1999, p. 12)

In this example, there is not a great deal of concern as to what strengths individual parents might have to offer the school, nor what type of support

parents would like to engage in. There is no discussion of parental values in the education of their children. The primary focus is that of the school, it is the institution with power and status.

Scribner, Young and Pedroza (1999) affirm findings from this analysis of school centric involvement. They suggest that the most important goal for schools is student achievement and therefore the main purpose of parent involvement is to further this goal. Sometimes, this focus of the school goal can be in opposition to parent and community values and concerns. Furthermore, within the school the definition of parent involvement tends to come from the schools rather than the parents. Educators within schools create forms of parent involvement that conform to school goals and that are convenient and relatively easy for them to adopt. Parent ideas about their involvement are traditionally viewed by teachers as less important and less valid as a form of student support. According to Scribner, Young and Pedroza (1999), parents have an interest in the whole child, including the social and emotional development, whereas educators within the school tend to focus solely on academic outcomes. This contrast is the basis for what forms of parent involvement are the most valuable from the varying perspectives.

2.2.2 Types of parent involvement in schools defined

In her seminal work on parent involvement, Joyce Epstein (1995) creates a framework for six major types of parent involvement. The different types include a variety of practices that lead towards a school-family partnership.

However, each has their own challenges. Her emphasis throughout the framework is on caring, defined as trusting and respecting.

Her framework for involvement in a caring and meaningful way is as follows:

Type 1 Parenting – Assisting families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students, as well as assisting schools to understand families

Type 2 Communicating – Conducting effective communications from school-to-home and from home-to-school about school programs and student progress

Type 3 Volunteering – Organizing volunteers and audiences to support the school and students. Providing volunteer opportunities in various locations and at various times

Type 4 Learning at Home – Involving families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions

Type 5 Decision Making – Including families as participants in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives

Type 6 Collaborating with the Community – Coordinating resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and providing services to the community (p. 710)

The American National Parent Teacher Association as of 1998 adopted this framework as guidelines for schools and families. Moreover, The Canadian Home and School Federation (2004) published a discussion paper, that promotes using an expanded definition of parent involvement inline with Epstein's work. The desire on behalf of the parents at national levels to develop of a new vision of parent involvement, speaks to the frustration and strain between schools and parents when it comes to supporting children in their learning.

Epstein summarizes the relationship between schools and families in the following way:

Schools have choices. There are two common approaches to involving families in schools and in their children's education. One approach emphasizes conflict and views the school as a battleground. The conditions and relationships in this kind of environment guarantee power struggles and disharmony. The other approach emphasizes partnership and views the school as a homeland. The conditions and relationships in this kind of environment invite power sharing and mutual respect and allow energies to be directed toward activities that foster student learning and development (Epstein, 1995, p. 708).

Epstein draws attention to what the relationship between schools and parents could be, given a shift in paradigm as related to parent involvement. As seen in the above quotation, Epstein believes there is clearly a need for schools to widen their vision of parent involvement and to begin to see what natural strength parents have, which can be used to support learning in a variety of ways and across a variety of definitions. Schools are being called upon to include parent support towards the academic success of children, but increasingly there is a demand for them to also recognize parents' goals for the development of their children. Epstein's comments suggest that there is a choice to be made by schools in how they come to include, involve and define partnerships with parents.

This parent involvement then requires mediation and negotiation for each situation due to the complex nature of individual experiences. Jacquet, Moore and Sabatier (2008) describe the necessity of having each of the actors involved; teachers, parents etc, being aware of the importance of family histories as well as school based needs and demands. This communication should be purposeful

in its design and yet sensitive to the diverse and complex circumstances of the individual actors. The authors go on to emphasize the need for schools to listen and allow the voice of parents to come forward in the context of the here and now. The past for these families needs to be valued and the distance between schools and families can be reduced by having common connections which lead to integration without losing a sense of self on the part of either the school or the families which it serves. This includes an acknowledgement of families being between cultures, they are not totally a part of the culture from which they came nor are they fully a part of this new culture they have joined, but rather at a delicate in between. The school's role is to then, act as mediator to build the connections between the past and the present, all the while honouring the process for these new families. (Jacquet, More & Sabatier, 2008).

While focusing specifically on plurilingual literacy, Dagenais and Moore (2008) draw our attention to the important role of representations constructed by parents of Chinese children. I can incorporate their findings on the importance of these representations constructed in our discussion of successful parent-involvement. Dagenais and More (2008) suggest that families are able to move from a minority group identity to a Canadian citizen identity depending on the representations they create in conjunction with their community, including schools. The context of plurilingualism poses its own set of complexities and merits further comment.

2.3 Plurilingualism

All of the participants in this study are plurilingual. Moore and Gajo (2009) define the concept as “the study of individual’s repertoires and agency in several languages” (p. 2). The authors go on to explain that a plurilingual individual uses different languages at different times for different reasons and with different people, and due to this complex communication structure individuals develop differing levels of competence across their languages (Moore & Gajo, 2009). Traditional views of bilingualism and multilingualism suggest that such an individual should focus on mastery of a language to a native-like degree of fluency (Bloomfield, 1933). Dabène (1994) explains that Bloomfield’s position is no longer accepted within academic discourses research on the views of minorities has shown that they feel that their English is not good enough to communicate with teachers and schools (Pena, 2000).

Lüdi (1995) discusses the notion of a plurilingual identity whereby individuals use aspects of their linguistic repertoire in specific situations. This identity shapes an individual’s perceptions and experiences as they interact with and perceive others. Similarly, Goffman (1963) describes how the perception of others by individuals leads to a comparison of them to typical social norms. Plurilinguals then face belonging to a certain identity group and not others. In a largely monolingual society, this would put plurilinguals apart and distinguish them as other by the cultural or linguistic majority.

Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism are concepts that do not appear to be well understood by professionals in schools as seen by the volume of research

lamenting the minimal development of their positive relationships with minority families (Pena, 2000, Lee, 2005, Daniel-White, 2002, Lahman & Park 2004). If school staff were more aware of plurilingualism, the quality of their communicative relationships with minority language families would certainly be improved. Additionally, Castellotti & Moore (2005) argue that the simple state of being plurilingual is insufficient to reap the full benefits that this linguistic repertoire offers. An active acknowledgement and fostering of plurilingualism will result in the full development of plurilingual assets. Recognition and support for plurilingualism is an important way schools can continue to strive for social equity (Moore & Gajo, 2009). Thus it is up to schools to promote the advantages of plurilingualism, thereby de-emphasizing the notion of plurilinguals being “other” in relation to the monolingualistic majority.

2.4 Challenges facing Minority families and their relationship with schools

In parent partnerships with schools, parents are often presented as a group with demands, needs and goals. This is evident through national, provincial and district parent associations such as: the British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, the Canadian Home and School Federation and the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, to name but a few, where discussions about relevant issues are held among parents who have seemingly generic or common concerns (BCCPAC, CHSF, OFHSA). Parents within these groups may also participate in advocacy groups at the national level with a more specific focus, such as the Canadian Parents for

French (CPF), and at the provincial and district level by participating in chapters that address issues specific to their school program and therefore their local needs (CPF, 2003).

However, a body of research, suggests that parents from minority cultures may not have the same needs, concerns, values and assumptions about schooling as compared to their white middle-class counterparts, yet there is no association to represent these differing perspectives. The following two sections will look at some of the research highlighting challenges specifically for minority parents and their partnership with schools, and then move specifically to examine the case of Chinese parents.

2.4.1 Minority-culture groups in general

Much research has focused on the communicative intersection of minority-culture parents and educators within schools. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) explore the attitudes and relationships between parents and schools of immigrant families in Central California. The study participants attended an elementary school primarily composed of Black, Hispanic and Samoan families with low incomes.

This study initially reveals that the school and school officials believe parents to be 'lazy, irresponsible and apathetic' (p. 85) regarding school involvement and that these attitudes are linked to poor performance of the students. However, further inquiry shows that parents are very opinionated and interested in ways to increase their involvement at home and at school. This

response by the school educators is typical of a school centric concept of parent involvement and communication.

Further study by Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) reveals that parents often have a feeling of guilt, inadequacy or regret when they are unable to attend meetings, often because they feel the structured meeting setting is the only setting they can have their opinions heard. They often cite that they have limited time, other engagements and priorities, or they do not understand the language spoken (i.e., the language barrier) as reasons for the inability to attend meetings and be more involved in school. Parents who wish for increased opportunity to become involved often remark how they would like to help, but feel limited by their own education or skill set. One parent said 'I wish there were more practical things for me to do with the kids, such as sewing and maybe carpentry' (p. 89).

Additional questioning by the researchers reveals the contrasting roles parents see themselves and teachers performing. Many parents see teachers as an extension of the family, essentially viewing the teacher as another parent. For example, the Mexican families see the teacher-as-parent role as a natural relationship as opposed to separate spheres or relationships.

The teacher is like a second parent. School is where their behavior is formed, apart from the home. The school is perhaps more important because I cannot be at home very much; I must work. So the school plays an important role in doing what I cannot (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001, p. 90).

The teacher-as-parent role is often viewed only as a one way relationship—the parents do not view themselves as teachers. This is thought to be a result of language and skill barriers, as well as the idea that teachers are

trained to teach, where as parents are not—so they should not interfere with the job of teaching.

A final aspect of this article reveals a possible reason for the lack of involvement in schools from parents. Parents often complain that the only time the school educator contacts them (other than the prescribed, formal meetings) is when something is wrong. As a result, their interactions with teachers and school officials are often negative, such as having to solve a problem or deal with an issue rather than simply discussing their child's progress or something positive they accomplished.

This article highlights the gamut of challenges facing parent involvement at school in the school centric model. Clearly, parents feel that their contributions are inadequate and desire other modes for supporting the school and their children.

In a study of parental involvement among 160 families with children in elementary schools in central California, Erickson, Rodriguez, Hoff and Garcia (1996) hypothesize that teachers are less satisfied with the level of parental involvement among minority-culture families and they are more understanding of the needs of white families. The results show there is no significant difference in the level of satisfaction from either group of families but that white families have a significantly higher level of satisfaction than minority-culture parents because they feel that the teachers understood their concerns and needs.

The article acknowledges this is contrary to other findings that show minority-culture parents are less satisfied and content with home-school relations

than white families. They attribute this difference in part to the fact that they only study one school, that nearly half of the parental surveys were not completed. The reason why many of the surveys were not completed is attributed to the idea that some cultures don't like to draw attention to themselves with negative opinions or may view the school as the 'authority' and not want to question them (p. 9).

Daniel-White (2002) describes attempts by some school districts to actively engage minority families in school activities/work. The author suggests that the current mode of parental involvement consists of reading to their children, helping with homework and buying supplies and if they do not do these things, they are neglecting their duties as parents (p. 31). The author points out some flaws in this approach, primarily that the language of the home may be inconsistent with that of the school and the barrier that this discrepancy can create for minority families. Reading and helping with homework both require some level of proficiency in the language of instruction and if the parents do not have those language skills they can be 'negligent' in their role as parent-as-teacher.

This approach also ignores cultural differences in communication and assumes that the parents of the children are aware that to be successful parents, they need to communicate with the school in this way. If their culture does not use this model of parental involvement, they can be 'negligent' of their roles without even knowing what that role is.

Pena (2000) explores the involvement of Mexican-American parents in their children's education. Pena describes the concerns about successful parent involvement in schools. There is a lack of access points, where parents can enter into school life and meet with teachers. She continues by arguing that teachers do not value the informal meeting opportunities with parents. Additionally, Pena cites the many reasons for parents not being involved in school activities. These include minimal opportunities for involvement, educational jargon, logistics, language, culture and socio-economic barriers as well as parents own negative school experiences (p. 34).

Parent involvement is also influenced by cultural differences between the parents and the educators within the school. This can influence how parents become involved. Furthermore, Pena states that teachers assume that a lack of parent presence indicates that parents are not interested in the school whereas she notes, in the case of Mexican-American parents, the belief is that home and school should not interfere with each other. It is interesting to note that the studies to which Pena is referring to (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995, Carrasquillo & London, 1993, Moles & D'Angelo, 1993) are in opposition to findings from Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001).

The main question directing Pena's study was "how Mexican-American parents are or are not involved and what factors influence their involvement" (p. 44). This qualitative study involves interviews with parents from elementary schools in urban Texas. Pena reports that the language barrier significantly interfered with the parents' ability to participate at school. Another important

factor in parent involvement is the presence of smaller parent groups with power within the school excluding the Spanish speaking parents from meetings and decision making opportunities. Low levels of education of some Mexican-American parents is another challenge for home-school communication. Unwritten customs and rules around school expectations are an area of confusion for parents who cannot read the language of the notices and who may differ in the assumptions they make as parents. Attitudes of the school staff plays an important role in that teachers want more involvement by the parents but are unwilling to take on perceived extra work (p. 49). Often, Mexican-American parents in this study note further challenges including transportation barriers, work schedules and other family commitments as reasons why they struggle to participate at school.

These studies together tell a story of how communication between minority parents and the school is faced with a myriad of challenges. The degree to which parents should be involved at school, and how, seems to be fraught with difficulty.

2.4.2 Barriers to Communication

Language Barriers

Among research related to parent-school relationships, the most common barrier to the relationship is a language barrier, whether real or perceived. Whether Asian, Mexican, Eastern European or other cultures are sampled, findings remain consistent with respect to the constraints of using a minority-language when trying to engage in the school. Pena (2000) says: "Language was

particularly influential in determining the activities in which parents chose to participate” (p. 46). She argues that as a result of the language barrier between the parents and the school, communication was limited and this led to frustration and an unhealthy relationship. Pena’s article focuses on how the language barrier discourages parents from participating, understanding or even attending organized meetings at the school. Pena uses one example where a Spanish-speaking parent is unable to participate at official school meetings because she does not speak English. “The language issue influenced Mrs. Chavez’s ability to actively participate at the meetings. She explained that frequently she did not voice her questions or concerns because her ability to understand English was limited...” (p. 47). Speaking about a different set of meetings, Mrs. Chavez remarked “I came to one meeting last year...all the time Mrs. Caro (the school principal) was talking, she talked in English. She never once spoke in Spanish and half the people there didn’t understand English” (p. 47).

Other articles yield similar conclusions. Soyoung Lee (2005) describes a Korean parent who felt completely isolated by her lack of English.

I was humiliated. I remember I sat in the corner seat and I came out of the room quietly in the middle of it. No one knows that feeling unless you’ve been put in such a situation. Believe me, I wanted to be part of it, and that’s why I was there. We don’t go to these things to waste time. Everyone is busy, but I couldn’t understand, follow what they were talking about, and then I sat there thinking ‘This is not going to help me or them’. And so I just left... It’s always centered around the English-speaking parents, everything, not just the language. (Lee, 2005, p. 302)

Lee's article relates other stories of Korean parents who endured similar situations and were left with similar feelings of disenfranchisement and helplessness.

A final example of the barrier to parent involvement in meetings and other public activities comes from Teb (1997). The author describes the situation for Hmong parents who, for several reasons, feel alienated and unable to help even though they wish they could. "Parent meetings called by school staff are often perceived by schools as a solution to family/school communication problems, but parents frequently see them as another barrier to be overcome" (p. 11). Another quote reflects the frustration seen by immigrant families. "In one school district, no Cambodian parents went to school meetings or called the school during the entire year 'because we do not understand what was said or why', explained one parent" (p. 12).

A second type of language barrier relates to immigrant families being unable to help their children with their English as they lack the language skills to do so. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) argue that the language barrier has rendered the parents unable to help with their children's homework and therefore created a boundary so that parents felt they could no longer participate. Quoting a Mexican parent who said "I cannot help with homework because I don't speak English. I can help my little daughter with numbers and her ABC's. I can help my fourth grader with some of the math. But then I tell them they just have to ask the teacher other times" (p. 88) In this quote they list language barrier as just one of the impediments to parental involvement.

A third major category within the language barrier umbrella revolves around how the barrier prevents parents for interacting with teachers in an informal way, outside of the formal meetings and scheduled interviews. Lahman and Park (2004) describes a Korean family who's 5 year old daughter attends school in the United States. The mother, Jae Min talks about how she wants to volunteer and talk to her daughter's teacher, but feels as though she is unable. "Sometimes I have a lot of questions for Mi Young's teacher, but it is hard to ask...I feel sorry that I don't volunteer or participate in school. Her teacher might be thinking that Korean parents are not active. When I hear about parents' volunteering activities, I want to do it, but I say to myself, well, I can't do it because of English' (p. 139). Here, the mother feels as though she cannot participate because she feels her language skills are not good enough, even though she wishes she could.

This language barrier, whether real or perceived, can seriously limit the ability of immigrant parents to communicate with the school as well as with their children about homework and other information from school.

Logistics

There are several different ways logistical concerns can prevent or limit parent-school communication and interaction. Whether these problems are parents at work, parents with other commitments, transportation issues or others, the result is the same—a barrier to communication.

Teb (1997) describes Cambodian families who are unable to participate in meetings and other events hosted by the school because they cannot drive or

arrange transportation in the limited time available to them. 'Many Hmong mothers, for example, still do not drive' (p. 11). Many Cambodian parents in this study expressed concern that they cannot attend parent-teacher meetings and other events simply because they cannot get there.

Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) describe families who have too many other obligations to attend school functions. "Parents pointed to work, child care, church, and household chores as obligations that hindered their involvement in schooling... The grandmothers with primary responsibility for their school-aged children pointed to their ill health, which limited their mobility and allowed for only infrequent trips outside their home" (p. 91).

Lee (2005) lists time conflicts as a major reason for the lack of parental involvement. She uses the example of Korean parents who often work at jobs that don't conform to 'regular' 9-5 working hours. Because of this, they cannot attend meetings that are scheduled for parents assuming that they work typical hours. "The scheduling of the meetings and various school events unfairly predetermined which of the parents could and could not participate. The time selectively favoured those parents who had regular 9 to 5 jobs and/or those who stayed at home with their children" (p. 304).

These are some examples of the difficulties many immigrant families face with regards to involvement in their children's schooling. Simply having access or the time to be involved is limiting their ability to interact with their children's schooling.

School as Authority

Lee (2005) discusses Korean parents' culture of trusting and respecting teachers, which discourages parents to question or interact with teachers. "Many of the Korean parents mentioned that their orientation towards authority figure was something that they had culturally inherited" (p. 305). Korean parents point out in interviews that their respect for authority came from their school-years when disrespect meant humiliation or physical retribution. "When we were growing up, I never did, but when, in school, a student challenged a teacher, or god forbid, a principal, they were not just punished. The punishments were bad but the worst thing that could happen was...teachers would say...the most humiliating thing that anyone could say to a child... We don't challenge authority, or at least, we used to not do so, our generation" (p. 305). In this case, the Korean parents respect is attached to fear of humiliation, a sentiment they find hard to question even in their new environment.

Another reason to not interact with teachers is that Korean parents view silence as a way of showing their trust. Any interaction with a teacher might then be interpreted as an open lack of trust in their competence and abilities. Even when parents do come to talk to the teachers, they are commonly very quiet and seemingly disengaged. A teacher speaking about the Korean parents says "The Korean parents, even when they come, don't talk. They are so quiet and to me that's a concern" (p. 306). In this case, both sides are misinterpreting the situation and in reality their intentions are not being communicated to the other party involved.

Moore and others (2008) explained in their study of the integration of young immigrant Africans in francophone schools in British Columbia, that the situations of these young immigrants are complex. In fact, Jacquet and others (2008) bring our attention to the multiplicity of African languages and cultures, as well as to the diversity of homeland contexts of these immigrant families. In addition, the opportunities for education on an ongoing basis may not have been available due to refugee status, displacement and the de structuring of African educational systems in the 1970's (Jacquet and others, 2008). Stakeholders in the British Columbian schools would benefit from understanding and identifying the issues surrounding the difficulties encountered by these immigrant students. Parents in this community indicated, in the Moore and others (2008) study, that the education of the children was considered to be the responsibility of the school. This is in line with what Pena (2000) noted in her study of latino families and helps us to understand why immigrant families may be reluctant to engage in extensive communications with the school.

In the same vein, Mannan and Blackwell (1992) argue that, among other reasons, the perceived authority of the school limits the levels of communication between parents and schools. "Parents feel unwelcome and psychologically threatened in starting communication with the teachers" (p. 220).

These cultural differences are another example of the barriers to parent-teacher communication and collaboration, made even more complex by the unique differences in cultural norms within each minority group.

Negative Communication/Parents History with Schools

Teb (1997) offers a differing notion of what involvement looks like also shapes the relationship, or lack thereof between parents and schools. The study describes families from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia who grew up under the French system of education where parents were forbidden from intervening in the education of their children. In this case, it would seem perfectly normal for the parents to not feel as though they need to interact with their teacher as their own parents did not interact in their own education in that way. A Hmong mother recalls about her time in Laos.

Hmong parents completely felt their children to be the school's responsibility. Whatever happened to their children would be considered the faults, mistakes or abuse of the school. Parents got used to having little involvement in their children's education. All educational aspects are up to the teachers to decide. They have no role for parents in teaching their kids academically (Teb, 1997, p. 4).

Another Cambodian father recalls that "once children were registered in schools, everything was taken care of by the teachers. As parents, brothers, and sisters, we had no right to interfere in the system regarding our children's education" (p. 5).

This final barrier provides yet another example of the difficulties minority groups can have in feeling like they can or even want to communicate with the school and/or teacher. The following section looks at research that has focussed on Chinese parents and their unique and diverse cultural and societal norms, and how home-school relationships have been documented thus far for this cultural group.

2.4.3 Examining the Case of Chinese Parents

In comparison to the extensive research with the Afro-American and Latino samples, there is relatively few studies focused on Chinese parents. Chinese parents have been stereo-typically represented as ‘model minorities’ in terms of the children’s academic success (Li, 2003, 2005). However, research in this area is growing due to Chinese immigrants becoming one of the largest groups to enter the United States in recent years (US census, 2002). The following research uncovers some of the struggles facing Chinese parents in their partnership with and involvement in schools.

Lahman and Park (2004) study Korean and Chinese families to explore their relationships with teachers in US schools. Three Korean and two Chinese families were studied with each parent being interviewed separately. One of the findings consistent among all parents was the desire for their children to learn English yet not to become too ‘Americanized’ (p. 138). The language barrier between parents and teachers was again an issue as parents were found to want increased communication between themselves and the school/teachers but were concerned about being helpful given the language barrier. One parent stated:

Sometimes I have a lot of questions for Miyoung’s teacher, but it is hard to ask. I understand most things that she tells me, but it is still difficult for me to speak. I feel sorry that I don’t volunteer or participate in school. Her teacher might be thinking that Korean parents are not active. When I hear about parents’ volunteering activities, I want to do it, but I say to myself, well, I can’t do it because of English (Lahman & Park, 2004, p. 139).

Li conducted a study in 2003 in which she investigates Chinese parent’s beliefs about learning, their involvement in literacy practices at home and their perceptions of communication with the school. This qualitative study is based on

data from a survey of 34 families in the New York area. Most of the respondents have a high level of formal education and have been in the US for an average of 10 years. Approximately 30% of the families speak only Chinese at home while another 70% report speaking English and Chinese.

Li notes that beliefs and practices around literacy for this group of Chinese parents, seem to indicate a degree of acculturation to the American way of thinking. For example, the Chinese parents' believe that the current amount of homework provided by the school is sufficient. The author reports that in previous research Chinese parents have supported much more homework than their American counterparts. However, Chinese parents still value drills and repetition in Math instruction.

Li reports that Chinese parents in her study are still unclear about instructional methods at their children's school, particularly in writing and math. Where parents understand school instructional methods, there is more support at home for the children that mirrors the instruction they receive at school. Parents are less able to support their children at home when the communication between home and school is less clear.

Siu and Feldman (1996) classify different types of Chinese parents in their study conducted in Boston, Massachusetts. Their study involves both a qualitative, ethnographic style of case study over a period of three years, as well as a quantitative style questionnaire to confirm their findings. The types or patterns of support from Chinese parents for their children's education reveals three distinct groups.

The first group consists of Chinese parents, at least one of whom is born and educated in the US, and who also feels very secure with the schooling system in the US. The second group are families who received their schooling overseas, but may have also done some schooling in the US. This group attempts to achieve a balance between traditional Chinese values and practices and their American counterparts. The third pattern of parents are immigrants who completed all of their schooling overseas and do not feel secure yet in the US.

Siu and Feldman (1996) go on to suggest that the more schooling Chinese parents have done in the US combined by their positive feelings of security, the more they are likely to be involved in their children's school in direct and active ways.

In a separate document, Siu (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, n.d.) offers some further insights into Chinese parents and their partnership with schools. She states "Language is not the only barrier to parents' active participation in the schools. Other factors are unfamiliarity with the school structure, discomfort with an active parental role in the school building, and conflicts with work schedules." Additionally, she refers to the importance of formal and informal community resources, including the extended family, which Chinese parents enlist to support success for their children.

In my project I have used this body of research to form the backdrop that guides my thinking and planning. I attempt to seek out what a specific group of Chinese parents think and want in terms of cultural inclusion and parent involvement at school.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 The Context

This section outlines the context of the study. It explains the project in detail, the city in which the project takes place as well as some information regarding the participants.

3.1.1 The Project

This project is a small part of a larger one entitled “Literacy of Multilingual Children in French Immersion Programs”. This study, funded by the CRSH, was led by Dr. Hoskyn as principal investigator and Dr. Dagenais, Dr. Moore and Dr. Samier as joint investigators. Within this project, a quantitative study examines the phonological, orthographic, working memory, language use, language awareness and reading skills of children of Chinese descent currently enrolled in the French Immersion program and the regular English program. The other aspect of this study is qualitative in nature and focuses on the group of children enrolled in French Immersion. This portion of the project involves 40 families and has as an objective to examine the multilingual linguistic development of Chinese speaking families who had chosen to put their children in French Immersion. Of the forty families of participants, 13 volunteered to participate in a semi-structured interview. The interview was intended to better understand literacy

practices within the home and the community. This study is based on a portion of the interview and was dedicated to the home-school relationship.

3.1.2 The City

The interview portion of the project took place in Richmond, a suburb of Vancouver, British Columbia. Richmond, with a population of 174 000 (Census Canada, 2006) is an important destination for immigrant families from Asia, more specifically from China. The 2001 census indicates that 48% of the city's population is of South-Asian origin with 40% being of Chinese origin (Census Canada, 2001). These numbers indicate that this city is the home of the largest proportion of South-Asian origin in the metropolitan region (Census Canada, 2001). Of course, this population has had an important impact on the city in terms of the goods and services offered as well as the politics of the city (Mitchell, K. 2001). The number of signs and posters in Chinese along the main roads of the city represents the positive and influential status of the community and its languages. After English, Chinese is the dominant language in the semiotics of the city. (Dagenais, Moore, Sabatier, Lamarre et Armand, 2009)

3.1.3 The Families

All 13 families involved in the project have resided in the Greater Vancouver area ranging from one to twenty-eight years. They live in single-family dwellings located on quiet streets in both Richmond and Vancouver. One family came from Japan, two from Hong Kong, three from China, and six from Taiwan; most have become Canadian citizens.

All parents have completed a secondary level of education, and most have obtained a post-secondary degree in their country of origin, except three families: one completed a post-secondary degree in the United States and two completed a post-secondary degree in Canada.

The families involved in the study use a variety of combinations of languages in their homes. The families identified which languages are spoken most often at home: one family speaks English, one family speaks Taiwanese, one family speaks Cantonese and English, one family speaks Mandarin and English, two families speak Cantonese, and six families speak Mandarin.

3.1.4 The Schools

The schools involved in the study are situated in Richmond with one exception, which is a school in Vancouver. All of the schools are dual-track elementary schools offering the Early French Immersion program as well as the English program.

3.2 The Participants

3.2.1 The Parents

The participants are parents of children in grade 1 and 2 French Immersion classrooms in the Vancouver-Richmond area. All Chinese-speaking families within these classes were offered the opportunity to participate in the study. Because this particular project was a smaller part of a larger study, the parents involved also needed to match the criteria for other parts of the study.

Families demonstrated a strong willingness to share their ideas and experiences with respect to French Immersion. They seemed to be excited about sharing their stories of how their children have found success in Canadian schools. The discussions they had with us were an opportunity to talk freely about their children's schooling in their home language as opposed to a very brief, translated conference with their child's teacher. Parents who were multilingual in languages other than Mandarin, Cantonese or Taiwanese were not selected for study participation, with one exception, where the father was Chinese speaking but the mother spoke Japanese.

The participants in this study came from a variety of backgrounds. Some of them are recent arrivals to Canada, while others moved here at a young age. At the time of the study all the participants live in the Greater Vancouver region and their children attend schools in this area as well. Because the larger project, within which this smaller study was imbedded, examines literacy practices in multilingual families whose children are in French Immersion, all the parents interviewed are involved in the French Immersion program through their children.

All of the participants have some degree of speaking ability in English, but many preferred to have the interview conducted in another language such as Mandarin, Cantonese, or Taiwanese.

The parents who participated in the in-depth interviews were very keen to share their thoughts, experiences and practices with the interviewers. They seemed very comfortable discussing issues surrounding literacy practices and their child's schooling. Interviews were to be one hour in length, but the parents

often chose to talk for much longer periods of time; some interviews lasted for up to two hours.

3.2.2 Participant Details

Each family is briefly described based on information taken from the Mothers Demographic Characteristics Survey. One family interviewed chose not to answer this survey but they are included later in the analysis as they did participate in the interview.

Family A

In this family, the mother is of Japanese descent having arrived in Canada 15 years ago as an adult. She has resided in Richmond for the last 10 years. Mother A works as an office worker, although she was a teacher in Japan and speaks both Japanese and English. Father A is an office worker from Vietnam. He speaks English and Cantonese and came to Canada as a child. They have two young children one in school and one is a toddler.

Family B

In this family, the mother and father are both from Taiwan. They came to Canada 10 years ago and have lived in Richmond for the past seven years. Mother B works as an English tutor and student of acupuncture and the father is a financial consultant. Both parents speak English and Mandarin. They both have Master's Degrees from the United States. They have two school-aged children.

Family C

The mother and father in family C are both from Taiwan. The mother has been living in Richmond for two years and the father lives most of the time in

Taiwan. The mother is a stay at home mom and the father works as a manager of a high tech manufacturer. The mother is working on her PhD in Math and speaks Mandarin, Taiwanese and some English. They have two school-aged sons.

Family D

The mother in Family D is from China and came to Richmond, Canada in 1989 as an adult. She speaks Cantonese and owns a clothing store. Father D was an engineer in China but since moving to Canada works as a waiter. They have one school-aged child and a toddler.

Family E

Family E has been in Richmond for the last two years and in Canada only slightly longer. The mother was a doctor in China but is currently a stay at home mom. The father continues to work as a businessman. They speak Mandarin, Cantonese and some English. They spent 12 years living in Hong Kong before coming to Canada. They have two children, one school-aged and a baby.

Family F

The mother in this family works for an airline and speaks Mandarin, Taiwanese and English. The father shares the same languages. They have two children, one school-aged and one toddler.

Family G

Family G is from Hong Kong and they speak Cantonese. The mother and father both work in an electronics factory. They are divorced. They have been in

Vancouver for 16 years. They have 3 children, one school-aged child, one toddler and one baby.

Family H

The family is from China and moved to Canada 10 years ago. They have been living in Vancouver for 3 years. The mother works as a sales representative and the Father is a businessman. They speak Cantonese and English. They have two children, one adolescent and one school-aged.

Family I

Family I is from Taiwan, where the father currently lives. The mother has been in Canada for the past 19 years and speaks Mandarin and English. She works as a stay at home mom and the Father is a computer software designer. They have one school-aged child.

Family J

Family J is from China, they moved to Canada six years ago. They speak Mandarin and English. The mother is an accountant and the father works as a software engineer. They have two school-aged children.

Family K

In this family, the mother is from Taiwan and the father is from Hong Kong. They moved to Canada as children. She works as a stay at home mom and the father is a business developer. They speak English. They both attended university in Canada. They have two children, one school-aged and one toddler.

Family L

This family is from Hong Kong. They arrived in Canada 14 years ago have lived in Richmond for 10 years. The mother works as a secretary and the father works with computer systems. They speak Cantonese and English. They have one school-aged child.

Family M

Family M is from Taiwan. They moved to Canada 5 years ago. The mother is a stay at home mom and the father works as a carpenter. They speak Mandarin, Taiwanese and some English. They have school-aged twin sons.

Table 1: Summary of participants

Family ID	Country of Origin	Languages in the home	Number of Children	Members present at interview
A	Japan, Vietnam	Japanese, Cantonese, English	2	4
B	Taiwan	Mandarin, English	2	1
C	Taiwan	Mandarin, Taiwanese, English	2	1
D	China	Cantonese	2	2
E	China	Mandarin, Cantonese, English	2	1
F	Not given	Mandarin, Taiwanese, English	2	1
G	Hong Kong	Cantonese	3	1
H	China	Cantonese, English	2	1
I	Taiwan	Mandarin, English	1	1
J	China	Mandarin, English	2	2
K	Taiwan, Hong Kong	English, Mandarin, Cantonese	2	1
L	Hong Kong	Cantonese, English	1	2
M	Taiwan	Mandarin, Taiwanese, English	2	3

3.2.3 University Staff: Professors, Research Assistants, and Translators

Because many of the parents chose to have the interview conducted in Chinese; Mandarin, Cantonese and Taiwanese speaking research assistants conducted many of the interviews. Interviews conducted in English were undertaken by professors and research assistants involved in the project. Someone speaking the interviewee's Chinese language was always present at the English interviews in the event that some translation would be required or that the interviewee may have wished to express some things in a language other than English. Once the interviews had been conducted, the Chinese-speaking research assistants translated and transcribed the interviews into English for the purpose of analysis.

3.3 Project Implementation

The entire study was conducted over a period of three years in accordance with the SSHRC grant proposal awarded to Dr. M. Hoskyn (Principal Investigator), Diane Dagenais, Danièle Moore and Eugenie Samier (Joint Investigators). In the first year, I designed the questionnaire, found participants, and began interviews. During the second year I continued with interviews and began transcribing and translating the data. Throughout the final year the interviews, translations and transcriptions were completed. Alongside this process, I began to organize the data base and analyze the data.

The interviews were conducted over a period of approximately one year within the timeframe of the larger project. Most interviews took place at the

homes of the families unless another preference was indicated at the time of scheduling. In cases where families preferred to have the interviews occur elsewhere, interviews took place at the school. The families seemed very enthusiastic about participating in the project and though the interviews were scheduled to be about an hour in length, many families wanted to talk for much longer. Generally, they were keen to share their experiences and knowledge with the interviewers. Often, parents would get examples of books or schoolwork that their children were working with to show the interviewers.

3.4 Research Question

By doing this study I hope to discern a vision of how plurilingual families view their partnership with the school. I am interested in knowing how schools have tried to include them and their culture and language as part of the school community, from their perspective. I hope to discover if this particular group is interested in being involved in the school in a way that is different from their current experience and what schools can do to inspire involvement from this population. To that end my general research question is as follows:

From the perspective of Chinese parents in French Immersion, what does the partnership between them and the school look like? How do Chinese parents perceive their cultural and linguistic background is integrated into the school?

The questionnaire used to answer these questions (see Appendix 1) was intended to highlight some of the details of the relationship between this group and the school. The results may also create an awareness of challenges these

families face in communicating with different levels within the school system, whether it be teacher, principal or board office.

3.5 Biases and Assumptions

As a teacher, I approached this project with a school centric focus. I assumed there were certain ways for parents to be involved at the school to support their children. Typically parents are involved through informal conversations with teachers at transition times of the day, through written communications from the school such as newsletters, agendas, notices and the school's website. Additionally, there are opportunities for more formal communications throughout the year such as report cards and parent-teacher conferences. Another common venue for parent communication with the school is through the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), which usually meets once a month to promote collaboration with the school and to give parents a voice in decision making at the school level. Also, the School Planning Council (SPC) is a committee that enables staff and interested parents to work together in developing school goals related to curriculum and implementation guidelines.

In the past, I have invited families into the classroom to share their specialty skills whether it be cooking, crafts, or career opportunities. This an important way to involve parents in the classroom and to value their knowledge and skills. It also promotes maintaining open communication between schools and families and thereby creating a network of caring human connections that support all.

Another bias inherent in my teaching practice was the notion of the model minority as defined by Chou and Feagin in their 2008 book, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism*. The authors explain that the myth originated from the perception that Asian cultural values of hard work, family unity, independence and a drive for success led recent immigrants into and beyond the American middle class within one or two generations.

Growing up in a predominantly Asian area and attending a predominantly Asian high school instilled in me a sense of the Chinese work ethic and their high achievement in academics and music. From conversations with other teachers from similar backgrounds, this stereotype seems to be common when I am receiving students of Chinese background into our classrooms.

Through reading research done in this area and interviewing parents, my definitions have certainly grown and changed. However, my questionnaire used to interview parents for this study was built from a school centric mindset.

Another assumption that came into play when I was building this study was the notion that parents want to be involved in their child's education. In my work with parents in this study, nearly all have been interested in their children's progress and open to supporting their children in ways that worked for them as a family. This is perhaps in contradiction to what many teachers see at school when working with Asian families. Often there is the impression that these families are more absent from the school landscape and simply wish to see a strong academic program coupled with frequent homework and traditional assessment. I assumed that parents with whom I had frequent contact were

more interested and more involved in their child's schooling than those whom I saw infrequently.

3.6 Method of Data Collection

3.6.1 The Epistemological Perspective

According to Lessard-Hébert, Goyette, & Boutin (n.d.), an interpretive approach is an epistemology based on interpretation which is centred on the importance actors give to their actions and which combines a variety of methods such as: participant observer, ethnography, case study, and action research. In this study, an epistemology of this type is required to better understand the relationship between minority families and schools.

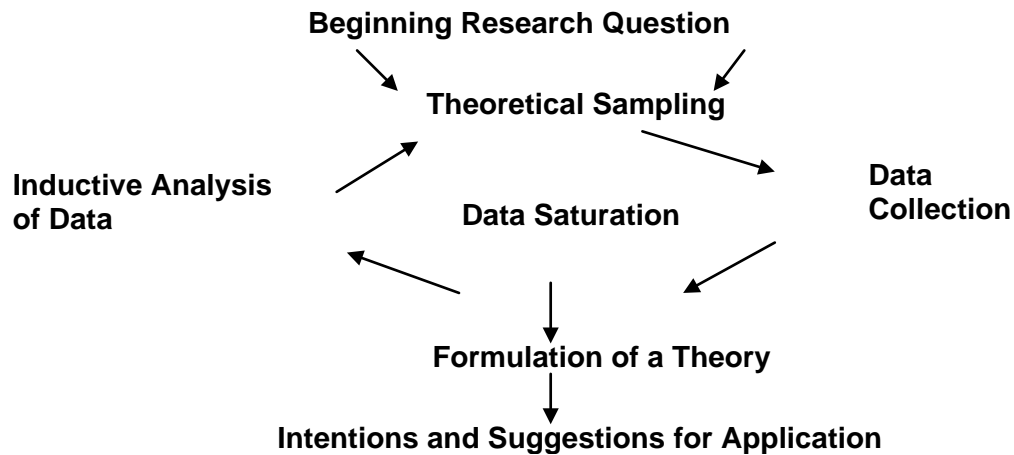
Furthermore, Paquay, Crahay and De Ketele (2006) describe a qualitative approach as a hermeneutic research that seeks to understand the significance of the actors and their actions. They speak of an inductive reasoning during the research process, which is to say that the formulation of a hypothesis happens during the investigation and that it can evolve depending on how the project unfolds. This type of investigation often targets individual case studies whether it be a person, a group of people, a class or a school etc.

3.6.2 The General Paradigm for this Project

Savoie-Zajc (2004) tells us that qualitative research is based on interactions. She emphasises that this type of research attempts to understand how actors make sense of their situations. Moreover, qualitative research is

particularly important to education as a tool for resolving problems within the domain. Savoie-Zajc uses a diagram from Lincoln and Guba's paper (1985), to demonstrate the process of interpretive research.

Figure 1: Process of Qualitative/Interpretive Research



(Lincoln, & Guba, 1985)

As seen in the diagram, there are three important phases to the data collection process: the theoretical sampling, the data collection and the analysis of the data. This cycle repeats until there is nothing new presenting itself from the data.

In qualitative research, I must accept that I cannot predict everything and that additional information or unexpected events can force a change in plan. Adaptation is necessary for success. This iterative cycle can be seen in a more specific example of qualitative research, that of the case study.

3.6.3 A Description of the Case Study Approach

Palys (2003) reveals that the case study approach is an iterative process that seeks causal and plausible explanations for the occurrence of specific

situations or interactions. As Palys suggests, in case studies I use a variety of tools like intuition, experiences, deductions, inductions as well as a list of analysis strategies to identify groups or themes present. In this project, the case study refers to the families of Chinese descent with children in the Early French Immersion program. The interaction being investigated is that of the communication between the parents and the school, from the parents' perspective.

3.6.4 The Process of Gathering Data

Van der Maren (1995) explains the difference between types of data: invoqued, provoqued, or elicited. In my study I have used the research interview, a way of gathering data based on elicitation. Within the parameters of the definition of an interview there is, of course, formats which are more structured and those which are more open. I have used a semi-structured interview format with the participating families. I tried to avoid waiting for certain answers and to demonstrate flexibility in my questioning. Van der Maren (1995) notes the importance of the conditions of the interview, notably the disposition of the researcher, the openness of the questions and the validity of the transcription. Once the data was collected and transcribed, coding was used to analyse the data.

According to Van der Maren, to code and treat the data there are several steps that should be followed. Firstly, the units of analysis are established by reducing the data. Van der Maren underlines the importance of rereading rubrics as well as the problem, the theoretical framework and the analytic echo.

Secondly comes the coding of the data. Once the data has been reduced they can be coded, verified, recoded and finally categorised. Thirdly comes the analysis of the coded data. This is done using categories followed by creating a hierarchy of categories and finally the conceptualisation and modelisation. This process is similar Lincoln and Guba's diagram in terms of it being an iterative process.

3.6.5 Ethical Implications

Before considering doing research, researchers need to obtain ethical permissions from the University as well as organizations involved in the project and finally from individual participants. Even after getting permission it is important that researchers remember their role in the project and that they demonstrate a level of respect and professionalism towards the participants. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) insist on the importance of informed consent for all participants. This means that each participant knows that their participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without retribution. According to Glesne and Peshkin, the researcher has a responsibility to preserve the confidentiality of the participants and to consider very seriously the impact of sharing information obtained in confidence. It should never be forgotten that it is a privilege to work with participants during a research project and that they have the right to decide what information will be gathered during the course of research.

3.7 Transcribing the Data

The interviews for this project were conducted in the language of choice of the interviewee. The intention was to provide a degree of comfort to the participant, to ease communication and to demonstrate a respect for the linguistic and cultural background of the participants. Due to the variety of languages used during the interviews, translators were employed to transcribe interviews and then translate them into English, with the obvious exception of interviews already conducted in English. A consequence of this translation is the loss of meaning that typically occurs during the translation process. It is not possible for me to know or confidently interpret certain passages in the transcription and translation and so I have omitted those portions from my analysis. Another implication of using multiple languages was that different people conducted the interviews and due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, occasionally they digressed in different directions. This resulted in not all of the participants responding to all of the same questions. I have adjusted to this situation by keeping my analysis to specific participants in the study on a case by case basis and not seeking trends across all families where it is not possible.

3.8 Data Analysis

3.8.1 Organization of the Database

Organization of the database began through identifying broad themes that presented themselves in the data. These themes included the language barrier as an impediment to home school-communication, the language barrier as an

impediment to parent involvement at school, logistical problems in home-school relations, level of parent education and skills on the home-school relationship, the school as an authority, cultural inclusion in the school, the relationship with the teacher and roles of teachers and parents: parents as teachers & teachers as parents. Once these themes were determined, I compared them with other research done on the relationship between the school and minority language families. While most of the themes which emerged from the data were consistent with other research that has been done, one theme, that of the relationship with the teacher is not typically found in other research and therefore added as an other possible option for categorizing the data. An iterative approach was used throughout the process of organizing the data as a means of continually refining the categorization.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS

With a description of the methods used to generate our project's data in place I can now present some of the findings concerning home-school relations for minority families with children in bilingual education as they relate to the key conceptual frameworks concerning families relationships with their childrens' school that were discussed in Chapter 2. This will include presenting data on: language barriers to the home-school relationship, logistical problems to the home-school relationship, impact parental education and skills on the home-school relationship, perceptions of school's authority in the home-school relationship, problems of cultural inclusion in home-school relationship, the roles of teachers and parents in home-school relationship. The final section of this chapter presents some novel findings concerning the parents' relationships with teachers, which is an issue that has not been addressed in the literature to-date.

4.1 Language Barriers

Language proficiency presents a readily apparent barrier to parents involvement in the education of their children. These barriers do however manifest themselves in a number of ways, including the home-school communication and parents involvement at school. Each manifestation of the language barrier will be dealt with in turn.

4.1.1 Language Barriers as an impediment to home school-communication

Home-school communication can take many forms: newsletters are sent home by the school, meetings involving parent groups are a regular occurrence, parent-teacher conferences happen once or twice a year and many schools host assemblies and concerts which parents are invited to attend. All of these communications require that parents have sufficient English skills in order for them to be aware that the event is taking place, understand what the event involves, and understand and participate in said event. Most of the families interviewed in the study note that understanding the home-school communication was often difficult. One family notes when it came to understanding the newsletters that,

I do think if it is to aim at these parents, that is, to the Chinese, ... they don't understand English very much... if you have them [the newsletters] in Chinese it is even better (M p. 50).

This mother went on to explain that she relies on another mother with better English that lives nearby to tell her about any important information conveyed through newsletters, such as professional development days when the children did not attend school. The mother expresses her gratitude for this helpful neighbour and is unsure how other mothers cope without the support of other parents with stronger English skills (M p. 51).

Other parents are a bit reluctant to discuss their own experiences but talk a great deal about their friends' problems with understanding home-school communication and the anxiety that accompanies the anticipation of not being able to adequately communicate with the school.

I remember one of my friends, her English is not that great and then her husband was away and then she had to go in to talk about her son to the teacher and then she called me and then she was asking 'Oh, what am I going to do because I might not be able to understand the teacher – what the teacher will be saying (A p. 40).

This frustration and concern over their inability to communicate and understand in English is consistent with the findings from other studies involving diverse ethnic groups (Pena, 2000, Lee, 2005, Teb, 1997).

Many parents interviewed feel that they would be more willing to attend meetings and be more involved in formal ways at the school if an interpreter were present. "It would be better if there is Chinese, one speaks in English, one in Chinese, so, like this, the parents could listen clearly" (D p. 13). Another mother states

I think it [the school] should invite some Chinese parents as interpreters to help those parents whose English are not so fluent, especially in some important meetings, it needs interpreters (G p. 10).

In light of the numerous forms that home-school communication takes, and the importance that it has for childrens' education, these language barriers represent a significant challenge that has not only been identified in the literature on this topic but also confirmed by the data presented here. Language barriers, however, are not only problematic for home-school communication, but –as discussed in the following section – they also play a role in the impediment of parents involvement in school.

4.1.2 Language Barrier as an impediment to parent involvement at school

Families in this project identify another type of impact due to language barriers seen in previous research, their restricted ability to participate at school in a more informal way. Parents mention feeling unable to participate in both school functions and in the classroom due to their inability to communicate in English. Here I see parallels to the French Immersion context. Generally, it is a challenge to involve parents in classroom activities in the French Immersion context largely because so few of the parents actually speak French. According to a Canadian Parents for French (CPF) survey, fewer than 10% of parents with children in French Immersion in British Columbia spoke French (CPF, 2003). In Richmond, the French Immersion program consists of 100% French for most of Kindergarten, all of grade 1 and 2. English begins in grade 3 with 20 percent of the week being put aside for this language. This challenge of involving parents in the classroom seen in the French Immersion context is particularly heightened in the primary years when children enjoy having their parents come to their classroom. This parent highlights this anticipation by stating, “I think that at this age they are excited about it [parents in the classroom]” (A p. 36), yet there is no English Language Arts being taught before grade 3. In the later elementary years, parent involvement is more possible linguistically but there are added challenges such as the children being less enthusiastic in having their parents come to the class. Parents in this project note that the primary years would be a better time for them to be involved in the classroom and they anticipate their children being reluctant to share a classroom with parents in the future. “But [parent involvement] in grade 4 and grade 5 ... it’s not cool” (A p. 36).

Many parents are comfortable with the idea of being involved in the classroom and possibly sharing some of their knowledge: linguistic, cultural or otherwise. However, as one parent explains, they are concerned that they would be unable to communicate clearly to the students in English: “It is my pleasure [to speak to the class] but my English is too bad” (D p. 12). Lahman and Park (2004) indicate that the language barrier prevents parents from participating in school life particularly informally. The parents in their work mention their frustration at not being able to be involved in their child’s school and express concern as to how this might be viewed by the teacher and the school. Some parents suggest that if they were able to talk to the class or the teacher in Chinese that this would make participating in the school environment a more feasible activity: “if it is in Chinese I can explain it much clearer” (D p. 12).

It is interesting to note that despite some of these parents claiming to be unable to talk to their child’s teacher in English they are able to conduct the interview for this project in English. One possible explanation for this is the issue of time. One parent mentions feeling “so rushed talking to the teacher” and that the pressure of having others waiting to speak with the teacher to be very stressful, even making the parent feel uncomfortable (F p. 32). Additionally, some parents who conducted the interview for this study in English by choice indicate that they do not feel confident enough with their English language skills to attend or speak out at a PAC meeting. This attitude is demonstrated by one parent who states:

...most Chinese parents like us have problems even they want but cannot maybe I should not say cannot we are afraid of maybe we

always go to the meeting we cannot express our feeling of some opinion...(J p. 17).

This lack of confidence, despite having some language skills, seems to have an impact on the degree to which the parents in this study communicate with the school in an informal way. Several parents state that if they had better English or if interpreters were readily available they would be involved more (M p. 51, H p. 11, G p. 10) and that in their current limited English capacity they feel they cannot talk with the teachers. As a teacher myself and also conducting the interview it is clear that some of these parents were linguistically able to talk to their child's teacher. Despite in-depth interview exchanges in interview settings parents continue to express that they perhaps feel they have to achieve a certain level of proficiency in order to be good enough to engage in a discussion at school. As one parent explains: "although like sometimes I feel like my language skills are still limited..." (C p. 30). This specific level of required proficiency, never explicitly indicated in the interviews, is vaguely referred to as something to be attained in the future, if possible, but seemed unlikely.

Coupled with the challenges of home-school communication, parents appear to face numerous language barriers to participating in the various relationships associated with their children's education. The following section identifies yet another layer of complexity to home-school-relations that take the forms of logistical problems.

4.2 Logistical Problems in Home-School Relations

Amongst the many logistical hurdles facing parents participating in their children's education, time limitations and workload are identified as some of the more central constraints. Typically as seen in other research done with minority families and schools, parents have very little time to come to the school to meet with teachers, to participate in school activities or to attend evening functions such as PAC meetings. (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001, Pena, 2000, Lee, 2005) For many parents, coming to the school to meet with the teacher or to visit the classroom was not possible due to their work schedules, family needs or other commitments.

... we haven't done much on this [participation at school] because we don't have the time and we have children. I also have other stuff going on. So we didn't participate much (E p. 23).

Many of the parents express an interest in participating more in the life of the school and are regretful that they are unable to do so.

"I wish I could but both of us work full-time and then the time we can take off is very limited." (A p. 34)

For some families, the time constraints associated with working and other commitments have consequently created a lack of awareness as to what happens at their child's school on a daily basis. Additionally, these parents are not then aware of various cultural opportunities happening at the school.

Well, I know for Chinese New Year there was-one of her friend's mom-she's Chinese so she actually went in [to the school] and explained what they do in Chinese New Year. Yeah, so I don't think they asked us-well, we didn't even know about it because I guess we are too busy (A p. 35).

While time constraints and workload are identified here as barriers to home-school relations, questions need to be asked as to whether or not this is a constraint limited to minority families? It may very well be the case that time constraints represent a compounding challenge that sits on top of the aforementioned language barriers which then impedes parents participation at school. Further research into this matter would be required to try and pull apart these causes and isolate their impacts on the home-school relationship.

4.3 Level of Parent Education and Skills on the home-school relationship

The parents interviewed in this study have an overall high level of education. Almost all of the parents have achieved post-secondary school education. Despite these levels, a few parents feel they could not share their knowledge of their culture or area of expertise without further studying it themselves.

I'm scared I will say something wrong, I probably would if I did some research or I asked my parents but um not if I'm not good at it or if I don't know what I'm talking about (K p. 25).

More commonly, parents feel they would share their knowledge and expertise with their child's class if invited or instructed to do so by the school. Otherwise, they tend to feel it was not their place.

This discrepancy between levels of parents education and their relative involvement in their children's school could therefore be explained by a number of factors including language barriers. However, as the next section details, there

are also cultural factors such as deference to the authority of the school as an institution that may also play a role here.

4.4. School as Authority

Findings from our research suggests that the parents' attitude towards the school is more in line with Soyoung Lee's (2005) depiction regarding Korean parents than some of the other research done in this area, particularly the work of Mannann and Blackwell (1992). Lee (2005) emphasizes the unwelcoming nature of the school as well as psychological threat associated with communicating with teachers. Whereas, the Korean parents from Lee's study associate silence and lack of involvement with respecting the authority of the school. This cultural difference is perhaps one of the sources of misunderstanding as to reasons for Chinese parents lack of involvement at school.

Data from our study indicates that parents wait for the school to initiate communication and to be directive in regards to parent participation. This approach of "I won't go if I am not asked to" was not only articulated directly by parent H (H p. 10), but parents across this study repeatedly state they would only give input to the school if they were specifically directed to and they would not propose coming into the classroom unless asked to by the teacher.

It is interesting to note that the Chinese families feel it is the responsibility of the school to teach their children about Chinese culture and language. One mother explained:

Because many Chinese children were born now in Canada. They don't know about the Chinese culture. If they have too much homework at home, the family won't usually tell them of some of the traditional culture. So they don't know about the Chinese culture. It would be very good if the school could help the children learn some such as the nature of China etc. (D p. 12).

In this quote, I see the authority of the school as being the disseminator of knowledge as well as a family's tradition and culture - in this case regarding Chinese culture. There is clearly an expectation that the school is the source of information and it is through their studies at school the Chinese children will learn about their heritage and culture. Additionally, in this quote the parent clearly places the work assigned by the school as greater in importance than any family teachings regarding heritage. This hierarchy may contribute to Chinese families lack of participation at school. For some of these families, parent involvement is only to support the school at the request of the school and it is for schools and teachers to decide what that participation should look like.

The next section examines in more detail participation and the type of content that parents would like to see in schools in relation to their culture and language.

4.5 Cultural Inclusion in the School

During the course of the interviews with families I ask specific questions pertaining to cultural inclusion. Cultural inclusion in this study refers to the addition of a given cultural group's language, celebrations, traditions or ways of doing and acting. Interestingly, our findings indicate that there is a lack of

agreement amongst participants as to whether the Chinese culture should be included into the classroom.

One group of participants feel that having Chinese cultural events as part of the school program is important for their children.

It would be really nice, that is, to let them know what is our Chinese people's culture, that is, you don't need to teach the language, but at least let them know what people do on Spring Festival, what to do to celebrate (F p. 32-33).

In this quote the parent clearly desires the school to pass on Chinese cultural ways of doing and seeing the world. When questioned about whether the schools should teach the Chinese language another mother replied "It is best if they do it" (D p.12).

There is also a concern on the part of some participants that this cultural knowledge and language will be lost if schools do not take on the role of teaching the celebrations, traditions and history. Mother D who was quoted in the previous section regarding schools teaching about the Chinese culture feels great concern that the community will be unable to pass on the appropriate cultural knowledge to their children. She later goes on to indicate that she cannot be the one to pass it on. There is an apparent great importance attached to the dissemination of the knowledge to the children of the community. Her desire to have the school take on this role demonstrates her trust that the school would be able to represent her culture sufficiently to teach it to others.

Not all parents in the study feel that the school should be a part of the transmission of the Chinese culture. Several parents when asked if they would

like the school to teach about the Chinese culture replied no. Still others suggest that it would only be acceptable if the classes were learning about other cultures as well so as not to highlight only the Chinese. One mother, when asked if the teacher should introduce the Chinese culture replied “I think it is not necessary.[...] the Chinese are too powerful in [this city], why is there no Korean...” (B p.14). In this quote the mother describes the importance of including other cultures, not only the Chinese culture. She implies that there is too much focus on the Chinese culture to the exclusion of others and that this is inappropriate. Still another parent, when asked about including the Chinese language and culture, as part of the curriculum simply answers “no” (M p. 48).

Finally, a third parent explains:

[...] I feel uncomfortable about it (schools teaching about Chinese language and culture). I would like to be treated equally (C p. 32).

These polarized views on the inclusion of Chinese language and culture in the school make it difficult to determine what would be an appropriate way forward. These two perspectives, that of cultural inclusion as compared with cultural assimilation will be discussed in further detail in the discussion portion of this paper as well as the juxtaposed theoretical frameworks that accompany them.

4.6 Roles of Teachers and Parents: Parents as Teachers and Teachers as Parents

Within the home-school relationship, teachers and parents expect to perform particular duties suited to their role, but it is also the case that for a dynamic home-school relationship to flourish these roles must also be exchanged and cross-fertilized. In doing so parents take on the role of teachers and similarly teachers can take on the role of parents. For many minority groups their own experiences with teachers lead them to interpret their role and that of the teacher in a certain way.

Although much research has been carried out that examines the roles parents should play in their child's education and the concerns that minority families have expressed through that research (Henderson and Mapp, 2002) there was very little mention of this during the interviews. Previous research (Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel, 2001) indicates that minority families, particularly Latino families in the US, do not feel that their role as a parent is to also teach. The boundaries between what should be learned at school versus what is to be learned at home are very clear. However, the Chinese families interviewed see themselves as having a very important role in their child's education as seen by their commitment to Chinese school which takes place outside of regular school hours, as well as the "homework" many parents create for their children to either support or supplement what was being taught at school.

Interviewer ...how much time everyday he has to spend on doing French?
Parent perhaps 20 minutes, 20 minutes to half an hour, then, half an hour for Chinese, and so he always starts about 4:00 pm to do them til 5:30pm. Sometimes, I make him do some math assignments, eh, or read some Chinese books. (F p.16).

The role of teachers has different interpretations varying from one cultural group to the next. The Latino families in Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) study speak of the teacher as being “like another parent” to their child (p. 90). Their expectation was that the teacher would look after their children in not only an educational capacity but also as a partner in parenting. Whereas another Latino group in Pena’s 2000 study had an opposite interpretation of the role of the teacher. This group felt that the teacher was not a parent and should not be telling parents how to raise children, including homework practices (Pena, 2000). The Chinese parents interviewed in this study did not describe the role of the teacher as being anything other than an educational one. While Latino families are seemingly quite passionate about the role of the teacher, for the Chinese parents in question, it is a non-issue, not even mentioned.

If it is indeed the case that Chinese parents in this study do not see teachers’ role as a parenting one, but do see themselves playing a considerable role in their child’s education, then it would seem that the onus is on the school or the teacher to build bridges and find solutions to the difficulty in home-school relationships.

4.7 Relationship with the Teacher

While it is the case that all of the previous findings presented in this chapter have a connection to the literature and frameworks presented in Chapter 2, it was of interest that there has been little other research done on the importance of minority-language parents’ relationship with the classroom teacher. In this particular research project with Chinese families the importance of this

relationship with the teacher is repeatedly underlined, this should be considered both a relevant and novel finding. Chinese families describe feeling at ease within the school because of how their child's teacher welcomes them. Many families feel very comfortable talking to their child's teacher despite the perceived language barrier.

Interviewer do you feel at ease talking with them [teachers]

Parent very comfortable unless I meet up with some unknown words and is stuck there.

Interviewer basically you have no big problem?

Parent nothing. Right. The teachers are very nice (M p.46).

[The teacher] respects us very much. Very nice (M p. 47).

They often feel that they could count on the teacher to tell them about their child's learning and how they can support their child at home. Parents also suggest that they are willing to come into the classroom and work with the students and share their own culture and language, primarily because of the positive relationship the parent perceives with the teacher.

Clearly, the interactions between minority-language parents and teachers stands to play a large role in the home-school relationship, and is therefore mildly surprising that it is such an overlooked dimension within the literature. Future research into home-school relationship amongst minority-language families would do well to consider this as a significant mediating factor that does require attention. That being said, this chapter has presented a series of findings that demonstrate that no one factor alone influences the home-school relationship. Instead, it has been suggested here that language barriers, everyday time constraints, levels of education, perceptions of institutional authority, desires for cultural inclusion, and embodiment of teacher/parent roles **all together** work to

shape the home-school relationship for these minority-language families. In the final chapter that follows implications of the findings presented here will be discussed, specifically with regards to an emerging paradox between cultural inclusion and cultural assimilation.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings from chapter 4 suggest that the home-school relationship is a challenge, and a multifaceted one at that. A few positions within socio-educational theory present possible ways forward to address the challenges facing minority-language families in modern educational settings. Two of the dominant positions will be described here, and related to the findings of the particular case at hand. However, in doing so it will be shown that a particular tension exists between these two positions that of cultural inclusion and cultural assimilation that makes both of them untenable as possible ways forward.

In highlighting some of the contradictions presented in research related to solutions I am left with the need for another way forward that marries the best of both approaches. Here the collaborative approach to minority-language inclusion and plurilingualism/pluriculturalism will be overviewed and put forward as such alternatives, and areas for future research within that alternative approach will be suggested.

5.1 Discussion: Future directions in Minority-Language Parent-Involvement

This section will juxtapose a cultural inclusion model with one of cultural assimilation. As mentioned in the introduction of the chapter, the findings regarding home-school relationship show that there are unresolved issues impeding the positive development of home-school relationship. How schools

and families can move forward is unclear but two different models are explained below.

5.1.1 A Call for Cultural Inclusion?

In section 4.5 dealing with cultural inclusion I presented a desire of some families to have their culture and language more integrated and explicitly taught at school. I can make sense of this finding by way of a proposed solution to enhancing minority-language parent-school partnerships through cultural inclusion. Cummins (1986) argues that traditional ways of connecting with minority families has been largely unsuccessful and proposes a framework to increase family participation at school as a way to change relationships between families and schools. He highlights the importance of recognizing the cultural background of minority families and suggests giving value to this heritage.

In a similar vein, Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) introduce the notion of funds of knowledge, based on the inclusion of minority-language community members' knowledge and skills being incorporated into the school as a way of validating the community. The 'funds of knowledge' concept goes beyond including cultural identity to involving members of the community in the school and classroom to share their personal areas of expertise. Gonzalez and others (1993) follow up this research with a project that first have teachers doing home visits to establish a relationship with families but also to determine what types of expertise were present in the families that can be incorporated into the curriculum.

In a similar study Moll and Gonzalez (1994) continue to develop the funds of knowledge approach to include and validate the skills of minority families within the context of the school. They begin this project by having teachers visit the homes of their students to determine what types of cultural resources and local knowledge were present in the community. They look for how families are functioning within the local economy, their networks and the sharing of material and intellectual resources within the community. This sharing can include knowledge such as carpentry, masonry, or other skills typical of working class people. The families also have other types of knowledge to share in the areas of health, plants and children. Furthermore, families were found to be sharing services, such as finding jobs and childcare for the community. Of importance is the cultural knowledge imparted by older generations. Often, children are involved in the family work related to the above-mentioned domains. With this information of shared knowledge within families, the teachers then create themes of study at school to utilise that wealth of family learnings. Family members were included in the classroom as experts, thereby valuing the expertise of children, their families and communities.

A number of other projects ensue, each using a funds of knowledge approach, with a result of increasing parent involvement and communication with the school (Gonzalez and Others, 1995, Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil & Moll, 2001). Their work was primarily with Latino households in the US, and their approach, while clearly satisfactory for that population, may not be appropriate for other groups.

The findings from section 4.5 of this paper support an interest in having cultural knowledge and language imparted at school. There is also some interest on behalf of individual parents to be involved in the classroom as an expert on Chinese culture and language.

Despite the growing awareness of the need to better involve minority-language families, it seems to be a continual challenge for schools. The many proposed ways of acknowledging and including non-majority groups is hardly status quo within school districts across North America. Delpit (2006), encourages teachers to include the language and culture of all students in the classroom as a way of bringing relevance to the curriculum and valuing the cultural identity of individual students when she urges teachers to be “identifying and giving voice to alternative worldviews” (p. 23). I see a similar desire being expressed on the part of some parents in section 4.5 where they explain that all cultures should be included, not just the Chinese culture.

The need for acknowledgement and honouring of diversity continues to be highlighted in research; however, alternative models such as that of cultural assimilation urge caution in this enthusiasm for inclusion. Data presented in Chapter 4 indicates that while some of the participants were enthusiastic about having their culture and language included in the school environment and even being involved in the types of ways expanded upon above, others felt differently. Findings in section 4.5 point to a desire on the part of parents for students to have Chinese language and culture remain at home and a more dominant, English and French, cultural exposure at school.

If cultural inclusion is a goal in the research presented above, I must pay attention to the findings in section 4.4 - School as Authority. Here I see that part of the culture, for some of the participants, is to not be involved with the school. The funds of knowledge model, while attempting to include elements of minority culture, cannot integrate cultural norms that prevent participation by parents with the school. This complicates the ability of this model to explain and resolve the home-school relationship with minority-language families. In light of this complexity surrounding inclusion of minority-language families with particular values vis-à-vis inclusion another model may be required.

5.1.2 A call for dominant cultural awareness

Ways in which cultural inclusion can be created in schools using a 'funds of knowledge' or inclusive model is a useful approach to explain some of the findings resultant from the research carried out here. However, I see that this model is deficient in explaining the data that demonstrates reluctance on the part of minority-language parents to have their culture and language brought into the school and classroom. Another body of research cautions against this inclusive approach when addressing possible solutions to enhancing the family-school partnership. Au and Raphael (2000), relate that the simple act of minority cultural inclusion in classrooms may not have the desired effect that Moll, Gonzalez and others are trying to create through the 'funds of knowledge' approach. The authors maintain that by bringing in aspects of a minority culture to the classroom, teachers may be working in direct opposition to what minority parents desire for their children's education. It is possible, according to Au and Raphael,

that minority parents send their children to school to learn the culturally dominant way of speaking, reading and writing and the relative status and power that brings. For these parents the goal is to equip their child with the tools necessary to succeed and knowing the ways of the dominant culture will help in that endeavour.

I found in section 4.5 that while some parents want Chinese culture and language to be taught at school, others were very clear that this would not be appropriate. This view is supported by Gilmore (1983), who relates a scenario in which 'doin' steps' with black students at school is negatively perceived by the parents as it seems to be of a lower standard than what white children are doing. The parents in Gilmore's study seek an equal footing for their children through the acquisition of knowledge and skills that parallels white students. They feel that by including elements of black culture in the classroom, their children are being deprived of tools they would need in the world outside the classroom.

This notion of the dominant language and culture holding a high status and power is elaborated on by Gee with his notion of discourse. Gee (2001) describes this discourse as an 'identity kit' that allows an individual to acquire linguistic and cultural tools in order to belong to a certain group. If an individual's identity kit is incomplete in some way, it is quickly noticed by members of the group, and that individual then risks becoming an outsider. Gee suggests that minority children can acquire the full identity kit of the dominant culture by avoiding the types of inclusions recommended by Cummins (1986), Moll and Gonzalez (1994) and McCarty and Watahomigie (1998). Furthermore, it may be

unfair to remove that opportunity for status and power by including a minority culture or language in the classroom and thereby changing the nature of the identity kit.

This presents an interesting dilemma in terms of the messages sent to minority- families regarding their own culture and the perceived need for the acquisition of the 'right' toolkit. Gee suggests that the discourse of minorities may exclude them from achieving status and power within the culture of majority if they are not given the appropriate tools to assimilate. The message then for minority families is that by maintaining their own discourse or identity kit they are at a distinct disadvantage when compared with children from a majority discourse. In the findings from our study it appears that some individuals want their children to maintain their heritage discourse, others want the Chinese culture and language left out of the classroom.

While the cultural assimilation model assuages the findings refusing cultural inclusion, the model is incomplete in its ability to resolve the diversity present within the community from this study. Other perspectives based on collaboration or plurilingualism and pluriculturalism are perhaps more pertinent and appropriate to resolve this paradox.

5.2 Directions for Future Research: The Way Forward for Collaboration Between Parents and Schools?

Given the contradictory nature between the models of inclusion and assimilation of minority-language parent and culture involvement in schools, the way forward seems unclear. However, two alternative approaches seem to offer

some possible solutions and ways forward to deal with the complexities of this community. Jordan, Averett, Elder, Orozco, and Rudo (2000), offer a tentative solution in their definition of collaboration in which both parties develop joint goals that they work towards. Alongside joint goals are shared responsibilities. Without both aspects of the partnership the authors feel that collaboration and the realization of mutual goals are not possible. This approach would allow for individuals and communities to make their preferences known and could resolve some of the contradictions from the findings. It is possible that this type of communication could be developed between schools and minority-language families in our study. Parents indicated a willingness to work with the school in bringing their culture and language to the classroom.

Scribner, Young and Pedroza (1999) support the idea of collaboration in their study conducted with Hispanic schools along the Texas-Mexico border. They look at schools in that area with a population of Hispanic students who are achieving beyond the state average. A majority of the students are from low socio-economic families and all students are either bilingual or have limited English. Parent involvement in these schools is not based on the school-centric model mentioned earlier, but rather as a partnership focused on the well-being and general development of children. The school uses culturally appropriate strategies to build a relationship with families including acknowledgement and integration of Hispanic cultural values, personalized home school communication and the creation of a welcoming environment at school. Additional structures are put into place by school staff to facilitate parent involvement in less traditional

ways. As Scribner, Young and Pedroza state the staff and parents “join together to serve the needs of all the children, unencumbered by role differentiation.

These are places that are neither top-down nor bottom-up; they are places where power is shared.” (p. 40-41) Parents in this school are included and valued through deliberate actions taken by the school and staff. Within our own data is the notion of working with the school to bring in elements of Chinese language and culture, that being said, collaboration might still present challenges with the community which seems to view school as an authority. Additionally, our findings in section 4.7 regarding the importance of the parents’ relationship with the teacher suggest that collaboration may be more successful when integrated into this significant relationship as opposed to being carried out at an institution level. The importance of this relationship has not been sufficiently researched and requires further exploration to determine what kind of collaboration could be achieved from this perspective.

Similar results are found in the American Department of Defense Activity schools. There, Smrekar, Guthrie, Owens and Sims (2001) carry out interviews of educators, parent leaders and counselors. In these schools, minority students demonstrate high levels of success in reading and writing. The researchers find parent-school partnerships to be of high priority in these schools. Access to information regarding school related programs and communications is easily accessible and parents are actively encouraged to participate at school. Shared norms, values and attitudes are common in these schools thus creating trust and collaboration between families and schools. Smrekar et al refer to a type of

collaboration between parents and schools that give parents a feeling of power and importance in terms of their contributions to their children's education. Open communication between the two groups allows for shared values and attitudes to be developed, much like Jordan, Averett, Elder, Orozco, and Rudo suggest. This study touches briefly on the importance of trust between parents and schools. Given that the families in our study view the school as an authority figure it is possible that a similar style of relationship could be created between minority-language families and schools.

A final approach, which could be married with the collaboration model previously mentioned, is that of pluriculturalism and plurilingualism. Despite cultural and linguistic diversity continuing to develop in the communities of this study, the inclusion and integration of plurilinguistic and pluricultural knowledge is under-developed in the school system and could do much to promote the home-school relationship with minority-language families. Moore & Py (2008) describe plurilingualism as a social representation, a discourse, or to use Gee's term an 'identity kit' that shapes and impacts each individual. In the case of the Chinese families from this study, an understanding of their discourse remains hidden from the school. However, an elucidation of their social representations may do much to positively influence the nature of the home-school relationship. For example, in section 4.7 I examine the parents' perception of school as an authority. An understanding on behalf of schools of their importance as an authority for parents could do much to lubricate the home-school relationship.

Dagenais (2003) explains how her findings from working with another plurilingual community demonstrate that they had begun to distinguish their identity from that of other local communities and thereby begun to develop their own vision of themselves. Additionally, Dagenais and Moore (2008) find that the community investigated in our study continues to shape its plurilingual identity through its educational choices for their children. They suggest that this community is attempting to create a pluri-identity that incorporates their heritage language and culture and weaves in the new languages and cultures of their home in Canada. However, while their own identity is perhaps being clarified to themselves, the communication of that identity to the school has yet been made clear. Beyond a linguistic barrier, teachers, school and parent groups fail to acknowledge the complexity of minority-language families and value the linguistic and cultural resources they have to offer.

In light of the pluricultural and plurilingual identity models, a number of fruitful directions for new research are possible. Castellotti and Moore (2005) warn us against a continuing ignorance of the plurilingual child and family. Their plurilingual assets cannot be appropriately and positively developed without a supportive educational environment. The best way in which to incorporate these principals is an area to be developed further. Future research with Chinese minority-language families and home-school relationship might examine the extent to which the development of plurilingual and pluricultural identities development is taking place, and the cultural specificities by which that development is mediated.

In conclusion, there are some findings from this study to consider when addressing the parents-school relationship with minority-language parents. It is essential that educators be aware of underestimating the importance of the relationship fostered with minority-language parents. Additionally, they should be aware of the importance of including and integrating a plurilingual and pluricultural knowledge into their practice, either at the classroom level or the larger school level. Finally, acknowledging and valuing the complexity of minority-language families and their linguistic and cultural resources should be a priority for teachers and schools when bridging language and cultural barriers.

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