

IMMIGRANT PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN ONE ONTARIO SCHOOL:

A CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to examine the involvement of immigrant parents in one classroom. Specifically I examine: (a) how one school involved immigrant parents in their children's education; (b) how immigrant parents perceive they have been involved; and (c) how immigrant parents want to be involved in their children's education.

This constructivist case study examined immigrant parent involvement from the perceptions of different stakeholders--the vice-principal, teacher and immigrant parents from the one teacher's class. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the vice-principal and one teacher of one model middle school in the Toronto District School Board to elicit information about their school and their experiences related to immigrant parent involvement. In addition, a parent questionnaire was used to explore parents' perceptions. The parent questionnaire was distributed to the one teacher's class of parents (all but one who were immigrants).

The data analysis revealed five core themes related to immigrant parent involvement. The educators suggested that parents lack the knowledge of how the Ontario education system functions, while the immigrant parents said that they were unaware of what is being asked of them or offered to them. No communications sent home to the parents were translated. Suggestions for future research and recommendations are offered to the school and school board in order to increase parent involvement, through initiatives and policies that target immigrant parents.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
List of Tables	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Research Purpose	2
Rationale for Study	3
Significance of the Study	4
Context for Research	4
Overview of Methodology	6
Limitations of My Research	8
Overview of Thesis	10
CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	12
A Brief History of Parent Involvement and School Councils in Ontario.....	12
Ontario Parent Involvement Policy	16
The Legal Role of Parents and Teachers	19
Defining Parent Involvement	20
Parent Involvement in the Public Policy Domain	24
Discriminating Family Factors	26
Working-Class Immigrant Parent Involvement	30
Rethinking Policy, Schools, and Relationships.....	36
Model Schools	39
Summary	42
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	46
Research Design	46
Constructivist Framework	47
Case Study Design.....	48
Ethical Clearance.....	51
School Information	51
Criteria for Selection of Participants	54
Methods	55
Questionnaire Development	55
Pilot Study for Parents' Questionnaires	56

Table of Contents (continued)

Data Collection	57
Field Log	58
Interviews	58
The Parent Questionnaire	60
Data Analysis	62
Approaches Used to Enhance the Validity and Trustworthiness of the Study	64
Summary	66
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS	67
Findings From Educators’ Interviews: Vice-principal and Teacher	67
Section I: The Vice-Principal	68
Building on the Culture and Experiences That New Immigrant Parents Bring to Canadian Schools.....	68
Building Bridges Between New Immigrant Parents’ Experiences in Their New and Native Countries	70
Helping Parents to Perceive Themselves as Teachers of Their Children Alongside Schoolteachers	72
Challenges That Impeded Efforts to Address Parent Involvement	72
Section II: The Teacher	74
Building on the Culture and Experiences That New Immigrant Parents Bring to Canadian Schools.....	74
Building Bridges Between New Immigrant Parents’ Experiences in Their New and Native Countries	76
Helping Parents to Perceive Themselves as Teachers of Their Children Alongside Schoolteachers	77
Challenges That Impeded Efforts to Address Parent Involvement	78
Findings from Parents’ Questionnaires.....	80
Demographic Information	81
Education and Occupation	82
Home-school Communication	83
How Parents Want to be Involved.....	86
Summary of Findings	89
Building on the Culture and Experiences That New Immigrant Parents Bring to Canadian Schools	89

Table of Contents (continued)

Building Bridges Between New Immigrant Parents’ Experiences in Their New and Native Countries	90
Helping Parents to Perceive Themselves as Teachers of Their Children Alongside Schoolteachers	91
Challenges That Impeded Efforts to Address Parent Involvement	91
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS	93
Restatement of Research Purpose	93
Responses to Research Questions	94
First Research Question	94
Building on the Culture and Experiences That New Immigrant Parents Bring to Canadian Schools	95
Building Bridges Between New Immigrant Parents’ Experiences in Their New and Native Countries	96
Helping Parents to Perceive Themselves as Teachers of Their Children Alongside Schoolteachers	97
Challenges That Impeded Efforts to Address Parent Involvement	98
Second Research Question	101
Third Research Question	106
Policy Implications	107
Summary of Findings	109
Recommendations and Implications	110
Recommendation #1	111
Recommendation #2	112
Recommendation #3	113
Recommendation #4	113
Limitations of the Study	114
Implications for Further Research	115
Closing Thoughts	116
REFERENCES	118
APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE	133
APPENDIX B: LETTER OF RECRUITMENT FOR PRINCIPAL	134
APPENDIX C: LETTER OF RECRUITMENT FOR TEACHER	136
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE VICE-PRINCIPAL	138

Table of Contents (continued)

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE TEACHER 139
APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM FOR VICE-PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER 140
APPENDIX G: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS..... 142
APPENDIX H: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSLATOR 148

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an exploratory, qualitative case study that investigates the involvement of immigrant parents in their children's education. Specifically I examine: (a) how one school involved immigrant parents in their children's education; (b) how immigrant parents perceive they have been involved; and (c) how immigrant parents' want to be involved in their children's education. For the purpose of this study, the word 'immigrant' refers to a person who comes to live permanently in another country, in this case, Canada.

I carried out research using a semi-structured interview format and parent questionnaires to understand immigrant parents' involvement in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). To protect the anonymity of the school, I gave it the pseudonym: Northridge middle school. The student population at the selected school is approximately 1200 students, over 90 percent who are immigrants. One in three of these students was living in Canada for less than five years.

The school's neighbourhood is home to many immigrants, predominately from India, Pakistan, Philippines, Colombia, Sudan, and Afghanistan, as well as many people born in Canada. Immigrants coming to Toronto are three times more likely to live in this community than any other in Toronto when they first arrive in Canada (Toronto Community Foundation, 2006). Subsequently, this community can be viewed as an entrance community for many newcomers.

Prior to entering the teaching profession, I volunteered in the Northridge community at a community agency helping out with the Newcomers to Canada program,

a local non-government organization. The Newcomers to Canada program (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012) offers immigrants the opportunity to improve on their English language skills and to prepare for employment in Canada. This work has provided an opportunity for me to become sensitized to the many barriers and challenges immigrant families face as they adjust to a new education system. I have become aware of the dissonance between the objectives of the provincial and school board policies on parental involvement, and the social, cultural, and economic realities of immigrant families. While this dissonance may be approached from a variety of different perspectives, my interest was in immigrant parents' perceptions of their own involvement in their children's education. Few studies that I could locate have specifically clarified the parental perspective on education from different cultural viewpoints. In order for partnerships to be formed, policymakers and those working in schools need to become aware of and understand the perceptions of immigrant parents. I hope this research will ultimately be used to encourage immigrant parents to continue and even increase their involvement in their children's education, and to help educators and policymakers work closely with immigrant families.

In this introduction, I outline the rationale for my study. I then describe the purpose of my study and the methodology. The last section of the introduction includes the thesis design, limitations of the research, and a brief description of each chapter.

Research Purpose

This case study investigated the involvement of immigrant parents in their children's education from the perspectives of a vice-principal, a teacher, and the

immigrant parents of students in the selected teacher's class. The questions guiding this research are:

1. What kinds of involvement does the school have with its parents?
2. What kinds of involvement do immigrant parents want to have in terms of their children's education?
3. Are these kinds of involvement similar, complementary, or different to what the immigrant parents express?

My research allowed me to gain an understanding of how some immigrant parents of one teacher's class in one Model School in the TDSB want to be involved in their children's education. As well, I learned how one administrator and one teacher involved immigrant parents in their school and the challenges they encountered which they believe impeded parental involvement.

Rationale for the Study

The vision for inclusive education outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education in *Realizing the promise of diversity: Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) and the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a) emphasize that all students, parents, and other members of "our diverse communities" are welcomed and respected in Ontario schools. Both policies underscore parent involvement as a shared responsibility among parents, principals, and teachers. Specifically, this case study investigated immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education from the perspectives of a school administrator, a teacher, and the immigrant parents of students in one teacher's class.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to enhance our understanding of immigrant parent involvement by asking them how they are involved and would like to be involved in the children's education. My research contributes to this body of literature by outlining some of the ways some immigrant parents want to be involved in their children's education. Furthermore, I contend that my study underscores the challenges associated with immigrant parent involvement.

The findings of this study should help broaden the awareness of teachers and schools communities, in terms of gaining an understanding of some immigrant parents' opinions about parent involvement. This case study may also help teachers and school communities to foster involvement of immigrant parents in ways that are more meaningful to the immigrant parents. In order for meaningful relationships to be formed between parents and schools, those working in schools need to understand the parents' perceptions and learn from parents. Furthermore, educational research appears to be lacking different cultural viewpoints concerning parent involvement. This research begins the needed exploration of immigrant parents' perspectives on their children's education.

Context for the Research

As Ontario is home to more than half of Canada's immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2006), Ontario's school enrolment is very diverse. Levin (2008) provided some statistics: 27 percent of the population of Ontario was born outside of Canada; 20 percent are visible minorities. Toronto, with approximately 40 percent of the province's population, is one the most diverse urban areas in the world, and receives approximately 125,000 new immigrants each year from dozens of different countries. If demographic predictions for

Ontario are accurate, schools in Toronto will continue to serve an increasing population of immigrant parents and children (Levin). In keeping with their cultural diversity, Toronto families express very diverse ideas about standards of living, culture, and religions, as well as beliefs and expectations about education and their educational responsibility (Dorfman, 2009). Not only does the TDSB have a population rich in diversity, but also it is one of the largest school boards in North America (Levin) with approximately 250,000 students. Accordingly, as the number of immigrant families in Toronto increases, it is increasingly important that teachers and administrators understand how immigrant parents want to be involved in their children's education, and how to best support these parents' needs and the needs of their children.

In a 2002 survey conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Education, out of an estimated 2.3 million parents of children attending publicly funded schools, only 11 percent of parents considered themselves actively involved in their children's education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a). *The Ontario Parent Involvement Policy*, implemented in December 2005, stated that the Ministry of Education wanted to "address diversity" for the purpose of reaching parents who find involvement in their children's education challenging due to such factors as language barriers, recent immigration, poverty, and newness to the system. In reviewing the literature on parent involvement, however, I found very few studies from the perspective of parents, and even fewer from the perspective of immigrant parents about how they would like to be involved in their children's education. Parental involvement is almost always assessed from the perspectives of teachers and students (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). I contend, however, that it is imperative to ascertain what immigrant parents have to say

about their involvement in the education system so they, and their children, can be properly supported.

Overview of Methodology

I conducted a multi-perspective case study about the immigrant parents of students of one teacher's class in one middle school. This school is a member of the Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) initiative, which was launched by the TDSB in 2005. Building on a vision of equity and inclusiveness, MSIC supports schools in high-needs neighbourhoods in Toronto (Branco & Steinhauer, 2010). "High-needs" is defined in part by the Learning Opportunities Index (TDSB, 2009) that measures the challenges faced by families in their experience of public schooling. Model Schools are the 105 schools in the board with the highest scores on the Learning Opportunities Index (TDSB, 2009). I focused on a Model School in the TDSB because these schools have the highest populations of immigrant parents--the target population for this study.

My qualitative research study is based on constructivism, which assumes that multiple realities are socially constructed through individual and collective perceptions or views of the same situation (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). I wanted to uncover different stakeholders' perceptions of how immigrant parents have been involved and want to be involved in their children's education. The case study is intended to capture and report multiple perspectives rather than to seek a singular truth. To gain these different perspectives, I first carried out document analysis to learn about the history of parent involvement in Ontario and the kinds of parent involvement discussed and recommended by the TDSB.

Second, I approached a selected MSIC middle school to be part of my research study. Once I obtained approval and the vice-principal agreed to participate, I randomly selected one teacher from that school. I interviewed first the vice-principal and then the selected teacher. I wanted to investigate what the vice-principal perceived as involvement between the school and its immigrant parents. Similarly, I wanted to find out what kinds of involvement occur between one teacher and the immigrant parents of the children in his or her class. I used Pecoraro and Phommasouvanh's (1992) principles for effective parent involvement to guide my questions regarding school initiatives, as well as to present my data. Specifically, participant responses are presented under the headings of: a) building on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents bring to Canadian schools; (b) building bridges between new immigrant parents' experiences in their new and native countries; and (c) helping parents to perceive themselves as teachers of their children alongside school teachers. In addition, I included (d) challenges that impeded efforts to address these principles. I used these principles as etic codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to structure and analyze the interviews of both the vice-principal and the one teacher on how their school has involved immigrant parents in their children's education.

Third, primed with the information from the interviews, I surveyed the immigrant parents of this one class (in this case, the entire population of parents) to find out how they have been involved in their children's education, and how they would like to be involved in their children's education. I did this by using a questionnaire sent home to them with their child. I organized the data from the parents' responses in terms of: (a) demographics, (b) education information and occupation, (c) parents' experiences of

home-school communication, and (d) parents' descriptions of how they would like to be involved in their children's education. The results of the three-phase data collection strategy were two interview transcripts and nine parent-completed questionnaires, eight of which I used. After analyzing both sets of data separately, I compared the similarities and differences among the responses of the vice-principal, teacher, and immigrant parents.

Limitations of My Research

The case study was conducted in one TDSB MSIC middle school and with one set of parents from one class. The sample was small; in using only one class of parents, I may have overly represented parents who historically have low literacy skills and were challenged with the questions, or those who had little involvement in their children's education. In addition, the opposite kind of sampling bias may have occurred in this research--parents who responded on the questionnaire may already be heavily involved with the school and their children's education. Therefore, certain members of the parent population might have been underrepresented and others overrepresented in my study. I recognize that the range of responses from immigrant parents may be somewhat limited in this initial exploratory research. The limitations of the sample include the fact that there was no control for the demographics--for example, eight of the nine parents are immigrants, but they have different backgrounds; therefore the limitation is that the sample lumps all categories of immigrants together. There is also no way to differentiate between parents who speak and read English and those who do not.

Completing questionnaires in a written format may not have been the best choice for getting the parents' input, as I noted differences between the quality and completeness

of the survey responses versus those given during interviews. The face-to-face interviews, however, allowed me to ask clarifying questions to the vice-principal and teacher and allowed for additional elaboration. It is important for me to clarify that I considered the possibility of conducting face-to-face interviews with the immigrant parents, however I felt that there was not enough time to build trusting relationships with the parents in order to be able to obtain meaningful data. I also felt that due to time constraints and language barriers conducting interviews would not be suitable for my case study. In addition, after conducting the interviews with the teacher, she informed me that female professionals are not always given the same respect as males and this may have limited by ability to access data. Therefore, I chose to use the parent questionnaire to obtain data from the immigrant parents.

Furthermore, a disadvantage of using a questionnaire with the immigrant parents was my inability to clarify the answers or ask for elaboration on any of the open-ended questions. In addition, one of the major limitations of the validity of evidence in similar research has been the failure to examine the relations between responses on questionnaires and actual parental behaviour. Self-reported measures for parent involvement have limitations because subjective measures rather than observational methods are used. To address this limitation in my research, I used multiple means of data collection to examine the multifaceted interactions and relationships of the parents with the school during school council meetings and other parent nights at Northridge. I kept a field log with a chronological record of the dates, times, and people involved with the school council meetings and parent workshops.

Overview of Thesis

The thesis is organized into five chapters. This chapter, Chapter 1, introduces the study and its purpose. I describe my own personal interest in my research topic and I outline the methodology. In Chapter 2, I present a review of the findings of prior research and literature related to parent involvement. I review the historical and contemporary terms of parent involvement in the public policy domain, and research studies on immigrant parent involvement programs. Finally, I review the theories of barriers to parent involvement.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of the methodology that underpins my research and the specific methods used to collect and analyze data. This chapter includes a description of my research purpose and the key questions of my study. I describe the theoretical framework that underpinned my research. I also described the approaches used to enhance the trustworthiness and overall quality of the study. I outline the steps that I followed to collect, code, analyze, and interpret the data.

The findings are presented in Chapter 4, beginning with the data collected from the interviews with the vice-principal and teacher, and followed by the data obtained from the nine questionnaires from the parent participants. Using the data collected from the two in-depth interviews, I document each theme independently for the vice-principal and teacher. I aggregate the data collected from the parents' responses. Illustrative quotes taken from the interviews and questionnaires are used throughout this chapter to demonstrate how parents have been involved in their children's education. I compare and contrast the perspectives of the three participant groups: vice-principal, teacher, and

parents in my analysis. The chapter closes with a summary of the findings, from the perspectives of both the school (the vice-principal and the one teacher) and the parents.

I conclude my thesis in Chapter 5. There I summarize key findings in reference to my three research questions. Each section includes themes that emerged in my review of the literature and in my research. In addition, I propose recommendations for the school and school board to improve parent involvement policies that target immigrant parents. I also suggest possible avenues for future research resulting from my study. Finally, I discuss the significance of my work and its contributions to the literature on immigrant parent involvement in their children's education.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the literature related to parent involvement in education in reference to three key objectives. The first objective is to understand the historical and contemporary terms of parent involvement in the public policy domain. The second is to review what is known about immigrant parent involvement in education. Then I review the theories on barriers to parent involvement in their children's schools. Works cited include peer-reviewed research articles, empirical policy research, and critical and theoretical analyses of terms.

A Brief History of Parent Involvement and School Councils in Ontario

To understand the legal context of parent involvement, one must acknowledge the legal principles that govern public policy in Canada and in the province of Ontario. It is important to note that, by the virtue of the Constitution Act (1867), "In and for each Province the Legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Education" (s. 93). The federal government has no legislative authority with respect to public education and each of the 10 provinces and three territories operate their own public education systems. I first examine the legal and regulatory policies of parent involvement and school councils in the province of Ontario. I begin with the history of how parent involvement became an educational policy initiative in the province of Ontario.

Many educational policies created in Ontario in the 1990s by the Progressive Conservative and New Democratic parties were created to meet market principles and practices (Delhi, 1996). One of the main objectives of the provincial government in Ontario was to raise standards and 'retool' schools for the global market. Contemporary

educational reforms in Ontario invoked “pernicious nostalgia” for a well-ordered past when people knew their place in society and were well behaved (Delhi, 1996). The policies appealed to the traditional role of a parent, yet also generated normative and exclusive visions of individuals, limiting who belongs and who is excluded from a community and a nation (Epstein & Johnston, 1998). These policies defined how parents should be involved in their children’s education.

The Toronto District School Board changed substantially under the Rae NDP government from 1990 to 1995 and again under the Harris Progressive Conservative government from 1995 to 2003. The province took steps to centralize influence at the provincial level, particularly in the Education sector. The Progressive Conservative government and the NDP government, although widely different in terms of orientation and priorities, moved towards more provincial and less local influence over education. The centralized education system included a more prescriptive curriculum and increased student assessment (Gidney, 1999).

In the 1990s, the Harris government implemented the “Common Sense” ideology that was made effective using “progressive” market discourse and authoritative assertions of traditional discipline and order. Deem (1990) observed that the Harris government’s objective was to transfer education from the “producers” (teachers), to the “consumers” (parents). The introduction of province-wide curriculum, testing, and reporting on student achievements were justified with terms like “accountability” to both parents and taxpayers. In 1994, the provincial government asked the Education Improvement Commission (1997) to conduct research about establishing local school parent councils across Ontario. The Education Improvement Commission (1997) recommended that the

Education Act be amended to include parent involvement at the local school level. The Education Improvement Commission (1997) recommended that school councils be required at every school to ensure participation of all parents from across Ontario.

In January 1994, the Royal Commission on Learning released the report *For the Love of Learning*. That report emphasized the importance of parental involvement and recommended that schools establish school and community councils. In April 1995, responding to the Commission's recommendation, the Ministry of Education and Training implemented the Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 122 *School Board Policies on School Councils* (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1995). This policy required school boards to develop strategies to implement school councils by June 1996.

In 1996, the entire education governance system was changed in Ontario. The number of local school districts was reduced from 140 to 70. In addition, school principals were removed from the teachers' union. At the same time, funding was reduced for many (non-education-related) social assistance and government programs. These cuts included many programs for recent immigrants, as well as cuts to social support programs and youth services (Levin, 2008). These social funding cuts exacerbated the education cuts by removing access to even more resources from those who most needed them. In 1996, a small group of parents---mostly mothers--who were concerned about the government's new education policies and budget cuts, formed the organization People for Education. The group became and remains an important participant in public debate about issues that affect education in Ontario. In addition to carrying out educational activism, People for Education conducted research and provided

compelling data to counter the Harris government budget cuts to the education system and social services programs.

In 1997, the Education Quality Improvement Act mandated that all publicly-funded schools have school councils in Ontario. Later in the year, the majority of school boards in Ontario had implemented school councils. However, it became apparent from the beginning of the policy implementation that not all school councils were equally positioned in terms of the number of parents involved. The Ontario provincial government wanted more accountability and guidelines to be implemented, as documented in the *PPM 122: School Board Policies on School Councils*.

A pivotal shift occurred in 1998 when the Ontario Education Improvement Commission (EIC) released their report *The Road Ahead-III: A Report on the Role of School Councils*. The report recommended that school councils, rather than the schools themselves, should be in charge of encouraging parent involvement. The EIC also noted that clear expectations for school council's role and areas of authority and participation were needed in Ontario. Also important to note, on a global level, in 1997 the report *Parents as partners in schooling* for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1997) revealed that countries may wish to increase parent involvement for a variety of reasons not directly related to a child's achievement. Their reasons for parent involvement included: accountability in market-oriented countries, consumer choice in contexts where parents as consumers may choose their children's schools, as a way to improve home/school relations, equalization of social resources by showing parents how to best support their children's education, and how to use parents as fundraisers and volunteers.

After consultations with school councils across Ontario in 1999, the Minister of Education, Janet Ecker, initiated Ontario *Regulation 612/00*, which was passed in 2000. The regulation (Ontario Government, *School Councils*, 1997) confirmed school councils as the means to improve student achievement and enhance the accountability of education to parents. The purpose of school councils, as described in *School Councils* (2000), was: “to improve pupil achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents” (s. 2(1)). The provincial government set standards for student achievement, performance, and accountability; however, little information was provided describing how schools could or should work with parents.

Ontario Parent Involvement Policy

In 2002, a survey conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Education showed that 11 percent of the 2.3 million parents of children attending publicly funded schools, considered themselves actively involved in their children’s education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a). The *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy*, implemented in December 2005, states that the Ministry of Education wanted to “address diversity” for the purpose of reaching parents who may find involvement challenging due to such factors as language barriers, recent immigration, poverty, and newness to the system. Policies that address diversity in schools are connected in policy webs (Joshee & Johnson, 2005) consisting of federal, provincial, and local schools board policies. Although, the federal government has no legislative authority with respect to public education, multicultural and immigration policies at the federal level do impact policy in the provinces and hence in schools. As an example, the federal government funds a program entitled the Languages Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) in the province of Ontario.

However, the province and the school boards in Ontario are responsible for funding language training in schools, and teaching ESL is not a mandated part of any teacher initial qualification (B.Ed.) in any province. Access to the LINC programs is limited to permanent residents or Convention refugees. Temporary immigrants, non-status immigrants, refugee claimants, and Canadian citizens cannot access federally-funded LINC programs or any other settlement programs. The regulations implemented for support programs and services limited immigrant parents' access to resources in the province of Ontario. To address some of the issues immigrant families encounter, the Ministry of Education introduced the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a).

The *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a) required an additional one million dollars for use in addressing diversity. The money was allotted to school councils to help create a welcoming environment for immigrant parents through school-based initiatives. In addition, the Minister announced that \$750,000 was going to be used for parent-focused regional and provincial projects. The language of policy discourse used in the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* is an example of a more traditional form of parent involvement. The parent involvement policy outlines a range of “good activities.” The policy identifies these good activities as: (1) helping with homework; (2) serving on school councils and school board or provincial committees; (3) communicating and meeting with teachers; and (4) volunteering in the classroom or on school trips (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a). The policy does not discuss how educators can work with parents with language barriers, or who have recently

immigrated, who are poor, or who are new to the system, i.e., with parents who bring with them varying beliefs, values, and ethics.

In 2005, the Ontario Ministry of Education created the *Parent Voice in Education Project* (2005b), which researched parents' opinions concerning what they want in terms of their children's education. The parents wanted:

[M]ore regular updates on their individual children's education, and they wanted access to information about the education system as a whole—about how the system works, who is responsible for what, how education is funded, what the appropriate channels are to address specific concerns, and how to be meaningfully involved in their children's education. (p. 4)

The main research findings were that parents wanted to have uncomplicated information about their children's education, opportunities to provide feedback, and be aware of specific ways to support their children.

In 2006, the newly elected Conservative government reversed a Liberal initiative to grant status to a number of non-status immigrants who had been working in Canada for many years (Gagia & Slade, 2011). The Conservatives put increased resources into deporting thousands of non-status immigrants. This initiative was highly criticized by the press and led to the implementation of the *Access Without Fear: Don't Ask, Don't Tell* (TDSB, 2007) policy at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). The TDSB decided that to protect the rights of children of non-status immigrants the school board would not require families or their children to divulge their immigration status.

In 2010, the *Ontario Parent in Partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a) was released by the Ministry of Education. The purpose of the policy was to provide “the supports needed to connect parents at the local level and to help ensure that they have the skills, knowledge, and tools they need to engage fully in their children’s education and in the life of their schools” (p. 5). *Ontario Parent in Partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (2010a) policy changed the term ‘parent involvement’ to ‘parent engagement’. According to Pushor (2007), parent involvement implies that parents are involved in school activities without having the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process; whereas, parent engagement implies the “integral and essential” (Pushor, 2007, p. 3) role of a parent in the process of structuring their child’s education.

The Legal Role of Parents and Teachers

A parent or guardian has the legal right and responsibility to make all decisions regarding his or her child’s schooling. According to Act 5 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990), governments must respect the rights, responsibilities, and duties of parents to provide guidance and direction to their children. Similarly, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) stated that: “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children” (Article 26(3)).

In Canada, children may attend home, private, or religious schools (Bezeau, 2007) as alternatives to publically funded schools. Despite this freedom, Magsino (1995) earlier suggested that the power of the state over child rearing has become an established fact. He found that evolving views of family have changed laws, resulting in greater

involvement or power of the state in family matters. In the past, teachers held *in loco parentis*, which meant they acted as stand-in parents while students were in school. However, with the increase in state authority, the principle of *parens patriae* was introduced, under which the government is empowered to act to protect and promote the welfare of those who are unable to act in their own best interests. The increase in state authority has changed the teacher's role from *in loco parentis* to *parens patriae* because the role of the teacher has become defined by statutory and regulatory requirements (MacKay & Sutherland, 2006). These new regulatory requirements have changed the way family matters are dealt with in schools.

Defining Parent Involvement

The term "parent involvement" has many complex and contradictory meanings. Traditional parent involvement includes activities that encourage parents' presence in the school, such as: Parent-Teacher Association (school-council) committees, scheduled parent-teacher conferences, school celebrations, volunteering in the classroom, and accompanying students on fieldtrips (Peña, 2000). Many of the activities accepted as parent involvement are what Lawson (2003) called "school-centric" practices; whereby the teachers or the administration prescribe the ways parents can participate in schools.

Researchers have made the distinction between home-based activities (e.g., helping children with homework) and school-based activities (e.g., participation in volunteer activities) (Walker, Dallaire, Green, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2004). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) researched parents' motivation for involvement and found that parents' sense of self-efficacy for helping their children succeed in school influenced specific involvement decisions. To conduct this study, the researchers used a theoretical

model by Hoover-Dempsey (1995) to predict the types and levels of parent involvement at home and at elementary and middle schools. The predictor variables included: parents' motivational beliefs about involvement, perceptions of invitations from others for involvement, and perceived life context variables (role construction, personal self-efficacy, specific invitations from the teacher and child, self-perceived skills and knowledge, and self-perceived energy) (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005). They concluded that parent relationships with children and teachers emerged as the main predictor in parental involvement. Parents' interpersonal relationships with children and teachers determined their personal sense of self-efficacy for involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In addition, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler warned that, even if parent involvement policies and programs are well designed, programs for involvement will meet with only limited success if they do not address the issues of parent role construction and parents' sense of self-efficacy for helping their own children succeed. Therefore, teachers and schools should consider acknowledging and encouraging parents to work with their children at home, i.e., parent-centric activities.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's research (1995, 1997) suggested that, by devoting interest and time to school related activities, parents enhanced the possibility that their children would do well in school. The model predicted (1995) that children whose parents are involved in their education would be more likely to succeed academically than children whose parents are not involved. Although Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) findings were that parent involvement determined a child's sense of self-efficacy for doing well in school, research by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) found that

intervention to promote parent involvement failed to deliver convincing measures of impact on student achievement. They noted “evaluations of intervention are so technically weak that it is impossible, on the basis of public available evidence, to describe the scale of the impact on pupils’ achievement” (p. 5).

Harris and Goodall (2008) explored the relationship between innovative work with parents and schools and its subsequent impact upon student achievement. Their 12-month research project, Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement (EPRA), was carried out to capture the views and voices of parents, students, and teachers, as well as to explore barriers to parental involvement. Other factors that were taken into account included the socioeconomic status (SES) and the black minority ethnic (BME) percentages. The results showed that a number of socioeconomic factors prevented parents from being fully involved in their children’s education. Key findings from the interviews with parents revealed that parents reported a sense of powerlessness in their interactions with the school. The only form of communication that parents described was written communication, i.e., letters and emails from the school, which proved to be difficult for parents with low literacy skills to comprehend. The researchers found that it was the schools, rather than parents, who were difficult to work with. Parents, teachers, and students tended to have the belief that parent engagement was a “good thing,” yet they held different views about the purpose of engaging parents. Parents viewed parental involvement as offering “support to students;” teachers viewed parent engagement as a way to “improve behavior and support for the school”; students viewed it as “moral support” (Harris & Goodall, 2008, p. 282). The researchers contended that home-based education makes the greatest impact on students’ achievement. Harris and Goodall

concluded that a major difference existed between involving parents in schooling and engaging parents in learning. They said that engagement of parents in their children's learning in the home was the factor most likely to result in a positive difference in learning outcomes and achievement of students.

According to Jeynes (2005), having high expectations of one's child was found to be the most significant contributor to students' academic achievement. Jeynes' meta-analysis revealed that it was not particular parent actions, such as attending school functions, establishing household rules, or checking student homework, that yielded the statistically significant results in the research in relation to student academic achievement. Instead, elements that created "an educationally oriented ambiance" (p. 262) provided children with standards and support that produced the strongest results. The findings indicated that parent involvement in schools was not the determinate factor of a child's academic success. However, research has revealed that parents' personal sense of self-efficacy affected how they get involved with their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). If they do not feel competent, they are less likely to volunteer in school or help their children at home. Therefore, parents' sense of low-efficacy, which is demonstrated by low levels of involvement, may also lead to low participation in learning and the inability to create educationally oriented atmospheres for their children.

Furthermore, Carreón, Drake, and Barton (2005) examined the opinions of how working-class immigrant parents participate in their children's formal education. Interviews with the parents outlined the challenges immigrant parents face as they attempt to participate in their children's schooling. The researchers argued that parent

involvement should be understood from the parents' perspective, regardless of whether that presence is in a formal school space or in more personal, informal spaces, including those created by parents themselves. The researchers discovered that parents wanted opportunities for parent-school connections that respected the parents' cultural-immigrant stories to allow the parents to feel "supported and encouraged in expressing their critical views of the world and attempting to strengthen their parent community" (p. 495).

Parent Involvement in the Public Policy Domain

Some researchers (Crozier & Davies, 2007; de Carvalho, 2001; Fine, 1993; Flessa, 2008; Lareau, 2002; Nakagawa, 2000) have challenged the democratic underpinnings of parent involvement policies and school councils by examining the use of language in policy discourses. This section focuses on the critical theories that enrich our understanding of barriers to involvement that are often beyond the parents' control. I discuss the literature outlining the various impediments for families to participate in their children's schooling in ways that educators' desire (Crozier, 2000; de Carvalho, 2001; Lareau, 2002; Pushor & Murphy, 2004) and summarize the research that demonstrates how policy discourses around parent involvement contradict their stated aims to empower parents who come from low socioeconomic and diverse ethnic backgrounds.

There is no administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designed by such notions as field, region, and territory...Endeavoring...to decipher discourse through the use of spatial. Strategic metaphors enable one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power.

(Foucault, 1980, p. 70)

Critical theorists such as Foucault place particular emphasis on the concept of power in policy creation and implementation. Foucault (1980) used the spatial metaphor of the battlefield to conceptualize the struggle involved in implementing social justice. He discussed how power, acting through discourse, shaped the very construction of knowledge. Each individual or group of individuals may put forth seemingly independent ideas; however, society “must attend to the working of power in articulation, dissemination and assumption of these various forms of knowledge” (Dumas & Anyon, 2004, p. 154). Foucault argued that no such concept of power exists in and of itself; it exists when it is put into action. Forms of cultural capital become apparent when discussing how parents view their role in education. Foucault said that subjects of policy initiatives self-regulate their behaviour so that the state no longer requires power over them. By stating the ideal role of parent involvement, the state reinforces its power with and over parents. The discourse of power limits the role that parents might play in schools and what parents and children are able to capitalize in the market-oriented education system.

Nakagawa (2000) examined the role of language in American parent policy discourse. He stated, “language used to discuss parents in relation to schools controls how parents get involved and creates representations of the ideal parent” (p. 447). Nakagawa discussed how the policy text positioned the parents in a “double bind” (p. 448)—parent-as-protectors or parent-as-problem. Similar to the Coleman Report (discussed below) from the 1960s, parent involvement policy is primarily aimed at improving the educational performance of ethnic minority and poor children. Often these

parents are viewed through a deficit lens. Either the parent complies with the policy or is often seen as negligent (Nakagawa, 2000).

Discriminating Family Factors

The literature on parent involvement often implicitly discriminates against immigrant families. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that schools are middle-class institutions with middle-class values and take for granted that all parents have the same social and cultural experiences as those of the intellectual and economic elites.

Before discussing the literature on cultural capital, I think it important to establish how parent involvement became part of the public policy domain. In 1964, the term “parent involvement” became synonymous with “student achievement” in the American public policy domain. During this period, many studies were conducted in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In 1966, the Coleman Report was published as a result of a national survey that had been commissioned to focus on the problems related to academic achievement by children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. The data from this report provided evidence to develop some (US) federal legislation and the Coleman Report itself. The Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966) suggested that family background explained most of the variation in school achievement. Coleman correlated parents’ different levels of school involvement with their socioeconomic status. This is known as the ‘culture of poverty’ theory, and suggests that working-class families do not value education as highly as middle and upper class families. The Coleman Report has been criticized for the ‘culture of poverty’ theory, as well as for errors in its methodology (Johnston & Viadero, 2000).

Scharpf (1997) stated that the Coleman Report limited the policy narrative for future choices on how low-income parents are viewed in education using a social process of political and policy oriented goals known as “actor-centered institutionalism.” According to Howlett and Ramesh (2003), actor-centered institutionalism emphasizes the importance of the autonomy of political institutions from the society in which they exist. The theory takes into account that “rules, norms, and symbols all affect political behaviour; that the organization of governmental institutions affects what the state does; and that unique patterns of historical development constrain future choices” (p. 29). The main purpose of the Coleman Report was for social cultural capital to comply with educators’ vision of the ideal parent role. When referring to “cultural capital,” I refer to Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) beliefs, motivations of personal life orientations, and social networks that define schools as middle-class institutions with middle-class values.

As previously mentioned, Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) theory of cultural reproduction has been useful for highlighting the subtle way in which schools reproduce an arbitrary cultural scheme (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), which privileges parents with dominant white, middle-class values. Crozier and Davies (2007) also suggested that educational policies for parent involvement were flawed because they fail to recognize ethnic diversity among parents. The issues of the parents’ context and culture are ignored and wrongfully taken as resistance, which may lead to widening the gap between involved and uninvolved parents. This finding is important to note when referring to the low level of involvement of immigrant parents. Nowhere does the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (2005a) acknowledge that many ethnic parents view the role of parents differently from how it has been defined in that policy.

After examining the legal and cultural factors affecting parent involvement, I next discuss the language and structural issues related to the creation of school councils. The provincial decision to give parents more defined responsibilities in education in Ontario through the establishment of school councils was intended to enhance parental involvement in education (Ontario Government, *School Councils*, 2000). However, Flessa (2008) noted that policies that label students and parents are inherently destined to fail because they begin with frameworks that suggest students and parents are inadequate. Researchers such as Bauch and Goldring (1998) examined the restructuring efforts that have led attempts to change the traditional relationship between parents and teachers, including the creation of school councils. However, “[school councils] can also be perceived as an attempt by government to regulate more clearly parental involvement in schools” (Brien & Stelmach, 2010, p. 10).

Well-intentioned and clearly expressed purposes for parent involvement outlined in policies may not be achieved because of explicit understandings and assumptions existing within the organizational culture of schools. In the few studies that have included parents’ perspectives (Bernhard & Freire, 1999; Lareau, 2002; Li, 2003; Ramirez, 2003), the schools have been positioned as institutions that privilege the language and cultural norms of white middle-class English-speaking families over immigrant families’ language and culture. Middle-class parents are typically involved in social systems of dense social networks and cultural capital, with connections to other parents in the community, and using these networks, they are able to access extensive information about the school. Middle-class parents mobilize other parents in their network to bring about change as a group. Working-class parents often have limited social networks,

interact with the school individually, and may have less success in achieving their goals (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). Fine (1993) noted earlier that immigrant parents are often constructed as “needy, ‘naïve,’ ‘hysterical,’ and appear to be working in opposition to teachers” (p. 685). Fine’s (1993) research indicated that schools have much work to do to create understanding of immigrant parents and their roles in parent involvement.

To illustrate socioeconomic influences on parents’ involvement in schools, Lareau (2002) examined working-class and middle-class parent interactions. Lareau concluded that social class influences how parents perceive their roles and how they understand their child. She found that middle-class parents engaged in concerted cultivation, i.e., the parents purposefully organized their children’s lives in ways that fostered their skills and development for school- related activities and professional success. The middle-class parents capitalize on opportunities to interact with and have influence over their children. Working-class parents, on the other hand, are less likely to be involved in school councils and prefer to interact directly with their children’s teachers because they do not feel welcome in schools. In her earlier research (Lareau, 1989), Lareau noted the efforts of upper-middle class, professional families in constructing their children’s school success. She argued that social class, independent of ability, does affect schooling.

Other studies have revealed that parents from lower socioeconomic groups who are of minority ethnic status do not participate in their children’s schools in traditionally expected ways, and the implementation of policies does not help increase these parents’ involvement (Caines, 2006; de Carvalho, 2001). Some ethnic minority parents perceive that they are not respected or are marginalized by schoolteachers and administrators, and

thus they have little motivation to participate in school-parent activities (Ramirez, 2003; Tapia, 2000; Valdez, 1996). The education system is set up such that teachers ask for parent involvement, and cultural capital and social class shape the resources parents have at their disposal to either comply with school orders or not. According to de Carvalho (2001), schools are conceived and organized so that not only do teachers need parents' commitment or involvement in academic decisions, but also a teacher makes decisions concerning students "based on evaluations or bets," involving stereotypes and prejudices about his or her students' parents. The dilemma is that immigrant parents are already at a disadvantage in their new (Ontario) education system because the majority of them view the education system differently from the middle-class parents and teachers who operate the schools and school boards (de Carvalho, 2001).

Working-class Immigrant Parent Involvement

In the province of Ontario, with its high immigrant population, parent involvement policies become problematic because of the cultural factors that contribute to parents' feelings about the education system. As previously mentioned, the literature indicated that many immigrant parents feel marginalized and powerless in light of traditional hierarchies between professionals and non-professionals (Dorfman, 2009; Lareau, 1989). The majority of parent involvement policies ignore power discrepancies on the assumption that as long as parents are provided with equal opportunities to get involved in schools they should be able to. However, policymakers do not take into consideration that not all parents share equal conditions to capitalize on formal arrangements of parent involvement policies. According to Brien and Stelmach (2010), research that focuses on "identifying strategies for engaging hard to reach parents (Epstein, 2001, p. 275) is

symptomatic of a false binary that results from the expectation that opportunities enhance engagement” (p. 10). Furthermore, parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to see themselves as collaborators in their children’s education and as being entitled to be involved. Parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often encounter limitations in participating in schools (Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2004). The education system is set up so that schools:

[C]apitalize upon the entering of Canadian-born middle-class students not from some conscious and malicious conspiracy, but simply from a privileged class ethnocentrism. Our schools are operated by middle class school boards, administrators and teachers. (Forcese, 1997, p. 127)

Researchers have noted that parents of colour often have different values for education or different ideas about their participation in their children’s education (Carreón et al., 2005; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Soyoung, 2005), which often goes unrecognized in a traditional top-down approach to parent involvement. Crozier and Davies (2007) said that the term ‘hard to reach’ is often imposed upon ethnic groupings; and that individuals belonging to these groups are often considered as indifferent and difficult. Similarly, research conducted by Noguera (2004) revealed that low levels of parent and community involvement in public education are interpreted as an indication of disinterest in education. However, these patterns follow trends that are common to other forms of civic engagement (e.g., voting, participation in political parties, and community organization) in low-income communities (Putnam, 1995). In a study of Ontario parents and educational activists, Dehli (1996) uncovered that:

[P]arents do not comprise a coherent and unified constituency within educational politics. The specific and varied histories and struggles over school programs and governance in Ontario, and the different articulations of ‘choice’ within that history, further illustrate that parents are positioned differently in relation to schooling. (p. 85)

Dehli’s findings are similar to those of Tomlinson and Hutchinson (1991). Tomlinson and Hutchinson (1991) researched parents of Bangladeshi origin and found that the Bangladeshi parents had specific problems in relation to their children’s schooling, which related to socioeconomic position, their immigrant status, and their racial and cultural differences. This latter aspect included limited knowledge of English, which inhibited home-school communication (1991, p. 42). The limited knowledge of English for many immigrant parents has reduced their ability to get involved in parental involvement activities in the school. Cummins (2000) pointed out that:

If the ability to speak English and the knowledge of North America Cultural Conventions are made prerequisites for ‘parent involvement,’ then many of those parents will be defined as apathetic and incompetent and will play out their pre-ordained role of non-involvement. (p. 8)

Many of these immigrant parents come from cultures and societies that have different education systems than that of the Ontario education system. Dorfman (2009), a provincial coordinator of settlement workers in Ontario schools, found that in many of the immigrant parents’ first countries, they are expected to ensure the child is fed, dressed, and their homework is completed. All of this is done with the support of the extended family. However, in Canada the role of the parent is to do all their usual

parental tasks “plus debriefing the day, providing stimulating weekend and summer activities, reading with young students, monitoring for Internet abuse and bullying, and communication with teacher(s)” (p. 36). Dorfman noted that parents are not able to send their child to school, “knowing that the school will take care of things, like back home, [instead] they find that the school needs their attention at a time when they are most overwhelmed” (p. 36). Immigrant parents are often asked to adjust to a new education system but often have limited time and resources to do so as outlined in the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a).

Furthermore, parents are often unable to become involved in school councils or attend the parent-teacher interviews. According to Dorfman, many immigrant parents do not know about parent-teacher interviews, as only parents from elite private schools in their country of origin would have experience with interviews. In many countries, “parents would only meet with teachers if their child had done something terribly wrong” (p. 37). This creates a challenge for many of the immigrant parents in the Canadian education system because parents do not understand that interviews are considered to be of great importance. However, Dorfman also observed that, even if they do attend the interviews, parents’ language barriers are the least of their worries because parents have “no experience talking in a conversational style with someone as ‘highly-esteemed’ as a teacher” (p. 37). A similar finding by Smrekar (1996) was that minority-language parents are less likely than their dominant-language counterparts to be familiar with the technical language used by teachers to describe curriculum and educational goals.

Many immigrant parents think that the teacher is the expert on school matters and therefore the parent should remain outside the affairs of the school. Moles (1993) stated

“Southeast Asian immigrant parents believe they are being helpful by maintaining a respectful distance from the education system” (p. 35). Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001), researchers for the Harvard Immigration Project, came to a similar conclusion. They conducted the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaption Project (LISA), one of the largest ongoing longitudinal studies of immigrant children in the United States. Their research employed a variety of social science techniques that included structured questionnaires for children, their parents, and teachers, ethnographic fieldwork in their schools as well as community, and psychological and narrative techniques. They revealed that immigrant parents believe that it is not their business to micromanage the schooling of their children and that what goes on in the school is the responsibility of the teachers (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). They underscored that one of the challenges for immigrants as social outsiders is that they are insecure in questioning the judgment of school authorities.

Ladky and Peterson (2008) conducted one of the few recent studies on immigrant parents in Ontario. They conducted research from the perspectives of 21 immigrant parents who spoke eight different languages and had been living in Canada for less than six years. In addition, their study included the perspectives of 61 teachers and 32 principals who work with English as a second language (ESL) populations of 20 percent or greater who have been recognized for successfully involving immigrant parents in their children’s schooling. The findings revealed that the greatest barrier to successful interaction with immigrant parents was the language barrier. Similarly, Trueba (2004) examined immigrant parent communities and uncovered that the greatest challenge for immigrants was language; parents lose some of the authority they had in their home

countries because they lack knowledge of the nuances of language called for in particular situations, such as talking to a teacher or requesting a schedule change. Horvat et al. (2003) said that working class parents often lack the education and status to “stand up” to school authorities as equals.

Accordingly, the reasons found in the above literature to explain less parent involvement in their child’s education include:

[C]ultural differences and views of education, fear of authority-based institutions, parental illiteracy, family problems, negative education experiences, job-related issues, economic conditions, health, living arrangements, and lack of resources for participation. (Plevyak, 2003, p. 32)

Not only do immigrant parents view the education system differently, but they often lack knowledge about how the curriculum is organized or how the Canadian school system functions. Perez, Drake, and Barton (2005) found that immigrant parents often rely on their children as translators with other school actors, altering the natural power structure within both the family and the school. School councils and parent involvement policies do not take into account the varying challenges both culturally and economically that limits the involvement of immigrant parents.

Immigrant families must structure new lives for themselves and their families in a culture that is often unknown to them. To become acquainted with Canadian culture, they must establish new ways to function and acquire new forms of cultural capital (e.g., learning to speak English) and new social networks. Reitz (2005) stated that the majority of immigrants with doctorate degrees have difficulty acquiring employment and often end up working in the least-skilled occupations. Many immigrants have difficulty

obtaining the “Canadian experience” they require for higher paying jobs and often work jobs that pay minimum wage. Researchers have observed that perhaps policy is not the most appropriate way to engage parents and teachers (Brien & Stelmach, 2010; Pushor & Murphy, 2004; Ruitenberg & Pushor, 2005). These researchers indicated too, that relationship-building is central to establishing effective parent-teacher relationships. Accordingly, the next section discusses rethinking parent involvement policy initiatives by focusing on relationship building.

Rethinking Policy, Schools, and Relationships

Improved parent involvement policies should begin to reconsider the “school-centric” approach (Lawson, 2003) to parent involvement. Moreover, perhaps policy is not the most appropriate way to engage parents and teachers. As Pushor and Murphy (2004) and Ruitenberg and Pushor (2005) argued, relationship building is central to establishing effective parent-teacher relationships.

Warren, Thompson, and Saegert (2001) commented that community-based organizations (CBO’s) are authentically rooted in community life; therefore, they can bring to schools a better understanding of the culture and assets of families, as well as resources that schools may lack. Levin (2008) also emphasized that community organizations, such as ethnic organizations, can be important vehicles for reaching--and hearing from-- people who may have few links to schools, including immigrants who do not speak the majority language. Warren et al. (2001) believed that educators could benefit from taking a patient approach to building relationships with parents over time. In doing so, schools will profit from the social capital expertise of COB’s, as these

organizations understand the interests, values, and capacities of any particular school community.

Case studies conducted by Noguera (2004) and Pollock (2004) suggested that, since most teachers live outside the community in which they teach, neighbourhood visits are one way to educate teachers about their students' communities. However, Noguera noted that these trips might, in fact, perpetuate negative stereotypes and occasionally insult teachers' and communities' knowledge.

In all, several recommendations are found in the literature to increase immigrant parental involvement, including:

[H]iring bilingual administrative and teaching staff; providing cultural awareness training for teachers and principals; making available translation services for written communication going home and verbal communication in formal and informal meetings of parents and school personnel; and integrating bilingual and multicultural materials in regular classroom instruction. (Kauffman, Perry, & Prentiss, 2001, p. 7)

Teachers providing good news to parents about students, teachers using translation and interpretation services, and teachers' awareness that parents of different cultural/ethnic backgrounds have different cultural practices around education are all important elements that help build bridges with parents (Levin, 2008). Henderson and Mapp (2003) emphasized the importance of relationships and building a foundation for authentic parent participation. The school staff has to engage in caring and trusting relationships with the parents and they must "recognize parents as partners in the educational development of children, these relationships enhance parents' desire to be

involved and influence how they participate in their children's educational development” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 46). Researchers Bryk and Schneider (2002) contended that schools with higher levels of trust among participants have shown to exhibit a greater capacity to reform themselves and improve their practice. Nieto (1994) found that it was important for the teachers to be able to understand and empathize with their students' life histories. Furthermore, administrators have an important role to play in interpreting the external community context and linking this knowledge and understanding to the school's internal community. According to Levin (2008), administrators need to commit to partnerships coupled with respect and ongoing effort to create dialogue and mutual understanding. Although administrators have a role to play in establishing parent-community relationships, the research conducted by Epstein and Sanders (2000) found that only one fifth of new administrators are well prepared for partnerships with families and communities.

Building relationships with immigrant parents cannot all happen within the context of the school nor should it be the sole responsibility of the school. According to a 2006 paper issued by the Canadian School Boards Association (CBSA) (CSBA, 2006) on the needs of second language learners, all provinces are dealing with a similar lack of social services for immigrant families. The CSBA called for “Federal-provincial-community partnerships to provide the range of essential supports that fall outside the traditional picture of classroom instruction but are acutely needed by immigrant children in school” (2006, p. 1). The CSBA noted that immigrant parents' and students' integration into the education system has to happen at a provincial level and should not just be left to the boards of education to deal with. Although some researchers stated that students directly

benefit when their parents are involved in their education, there are also side benefits for parents themselves—they learn more about public education in Ontario and they become part of a school community as engaged citizens (Corter & Pelletier, 2004; People for Education, 2008).

School board policies tend to favour school-centric parent involvement activities, and not parent-centric activities (Warren, Thompson, & Saegert, 2001). Rather than starting with an activity—for example, getting parents to attend school council meetings—another approach would be to start with relationship building in order to create conversations; which may give parents an opportunity to articulate their own concerns. Warren et al. (2001) suggested that the school should provide parents with the opportunity to take leadership in setting a joint agenda. The researchers argue that when community-based organizations are rooted in community life they can bring to schools a better understanding of the culture and assets of families in that school community. They also state that: “as go-betweens (community-based organizations), they can build relational bridges between educators and parents and act as catalysts for change” (Warren et al., 2009, p. 2209). Parent-centric activities focus on the importance of relationships and trust for building a foundation for authentic and powerful parent participation in schools (Mapp, 2003). The TDSB is attempting to build relationships with parents and local communities in the high immigrant populated areas by implementing the Model School for Inner Cities Initiative.

Model Schools

This section discusses the implementation of the Model Schools for Inner Cities initiative that was established by the TDSB to provide essential services to families in

inner city communities in Toronto. The TDSB created a program in 2005 called Model Schools for Inner Cities—an initiative built on a vision of equity and inclusiveness that supports schools in high-needs neighbourhoods in Toronto (TDSB, 2005). “High-needs” is defined in part by the Learning Opportunities Index (TDSB, 2009), which measures the challenges faced by families in their experience of public schooling. One hundred and five elementary schools (almost one quarter, of the 475 elementary schools) in the TDSB were identified as having the highest score according to the Learning Opportunities Index (TDSB, 2009) and were classified as Model Schools. Because of the families’ socioeconomic status, these schools attempt to provide essential services and closer ties to the families they serve. Research by Harris and Goodall (2008) concluded that a number of socioeconomic factors prevented parents from being fully involved in their children’s schooling. A key factor influencing parental involvement is socioeconomic status, whether indexed by either occupational class or parental (specifically maternal) level of education. Feinstein and Sabates (2006) found an association between the duration of a mother’s full-time education and her attitudes and behaviours towards her child’s education. The study showed that an additional year of post-compulsory schooling for mothers was significantly associated with the index of educational attitudes and behaviors. This is an important fact to take into consideration; many of the families in the Model Schools are immigrants and many of the mothers may have had limited educational opportunities in their home countries.

A benefit of the Model School initiative is that it provides new resources which, according to Levin (2008), builds commitment to change at all levels of the school. Levin explained that, “Money works as a lever for change in that a relatively small amount of

money, if used well, can generate a substantial amount of change” (p. 133). However, model programs often have disappointing results when imposed on school communities rather than when they emerge from a deeply rooted process of engagement (Coburn, 2003). When programs for families are created to meet the needs of the community context, there tends to be better results than when traditional forms of engagement are imposed.

The Model Schools initiative uses a more traditional approach to parent involvement. The program implemented the National Network for Partnership Schools (Epstein, 2001), following Epstein’s six-part framework of parent involvement. The School-Family-Community Partnerships framework includes: (a) assisting families with parenting and child-rearing skills; (b) communicating with families about school programs and student progress; (c) involving families as volunteers; (d) involving families in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities; (e) including families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils; and (f) involving parents in school-community collaborations. The School-Family-Community Partnerships framework has been characterized as individualistic, school-centered, and activity-based (Warren et al., 2001). The Model School program has shown encouraging results in some TDSB schools; the program uses Epstein’s framework for successful School-Family-Community Partnerships (2001). The School-Family-Community Partnerships framework attempts to involve parents as individuals in activities determined mainly by educators. Inherent in the current parent involvement policies is the assumption that parents should take up quasi-teacher roles and establish “school-like homes” (p. 32).

Epstein's framework for successful School-Family-Community Partnerships (2001) is based on "the misconception that parents must "be" a certain way, [and] results in a dichotomization of "involved" and "uninvolved" parents" (Brien & Stelmach, 2010, p. 10).

Other school districts in Ontario are also attempting to provide services to increase the likelihood that adolescents will enroll in postsecondary education. The District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) has created the DSBN Academy for Grade 6 and 7 students whose parents do not have a postsecondary education. The students are paired with mentor teachers at the schools who guide them through their middle and secondary school years and who help them select a postsecondary program. In return for the additional resources, parents are expected to commit 15 hours of volunteer time per year in the school or at students' homes. This program has been controversial, as it was originally designed only for low-income students and parents. Some parents and residents do not agree with the program because they said it stigmatizes families; others said that the school helps reduce the barriers to postsecondary education for many families (Tamburri, 2011).

Summary

In this review of literature, I have identified several bodies of literature on parent involvement. I have reviewed the historical and contemporary terms of parent involvement in the public policy domain, the research on immigrant parent involvement programs and studies, and the literature clarifying barriers to involvement that are beyond the parents' control. Various researchers have mentioned that socioeconomic position, immigrant status, and racial and cultural differences all limit the ability of immigrant

parents to become involved (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Crozier & Davies, 2007; de Carvalho, 2001; Dehli, 1996; Dorfman, 2009; Fine, 1993; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Moles, 1993; Nakagawa, 2000; Perez et al., 2005; Ramirez, 2003; Smereker, 1996; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Tomlinson & Hutchinson, 1991; Trueba, 2004).

Immigrant parents are often required to adjust to a new education system but often have limited time and resources to do so as outlined in the *Ontario Parent and Community Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a). Not only do immigrant parents view the education system differently, but also they often lack knowledge on how the curriculum is organized. Many parents are unaware of how the Canadian education system functions and about parent-teacher interviews, as only parents from elite private schools in their country of origin would have experience with interviews (Dorfman, 2009). Minority-language parents are less likely than their dominant-language counterparts to be familiar with the technical language used by teachers to describe curriculum and educational goals (Smerekar, 1996). Furthermore, many immigrant parents believe that the teacher is the expert on school matters and therefore the parent should remain outside the affairs of the school (Moles, 1993; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). In addition, many immigrant parents believe it is not their business to micromanage the schooling of their children and that what goes on in the school is the responsibility of the teachers (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco).

One of the greatest barriers for immigrant parents impacting home-school communication was language (Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Trueba, 2004). Some immigrant parents stated that they lost some of the authority they had in their home countries because they lacked knowledge of the nuances of language called for in particular

situations, such as talking to a teacher or requesting a schedule change (Trueba). In addition, language barriers created other challenges in which parents often rely on their children as translators with other school actors, altering the natural power structure within both the family and the school (Perez et al., 2005).

The *Ontario Parents in Partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (2010a) focuses on parents' volunteering on school councils or Parent Involvement Committees, a school-centered activity. According to People for Education (2009) these types of involvement are not parent-centered and do not improve individual students' chances for educational success, which is the stated aim of the policy. Parents prefer to be involved in informal ways, rather than participating in their children's education by serving on school councils. This information should be used to help policymakers understand what types of involvement the parents want in terms of their children's education.

I found very few studies from the perspective of parents and more specifically immigrant parents. Parental involvement is most often assessed from the perspectives of teachers and students (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Little from the perspectives of immigrant parents has been found. Accordingly, I believe that a need exists to understand what immigrant parents have to say about their involvement in the education system.

The Ontario education system should, I contend, find out more about the views of immigrant parents and investigate how schools can work with parents from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, rather than prescribing how parents can work with schools. Surely, the policies that impact parents should involve the parents in their initial

development and then enactment. The education system can be improved to meet the diverse needs of immigrant parents and their children when they arrive and stay in Ontario. Accordingly, in the next chapter, I present the methodology used to conduct my research to help explore the involvement of immigrant parents in their children's education.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology that I used to conduct the research and analyze data. The purpose of this case study was to determine how one class of immigrant parents are involved in their children's education and how they want to be involved in their children's education. The case study researches immigrant parent involvement in one classroom, I examined: (a) how one school involved immigrant parents in their children's education; (b) how immigrant parents perceive they have been involved; and (c) how immigrant parents' want to be involved in their children's education.

First, I discuss the qualitative nature of this study and how I used a constructivist framework to inform the research design. I then provide a detailed description of the methodology, including: (a) research design, (b) information about the case under study (c) criteria for selection of participants, (d) methods, (e) data collection, and (f) analysis. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the reliability and trustworthiness of the data.

Research Design

The focus of qualitative research presupposes a collaborative approach between the researcher and participants while recognizing the participants' expertise about the subject of investigation and the participants' own experience (Rodwell, 1990). This qualitative research study focused on understanding the phenomenon from the perspectives of those who had experienced it (Patton, 2002). To gain these different perspectives, I collected data from one vice-principal and one teacher from one Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) middle school in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), and from the

parents of students in that teacher's class. Using the multiple perspectives of the vice-principal, the teacher, and the parents, I was able to answer my three research questions and, also, note similarities and differences in perceptions. In addition to learning what multicultural parents want by investigating one of these MSIC middle schools in the TDSB, I also gained an initial perspective on the kinds of parent involvement practiced within one class in a school in Toronto.

Constructivist Framework

I used a constructivist framework for this case study. The purpose of using a constructivist framework is to understand the meaning that respondents made of their own personal experiences. I wanted to capture and report multiple perspectives of different stakeholders: the vice-principal, the teacher, and the parents. Constructivism is based on the premise of a social construction of reality (Searle, 1995), where "power comes into the picture as views of reality are socially constructed and culturally embedded, those views are dominant at any time and place and will serve the interests and perspectives of those who exercise the most power in a particular culture" (Patton, 2002, p. 100). Crotty (1998) defined constructivism from a social perspective as "the human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). For example, while the vice-principal and teacher may have their own perspectives, the parents may have entirely different ones. Accordingly, it is important to observe and understand the socially constructed and culturally embedded views of all the participants in the case study.

Constructivists acknowledge that many possible interpretations of the same data exist, all of which may be potentially meaningful. Constructivist research methods begin with “the aim of inquiry [which] is understanding and reconstructing of the constructions that people including the inquirer initially hold, aiming towards consensus but still open to new interpretation as information and sophistication improve” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). The goal of using the constructivist framework is to offer an interpretation that challenges, provokes, or encourages further questions rather than one that provides definitive answers or explanations (Guba & Lincoln). The main aim of my case study is to explore the perspectives of two individual stakeholders and one stakeholder group, to better understand parent involvement in education.

The following section discusses the case study and its use as the prime method of data collection in this study.

Case Study Design

For this study, I used a qualitative case study design. Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in its context, such as “a real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomena of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 39). The constructivist paradigm is often used with a case study approach (Stake, 2006). The case study design “concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political, and other contexts” (Stake, 2000, p. 444). This case study is a first step toward identifying general themes to understand the phenomena (Stake, 2006) of parent involvement at one MSIC middle school. Furthermore, qualitative research is based on a view that social phenomena, human dilemmas, and the nature of cases are situational, revealing experiential

happenings of many kinds (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). The case study research design includes revealing the happenings of a particular school and “shares an intense interest in the personal views and circumstances” regarding that school (Stake, 2006, p. 459). For the purpose of this case study, I use the “personal views” of a vice-principal, a teacher, and parents, representing different stakeholders involved in the education of children at one school.

I deliberately chose to conduct my research at one Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Model School for Inner Cities (MSIC) middle school. They defined inner-city schools as schools with a large population of students living in poverty. Currently, one in six students in Ontario is considered to be living in poverty (Branco & Steinhauer, 2010, p. 27). To address poverty and challenges faced by families living in poverty, the Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) program contains five components to be implemented in Model schools:

1. innovative teaching and learning;
2. support services to meet the social, emotional, and physical well-being of students;
3. the school as the heart of the community;
4. research, review, and evaluation of students and programs; and
5. a commitment to share successful practice. (Branco & Steinhauer, 2010)

Seven of the Model Schools work in collaboration with a number of cluster schools. Together, these cluster schools share their budgets, making those schools part of a Model School’s cluster. I purposefully selected a community of Model Schools in a neighbourhood where I had volunteered and worked. I focused on a Model School in this

community because it has one of the highest populations of immigrant parents, the target population for this study.

As part of the TDSB's ongoing commitment to family, school, and community partnerships, the Board organized two programs for some of the Model Schools. Both programs, the Faith Walk and Community Outreaching program, enable educators to learn more about the students and the communities where they work (Ghuman, 2009). The Faith Walk allows educators from selected Model Schools to visit different places of worship in the community to learn about the cultural and religious beliefs and values of the students and their families. The Community Outreaching initiative was a professional learning experience that took educators into communities to see and experience their students' neighbourhoods. The half-day excursions allowed staff to go to their students' neighbourhoods and spend time in local community centers and community agencies. After completing the Community Outreaching program, the staff returned to their schools with formal reports on community agencies with which they would be liaising. These two initiatives were created to allow educators to form connections with the community and to learn about the families and students they work with on a daily basis (Ghuman).

In 2008, the TDSB hired 24 Community Support Workers (CSWs) to work with the Model Schools and their cluster communities to help foster community relationships and to promote parent involvement. The goal of the CSW is to help develop partnerships between the school and the community to close the achievement gap and enhance student success. These additional outreach initiatives allowed the CSWs to become aware of teachers' perceptions of families in the selected communities, and have the potential to create greater teacher awareness of the communities they share with parents and students.

Ethical Clearance

Prior to beginning my research study, on April 15, 2010 I obtained ethical clearance from the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board (GREB) (Appendix A) for compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and Queen's policies. Following that clearance, I received the requisite ethical clearance from the TDSB External Research Review Committee (ERRC) on June 7, 2010. I gave the Letter of Information and two Consent Forms to the vice-principal (Appendix E) and teacher (Appendix F) to read and sign prior to the interviews. I sent home a Letter of Information with the parents' questions and parents gave implied consent with the return of their questionnaire. As per ethical guidelines, I replaced all participants' names and the name of the school with pseudonyms in all documentation and any ensuing publications to ensure confidentiality.

School Information

The school is situated in a densely populated multicultural neighbourhood with many high and low-rise apartment buildings. The neighbourhood has both an industrial and residential area. The neighbourhood is almost entirely a rental community; 92% of the population lives in rented households (Toronto Community Foundation, 2006). The residential area was designed as a planned community for 6000 residents but, as of 2006, houses over 28,000 residents (Toronto Community Foundation).

The neighbourhood is home to immigrants, predominately from India, Pakistan, Philippines, Colombia, Sudan, and Afghanistan, as well as many people born in Canada. Immigrants coming to Toronto are three times more likely to live in this community when they first arrive in Canada than any other community in Toronto (Toronto

Community Foundation). Subsequently this community can be viewed as an entrance community for many newcomers.

The majority of the residents in the neighbourhood are low-income, with the housing authority subsidizing a high percentage of accommodation. The average household income in 2006 in Toronto was \$64,128; the average household income in this community was \$34,456, just over half the average income of others in the city (Toronto Community Foundation). An even greater discrepancy exists with the median income among families: the community average income for families is 48% lower (\$39,558) than the city median (\$75, 829). In 2006, 47% of the families in the community lived in poverty; and two in three children were living in low-income households (Toronto Community Foundation, 2006). Although the neighbourhood is known for its low income and high unemployment, the community has low crime rates (Wong, 2004).

The student population at the MSIC middle school is approximately 1200 students; over 90 percent are immigrants. One in three students had been living in Canada for less than five years. The participating school has four full-time equivalent teachers and two support program teachers for programs for immigrant students. The school has a staff of 70 and approximately a tenth of the staff is bilingual and speaks the predominant languages of the community, which are Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu, and Farsi. In addition, the school has a Settlement Worker and translators available to assist immigrant students and their families adjust to life in Canada. The TDSB partners with the Settlement Education Partnership Toronto (SEPT), to ensure that Settlement Workers are placed within TDSB identified schools for a minimum of two days per week. SEPT provides outreach and referral services to newcomer parents and families who have recently

immigrated to Canada. The services provided by SEPT range from assessment of settlement needs, to information, to workshops and educational seminars. In addition, the school has a buddy system that matches new students with a buddy who speaks the same language.

The pseudonym given to this MSIC middle school, and the name that will be used in any subsequent documentation, is Northridge. Northridge has partnered with various community agencies to provide students and their families with additional resources, extra-curricular opportunities, and access to basic regular health and dental care. The school facilitates students' annual medical assessments, including hearing, vision, and dental examinations. For the past eight years, the school has had a breakfast program to provide students with nutritious breakfast to eat before beginning their school day. In addition, the school implemented the Beyond 3:30 program providing students with after-school activities in a variety of arts, recreation, and life skills. The Beyond 3:30 program includes organized community dining evenings where the students cook meals for their parents followed by a parent workshop. Special guest speakers have been invited to these parent evenings to discuss topics with parents. The school attempted to build on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents brought to Canada by allowing prayers in the school on Friday afternoons, having Halal food served in the cafeteria, and celebrating the diversity of their student body. Artwork displayed in the main entrance represents the various cultures of the student population. In addition, a Heritage Day celebration provided the students with the opportunity to celebrate the traditional dances and music of their various cultures.

In the fall of 2009, Northridge held a Parent Forum. The vice-principal asked me to attend the Parent Forum because he felt it would be a good opportunity to meet some of the parents and community members. I obtained all background information pertaining to the Parent Forum from the vice-principal. The purpose of the Parent Forum was to build bridges with the community and to determine: (a) what parents liked about the school; (b) what areas of the school needed improvement; and (c) what the parents knew about the school. The Parent Forum was funded in part by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Toronto District School Board. The first Parent Forum took place in November 2009. On an early Saturday afternoon, approximately 20 parents attended. The parents came with many questions and concerns about the school. As a result of the Parent Forum, the administration took the parents' concerns to the teachers at the next staff meeting. A second Parent Forum was organized for April 2010. The second forum intended to discuss: (a) special needs education; (b) community-school relations; and (c) understanding student assessment and evaluation. Northridge received five parent confirmations. Due to the lack of interest, the second forum was cancelled.

Criteria for Selection of Participants

I contacted the selected Model School by sending the principal a letter of information. The principal contacted me and referred me to the vice-principal. Once the vice-principal of the model school agreed to participate, I interviewed him using a semi-structured interview guideline. Upon completion of the interview with the vice-principal, I asked him to identify eight teachers who might be interested in participating in the case study. I wanted to interview a teacher who was willing to participate, who had been on staff for more than two years teaching full-time, and who welcomed parents' involvement

in his or her classroom. I randomly selected four teachers out of the eight names given to me by the vice-principal to approach to be part of my research study. I then approached the four teachers to explain the study and ask for their participation. As soon as one of the teachers agreed by sending me an email, I then interviewed the teacher face-to-face using another semi-structured interview guide. I interviewed the teacher on one occasion to determine the types of involvement the teacher had initiated with parents. The principal, vice-principal, and all of the other teachers were unaware of the one teacher's involvement in this research.

Methods

There were several aspects of my data collection. I first carried out a literature search to uncover the history of parent involvement in Ontario and the kinds of parent involvement discussed and recommended by the TDSB. Second, I kept a field log on parent and staff interaction. Third, I collected data from one school in that board through interviews with a vice-principal and teacher. Lastly, I collected data through parent responses to open-ended questions in a questionnaire. The qualitative responses to the interview data enriched and provided contexts for the questionnaire data.

Questionnaire Development

I identified three distinct stakeholder groups as data sources for my research: one, the school administrators; two, the teachers in the school; and three, the multicultural parents, many of whom were recent immigrants. I selected one administrator (in this case, the vice-principal), one of the 60 classroom teachers in the school, and potentially all parents of that one teacher's class. Accordingly, I used three different questionnaires to elicit information from the different stakeholders. A questionnaire: (a) provides standard

questions and uniform procedures for all participants; (b) provides time for participants to think about their responses; and (c) ensures anonymity (Patton, 2002).

The questionnaire and interview questions were developed based on questions elicited from a literature search on effective parent involvement practices (Eccles, Kirton, & Xiong, 1994; Epstein, 1995; Pecoraro & Phommasouvanh, 1992). In addition, the questions for both the interview guides and questionnaire were based on information provided in the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a). The *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* includes a range of “good activities” associated with parent involvement. The policy determines good activities to be equated with: (a) helping with homework; (b) serving on school councils and school board or provincial committees; (c) communicating and meeting with teachers; and (d) volunteering in the classroom or on school trips (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a). As well, I examined the policy and literature surrounding the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (2005a).

Using this document, I framed questions relating to how multicultural parents have been involved and want to be involved in their children’s school and schooling. I also asked whether they equated parent involvement with the same activities described in the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (2005a).

Pilot Study for Parents’ Questionnaire

Before sending the questionnaire to parents, I carried out a pilot test of the questionnaire. The pilot study allowed me the opportunity to assess the clarity of the questions and the time required to complete the questionnaire (as Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested). The sample that was used to conduct the pilot questionnaire was five

parents who were graduate students in the Faculty of Education Graduate Studies program at Queen's University. Three of the five parents who completed the questionnaire identified themselves as immigrant parents. The pilot questionnaire was sent out electronically to these volunteers during the first week of March 2010. The pilot test respondents were given allotted space to write their overall comments on the survey. With the feedback from my colleagues, I improved the clarity of four of the questions. Also, through recommendations given by the participants, I made sure that I used terminology similar to that of the Toronto District School Board when asking about parents' cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The questionnaire for the parents used brief, straightforward questions (see Appendix G).

Data Collection

In all I used four sources to collect data about parent involvement: one, documentation on parent involvement policies in Ontario; two, a field log based on parent and staff interaction (at school council meetings and parent workshops) was used to gather and record parent involvement data, which I expand on below; three, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the vice-principal and teacher; and four, written parent responses to a sent-home questionnaire.

I gathered detailed information from a variety of sources, and documented contextual particularities of events and processes as recommended by Merriam (2001). I used a field log to record data while attending the school's council meetings each month. Additional data recorded in the field log were derived from school observations and informal conversations with school staff and the local settlement worker. I was involved in several events as a teacher and observer: parent information nights, school council

meetings, parent teacher conferences, family barbeques, and working with local community organizations. At each of these events, I documented: (a) the school environment; (b) the parents' presence at the school; and (c) the interactions among the administration, teachers, and parents.

To provide myself with background information, I first investigated the documents available at the provincial and school board levels on the philosophy, policy, and extant practices of involving parents in their children's education. Next, I needed a school's perspective. To gain these different perspectives, I collected data from one vice-principal and one teacher from one MSIC middle school in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), and from the parents of students in that teacher's class.

Field Log

Throughout the beginning of data collection, I kept a field log of all the people, places, events, and dates involved with the study. I also kept notes on my on-going ideas and feelings about the case study. I documented what the parent presence was in the school, whether there was a welcoming environment, the staff diversity, and whether information was translated into various languages and made available to parents in the main office. I attended monthly school council meetings and went to a parent forum at the school in the fall of 2009. The notes were later used to enhance my findings and to ensure that I was aware of my thoughts and potential biases. I also used my field log to take notes during the interviews with the teacher and principal. The notes allowed me to reflect on how the interviews progressed and any observations made during the interactions with the principal and teacher.

Interviews

I believe that the interviews also added to the trustworthiness of results from the questionnaire data. Semi-structured interviews with the vice-principal and teacher were conducted in June 2010. Semi-structured interviews have questions that are phrased to allow for individual responses. The questions are open-ended but are specific in their intent (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). These interviews were used to elicit further memories and significant experiences related to parent involvement in the MSIC model middle school. I created an interview protocol, including a standard introduction followed by a list of carefully worded, open-ended questions, as are typically used in open-ended interviews (McMillan & Schumacher).

For confidentiality purposes, I wanted to interview the teacher off school premises. However, the interviews took place at the school, in a location chosen by the participants where they both felt comfortable and at ease in (Berg, 2004). The teacher said that conducting the interview in her classroom was most convenient, given her busy schedule. Prior to the interview, I met with the teacher on two occasions to discuss the spoken languages of the students' families, to determine if I had to have the documents translated. I had originally planned on having all documents translated for the immigrant parents (Appendix H). However, the teacher informed me that these parents did not need to have documents translated.

Each participant read over the Letter of Information (Appendices B and C) and signed two copies of the Consent Form (Appendix F). An interview protocol was provided to both of the participants a week prior to the interview. I included the standard introduction followed by the open-ended questions. The duration of the interview with each of the vice-principal and teacher was 40 minutes. I questioned them on how they

involved the immigrant parents in the school and their child's education. I used interview guides to conduct the interview with both the vice-principal (Appendix D) and teacher (Appendix E). Our discussions were digitally recorded (with permission), and afterwards I transcribed the recordings. I asked specific questions concerning immigrant parent involvement, including: how to create meaningful relationships, challenges in gaining immigrant parent involvement, projects and initiatives that have proven successful, and communication with community agencies, as well as their understanding of the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a).

The use of a semi-structured interview guide offered the opportunity to gather data on all the necessary topics in time-limited interviews while also allowing the participant the opportunity to elaborate on answers or to digress (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). Both the teacher and vice-principal received drafts of their own transcripts from the interview. Neither participant made any changes to his or her transcript. I did follow up with the teacher, asking clarifying questions over the phone after I transcribed the data to verify the meaning of certain answers.

The Parent Questionnaire

The questionnaire was informed by the literature and designed with both open and closed questions. The questions for the questionnaire were taken from the literature identifying effective parent involvement practices (Eccles et al., 1994; Epstein, 1995; Pecoraro & Phommasouvanh, 1992). In addition, I compared the content of the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a) to what the immigrant parents stated on their questionnaire concerning how they are involved and how they would like to be involved in their children's education.

All parents of students who attended the class of the teacher I interviewed were asked to complete the questionnaire. The class that was randomly selected was an Extended French class. One of the nine parents indicated on her questionnaire response that she was not an immigrant; therefore her parent questionnaire was removed from the findings. I had originally intended to have the questionnaire translated into the families' home language. However, the teacher informed me that no parents required translated questionnaires, so I sent them home in English through their children. By collecting data from the parents, I believed that I would gain knowledge of their perspectives of how they have been involved and how they want to be involved in their child's school and schooling. I attempted to make the questions brief and precise. Each questionnaire package was sent home with the child. I asked that the parent return the completed questionnaire in a sealed envelope to the main office of the school with his or her child. The distribution and collection of questionnaires were all completed within a two-week period. The questionnaires were distributed on Monday, June 7, 2010; the return date listed on the Letter of Information was no later than Wednesday, June 17, 2010. I picked up the questionnaires within one week of the return date listed on the questionnaire. The teacher's class contained nine students; all nine questionnaires were returned and completed. The student population of the teacher's class was low because it was a new program at the school.

I used some close-ended questions. These questions focused on demographic and educational information of the parents, including the mother and father's level of academic attainment and current and past employment. The open-ended questions focused on parents' opinions concerning their children's school, their practices at home

in relation to school, their perceptions about how the school presently involves parents, and their preferences for actions and programs by the school (Appendix G).

Data Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data, I used grounded theory, which is based on the idea that theories are to be built or to emerge rather than to be tested (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The first step of data analysis was the development and management of the data. Data analysis was conducted in two stages, following Bogdan and Biklen's recommendations (1992), with the first step occurring during data collection in the field and the second step occurring once all the interviews and questionnaires were completed.

In my analysis of this case study, I first constructed an overview of the school's parent involvement strategy, the effects of parent involvement on school and community relations, and continuing challenges faced by the parents and school through my data collection in the field from the perspectives of the vice-principal, teacher, and parents themselves.

The second stage of data analysis was when I transcribed the interviews verbatim after completing each of the interviews with the vice-principal and teacher. I began by using a system of manageable classification (cut and paste) to help structure the data for analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that researchers start their coding with some general themes derived from the literature (etic codes) and then add more themes and subthemes as the researcher analyzes the data (emic codes). For the purpose of this research, I used etic codes provided in the literature on parental involvement and added emic codes to organize the data for analysis.

I used Pecoraro and Phommasouvanh's (1992) proposed principles for effective parent involvement to guide school initiatives, which include building on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents bring to Canadian schools, building bridges between new immigrant parents' experiences in their new and native countries, and helping parents to perceive themselves as teachers of their children alongside school teachers. I used these recommendations as reference points for discussing the first part of my research questions: how has one school involved immigrant parents in their children's school and schooling. I use these principles as etic codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to analyze the interviews of both the vice-principal and the teacher. I also looked for barriers that impeded efforts to address these principles.

The main goal of this case study research was to uncover how immigrant parents have been involved in their children's education, and how they want to be involved. Using parent descriptions of their own participation in their children's education, the case study explores whether parents' descriptions and desires match Epstein's (1995, 2001) six types of involvement used by the Model School for Inner Cities Initiative: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and involvement with the community.

I transcribed each set of responses to the open-ended questions into individual Microsoft Word documents. Once I listed their responses to each question, I used the constant comparative method to compare the responses of the vice-principal and teacher. Once I received the package of parents' responses, I documented each of their responses by question, and aggregated their responses. Then I compared their responses with those of the vice-principal and teacher. I noted when and if parents had similar,

complementary, or different perceptions of parent involvement than other parents, the vice-principal and the teacher. I created a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel to aid in the display of data. I then looked for commonalities and differences, and constructed cross-case profiles and analytical matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Approaches Used to Enhance the Validity and Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure enhanced validity of the data, I adopted Guba and Lincoln's criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (1985). Guba and Lincoln (1985) recommended a variety of strategies to improve the likelihood that findings and interpretations produced using a constructivist framework are credible. Two of these strategies are peer debriefing and member checking. Guba and Lincoln (1985) defined peer debriefing as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). Another graduate student and I talked frequently throughout the course of the study, discussing the methodology, the data, and the framing of the study. Member checking, meanwhile, is a process through which respondents verify data and the interpretations provided by the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Each response within the transcript was considered separately. In order to increase reliability and enrich the analysis, a graduate student served as a second reader and coder. The coding of the texts was assigned to this individual so that I could determine whether the meanings and experiences investigated were shared between coders and whether both individuals would apply the same code to particular segments of each interview. This framework was used to ensure that the themes extracted from the transcripts had some external validity and

that they were not the result of any personal biases.

After re-reading the data four times, I noted patterns and relationships between the interviews and questionnaires. I also kept a field log to document the continual fieldwork as well as to chronologically record the school council meeting dates and places, and persons involved in the case study. I also chose to double code the transcripts to ensure validity; after a period of two weeks, I returned and coded the same data set and compared the results with my original findings (Krefting, 1991).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), both dependability and confirmability can be determined through a properly managed audit. The auditor determines whether this process was applicable to the research undertaken and whether it was applied consistently (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). To illustrate confirmability, I have kept interviews, parent questionnaires, all notes from interviews and discussions, and hard copies of all transcriptions. These records remain in both their original forms and in the aggregated forms for the data analysis.

Once I transcribed the data, I read and re-read the interviews several times until I believed that I had sufficient understanding of each participant's implied meanings before I cautiously analyzed the data. The extent of validity begins when the inquirer's voice moves away from the position of the detached observer and becomes that of the passionate participant (Lincoln, 1995). As previously mentioned, I purposefully selected a specific community and model school in a neighbourhood in which I have volunteered and worked in. I had a prolonged and intense exposure to the phenomenon to establish a rapport with the participants.

The semi-structured interview guides of the interviews with the vice-principal and the teacher were designed so that I could probe their responses. Both the vice-principal and the teacher received drafts of the write-up revealing how they are presented, quoted, and interpreted. My use of digital audio recorded interviews allowed me to ensure verbatim transcriptions of the audio recordings. Neither respondent asked that their transcript be revised. I supplemented their responses with their nonverbal behaviour that I had observed during the interviews.

The second approach that I used to enhance the validity and trustworthiness was a common set of questions and procedures for the take-home parent questionnaire. As I had mentioned above, the parent questionnaire: (a) provided a standard set of questions and procedures for all participants; (b) allotted time for the participants to think about their answers; (c) did not require more than 10 minutes (duration to complete the questionnaire was determined through the pilot study); and (d) ensured anonymity.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology that underpins my qualitative case study research, described my case study, and documented the specific methods used to collect and analyze data. In the next chapter, Chapter 4, I present the analysis of the data delineating the responses of the different stakeholders about their views on immigrant parents' involvement in their child's education.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of the case study was to research the involvement of immigrant parents in their child's education. Specifically, I examined: (a) how one school involved immigrant parents in their children's education; (b) how immigrant parents perceive they have been involved; and (c) how immigrant parents' want to be involved in their children's education.

This chapter describes the findings from the interview data with the vice-principal and teacher, and the data from the parent questionnaire responses. The findings are based on the participants' descriptions of their experiences with parent involvement in one selected Model School in the TDSB. In the first section, the findings from the vice-principal and teacher interviews about their involvement with parents in their school are reported individually. The second section documents the aggregate findings from the parents' responses to the questionnaire. The information has been structured into the following headings: (a) demographic information, (b) education and occupation, (c) home-school communication, and (d) collaboration and communication.

Findings from Educators' Interviews: Vice-Principal and Teacher

In this section, I report the responses from the vice-principal and teacher. Once the vice-principal agreed to participate, I conducted interviews with, first, the vice-principal and then one teacher at the school. Using quotations from their interview transcripts, I describe how each participant experienced parent involvement in the selected model middle school. I structured the responses from the vice-principal and teacher in terms of themes that emerged from their data: (a) building on the culture and experiences that new

immigrant parents bring to Canadian schools; (b) building bridges between experiences in the immigrant parents' new and native countries; (c) helping parents to perceive themselves as teachers of their children alongside school teachers; and (d) challenges that impeded efforts to address these principles.

In preparing the responses and some quotations for inclusion in this thesis, I used some conventions. All names, places, and identities have been changed to ensure confidentiality to the extent possible. For ease of reading and understanding, I have deleted words such as “um” and “you know”. Square brackets indicate where I have added to the quote for clarification of meaning.

Section I: The Vice-Principal

The vice-principal had been working at the selected school for two years. He was on the parent school council and was aware of the Toronto District School Board and Ministry of Education initiatives for parent involvement. He also had previous experience working with high immigrant populations at schools where he taught and/or was an administrator. The interview began with questions about how the school has accommodated the culture and experiences of immigrant parents (see Appendix C).

Building on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents bring to Canadian schools. The interview began with questions that addressed how the school and school board built on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents bring to Canadian schools. The vice-principal described the school and the school board's parent involvement programs in detail, including the role of the Equity Department at the Toronto District School Board. He explained that the Equity Department is aimed at

working with “everybody who is a stakeholder in the Toronto District School Board: parents, teachers, all staff and students” (VP).

He described a section of the school board’s website that outlined information on parent involvement and programs for helping newly immigrated parents better understand the education system. He explained that the school board offered programs like: “the WIN program, which is Welcoming [and Information for] Newcomers to Canada. They run these programs out of schools that have a large number of newcomers coming to them” (VP). The Welcome and Information for Newcomers (WIN) program is a one-day orientation program for middle grade students and their parents. The teachers and settlement workers, with the support of the current students, run the WIN program at the school; the students are referred to as peer leaders. The purpose of the program is for the parent and student participants to learn about their new school environment using direct observation and interaction with their peers and with strong guidance and support from teachers and settlement workers. The vice-principal discussed the importance of the settlement worker, whose purpose is “to liaison between the school and the board and these new parents from different backgrounds and different countries” (VP).

I asked about the implementation of the Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) initiative. In response, the vice-principal discussed how the program has a board and Ministry initiative, created to target schools in areas with high numbers of immigrants. He noted the program is typically placed in inner city schools that “have a large number of immigrant students or newly landed immigrants...as part of their school population” (VP). He mentioned that the program provided additional funding for resources such as a: “community support worker, hearing and vision clinics, ...other resources that are used to

help make these newly landed immigrants feel welcome; not just in Canada but in Toronto and in our school” (VP). He said that the aim of the MSIC program was to involve or engage parents as much as possible; commenting that the program was “aimed at getting parents to believe that the school is the centre of the community” (VP).

In response to the question about what the school has done to make immigrant parents feel welcome, he mentioned the value of communication and listed making phone calls, sending emails, and using the members of the parent council to communicate messages to the local parents in the community “to tell them that we want [newcomers] here” (VP). Accordingly, the school translated as many of the documents that go home as possible. He noted; “If we are unable to translate a document, we will put it in as many different languages as possible, and ask that someone who understands English should read this to you” (VP).

The vice-principal also mentioned a variety of ways the school attempts to engage parents. The school uses a parent engagement committee, “which [gives] parents an opportunity to come to the school and say what they feel the school could do to improve...to meet the needs of their individual child or children of that cultural background” (VP). He said that he wants the parents to be able to express their “opinions about what the school is doing to provide positive feedback or criticism” (VP).

Building bridges between new immigrant parents’ experiences in their new and native countries. The next set of questions focused on how the school was building bridges between new immigrant parents’ experiences in their new and native countries. He discussed how the school attempted to create meaningful relationships with the parents. He stated that the way to do this “is to...get the message out to them that their

opinion and their thoughts and input [are] important to us. Because like we say ‘who knows their child better than them?’” (VP). The vice-principal was aware of the need to form meaningful relationships with the families to make the parents feel welcome in the school. He mentioned ways in which the school attempted to get a higher turnout of parents into the school, including activities such as the Heritage Day recognition assembly for Asian Heritage month. He emphasized the need to use different means of communication to get parents’ attention, such as: “using monitors to put messages out, encouraging parents to come to barbeques. Food always works and just it’s an opportunity to meet and greet” (VP). He said that he wanted parents to see that the school was celebrating and acknowledging the various cultures of the parents and students, “and having parents come in to see how we celebrate the different cultures that they come from” (VP).

The vice-principal explained that, to create a meaningful relationship between parents and the school, the staff members have to listen to the parents and what they have to say. He said, “Have them come, take the time to actually listen to them, validate what they have to say” (VP). He went on to say that, if the opportunity arises to put into practice some of their suggestions, then do so: “Let them see that you are truly understanding, and listening, and appreciating what they’re saying and putting it out there for them to see that” (VP). The main reason for parents coming into a school, he said, is to see how their own child is doing.

The vice-principal discussed how the school has attempted to include the cultural traditions of members of the school community by allowing prayers once a week. The prayers are organized by some of the community leaders who are members of the local

Mosque. “It’s...successful in the sense that it provides students the opportunity to pray [and] we don’t have to worry about them missing school or leaving school to go to the Mosque” (VP). Having the students all together in the school cafeteria was a challenging issue for the school, “trying to do it without interfering with curriculum delivery” (VP). However, the vice-principal noted that it was important to accommodate the needs of the community and thought that “it is met with success and it is appreciated by the community” (VP).

Helping parents perceive themselves as teachers of their children alongside schoolteachers. The vice-principal spoke of how the school wanted to help parents perceive themselves as teachers of their children. He emphasized that the school wanted the support of parents to create partnerships. However, he said that connecting with local parents in the community remained a challenge for the school. He explained, “We’re slowly trying to break that—we want them to understand that this is a partnership. Truly nobody knows your child better than the parent themselves” (VP).

The vice-principal emphasized the importance of the teachers’ presence at school functions; parents wanted teachers present. He explained that the challenge of teacher involvement “is getting [a good representation of] teachers involved consistently in activities” (VP) because “where teachers are involved in presenting to the parents, you get good turnouts” (VP). However, he recognized that teachers’ evenings were limited and that they could not attend all the time.

Challenges that impeded efforts for parental involvement. Overall themes related to challenges included community leader “liaisons” that impede direct communication with parents, language barriers; as well as, the age of middle school

children. The vice-principal described the community leaders as three parents and two local religious leaders that speak on behalf of the parents in the Northridge community. The vice-principal stated that the role of community leaders limits the lines of communication between parents and the school. “The community leaders act as a liaison between the school and the parent community and we need to kind of break that” (VP). The vice-principal said that the goal of the school was to have relationships with as many of the parents as possible. He said he understood why the parents went to community leaders, but at the same time, he wanted everybody to feel welcome in the school.

Another barrier that he said impeded involvement by parents were language barriers. The vice-principal stated that parents have difficulty “understanding what is being asked of them or being offered to them. If we don’t provide translation or interpretation every time, parents might be a little reluctant to come because they might not actually understand what’s happening” (VP).

Another challenge related to more involvement by parents is getting parents involved as students get older. He said that parent involvement was “vastly different” at schools that were K to 6 schools and K to 8 schools. He said that parents of younger school children go to school because “they like the reassurance, they like to be more involved. Also, the children want them there. But as children get older, it’s no secret that they want more and more independence” (VP).

He discussed future plans for the school, describing events and activities that attracted high levels of parent turnout. Those activities were Education Quality Accountability Office (EQA) information night, transition from Grade 5 to 6 or 8 to 9 night, Heritage Day, the talent show, and family barbecues. He spoke of future school

events intending to get parents more involved, including activities for students, because “using activities that bring the students will bring their parents” (VP).

The MSIC program includes a program to allow teachers to have a half-day to explore the communities where they teach and for teachers to form connections with community leaders and organizations that may benefit the school and parents. Although the vice-principal was aware of this particular initiative, it was not implemented in this school because of its low number of teachers.

It should be noted that the interview with the vice-principal took place in April of 2010, prior to the release of the *Ontario Parent in Partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a) which was released in the fall of 2010. Therefore, the discussion with the vice-principal was pertaining to parent involvement as outlined in the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a). Further information about the two policies is discussed in the final chapter.

Section II: The Teacher

The teacher had been teaching at the selected school for over 10 years. She immigrated to Canada in her early twenties in 1991, and was from a similar cultural background as the majority of the student population. In addition to speaking the same language as the families in the community, she was aware of community organizations and social programs available both inside and outside the school. I have structured the findings under the same four headings as the above discussion with the vice-principal.

Building on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents bring to Canadian schools. The interview contained questions about how the teacher and school

build on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents bring to Canadian schools. The teacher explains her own cultural background in order to help build connections with the parents. “I share a lot about [how I have similar] cultural habits and customs, and traditions. I understand their code of values, so when I speak, I speak using their own terms, their own values. We don’t need translation” (T).

On Meet the Teacher Night, she tells the parents that she was born in France but immigrated to the Middle East where she learned the Arabic language. “I share with them also the transition period. How we traveled between the cultures. I share with them how difficult it is. I make them understand that I know what they’ve gone through from the beginning” (T).

The teacher uses potlucks as a means of building relationships with the parents of her students. By inviting parents into her classroom, on field trips, to volunteering in her classroom, and completing “chores” (such as attending school council meetings and in-school activity nights), she works diligently at building relationships with the parents.

The teacher said that some activities were successful in obtaining parent involvement and building on the culture and experiences of the new immigrants. The activities included barbeque nights, arts night, outdoor education information night, EQAO night, science fair, literacy and numeracy night, and the talent show. The most successful in obtaining parent involvement and building on the culture of the community was Heritage Day. The children bring their cultural food to share in each class, and the staff and students dress in traditional clothing and celebrate with dances and songs in the school cafeteria. She said: “We dressed traditionally based on our home culture. We got to know what symbolizes your culture, what’s really peculiar about your tradition, your

food” (T). The teacher commented that the principal is adamant about sending emails constantly to all parents about anything that is or will be going on in the school, and inviting them to participate.

Students are at the middle school for three years. The teacher explained that forming a relationship with parents is important at the beginning because a teacher is likely to teach siblings from the same family. She said, “This is a community where we have a lot of siblings. So you go through this struggle with the first child, you already know the rest of the story for the rest” (T). She believes that the bonds and lines of communication that she has created with the families in the community have allowed her to be fortunate in building meaningful relationships.

Building bridges between new immigrant parents’ experiences in their new and native countries. The teacher described how she first initiates contact with the multicultural parents of the students in her class. She described how she attempts to form a relationship starting on the first day of school. This is when she makes her “first contact. I get to know the parents right on the spot. I get my first opinion...they are here with their kids, which means they care” (T). Her second contact with the parents is on the “Meet The Teacher Night.” She described the evening as “an excellent opportunity for the teachers to get to meet the parents...give an overview of my plans, my expectations, and the highlights of my year. I also send a letter home to welcome families into our school” (T). She maintains regular contact with the parents of her students through email and she phones each of her students’ parents after Meet the Teacher Night.

The teacher mentioned how she tried to create meaningful relationships with the parents of her students. She said it was a lengthy process, but one she enjoyed. “I love it!

It's one of my fortés! To me constant dialogue and communication with the parents is the key. I meet with the parents at least once a month" (T). The teacher preferred contacting parents directly. She said, "I am very well known in this school to have monthly meetings, very lengthy meetings with the parents. I do it before report cards" (T). She also contacts the parents with both negative and positive feedback about their child. She calls parents to thank them and tells them "you're making my teaching much easier, more joyful by preparing your child to come to school" (T).

The teacher noted that she understands that immigrant parents are busy establishing themselves and therefore are often unable to come into the school and meet for interviews. She said: "They...cannot come in for interviews on a regular basis, they want an interview at 7-8 o'clock but the school is closed!" (T). She comes into the community on the weekends to meet with parents who are unable to meet during regular school hours. In this way, she tries to support parents who are trying to establish themselves in Canadian society.

She also helps parents become aware of the social services available in the local community, referring them to the social worker, the settlement worker, and the community centre. Furthermore, she gives parents "suggestions and strategies for them...like parenting, how to cope with the kids, how to understand emotional stress, what they're [child's] going through and peer pressure" (T).

Helping parents to perceive themselves as teachers of their children alongside schoolteachers. The teacher spoke of how she wanted to help parents perceive themselves as teachers of their own children. However, she said that it was a challenge because the parents do not understand the schooling system since it is totally different

from that of the immigrant parents. In their culture, the school is the place where the child is disciplined physically and emotionally. The teacher said that the immigrant parents do not understand that the teacher is not allowed to discipline children with physical or emotional discipline. She said: “I have some parents coming to me saying: ‘Discipline him, you can spank him, you can do whatever you want! Well, this is allowed in my culture.’ They don’t know that we [teachers] are not allowed [to discipline their children]” (T).

Many of the immigrant parents come from schooling systems where, if a student does not meet all the requirements of the curriculum, they fail the grade. The teacher said that many of the immigrant parents do not understand that the Ontario education system allows elementary students to pass a grade, even though the child did not meet all the grade requirements. Many parents come to meet with her asking her, “Why is it that until now I’ve had two or three kids in the education system and nobody told me this [that elementary school children rarely fail]?” (T).

Challenges that impeded efforts to parent involvement. Overall themes related to challenges included language barriers, adjustment to the different culture and school system, and the roles of females and males in the community. Similar to the vice-principal, the teacher said that one of the largest obstacles was the language barrier. Some parents do not speak English. Hence, the school relies on the support of teachers who speak more than one language. During parent-teacher interviews and meetings with parents, the school relies on the use of bilingual teachers and the local settlement worker to act as interpreters for parents. However, when those resources are not accessible, the teacher has had to rely on the students as the interpreter. The teacher noted the difficulty

of this situation by stating, “You have to try to trust the child who is translating for the parent. You have to try to make sure he or she is translating the right information to the parents” (T). She said that, because the child is the interpreter for the parents, an imbalance results. It changes the roles and makes it very difficult for the parents because they feel less capable. She noted: “it’s one of the major difficulties we have in this community, because the child gets the power over the parents” (T).

Another challenge that the teacher brought out was the way the community viewed the roles of males and females in education. She said that “some fathers...don’t have the same respect they do for [a female teacher as for] a male representative or professional” (T). She went on to explain. “[in some families], the [mother] is not allowed to come to the interview without the father” (T). She said that this directly affects the education of the females in her class. The boys are allowed on school trips, while sometimes the girls are not. “I have to go and explain to the father and the mother that it doesn’t matter supervision is available [for school trips] and [it doesn’t matter what gender their child is] they both have the rights to [an] education. In many ways I’m the advocate for the girls” (T).

The teacher spoke about how the province of Ontario lacks social programs to assist new immigrants in Toronto. She said that social programs are vital in resolving some of the issues that immigrant parents encounter when they start dealing with schools. She said that it was not the school or the school board’s responsibility to form social programs: “It’s the government that has to create a program. There must be in place a program where new immigrants are invited to a seminar in the community telling them this is how our education system works.” (T)

The teacher related her own personal experience as a new immigrant in Canada and her thoughts on the education system. She said: “I cried a lot when I came [to the country] and all the work I did, and they said: ‘What did you do? You don’t have Canadian experience!’ I have my degrees.’ But you don’t have anything yet!’” (T). The parents of her students had similar experiences in terms of their job experience not being acknowledged. She stated, “if we have a program that’s in place where all immigrants can come and say this is our education system, that would help” (T).

She ended the interview by discussing initiatives that might help to increase parent involvement. She said, “It’s extremely important that the teachers go out into the community. There must be some kind of communication outside the school that sensitizes the teachers to the kind of community that’s in there” (T). “Once you are immersed in the culture of the place, you will never get a better understanding otherwise” (T). However, she noted that the high turnover of teachers presents a challenge to this teacher-community connection in that the teachers do not have time to get to know the community before they leave the school.

Findings from Parents’ Questionnaires

All nine parents of students who attended the class of the teacher who I interviewed were asked to complete a parent questionnaire; all nine completed the questionnaire. I used the data from only eight of the nine questionnaires because one the parents identified themselves as a Canadian-born non-immigrant. I used closed and open-ended questions. These initial closed questions solicited demographic and educational information of the parents, including the mother and father’s level of academic attainment and current and past employment. The open-ended questions focused on parents’ opinions concerning their children’s school, their practices at home in relation to

the school, their perceptions about how the school presently involves parents, and their preferences for actions and programs by the school (see questionnaire in Appendix I). I organized the data from the parents' responses in terms of: (a) their demographic information, (b) education information and occupation, (c) parents' perceptions of home-school communication, and (d) parents' descriptions of how they would like to be involved in their child's education.

Demographic Information. Two male and seven female parents responded to the parent questionnaire. The responses of two male and six female responses were used in the data analysis because one parent was removed for not identifying herself as an immigrant. Each participant was asked to seal the completed questionnaire in an envelope and have his or her child deliver it to the main office of the school. I picked up the questionnaires within one week of the return date listed on the questionnaire.

I had nine parents return the parent questionnaire, however I chose to only include data from the eight parents that indicated that they were immigrants. The parents identified their countries or origin as: India, Bangladesh, Bosnia, and Africa. Their arrival to Canada ranges from 1995 to 2009. Some of the participants had immigrated to Canada more recently, including one participant who immigrated to Canada in 2006 from Bangladesh, and another participant who arrived to Canada in 2009 from the Congo in Africa. Each respondent was asked his or her ethnic background. Five of the respondents identified themselves as South-Asian. The remaining respondents listed their ethnic identities as Indian-Caribbean, Black-African, and White-European.

Each of the respondents was asked how long they have lived in the province of Ontario. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Permanent Resident of Ontario

Year	No. of Participants
1-4 years	2
5-10 years	4
11-20 years	2

Education and occupation. Information pertaining to the level of education attained by the participants and their parents was obtained using a checklist format. Many of the participants checked only the highest level attained, while others checked all applicable levels of education. The results of this checklist are shown in Table 2. In general, the parents surveyed exceeded their own parents in the level of education attained.

Table 2

Level of Education Attained

Education	No. of Parents	No. of Parents'	
		Mothers	Fathers
High school (no diploma)	2	4	3
High School graduate	6	1	3
Some College (no diploma)		1	
College Diploma	3	1	1
University (no degree)	1		1
University	3		1
Graduate or Professional	2		1

Parents also indicated their current occupations. The occupations listed were housewife, sales associate, store clerk, hair stylist, stay-at-home mom, financial advisor representative, and financial consultant. Parents were also asked to list occupations they had in the past. Some of the occupations listed were cashier, translator, NATO resources manager, corporate development manager, teacher, and security officer.

Home-school communication. The parents were asked how their child's education were similar to or different from the school(s) that the parents attended as children. Seven of the parents described their child's education as different. One of the mothers listed her own personal experience in elementary school as:

[W]ay different. I studied in convent school, which was strict, and we were studying only books but my child is learning to be independent, research projects,

are part of study. [My daughter] has liberty to express her ideas far better than I [did].

Another parent commented that: “Yes, big time different, [my child has] track-field, more sports to join and craft club, music classes. More help when needed in [a] subject.” However, two parents responded that the teacher moved on to new course material too quickly. One parent commented, “my teacher never moved on to a new chapter until all of the students understand the work. That’s what’s needed today!” Another parent described her child’s school as: “more teacher-centered with more rules. Children respect the teachers a lot.” One parent expressed her concern over the schooling system in Canada and the amount of work that her child is given. The parent noted that: “up to Grade 5 they had no responsibility; in Grade 6 and even more in Grade 9 they are expected to act like an adult.” Another parent wrote that her education system was more comprehensive and “much different, I went six days a week to school, many, many, many more subjects; much more comprehensive; different teachers for each subject.” One of the parents wrote about the difference in school culture. “We did not have freedom to speak in front of the teacher even if they were wrong on some matters. But yet, they always called our parents to tell them about our progress or area in which we need improvement.”

The parents were asked how they learned about the Ontario school system. Five of the respondents listed receiving information about the education system from a friend or family member. Three of the parents listed a source other than the school or school board; and one of the parents listed the Toronto District School Board website.

The next open-ended question asked each participant how often he or she talked about her child's progress and/or class activities with the teacher. Two of the respondents said that they talked with the teacher once per week; two talked with the teacher once per month; two of the participants talked with the teacher once per term. One participant responded: "I do not talk with my child's teacher (mothers don't talk [to] teachers)." They were then asked how often they entered the school. Four of the respondents listed once per week, four listed once per term, and one listed once per month.

The participants were given a checklist showing the most common school activities and were asked to indicate the activities they attended. Many participants checked off multiple activities. The results of this checklist are shown in Table 3. In general, the parents were involved in activities that included the participation of their children at the school.

Table 3

Parent Involvement Activities

Activities	No. of Participants
Parent teacher interviews	8
School Council meetings	1
Heritage Day celebrations	7
Field trips	0
Annual family barbeque	6
Arts Night	4
Volunteer in the classroom	0
Sports events	1
Deal with disciplinary issues	2
Other	3
I did not visit my child's school	3

The ‘other’ activities that parents were involved in included making presentations to the students and participating in the Beyond 3:30 program. One parent indicated that she did not visit her child’s school; however, she stated that she would go to the school “now and then when need[ed].”

How parents want to be involved. The parents were asked how they would like to be involved in their children’s education. Half of the parents responded with how they would like to be involved in their child’s schooling rather than with reference to activities in the school. All the opinions of the parents are paraphrased in the list below:

- To learn about my child's progress or her weaknesses;
- To share ideas;
- To volunteer in the classroom;
- To have the teacher meet with all the parents together;
- To be involved in planning school activities;
- To be invited to activities at the school by teachers; and
- To be involved in almost all extra-curricular activities.

Participants were asked how the school should go about supporting more forms of parent involvement. The parents' responses are also listed and paraphrased below:

- The school should have open discussion[s] on school issues and future plans, and should involve parents in active school planning activities;
- The school should arrange parents' meetings, [both] formal and informal class-wise;
- The school should send more information home on upcoming programs for the students to join; and
- The school should encourage the kids to participate in all activities with their parents.

The parents were asked whether they had been asked for suggestions for the school or the teacher since their child had been at the school. Seven of the respondents answered "no," and one respondent did not answer the question. The parents were asked to describe an activity used by the teacher or the school that has helped the parents to get involved. Some of the parents listed family activities that took place at the school such as the Heritage Day and the talent show. Other extra-curricular activities listed by the parents

included arts night, Science Fair, Beyond 3:30 program, and field trips. One of the parents responded that her daughter's teacher invited her on a field trip. Two commented that they enjoyed being part of helping to organize an activity; another enjoyed it because she was involved. Although some of the parents found activities worthy of getting involved in, four parents commented that the teacher and the school did not have programs in which for them to participate. Although those parents were unaware of the activities organized by the school, one of the parents noted that she was not interested in getting involved in school activities, including parent council, commenting "I always get parent-council invitation[s] but did not feel like going there."

Parents were asked if they would support having home visitation programs to help schools understand families. Only two of the respondents responded "yes," where seven said "no." In addition, parents were asked if they would support neighbourhood meetings to help families understand schools. Eight responded that they would support having neighbourhood meetings in the community to help families better understand schools.

At the end of the parent questionnaire, parents were asked to leave any additional comments; two parents each one. One parent discussed the importance of academic achievement. The first respondent said that students should have a more competitive academic environment in order to excel. He also expressed his concern over his child's achievement in comparison to others. The second comment addressed the parent's lack of knowledge of the Canadian education system. The parent wrote "more [information is needed] for parents to get involved with the school; [the school needs to] get better feedback from parents and grandparents."

Summary of Findings

The following section provides a synthesis of the vice-principal's, teacher's, and parents' responses. The structure of their responses is presented similarly to the above, under the headings of (a) building on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents bring to Canadian schools; (b) building bridges between new immigrant parents' experiences in their new and native countries; (c) helping parents to perceive themselves as teachers of their children alongside school teachers; and (d) challenges that impeded efforts to address these principles.

Building on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents bring to Canadian schools. The vice-principal and teacher both discussed how they build on the culture and experiences of the parents in the school community. The vice-principal discussed the school's and school board's parent involvement programs and how he wanted the school to be the centre of the community. The teacher discussed how her own cultural background helped her form meaningful relationships with the families of her students. Both the vice-principal and the teacher spoke about the value and importance of communication with the parents. The vice-principal used phone calls and sent emails to get parents involved in the parent involvement committee; the teacher invited the parents to meetings, to volunteer in her classroom, and to come with the class on fieldtrips.

The vice-principal discussed how the board is interested in helping newly immigrated parents better understand the education system through programs such as the WIN program and the parent involvement section on the TDSB website. The teacher was unaware of the WIN program and the parent involvement website, both board initiatives.

The parents were asked if their children's education were different from their own educations. A majority of the parents described their child's school and schooling as different from their own experience. Many of the parents described their school as strict and believed that their children had more liberty in the Canadian education system.

Building bridges between new immigrant parents' experiences in their new and native countries. The vice-principal and teacher discussed the importance of creating meaningful relationships with the parents by celebrating their cultures. The vice-principal and teacher spoke of the importance of representing the immigrant parents' culture through celebrations such as the Heritage Day.

The teacher discussed how she attempts to form meaningful relationships by meeting with parents in person and phoning them to maintain regular contact. The vice-principal also encouraged ongoing communication between the school and the parents. He encouraged parents to voice their opinions and concerns about the school at any time. However, both the vice-principal and teacher were aware of the time constraints on students and their families. The teacher expressed that she understood that families are busy adapting to a new culture and do not always have the time to become involved in school activities. The vice-principal and teacher also mentioned how the community and parents really appreciated having prayers in the school because it acknowledged the immigrant parents and students' culture.

The parents were asked how they were informed about the Ontario education system; the majority were informed through a member of the family or a friend. The parents were also asked how the school should go about supporting more forms of parent involvement. The parents' responses varied, indicating that the school should have open

discussions on school issues and future plans, should send more information home on upcoming programs to join, and should encourage the children to participate in all activities with their parents.

Helping parents perceive themselves as teachers of their children alongside schoolteachers. The vice-principal and teacher wanted to help parents to perceive themselves as teachers; however, both expressed the challenges in doing so. Both the vice-principal and teacher noted that parents do not understand the education system in Ontario. Many of the parents come from different cultures with different views on education; the vice-principal and teacher said that the immigrant parents are unable to see themselves as teachers of their children alongside schoolteachers. The teacher explained that parents from other countries believed that they should not interfere with the professional teacher in the classroom. This view was validated by one of the parents through her written response, indicating that parents should only volunteer at the school and not interfere with teaching.

The parents were asked how they would like to be involved in their child's education. Half of the parents responded with how they would like to be involved in their child's education at home rather than referring to activities in the school. The parents wanted to learn more about their child's progress, to share ideas, and to be involved in planning activities. Two of the parents wanted to have more meetings with the teacher and to be invited to school activities by the teacher.

Challenges that impeded efforts to parent involvement. The vice-principal and teacher described the largest obstacle to parent involvement as language barriers, stating that many of the parents do not understand what is being asked of them or offered to

them in the school. The vice-principal also discussed how community leaders limited the involvement of parents, because a select few community leaders speak on the behalf of the entire parent community. Similarly, the teacher stated that the children of the immigrant parents often act as interpreters, which also limits the involvement of the parents and impacts the lines of communication between parents and the school.

Another challenge was insufficient teacher involvement in parent activities. The vice-principal expressed that the parents wanted teachers involved in afterschool functions. The teacher, on the other hand, stated that she was unable to attend these events due to her own family commitments. The teacher also noted other challenges in the community included the role of males and females; females were not always given the same authority and respect as male professionals. In addition, the teacher discussed the need for more social assistance programs to help new immigrants adjust to the Ontario education system.

In the next and final chapter, I present the core themes that are contained in the vice-principal, teacher, and parent data.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final chapter, I present the conclusions of my research and some recommendations. I begin by restating the purpose of my research. I then draw conclusions based on my findings. I frame my conclusions around how one school has involved immigrant parents and how immigrant parents wanted to be involved in their children's school and schooling. Next, I propose some recommendations on how I think that the Model School and the Toronto District School Board can further include immigrant parents in the education of their children. I conclude the chapter with the significance and limitations of my research and provide suggestions for further research.

Restatement of Research Purpose

This thesis is an exploratory, qualitative case study that researches immigrant parent involvement in one classroom. Specifically I examined: (a) how one school involved immigrant parents in their children's education; (b) how immigrant parents perceive they have been involved; and (c) how immigrant parents want to be involved in their children's education. This qualitative research study focused on describing the phenomenon from the perspectives of those who had experienced it. To gain these different perspectives, I collected data from one vice-principal and one teacher from a Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) middle school in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), and from the immigrant parents of students in that one teacher's class. I based my parent findings on the responses from the eight parents in the class. I examined the responses of the vice-principal, the teacher, and the parents. I then analyzed the parents' responses, documenting their perspectives and the similarities and differences of their responses to those of the vice-principal and teacher. I also compared the two

educators' responses to each other to determine what their perceptions were and whether they held similar perceptions about how they involved immigrant parents in their children's schooling. Using multiple perspectives from the vice-principal, teacher, and parents, I was able to answer my research questions and, in addition, note similarities and differences in perceptions.

Responses to Research Questions

This case study investigated immigrant parents' involvement with their children's education from the perspectives of a vice-principal, a teacher, and the immigrant parents of students in the selected teacher's class. The questions guiding this research were:

1. What kinds of involvement does the school have with their immigrant parents?
2. What kinds of involvement do immigrant parents want to have in terms of their children's education?
3. Are these kinds of involvement similar to, complementary, or different from what the immigrant parents express?

The main objective of my research was to determine the involvement of immigrant parents in their children's education. Until recently, researchers, policymakers, administrators, and teachers have speculated about why parents are not as involved as they could be. However, very few studies have asked immigrant parents for their views on the matter. Below, I summarize my findings in terms of each of these three research questions.

First Research Question: What kinds of involvement does the school have with immigrant parents?

Both the vice-principal and teacher spoke confidently about their abilities to support effective parent involvement. The vice-principal viewed parent involvement as a means to enhance students' learning. The teacher viewed parent involvement as a way to inform parents about their children's progress and to inform parents about the Ontario education system, including some the practices and expectations of parents and students.

I used Pecoraro and Phommasouvanh's (1992) principles for effective parent involvement to guide my questions regarding school initiatives. The responses are presented using three categories of recommendations:

- building on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents bring to Canadian schools;
- building bridges between new immigrant parents' experiences in their new and native countries; and
- helping parents to perceive themselves as teachers of their children. alongside school teacher;

I included an additional category: challenges that impeded efforts to address these principles. I discuss these four recommendations in relation to how the vice-principal and teacher worked with immigrant parents at one model middle school.

Building on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents bring to Canadian schools. The vice-principal said the board was interested in helping newly-immigrated parents better understand the education system using programs like the WIN program: Welcoming [and Information for] Newcomers to Canada. The WIN program is a one-day orientation program for middle grade students and their parents. The teacher

was unaware of the WIN program and the *Ontario Parent and Community Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a). To inform immigrant parents and their children about the Ontario education system, the school should consider creating a parent handbook with all the programs available to immigrant parents and children, translated into all the home languages. In addition, teachers should be informed of board and school programs and initiatives, such as the WIN program and the parent involvement website so they can recommend them to parents.

The vice-principal discussed how parent activities that involved students got a better parent turnout than parent-only events like school council meetings. Corter and Pelletier (2005) had a similar finding, observing that the most beneficial school-based programs are the ones that: include programming for parents and children, target the home as well as the school, and focus on involvement that is specifically linked to students' achievement. For Northridge to involve more parents, the school may want to consider organizing more activities focusing on both the students and their parents, such as the family barbecue and Heritage day, both of which have had good parent turnout at Northridge.

Building bridges between new immigrant parents' experiences in their home and new country. The vice-principal and teacher discussed the importance of creating meaningful relationships with the parents by celebrating their cultures. The teacher said that some activities were successful in having parent involvement in the school and building on the cultures and experiences of the new immigrants. The activities included family barbeques, Arts Night, outdoor education information night, EQAO night, the science fair, literacy and numeracy night, and the talent show. The MSIC middle school

should continue to hold family activities to ensure that immigrant parents feel welcome and accommodated in the school environment.

Helping parents perceive themselves as teachers of their children alongside school teachers. The administrator and teacher were aware that many of the immigrant parents were reluctant to get involved in the school because expectations of parent involvement in Canada differed from those in their home countries. Dorfman (2009) noted that parents are not able to send their child to school “knowing that the school will take care of things, like back home, [instead] they find that the school needs their attention at a time when they are most overwhelmed” (p. 36). Immigrant parents are often asked to adjust to a new education system and often have limited time and resources to become involved in the many ways as suggested in the *Ontario Parent and Community Involvement Policy* (2005a) and the *Ontario Parents in partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (2010a) . Many of the parents do not understand how the Ontario education system functions.

Magsino (1995) found that evolving views of family have changed in laws. He noted that the state supremacy in education is a recent phenomenon. In the past, teachers held what was known as *in loco parentis*, where they stand in as parents while students were in school. However, the role of the teacher has become defined by statutory and regulatory requirements and has changed from *in loco parentis* to *parens patriae* (MacKay & Sutherland, 2006). *Parens patriae* refers to the inherent, overriding power of the Court to intervene to protect the best interests of children, where legislation does not fully provide for or anticipate children's needs in a specific circumstance. The teacher observed that, in her country and the country of many of her students, the teacher

maintains control of the children and disciplines them according to the rules of *in loco parentis*. This results in two distinct schooling environments and different expectations of how teachers should act and what to expect of parents.

The teacher spoke of how she wanted to help parents perceive themselves as teachers of their own children. However, she said that it was a challenge because the parents do not understand the schooling system, as it is often quite different from that of the immigrant parents. In the teacher's home culture, school is a place where children are disciplined physically and emotionally. The teacher said, now in Canada, the immigrant parents do not understand that the teacher is not allowed to discipline children with physical or emotional discipline. She said: "I have some parents coming to me saying: 'Discipline him, you can spank him, you can do whatever you want! Well, this is allowed in my culture.' They don't know that we [teachers] are not allowed [to discipline their children physically or emotionally]" (T). Dorfman (2009), a provincial coordinator of settlement workers in schools in Ontario, had similar findings. He documented that, in many of the parents' first countries, parents are expected to ensure the child is fed, dressed, and has his or her homework completed. All of this is accomplished with the support of extended family. However, in Canada, the role of the parent is to do all of the above and more. Further, immigrant parents are not aware of how the system works or what is expected of them.

Challenges that impede efforts to address parent involvement. During the interviews with the vice-principal and teacher, I realized that parent involvement included activities that only occurred within the school. Both the vice-principal and teacher viewed parent involvement as "school-centric" (Lawson, 2003) and did not mention parent

involvement in home activities. Researchers have made the distinction between home-based activities (e.g., helping children with homework) and school-based activities (e.g., participation in volunteer activities) (Walker et al., 2004). Yet, Harris and Goodall (2008) concluded that there is a major difference between involving parents in schooling and engaging parents in learning. Their findings indicated that parent involvement in schools is not the determinate factor of a child's academic success. They concluded that engagement of parents in learning in the home is most likely to result in a positive difference in the learning outcomes and achievement of students. Accordingly, I believe that educators at Northridge may want to consider a broader conceptualization of parent involvement that would include more than just school-based activities and parent council meetings.

The vice-principal and teacher described the language barrier as the greatest obstacle to parent involvement. Many of the parents do not understand what is being asked of or offered to them in the school. The teacher mentioned parents' lack of knowledge about the Ontario education system caused them to lose some of their authority with their children. Trueba (2004) examined immigrant parent communities and also revealed that the greatest challenges for immigrants was language; moreover, he documented that parents lose some of the authority they had in their home countries because they lack knowledge of the nuances of language called for in particular situations, such as talking to a teacher or requesting a schedule change. I admit I found it surprising that no communications sent home from the school to the parents have been translated. Even if the parents are able to speak English, reading may present additional challenges. If the whole point of school communications is to help the parents understand

the school system and their child's progress, then it is even more important for the school to ensure that the communications are fully understood by the parents.

The vice-principal discussed another ongoing challenge in the school community: he said that community leaders limited the involvement of parents in the school. According to the vice-principal, a select few community leaders speak on the behalf of the entire parent community. Similarly, the teacher stated that the children of these immigrant parents often act as interpreters, who in essence, restrict the involvement of the parents and could interfere with the clear communication between the school and the parents. Perez et al. (2005) had earlier noted that immigrant parents often rely on their children as translators with other school actors. Another challenge discussed by the vice-principal was the lack of teacher involvement in school activities involving parents. The vice-principal mentioned that the parents wanted teachers involved in afterschool functions. The teacher interviewed was unable to attend these events due to her own family commitments.

The teacher mentioned a need for more social assistance programs to help new immigrants adjust to the Ontario education system. She said that the school could not take on the full responsibility of helping immigrant parents and students adjust to the Ontario education system. The Canadian School Boards Association (Cook, 2006) observed that immigrant parents' and students' integration into the education system has to happen at a provincial level and should not be left to local school boards. The CSBA mentioned that all provinces are dealing with a similar lack of social services for immigrant families, calling for "Federal-provincial-community partnerships to provide

the range of essential supports that fall outside the traditional picture of classroom instruction but are acutely needed by immigrant children in school” (CSBA, 2006, p. 1). Additional provincial funding for social service programs may help immigrant parents and students adjust to the Ontario education system.

In education, principals, teachers, and students continually make policy decisions as they go about their work (Ozga, 2000). It is important that we acknowledge that these stakeholders have varying beliefs, knowledge, and experiences, all which impact policy implementation. In order for the policy outcomes to be successfully implemented, the stakeholders need to be part of the policy making process.

The more research that is conducted and the more dialogues we have about education the better the influence on policy texts and practices. Having teachers and immigrant parents become involved in policy dialogues may allow these stakeholders to indirectly impact educational policies; with the potential to promote change and action at the local level. I believe that education and the policies that govern it need to be generated by communities. Community-based policy dialogues may help influence how policies are created and implemented.

Second Research Question: What kinds of involvement do immigrant parents want to have in terms of their children’s education?

The results of this case study revealed that parents can and want to be involved in their children’s education in many ways. Half of the parents responded by referring to potential involvement in their child’s education home rather than referring to activities in the school. For example, parents wanted to learn about their children’s progress and

weaknesses, to have the teacher meet with them on a regular basis, and to be invited to activities at the school by teachers. Parents also responded by referring to wanting involvement in ways similar to those documented in the *Ontario Parent in Partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a). They stated that they wanted to volunteer in the classroom, to be involved in almost all extra-curricular activities, to be involved in the planning of school activities, and to share ideas. The four types of involvement listed above by parents were already prevalent at the Model School and the topics were discussed at the monthly school council meetings. However, none of the parents who completed the questionnaire attended the school council meetings (i.e., one entire class of parents). Why these immigrant parents do not attend school council meetings is in itself worthy of a research study.

The parents listed many ways that the school should support more forms of parent involvement. However, many of the suggestions made by parents have already been implemented in the school. This infers that many of the parents did not know that these services and programs were offered at the school. For example, two of the parents stated that the school should have open discussions on school issues; such discussions do take place at the school council meetings.

The parents also indicated that the school should send more information home on upcoming programs for the students to join. However, the school administration reported that information was constantly being sent home. I investigated and learned that all information that had been sent home and posted on the Internet was in English. The parents are either not receiving these notices, do not have access to the Internet, are not reading these notices closely, or are not able to comprehend the content of these notices.

The school may be wise to send messages and newsletters about parent involvement activities and events multiple times all translated to ensure that information is received clearly and completely. I suggest the issues of dissemination and translation of information are both worthy of further investigation, as they appear to act as a roadblock to parents' involvement in their children's education.

The parents were asked to describe an activity used by the teacher or the school that has helped them become involved. Some of the parents listed activities involving members of the family that took place at the school such as the Heritage Day, parent-teacher interviews, family barbeques, and school council meetings. Other extra-curricular activities listed by the parents included Arts Night, the science fair, Beyond 3:30 program, and field trips. Four parents indicated that they could be involved in some of these activities, but commented that the teacher and the school did not offer programs in which for them to participate. Another lack of communication can be found in how the parents have learned about the Ontario education system. Five of the nine respondents listed that they received information about the education system from a friend or family member, and two gave a source other than the school or school board. Only one parent listed the Toronto District School Board website as a source of information. Northridge may want to ensure that a variety of approaches are being used to communicate information effectively to immigrant parents rather than immigrant parents relying on family and friends.

The questionnaires used in the study were not translated. I consulted with the teacher initially on this matter; her opinion was that the parents did not require the

questionnaire to be translated. However, two of the respondents did not answer the questions correctly. This may have been because they did not understand the questions. Unfortunately, I have no way of knowing whether this was a simple misunderstanding of what the question was asking for, because they were not translated into their home language. In retrospect, despite the advice of the teacher, I should have had the questionnaire translated into the parents' first language. Too late, I discovered that the vice-principal and teacher both used translators during parent-teacher interviews. These translators were either from the Toronto District School Board, a multi-lingual staff member, or a child of the parent being interviewed. However, no report cards that were sent home were translated. Therefore, the immigrant parents are getting the report cards translated by their children or family and friends; the content may or may not be fully understood by them. This discrepancy raises a red flag and certainly bears further research. I suggest that the school administrators might want to investigate this situation more closely. If a communication problem exists, the school should take the lead in resolving it.

The next open-ended question asked participants how often they talked about their child's progress and/or class activities with the teacher. One participant responded, "I do not talk with my child's teacher (mothers don't talk [to] teachers)." One of the parents commented that she was not interested in getting involved in school activities, including parent council, responding, "I always get parent-council invitation[s] but did not feel like going there." Researchers such as Caines (2006) and de Carvalho (2001) found that parents from lower socioeconomic groups and who are of minority ethnic status do not participate in their children's schools in ways that are usual in the North American

culture. In retrospect, perhaps this question should have been reworded to be more open-ended, such as “How did the parents find out about their child’s progress in school?”

One of the immigrant parents commented on his lack of knowledge about the Canadian education system. The parent wrote “more [information is needed] for parents to get involved with the school; [the school needs to] get better feedback from parents and grandparents.” I believe that this finding is important because it emphasizes that not only do immigrant parents view the education system differently, but they often lack any knowledge of how the provincial school system functions. Research conducted by Perez et al., (2005) noted this same conclusion. They found that immigrant parents often rely on their children as translators with other school actors, altering the natural power structure within both the family and the school, and perhaps altering the content being communicated. Although the parents did not discuss their children acting as translators in any of the responses to me, the teacher did mention this as a concern, during our interview. I comment on this in more detail in the following section in the discussion of the second research question.

Half of the participants were of Southeast Asian decent; two of the Southeast Asian immigrant parents wrote that they thought that the teacher was the expert on school matters and therefore the parents should remain outside the affairs of the school. This finding was also found in research conducted by Moles (1993), who stated “Southeast Asian immigrant parents believe they are being helpful by maintaining a respectful distance from the education system” (p. 35). In addition, similar findings have been found previously in the research of Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001). The participants in their study felt less secure about questioning the judgement of school authorities. The

parents believed that it was not their business to micromanage the schooling of their children (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco). This finding is important because, in fact many immigrant parents believe that maintaining a respectful distance is the best way to support their children, educators need to be made aware of this belief so that they do not assume that immigrant parents do not care about their children's education because of their non-involvement.

Third Research Question: Are these kinds of involvement similar, complementary, or different to what the immigrant parents express?

The findings among the immigrant parents, the vice-principal, and teacher are, for the most part, similar. The vice-principal and teacher both stated that they found that immigrant parents had difficulty understanding what was being asked of them or offered to them. Similarly, the immigrant parents in this study indicated that they lacked knowledge about the Canadian education system. One parent wrote, “more [information is needed] for parents to get involved with the school; [the school needs to] get better feedback from parents and grandparents.” If Northridge and the Toronto District School Board want to have immigrant parents become more involved, then they have to better educate parents about how the Ontario education systems functions. Parents in this study were unaware of the resources offered to them. Therefore, to inform immigrant parents about the education system programs, additional resources and programs should be created to allow immigrant families to become acquainted with their children's education. In addition, Northridge may be wise to create a parent handbook that is translated into various home languages to accommodate the immigrant parents in that specific school community (e.g., TDSB, *Parent Handbook*, 2012).

Policy Implications

The *Ontario Parent in Partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a) provides some examples of successful initiatives conducted in some school districts. In addition, the policy discusses how the Ontario Ministry of Education has created initiatives to translate resources for immigrant parents; including multilingual materials for parents such as brochures, bullying-prevention, parent guides to reading and writing and mathematics, communicating with teachers to name a few.

Although the *Ontario Parent in Partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a) appears to be much more comprehensive, with reference to immigrant parents it has remained the same. In the section eliminating barriers, the policy states “the Ministry’s Parent Reaching Out grants program support school based initiatives focused on engaging parents who may experience barriers as a result of language, recent immigration, poverty, newness to Ontario’s school system, or other factors” (p. 19). A similar sentence is found in the 2005 *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a), which stated that grants: “will be available to school councils for initiatives to reach parents who may find involvement more challenging due to language, recent immigration, poverty, newness to the system, or other factors” (p. 5). Since 2005, over \$25 million dollars has been invested to support parent engagement initiatives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a, p. 15), yet few changes exist in the 2010 policy in the way immigrant parents are acknowledged. The *Ontario Parents in Partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a) still focuses on parents’

volunteering on school councils or Parent Involvement Committees, a school-centered activity. These types of involvement may help to build a sense of community, but they do not improve individual students' chances for educational success (People for Education, 2009), which is the stated aim of the policy.

In addition, the policymaking body for the *Ontario Parents in Partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a) has to be aware of their assumptions around parent expectations versus the parents' willingness to comply and participate according to the expectations outlined in the policy. An assumption within both policies appears to be that immigrant parents are not becoming involved because of barriers; however, we cannot assume why they are not involved. The study conducted by McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) revealed that some urban parents deliberately choose to remain uninvolved in school related activities. Their research study found that urban parental non-participation stems from a lack of trust toward teachers, who parents feel have biased behavior, as well as a the lack of trust for the school system. There is an assumption that immigrant parents, those for whom English is a second language, want to be involved as outlined by the Ministry; such assumptions should not be made. In addition, the objectives that are created from the policy makers' perspective do not necessarily represent what is meaningful to the immigrant parents. Policymakers should obtain the voices of their target group, in this case immigrant parents, in order to understand what types of involvement the parents want in terms of their children's education.

The *Ontario Parents in Partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a) focuses on parents' volunteering on

school councils or Parent Involvement Committees, a school-centered activity. According to People for Education (2009), parents prefer to be involved in informal ways, rather than participating in their children's education by serving on school councils. This point was also reiterated in my findings from the immigrant parents. This information should be taken into consideration and should lead to changes in the way the Ontario Ministry of Education has outlined the parent involvement policy. More needs to be done to express the kinds of involvement that immigrant parents express an interest in. In terms of policy implications, I believe that there should be additional support for the Ontario Leadership Strategy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b) which encourages schools and leaders in the education system to foster genuine, trusting relationships with students, parents and families, staff, and communities (Ontario Ministry of Education, *Parents in partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools*, 2010a, p. 33). In addition, an evaluation of the policy should be carried out, to allow for further parental input and possible suggestions.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the data collected throughout my research have helped to answer the three questions of my study. My qualitative methodology allowed me to gain an understanding of the participants' socially constructed and culturally embedded views about parent involvement in school. The immigrant parents of this one teacher's class were unaware of the services and programs being offered to them at the Model School. Various reasons were offered, including the fact that no communications to the parents were sent home in translated form.

Many parents received their information about the Ontario education system from sources other than the TDSB. The vice-principal and teacher both acknowledged that parents lack knowledge of how the Ontario education system functions. They said that more information is needed to ensure that parents receive the resources they require to better support their children in the Ontario education system. Many of these parents do not know how the curriculum is organized or how the school system functions. The TDSB should ensure all communications home are translated into the parents' first language, particularly how the Ontario education system functions and what is expected of parents and their children.

Recommendations and Implications

In this section, based on my research, I propose four recommendations about how the vice-principal, the teacher, and the school can address the issue of immigrant parent involvement in their child's school and schooling. This list is not presented in ranked order. Further, I recognize that many challenges may limit the implementation of these recommendations. I recommend that the school and school board should:

1. Support teachers in their efforts to build meaningful relationships with immigrant parents by providing cultural awareness training that provides specific information about how immigrant parents view the education system.
2. Include a list and description of all resources available to parents, teachers and students on the school's website, translated into the home languages (including all policy documents).
3. Translate all information and documents into appropriate home languages. This would include report cards and parent involvement policies and would involve

having interpreters present for all parent-teacher interviews, and all school-based activities.

4. Broaden school activities to involve both parents and their children in parent-centric ways, not just school-centric. Some examples of parent-centric activities include activities that are chosen by the parents themselves, and activities that take place outside the school setting in the local community.

I expand on each recommendation below.

Recommendation #1

Support teachers in their efforts to build meaningful relationships with immigrant parents by providing cultural awareness training that provides specific information about how immigrant parents view the education system.

Immigrant parents do not always participate in their children's schools in ways that are usual in North American culture. In many other cultures, the educator maintains control of the children and disciplines them. In Canada, educators are not given the same authority to discipline students, especially physically. This results in distinct schooling environments and different expectations of how educators and parents should act. Educators need to be made aware of the fact that many immigrant parents view the teacher role as disciplinary, even though this is not their legal role. In addition, educators should be informed that many parents of Southeast Asian descent view their role as parents differently from what has been defined in the Ontario Parent and Community Involvement Policy. Moles (1993) found that "Southeast Asian immigrant parents believe they are being helpful by maintaining a respectful distance from the education system" (p. 35). The parents in my study were also Southeast Asian immigrant parents who said

that it was not their place to question the judgment of educators. Therefore, educators should learn that, if immigrant parents are not present at school functions or parent-teacher interviews, it may be because they view their role as parents differently, rather than they do not value their child or the child's education.

Recommendation #2

Include a list and description of all resources available to parents and students on the school's website, and translate into the home languages.

The school should strengthen the channels of communication to facilitate information sharing about programs and services available for immigrant parents and their children. To facilitate communication at the Model School, I suggest making information more accessible to immigrant parents. While the vice-principal revealed that some resources were available to support immigrant parents in the school, such as the WIN program, both the teacher and the parents of the students in her class were unaware of these resources. I recommend that the school put all information onto a website, and explicitly inform the teachers and parents so that both have knowledge and access to the information. Some immigrant parents will not have access to a computer. For those families, the Model School should consider: (a) printing out information from the TDSB website and sending it home and/or (b) donating second-generation computers. The collection process for the computers could be part of a volunteer project. Another way for parents to have equal access is to have "parent hours" in the library, so the librarian could show parents how to access valuable information online. For example, I propose one such way: through the school website with links to resources for parents and teachers (e.g., the People for Education website offers its information available in translation). If immigrant

parents had a better comprehension about the Ontario education system, perhaps they might understand how to better support their children in school and their schooling

Recommendation #3

Translate all information and documents into appropriate home languages. This would include report cards and parent involvement policies and would involve having interpreters present for all parent-teacher interviews, and all school-based activities.

The parents in this study were unaware of the school's expectations for parent involvement, and they were unfamiliar with the expectations for parent involvement as outlined in the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a) and the *Ontario Parents in partnership: A parent engagement policy for Ontario schools* (2010a). According to Cummins (2000), "if the ability to speak English and the knowledge of North American cultural conventions are made prerequisites for 'parent involvement,' then many of those parents will be defined as apathetic and incompetent and will play out their pre-ordained role of non-involvement" (p. 8). The English-only policies need to be changed so that immigrant parents are able to understand what is being asked of them or offered to them.

Recommendation #4

Broaden school activities that involve both parents and their children in parent-centric ways, not just school-centric. Including all policy documents are given and explained to teachers and parents.

At this one Model School, parent activities that involved students got a better parent turnout than parent-only activities such as school council meetings. Corter and Pelletier (2004) had a similar finding; they found that the most beneficial school-based programs are the ones that include programming for parents and children, that target the home as well as the school, and that focus on involvement that is specifically linked to achievement. Accordingly, the school should consider offering more activities focusing on both the students and their parents, such as the family barbecue and Heritage day. In addition, more activities should focus on parent needs rather than school needs, such as activities and programs specifically for parents to become more informed about the education of their children and/or the Ontario and board school system. Activities should not only be school-centric they should be parent-centric. Parent-centric activities focus on the importance of relationships and trust for building a foundation for authentic and powerful parent participation in schools (Mapp, 2003). A parent-centric approach would start with relationship building in order to create conversations; which may give parents an opportunity to articulate their own concerns. The school might want to consider giving parents more opportunities to take leadership in setting a joint agenda. In addition, community-based organizations should continue to be used in order to bring a better understanding of the culture and assets of families in that school community. These local community organizations should continue to be used to build bridges between educators and parents.

Limitations of Study

I identify three limitations to my research: not translating the parent questionnaires, small sample size, and my novice research skills. First, I recognize that the range of

responses from immigrant parents may be somewhat limited through this initial exploratory research because I did not translate the parent questionnaire. I discussed this with the teacher and deferred to her opinion. In retrospect, after receiving the parents' responses, I should have had the questionnaire translated. Furthermore, I used a questionnaire that parents were to complete at home. In doing so, they were unable to ask me to clarify the meaning of any of the questions and I, on the other hand, did not have any opportunity to ask them to elaborate.

The second limitation of my research was that my study had a small sample size. I only interviewed one teacher and one vice-principal, and had only nine responses to the parent questionnaire (which represented all the parents of that one teacher's class, and all but one were immigrant parents). However, I have clearly stated that my findings should not be generalized to any other school. Rather, I am providing a case study of one classroom of MSIC middle school in the TDSB as baseline research.

My third limitation was my novice research skills. I tried to overcome these by doing several things. I attempted to ensure validity and trustworthiness of my data by gleaning the different perspectives of the vice-principal, teacher, and a group of immigrant parents. I relied on the literature to help guide my study and to inform my research. Moreover, to enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the data, I used a common set of questions and procedures for both the interviews with the vice-principal and teacher as well as the take-home parent questionnaires.

Implications for Further Research

Four new lines of inquiry emerged for further research, in addition to the obvious need to verify the research using a larger and more representative sample from multiple

schools from a variety of boards. First, I would recommend replicating the study with a broader sample size by including more classes at the selected model middle school, and later, perhaps, including other MSIC schools in the research.

Second, I would consider incorporating the perspectives of the children/students of these immigrant parents in further research. It may prove to be interesting to ask the children about how they want their parents to be involved in their education; the implications of the children acting as translators for their parents; and what happens when they carry communications home from the school to their parents.

A third topic would be to investigate why these immigrant parents do not attend school council meetings.

A fourth research topic would be to investigate the implementation of the WIN program at the Model School and interview immigrant parent participants about whether they found the program beneficial to learning about the Ontario education system.

A final area of inquiry would be to investigate how information and particularly policy is disseminated both to teachers and to parents. The findings from my study suggest that neither the teacher nor the parents in her class were familiar with the content of the *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy* (2005a). Further investigation is warranted to determine whether teachers in the school in general are ignorant of this policy document, and to what extent and how the school administrators have implemented this policy.

Closing Thoughts

Throughout the research process, I was aware of the privileges I received by being a white, female, academic working within the education system. I was aware that I was working with racial, cultural, and linguistic minority participants and I focused on

building trust within the Northridge community. At the end of the research process, I realized that the success of my data collection and thesis relied on trust. The research relied on trust between the teacher and the parents, between the parents and the school administration, and between the participants and myself, as a researcher. Trust seems to me to be very fundamental in building and maintaining relationships of those in education with the parents of the children in their schools.

I hope that my research may serve as a catalyst for future studies that explore resources and services for immigrant parents so they can become more involved in their children's education. My research did reveal a lack of information and communication about the services and resources available for immigrant parents and their children. I hope that the school may consider my recommendations. If these recommendations are implemented, perhaps these immigrant parents will be more aware of and hence involved in their children's education in culturally appropriate ways. I would be eager to reproduce my study to investigate if and how parents' involvement has increased with respect to their children's education.

I hope this study will help educators of the one class and in that school interact more closely with parents to allow immigrant parents to better comprehend the educational system in which their children are currently. In addition, the English-only policies and report cards need to be re-thought to ensure that immigrant parents have a greater probability of understanding what is being asked of and/or offered to them.

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APPENDIX A
ETHICAL CLEARANCE



April 15, 2010

Miranda H. Blazey
Master's Candidate
Faculty of Education
Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen's University

OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES

Fleming Hall - Jemmett Wing, 3rd Floor
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6
Tel 613 533-6081
Fax 613 533-6806
ors@queensu.ca
www.queensu.ca/ors

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-503-10

Title: "Multicultural parents' perspectives on their involvement in their child's education:
A case study"

Dear Miranda:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "Multicultural parents' perspectives on their involvement in their child's education: A case study" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB; of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (details available on webpage <http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html> – Adverse Event Report Form). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementations of new aspects into the study procedures on the Ethics Change Form that can be found at <http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html> - Research Ethics Change Form. These changes must be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca prior to implementation. Mrs. Irving will forward your request for protocol changes to the appropriate GREB reviewers and / or the GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan Stevenson".

Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c.c: Dr. Malcolm Welch, Chair, Unit REB
Dr. Ruth Rees, Faculty Supervisor
Celina Freitas, Dept. Admin

JS/ll

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF RECRUTIMENT FOR PRINCIPAL

Date

Dear Principal:

My name is Miranda Blazey and I am a graduate student working under the supervision of Dr. Ruth Rees in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. I am writing to request your participation in a research study, entitled *Immigrant parents' involvement in one Ontario model middle school: A case study*. The purpose of this case study is to determine: one, how one school has involved immigrant parents in their children's education; and two, how multicultural parents have been involved and want to be involved in their child's education. The findings of this study should help broaden the awareness of the teacher, the school, and even the Toronto District School Board in terms of gaining an understanding of these multicultural parents, and may help them in meeting these multicultural parents' needs.

I obtained your name and address from the Toronto District School Board. I am seeking your participation as a principal in one of the Toronto District School Board Model schools, for a one-hour face-to-face interview. The purpose of the interview in this study is to learn the kind of initiatives you and your school have engaged in with multicultural parents. If you agree, I will set up a time for the interview at your convenience, either in or out of school. I will provide you with the interview questions beforehand. With your permission, I intend to digitally record our discussion. All electronic files will be password protected. None of the data will contain your name, or the identity of your place or work. Paper and audio data will be secured in a locked cabinet. I may have to ask you clarifying questions after I transcribe the data, but I would think that this could be carried out over the phone.

Once the interview is over, I will ask you to identify six to eight teachers whom you believe may be interested in participating in the case study. I will then randomly select four teachers from the list to contact about being involved in the case study. I want to choose only one teacher to interview, and then send a questionnaire home to all those parents of that teacher's class (translated into the parents preferred home languages).

I do not foresee risks in your participation in this research. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to answer any questions you find objectionable or uncomfortable. You may withdraw at any time without negative consequences, and may request the removal of the data from the study. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent possible. Should reference be made in the final document to any specific information, all identifying material will be altered (place, names, school etc.) to protect your anonymity. The results of the research study may be published, but your name and the name of your school will not be used. If you are interested in a hard copy of the research findings please inform me and I will provide you with a copy.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please feel free to contact me, the researcher, Miranda Blazey by email at 6mhb@queensu.ca or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Ruth Rees; at ruth.rees@queensu.ca. This project has been reviewed and received ethical clearance from both Queen's University General Research Ethics Board and the Toronto District School Board. If you have any concerns or questions about your involvement in the study feel free to contact:

Queen's University General Research Ethics Board Coordinator
C/o the Office of Research Services
Telephone: 613-533-6081
E-mail: chair.GREB@queensu.ca

Please email me whether or not you wish to be involved. Then sign the attached consent form if you agree to participate in this case study.

Sincerely,

Miranda Blazey
Master of Education student
Faculty of Education, Queen's University
6mhb@queensu.ca
416-538-0914

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF RECRUITMENT FOR THE TEACHER

Date:

Dear Teacher:

My name is Miranda Blazey and I am a graduate student working under the supervision of Dr. Ruth Rees in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. I am writing to request your participation in a research study, entitled *Immigrant parents' involvement in one Ontario model model school: A case study*. The purpose of this case study is to determine: one, how one school has involved immigrant parents in their children's education; and two, how immigrant parents have been involved and want to be involved in their children's education. The findings of this study should help broaden the awareness of the teacher, the school, and even the Toronto District School Board in terms of gaining an understanding of these multicultural parents, and may help them in meeting these multicultural parents' needs.

I obtained your name from your principal; he or she felt that you may be interested in being involved in this case study. The principal was asked to identify six to eight teachers whom he or she believed might be interested in participating in the case study. I randomly selected four teachers from the list to contact about being involved in the case study, therefore the principal will not know who was selected. I am seeking your participation as a teacher for a one-hour face-to-face interview. If you agree, I will set up a time for the interview at your convenience, either in or out of school. I will provide you with the interview questions beforehand. With your permission, I intend to digitally record our discussion. All electronic files will be password protected. None of the data will contain your name, or the identity of your place or work. Paper and audio data will be secured in a locked cabinet. I will have to meet with you on two occasions to discuss one, what languages the families require the documents translated into; two, to hand you the questionnaires for the parents. I may have to ask you clarifying questions after I transcribe the data, but I would think that this could be carried out over the phone.

I do not foresee risks in your participation in this research. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to answer any questions you find objectionable or uncomfortable. You may withdraw at any time without negative consequences, and may request the removal of the data from the study. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent possible. Should reference be made in the final document to any specific information, all identifying material will be altered (place, names, school etc.) to protect anonymity. The results of the research study may be published, but your name and the name of your school will not be used. If you are interested in a hard copy of the research findings please inform me and I will provide you with a copy.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please feel free to contact me, the researcher, Miranda Blazey by email at 6mhb@queensu.ca or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Ruth Rees; at ruth.rees@queensu.ca. This project has been reviewed and received ethical clearance from both Queen's University General Research Ethics Board and the

Toronto District School Board. If you have any concerns or questions about your involvement in the study feel free to contact me:

Queen's University General Research Ethics Board Coordinator
c/o the Office of Research Services
Telephone: 613-533-6081
E-mail: chair.GREB@queensu.ca

Please email me whether or not you wish to be involved. Then sign the attached consent form if you agree to participate in this case study.

Sincerely,

Miranda Blazey
Master of Education student
Faculty of Education, Queen's University
6mhb@queensu.ca
416-538-0914

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE VICE-PRINCIPAL

1. How does the board and the school encourage immigrant parental involvement?
2. How do you initiate contact with the immigrant parents of your students?
3. How do you create meaningful relationships with immigrant parents?
4. What projects and initiatives have proven to be the most successful in gaining further immigrant parental involvement?
5. What are some of the challenges you have faced in gaining immigrant parental involvement at your school?
6. How do you think further integration between immigrant families' home and school life could be achieved?
7. What are some of the practical strategies you use to form successful shared partnerships between yourself and immigrant parents?
8. Is there anything that I didn't ask you, that I should have?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE TEACHER

1. How do you initiate contact with the immigrant parents of your students?
2. How do you create meaningful relationships with the immigrant parents of your students?
3. What are some of the challenges you have faced in gaining parental involvement with the immigrant parents in your class?
4. What projects and initiatives have proven to be the most successful in gaining further immigrant parental involvement?
5. What are some of the practical strategies you use to form successful shared partnerships between yourself and the immigrant parents?
6. Are you aware of the Toronto District School Board parent involvement policy? If so, how were you informed about the policy?
7. Do you know of any local community agencies and organizations that have supports for the immigrant parents in your school community?
8. Is there anything that I didn't ask you, that I should have?

APPENDIX F
CONSENT FORM

Interview Participants (Principal and Teacher)

- I understand that the purpose of this case study is to determine: one, how one school has involved immigrant parents in their child's school and schooling; and two, how immigrant parents want to be involved in their child's school and schooling. This study is of relevance to educators who may wish to know more about the views of immigrant families.
- I have read and retained a copy of the Letter of Information.
- I understand the research will take the form of an interview, which will be digitally recorded, and that the researcher may initiate further contact in order to clarify data as the analysis unfolds.
- I understand that my participation will take the form of an interview and that the interview will last a maximum of one hour.
- I understand that it is my right to refuse digital recording of the interview. I also retain the right to refuse to answer any specific question.
- I understand that all information will be kept confidential to the extent possible and will be used only for the purpose of this research. The researcher will do all transcribing of data. Should reference be made in the final document to any specific information all identifying material will be altered (place, names, school etc.) to protect anonymity.
- I understand that in agreement with Queen's University research policy the information provided will be retained for five years.
- I understand that the researcher may publish the findings of the study.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw consent at any time.
- I understand that if I have any questions concerning the research study, I can contact the researcher, Miranda Blazey by email at 6mhb@queensu.ca or her thesis supervisor, Dr. Ruth Rees at ruth.rees@queensu.ca.
- I understand this research study has been reviewed and received ethical clearance from both Queen's University General Research Ethics Board and the Toronto District School Board. If you have any concerns or questions about your involvement in the study feel free to contact:

Queen's University General Research Ethics Board Coordinator
c/o the Office of Research Services
Telephone: 613-533-6081
E-mail: chair.GREB@queensu.ca

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return the other to Miranda Blazey.

Retain the second copy for your records.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

- Asian - South (e.g., India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)
- Middle Eastern (e.g., Iran, Israel, Palestine)
- Asian - East (e.g., China, Japan, Korea)
- Latin American (e.g., Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica)
- Indian-Caribbean (e.g., Guyana with origins in India)
- Asian - South East (e.g., Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam)
- Black - Africa (e.g., Ghana, Kenya, Somalia)
- White - Europe (e.g., England, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Serbia)
- Black - Caribbean Region (e.g., Jamaica, Trinidad/Tobago)
- Aboriginal
- Black - Canada
- White – Canada
- Mixed _____

4. How long have you lived in Ontario?

- 6 months or less
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 20+ years

5. How long has your child been at this school?

- 3 months or less
- 6 months or less
- for the full school year of grade six

Part Two: Education Information and Occupation

6. Please mark an X in each box that applies:

	Your education	Your Mother's	Your Father's
High School (no diploma)			
High school graduate			
Some College (no diploma)			
College Diploma			
University (no degree)			
University			
Graduate or Professional			

7. What is your current occupation?

8. Please list any occupation you may have had prior to this:

Part Three: Home school Communication

9. How is your child's school and schooling the same or different from the school(s) that you went to as a child?

10. When your child was first enrolled at this school, did you receive a Parent Handbook?

- Yes No Do not remember

11. How did you find out about the Ontario school system?

- Toronto District School Board website
 Settlement Worker
 Friend or family member
 School staff
 Other: _____

12. How often do you talk about your child's progress and/or class activities with your child's teacher?

- Once per week
 Once per month
 Once per term
 Once per year
 I do not talk with my child's teacher.

If you checked I do not talk with your child's teacher, why not?

13. How often do you enter your child's school?

- Once per week
 Once per month

- Once per term
- Once per year
- I do not go to my child's school.

If you do not go to your child's school, why not?

14. Why do you go to your child's school? Please mark an X in each box that applies:

- Parent teacher interviews
- School council meetings
- Heritage Day celebrations
- Annual Family BBQ
- Fieldtrips
- Arts Night
- Volunteer in the classroom
- Sports Events
- Make presentations to the students
- Deal with disciplinary issues
- Other: _____
- I do not visit with my child's school

Part Four: Collaboration and Communication

15. How would you like to be involved in your child's school and schooling?

16. How should the school go about supporting more forms of parental involvement?

17. Have you made any suggestions of any kind to the school or to the teacher since your child has been at school?

- Yes No (If no, please skip to question 19)

If yes, what suggestions have you made to the school or teacher?

18. If yes, has the teacher or school used any of these suggestions?

- Yes No

19. Please describe an activity used by the teacher or the school that has helped you to get involved. What did you like about it?

20. Please describe an activity that the teacher or the school has done to get you involved, but that you did not like? What do you not like about it?

21. Would you support having home visiting programs or neighbourhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families?

- Yes No

Additional Comments:

Thank you for answering this questionnaire.

When you have completed answering the questions, please put the completed questionnaire and signed consent form into the envelope provided, and have your child deliver it to the secretary in the main office.

APPENDIX H

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Translator

- I understand that the purpose of this case study is to determine: one, how one school has involved immigrant parents in their children's education; and two, how immigrant parents want to be involved in their children's education. This study is of relevance to educators who may wish to know more about the views of multicultural families.
- In my role as a translator for the researcher, I understand the nature of the study and requirements for confidentiality. I have had all of my questions concerning the nature of the study and my role as an interpreter answered to my satisfaction.
- I agree not to reveal in any way to any person other than the researcher any data gathered for the study by means of my services as an interpreter.
- I understand that all information will be kept confidential to the extent possible and will be used only for the purpose of this research. The researcher will do all transcribing of data. Should reference be made in the final document to any specific information all identifying material will be altered (place, names) to protect anonymity.
- I understand that in agreement with Queen's University research policy the information provided will be retained for five years.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw consent at any time.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw consent at any time. I understand that if I have any questions concerning the research study, I can contact the researcher, Miranda Blazey by email at 6mhb@queensu.ca or her thesis supervisor, Dr. Ruth Rees at ruth.rees@queensu.ca.
- I understand this research study has been reviewed and received ethical clearance from both Queen's University General Research Ethics Board and the Toronto District School Board. If you have any concerns or questions about your involvement in the study feel free to contact:

Queen's University General Research Ethics Board Coordinator
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Telephone: 613-533-6081
E-mail: chair.GREB@queensu.ca

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return the other to Miranda Blazey.

Retain the second copy for your records.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Signature: _____

Date: _____