

## A SURVEY OF TEACHERS' AND PRINCIPALS' PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN FOSTERING NEW IMMIGRANT PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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This research, using questionnaire and interview data, examined practices and challenges of educators in areas of southern Ontario in fostering immigrant parents' support for their children's literacy. Results showed that teachers learn about the language and culture of their students, modify homework assigned to their ESL students, and encourage parents to read to their children in their mother tongue. Teachers need to increase their awareness of parents' perceptions of authority and the role of their first language for success in their children's English literacy. Teachers also need to understand parents' role as co-teachers at home.

Key words: home-school relationships, ESL parents, parents as co-teachers, homework support

Cette recherche faisant appel à un questionnaire et à des données tirées d'entrevues porte sur les pratiques et les défis d'enseignants du sud de l'Ontario qui veulent inciter des parents immigrants à favoriser la littératie chez leurs enfants. Les résultats indiquent que les enseignants apprennent à connaître la langue et la culture de leurs élèves, modifient les devoirs qu'ils demandent à leurs élèves en anglais langue seconde (ALS), de faire à la maison et encouragent les parents à faire la lecture à leurs enfants dans leur langue maternelle. Les enseignants ont besoin de se familiariser davantage avec les perceptions qu'ont les parents de l'autorité et du rôle de la langue maternelle dans le succès des enfants en littératie en anglais. Les enseignants doivent aussi comprendre le rôle des parents comme co-enseignants à la maison.

Mots clés : liens maison-école, parents et ALS, parents comme co-éducateurs, soutien pour les devoirs faits à la maison

In this article, we present the perspectives of 61 teachers and 31 principals, working in Ontario elementary schools with 20 per cent or greater new immigrant populations, on effective practices and the challenges they face in encouraging new immigrant parent involvement in their children's learning. Our understanding of parent involvement stems from that put forward by Kauffman, Perry, and Prentiss (2001): "Diverse activities occurring either at home or at school to allow parents [and extended family members] to share in their child's education" (p. 2). These activities include supporting and encouraging children's learning and active involvement in children's schooling.

Because researchers (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Lareau, 1989) have found a strong correlation between parent involvement and students' scholastic achievement, they encourage teachers and principals to devote considerable energy and resources to encourage parents to be more engaged in their children's education. More specifically, Epstein and Dauber (1991) advise schools to help parents "build home conditions for learning, understand communications from school, become productive volunteers, share responsibilities in their children's education in learning activities related to the curriculum at home, and include parents' voices and decisions that affect school and their children" (p. 291).

Parents' perspectives have been sought in much of the research on parent involvement (Bernhard & Freire, 1999; Dyson, 2001; Li, 2003; Ramirez, 2003). These studies position schools as institutions privileging the language and cultural norms of white middle-class English speakers over immigrant families' languages and cultures. They lament the "power asymmetries" that construct immigrant parents as individuals who are "'needy,' 'naïve,' or 'hysterical' and appear to be working in opposition to teachers" (Fine, 1993, p. 685). This research indicates that schools have much work to do to design systematic approaches to parental involvement and create openness among new immigrant families, teachers, and principals.

Yet, we know that schools are making efforts to respond to the needs identified in the research on parent involvement. Case study research has reported the positive results and the shortcomings of these efforts (Eccles, Kirton, & Xiong, 1994; McCaleb, 1994). There is a need for

research that creates a broader picture of school-wide and classroom initiatives to foster new immigrant parents' involvement in their children's learning, however. Our research, based on interview and survey data from principals and teachers in 32 schools in southern Ontario with at least a 20 per cent ESL population, has created this larger picture. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What programs, policies, and practices for involving immigrant parents in supporting their children's literacy are deemed to be effective by principals and teachers in 32 schools with large new immigrant populations?

2. What challenges do these teachers and principals face in fostering new immigrant parent involvement in their children's literacy learning?

In the first phase of our research, we surveyed 61 teachers and 32 principals, and interviewed 12 of the teachers and 10 of the principals. The voices of parents are heard in our report of the second phase of this study elsewhere (Ladky & Peterson, in press).

#### RELATED RESEARCH

In this section, we present the results of previous research on challenges facing parents and school personnel in involving new immigrant parents in their children's learning and that which identifies efficacious practices for new immigrant parent involvement.

##### *Barriers to New Immigrant Parent Involvement*

No one factor can be used to explain parent involvement patterns. Research indicates that parent involvement varies according to families' ethnic and language backgrounds, their socioeconomic status, and their formal education (Lareau, 1989; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990; Valdes, 1996). Although schools with high numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged children report less positive parent involvement (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998), researchers caution against drawing hard causal relationships between the two. Further factors include a lack of time due to child-rearing or work obligations (Perry, Prentiss, & Kauffman, 2001). Parents who have experienced discrimination during their own school experiences or who face ongoing economic stress may feel uncomfortable and fearful when visiting their

children's schools. Moles (1993) explains that, "disadvantaged parents and teachers may be entangled by various psychological obstacles to mutual involvement such as misperceptions and misunderstandings, negative expectations, stereotypes, intimidation, and distrust" (p. 33).

Language itself is a barrier to successful parent involvement. Some parents lack confidence in their abilities to support their children in school work that uses a language they are struggling to learn. Furthermore, minority-language parents are less likely than their dominant-language counterparts to be familiar with the technical language used by teachers to describe curriculum, instructional strategies, and educational goals (Smrekar, 1996).

Cultural attitudes among parents towards, for example, authority or the value of education, can have a profound impact on the way teachers and principals develop practices and establish a school atmosphere which is open to active and engaged parental involvement. Moles (1993) explains: "Many Hispanic and Southeast Asian immigrant parents believe that they are being helpful by maintaining a respectful distance from the education system" (p. 35). Immigrant parents are often not aware of their children's teachers' expectations for their involvement or consider the authority of the school unassailable. Parents' preferred style of communication, influenced by cultural norms, may differ substantially from the communication norms of the school. Parents may assume a submissive position as a result of this miscommunication (Bermudez, 1993).

Attitudes and assumptions of school personnel also influence parent involvement. Cummins (1996) explains that teachers and principals must examine their perceptions of language and the abilities and desires of new immigrant parents to be involved in their children's learning. He writes: "[I]f ability to speak English and knowledge of North American cultural conventions are made prerequisites for 'parental involvement,' then many of these parents will be defined as apathetic and incompetent and will play out their pre-ordained role of non-involvement" (p. 8). His words were borne out in Comer's (1986) work in low-achieving inner-city New Haven schools. Here, teachers and principals stereotyped minority parents as uncooperative, unconcerned, and uncaring about their children's education. They misinterpreted new immigrant parents'

absence from school activities as a demonstration of their lack of interest in their children's education. Yet minority parents in Comer's study explained that they did not participate in activities such as Parent Teacher Association meetings because they felt uncomfortable at the school. They wanted to know more about school protocols to participate in school life.

*Recommendations for Fostering Greater Parent Involvement*

A growing bank of recommendations for fostering new immigrant parent involvement in their children's learning has arisen from case study research examining particular school initiatives (Eccles, Kirton, & Xiong, 1994; Epstein, 1995; Kauffman, Perry, & Prentiss, 2001; Pecoraro & Phommasouvanh, 1992). From this research, Pecoraro and Phommasouvanh (1992) propose principles for effective parent involvement to guide school initiatives:

- 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;
- helping parents to perceive themselves as teachers of their children, alongside the schools' teachers.

These principles underpin specific recommendations such as: hiring 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, pp. 6-7). Other suggestions include providing parents with explicit instructional responsibilities to support their children (Epstein, 1995) and encouraging parents to write personal histories for their children to read (Eccles, Kirton, & Xiong, 1994). We identify these recommendations here as reference points for discussing the practices of teachers and principals participating in our research.

## METHODS

Participating teachers and principals worked in 32 schools in eight Ontario school districts. After receiving ethics approval from the school boards, we contacted the principals of eight randomly selected schools within each board, inviting their participation and requesting the names of all teachers in grades K-6 who had been teaching for three years or more in their school. We then telephoned two teachers in each school, inviting their participation. Teachers and principals who agreed to participate were sent questionnaires. The schools were located in three main areas of southern Ontario where recent influxes of immigrants have dramatically shifted the school demographics. Some participating school boards were in communities with a largely working class, transient Vietnamese population, and more established Portuguese populations. Other school boards were in communities with primarily middle-class immigrant populations that were mixed in their ethnic make-up. The third area contained communities with immigration patterns that are shifting so rapidly there are myriad demographic changes from year to year. The interview participants were randomly selected from teachers and principals who had indicated on their questionnaire a willingness to take part in an interview. We attempted to have equal representation from each of the three geographic areas. A research assistant and one of the authors conducted the in-person interviews in the teachers' and principals' schools.

Participating schools have from 2.5 to 4.0 full-time equivalent ESL teachers. Seventy-five per cent of the schools have bilingual teachers or teaching assistants and many have established a buddy or ambassador system among students to ensure peer support of ESL students. Over 60 per cent of the schools have translators and settlement workers available to assist parents of ESL students to communicate with school personnel and to become more familiar with daily living in their new country.

We drew on the literature identifying effective parent involvement practices (Eccles, Kirton, & Xiong, 1994; Epstein, 1995; Kauffman, Perry, & Prentiss, 2001) when designing the questionnaire and interview questions. Questionnaires (see Appendix A for teacher and principal questionnaires) were sent to 79 teachers and 39 principals, with a 77 per cent return rate for teachers and a 79 per cent return rate for principals.

There were even numbers of primary and upper elementary teachers involved in the study. Almost half the teacher participants (48.4%) had taught for fewer than five years. An even greater percentage of the principals (84%) had been principals of schools with ESL populations of 20 per cent or more for fewer than five years. From this sample, we interviewed 12 teachers and 10 principals (see Appendix B for teacher and principal interview questions).

We calculated percentages of responses to the quantitative questionnaire data. For many questions, participants checked more than one response, so percentages do not add to 100. We used the interview responses to deepen and extend the information gathered in the questionnaires. In addition, because the questionnaires had many forced-choice questions, we felt that interviews would also help to identify practices that were overlooked in the questionnaire choices.

We used the three principles identified by Pecoraro and Phommasouvanh (1992) to analyze the interview transcripts and the responses to open-ended questions in the questionnaire. To determine effective practices, we looked at how teachers and principals built on the culture and experiences that new immigrant parents brought to Canadian schools, built bridges between new immigrant parents' experiences in their new and native countries, and helped parents to perceive themselves as teachers of their children, alongside the schools' teachers. We also looked at the barriers that impeded efforts to address these principles. We report the results of questionnaire and interview data together. The qualitative responses to open-ended questionnaire questions were primarily lists of practices and challenges. The interview data enrich and provide contexts for the questionnaire data.

## RESULTS

### *Practices Fostering New Immigrant Parent Involvement*

Greater awareness is a first step in teachers' and principals' efforts to build on the knowledge and experiences that their new immigrant students and their families bring from their home countries, to help families create bridges between the two cultures, and to help parents see themselves as teachers alongside their children's teachers. Teachers participating in this study focused on the first principle in their

professional development endeavours. To the greatest extent, they have participated in the ESL Additional Qualifications (AQ program), a series of three 80 hour courses taken over the course of a semester or during the summer break. Each course builds on the previous course; courses must be taken sequentially. The courses are offered by the school districts and by university faculties of education, though they do not have a university credit attached to them. Some districts offered to subsidize the cost of these expensive courses, but they did not mandate that teachers take the courses. Other activities identified by teachers in interviews and written comments included attending an ESL conference at the local university, participating in community activities celebrating linguistic diversity, participating in an urban diversity program at a local university, attending ESL sessions at literacy conferences, and networking with other teachers.

Principals were more active than teachers in becoming knowledgeable about how to build bridges between new immigrant families' home and new cultures and about helping parents see themselves as partners in educating their children. Principals had been particularly active in attending intercultural workshops and family and school partnership workshops. They had also worked on district-wide ESL committees with the district ESL consultant, facilitated multicultural leadership and heritage language workshops for the district, and participated in international travel to visit schools in Southeast Asia.

One way in which participating teachers and principals constructed bridges between cultures and demonstrated to parents that they were co-teachers of their children was to facilitate communication between immigrant parents, their children, and school personnel by bringing in translators. Teachers felt that it was important to communicate in the parents' mother tongue and did whatever they could, including having student-led conferences so that the children explained to their parents in their mother tongue what they had learned, to ensure that parents understood what their children were achieving. School boards hired translators to assist with parent-teacher conferences, and, to a lesser degree, to assist in writing report cards. As a result, as indicated in questionnaire results found in Table 1, teachers used many other



methods to communicate as clearly as possible with new immigrant parents about their children's learning.

*Table 1*  
*Teachers' Modifications when Reporting to Parents on ESL Students' Progress*

Modification to Report Cards	Percentage of Teachers
Use simplified language	51.9
Have report card translated	11.1
Go over the report card with students so they can explain it to their parents	42.6
Explain it with examples and gestures in parent-teacher conferences	59.3
Ask a translator to be present at parent-teacher conferences	90.7
Other	14.8
No modifications	1.8

Bilingual teachers, administrators, or support staff in the school and members of the community also served as translators. Many of the interviewed principals believed that they had been largely successful in hiring staff that represented the increasingly linguistic diversity of their students. Some of the interviewed teachers and principals knew firsthand what their ESL students and their parents were experiencing. One interviewed teacher, who had been an immigrant learning English in elementary school herself, said, "So for me, I know what they're going through and it's easy for me to understand how much work the child can do and how much the parents are capable of because I have first-hand experience." Other principals wanted to hire more bilingual staff and teachers but were finding it hard to do so, however. A principal explained in an interview:

We've been trying to hire staff members that are multi-lingual, which is important for daily phone interactions. Like we've just had a little girl who bumped her head and when we called home there was nobody there who spoke

English and the two teachers here that speak Cantonese aren't here today so you try to go through that and it's just a simple bump on the head.... (principal interview)

An important practice, identified in questionnaires and in interviews, in fostering a collaborative relationship with new immigrant parents as co-teachers of their children and to build bridges between their new and native cultures was to encourage parents to read and write to their children in their mother tongue and in English, whenever it was possible. One principal explained in an interview: "It's a validation of their first language and the fact that they are literate . . . It's the unifying of both languages. Students are given the validation that they can converse in their own language and told that having two languages is a real leg up."

Furthermore, questionnaire data showed that dual language books were common in all the schools and classrooms in our study. If dual language books were not available for purchase, then teachers involved their students and their parents in creating the books. One teacher explained in an interview that the creation of dual language books

was extremely valuable to our community because, first of all, we involved parents from our community in translating. (Sometimes they're a little bit reluctant or uncomfortable, because of their language barrier, participating in school activities.) Secondly, it encourages literacy at home between children and parents. (teacher interview)

As shown in questionnaire results reported in Table 2, reading, listening to their children read, writing to their children, and reading their children's writing in their mother tongue and in English were most frequently indicated. In interviews, teachers explained that they encouraged parents to talk to children about their jobs and daily lives, tell stories, serve as models of readers and writers, and attend monthly parent nights of student performances, and teacher presentations about literacy programs in their classrooms.

Table 2

*Teachers' and Principals' Views on How Parents Should Support their Children's English Literacy Learning*

Parental Support	Percentage of Teachers	Percentage of Principals
Reading and listening to children read in mother tongue	73.8	93.8
Reading and listening to children read in English	82.0	87.5
Helping with homework	85.2	90.6
Speaking English to children at home	67.2	59.4
Writing to children and reading children's writing in English	63.9	62.5
Writing to children and reading children's writing in mother tongue	73.8	90.6
Providing computer access	72.1	75.5
Parents cannot play a role because of English language difficulties	11.5	0.0
Other	31.1	18.8

Another way to involve new immigrant parents as co-teachers was to assign homework that encouraged ESL students to use English and their mother tongue in meaningful communicative contexts. For the most part, questionnaire data showed that teachers modified homework assignments by decreasing the number of tasks ESL students were required to complete. Teachers also provided information to parents to help them work with their children. They did not assign excessive amounts of homework to allow children time with their families. One teacher said in an interview that it was important to “build all those [family] relationships and it’s very hard when students come home and they’re just consumed with homework. There needs to be a balance...” Other modifications identified in interviews and in written comments on questionnaires included providing tape recordings of books for students to listen to while they read and sending home a model assignment and a parent tip sheet to help parents work with their children. Other teachers had established a peer tutor system so that ESL students could telephone them if they had difficulties completing the homework. In two schools, ESL students had the option to stay after school to work with older peer tutors on their homework. One teacher indicated in the questionnaire that she gave students his email address and was willing to act as a consultant when students needed help with their homework. Sometimes teachers assigned reading in the children’s first language or material that was easier for the children to read for homework. One teacher held meetings with ESL students’ parents on a monthly basis to show parents how they could help their children with homework. Many teachers indicated that they drew on their school’s ESL teachers’ expertise when making modifications.

A final way in which participating principals and teachers fostered within new immigrant parents a sense of being partners in teaching their children was by making their schools into welcoming environments where all parents felt comfortable. Interviews were the sources of information about these practices. One teacher explained that she and her colleagues organized family activities where the children were involved because “the parents don’t have to speak English and then feel that they’re being tested. It’s less intimidating for the parents.”

Similarly, a principal explained that parents found it easy to talk with teachers informally about their children's literacy learning:

because of the very welcoming nature of the staff. And also 80-90 per cent of our kids are ESL. So I've got the type of staff that will take the family in the car if they're going for a paediatric assessment or a speech and language referral. It's part of the school culture. Do we schedule regular interviews for report cards? No, because it's pointless. We have open interviews. You can make a nice little schedule, but you have to realize well, they might come at 2:00 on Monday when their appointment was 1:00 on Wednesday. You just deal with that. (principal interview)

Teachers also maintained that parent involvement could be of a more informal nature. One teacher applauded her school's decision to replace "Meet the Teacher" night with a community barbecue that was "more relaxed and fun and broke the ice so people were more comfortable coming in to talk to us." Teachers felt that new immigrant parents should not be judged by the same standards as their native Canadian counterparts because they were less comfortable in formal situations.

In spite of all the successes that came from such efforts, teachers and principals felt they could be doing more. As outlined in the next section, multiple challenges arise when schools attempt to involve new immigrant parents in supporting their children's learning.

#### *Barriers to New Immigrant Parent Involvement*

In questionnaires, principals indicated that new immigrant parents were involved in their children's schooling to a greater degree than teachers indicated they were. All participants agreed, however, that barriers specific to new immigrant parents' experiences hindered their involvement. Only 30 per cent of teachers had observed ESL students' parents helping out in classrooms, particularly in reading with individual students. However, 81 per cent of principals observed that new immigrant parents participated in their children's schooling to the greatest degree through accompanying classes on field trips.

For the most part, participants' reasons for the low levels of new immigrant parent involvement indicate failures in building bridges

between parents' new and native cultures. For example, in interviews, teachers raised the issue of how new immigrant parents view the value of literacy activities like reading for pleasure. One principal explained that he and his staff tried to promote the importance of reading but found it a huge challenge to convince new immigrant parents because "they don't see the academic value of it." A teacher acknowledged this tension by saying, "a lot of parents don't understand how important it is to read to their children in their mother tongue. They feel it will confuse their child."

Difficulties in building on the language and culture of new immigrant parents hindered their involvement in their children's learning. Language was a barrier, as identified in 85 per cent of teachers' and principals' questionnaire responses. In interviews, teachers and principals gave numerous examples of parents who felt that they were not able to help their children because their English was not of native speakers' quality. One principal described parents' anxieties in this way: "There's a sense of helplessness about 'If my child's making mistakes I can't assist them in terms of the vocabulary and the stories.'" A teacher expressed the beliefs of many participants:

Many of the parents think that because they don't speak the language, they cannot help. They feel that teaching their children Chinese is going to lower their chance of doing well in university. Some parents tell me at interviews that they don't want to help their children, even parents who speak English, because they think they're going to mispronounce words or read the book with an accent. (teacher interview)

Barriers were also constructed by school personnel's views towards the relative value of new immigrants' mother tongue and English in supporting their children's learning. Two teachers were concerned that some immigrant parents could not read in their mother tongue and had not attempted to learn English. One teacher expressed frustration: "There comes a responsibility on the part of the parents to learn English. And, of course, many of the parents are not even schooled in their own country. For us to help them, it becomes very difficult." Another teacher explained that "these parents want their children to succeed, but it puts their kids at a distinct disadvantage because often, they don't have

someone who can help them." The *English* only policies in a few of the schools participating in the study, while perhaps helping students to read and write in English, also reinforced the division between home and school for non-English speaking parents.

Another principle of parent involvement, that of fostering a view of parents as co-teachers of their children, was difficult to address because of parents' work responsibilities, according to 90 per cent of principals and 82 per cent of teachers. One interviewed teacher felt that new immigrant parents did not volunteer in her classroom because "they are either working or they have babies at home. They don't have the freedom to come and go." Interviewed participants felt that immigrant parents simply did not have the time to be literacy models for their children. They were more focused on the basics of survival – finding steady employment, suitable housing, and other aspects of establishing a new life in Canada. As one principal expressed it: "New Canadians tend to be working, they tend to be less available...I often have no way to get in touch with families and I think that's because there's this huge breakdown in terms of getting all that information home and getting that back from the families." In addition, new immigrants' socio-economic realities often necessitated frequent moves to new locations. One interviewed teacher said, "I find that we get them here and as they start to get on their feet, they move away from the neighbourhood." This often means that parents are not focussed on, for example, their children's regular school attendance and as a result, "Transience among the parents, absenteeism among the students, as well as inconsistent routines at home, are major roadblocks."

#### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Pecoraro and Phommasouvanh's (1992) principles for effective parent involvement to guide school initiatives 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 the schools' teachers. Based on extensive case study research, they recommend that schools try to hire greater numbers of bilingual administrative and teaching staff provide

cultural awareness training for teachers and principals, make translation services available, and integrate bilingual and multicultural materials in regular classroom instruction (Kauffman, Perry, & Prentiss, 2001). Successful practices also include providing parents with explicit instructional responsibilities to support their children (Epstein, 1995) and encouraging parents to write, for example, personal histories for their children to read (Eccles, Kirton, & Xiong, 1994). In the schools participating in our study, there were abundant examples of school practices and programs that actively support parental involvement, suggesting that these recommendations are being implemented. There is, however, variation in the recognition and implementation of these practices between principals and teachers, as well as limitations to the kinds of programs currently developed. There are also differences between survey responses and those given during interviews. It is often the case that the interview process draws out the more participatory teachers and principals, providing them with an opportunity to share successes.

In relation to Pecoraro and Phommasouvanh's (1992) recommendation that schools build on the cultural experience of new immigrant parents and, by extension, build bridges between the old and new homeland, principals stated that they attended workshops designed to broaden their awareness of cultural issues affecting their schools. Despite funding challenges, they also hired bilingual staff when possible and offered translation services at reporting time. They supported teachers' use of bilingual texts and multicultural materials. Principals also said they encouraged the development of programs and the use of resources both specifically designed to widen and support the role of parent as co-teacher. Principals regarded parents as literacy coaches for their children, whether in English or in their first language, and perceived new immigrant parents as actively involved in school life, despite the fact that over 80 per cent of that involvement was on one-off field trips. In general, principals displayed confidence in their abilities to support the principles of effective involvement of new immigrant parents, whether or not that support was producing actual results.

Teachers identified greater challenges, in terms of the time they had to devote to support parents of their ESL students. Incongruous with



effective practices identified in the literature, more than 10 per cent of those queried in the survey believed that immigrant parents were not able to play a role in supporting their children's literary learning. Teachers do attend intercultural workshops and take Additional Qualifications courses but are less likely to do so than the principals in this study. The specific reasons for this lack of participation are unclear but teachers might have felt they were doing enough in terms of classroom practices to support parental involvement.

Teachers participating in surveys and interviews identified many practices that supported parental involvement at school. Specifically, teachers used simplified language on report cards and routinely asked to have a translator present during parent-teacher conferences. That being said, few teachers outlined explicit instructional strategies (Epstein, 1995) to involve parents as co-teachers of their children at home. Teachers in this study firmly supported, in principle, the idea that parents should read to their children in any language and help them complete homework, but failed to explain in the interviews specific ways this could be harnessed to support their literacy development in English.

The results of this study suggest, therefore, that there needs to be an increased awareness, on the part of teachers, about parent perceptions of authority and the role of their first language as a tool for success in their children's English literacy. There is clearly an urgent need to expand teachers' understanding of the role of parents as co-teachers at home, without necessitating their physical presence in school. That is to say, teachers need to provide parents with the language and agency that previous research has suggested is lacking, in order to support their children's literary success. These tools must include the recognition of the family's first language and a greater awareness of the possible perceptions of parents regarding authority, their role and the teacher's role when they first arrive in the new school environment. Teachers need to link their understanding of effective at-home parental support to the actual literacy environments and practices of each household. It is up to teachers, with the support of their administrations, to actualize the role of co-teacher, a role that perhaps has been previously under acknowledged.

In all, teachers and principals who participated in this study believed in the necessity of increasing parental involvement in their students' literacy success. The *English only* policies and misinformed attitudes that blame parents for non-involvement are changing in many real and effective ways. It is up to researchers and practitioners together to clarify misunderstandings by identifying and implementing strategies which allow new immigrant parents to be effective co-teachers and supporters of their children's literacy success.

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## Appendix A: Questionnaires

## Supporting ESL Students' Literacy Success at School and at Home

## Principal Questionnaire

Instructions: Please check the responses that best describe you and your work as a principal. We would appreciate your written responses to the final questions. It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete this questionnaire. Thank you very much for participating in this research study!

**\*Please note: For the purpose of this questionnaire, please consider children who have been in an English-speaking country for less than six years and whose parents speak a language other than English as ESL students.**

1. For how many years have you been the principal of a school that has at least a 20 per cent ESL student population? [Please check the box representing the sum of all schools in which you have worked as an administrator]

- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-10
- 10-15
- 15 +

2. What grades are included in your school? [Please check one.]

- K-Gr. 3
- K-Gr. 5
- K-Gr. 6
- K-Gr. 8

3. Please check all the avenues for diversity training that you have participated in. [Please check all that apply.]

- ESL Additional Qualifications

- ESL undergraduate courses
- ESL graduate courses
- Intercultural communication workshops
- Family and school partnership courses/workshops
- Professional reading – Please list 1-2 titles:

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Other [Please list]

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No diversity training

4. What full time equivalent of ESL teachers do you have in your school?

\_\_\_\_\_ FTE

5. Which of the following supports for ESL students and their parents are available in your school? [Please check all that apply.]

- ESL program
- ESL resource centre
- Bilingual parent volunteers
- Bilingual teacher/teaching assistant
- Buddy system among students
- Parent centre
- Information brochure in English
- Information brochure with translations
- Settlement worker
- Bilingual interpretor/translator
- Other [Please list]

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None of the above

6. In what ways are parents of ESL students involved in your school? [Please check all that apply.]

- Helping in classrooms
- Helping with class field trips, etc.

- School council or parent group involvement
  - Fundraising
  - Decision-making
  - Attending parent-teacher conferences
  - Other [Please list]
- 
- 

ESL parents are not involved

7. What do you find tends to limit ESL students' parents' involvement in your school? [Please check all that apply.]

- Parents and teachers have differing perspectives on effective instruction and/or assessment
  - Parents' work/other responsibilities
  - Parents' English language difficulties
  - Parents' views on parent involvement
  - Teachers' views on parent involvement
  - Other [Please list]
- 

There are no factors limiting ESL students' parents' involvement

8. Which of the following do you have in place to try to work around these limiting factors? [Please check all that apply.]

- Provide information for parents that include translations in parents' mother tongues
  - Bring in translators
  - Provide information to teachers and parents about the benefits of parent involvement
  - Hold meetings to explain teachers' instructional approaches
  - Other [Please list]
-

9. What are your views on the role of ESL parents in their children's literacy success? [Please check all that apply.]

Parents can play a role by helping their children with their homework

Parents can play a role by speaking English to their children at home

Parents can play a role by reading and listening to their children read in English

Parents can play a role by writing to their children and by reading their children's writing (in English)

Parents can play a role by reading and listening to their children read in their mother tongue

Parents can play a role by writing to their children and by reading their children's writing (in their mother tongue)

Other [Please list]

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Parents cannot play a large role because of their English language difficulties

10. What does your school do to support ESL students' literacy learning that you are most proud of?

11. What would you like to be able to do within your school and in your work with parents to support ESL students' literacy learning?

12. What kinds of support do you need to achieve those goals?



## Supporting ESL Students' Literacy Success at School and at Home

## Teacher Questionnaire

Instructions: Please check the responses that best describe you and your work as a teacher. We would appreciate your written responses to the final three questions. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete this questionnaire. Thank you very much for participating in this research study!

**\*Please note: For the purpose of this questionnaire, please consider children who have been in an English-speaking country for less than six years and whose parents speak a language other than English as ESL students.**

1. For how many years have you been a teacher in a classroom that has at least a 20 per cent ESL student population?

- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-10
- 10-15
- 15 +

2. What grade are you teaching now?

- Kindergarten
- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Grade 4
- Grade 5
- Grade 6

3. Please check all the avenues for diversity training that you have participated in. [Please check all that apply.]

- ESL Additional Qualifications
- ESL undergraduate courses

- ESL graduate courses  
 Intercultural communication workshops  
 Family and school interrelations courses/workshops  
 Professional reading – Please list 1-2 titles:
- 
- 

Other [Please list]

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None of the above

4. In what ways are parents of your ESL students involved in your classroom literacy instruction? [Please check all that apply.]

- Assisting in preparing teaching materials  
 Helping individual students with their reading or writing  
 Helping with marking students' written work  
 Other [Please list]
- 
- 
- 

ESL parents are not involved

5. What do you find tends to limit ESL parents' involvement in your classroom? [Please check all that apply]

There are no factors limiting ESL students' parents' involvement

- Difficulty in scheduling  
 Parents have conflicting perspectives on effective instruction and/or assessment  
 Parents' work responsibilities  
 Parents' English language difficulties  
 Parents' views on parent involvement  
 Your school does not support parent involvement  
 You prefer not to have ESL students' parents involved in daily classroom activities  
 Other [Please list]

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6. What are your views on the role of ESL parents in their children's literacy success? [Please check all that apply.]

Parents can play a role by helping their children with their homework

Parents can play a role by speaking English to their children at home

Parents can play a role by reading and listening to their children read in English

Parents can play a role by writing to their children and by reading their children's writing (in English)

Parents can play a role by reading and listening to their children read in their mother tongue

Parents can play a role by writing to their children and by reading their children's writing (in their mother tongue)

Other [Please list]

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Parents cannot play a large role because of their English language difficulties

7. What modifications do you make in homework assignments for your ESL students? [Please check all that apply.]

Do not assign homework to ESL students

No modifications

Decrease the number of tasks that the ESL students have to do

Ask the ESL teacher to help ESL students with their homework

Ask a teaching assistant to help ESL students with work that is assigned as homework to non-ESL students

Provide additional information to ESL students' parents so they can help their children

Other [Please list]

8. What recommendations do you give to ESL students' parents to help their children with their literacy development? [Please check all that apply.]

- To read to their children and listen to their children read in their mother tongue
- To read to their children and listen to their children read in English
- To write to their children and read what their children have written in their mother tongue
- To write to their children and read what their children have written in English
- To talk with their children about what they are learning at school
- To take their children to a library, museum, or community event
- To play educational games with their children related to reading and writing
- To help their children with their homework if possible
- To continue to use the native language at home for teaching life skills and concepts to their children
- To discuss events and news with their children in their own language
- Other [Please list]
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- You do not make recommendations

9. What modifications do you make to the way you communicate through report cards to parents of your ESL students? [Please check all that apply.]

- Use simplified language that parents are more likely to be able to read
- Ask someone to write translations of the report card for parents
- Go over the report card with students so they can explain it to parents

\_\_\_ Explain it with examples and gestures in parent-teacher conferences

\_\_\_ Ask a translator to be present at parent-teacher conferences

\_\_\_ Other [Please list]

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\_\_\_ No modifications

10. What challenges do you face in teaching ESL students to read and write?

11. How do you think the students' parents could support you in overcoming those challenges?

12. What would you like to be able to do to support your ESL students in their literacy development to a greater degree than is presently possible?

## Appendix B: Interviews

### Principal Interview

1. In what ways are parents involved in the everyday workings of your school? How is the type and degree of involvement different or the same for ESL parents?

2. How do issues regarding ESL students' literacy learning influence the everyday workings of your school (e.g., special events, staffing, scheduling, homework policies, parent-teacher conferences, committees)?

3. What is your school's policy on communication with parents who speak a language other than English? Are there translation services available?

4. What kind of training do the teachers and support staff in your school have to support ESL students' literacy success?
5. How does your school welcome new-immigrant families?
6. What are your views on the role of parents in their children's literacy success? How is this role different or the same for ESL parents?
7. What challenges do you face in achieving those goals?
8. What supports are in place in your district and community to help you achieve the goals?

#### Teacher Interview

1. What are your views on the role of parents in their children's literacy success? How is this role different or the same for parents of your ESL students?
2. What challenges do you face in teaching recent-immigrant students to read and write? How do you think the students' parents could support you in overcoming those challenges?
3. Describe your experiences in communicating with parents of your ESL students in parent-teacher interviews.
4. How do you find out about the cultural background of your students? How do you use this information in supporting your students' literacy learning?
5. What opportunities do you create for parents of your ESL students to be involved in classroom activities that support students' reading and writing?
6. What are your goals for involving ESL parents in classroom activities relating to literacy?
7. What challenges do you face in achieving your goals?