

Family–School Partnership: Practices of Immigrant Parents in Quebec, Canada

France Beauregard, Harriet Petrakos, and Audrey Dupont

Abstract

The immigrant population is increasing steadily every year in Canada and in Quebec, in particular. The immigrant population is made up largely of families, most of whom have school-age children. However, we have little information on the practices these parents adopt when they become involved in their children's schooling. In this study, 28 parents from three groups (Latin American, Maghrebi/Northwest African, and Central African) took part in semistructured interviews designed to uncover their perspectives of family–school collaboration. The practices identified were analysed using Epstein's (2001) framework of six types of involvement. The results showed that the parent involvement practices were interdependent and that the intentions underlying the practices could vary from one parent to another. We were also able to identify individual and environmental factors that influenced these practices.

Key Words: immigrants, parents, family, families, parental involvement, engagement, family–school collaboration, partnerships, Latino, African, Quebec, Canada, roles, practices, communication, schools, schooling, education

Introduction

The school's relationship with the family and the community is a major challenge currently facing Quebec schools. The Council of Higher Education (1994) and the Council of Family and Childhood (2001) advise the Ministry of

Education, Leisure, and Sports (MELS) on this dynamic. They identify specific issues such as the recognition of parental skills, the expectations of each party, and the role of parents at school. Moreover, studies show that parental involvement in children's schooling supports children's success in school (Christenson & Reschly, 2009; Deslandes, 2006; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2003; Deslandes, Royer, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1999; Epstein, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Lareau, 1989). The importance of parent involvement has implications for traditional and nontraditional (i.e., single parent, families with disabled children, immigrant) families. While the school–family relationship has been studied over the past several years, the relationship between schools and immigrant families has received limited attention.

The number of people immigrating to Canada and to Quebec each year is growing (Ministry of Immigration and Cultural Community [MICC], 2009a, 2009b; Statistics Canada, 2006). Specifically, Canada has had a 7% increase in immigration since 2000 (Statistics Canada, 2010), whereas in Quebec, immigration has had an 8% increase (MICC, 2013). In addition, immigrant families' integration into their new society can be affected by a variety of factors, including their culture and country of origin, their socioeconomic status in their country of origin, their level of mastery of the language of the recipient country, their level of education, their reasons for immigration, their migration plan, the existence of an ethnocultural community that they can identify with in the recipient country, and relationships with the dominant culture (Benoît, Rousseau, Ngirumpaste, & Lacroix, 2008; Bérubé, 2004; Costigan & Su, 2004; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Valdés, 1996).

In 1998, the Quebec Ministry of Education (MEQ) issued a policy on school integration and intercultural education (MEQ, 1998). This policy arose from a recommendation of the Commission for the Estates General on Education (MEQ, 1996a, 1996b), which noted the numerous but scattered efforts made by schools with regard to immigrant families. There was clearly a need to provide guidelines that would specify schools' responsibilities in matters of integration and intercultural education. One of these guidelines deals particularly with the relationship between families and communities, on one hand, and the responsibilities of teaching establishments, on the other. Thus, the goals are designed to facilitate immigrant parents' involvement in schools. While there is limited research on the impact of the links between community and school on parental involvement, some research is emerging on conditions that foster immigrant families' involvement in school.

Immigrant Parents' Involvement in Their Children's Schooling

Immigrant parents' involvement in school can depend on a numbers of factors, including the immigrant family's history and background, the impact

of the new environment, and the recipient society. Studies have confirmed that children's education is very important to immigrant parents (Audet, 2008; Delgado Gaitan, 1991; Kanouté, Vatz Laaroussi, Rachédi, & Doffouchi, 2008; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2011; Valdés, 1996). Indeed, this is reported by parents as one of the main reasons to immigrate. Some studies have also shown that parents who perceive the school as a means of social advancement tend to encourage their children to pursue their education (Carréon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Mo & Singh, 2008; Orozco, 2008). These parents often have very high expectations for their children. The family dynamic, which refers here to the family's ways of functioning and how parents and children interact, can also have an influence, especially when this dynamic is very different from that promoted by the recipient society (Costigan & Su, 2004; Kanouté & Llevot Calvet, 2008). Parents who sense that their interactions with their children are perceived negatively will tend to withdraw. Finally, everything related to the migratory path (conditions related to their departure, conditions upon arrival) will have repercussions on families' integration into the recipient society. For example, immigrant parents often take on employment that is not secure, and they may therefore be less available to take part in school meetings (García Coll et al., 2002; Kanouté & Saintfort, 2003). In the same vein, studies have shown that the language and cultural differences between the host society and immigrant families influence parental engagement and involvement (Denessen, Bakker, & Gierveld, 2007; Klein, 2008; Li, 2006; Wang, 2008). In addition to learning a new language and getting to know a new culture, it appears that immigrant parents experience more culture shock as they have to navigate two school systems (the one they experienced and the one in which the child develops), and they are confronted with changes in roles (i.e., the role they used to play, and the one expected in the host society; Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Valdés, 1996). Consequently, some immigrant parents seem to withdraw or participate less in school activities.

Meanwhile, schools may see such behaviors as a sign of lack of parental interest and involvement. Of course, limited knowledge of the dominant language affects the development of a relationship with the school, and translation alone does not remediate this problem. In fact, the differences in values and practices of parents and school staff that are both implicit and explicit and the attitudes of school personnel and their stereotypes toward immigrant families can have more impact on the family-school relationship than language (Benoît et al., 2008; Carreón et al., 2005; García Coll et al., 2002; McAndrew, Pagé, Jodoin, & Lemire, 1999; Moosa, Karabenick, & Adams, 2001; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003; Wong & Hughes, 2006). From

both perspectives, the interpretations of behavior and use of language may be challenging for parents and teachers.

In Quebec, the percentage of school children from immigrant families increased from 13.7% in 1996–1997 to 18.1% in 2003–2004 (MELS, 2006). In 2003–2004, 85% of these students were in public schools, and 77.9% of those were from families whose mother tongue was neither French nor English. Studies have shown that immigrant parents' perceptions of their parenting role and of school is closely related to their personal history (Lahaie, 2008; López, 2001). In addition, the host society expects them to assume a specific role and, in some cases, challenges the values and beliefs of immigrant parents with a very different value system than the one they know (Turney & Kao, 2009). Some of the research on immigrant families and school collaboration has shown that parents' engagement is positively related to children's success in school, and parents' involvement at home is also strongly linked to immigrant children's school achievement (Carreón et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Wong & Hughes, 2006). Others have observed that immigrant parents' perceptions of school and of their involvement often differ from those of the host society (Delgado Gaitan, 1991; García Coll et al., 2002; Kanouté & Saintfort, 2003; Kanouté et al., 2008; Orozco, 2008). In fact, their involvement in school may be perceived by this society as an indicator of their social integration and is even considered by some as showing adherence to this society's values. Consequently, these inconsistencies in perceptions are potentially contentious issues between the school and immigrant families. Thus, some schools perceive that there is a lack of participation of immigrant families in their institutions; therefore, these parents may feel the school personnel are judging them which may leave parents further alienated from others and less active in the decisions affecting their children's education.

In the current Quebec context, the majority of the increasing immigrant population speaks neither French nor English. Since parental involvement is encouraged in both official and informal documentation, it is important to understand immigrant parents' vision of their role and the practices they enact to carry out this role. Therefore, in this study, we were interested in understanding the practices that immigrant parents adopt when they become involved in their children's schooling.

Theoretical Framework

Many authors agree that parental involvement is multidimensional (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; Beauregard, 2006; Desforges &

Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein, 1992; Fan & Chen, 2001). However, the role parents play in school is not consistently defined across the literature. The most commonly described role is related to practices associated with parents' involvement in their children's schooling and their relationship with the school (Christenson & Reschly, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Various models have been created to illustrate parental involvement. Hoover-Dempsey's (2005) and Epstein's (1992, 2001) are the models found most often in the literature. The former focuses on the reasons underlying parents' involvement and is defined particularly by parents' feelings and perceptions of competency and effectiveness, as well as by the opportunities created by the school to foster parental involvement. The latter encompasses parental practices that are related to education. Given that the primary objective of this study was to describe parental practices, we have used Epstein's framework of parent involvement to analyze parent's perceptions of their involvement.

Epstein (1992, 2001) proposed a framework composed of six dimensions, each made up of a group of parental practices. For each dimension, Epstein presented a series of activities or practices that parents adopt when they become involved in their child's education. The dimensions include: (1) family obligations and support of their child ("Parenting"), (2) home-school communication ("Communicating"), (3) family involvement in school life ("Volunteering"), (4) parental involvement in the child's schoolwork at home ("Learning at Home"), (5) parental participation in the decision-making process and in the management and defence of the child's interests ("Decision Making"), and (6) partnership with the school, businesses, and other local organizations ("Collaborating with the Community"; Epstein, 1992, 2001). This framework is useful for identifying parental practices in the schooling experience of a child. We have therefore used this framework to classify the practices of immigrant parents (see Table 1).

This framework can be used to distinguish between different types of parental practices related to their children's education in general. Since there have been fewer studies on parental involvement of immigrant parents, parental perceptions of these practices may reveal whether one dimension is more important than another for immigrant parents (Carreón et al., 2005; Denessen et al., 2007; Hossain & Shipman, 2009; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Klein, 2008; Li, 2004; Wang, 2008).

Table 1. Parental Practices According to Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement (2001)

Dimensions	Practices of Parents
Obligations toward and support for the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ensure the child’s well-being: physical health, nutrition, clothing, hygiene •Talk with the child •Take part in education groups
Home–school communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Meet with the teacher •Attend information sessions •Obtain support for parents from the school
Family involvement in school life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Attend training sessions •Attend school activities •Attend extracurricular activities •Visit the classroom •Volunteer
Parental involvement in the child’s schoolwork at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Supervise homework •Support the work of the teachers
Parental participation in decision-making, managing and defending the child’s interests (advocacy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Support school programs •Sit on decision-making committees, organizational boards, parents’ committees at the school commission •Engage in advocacy for children’s interests
Partnership with the school, businesses, or other local organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Meet with businesses, social clubs, community organizations

Although these practices represent the roles parents play, they do not delve into parents’ perspectives of their own roles. This representation of their roles can be related to social and personal perceptions they have of the environment and of the roles within that environment. Parents will thus apply the practices they consider to be appropriate and necessary in order to carry out their roles as effectively as possible. This theoretical framework is borrowed from the social psychological work of Abric (1989), which encompasses several aspects related to issues of immigrant families:

It consists of the product and the process of a mental activity by which an individual or a group reconstructs the reality with which it is confronted and attributes to it a specific meaning. A representation is therefore an organized set of opinions, practices, beliefs, and information referring to an object or a situation. It is determined by the subject himself (his history, his experience), by the social and ideological system into which

he has been placed, and by the nature of his connections with this social system. (p. 189; authors' translation)

What emerges from this definition is that parents' representation of their role is a social construct that relates parents' personal history with that of the society in which they now live. Thus, examining immigrant parents' representation of their role will provide an in-depth understanding of parents' underlying beliefs and values as they relate to their practices.

In summary, from the limited research on immigrant parents in Canada, we can identify the factors influencing immigrant families' integration into the host society and their perceptions about their partnership with schools, but we know very little about the practices they adopt when they become involved in their children's schooling. This observation raises several questions. How do immigrant parents see their role in the school environment in Quebec? What practices do immigrant parents adopt when they partner with the school? Are these practices the same for all immigrant parents? What were the underlying issues influencing these practices? What factors influence these parents' perceptions? The following research objectives guided our inquiry: (a) to examine immigrant parents' representations of their role; (b) to analyze parental perceptions of their practices as they describe their involvement practices in their child's schooling; and (c) to identify the factors that influenced these practices.

Methodology

Given our objectives, this study used an interpretive paradigm as we sought to understand the meaning attributed to reality, that is, the representations underlying the practices of immigrant parents in Quebec's school system (Savoie-Zjac, 2003). Our desire to acquire both knowledge and a deeper understanding of parental involvement among immigrant families led us to undertake a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative research approach is particularly useful because it is representative of the respondents' reality; that is, the subjects should recognize themselves in the results. It should also be meaningful for those in the sector involved, so that they can use the results in practical applications. Finally, it should take into account the interactions between individuals and their environment. This approach allows the researcher to adapt to the needs of the research process while still respecting the focus of the study (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2008).

Measures

We used two instruments for data collection. The first was a sociodemographic questionnaire that collected information on the participants: country of origin, number of years in Quebec, number of children, level of education, religious affiliation, first language, education background, employment in their country of origin, and employment in Quebec. This allowed us to develop a picture of the history and background of the participants. The second instrument was a semistructured interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. The open-ended questions were focused on partnership with the school and the practices parents used when becoming involved in their child's schooling.

The open-ended questions were geared toward general practices as well as practices specific to each dimension of Epstein's framework of six types of involvement (2001). We adopted the same questioning frame used in a previous study (Beauregard, 2011). Specifically, we asked parents the following questions: *Tell us about how it is going for your child in school. How do you perceive your parenting role in school? How do you perceive your parenting role with your children? How do you perceive your role with your children's teacher? What is your role at your child's school? What is your role in the school board (district)? How do you play your role toward the community?* Before the data collection process, these two measures were validated by peer experts in the field who work with immigrant families. We then checked these questions with a volunteer parent using the discussion grid to ensure the questions were significant and effective (Van der Maren, 1995). The data gathered from this parent were not included in the analysis of our findings. However, this step allowed us to fine-tune certain questions and to confirm that they would elicit information from parents regarding their parental practices. For example, we changed the question *How do you perceive the parent role?* To *How do you perceive your role in supporting children at school?* We also focused more on parent's role in the community by asking how they were playing their parent role in their own community and in Quebec's community.

Procedure

The research team included three interviewers/research assistants who were immigrant students (2 males and 1 female) who were graduate students in the social and human sciences and education and who had lived in Quebec less than 5 years. In addition, the three researchers included two who are French Quebecois and one who is second generation Quebecois whose parents were immigrants. The interviewers were chosen from the associated communities related to this study. Their first language was that of the culture of the families

and parents of this study, and the participants were encouraged to speak their mother tongue if they wished. The interviewers participated in the formulation of the sociodemographic questionnaire and also in the development of the interview questions. This step allowed the researchers to adapt the questions to the ethnic community they were interviewing. For example, we asked the ethnic backgrounds of Magrebiani and Latin American participants, but this was not a relevant question for participants from the Central African immigrant community. In this way, the questions were always adapted to the community that were being interviewed. The assistants underwent training to understand the research objectives and to learn how to conduct semistructured interviews in order to minimize as much as possible any potential for bias on their part. In addition, the interviewers were trained in active listening skills and interviewed the participants in an open-ended and encouraging way to ensure that the participants were comfortable and discussed what was important to them. The interviewers were sensitized to any possible biases that may influence the interviews and to be ethically responsible in formulating and reformulating a question when the participant seemed not to understand or asked for clarification. After the interviews were completed, the interviewers translated as necessary and transcribed them verbatim.

We recruited parents in two ways. The first was by sending a recruitment letter to community organizations that work with immigrant populations. These organizations contacted their members by letter or placed notices in their newsletters about our study. Our recruitment letter presented the research objectives, selection criteria, and how to contact the researcher. To be included in the study, parents had to meet two selection criteria: (a) they were able to communicate in French, and (b) their child had been in a regular class in elementary school in Quebec for at least one year. This was to ensure that parents had a certain basic knowledge of Quebec's school environment. Parents who wished to participate contacted the researcher by phone. During this call, the research objectives were reviewed, procedures for their participation were determined, and an appointment was set up for the first meeting.

The second method of recruitment was the cascade method, which involved asking people working in this field to talk about the research project (Van der Maren, 1995). As mentioned, we hired research assistants who themselves were immigrants from the same groups targeted in the study, that is, from Central Africa, Maghreb, and Latin America. Thus, they shared the same culture as the parents they encountered and were therefore able to observe verbal and non-verbal communication that would be less noticeable to people from outside those cultures. In addition, if parents had difficulty responding in French on the questionnaires or during the interviews, then the assistant could translate

everything or let the parents express themselves in their own language. They recruited families from their own communities who met the criteria.

The interviews were conducted at the families' homes from January to May 2010. During these interviews, parents were first given information about the study and the consent process; they were also asked for permission to record the interview. Once they were assured of confidentiality, they signed a consent form. These steps were intended to create a relationship of trust and respect between the researcher and parents so they could freely express their fears or expectations and ask questions. During the interview, parents were asked first to describe broadly their role in terms of their involvement in their children's schooling. Then they were asked specifically about their role in relation to their child, the teacher, the school team, the school environment, and the community. At the end of the interview, the research assistant summarized the parents' comments and asked if they wished to add anything. In this study, the parents of any one child were considered a single unit.

Participants

The parents who participated in this study resided primarily in the Eastern Townships region of Quebec. This region is near Quebec's borders with Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The territory is large (10,195 km²) with 2.4% of Quebec's population with approximately 310,000 citizens (Statistics Canada, 2012). The Eastern Townships welcome approximately 2.2% of people each year (around 1,000 immigrants) migrating to Quebec; specifically, in 2011, 4.7% of the population was immigrant (MICC, 2009a, 2009b; Statistics Canada, 2012). Even if Eastern Townships ranks as the seventh region numerically in welcoming immigrants in Quebec, it has the third highest number of immigrants coming from visible minorities, with more only in Montreal and Gatineau (near Ottawa, Canada's national capital; MICC, 2009a, 2009b). The majority of the immigrants here are from South America, Central Africa, and the Maghreb (Northwestern Africa); this is why we chose these communities.

In all, 28 immigrant parents were interviewed. Table 2 presents the participants' demographic backgrounds. All families had at least one child at elementary school. Only a few of them had children in high school, but they responded to questions about their elementary school-aged children.

IMMIGRANT PARENTS IN QUEBEC

Table 2. Participant Descriptions

Community	African (A) N = 10		Latin American (L) N = 10		Maghreb (M) N = 8	
Parents	Mothers Fathers	0 10	Mothers Couples	1 9	Fathers Mothers Couples	3 1 4
Origin Country	Congo Burundi Nigeria Chad	6 2 1 1	Colombia Peru Venezuela	8 1 1	Morocco Algeria	6 2
Immigrated Else-where Before Quebec	7 families		1 family		2 families	
Average Years in Quebec	9		3		12	
Spoken Language at Home	French French/Other Other	6 3 1	French/Spanish Spanish	2 8	French French/Other Other	2 3 3
Number of Children	= 3,5 σ = 1,7		= 2 σ = 0,8		= 2,5 σ = 1,1	
Age of the Children	= 10,8 σ = 4,7		= 10,6 σ = 3,6		= 12 σ = 5,4	
Educational Backgrounds			<i>Fathers (n=9)</i> Master University Elementary		<i>Fathers (n=7)</i> Master University College High school	3 2 1 1
	<i>Fathers (n=10)</i> University Master Ph.D.	6 2 2	<i>Mothers (n=10)</i> Master University College High School	6 1 5 3 1 1	<i>Mothers (n=6)</i> Master University College High School Elementary	1 2 1 1 1
Parents' Occupations After Immigration			<i>Fathers (n=8)</i> Student Administration Services Technologies	4 1 1 2	<i>Fathers (n=8)</i> Social Administration Services Without work	3 1 3 1
	<i>Fathers (n=10)</i> Student Social Medical Administration Without work	3 4 1 1 1	<i>Mothers (n=10)</i> Administration Technologies Social Services Student Without work	2 1 2 1 3 1	<i>Mothers (n=8)</i> Social Services Without work	2 4 2
Average Family Income	30,000\$ *† * 3 unknown		16,000\$ *† * 4 unknown		67,000\$ *† * 3 unknown	

*Information is missing in some categories because parents could choose not to answer a question.

†Canadian dollars

In summary, participants came mainly from three countries (Congo, Colombia, and Morocco). This may be based on the fact that, in addition to sending a letter for participants' recruitment to various organizations, assistants could recruit in their community, which matched with the countries most frequently mentioned by the participants. Second, we note that—depending on the group—participants are mostly either fathers or couples. However, in the literature, mothers were found more often as participants unless the researcher's intention was to meet couples or fathers (Costigan & Su, 2004; Hossain & Shipman, 2009; Klein, 2008; Patel, Power, & Bhavnagri, 1996). In addition, the majority of the parents in this study have a high level of education but not necessarily a high socioeconomic status. However, studies have shown a relationship between parental education or socioeconomic status and parents' school involvement, which is not the case with these participants (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lareau, 1989; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Finally, most of the parents are working in the social field. Furthermore, seven fathers were students when the interview was done. Their reasons for immigrating were for the father to pursue his studies, or secondly, some fathers who could not find a job in their field decided to go back to their studies.

Two-thirds of participants had immigrated to Canada for reasons of security, related either to war or to unstable political situations, while the remaining one-third immigrated for education purposes. Some immigrated directly to Quebec, and others went to various countries before coming to Quebec. Ultimately, they chose Quebec mainly because of the language spoken, which is French, or because they felt welcome. Finally, two-thirds of the families have been living in Quebec for the past five years, and their children were also born in Quebec.

Data Analysis

The method of analysis chosen for this study was content analysis, a qualitative method used to describe, clarify, understand, or interpret a reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Content analysis by thematic classification, as proposed by Paillé and Mucchielli (2008), was the most appropriate method for this study because it introduces data reduction processes by being able to switch back and forth among the interviews both longitudinally and cross-sectionally, providing in-depth analysis of the corpus. The data were coded in three ways using QDA Miner software (Provalis Research, 2008). The first way consisted of coding from the questions, that is, the response to a question was directly associated with a corresponding code. The second way was to link the data that corresponded to parental practices. Each coding unit corresponding to a

particular parental practice was categorized using Epstein's (2001) framework of six types of involvement. Finally, the third way took into account new data and categories that emerged from the participants' statements.

The analysis grid was validated using a cross-coding process. To ensure validity, we asked pairs to cross-code units (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). We provided them with matrices including coding units selected randomly for each theme (approximately 10% of all coding units) as well as the coding grid with the definitions of the themes and matching categories. We obtained an average concordance rate of 70% between the cross-coders and the primary research investigator, and consensus was attained after discussion meetings between the coders. These results corresponded to the levels of consistency recommended for cross-coding (Miles & Huberman, 2003).

Results

Parents' Representations of Their Role

All the parents, without exception, spoke about the importance of their involvement with their children. Indeed, they chose to immigrate to Canada to facilitate their children's education. Of course, there were other reasons as well, as previously mentioned, but they stressed the fact that they wanted most of all to ensure their children could attend school in a safe environment. In addition, parents often compared the host society and the Quebec school system with what they had known in their country of origin or in other countries where they had lived. Many parents had experienced culture shock when they first arrived. They spoke about how people dressed, the way children spoke with adults, and different rules related to respect. Others found the schools too lax. Irrespective of the number of years living in Quebec—some for over 5 years, and even some for over 10 years—families found it difficult to integrate to Quebec's culture and felt torn between the two cultures. In fact, they often felt powerless, because they had the impression they could not pass on their own values to their children, because their children had much more contact with the values of the host society than with their country of origin:

You swing back and forth between the values you grew up with that you can't impose on them here, because, in any case, even if you tried to impose them, your child spends a lot of time in school, but only evenings and weekends with you.

These parents perceived that they needed to give up some of their values to avoid conflictual interactions with their children. When these perceptions surfaced, they felt a greater need to conserve their culture of origin. These findings

seem consistent with previous research that shows that regardless of the host country or the immigrant families' origins, these families experience cultural shock when they arrive and are torn between both cultures (Barton et al., 2004; Benoît et al., 2008; Bérubé, 2004; Costigan & Su, 2004; Denessen et al., 2007; Garcia Coll et al., 2002; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Kanouté & Llevot Calvet, 2008; Li, 2006; Patel et al., 1996; Valdés, 1996; Wong & Hughes, 2006). The impact on the family and on the child's education is clearly important, and preservice and inservice teachers can benefit from understanding the implications of these changes on their relationships with families and on the children themselves.

When asked about their perceptions of their parenting role, immigrant parents saw their parenting role as watching over and guiding their children in their daily lives. This representation was related to the reasons cited for their decision to immigrate. This suggests that parents who think their children either are not safe or are not learning would adopt certain practices to remedy the situation. On the other hand, more than half the parents saw their parenting role as being complementary to that of the school. In fact, they saw themselves as supporting the work of the school teacher:

I help with my children's education, because if I teach them well at home, the children apply it at school, and that makes the school work well.

While several parents reported having experienced culture shock at the start of their children's school year, some said that as they had contact with the school over time, they saw the advantages such as the variety of activities offered at school, learning through reflection, the opportunity to have more contact with their children, and the fact that education was free. With time, they became more trusting of the school community. This suggests that parents' representations of their role and of the environment may influence their perceptions of the school and their role as active partners.

Parental Practices

We used Epstein's (2001) framework of six types of involvement to analyze the practices that emerged from the parents' responses in the semistructured interviews. In presenting the results, we will outline the number of statements associated with each dimension of Epstein's framework. From this, it can be seen that immigrant parents perceived some dimensions as more important than others. The tables that follow indicate the practices seen for each dimension. Clearly, certain practices were more prevalent than others. Table 3 shows the number of coding units for each dimension of Epstein's typology and the corresponding number of participants discussing that dimension.

Table 3. Epstein's Typology: Practices of Immigrant Parents

Dimension	Number of Coding Units	Number of Participants
Home-school communication	130	28
Obligations and support (Parenting*)	30	27
Involvement in schoolwork at home	25	17
Community partnership	22	16
Family involvement in school life	21	14
Participation in decision-making and advocacy	12	10
Total	240	28

*"Parenting" is the term used for this dimension in Epstein, 2001.

First, we observed that virtually all the parents reported that they engaged in practices related to the *home-school communication* and *obligations and support* dimensions. The *home-school communication* dimension was the most frequently reported by parents (more than 54%). If we examine the coding unit/parent ratio for each dimension, we see that parents referred to communication practices, on average, approximately five times. This ratio dropped to approximately one for the other dimensions. This illustrates that the *home-school communication* theme was important for these parents. This finding is consistent with previous research on parents in the United States (Epstein, 2001) and Canadian parents of children with special needs (Beauregard, 2011). However, it is interesting to note that the *community partnership* dimension was less frequent (ranked fourth) but also more important than to families in other studies who rated it in sixth place (Beauregard, 2011; Epstein, 2001). One explanation for this may be that immigrants often have a more collectivist vision of family and culture compared to Canadian and American families' more individualistic outlook (Delgado Gaitan, 1991; Garcia Coll et al., 2002; Kanouté et al., 2008; Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005; Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2011; Valdés, 1996). Practices will be discussed in order of frequency.

Practices Related to Home-School Communication (Dimension 2)

Parenting practices related to home-school communication were important for interviewed parents, but also varied with respect to who initiated the communication. We further analyzed these communication practices into two themes: (a) communication practices initiated by parents toward the school, and (b) communication initiated by the teachers, to which parents responded. Table 4 shows the breakdown and frequency of each subtheme.

Table 4. Practices Related to Home–School Communication

Practices	Number of Coding Units	Number of Participants
Methods used (schoolbag, agenda, telephone, email, letters, etc.)	32	21
Request by the parent to meet the teacher because the child is having problems, to talk about the child’s particular characteristics, to find out how he is doing, to talk about his school ranking	34	18
Attending annual meetings	21	16
Asking for information regarding the child’s homework or report card	11	9
Expressing availability and offering support	7	4
Asking to meet with the school administration	3	3
Request by the parent to set up a mechanism to discuss the child’s progress	1	1
Teacher provides information in writing or in person on the child’s progress	12	9
Teacher requests a meeting with the parents to talk about the child’s progress in class or because the child is having problems	7	7
Total	130	28

First, all the immigrant parents—without exception—spoke about the importance of communication with the school. These communication practices serve as a bridge between the two environments in which the child is growing up. In general, the parents considered that these communication practices were well-received; however, several parents pointed out that this depended on the teachers. For example, some parents reported that teachers were responsive to their questions, while other teachers were less responsive or took time to respond their questions.

Sometimes yes, sometimes no; we’d like to talk with the teacher, and we try to reach him, but it’s not possible; we send notes, and sometimes he doesn’t respond.

Even though immigrant parents said they understood that teachers had a heavy workload, they also expressed that this nevertheless did not explain any problems of communication since some teachers seemed to manage to communicate more effectively despite their heavy workloads. Rather, they attributed communication challenges to the teacher’s personality. In short, they

did not associate communication problems with all teachers, but rather with certain individuals. The most frequently mentioned communication methods were the agenda book, email, or schoolbag notes. In particular, the parents said they received general information from the school and the school board either in the children's agendas or in letters¹. This included information about what food to bring in lunch boxes, school holidays, and school registration. They also received information on their children's progress. One-quarter of the parents reported that teachers used the same means to communicate with them (e.g., agendas), whether related to homework or about their children's misbehavior at school. While most parents appreciated these communications, some of them found these tools to be lacking in warmth, with one saying, "There's not enough verbal communication. It's okay to write, but it's cold."

From this statement, it is clear that person-to-person contact is very important for immigrant parents, especially when it comes to talking about problems their children are experiencing. Thus, two parents said they had been informed by letter that their child was being moved to a different school because of behavior problems, without the parents being consulted or advised by anyone. They would have preferred to be consulted about putting in place certain supports to help their child modify these behaviors, and if those failed, then to be involved in the decision-making process. Such a situation frustrated them and made them wonder whether teachers had taken their communication responsibilities seriously.

Teacher-parent occasional meetings were the second most frequent practice that parents initiated. These meetings involved discussing problems that their children were experiencing with school/academic content or with social issues. The school problems were often related to parents requiring additional information regarding French vocabulary or the teaching methods used in Quebec, as these were different and less familiar to the families. When this was the case, it was more difficult for parents to support their children's learning. The social problems that parents were concerned about often varied depending on the parents' cultural origin. For example, Central African and Maghreb parents initiated meetings with teachers when their children were victims of racism, while Latin American parents wanted to explain to teachers the difficulties related to learning a second language.

One-third of the parents also initiated communication related to homework or academic lessons. It appeared that the education system was different in Quebec. However, this is a claim that nonimmigrant parents often make, as well. Immigrant parents also felt that it was important to support the school, and they would like to better understand these new ways of doing things. Therefore, they communicated frequently, in writing or by telephone:

Each time I found that I didn't know the method, this is what I did: I contacted the teacher to tell her that, regarding this item, I would like to know how you proceed. This will allow me to help my child with his homework.

Some parents felt that there was not enough homework or that the homework was too easy, so they requested that there be more homework sent home. If that was refused, they gave their child more homework themselves (dimension 4).

Formal meetings, particularly the parent-teacher conferences when report cards were discussed, were the third most frequent practice that parents referred to in interviews. The parents reported that this was a time when they could talk about their child with the teacher and discuss how they could support the child. Some parents gave the teacher their cell phone number or their email address. These parents explained that by being accessible, they demonstrated their availability and how important it was to them that their child should do well in school. In addition, one parent said he had used this meeting to ask for a way that would allow him to track his child's progress at home. However, some parents complained that these meetings were too short; they added that the meetings often involved listening to the teacher, rather than allowing them an opportunity to express themselves, as they would have liked:

Ten minutes, not more, and when I wanted to change the subject, the subject was always brought back to what the teacher wanted. It's serious, I think.

Six parents who were dissatisfied with a teacher's lack of support for their children requested meetings with the school administration. From the parents' statements about their communication practices, their dissatisfaction was apparent. While some said they were satisfied...

Everything is going well. I can make an appointment if I have some concerns for activities and learning.

...others were very frustrated:

When we noticed that our son was failing his school year, we went to school. We asked why the school said nothing, did nothing, didn't tell us anything. We were very angry. It was a shock.

The parents emphasized their need to communicate without creating conflict, which meant that sometimes they had to ignore certain prejudices they could sense in the teachers' attitudes.

Practices Related to Obligations and Support of the Child (Dimension 1)

Practices related to obligations and support to the child mainly involved supporting and caring for children's physical, social, and emotional well-being. Examples of parental support practices that emerged are outlined in Table 5.

Table 5. Practices Related to Support and Obligations

Practices	Number of Coding Units	Number of Participants
Emotional well-being (e.g., asking about their day; support for problems; showing the rules of respect toward the teacher, toward different teachers, etc.; support in dealing with racism; support regarding the language spoken)	23	22
Physical well-being	5	5
Supporting the child in his choice of school	1	1
Taking steps to get help for a child in difficulty	1	1
Total	27	26

These immigrant parents also spoke at length about the emotional support they provided to their children. For example, many of them asked their children about what had happened during the day—both in terms of schooling and social interactions—what had gone well and what had not gone well in school. They asked these questions in order to support their children if there were any problems. From their statements, it was clear that their children's emotional well-being was of utmost importance and that their support varied depending on the children's needs:

One of them excels, he doesn't even need me. But my daughter, I have problems with her because she has a learning difficulty, while the youngest has trouble concentrating. I don't do the same thing with each of them.

The topics of discussion varied across families. For example, three African fathers mentioned talking with their children about racist comments made about the color of their skin. Similarly, three Latin American parents also mentioned talking with their children but about their accent when speaking French. In every case, parents verified whether their children were sad and attempted to de-dramatize the situation by explaining that some people in the recipient society were not used to encountering immigrant persons and that the children needed to keep that in mind. Depending on the children's ages, some parents suggested that the child talk with the teacher. However, if they felt the situation was not improving, parents then asked to meet with the teacher themselves (dimension 2).

Some parents talked with their children about the respect they needed to show for the teacher, even if the child did not agree with what went on in the classroom, for example:

Even if at times I find the teacher is slow to intervene when an injustice is happening to my child and he is angry, I explain to him that he should respect the teacher because she is the authority of the classroom.

Some spoke with them about their responsibility to do well in school. The parents considered these discussions to be important because their children will encounter all sorts of persons and situations in their lives. Therefore, they were trying to prepare their children for what they perceived as the “real world”:

Sometimes, my children say, the teacher, this and that. I said no, you’re the one who isn’t working. If you bring me your copy and show me that what you did was correct and that he gave you a poor grade, then I can get involved.

The different statements described above indicate that, on one hand, the parents took the time to really understand their children’s situation before getting involved, and on the other, that they intervened if they believed their child was being treated unfairly or if the teacher was not doing anything to help when they requested the teacher’s guidance.

A few other practices also emerged from parents’ interviews on parental involvement. One had to do with a parent who supported his child’s choice of school. In this case, it was not the parent who chose the school, but the child. Another statement came from a parent who, faced with the school’s lack of support for his child’s learning difficulties, obtained academic support privately. Finally, the physical well-being to which several parents alluded had to do with typical care (i.e., physical health, nutrition, clothing, hygiene).

Practices Related to Involvement in Schoolwork at Home (Dimension 4)

Parents also discussed parental involvement practices in the child’s schoolwork at home; these are listed in Table 6.

Table 6. Practices Related to Involvement in Schoolwork at Home

Practices	Number of Coding Units	Number of Participants
Doing lessons and homework	21	21
Adding homework because there is not enough	2	2
Providing support when there are problems	1	1
Signing the agenda	1	1
Total	25	17

More than half the parents talked about specific homework lessons. First, helping their children in this stage of their learning was, in their view, of primary importance. They considered this to be part of their role as parents:

The parent needs to be present in the child's schooling. There needs to be supervision, making sure the homework is done, maintaining a steady rhythm of work.

In their view, this helped to give children a sense of responsibility for their success. Also, immigrant parents often compared their children's homework with what they had experienced in their country of origin. Some felt there was not enough homework, and/or that it was too easy. However, one mother mentioned that this gave her more time to talk with her children, which she had not been able to do in her country because the homework took too much time. Other immigrant parents said that the way of doing homework was so different from what they had known that they were unable to help their children. It should be noted here that nonimmigrant parents often make the same observations. In addition, Latin American parents also expressed that language difficulty was a barrier to helping their child:

Once we tried to help her. It was worse. She said to me, "Papa, it's not working," and I said, "Yes, yes, try this." It works for me, but it was not right. We wrote it up in Spanish, but the syntax was different. Now we tell her to do it the way she thinks it should be done in French.

The parents felt that they could not play their role as they would have liked, and this led to frustration. It should be noted that two parents who considered the homework too easy or insufficient added extra work for their children to do in addition to what was assigned by the school. This practice was also in line with the comments of some parents who considered Quebec schools to be too lax. This raises other questions for which we do not currently have answers and should be examined further. What might the school's perceptions of these issues be, and how may they discuss these issues with parents and with children? How do children compare themselves to other students in the class—do they accept themselves, or do they try to hide their differences from their peers, and do they resist their parents' high expectations? The potential for intergenerational conflict between immigrant parents and children is prevalent when the values of the culture of origin are very different from those of the host society.

Practices Related to Community Partnership (Dimension 6)

Parents' community partnership practices consisted of implementing ways to integrate their children in the community and to obtain the support of the various community and governmental organizations (health, social services, etc.). These practices are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Practices Related to Community Partnership

Practices	Number of Coding Units	Number of Participants
Involvement in community organizations	9	9
Involvement in the board of directors of a day care center	3	3
Receiving support from community organizations	3	3
Supporting other immigrant families in their relationship with the school	3	3
Creating organizations to work with immigrant families	3	3
Coaching a sport	1	1
Total	23	16

Sixteen parents spoke about their practices in the community. Two-thirds of those comments were about their involvement in community organizations as directors or volunteers. These organizations promoted links between immigrant families and schools. One parent observed that these organizations facilitated not only intercultural links, but also intergenerational ones. They helped both immigrants and nonimmigrants learn about each other's cultures. Thus, they held a variety of activities such as intercultural suppers, performances, and so on.

Three parents explained that their community involvement sometimes took the form of defending the interests of children or other families. For example, two African fathers mentioned that they helped children who were not their own with their homework because those children's parents had little education and did not have enough knowledge to do so themselves. One Arab parent said he had sometimes acted as an intermediary between Arab-Muslim families and the school. He described different situations in which he intervened to support parents whose children were experiencing racism:

One parent told me her child's teacher was racist. He left the child outdoors for hours and punished him constantly. This is a child in first grade. So I told her to go to the school board because the school administration was doing nothing. If something was going on, they would settle it. She told me she went...and it dragged on for a long time.

From this statement, we understand that when the school ignored the problem, parents engaged in a different role to defend their children. Finally, three parents explained that they had been or were currently involved in creating community organizations to represent their respective communities. Their objectives were to promote the integration of new immigrants, to draw some

immigrants out of their isolation, and to provide opportunities to bring together people who shared the same culture. Three other parents also mentioned having benefited from such services.

Practices Related to Family Involvement in School Life (Dimension 3)

This dimension related to parents' practices when they became involved at school, which are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Practices Related to Family Involvement in School Life

Practices	Number of Coding Units	Number of Participants
Participation in extracurricular activities	11	10
Informing the class about a topic of interest to the parent	4	4
Visiting the schools and classrooms	3	3
Participating in fundraising campaigns	2	2
Staying in the classroom to reassure the child	1	1
Total	21	14

The practice that emerged most often was participation in extracurricular activities. This involved attending a performance organized by the children, accompanying their child's class on an excursion outside the school, or providing transportation for such activities. In addition, some parents took part in school fundraising campaigns. Some parents mentioned being invited to talk to the class about subjects that interested them, which might have to do with science, religion, or a new language. Some parents visited schools and classrooms, with or without their children, to ensure that they were appropriate for their children. It should be noted that this practice is different from the one mentioned in dimension 1, in which the child chooses a school and the parent supports that choice. Finally, one parent accompanied her child who was starting school because the child did not understand French very well; it would seem that the teacher in that class had an open attitude about parents' presence in the room.

Practices Related to Participation in Decision Making and Advocacy (Dimension 5)

Parents discussed practices related to involvement in decision making, including statements related to their interactions with administrative or legal authorities, excluding the school administration. These practices are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Practices Related to Participation in Decision Making and Advocacy

Practices	Number of Coding Units	Number of Participants
Involvement in the board of directors of establishments	7	7
Involvement in the Parent Participation Organization (OPP) of the school	3	1
Contacting the school board	2	2
Total	12	10

The majority of parents said they were not involved in decision-making committees. Two reasons were given for this. One was that parents did not have time because of work commitments, having to maintain the home, or studies. Others saw the school board as an enormous entity far removed from their daily lives, and it was considered by some to be unapproachable.

Ten parents spoke about their involvement in official committees. They talked mainly about their involvement in the school's board of directors and the Parent Participation Organization (*Organisme de Participation des Parents*; OPP).² Each school has its own OPP and board of directors; these two committees were created as a part of the reform undertaken by the Government of Quebec in 1999 to promote parents' involvement in schools. Parents gave two reasons for this involvement: They wanted to better understand the Quebec school system, and they wanted to sensitize administrators to the situations of immigrant parents. Finally, one parent mentioned attempting to contact and meet with the School Board personnel for information, but the School Board's offices were closed at the times when the parent was available (e.g., after work). Another parent who was not happy with the schools' identification of her child's special needs had only three contacts with school staff to discuss the situation, and the situation remained unchanged despite these attempts.

Discussion

Several observations emerged from the data analysis. First, the link between the vision parents have of their role and the practices they adopt to carry out this role is clearly seen. For example, they perceived their role as a support to the school and showed interest in gaining a better understanding of the teaching methods and homework. The practices they adopted included requests for meetings on these matters, requests for information, getting involved with their children's homework, and for some, even helping other families' children. Therefore, it seemed that parents perceived their role as meeting the individual needs of each child, and they may have perceived independence as a process

that would take time to develop as the family settled in and understood these new school expectations. Other studies with immigrant families show a similar link between the vision parents have of their role and their practices (Barton et al., 2004; De Carvalho, 2001). Those authors noted that parents who were seeing themselves as a low educated person without power had the tendency to be less involved in school. The link is not specific to immigrant parents. In fact, we had similar results in a previous study on children with special needs and nonimmigrant parents (Beauregard, 2006, 2011). In previous work, parents also viewed themselves as defenders of their children's rights, and their practices were clearly related to this role.

Epstein's (2001) framework of parent involvement was used to code the different practices adopted by parents when they became involved in their children's schooling. Prior work that has emerged based on this framework has not particularly focused on issues related to immigrant families who are having to adapt to a new country and school system. However, we did not need to add any new dimensions to this model, because all the parental practices that we identified could be classified using the existing dimensions. Our findings were consistent with Epstein, although we had to make a few adjustments to explain our data. First, the *defending interests* practice in dimension 5 was not retained, because we noted that parents were defending their children's rights in all the dimensions; therefore, it was not a separate category. Indeed, the defense of rights was infused along the six dimensions of Epstein's model. The second adjustment was in the *home-school communication* dimension. There, we considered only practices that involved communication between parents and personnel at their children's schools. Any practices involving school board personnel were classified in dimension 5.

The results also showed that the dimensions were interconnected, that is, they were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, a practice that was categorized in one dimension may arise from or be explained by a practice in another dimension. One example would be a parent meeting with a teacher (dimension 2) to help her child with homework lessons (dimension 4). Another would be a parent meeting with his child's teacher (dimension 2) because the child told him about being subjected to racist comments by other students (dimension 1). There seemed to be a need to show teachers that the parents' role was also to protect their children from societal injustices because they believed these attitudes may serve as a barrier to their children's progress and success in school.

Along the same lines, we saw that one dimension can consist of several practices and that these can vary from one parent to another. Moreover, the same practice may be adopted with different intentions. For example, parents were involved in decision-making committees (dimension 5) for different reasons.

Some wanted to better understand the school system, while others wanted to be noticed and to have a presence representing immigrant families in that school. Conversely, the same intention can manifest itself in different practices. Thus, the parent who, in a meeting with a teacher, expressed his availability (dimension 2) and the one who participated in school life (dimension 3) both have the intention of demonstrating their presence in their children's lives. In summary, for teachers, it is important not to base one's conclusions only on parents' actions, but to look for the meaning behind the practice. Demonstrating their presence in the school and in their children's public life may have reflected parents' need to become part of the school community. Therefore, an action was more than just about participating in school activities, but was a way to ensure that teachers perceived their role as parents in overseeing the school life of their children and in helping their children and themselves to adapt to this new society. This is a finding consistent with previous work using Epstein's model, and identifying the importance of the reason underlying parents' practices was most helpful in understanding parents' perceptions of their roles (Beauregard, 2006, 2011). School personnel may have the tendency to notice the practice and not always understand or appreciate the underlying issues related to the practices. This has implications for all school personnel who have (or will have) direct contact with parents, such as preservice teachers, teachers, and principals.

We were able to see some interesting themes related to issues of racism and language competency. New emergent themes regarding parental protection and child independence as well as individualistic and collectivistic views of the family emerged in the parents' discussions of their parenting practices related to school. In addition, parents reported on their perceptions and the underlying issues related to their practices. We have grouped these into two categories: individual and environmental.

Individual factors were found to be associated with parents' culture, migratory pathway, and native language, as well as their views and expectations regarding their children's developmental needs and their adjustments to the Quebec school system. Added to these factors were parents' past experiences of their own school years. Parents reported that these experiences influenced their view of the situation and the practices they adopted. For example, several of them spoke about culture shock and compared their own experiences as students to that of their children. Another parent described the linguistic needs of her young child in kindergarten who benefitted from her visiting and staying in the classroom the first day of class. These differences may have also reflected a growing awareness that they had less and less control over the conditions that their children encountered in school and that these differences

served to socialize their children in different ways than their own beliefs and values would. These results are consistent with previous findings which have shown that immigrant parents from different backgrounds experience similar cultural shock regarding schooling policies and cultural norms and practices in their new country (Bérubé, 2004; Carréon et al., 2005; Denessen et al., 2007; Valdés, 1996; Wang, 2008). They are challenged by the new educational methods and the teaching practices, as well as the role the schools expect of them. In addition, the learning of a new language also interferes with parents' ability to discuss important issues and further complicates the family-school relationship (Benoît et al., 2008; Denessen et al., 2007; Kanouté et al., 2008; López, 2001; Moosa et al., 2001; Wang, 2008). Note, in this study, only Latin American parents had to learn a new language. However, parents from Central Africa and Maghreb spoke about the difficulties related to language accent, vocabulary, syntax, and referents which are different from their own. In these situations, the communication could be difficult not because of the language but because of the cultural language. These concerns voiced by parents speak to the sociocultural adaptation outlined by theorists about how minorities perceive and respond to schooling depending on how they perceive they are being treated (e.g., Ogbu & Simons, 1998). In this study, the parents used a variety of means to solve problems and to find ways to help their child.

The environments within which the child is developing—that is, family and school—are also important for shaping parenting roles and practices. The family environment may refer to the number of children in the family, the language spoken at home, the availability of the parents, the children's relationships with family members, and so on. The school environment included the school issues related to structure (staff turnover, identification of child needs, etc.) and the support provided to children, as well as parents' experiences with school staff and the attitudes of school staff regarding their children's needs. In fact, parents made many comments related to their communication with school personnel who they believed judged them for being different. For example, one parent said the teacher was very surprised to hear his son speak with a Quebec accent, despite the fact that the child was born in Quebec, because he had an Arabic name. The parent found this situation disconcerting and wondered what perceptions and biases teachers had regarding immigrant families. In addition, these types of comments from teachers further perpetuated issues of exclusion and a lack of sense of belonging. These results concur with those of other authors who identified these factors as barriers to parental involvement (Audet, 2008; Carréon et al., 2008; Delgado Gaitan, 1991; Garcia Coll et al., 2002; Kanouté & Saintford, 2003; Turney & Kao, 2009; Wong & Hughes, 2006). Based on these reflections, one parent suggested that teachers should

be involved in professional development to learn about how to understand the adaptations that immigrant children need to make and how their teachers could facilitate this process by being aware of each child's situation. Some studies show that teachers will judge parental involvement based on their own values (Moosa et al., 2001; Strickland, Keat, & Marinak, 2010; Trumbull et al., 2003). For example, Moosa et al. (2001) note that teachers and preservice teachers have to know and understand immigrant culture so they can communicate with them in a constructive way. Strickland et al. (2010) and Trumbull and Pacheco (2005) have also produced tools and activities that facilitate this knowledge which promotes better communication.

Overall, it seems that immigrant parents have their own representations of their role. They are able to describe how they support their children's schooling. However, it is also important to note that they face challenges that require them to adjust their roles in order to be perceived as involved parents. Despite the fact that parents protected their children from challenges related to different issues of injustice, they maintained the position that teachers and school personnel should be respected in order to ensure that their children learn to respect authority.

Conclusion

The objectives of this study were to describe the practices adopted by immigrant parents when they become involved in their child's schooling and to identify the factors that influence these practices. Epstein's (2001) model, which has had limited use from this perspective, enabled us to articulate these practices. Our findings and those of other studies, however, also show that researchers and professionals working with immigrant parents need to look beyond parents' actions or practices to understand the meaning these practices have for them and the reasons why they used these practices. Understanding the underlying meaning of parents' practices will allow leaders to develop conditions that promote the development of effective partnerships between immigrant families and the school.

This research had several limitations. Certainly, given the small number of participants, the results may or may not be transferable to schools with similar social and cultural contexts. Also, using research assistants from targeted cultural communities may have introduced some bias to our methodology. It is possible that some parents who were worried about being judged by a member of their cultural group may have been hesitant to express themselves on certain points. Thus, there were very few comments about parent-teacher conflict, although this point was raised in some other studies. However, there is no way of

being sure if this observation would not apply if the assistants had come from the host society. The families of this study came primarily from three countries: Congo, Colombia, and Morocco, and the three research assistants were also from these countries to facilitate verbal and nonverbal exchanges. The families were given the choice of language and interviewer to ensure that they felt comfortable sharing their perceptions. Finally, the fact that many fathers and some couples were interviewed adds a new dimension to the literature. Indeed, mothers are usually more frequently interviewed for this type of research. Certainly, future studies could incorporate varied approaches (mixed, quantitative methods, participatory, different assistants, etc.) to reduce these limitations. Future research with immigrants who are speaking neither French nor English (both official languages in Canada) to learn whether limited language use has a different impact on parental involvement and practices would be interesting. In the same vein, a comparative study of nonimmigrant parents and immigrant parents may shed some light on parent involvement in Canada.

These results also allow us to put forward some recommendations. First, all the authorities involved (education departments, school boards/districts, associations, unions, etc.) could work together to create a greater awareness for the need to acknowledge the importance of the relationship between immigrant families and schools, not only in writing, but also through training programs and in practice. For instance, professional development workshops on the family–school relationship with a particular focus on immigrant families would help future teachers to understand the significance of certain practices. Workshops for teachers could also be developed about verbal, nonverbal, and cultural communication. Just because two communities speak French, English, or Spanish, for example, does not mean that they speak the same language. For parents who don't speak French, school boards in Quebec have translators; however, their role could be more than just translators. They could be cultural mediators and provide teachers with insight about culture. Along the same lines, school personnel can make a more conscious effort to understand parents' perceptions of parental involvement. This involvement seems to be important and not limited to getting involved in homework and attending formal meetings. Moreover, different parents are able to be involved in different ways. Finally, teachers need to be given opportunities to update their knowledge about immigrant students and their families.

Endnotes

¹Note that schools in Quebec are required to communicate formally with parents eight times per year; one of these occasions is the general assembly at the start of the school year, and another is when the first report cards are distributed.

²The Parent Participation Organization (*Organisme de Participation des Parents*; OPP) is made up of parents; its purpose is to promote parents' participation in the development, implementation, and periodic assessment of the educational plan and their support for their children's progress at school (Government of Quebec, 1999, art. 96.2). The school's board of directors is made up of a maximum of 20 members. In elementary schools, it includes at least four parents of children attending the school. These parents are elected by their peers at the annual general assembly. Added to these are at least four members of the school's personnel, of which at least two are teachers, one representative of the day care program if the school has one, and two members of the community. The parents and members of the community cannot be members of the school personnel (art. 42). The school's board of directors adopts the school's operating budget each year (art. 66) and establishes the internal policies and procedures (art. 67).

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France Beauregard is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at University of Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada. She is also a researcher for the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Rehabilitation of Greater Montreal (CRIR) and Institut Raymond-Dewar. Her current research interests focus on family–school–community relationships, specifically parents' involvement and inclusion of children with learning disabilities. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to her at Faculty of Education, University of Sherbrooke, 2500, boul. De l'Université, Sherbrooke, Quebec, J1R 2K1, Canada, or email france.beauregard@usherbrooke.ca

Hariclia Petrakos is an associate professor in the Department of Education at Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Her current research focuses on family and school collaboration and the education of children with school difficulties. She also directs the Concordia Observation Nursery that provides preservice teachers with training in working with parents and children.

Audrey Dupont is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Université de Sherbrooke and an assistant teacher and research coordinator at the Université de Montréal. She is a student member of the Institut Raymond-Dewar and CRIR. Her research focuses on school inclusion of students with hearing impairment using cued speech.