

**THE "ASTRONAUT" FAMILY AND THE SCHOOLS**

by

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The "Astronaut" Family and the School  
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ABSTRACT

The focus of the study was a group of ten women who had recently come to Ontario from Hong Kong with their children. Their husbands remain in Hong Kong to maintain their businesses and visit their families two or three times a year. This phenomenon has been called "astronaut" family by sociologists. Some of the children in these "astronaut" families in my school have been having difficulty with English language acquisition and other academic subjects. Teachers and administrators have been asking why this should be so when it has been assumed that Chinese children are highly motivated and achievers. The mothers often do not speak English well and they are having to handle all aspects of family living by themselves in a new country with different expectations and values. This study was an attempt to understand the lives of the women in this situation, how they feel about the schools in Ontario and what their expectations are for their children. An open-ended questionnaire and a follow-up interview with three of the mothers were used to gain information about these issues and give the mothers an opportunity to express their feelings about living here. Teachers and principals in the schools the children attend were interviewed to investigate their perspective on the education of the children in "astronaut" families and the role of these Chinese mothers. The children of the three women in the follow-up were also interviewed. Recommendations were developed based on the results of the questionnaires and interviews proposing steps that schools and teacher training institutions could take in training teachers and administrators who must work with the children and mothers in "astronaut" and other immigrant families.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1. Purpose of this research study

The purpose of this exploratory, ethnographic study was to investigate the lives of a small group of women with children who had recently arrived from Hong Kong. The focus of the study was the everyday activities of the women and the relation of these activities to their involvement in the schools and education of their children.. The women are living in a relatively small southern Ontario community with their children while their husbands remain in Hong Kong to carry on business careers. This familial situation will remain, at least, until the political situation in Hong Kong is settled after the mainland Chinese takeover of Hong Kong on July 1, 1997.

The women must deal with necessary day-to-day household issues and many bureaucracies in this, their adopted country. Rockhill (1991) reported that the immigrant women she studied were faced with the bulk of the work and emotional support necessary to maintain the family. She also discussed how the women were responsible for handling the day-to-day issues, for example, buying groceries, paying bills and home maintenance. If immigrant women have had to do all these things even when their husbands are here, there are even greater responsibilities for the women involved in this study.

One of the most important bureaucracies with which these women must interact is the education system and particularly the school in which their children are enrolled. A policy of the Ontario Ministry of Education, quoted by Leonard and Millar (1995) in their study of parents and reading states that, "schools should encourage parents and guardians to become involved in their children's education in meaningful ways." "Meaningful ways"

can have many connotations, from assisting students with homework to volunteering in the school and/or having input into the decision-making in the school.

The Ministry has some expectation that parents will support and assist their children in their academic careers through their involvement in the schools and in the home.

A new Ministry initiative is "School Councils" for every school. The Council must include parents as well as community persons, teachers and students. Therefore, through its policy statements, the Ontario Ministry of Education makes it clear that there are expectations for parental involvement at many levels.

The "Common Curriculum", the main curriculum document of the Ontario Ministry of Education, which must be followed by every school board and school, includes clauses requiring schools to involve parents in the everyday working of the school and their children's education. Although the Ontario education system is based on white middle-class values, parents of all cultural backgrounds are expected to attend parent-teacher interviews, help with their children's homework and now participate in the local School Councils. As people from non-English speaking cultures have come here, there is a further expectation that parents assist their children in English development.

This exploratory study was conducted to begin to understand the lives of a particular group of women, their attitudes and behavior with regard to their children's schools and education, particularly English skills development, because they are the ones who are responsible for the children here, and have specific values and expectations for their children's education. If administrators and teachers are to invite mothers to assist in helping their children learn English more quickly and achieve better grades, they need to know more about the lives of the families. This unique sociological phenomenon - the "astronaut" family - is not well understood at present because it is so new. Therefore, I hoped the mothers in this study could provide insight into their lives. The issues explored

included: how the mothers spend their time when their children are at home and at school; concerns of the mothers about living in Canada without their husbands; their actual experiences with their children's schools; how they explain their children's academic success and failure; their expectations of the schools their children attend.

The results of this study have implications for teacher preservice education in faculties of education. There are courses on parent interaction and multicultural issues that could benefit from more information from a study such as this. Staff development (in-service) is conducted in local schools and by the board. Where administrators and teachers work with minority group families there needs to be more sensitivity to issues such as those facing the mothers in this study. Therefore, recommendations were developed for pre-service and in-service education.

## 1.2 Author's Perspective

In 1989, I began teaching in a newly built elementary school, in a new subdivision, that unexpectedly had a great influx of Hong Kong immigrants. Today, the students from Hong Kong constitute over 75% of the student population in the school. There are over 730 students in the school and therefore, the population of students from Hong Kong is over 500. Smith (1987) in her research talked about how the changes in the character of a local population can, in very sudden ways, confront a school with entirely new situations. She pointed out that many times the procedures already in place are inadequate and that we must talk to the mothers to find out how to proceed, something that this study is meant to do. There are many other cultures represented in the school, for example, students have come from India, Iran, the Caribbean, Japan and Mainland China. At present there are 60 staff members in the school but the majority are from the dominant

culture. There are two Black teachers, two teachers from Hong Kong and one teacher from India.

Some of the students from outside Canada have difficulty, at first, simply adjusting to their new surroundings - Canada is a drastic change from where most have come. Depending upon what time of year the families arrive, the children may have to deal with a totally different climate immediately. For example, if they arrive in the winter, they need to wear different clothing, and many of the children talk about feeling very cold at first, regardless of what they wear.

Then there is the problem of learning a new language (even if they have studied English in their country of origin) and potentially a new way of schooling - not sitting in rows, not having the teacher give all the "right" answers, doing group work with peers, being expected to discuss rather than give back what the teacher said. Many students from Hong Kong express the view that discipline in Ontario schools is lax and that they can do anything they want. Teachers in Hong Kong have high expectations of compliance (Luk, Leung and Lee, 1988) and many of the students who have come here from Hong Kong say they are not used to having to think for themselves most of the time (Lai, 1992). Therefore, it can take them a great deal of time to develop the internal locus of control (the ability to exercise restraint when there is not an external force telling them what to do) that is necessary to learn effectively in this new environment.

Teachers and administrators expect students to immediately begin to learn English or consolidate their ability to work and study in English. For the students from Hong Kong, this expectation is complicated because they are in the majority in the school and can quite easily spend a great deal of their time not using English. The students sit together in groups in the classrooms. There are not enough non-Chinese speaking students to be able

to separate the Chinese students into separate groups. As they play on the playground at recess and lunch they speak Cantonese, as that is the language of Hong Kong. They speak Cantonese in the halls, before and after classes. While the staff acknowledges the need for them to keep their first language, they also believe the use of Cantonese for a great percentage of the day hinders many of the students' ability to progress quickly in their English development.

For some students, the adjustment difficulties are compounded because their family configuration in Canada is a variation on what was called a "split-household" family in the late 1800's and early 1900's and today has had a new term coined for it - "astronaut" family (Lai, 1992; Billson, 1995). The "astronaut" family is the flip side of the "split-household" family. In the "split-household" family, the father immigrated, supposedly temporarily, to Canada and sent money back to his family in China. In the "astronaut" family, the father has stayed in Hong Kong and the wife and children have come to Canada to await the outcome of the transfer of Hong Kong to China in 1997 (Billson, 1995). The students in "astronaut" families are the majority of the recent immigrants in our school and many continue to experience difficulties with English development even after they have been here long enough to have become somewhat acculturated. At the present, there is minimal contact between the home/mother and the school in many instances and when it does occur it is usually confined to parent - teacher talks through a translator.

I believe if the teachers and administrators are going to provide more relevant help to these students there needs to be a better understanding of their family situations and the best place to start is with the mothers - their expectations regarding their children's education, their suggestions regarding what teachers and administrators can do to facilitate parental involvement at home, their willingness to become more active in the school and their proposals for facilitating this involvement.

## CHAPTER 2

### Background to the study

#### 2.1 History of Hong Kong

Hong Kong is an important site in Asia because the harbour is the best one between Shanghai and Indochina (Microsoft, Encarta, 1993). Prior to 1842, because of its irregular coastline, Hong Kong consisted of small fishing villages and pirate havens and was pretty much left alone by China. In 1842, Britain gained control of Hong Kong in the Treaty of Nanking which ended the Opium War with China. Initially under this treaty, Britain was to hold Hong Kong in perpetuity, but in 1898 a change was made. Britain was granted a 99-year lease for Hong Kong including the New Territories on the mainland. Hong Kong became a place of refuge for many people from the Chinese mainland in the ensuing years. In 1912 when the Chinese Republic was established, ending dynastic rule of China, political exiles fled to Hong Kong and began setting up small businesses.

The Japanese invaded China in 1937 and thousands of Chinese fled to Hong Kong. Unfortunately, the Japanese also invaded Hong Kong later. After the Second World War, the Nationalist-Communist civil war in China sent thousands more refugees to Hong Kong. When the Communists won in 1949, again thousands came to Hong Kong, hoping to maintain their freedom in a British protectorate. In the 1970's, during the Cultural Revolution in China, there was another influx of political refugees from mainland China.

Most of the people who came to Hong Kong came from Guangzhou, a southern province in China, just north of Hong Kong. The Chinese dialect spoken in Guangzhou is Cantonese (the area has been known as Canton by the English speaking world for many years) and therefore, the main language in Hong Kong has been Cantonese.

Anti-Communist sentiments from parts of the world resulted in foreign investment in Hong Kong by those hoping to hurt the communist regime in China. This resulted, ultimately, in the creation of an economic boom that has made Hong Kong one of the wealthiest areas in the world and one of the driving forces in Asia.

Britain and China negotiated the return of Hong Kong to China and signed an agreement in 1984. Although Hong Kong is supposed to be allowed to maintain its own legal, social and economic systems for at least another 50 years, many people in Hong Kong became concerned and the emigration began. (see Table 1 for the immigration statistics). In 1987 there was a triple fold increase in immigration to Canada from Hong Kong.

In June, 1989, with the massacre of students in Tianamen Square, Beijing and the repression of democratic influences, many people feared that the same thing could happen in Hong Kong when it reverts to mainland China's rule and so even more emigrated. Instead of fleeing to Hong Kong as in the past, people were now fleeing from Hong Kong. However, it was an exodus with an interesting twist. Wives and children were sent to many places around the world, for example, Canada and Australia, while the husbands/fathers remained in Hong Kong to keep their businesses going.

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Canada has been the recipient of a large proportion of this new exodus and the percentage of Hong Kong immigrants coming into Ontario has consistently been more than 50% of the total number of immigrants from Hong Kong. The communities and schools where there has been a large influx have been faced with many new concerns.

**TABLE 1**

**Immigration to Canada from Hong Kong, 1980-1993**

| YEAR  | TOTAL  | ONTARIO |
|-------|--------|---------|
| 1980  | 6,309  | 2,681   |
| 1981  | 6,451  | 2,679   |
| 1982  | 6,524  | 2,826   |
| 1983  | 6,710  | 3,071   |
| 1984  | 7,696  | 3,919   |
| ***** |        |         |
| 1985  | 7,380  | 3,400   |
| 1986  | 5,893  | 2,796   |
| 1987  | 16,170 | 8,691   |
| 1988  | 23,281 | 13,519  |
| 1989  | 20,001 | 10,812  |
| ***** |        |         |
| 1990  | 28,949 | 16,032  |
| 1991  | 22,329 | 11,222  |
| 1992  | 38,841 | 16,967  |
| 1993  | 36,511 | 15,642  |

Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1994

Canada and Hong Kong Update, Winter, 1995

## 2.2 The local region

The community in which the mothers in this study live is immediately north of Toronto. The community is part of a town within a geographically large region in which there are many small towns and cities. In 1984, this town was studied by Alberti and Pozzebon for its ethnocultural profile. At that time, 1.3% of the population was classified as born in Asia, but none were listed as Chinese. Since then this area has received a large number of new residents from Hong Kong, especially since 1989.

The families have purchased large houses and the women and children are living in relative isolation in their new environment. The men jet to Canada for a couple of weeks, usually twice a year - February for Chinese New Year and September for the Chinese Harvest Festival.

While English has been the second language in Hong Kong and most children study English in school, the children who have come to Canada usually have to become more proficient in English in order to learn effectively in Ontario schools. Many of the mothers do not speak English well, if at all, and do not have access to English instruction, for a variety of reasons; for example, as spouses they do not have access to free English language education here in Ontario because the Federal Government will only fund English education for the head of the household at present and in these families, even though the husband is not here, he is considered the household head (Burnaby, 1992; Rockhill, 1994).

Having talked with parents about their children for over 30 years, I believe that most mothers want to be able to help their children, in whatever way they can, to achieve in school and the research by Bauch (1989) confirms this. He found that most parents he

worked with wanted to know what they could do at home to assist their children. This can be very difficult for the mothers who do not speak English and also do not understand the education system in Ontario. The mothers may know what needs to be done, but without the assistance of those in the local education system, they may not know how to go about providing the help they believe is necessary. Teachers and principals need to know what is happening in the lives of the families in this situation so they can help the mothers assist their children in their schooling.

Given their own different educational experiences and cultural backgrounds, some mothers I have spoken to who have been here several years have said that they were very reluctant in their early years in Canada to take the initiative to approach the school for help. Ritter, Mont-Reynaud and Dornbusch (1993) reported similar findings. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the school to develop strategies that can bring the mothers into the school in order to help them and their children. It may mean the schools will have to make changes in accordance with the wishes and values of the families in their community. The best way to find about the values and expectations of the families is to ask them. This study was an attempt to do just that.

#### Context of the study

### 2.3. Chinese and Hong Kong immigration to Canada

#### 2.3.a. Before 1984

The first Chinese immigrants came to Canada in the 1850's. Some had started in California at the beginning of the Gold Rush and then moved on to Canada (British Columbia) when gold was discovered in the Fraser River valley. Others came directly from China for the same reason. (Ruprecht, 1990; Lai, 1992). Hong Kong was the usual place for emigrants from China to begin their journey to Canada.

The men (and it was only men at first) who came from China were often peasants who had little hope of wealth in China (Johnson, 1992; Tong, 1994), and were hoping that Canada would provide greater opportunities. Unfortunately for them the gold rush did not last very long and they needed other work because they were expected to continue sending money back home. Authors who have studied this phenomenon of fathers emigrating and sending money back home to support their family called this a "split-household" (Glen, 1983).

When Sir John A. MacDonald began the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway to bring British Columbia into Confederation, thousands of men emigrated from China to become labourers on the railroad. Others became cooks, grocery store owners and launderers as support services for those who were working directly on the railway (Johnson, 1992). Unfortunately for many of the men working on the railroad, there were many deaths because of the dangerous nature of the work and the racism that made it all right to give the most dangerous jobs to the Chinese men.

Although, men were usually the only ones to immigrate, some women did come to Canada as well (Nipp, 1986). The first documented women arrived in the 1860's.

In the United States of America, there was some concern about the numbers of Chinese men flocking to west coast cities. The "yellow press" (newspapers that were opposed to immigration from Asia) spread stories of opium dens and dissolute lives of Chinese men. They tried to make "white" citizens believe this was a threat to the young people of the United States. This paranoia spread to Canada when the railroad was finished. Now the Chinese workers had no jobs and since Canada was in an economic depression the Chinese were seen as a threat to the "white" labour force. This led to a wave of racism, anti-Chinese sentiment and discrimination (Baureiss, 1985). Now, with little or no work,

there was no money for the men to be able to return to their families in China (Nipp, 1986) or bring their families here.

In 1885, the Canadian government passed the Chinese Immigration Act. This Act imposed a \$50.00 head tax on all Chinese who wished to become immigrants. This amount of money completely precluded the ability of the men already here to bring their wives and children to Canada (Johnson, 1992). Today there is a feeling of *deja vu*. The Canadian Government has again imposed a "head tax". This time it is \$900.00.

The "split-household" remained a fact of life for these early Chinese immigrants in Canada and their wives and children back in China. In the split-household, the man was expected to send as much as possible of his earnings back to his village to support his family, which included his wife, children, his mother and perhaps younger brothers. The wife in the split-household was expected to remain in China, with her mother-in-law and serve her (Glen, 1983; Dill, 1988).

As hard as the men worked in Canada, when they could get a job or start their own business, in most cases they never were able to save enough money to be able to either return to China or bring their families here. In 1900, the Canadian government increased the head tax to \$100.00, and increased it to a prohibitive sum of \$500.00 in 1903 (Johnson, 1992). This series of laws limited the Chinese men's economic, social and political participation in Canada (Nipp, 1986). Sometimes, the men did manage to go back to China for a visit, but this was not the norm.

The beginning of the Chinese community in Canada began in British Columbia as it was the first place of embarkation. By 1900, some had crossed the country into Ontario. The first documented person of Chinese origin arrived in Toronto in 1900 (Ruprecht, 1990).

The Exclusion Act of 1923 ended any further Chinese immigration and the men were left in Canada to build some semblance of life on their own. Thus, the immigration of the men to Canada, which was to have been temporary, became permanent. This was viewed very negatively by the Chinese community because they had come with the tradition of not planting their roots in the "devil's" country (Tong, 1994).

The Chinese community was further ghetto-ized by the gender imbalance (Johnson, 1992). Some authors say the men chose to live in areas by themselves and not integrate into the larger population. However, with so much government and social discrimination they were not allowed to integrate fully. Therefore, the Chinese people tried to protect themselves by living in close proximity and keeping a close social bond among themselves, maintaining their traditional customs, developing social clubs and mutual aid societies. This was an adaptive process on their part, not an unwillingness to assimilate (Baureiss, 1985).

After World War II, there was a great deal of agitation in the larger Canadian community to repeal the 1923 Exclusion Act. China had been our ally in the war and the act was correctly viewed as discriminatory (Nipp, 1985). Also, the Canadian Chinese Immigration Act violated the newly formed United Nations Charter of Human Rights (Baureiss, 1985). Even though the repeal was finally enacted in 1947, there were still a great many restrictions placed on Chinese immigration and it was not until 1967 that all restrictions on Chinese immigration were fully removed (Johnson, 1992). Therefore, Chinese people were relatively free to come to Canada until 1996 when the Federal Government imposed a new tax of \$900.00 to be paid by all new immigrants before entering Canada.

### 2.3.b. After 1984

As Hong Kong prospered with the influx of people from mainland China, the entrepreneurs needed places to invest their money outside Hong Kong (Johnson, 1992). Money flowed into Canada, including Ontario. This put many Hong Kong people in an excellent position to be able to emigrate should the need arise. That need became acute after 1984. There was a great decline in confidence in the future of Hong Kong after Britain signed the agreement to return the colony to China in 1997 (Lai, 1992). As part of the agreement Britain was not to be allowed to introduce parliamentary democracy before the takeover in 1997.

The Communist Party officials stated that politics should be left to them so Hong Kong can concentrate on making money (Pan, 1990). However, many Hong Kong residents were distrustful of the Communist Government and what they might do once they took over complete control of the colony. Therefore, between 1986 and 1989 over 5 million people left Hong Kong for Canada, the United States, Australia and Britain (Pan, 1990).

The concern for the future of Hong Kong on the part of residents escalated even more after June 4, 1989. Lai (1992) found that 11% of those interviewed before the Tianamen Square massacre were intending to leave Hong Kong. After the massacre this percentage jumped to 15%. Many were concerned about retribution after 1997, as they had supported the rebel students and the democratic reform movement in China. Some had even gone so far as to participate in a march in Hong Kong on May 21 and hide refugee students after June 4 (Pan, 1990).

Now many more wealthy investors started to bring their families over to Canada and settle them here in anticipation of the effects to Hong Kong of the mainland Chinese takeover in 1997. Many men intended to get Canadian citizenship by having their wives and children live in Canada, while they maintained residence and business in Hong Kong (Pan, 1990). They were looking for an insurance policy - an escape route in the event that the Communist Government did enact measures to curtail private enterprise and revoke democratic reforms. Canada is a preferred country because our tax laws allow a citizen to live abroad without paying Canadian tax. This is perfect for the wealthy Hong Kong businessmen and entrepreneurs.

In the years immediately after the repeal of the Exclusion Act, Hong Kong immigration to Ontario consisted mainly of the sons of the well-connected and wealthy who came to attend university here (Ruprecht, 1990). However, as the immigration numbers rose, so did the range of people. Now there are people from every walk of life coming to Ontario.

As this paper was being written the situation in Hong Kong was again changing. The handover of Hong Kong to mainland China was imminent and there was increased concern concerning the outcome. July 1, 1997 has been the date in so many people's minds for so long and now it is upon them.

The young people from Hong Kong, prior to 1981, were originally seen as bright and industrious, obtaining the highest marks in university, especially in the maths and sciences (Barringer, Takeuchi and Xenos, 1990). A large body of literature evolved trying to explain why the Asian immigrant children were doing so much better than the North American children. Hurh and Kim (1989) looked at this stereotype. While they found that Asian children were doing better in math and science, they also found that these children paid a price. The children attained these higher marks in return for little time for

play, socialization and creative endeavours (Stevenson, Stigler, Lee, Lucker, Kitamura and Hsu, 1985).

There were many social problems and even though the students graduated with high marks, they have often remained underemployed (Barringer, Takeuchi and Xenos, 1990). Many of the problems of Asian-Americans today are not being addressed because of the misperception that they are doing well in their adopted countries. However, Asian-Americans are in need of support (Kim, 1995).

Today, the need for support is even greater. There are many more students coming from Hong Kong and because there are so many, it is only to be expected that they will come with a wide range of abilities. With the numbers and the needs of students with different abilities, the stress on the education system is particularly great in the areas in which the families have chosen to live, usually in large numbers. Therefore, the need for parents to participate in the schooling of their children and also be part of the decision-making in the schools is more critical now than ever before.

#### 2.4. Cultural assumptions and needs

Some adult immigrants who have come to Canada chose to live in communities in which they could shop and deal with regular household needs in their first language. They often learned some English but they may not have needed English on a daily basis. However, the children in these families need English to participate in schooling here and perhaps to find employment later.

The majority of people coming to Canada from China in the early years were men (Johnson, 1992). Most of these men had been peasants (Johnson, 1992). After their time on the railroad was over, those that could settled in small groups and started small businesses. They were subjected to systemic discrimination and were victims of a great deal of prejudice (Johnson, 1992). They, thus, tended to stay in their cultural group and not mix with the dominant culture.

The studies on the early days of Chinese immigration have focused on men because they were the ones who were here. The wives and children lived in China and as has been pointed out (Glen, 1991; Yamanaka, and McClelland, 1994) there is definitely a dearth of studies about these women. The few studies that have been done do not discuss in great detail the lives of those who had to stay behind in China and keep the family together.

China is a patriarchal society and when a woman married, often with a husband chosen by her father (Pan, 1990), she was obliged to live with her husband's family. Thus, the wives left behind had to remain with their mothers-in-law and bring up their children in an atmosphere of subservience (Glen, 1991; Glen, 1983; Song, 1995).

When the Canadian government finally lifted the discriminatory legislation that had effectively barred most Chinese women from coming to Canada, there was an influx of women and children joining their husbands. They continued to come with their husbands in subsequent waves of immigration over the next decades. Now, during this new wave of immigration (post 1984), the women are coming with their children, but without their husbands.

Studies conducted with immigrants from many different parts of the globe document the psychological upheaval many of them go through. (Kimer, 1986; Polyzoi, 1982). The

departure from the home country marks the beginning of a major disruption to every day life. While immigrants may believe they know what they will encounter from hearing and reading about Canada, the experience is never what it was expected to be. The dislocation can be traumatic, but the adaption process can be even more so.

Of course, the first obstacle is language. Even if there is some knowledge of English, speaking everyday idiomatic language can be a big problem (Polyzoi, 1982). The main feeling expressed by many of the new arrivals is the feeling of isolation (Hesse, 1990). The newly arrived families bring with them a whole stock of previously constituted knowledge, formed and developed within the social structure of their home cultures (Polyzoi, 1982), and this can no longer be their basis for judging the world around them in a new culture.

In the situation that is the subject of this research, the mothers arriving in Ontario are confronted with an entirely new value system (Kim and Hurh, 1988). For some of the women, this may put them in a position of having much more freedom - they are no longer under their mother-in-laws' control.

However, confusion is likely as they try to reconcile the value systems in which they have lived, with a new system with which they are as yet unfamiliar. Many values and lifestyles in both systems may be congruent but there are differences, for example, subservience to one's mother-in-law is a central tenet of traditional Chinese life.

While the men who have come to Canada tend to either have positions, for example, bank managers, accountants; have their own businesses or quickly find employment, the women are mainly expected to stay home and look after the children. However, some

women work in the family businesses (Song, 1995), especially if the family business is running a restaurant or manufacturing goods.

Song (1995) stresses the need for women to be studied separately from their husbands. Their experiences can be very different and need to be treated with the respect and value they deserve (Glen, 1991). Also, since their perspective can be very different, they can bring a richness to our understanding that would not be possible in any other way.

Cumming (1994) points out that the number of immigrant females with limited English is nearly double that of similar males in Canada. Most men have to interact with the larger Canadian society, while many of the women can stay in their own communities.

It is important for educators to understand the values and cultural expectations of the home environments from which their students come (Bernhardt, 1994). The beliefs regarding success and failure that parents and students bring to the learning setting can also be critical to the students' academic achievement. Educators can not expect students to learn well in an environment where they do not know the rules and expectations and where their beliefs are not acknowledged. Also, teachers must not devalue the learner's home culture or language and especially must not devalue the mothers' voices and values (Corson, 1994).

## 2.5 Confucianism

Many of the mainland and Hong Kong Chinese have roots deeply connected to Confucianism (Flowerdew and Miller, 1995) in which collectivism and harmony are most important values (Harry, 1992) and a person is defined by his/her relationships with others (Chao, 1994). Confucianism is a philosophy of life that upholds, among other principles,

obedience to male authority in the family, to those who are older, to the state and to those who teach in the education system (King and Bond, 1985).

Confucianism holds that behavior is contingent upon the role a person has and that each person in the society has a specific role to play (Sue and Morishima, 1982). If everyone plays their proper role then a harmonious society will be achieved (King and Bond, 1985). Confucianism also states that human nature is biased toward the good (Ho and Kang, 1984) and that humans have an innate need to choose the good path toward human perfectibility (Pomerleau, Malcuit and Sabatier, 1991). Therefore, it is to be expected that there could be adjustment difficulties when immigrants from this value system are exposed to cultures where different values are held.

Since Confucianism is a patriarchal philosophy and reinforces other aspects of patriarchy in contemporary Hong Kong, women have had the main responsibility for the raising of the children. Women were expected to occupy a subordinate position to men and to accept the role of homemaker and mother (Billson, 1995), even though there are many stories of individual women who broke out of the mold.

However, Confucius did not consider individuals as independent entities. Everyone was part of the collective identity (Kim and Choi, 1994) with mutual dependence, group identification, self-discipline and harmony the goals (Chiu, 1987). The family was an especially important collective (Sue and Morishima, 1982).

Those grounded in Confucianism place a high value on educational achievement (Chiu, 1987). However, they have attitudes toward teaching and learning that are different from the dominant Canadian culture (Flowerdew and Miller, 1995). They believe in learning by listening and observing (Huynh and Yang Lam, 1994). Students in Confucianism-

influenced classrooms tend to sit quietly in rows of desks while the teacher "teaches" what is "correct knowledge" because education and strictness must go together. Students are not expected to respond to questions or engage in dialogue. There is very little experiential learning; for example, in science, the teacher conducts experiments in the front of the class and the students watch (according to the students in my school). Students are expected to act in such a way as to bring respect to the family name. The Confucian classroom emphasizes effort because the belief is that children can improve in almost anything if they work hard (Chao, 1994). In contrast, in most Ontario schools, students sit in groups and engage in exploratory learning where they are exposed to many different styles of teaching and learning. Debate is encouraged and finding the "right answer" is not seen as the most important outcome; rather it is the process that is seen as more important.

## CHAPTER 3

### Parents and children's learning

#### 3.1 Parents and Reading

For students who are new to Canada and for whom English is not the first language the greatest need is to learn the language in which their academic instruction will take place. The learning of a language can also help in understanding the culture of their adopted country and this can be of benefit for young people who hope to seek and find employment in the future in Canada. In Ontario, academic subjects, such as science, history, family studies, totally depend on language for their instruction. Yu and Atkinson (1988) found that students who do not have English as their first language had to resort to "rote" learning in the content subjects such as science and history because they did not have enough known English words at their command. Rote learning does not give understanding of the subject or content within the subject. Students who rely on rote learning cannot answer evaluation and synthesizing questions on tests. These students are also unable to participate in class discussions about the implications of the information they are reading. These students also tend to simply copy material from texts, resource books and computers. They do not develop the skill of note taking and writing points in their own words - skills that are so necessary in the academic world to which they aspire.

Communicative language according to Cummins (1986) includes listening, speaking, reading and writing and this is the definition that is used in most ESL classes. Becoming competent in all four areas is necessary for a student to be truly successful, but the one that will have the greatest impact and lasting effect on a student's ability to succeed in academia is reading (Bloom, 1992; Grabe, 1991). Practically everything we do throughout life in our industrial and information society today relates in some way to reading and the ability to understand what is read and act upon that information.

There is a great body of research and literature that discusses the importance of reading for the child and value of parents being involved in the development of the skill and enjoyment of reading. For example, Tizard, Schofield and Hewison (1982) found children whose parents said they read to them regularly had higher reading scores than those who did not have this exposure and Kropp (1993) reiterated this in his work.

According to Early and Gunderson (1993), schools do not provide enough experiences in authentic literacy. Schools tend to rely on set readers, story books and resource material that often do not show minority people doing activities that are part of the students' experiences. Recently I had a class of Grade 7 students look at the picture books in our library. They were to particularly look for gender and cultural stereotypes. Over 50% of the books they studied had gender stereotypes. Women were only shown in domestic situations and men in situations outside the home. The cultural stereotypes showed children from other cultures in traditional clothing only. Women and girls were not pictured in some books from other cultures. The children in the class were outraged and because they are from many different minority groups they made a deputation to the librarian to remove many of these books. Academic text books often do not include people from minority cultures in their examples and at worst, they show minority people in stereotypical and racist ways. This can make it even harder for the student, new to Canada, to relate to the information being disseminated.

The home can fill many of the gaps in reading. Parents' newspaper reading habits and the number of books in the home are related to children's educational success (Hewison and Tizard, 1980), at least in the dominant culture. Reading shopping lists, reading packages in stores, reading advertisements before shopping or reading telephone messages can be authentic reading (Fox, 1989). Researchers in the anthology edited by Cozden and Snow (1990) advocate not reading only English and they state that a bilingual approach to

reading is more beneficial. However, there needs to be a minimum level of English reading proficiency to succeed in Ontario schools today. Reading for sheer enjoyment, with no response journal or character study to write, is also authentic reading and, all too often this aspect of reading is forgotten by classroom teachers who must follow a curriculum laid down by the Ministry of Education.

Schools, being middle-class institutions that reinforce the dominant culture, expect parents to have exposed their children to reading prior to coming to school (Early and Gunderson, 1993). Educators believe children who have had extensive book experiences in their pre-school years arrive at school with the type of orientation to literacy and literacy activities that are beneficial to further literacy learning. However, students who arrive from other countries may have had different kinds of exposure to literacy. Perhaps, books have not been the main source of reading; perhaps newspapers have not been in the home every day. In these cases teachers and administrators may have expectations that parents will work with their children to assist them in coming up to the level necessary to succeed in the academic setting here by taking them to libraries, subscribing to the local newspaper and generally encouraging children to look at as many aspects of reading as possible.

Most teachers expect that students will participate in individual and group research projects. Usually this will entail using encyclopediae and today, CD-Roms. This means that the students will have to be able to read at the level of the resource material. In order for a student whose first language is not English to be able to read this material, she will need to have an understanding of English that is beyond the first stages. Here, also parents could help by providing access to such material and assisting students in understanding the material.

Some parents may need help in various reading activities with their children (Hannon, Jackson and Page, 1985; Hannon and James, 1990) in ways that can enhance the children's enjoyment and understanding of reading. Research has shown that listening plays a key role in the development of a second language (L2) (Dunkel, 1991) and therefore, the more the children can be read to, the better. DeBaryshe (1995) states that reading aloud to young children may be one of the most important home activities. She also believes mothers are key in this area because they often are the ones who put their children to bed or are seen as the ones to take the time to do this activity. Reading to children gives them a starting point for their own reading and allows them to imitate reading behaviour by saying the familiar words they have heard (Timion, 1992).

Young students who are learning English can benefit from being read to as a way to develop vocabulary and cultural content (Fitzgerald, 1993; Morrow, 1992). New immigrants often believe that immersion in the dominant culture and its language is the "right way" (Manfredi-Petitt, 1994) since this seems to make sense. However, research conducted by Cummins (1986) and Cazden and Snow (1990) has shown that it can be valuable also to be read to in one's first language. Reading in one's first language can facilitate conceptual growth because the child is not hindered by unfamiliar vocabulary. A child who is read to and reads in her first language grows conceptually at a rate that would have occurred in the home country. As conceptual growth continues, it is possible to overlay the vocabulary in the second language. Discussion during reading can also be easier if it is conducted in L1 (first language) at first while the child is learning English. Since the teachers probably do not speak the child's first language, this is a vital task for parents.

There can be a progression of styles of reading. A younger child may need a parent or older sibling to read to her exclusively until the child can read for herself. For the older

child who can read a little, paired or cooperative reading is a way to increase vocabulary and cultural understanding (Giddings, 1992). Paired/cooperative reading involves the child reading a page or part of a page and a parent (or other significant older person) reading a similar amount (Fox, 1989). The kind of reading that can be done in this way need not be great literature (Lipp and Wheeler, 1991). In fact, "great" literature may not be the best at all. Instead, comic books with their colourful illustrations are useful. Fox also suggests trade books as high interest books for paired-reading. Trade books (the term used to designate popular young adult pocket books) offer a richness of vocabulary, sentence structure and literary forms (Fielding, Wilson and Anderson, 1984) that can be very useful for second language learners. It is also important to ask the ESL student what she likes to read and have read to her and then provide it (Lipp and Wheeler, 1991).

Parents can be role models for their children and family literacy programs benefit both parents and children (Handel, 1992; Nickse, 1990). Children who see people reading in the home will probably wish to do the same (Nicol and Wilkie, 1991). This may be overly optimistic as I personally know of parents who have read to their children from a very early age, were great readers themselves and still their adult children do not read. Therefore, even though research supports reading to children as a way to promote reading it does not necessarily have this result in all cases. However, if a child is never read to, how can that child begin to know of the richness in books and other material?

Paul Kropp (1993) is even more enthusiastic in his advocacy of family literacy. He believes parents are essential in making sure that books and the joy of reading are part of a child's experience. He further believes that children benefit from parents reading to or with their children every day. As the reading is happening, discussion of the reading can enhance the experience. Nickse (1990) who supports Kropp believes that literacy should

be a family goal. Parents can create a literate environment (Giddings, 1992) and share literacy activities (Smith, 1992).

It is important to have a variety of reading materials available for children to select. This will enhance the likelihood of their reading (Timion, 1992). Since it could be very expensive to have a great variety of material on hand at all times, trips to the local library are important. Children should also be encouraged to bring home books from their school library also. This underlines the necessity of school and public libraries stocking books in many languages when there are communities in which other cultures live.

For the child who is literate in her first language, the first language can be the reference point for L2 learning (Vacca, Vacca and Gove, 1987). A large part of the L2 learner's task is to learn new labels for concepts that are already known. Reading widely can supply many of these labels, especially if there is someone else with whom to interact during the reading process.

Different cultures view literacy differently (Ferdman, 1990): as means of delivering culture, for enjoyment, for information gathering, or a combination. Also the value of literacy for members of a group can depend upon one's gender. Some cultures hold the view that it is more important for boys to be literate than girls. Teachers need to understand these views in order to evaluate the place of literacy in the students' lives in their classrooms (Ferdman, 1990). They also need to know what place literacy has in cultures so they can explain the perspective of Ontario schools and have them tell what they expect.

The expectations of schools in this area can be overwhelming for some people and especially for the mother who is new to the country and virtually alone. What if she

cannot operate the library catalogue computer when trying to help her son with a school project? What if the parent cannot understand English well enough to pair-read with her child in L2 or does not understand the expectations of the school because the child, who is often the mediator between the school and home, does not tell the parent? What if the parent is having to spend so much time on survival issues, that the time to read to or with her child is minimal?

### 3.2 Women and single parenting

Traditionally, women have had the greatest responsibility for the children (David, 1993) and mothers have had far greater involvement in their children's education because of this (Reay, 1995; Rockhill, 1991). They monitor their children's school activities, spot problems, repair problems, and act as advocates for their children with the school (Griffith and Smith, 1990). In China, dedication to family is extremely important (Fong, 1994). While overall attitudes are changing, maternal attitudes continue to show a high degree of conservatism - child training practices tend to change more slowly than other aspects of culture (Ho and Kang, 1984). Mothers will continue to have the major responsibility for child rearing for many years to come.

Many of the women in Hong Kong have struggled against the restrictive aspects of their historical traditions while still maintaining their dedication to family (Billson, 1995). In this current wave of immigration from Hong Kong, some of the women are more assertive and confident (Billson, 1995), in part because of being from the middle or upper class. Yet, because women have unique role demands, they experience different stressors and need different coping strategies (Dyal, Rybersky and Somers, 1988). These women have come to Canada ahead of their husbands who have been dubbed "astronauts" because they jet to Canada once or twice a year usually for special holidays. The men are staying

behind in Hong Kong to amass as much wealth as possible before 1997 and provide substantial material comforts for their families now.

Gilligan (1982) discussed an interesting perspective on the roles women play and how relationships affect the way they play those roles. She talks about the different voices women have because of the relationships in which they are involved. However, it seems that women also see with different eyes and different feelings and then speak in different voices. Weingarten (1994) talked about women actually silencing or distorting their voices. In Agnew's (1990) interviews with Asian women she identified the women's struggles to define themselves in ways that do not reject their culture. This makes it even more important to hear directly from women in situations like the one under study here. The relationships for these women are very different from what they experienced in Hong Kong and this can add to their stress.

Since the women are here without their husbands, they have to make all the day-to-day decisions for themselves and their children, for example, they have to ensure the safety of their children on a daily basis (Conroy, Hess, Azuma and Kashiwagi, 1980). They must deal with house repairs, household purchases, utilities, bureaucracies and most importantly, the school(s) on their own. Virtually, these women are single mothers for most of the year. This makes it important for the mothers to have contact with other mothers in the same situation and Levine (1980) pointed out the value of parents contacting and communicating with other parents. Yet, because of their situation, the mothers tend not to make the moves that are required to set up a support system. Rockhill (1991) points out that women wish to learn English to be able to deal more effectively with the people outside their homes but the barriers are great. Rockhill and Tomic (1994) discussed the amount of work the women have to do to maintain their family and as spouses they are denied access to subsidized language training. While money

is not a big issue for the women in this study, it is the attitude toward them that constitutes the barriers. Being told they do not qualify as a man would give a subtle message that they are not as valued.

Some divorced single mothers have their former spouses living nearby and they can share the decision-making and child rearing. For the women from Hong Kong, their spouses are too far away for this to be a reasonable process. Fax machines and E-mail can keep the husband/father in touch, but these mechanical devices cannot take the place of being part of the acculturation process. The fathers cannot be intimately involved with their children's education. They get report cards by fax and then tell their wives how to respond. The women can find it very difficult to talk with the teachers and get the information their husbands expect.

Chow (1991) reported that it is difficult for women new to Canada to act collectively. They spend so much of their time on survival issues and therefore do not get together with others in the same situation to support each other. She also reported that many Asian women accept their role as wife and mother to the exclusion of their own aspirations. Enders-Fragasser (1991) and Brown and Gilligan (1992) reported that many women, regardless of their cultural background, have difficulty opposing the situations they find themselves in and suppress their voices. Gender roles (those into which we have been socialized) are very strong. Therefore, it is not surprising that the roles of women have for many centuries been that of housekeeper and main child caretaker (Fedigan, 1992) and in the face of family and societal pressure women have taken on this role, often to the exclusion of other roles.

While the mothers in this study are virtual single mothers for most of the year, the literature on single parenting has limited significance for this study. A big issue for single

mothers in the literature is the decrease in economic resources. This tends not to be an issue for many of the women from Hong Kong. While most are not wealthy, they do have economic resources such that they need not worry about having the money for essentials or work outside the home unless they want to and therefore, they may be able to spend time working with their children or participating in the school which their children attend. There is also the issue of disruption caused in the household when the father comes and then leaves as is the pattern in the astronaut family. Lowenstein (1986) documents emotional and behavioural problems with some children when there is a disruption with parents' living arrangements. While his study was done with children of fathers going to prison, there is still the question of the disruption the coming and going causes in the families under study here.

When father is in Canada, the children have two parents to account to and since the father has been away for an extended period, the children may not be as likely to listen to him. They have learned other ways of doing things and coping. Their lives have moved on even in the short periods of paternal absence. Then father leaves and they are again accountable only to their mother. One manifestation I have observed in the classroom is extreme agitation on the part of the students just prior to the arrival of the fathers, a real push on homework while he is here, and then a down period immediately after he leaves. Children's uncertainty about parental expectations could hinder their learning. Certainly the down period after their father leaves has resulted in projects not being completed on time. This means that there is a great need for the teachers to learn more about the dynamics of the families in order to plan projects for more appropriate times, or help the parents see what is happening to the children's learning during these cycles of visits so they can help the children cope.

Amato (1987) and Seltzer (1991) studied the relationship between the children and the non-custodial parent. While in the instance of this study, the father is not in the situation of being a legal non-custodial parent, he may be seen in much the same way by the children. The relationship between the children and the parent who is not continually present can deteriorate. When the absent parent is around, there can be confusion about the role of the children and to which parent they owe their allegiance. Parents of the children in this study need to discuss the roles of each parent with the children and also communicate to the teachers what their situation is so the teachers can better understand and assist the children who are living in "astronaut" families.

While there is a great deal of research on the issue of the lack of a male role model for children in the event of parental separation, there is also a great deal of research on the fallacy of the belief that this is detrimental to the development of the children (Zeigler, 1995; Randolph, 1995). Therefore, the dynamics of the "astronaut" family are difficult to discern and this can make it even more difficult for the school to know how to assist. This points to the need for more communication between parents and teachers.

Dickerson (1995) cautions us to interpret phenomena within their specific historical and cultural context if we are to ensure the quality and accuracy of the knowledge gained. Burgess (1995) points out that adjustments often need to be made in family life when immigration is happening and family patterns need to evolve depending upon circumstances. It is important to look at the strengths as well as the weaknesses (Ziegler, 1995) of the type of family situation in which the mothers and children find themselves.

### 3.3 Parental involvement in school

"It takes a whole village to raise a child" (Noble, 1995; Randolph, 1995). This old African proverb is as true today in Southern Ontario as it was when it was first stated. The Ministry of Education has acknowledged this wisdom in Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122 by mandating "School Councils" for each school in Ontario.

The government recognizes that the education of Ontario's young people is a shared responsibility involving schools, students, their families and members of the community.

The school councils, therefore, must consist of parents, teachers, students and community members.

When parents take part in their children's school, this sends a signal to the children - school is a good thing (Greenberg, 1989). Children need to know that their parents approve of what goes on at school and believe that it is what is best for them. Gordon (1980) believes that by bringing the home and school closer together, the parents can have more influence on the school's understanding of the family's culture. When parents are visible in the school, children realize that parents know what is happening and can assist them in their studies.

In our complex western society, schools cannot be expected to cover all the important areas of development in a child's life. All those with a stake in the future need to be involved in what happens in a child's life. Thus, parents are essential partners in the education of children (Galen, 1991) and they need to be viewed as equal partners by the teachers and administrators. If parents are viewed as equal partners, communication between the home and school will be open and supportive and this will enhance the education of the children.

Research has shown convincingly that parent involvement (both fathers and mothers) in schools is important for children's learning, attitudes about school and aspirations (Dauber and Epstein, 1993). There are many ways parents can be involved in the schools (Bloom, 1992). They can participate minimally by being a spectator on days which are designated as parent visit days or visit at some other time (Gardner, 1979) or to a greater extent as is their wont. Teachers and administrators like to believe they are open to parent visits (Chavkin, 1989) and they can show this by welcoming parents into the schools on a regular basis.

Every school can benefit from parental volunteers (Ferguson, 1995). Parent volunteers who act as library assistants help students find relevant materials and do projects. Parent aides in the classroom are also very useful. They do things that increase the adult-student contact, for example, by listening to individual students read, marking work as it is being done by the students and helping students understand what they are doing. Parents often have areas of expertise that can assist in the subject areas in which they have these special talents, for example, music, visual arts. Volunteers from minority cultures can also bring their own cultural traditions into the classrooms to broaden student contact with cultures different from their own.

A partnership between the school and parents is what is needed according to Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi and Johnson (1990). Epstein (1994) delineated six types of involvement that form a comprehensive program of partnership with parents and community:

1. parents have some basic obligations - housing, nutrition, safety and establishing home conditions that support children's learning, for example, monitor free time
2. basic obligations of schools - to effectively communicate with parents including how parents can assist their children in their learning;

3. involvement at the school building;
4. family involvement in learning activities at home - motivation, encouragement, monitoring;
5. involvement at the decision-making level;
6. involvement with collaborations and exchanges with the community.

The greater the involvement of parents, the better they will understand what is happening in the schools, the more likely they will be able to help their children and advocate for policy changes that they feel are in the best interest of their children. As Milken (1994) stated: "the successful interaction of families, communities and schools is critical to the quality of education that children are equipped with as they face an exacting future" (p.14).

Through involvement in the school and school system, parents can satisfy many of their own needs with regard to their children's education. Many parents want to know "how their children are doing", how the system works, and what they can do at home to assist their children (Bauch, 1989; Okagaki and Sternberg, 1993). Therefore, the teachers and administrators should ensure that their communication with parents is open and honest. There should be ongoing opportunities for parents to interact with teachers and be visible in the schools. These opportunities should not simply revolve around "hot dog days" and a cheerful "hello". There should be time set aside for substantive interaction.

Beyond knowing more about the school and system and trying to make the system better, most research studies report the direct positive effect on the students of their parents' involvement, for example: Bloom (1992) reported higher test scores, long-term academic achievement and positive behavior and attitudes; Chavkin and William (1988) reported enhanced self-esteem of the child; Chavkin (1989) showed significant increases in school achievement and Delgado-Gaitan (1991) and Solomon (1991) reported greater academic success on the part of the children.

Parent involvement in the decision-making process and advocacy is also beneficial both to the school and the children (Davies, 1987). Parents involved in this way can influence the curriculum to some extent as well as the attitudes and values that are implicitly taught in their children's school. Levin (1982) believes that there is a large scope for possible parent and community involvement but the actual numbers of parents that do become involved is small because many parents believe they lack the skills necessary for significant involvement.

Much of the research on parental involvement and student achievement does not take into consideration the parents from cultures other than the dominant culture, even when they may ask for a more active involvement on the part of minority parents (Chavkin, 1989b).

Studies on the academic achievement of immigrant children in the United States showed that many are over-represented in remedial and slow learner classes and under-represented in gifted classes (Marion, 1980). At present in the school in which I teach, many newly arrived children are over represented in the group identified by the ESL and special education teachers as being "at risk". That is, these teachers believe the children will have difficulty learning and may not be able to work at the grade levels in which they have been placed. Yet ethnically diverse parents often do not participate in their children's schools where they could become advocates for their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Geva (1994) reported that the concept of LD (learning disability) does not exist among some immigrant parents. Parents in her study tended to attribute difficulties to factors within the child (but did not mention learning disabilities) and to external factors. The internal factors identified by the parents were laziness and inattention. Therefore, it is reasonable that parents would not become advocates nor feel that there would be any beneficial outcome from becoming active participants in their children's education. Some

parents from minority cultures may believe that it is not their place to be in the school; the school may be viewed as the teachers' place and the parents' role is not to be a teacher.

Several authors have identified some reasons that non-English speaking parents may feel alienated from the school. For some the language barrier may make it difficult (Berliner and Casanova, 1985); also minority parents may feel intimidated by the school and a system they do not understand (Chavkin, 1989b; Leitch and Tangri, 1988). For others their experiences with their own schooling can affect involvement especially if that experience was negative (Robinson and Fine, 1994).

Chan (1981) has done some work in the area of culturally diverse parents and involvement in the school. Although Hong Kong is very westernized, Chan found that many still observe ancient Chinese festivals and customs and that most parents put enormous pressure on their children to achieve for the good of the family image (Lin and Fu, 1990). However, they tend to limit themselves to working with their children at home and not become involved in the school itself. Thus we see the impact on family cultural values that Confucianism has had with its stress on achievement as a source of pride for the group (Ching, McDermott, Fukunaga, Yanagida, Mann and Waldron, 1995; Suzuki, 1980). Education for their children is often regarded as an investment on the part of first generation immigrant parents (Lee, 1985). They have brought their values with them and only as acculturation proceeds do these tend to be modified (Chiu, 1987). Since these values include letting the school play its role, it is not surprising that Ritter, Mont-Renaud and Dornbusch (1993) found that Asian parents are unlikely to contact the school even if they have a problem.

O'Callaghan (1993) believes it is imperative that family members become active members of teams that work with and in schools. This kind of involvement can especially help

parents who are new to the country to understand the new system. It can also help parents orient themselves and see the value of their involvement (Sancho, 1979) and understand how their partnership will enhance their children's success (Galen, 1991). It is very useful if parents accompany students on field trips (Yao, 1993), both for the parents and the teachers. It provides an opportunity for the teachers to see how the parents interact with their children because differences in cultural backgrounds produce differences in forms of social interaction (DeVos, 1980). Also the beliefs of parents define the kind of person they want their children to become (Hess and Azuma, 1991) and teachers can better understand this if they have direct contact with parents in social settings.

We must recognize that parents are competent decision-makers where their children's needs are concerned and simply attending so-called parent information nights is not good enough (Curry-Sontag and Schacht, 1994). Parents have a vital role to play and teachers need to ask them what they want to do or believe they are able to do given their diverse time demands. Schools should no longer have complete power to define the curriculum and thus to repress, dominate and disempower minorities (Corson, 1993). The education system needs to listen to parents and begin to end the social injustices that are experienced by those who do not speak the dominant language.

Correa (1989) believes the challenge is to find ways to increase involvement of culturally diverse families. If this is what is needed then the profession must be open to the families' perspectives and understand the familial relationships (Chiu, 1987). The Confucian virtues, for example, filial piety, mutual dependence, group identification, harmony and self-discipline, play a large role in educational expectations (Matsuda, 1989). Tseng and Wu (1985) discussed how the value of the family is central to Chinese culture and that parents view their success in part through the ability of their children to perform well in school.

This can have an impact on how parents view their own participation and what they expect from their children and the school.

The key person in this process with new Hong Kong families is the mother. Cummins (1986) believes that when educators involve minority parents as partners in their children's education, a sense of efficacy is developed that communicates itself to children and this has positive academic consequences. However, the dominant culture tends to evaluate the behavior of minorities from its own perspective without input from the minority group members (Ogbu, 1991).

While educators in Ontario believe that it is very necessary for parents to support the education of their children through help at home and at school this is definitely a middle class North American perspective. Research has not conclusively shown whether parental involvement in school has the same outcomes when the parents are not from the dominant culture. What can a parent do who does not speak the dominant language or feels self-conscious about her ability to communicate? How can the parent know what is expected of her when it is the child who mediates the contact between the home and the school? How can a mother, a virtual single parent, find the time to become involved to the extent she would like to be? More research is needed on the kind of parent involvement that is the most effective with parents who are new to Canada (Singh, Bickley, Keith, Keith, Trivetter and Anderson, 1991).

There has been very little research that has concentrated on mothers in relation to schools or education (David, 1993). Therefore, it follows that there has been even less in the area of minority mothers (except for Black mothers in the United States). If teachers and administrators really want parent involvement and have parents support instructional agendas, they must understand the diverse school experiences among parents, diverse

economic and time constraints, diverse linguistic, and cultural practices (Fitzgerald, 1993; Finders and Lewis, 1994).

Teachers and administrators need also understand that parents have expectations for their children that impact on their attitudes and beliefs concerning the education system (Bacon and Ichikawa, 1988), must know and understand parents' beliefs about learning (Neuman, 1993; Wragg, 1989) and be prepared to include and work with them. Hsu (1994) calls for parent-teacher co-operation on expectations and beliefs. This can only be accomplished when both groups know and understand the expectations and beliefs of each other and if we do not attend to the home, whatever strategies we carry out in school may not be completely successful (Morrow and Paratore, 1993).

For the most part, all parents want their children to do well in school, but parents have different ideas about what constitutes success (Okagaki and Sternberg, 1993). Variations in parental beliefs can be a function of cultural background. Parents also define the causes of failure and success differently (Hess and Azuma, 1991) and educators need to know what these are in order to build on them. Therefore, it is even more important that we learn about the beliefs of the parents of the students we teach in our schools. This must also be understood in the context of the cultural values of the groups under consideration. Teachers must know, accept and reinforce parental expectations (Warren, 1988), not the other way around.

Burnaby (1992) calls for a great deal more qualitative information using the words of the minority people that can illuminate more fully their experiences in Canada, especially in the area of learning English and attempting to interact with the dominant culture. While qualitative studies can provide this, we must not neglect analysis of the information obtained in this manner. In attempting to learn more about issues that concern the

mothers in this study, I used the guidelines given by Maguire (1987). She tells researchers to consider carefully the questions asked in order to avoid bias and putting words and thoughts into the minds of those being asked. However, it is crucial that we learn more about minority cultures and establish relations with them with regards to the education of their children (Comer, 1984). This is the only way we can implement the best education for minority children (Laosa, 1982; Sontage and Schacht, 1994). Therefore, this study was intended to add to the qualitative research on a specific group of minority people and to find ways to establish relations with this group to help teachers and administrators devise the best education for the children.

## CHAPTER 4

### Methodology

#### 4.1 Process

This study began with the question, "what can be done for the children in "astronaut" families to help them progress in their English skills development". Since the mothers of these children are closest to them and are the most important adult in their lives, an investigation of the lives of the mothers seemed the most logical place to start to answer this question. In looking at the methodological research, the best type of research process that seemed to fit the question is ethnographic research. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) discussed this kind of research with minority groups and said that ethnographic research in cultural contexts should be a description of cultural groups, their beliefs and behaviors in a real world setting. Goetz and LeCompte further said that ethnographic research constitutes an investigation of a small, relatively homogeneous and geographically bounded study site. Researchers believe that it is the everyday that is important, for example, Andrews, (1994) said that we need the knowledge that comes from the examination of experiences themselves. Therefore, this study was intended to focus on what is happening in the daily lives of the women and their children and how the schools the children attend address the issue of "astronaut" families. Maguire (1987) believes that participatory research must be done with rather than on people and that this is the only way to really understand the issues involved. However she also stresses that we must be careful in the questions we ask because they will shape how we perceive the results. Therefore, the questions should be as straightforward as possible and simply ask exactly what is wanted to learn.

Schools need to know about parental expectations and what types of competencies parents encourage (Goodnow, Cashmore, Cotton and Knight, 1984) in their children and

also match them with the curricula in the schools or change the curricula if that is what is needed. In order to learn about parental expectations in this study, it was the mothers who were here and able to discuss these issues.

Another aspect of this study is the mothers' needs for education themselves (adult education). Lee (1993) has pointed out the lack of models and research into immigrant women's needs for education and therefore, as Hall (1975) points out, traditional social science research paradigms are inconsistent with the principles of adult education, the participatory research process was chosen. Participatory research assumes that ordinary people are knowledgeable and capable of knowing about their own reality and therefore the research can focus on problem posing and problem solving (Maguire, 1987). It is only through acknowledging and valuing the reality of the mothers in this study can we begin to understand their lives and what is needed in the education system to make the system and interaction between the system and the home better for minority students. Some research methods assume a problem orientation only (Fantini and Russo, 1980), while participatory research can investigate real life without assuming everything is problematic. Using this qualitative process makes it easier to interpret the social facts in the given context (Trueba, 1979).

In participatory research there is always a question of power (Maynard and Purvis, 1994). Since I was involved with the women who participated in the study as a teacher, there can be concerns about what is expected by a perceived authority figure. There is an added concern in this instance - I belong to the majority group in Canada and the women belong to a minority group. The issue of perceived power is great in this instance and therefore, great care needed to be taken to reduce the impact of this situation. Driscoll and McFarland (1989) believe the researcher should be in contact with people she is studying and not maintain a distance that can inhibit understanding (but the issue of power must be

kept in mind). Maguire (1987) says there must be a power sharing between the researcher and the group, and it behooves the researcher to make sure this happens, but also acknowledges that is impossible to remain completely distant..

Total impartiality is impossible in this case, since I came to know the women in this study quite well. However, I also believe it is true that the women came to trust me through the course of time in a language class and later in social contexts, and therefore, I perceive that my interpretation of the results would be accurate and the women would not have silenced nor distorted their voices as cautioned by Weingarten (1994).

Maguire (1987) advocates a dialogue process to investigate women's everyday life experiences, the kind of experiences that are at the base of this study. However, most of the women in this study did not speak English well enough initially to feel comfortable talking about their lives at length in English and there was a great chance for misunderstanding if I had asked questions directly in English. I thought about using a translator for interviews, but rejected this idea because I believed that the women would be reticent to talk about personal issues with a stranger present and if I had used a person know to them, they would not have answered because they may not have wanted that person to know about their personal issues. A different process had to be employed. Brock-Utne (1995) advocates the need for a feminist methodology characterized by an emphasis on lived experience and the significance of everyday life. Wylie (1995) concurs and says that we must deal with women's concrete, particular, personal experience. We need to think about how we can best listen to and make sense of women's accounts of their lives (Ribbins and Edwards, 1995).

Collins (1985) cautions that cultural groups vary in the ways they evaluate the significance of narratives and therefore, some may believe that some things are more or less important.

It is difficult to know in advance what is perceived as more important. Therefore the questions developed were a result of listening to the women practice their English, their stated needs in relation to learning English that were discussed at the beginning of the English language sessions and the literature in this field. This is an important part of a participatory study: participants must be part of the development of the questions however and whenever possible.

I wanted to know about the mothers' daily lives first and therefore the questions reflected this need. The questions were written in English and then given to a woman who had agreed to act as my translator. She is a woman outside of the group under consideration both geographically and socially. (Cantonese is the usual spoken language of the group of women who agreed to be in this study, however, Cantonese and Mandarin are written the same. Therefore, "Chinese" is the language used here by the women and translator.) The translator is Chinese and is sympathetic to the research and cultural sensitivities of the group. She, herself, is in an "astronaut" family, a woman newly arrived in Ontario with her two children with her husband still in Hong Kong. Therefore, she was able to appreciate the issues involved and be cognizant of what questions could be asked without the women feeling I was being too personal and could also elicit relevant information. The translator is fluently bilingual (Chinese and English) and thus could dialogue with me in English and discuss the interpretation of the Chinese women's responses as she translated them.

Duffy (1985) has stressed the need for a respondent to be able to answer in her own way and therefore she said that questions should be as open-ended as possible and that the questions should emerge from the concerns of women being questioned. After I had explained to the women what I was trying to do and asked for their participation, each of the women who agreed to participate in the study was given a copy of the open-ended

questions with a covering letter explaining what was being asked for and why (see appendix). The women were also asked to sign a consent form saying that they understood what was happening and explaining that they could withdraw at any time. The letter, consent form and questions were already translated into Chinese, but the women were also given the original English version. Included in the package was a blank audio tape that I hoped would be used by the women to answer the questions. I asked the women to take the questions home, think about them and then answer the questions by talking into a tape recorder in their own homes. I hoped that this would give the women a lot of time to consider the questions and think about how they wished to respond. I also intended that this process would provide opportunity for the women to have input into the questions themselves. If they did not feel any question was appropriate, they could express their reservations early and we could then have negotiated alternatives. Allowing the women to respond to the questions in their own homes, I believed, would make it possible for them to do it on their own time, whenever they felt they could do it and since they would be in their own homes, feel comfortable enough to say anything. They would have more time to consider their answers and add to them when something came up they would like to say. Without my intervention directly, I hoped they would be more forthcoming, especially in the area of their feelings. Weiler (1991) pointed out that this is absolutely necessary because it is their own personal experiences that can be the source of the knowledge and truth and can contribute to a transformation of their world.

These women are technologically adept, there are many electronic machines in their homes and the use of the tape recorder should not have interfered with their speaking their minds. Driscoll and McFarland (1989) emphasized the need to examine feelings as well as activities and therefore, I had hoped that the time allowed for the women to respond would have made it easier for them to reflect on their feelings and be able to talk about them. The experience then would have been more of a narrative process that could allow

for greater reflection as suggested by Collins (1985). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) confirm that a narrative approach fits best with qualitative research and that through narrative people can explain and reveal themselves.

Collins (1985) also advocates a narrative process because she believes that humans are storytellers. Allowing the women to tell their stories at their own speed, in their own time, with questions that were intended to be triggers only was as close to narrative as possible in the circumstances and I also hoped this would allow their voices to be heard in as a natural way as possible as advocated by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986). Following the process of translation of the tapes and transcription, I planned to use the material to explain the everyday lives of the women in question, their perceptions, their needs vis-à-vis their children and the education system and their beliefs and expectations for their children.

#### 4.2 Pilot Study

Since the process I proposed had never been done before, I conducted a small pilot study prior to the main study. The pilot study was intended to test the process; to see if it was possible to get relevant information using the open-ended questions and the tape recorder. This pilot study would also flag any questions that did not reveal relevant information and perhaps give ideas for other questions that would be useful. I know several other "astronaut" families and therefore I asked three women in these "astronaut" families to take part in the pilot study prior to the final development of the questionnaire. The women I asked to take part in the pilot study live in a community just east of where the women in the main study live and therefore the women in the two groups do not know each other. The three women agreed and they answered the questions within a week. Their responses were translated and after reviewing their responses, I decided to add an

additional question to the main study. This new question asked what similarities and differences the women perceived there were between living in Ontario and living in Hong Kong. This question was asked because this seemed to be an important issue and an area of frustration for the mothers as well as their children.

#### 4.3 Main Study: Data Collection and Group Evolution

I gave the questionnaires to the women in the main study in January, 1996 and they returned their responses within one month. Luckily the responses came in one or two at a time which gave the translator time to do her work at a fairly leisurely pace. Right after the women had completed the questionnaires the interaction between the researcher and the women and among the women themselves changed. Several of the women stated how glad they were to have answered the questions because it gave them a chance to reflect on their situation. This in turn led the group of women to begin to compare notes with each other about their responses. As the dynamics totally changed, so did the focus of the study. The women began to take control of the group and this in turn changed the way the study proceeded.

#### 4.4 Follow-up

The group continued until June, 1996, even though this was not my original intention. Originally I had agreed to continue only until the Easter break in April. While the group was on-going, I gave the responses to the translator and she gave them back to me one at a time which allowed me to think about each one separately and compare the responses as they came in rather than as a total group. After I wrote up the results of the questionnaires in the form of numeric tables in order to see similarities, it was obvious that the process had not worked as well as I had anticipated. The responses were quite one

dimensional and there was virtually no discussion of feelings. However, since the group had totally changed its course, and the impact on the women of the group experience was different from what was expected, I decided to interview three of the women to see if I could get more information. By now it was September and I had totally broken contact with the women as a group. The focus of the follow-up was to be what happened after the classes had ended, how they perceived the group experience and what impact the group experience had had in their lives. I contacted three women chosen because they had children of the same age who go to three different schools in the neighbourhood. The women agreed to let me come to their homes and interview them. These interviews were done during the winter break, December, 1996. This time I interviewed and taped the mothers in English. Following the hour-long interviews, I transcribed each of them. The children of the mothers were present during the interviews because the mothers still had some concerns about being taped in English and wanted to have help with translation if needed. The three mothers all perceived that their children spoke English better than they did. Therefore, it became clear that the mothers were still not totally confident in their English skills.

I had also decided that it would be very important to talk with the children of the three women who agreed to be interviewed as the follow-up. This study began with a question about the children in "astronaut" families and therefore, it seemed essential to try to get some input from the initial group that inspired the study. The three women whom I selected all have children in Grade 7. This maintained the necessary homogeneity suggested by Goetz and LeCompte. Being in Grade 7 also meant that the children were old enough to talk with me and had come here from Hong Kong recently enough to remember what their life was like before coming to Canada. The setting for the conversations was their own rooms in their homes and it was during a time of helping them with an English project they were doing at school

The other aspect of this study is the teacher pre-service and in-service implications. The mothers have their ideas; the children theirs and therefore, it was important to get the perspective of the administrators and teachers in the schools about what they are doing in the area of "astronaut" families. The three children each go to a different school in the area and therefore I also interviewed the three different principals and home room teachers in these schools to get their perspectives on "astronaut" families, their needs and what the teachers and administrators feel they should and could do. Interviewing those outside the main study group was recommended by Driscoll and McFarland (1989), who stressed the need to get feedback from informants in order to get a better perspective on the main results. The principals and home room teachers were interviewed individually in their schools in January, 1997.

Using this triangulation method I hoped to gain an even greater insight into the interactions among the important players in the issues under consideration

#### 4.5 Research Questions

The two research questions that began this study were: how do the mothers usually spend their time and would it be beneficial, from their standpoint, for them to be actively involved in their children's schools?

#### Main Study

Moving, in and of itself, causes great disruption to a family. Moving into a new country with a different language and different culture can cause even greater disruption. Add this

disruption, for the women in this study, to the fact that they made this move without their husbands and it is even more difficult, even though most moved because they perceived that it was the best thing for their children. Most of the women in this group have never lived in a single family, detached house nor have they been responsible for all the tasks that must be done in such an environment. Therefore, in an effort to understand their situation, the first series of questions, as suggested by Silverman (1985) dealt with how the women spend their time during typical days and on the weekends and with whom they interact during these times (see Appendix). I hoped by knowing how they spend their time I would gain insight into their time constraints and a better understanding of what actually goes on in these homes.

Canada is a bilingual country, with English and French as the two official languages. Chinese is not one of the official languages. However, Canada is also considered to be a multicultural country. This means that people who come to Canada from countries in which English or French is not spoken can still speak their first language, participate in cultural activities and get on quite well if they live in an area in which there are many other people from the same home lands. Many stores, banks and other services are provided in the first language of many people new to Canada and therefore, it might never be necessary for some to fully integrate into the English or French scene in Canada.

However, most education in Ontario is conducted in English and for young people new to Canada to receive a good education they must be able to converse and work in English during their school careers. They may choose to work in their own language when they are finished their schooling, but most jobs will require them to speak and work in English.

The women in this study are not fluent English speakers and believe they have relatively few opportunities to participate in formal English development for themselves in their everyday lives. However, they do recognize the importance of their children developing good English skills. This was also the issue that prompted this study. Therefore, the second set of questions dealt with what the mothers believe they can do to assist their children in their English development, given their time constraints and their own English language ability.

Even though the middle class school system in Ontario believes parental involvement in schools is both helpful and advantageous, the mothers in this study come from a completely different educational background. In an education system where Confucian values are still strong, the high value we purport to place on parental involvement in the school is absent. The Confucian value involved here is the one of each person having his/her own particular role to play: students must learn; parents must provide the correct environment at home. As students from this environment are expected to be mainly responsible for their own learning, the third set of questions dealt with the beliefs the mothers have of the reasons for their children's academic success and failure (Yokota-Adachi and Geva, 1997).

Finally, there was a series of questions that asked the mothers about actual experiences they had had with the schools in which their children study here in Ontario. This part also included questions about the hopes and expectations they hold for their children's education here.

## Follow-up

The questions asked of the three mothers in the follow-up were about their feelings one year later, the changes that may have occurred in their lives because of the experience they had in the group and their contact with their children's schools in the past year.

I did not develop a formal set of questions to ask the children. I talked with them about their feelings and changes in their lives since coming to Canada. I asked what had been the most difficult things for them here and how they felt about learning English and being here with their mother alone.

I formulated a set of questions for the principals and teachers in the three schools. These questions revolved around their concerns about teaching students from "astronaut" families and whether they had special programmes for students and their mothers (see appendix). They were also asked about the unique characteristics of their schools and their beliefs and roles in teaching children from minority groups.

## 4.6 Sample

A local Chinese church provided space for the women to attend classes in English in response to an expressed need on the part of the minister in the church. I had agreed to work with them on English development for several months in return for learning about their lives here. The minister has had involvement in the school in which I teach because his son attends the school. He believed the women in his congregation would benefit from language classes. The classes were set up for two days a week for one and a half hours in the afternoons through negotiation with the women. These women all had come to Canada with their children while their husbands remained in Hong Kong. Their husbands

visit two or three times a year for two to four weeks. From this group, ten women agreed to take part in the research study.

The children of the women go to the schools in the neighbourhood of the church. The two boys and one girl are in Grade seven and are in the beginning stages of their English development. They attend ESL classes in their schools.

The principals of the three schools which the children attend agreed to let me interview them and each selected a Grade 7 homeroom teacher for me to interview. The interviews with the principals took place in their offices. I interviewed the teachers in their classrooms and staff room.

## CHAPTER 5

### Results

#### 5.1 Pilot study

Three mothers who live in a community just east of the community in which the mothers in the main study live agreed to take part in the pilot study to ascertain whether the process and questions would elicit useful responses. These women all had the same characteristics as the women in the main study, that is, they have come from Hong Kong, been in Canada three years or less and are here with their children but without their husbands for most of the year.

When I approached these three women and asked them if they would help me out by trying out the questions, they asked if they could respond in writing instead of using the tape recorder. They said they wanted to be able to jot down ideas whenever they had a minute, instead of doing it all in one sitting, even though this had not been my expectation.

The women responded in writing and their responses, once translated, provided relevant information and showed that the questions could bring out responses that would give insight into the issues involved. This pilot was also the impetus to add the question about changes in their lives since coming to Canada.

#### 5.2 Main Study

Following the recommendations of Goetz and LeCompte (1984) this study involved a small (10 women) relatively homogeneous cultural group. The women were all from Hong Kong, and have lived in a small Ontario town for the past three years or less with their children but without their husbands. Goetz and LeCompte also suggested the study

group should live in a geographically bounded site. The women all live within four kilometers of my school in a rectangular area bounded by the three schools their children attend.

The composition of the mothers' ESL group remained in flux for the first several months of sessions, October to December. Some women came and went until a stable group of 12 remained. While the group membership was stable, all the women were not always in attendance at every session. Each had family or household issues with which to deal during the weeks of the sessions, for example, one child broke her leg and the mother was forced to take her to the doctor on regular occasions. Several of the women came and went to Hong Kong themselves for a couple of weeks. Two of the women had visitors from Hong Kong (not their husbands) and so elected to stay at home while the visitors were there.

Once the group became stable, the group members verbally contracted with me to remain in the group until April so that their stories could be collected and discussed. April also seemed a natural ending point. This is when many courses end and with the arrival of spring, I believed the women would not want to be inside for several hours each week.

The mothers in this study were unknown to me and each other prior to meeting at the church for the first time for the ESL sessions, but readily agreed to take part in the classes and the study even though they expressed reluctance to speak in English to answer my questions in the study. They were relieved when I explained that they would be able to communicate their responses in Cantonese.

Ten women from the group of 12 eventually agreed to participate in the main study, and they also requested that they be able to answer the set of questions in writing rather than on tape just as the women in the pilot study had wanted to do.

### 5.3 Demographics

The women are in their late 20's to late 30's. They have been in Canada with their children from half a year to five years, for an average length of one and a half years. All but one woman fit the initial criteria of being in Canada three years or less. However, this woman's English development and acculturation was the same as those who have been in Canada for less time in that her vocabulary was about the same as the women who had been here only two years and her grammar was also similar to theirs and therefore, her responses have been included.

Six of the mothers completed secondary school in Hong Kong; three finished junior high school and one went as far as grade 6. The translator whom I used for the study said that this amount of education is typical of this generation of women from Hong Kong. Most did not go on to post secondary school because they did not have easy access to university in Hong Kong and therefore tended not to pursue higher education. They were mainly expected to marry early.

The mothers and their children live in large houses (described as "monster homes" in the media). They have beautiful and very large kitchens. Their furniture is mainly of a type that would be found in Hong Kong although they said that they bought a lot of it here. Each of the children in the family has a computer for school work. The property around the homes is substantial. Most of the front yards have been professionally landscaped, while the back yards are mainly grass. This environment is totally different from what they

had experienced in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong they all lived in large apartment blocks in apartment complexes. They would generally eat most of their meals at restaurants not at home.

#### 5.4 Mothers' responses

For the purposes of reporting the responses of the women in this study, the quotes are literal translations of what they wrote in response to the initial questionnaire and said in the taped interviews, each woman has been given a pseudonym reflecting her heritage.

**Lo Lim:** The way I spent my days in Hong Kong is completely different from what in here. In Hong Kong, no matter what happened, my husband stood by me. At home, my maid took care of all household affairs. But I have to do all of these by myself now. I always console myself with the saying that "when you gain something here, you will lose another there".

The mothers have an average of 2.2 children here. There is a large age range among the children, from 4 years to 20 years, so the mothers must deal with a variety of school situations, and academic achievements. The average age of the children is 12 years and 7 of the mothers are dealing with children in their teenage years as well as pre-teen and older.

The families chose to come to this part of Canada/Ontario for a number of reasons

**May Wan:** There is freedom here. I have friends here too.

**Kam Sue:** I like the environment of Toronto. It is easy to find a job.

**Way Yin:** My relatives and friends are also living here.

**Lo May:** There are many schools. Especially there are more universities. The houses are large and the environment is quiet.

**Fay Lo:** I have visited here before, and I like this place very much.

In an effort to understand the whole of the women's days and different activities in which they participated, the questions were broken down into parts. Firstly, the questions dealt with how their spent their time with their children then, what they did when their children were at school.

1. (a) How did they spend the time in the morning before their children went to school

Mainly the mothers assisted their children in getting ready for school and seeing that they got to school safely.

**Joy Nan:** Before they go to school, I make breakfast for them.

**Sui Tam:** In the morning, I make breakfast for my children and then take them to school.

**Fay Lo:** In the morning: get up at 7 a.m. and prepare breakfast immediately. Pack lunch for my children. Wake them up, help them to wash their face, comb their hair, get dressed and eat breakfast. Then, take them to school.

A couple of the mothers do not need to take their children to school because they can go by school bus. One mother's son goes to university, so he drives himself.

1. (b) After the children go to school in the morning

Most of the mothers did their housework in the morning or went shopping for groceries.

**May Wan:** do housework, go grocery shopping.

**Fay Lo:** After they go to school, I do the housework, clear the dishes, make the beds, then watch TV news.

Way Yin, whose children are 17 and 18 years old, said: "After they go to school, I will sleep for a while if I haven't got enough sleep." Min Yan said, "Then I sometimes have dim-sum with my siblings or friends". Sui Tam does something none of the other mothers mentioned: "I attend fitness class twice a week".

1. (c) In the afternoon before the children come home:

The afternoon activities are extensions of the mornings - going out for lunch, shopping, getting necessary personal and household tasks done.

Way Yin: in the afternoon, before they come home, I will have dim-sum in the restaurant with my friends. We will go together to the department stores or supermarkets which are offering a sale. Sometimes I go to the beauty salon.

1. (d) In the afternoon after the children come home:

The late afternoons are very busy. The mothers supervise their children's homework, prepare supper, take their children to tutors and extra classes.

May Wan: review lessons.

Kam Sue: Every Wednesday, I send him to the private tutor. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, he goes swimming; on Friday nights, he has Mandarin lesson.

Fay Lo: When the children come home, give them something to eat, watch TV with them, chat with them and ask them what they have learnt at school today, supervise them doing their homework, cook supper.

1. (e) In the evening before the children go to bed:

Many of the children stay up very late (after 11:00 or 12:00), especially if they are in secondary school. The mothers do some activities with the younger children if they have any and some of their own activities before the children go to bed.

**Kam Sue:** in the evening, we watch TV, play video games together. Before he goes to bed, read some books, not the textbooks.

**Min Yan:** After supper, we watch TV for half an hour. It will be 10 o'clock when dishes and cleanup have been done. My son goes to bed at 10 and my daughter at 12.

**Sui Tam:** Before going to bed, I tell them some stories.

1. (f) After the children go to bed:

The mothers get some time to themselves after the children go to bed. However, some are so tired, they simply go to bed themselves.

**Joy Nan:** I finish what I need to do. Sometimes I do some reading; sometimes I call my friends.

**Fay Lo:** After they go to bed, I settle some more personal business, and then go to bed.

**Lo May:** After they go to bed, I do what I like to do.

**Way Yin:** After they go to bed, I go to bed too.

The work of the women does not end on Fridays. They still must do a great many things on the weekends. They were asked how they spent a typical weekend and their responses showed that they were very busy with their children during that time too.

**Way Yin:** On week ends, my children and I go shopping, watch movies, eat dim-sum, play badminton, swim.

**Kam Sue:** On Saturday mornings, [my son] has Chinese and mathematics lessons.

**Mín Yan:** On Sundays, we go for dim-sum, sometimes we go shopping or buy groceries. Because my daughter is older, I don't have to arrange anything for her. My son does not like shopping, he always stays at home.

**Hui Wo:** On weekends, my children and I sometimes go shopping in the malls, sometimes stay at home, watching TV or cleaning furniture.

The women in this study are here without their husbands and therefore, if they wish to converse with another adult they must either telephone a friend or relative or visit with him/her outside the home. The mothers were asked whom they would see, besides their children, on a typical weekday or weekend.

Most of the women said they would see friends and three said they would see a relative.

**Way Yin:** On a typical day, I see my schoolmates, neighbours or friends emigrated from Hong Kong.

Several of the women said they played Mah jong with friends or relatives.

**Kam Sue:** In my typical day, I go for dim-sum and play Majong with my friends.

Besides having to deal with their children, do housework, see their friends when time permits, the women have the total responsibility for the household maintenance and finances. There are many other people with whom they must interact for these situations, for example, plumbers, landscapers, lawyers, accountants.

When asked if they ever needed help in household maintenance and finances, most of the women replied that they felt competent to deal with these issues on their own. They would call on help only as a last resort. If help was needed then friends were enlisted in

most cases. Since there are so many professional people in the area who speak Cantonese, it is fairly easy for the mothers to conduct necessary business in their first language.

- Joy Nan: I go to pay the bills by myself or have them paid by autopay scheme.
- Sui Tam: Household affairs, paying bills and buying things are all done by me.
- Hui Wo: When I need somebody to help me out in some of the household affairs such as lawn care I will look up the advertisement in the magazines or flyers. I pay all bills by myself. I call on different people to help me out with different problems. For example: I ask my friends to help me with problems concerning hydro and water, I ask my accountant to deal with my income tax. I handle affairs relating to citizenship and school at my best.

The mothers in this study have high expectations for their children. Generally they expect their children to complete university and get good jobs.

- Lo May: I hope they can get an ideal job and can take care of themselves.
- Min Yan: I hope they can contribute to the society by means of what they have learnt.
- Kam Sue: To do some white-collar jobs such as working in the bank, accountant
- Way Yin: Professionals such as accountant, pharmacist, profession in computer.

One mother felt she could not answer this question because her children are too young

With these expectations, one of the most important issues facing the children of the mothers in this study is the learning of English. The mothers and the children may be able to live day to day without a great deal of English, but the children will have difficulties academically in Ontario schools until their English proficiency reaches a certain level. The more help the children can get, the sooner they will be able to achieve academically.

When asked if and how they helped their children with English development the mothers had a variety of strategies..

Lo May: To help my children learning English, I provide them with computer, audio tape recorder and dictionary. In summer vacation, I require them to take summer courses.

Joy Nan: I encourage them to read more English books, listen to radio, watch English TV. I try my best talking to them in English.

Min Yan: I cannot help them because their English is better than mine.

Three mothers specifically said they had hired private English tutors and another mother hinted that she also had a tutor (according to the translator).

While they may not feel confident enough to directly help their children learn English, they could perhaps assist in other areas of school work. Therefore, the mothers were asked about any help they gave in these areas.

Fay Lo: I teach them to read Chinese, History, Science and story books. I buy books and cassette tapes for them, do experiments.

Wui Ho: I take them to learning centres for Mathematics and Mandarin lessons.

One other mother gave a similar answer and three mothers simply said "no" (that they could not help their child.)

Recent research has shown that maintaining one's first language helps in the development of the second language. Therefore, the mothers were asked if they exposed their children to and helped them read Chinese books and newspapers. Most mothers do this.

Hui Wo: I help my children in reading Chinese newspapers.

**Min Yan:** I help my son, but not my daughter, in reading Chinese stories. My daughter is very good at Chinese. She always reads classical Chinese literature, magazines and fiction.

Only one mother specifically stated that she believes the continued use of Chinese is worthwhile.

**Fay Lo:** I help my children learning Chinese. It is beneficial knowing one more language. If they know Chinese, they can keep in touch with their former classmates and relatives. Besides, they may need Chinese in their future career.

As part of their answers about helping in other subject areas, several of the mothers said they took their children to Mandarin classes. Again, they employ outside help in maintaining the Chinese language..

Since they do not often directly help their children in their school work, the mothers were asked what they believed their role is in their children's education.

**Joy Nan:** Encourage them. Let them know how to accept and cope with the new environment. Talk with them more. Learn with them and tackle problems with them. Comfort them. Explain to them the effects and advantages of different educational systems

**Fay Lo:** In the education of my children, I think I play a very important role. Besides taking care of their nutrition and clothes, I have to "educate" them. Educate includes inculcating a correct concept of morality and helping them to acquire knowledge.

**Lo May:** In the education of my children, my role is to encourage them to work hard.

**Min Yan:** In the education of my children, my role is to drive them study hard and behave well. Tell them that accomplishing what one should do is one's responsibility. Encourage my children to work hard, to think in the right direction, to develop their mental and physical abilities properly. Remind them to set a goal for themselves, not to fall into a wrong track and not to be lazy.

To achieve their goals, the mothers believe that students must achieve academically. Therefore, the beliefs of the mothers for children's academic success and failure were probed. The mothers were asked what the children should do in school to succeed.

- Min Yan: Their responsibilities include working hard, loving their parents, respecting their teachers, getting along with their peers. To succeed in school, not only they need intelligence, they should also work hard.
- Lo May: In order to succeed in school, children should work hard to achieve good results.
- Sui Tam: "I think if my children can understand what teachers teach them, and can apply what they have learnt, they will succeed in school."
- Fay Lo: "I believe that my children should take "initiative" to learn, should work "harder". They should pay attention to their study, The intellectual ability and degree of diligence determine how much they can achieve in school."

As to reasons for not succeeding:

- Way Yin: not attentive in class
- May Wan: they don't review the lessons.
- Lo Lim: Too much freedom in the teaching and learning in Canada is the cause of poor performance.
- Lo May: They are not doing well in school because they do not pay attention to their study or they sometimes get lazy.

The major role of the schools is to assist the student to succeed to the best of their abilities. Therefore, the mothers were asked their opinions of the schools their children attend. They were asked about the expectations they had of the schools, what they liked and what they felt the schools could do better.

- Min Yan:** I hope their school can teach students politeness, help students to achieve good results in their study, and to make good development in their mental and physical abilities.
- Lo May:** I hope my children's school has teachers with good qualifications, has good discipline and provides more opportunities for my children to learn.
- Fay Lo:** I expect my children's school to be a good school which has a well established administrative structure; provides sufficient textbooks; is well equipped; is aware of the students' moral, intellectual, physical, social and artistic education.

Several mothers expressed the expectations that the school would: "give more homework". The main thing that is liked about the schools their children attend is expressed by May Wan: "The teachers are good". This was the response given by all the mothers.

Teachers and administrators can always do better or change what is going on. When asked about what changes they would like, the mothers responded:

- Min Yan:** I think the school can emphasize politeness of the students, ask them to do more physical exercise and more homework
- Lo May:** [I] think the school should assign more textbooks for students. Their teaching method should include pushing students to finish their school work and to have their homework perfectly done. Give them more chances to read reference books.
- Lo Lim:** Basically, it is to give them more homework so that they will not get indolent at home.

Since the focus of this study is on the mothers, their children and their school, the mothers were asked if they would like to become involved in their children's schools and in what way they feel they could be involved. Most of the mothers expressed the belief that, although they might like to become involved, they could not because of their limited English.

Hui Ho: Actually I like to attend the activities in school. However, my capability is limited.

Joy Nan: Not for the time being, because I am also learning English through ESL class.

Fay Lo: I am willing to take part in my children's school. Unfortunately, for the time being, I am unable to communicate in English.

When asked if they had had any experience in their children's schools, several mentioned that they had attended parent teacher meetings.

Lo Lim: I participated in a school meeting once. On that occasion, a teacher asked if anyone needed Chinese translation. However, nobody raised their hands. So I gave up the request. I didn't understand what was discussed in the meeting. Therefore, I never go to any meetings again

Hui Wo: When I visit my children's school, I find myself a stranger. It may be due to my limited capability in English.

Going to meetings seems to be their idea of what participation in school is. When they were asked about volunteering in the schools, they said their language was a barrier and they were not qualified anyway. However, several of the mothers said that if the school would offer ESL classes for adults and they could attend, then

Lo Lim: Having more contact with teachers, parents would be more willing to participate in other activities.

Sui Tam: I will participate in the social gatherings to meet other parents.

It is impossible to ask all the questions that one might like and therefore, the mothers were asked if they would like to make any other comments. They had some important additions to make, for example: they want the teachers to know about the special interests and inclinations their children have; they want teachers to listen to parental ideas about education; they believe the teachers should understand their children's characters; teachers need to learn and respect the holidays celebrated by cultural communities. The main thing they would like teachers to be aware of is that respect for others is a paramount issue.

### 5.5 Evolution of the group

The group process became an integral part of the study after the women answered the questions I had given them. In the beginning (that is October, 1995) the women were very much like other adult ESL classes that I have worked with on many occasions in many other settings. They came to the sessions, did the conversation exercises and went home. However, once the mothers began discussing their responses to the questions with each other, around the end of January, everything changed. I believe that through this process, I have had greater insight into their responses.

At the end of January (end of term in our schools) one mother brought her son's report card from school and asked for help in understanding what it was really saying so she could go to the parent-teacher interview with some questions. We rehearsed the questions she could ask and the possible answers she might hear in order to make it easier for her, even though she planned to take a translator with her to the school.

From then on, more and more of the women began to bring household and family issues to the sessions. They brought their American Express Card bills in which there were

enclosures they did not understand; they brought their hydro and water bills for explanation; they asked for help in using the public library.

By the time Chinese New Year came in February, they were bringing food to the sessions and beginning to discuss personal relations in their families. One woman's mother died in Hong Kong and upon her return, the other women in the group gathered around and gave her a great deal of support. They brought their problems with their teen age children to the group. Some wanted clarification that what their teenage children were doing was acceptable in Canada because some of the behaviours were not acceptable from their point of view, for example, not going to a detention given by a teacher. They were assured that this was not acceptable in Canada either.

We began to have more conversations about teenagers in Canada, expectations of young people, the schooling in Canada, life in Canada in general. When their husbands came to visit, they talked about the changes this made in their well-established daily routines and how their children were affected. They also complained about having to make full course Chinese dinners for their families when their husbands were here. These are a lot of work.

When April came, I reminded the mothers that the language sessions would be ending and we would be going our separate ways as had been agreed initially. The women all expressed their wish that this not be the case. They wanted to continue to meet, not necessarily for strictly English practice, but to learn more about their surroundings and gain support from each other. With the arrival of spring, they wanted to get out and see the area. Several mothers expressed the wish to find some good fishing spots to go to in the summer with their children.

I went to a local hotel that had a rack of brochures about attractions around the local area. We had to stay fairly close to home as the women needed to be home after school for their children. I brought the brochures to the church and the women looked them all over. We discussed the distances involved and what they might see at each of the places. Together we drew up an itinerary for the next three months. While the group members were becoming friends, I still felt I was in the role of tutor and explainer. This all changed once we started out on our excursions. Each new step in the process was resulting in changes in the dynamics of the group and the relationship between myself and the women. Sanguinette (1994) discussed how having a woman's group can help forge relationships and this was just what was happening.

We gathered on the mornings of the excursions in the church parking lot and pooled cars so that those who did not drive could come, and we would not have too many cars going along the roads. The women had decided among themselves before we met on the first trip day that after our trip we would all go to a dim-sum restaurant for lunch. This was another instance of them taking control of their lives and learning and this became the pattern of the days that followed. They began including me in their families. They invited me for dinner to their homes and I met their visiting mothers, grandmothers and mothers-in-law. Sometimes, these visiting relatives were also included in our trips. They even tried to teach me Majong. They were not successful! However, the mothers were continuing to take ever more control of their learning and the process of expanding their horizons. They were proving the value of education in playing a part in women's empowerment (Barr and Birke, 1994)

The first trip we took was to the local "English" (their expression) Super Centre grocery store. In our area it is very easy for the women to shop only in Chinese stores because there are quite a few of them and so most of the women had never been to the English

supermarket. We wandered up and down the aisles and discussed what the various meats were and how to cook them. They spent some time looking at the frozen foods and decided they were a good idea for fast food dinners for their children when they had to get out quickly for math classes, piano lessons, and other extra curricular activities. Now, while they mainly still shop in the Chinese stores, they do, on occasion go to the local English store and they do feel they can cook "Canadian". This Thanksgiving (October, 1996) several families got together to have a turkey dinner with all the trimmings for the first time. They also included some traditional Chinese food in case they didn't like the turkey. Luckily, they found it great!

We went to many other places around the area from April to June. We went to the village of St. Jacobs to see a small Ontario town and buy some local crafts. We visited Casa Loma and even one woman's 90 year old grandmother climbed the steps to the tower. We took the subway in Toronto and walked through the "underground city" and then over to Skydome. In May, we went to Cullen Gardens, in Pickering, to look at the flowers and trees they might be able to put in their gardens or suggest to their landscapers what they would like added. They all walked around with paper and pencil, writing down the names of the plants that took their fancy so they could buy them at the local nursery.

Each trip we went on involved people teaming up differently so that I was always with different people. I really believe I became part of their group. As we went along the highways, they kept in touch by cellular phone. One day, we lost contact with a group in one car. The driver had turned off to get gas. However, with the cellular phones we quickly found out where she was and guided her back to our convoy.

During one of our outings, the one mother who had worked outside the home in Hong Kong (Fay Lo) expressed the desire to see if she could work in her children's school. She

does not drive and therefore would have to be involved in her children's school. She had been a teacher's aide in handicapped classes in Hong Kong. With her training she would have been a real asset to any school in our area. We have a real need for teachers from various cultural backgrounds and yet at the present they are not readily available. There are rules about being able to teach in Ontario and the paper work alone can be extremely daunting. I agreed to contact the Ministry of Education for the necessary papers. Fay Lo was also seeing this opportunity as one where she would improve her English. The papers needing to be filled out were lengthy and required many documents from Hong Kong. We gathered together all that seemed necessary and sent them along to the Ministry. Three months later a form letter came back requesting further documentation - papers that had been sent. I telephoned the Ministry to get clarification and never managed to actually speak to the person designated to handle this case. Fay Lo gave up on this avenue.

Concurrent with this process, I suggested she volunteer in the special education class in the school her children attend. I contacted the principal who seemed very eager. However, the principal never called her and Fay Lo has subsequently become busy in other ways. What a loss to the system!

My continual contact with the women had to cease in September as I had to return to work. As we parted in June, we all said we would see each other in the fall. Throughout the summer, several families returned to Hong Kong; others took time to see more of Ontario and so I had no contact with them during that time.

Just after school started in September, I was invited to a dim sum lunch with the group. They told me they had decided to continue their study of English. They have made arrangements with the same church for a meeting place and a fluently bilingual secretary in the church to work with them. They also want to continue to meet with me on a monthly

basis to practice what they consider "small talk" over lunch. I believe they have become empowered to take control of their learning and their lives here in Ontario.

## 5.6 Interviews

The three mothers whom I selected for interviews agreed to talk with me about their experiences since January, 1996 (Lo Lim, Hui Wo and May Wan). They said that they believed their English had not improved very much but with encouragement agreed that they could be interviewed and taped in English. We gathered in their living rooms or kitchens with their children present. I first explained why I wanted to talk with them and use the tape recorder. I also showed them the initial responses they had written last year so that we had a starting point for our discussion. The initial question was, "How has your life changed because of the ESL classes and the experiences we had?" I expected to follow the questions as I had outlined (see appendix). However, this did not turn out to be the case. After the first question, the interview evolved into a conversation about what was happening to them right now. I kept the question list in front of me in order to try to get something on each issue but each of the mothers really wanted to talk about issues that were uppermost in their minds at the moment and use me as they had during our language sessions - as a sounding board and tester of standards for behaviour.

Each of the mothers did say that she was no longer as lonely as she had been before coming to the language group.

May Wan: I do not feel so lonely. Each morning just phone, how are you today, any problem, no problem.  
all family go to church, but not make friends  
now is better for me

Lo Lim: easier than last year, more friends - ask them  
busy now with friends

Hui Wo: go with friends on trips

Hui Wo and her children and Lo Lim and her children went to Windsor and Detroit during a few days of the winter break and said they had a good time. The children have taken to calling the other woman adult "auntie". This is typical of these kinds of relationships. While there is no blood connection, close friends are often called "auntie" and "uncle". This result fits into the early theories of Gilligan (1983) and others and reiterated by Caffarella and Olson (1993) that a sense of identity for most women comes primarily through connections and relational embeddedness. This could also help what Chow (1991) has identified as a problem for immigrant women - their inability to support each other. Through the coming together for an educative purpose, they found they could support each other in many other ways.

I did manage to ask about their relationship with the school their children attend. May Wan said that she still does not go into the school building her son attends. She waits outside for him each day to drive him home but will not go inside. She said there are not many Chinese parents and children in the school and there are no Chinese teachers in the school, thus she remains reluctant to enter. She said that she does not read the material that comes home from the school because it is in English and it is much too difficult for her to read English yet. In my interview, the principal of this school confirmed that he does not believe in sending material home in the languages of the children and therefore all communications from the school are in English. One reason he gave is because it would be very expensive to translate so many communications into so many languages. There are many first languages in this schools and no one is in the majority. The principal in this school had not investigated the possibility of having translations done by a parent. The other reason that he gave is he feels that it would make the minority parents different and separate and he wants integration of all the children and their families as soon as possible.

The principal of Hui Wo's school said she does send some things home in Chinese, but Hui Wo said that it is very rare from her experience. It seems that the most common pattern is that communications are delivered in English.

May Wan believes that her children are now doing much better than last year: "my daughter cry every day last year, now she happy; my son no problem in school" and so she herself is happier. She still spends the majority of her time each day cleaning and cooking but her affiliation with her Chinese church gives her strength. "I sit quiet in church. I go for my heart." She does not participate in any church activities outside of attending on Sundays. She said, "not friendly, don't talk with me." She does have some friends over to her house to play majong sometimes. However, taking everything into account, while I was interviewing her, she seemed more content and more satisfied with her life here in Canada.

While interviewing Lo Lim I found her hesitant and reluctant to really talk about much other than what is happening right now, but she seemed to be more comfortable with some aspects of her children's schools. She stated: "I know more about school now. Can say English to son's home room teacher." However, when notes come home from school she said: "Just have a look; if not need to sign, do not read, too trouble." This way of handling communications from the school almost resulted in disaster. She almost got left out of her daughter's Winter Concert performance because she had not read the note from school. It was only when her daughter started to cry the evening of the concert that she got her older son to translate the note and she realized how important it was. Luckily she got to the concert and was very proud of her daughter: "I liked very much."

Even though I tried to bring the interview with Lo Lim around to my questions, she had a particular subject she wanted to talk about with me: walking to school and exercise. All

the mothers had said they felt the schools should provide more physical education and so this was obviously still on Lo Lim's mind. Her younger son, in Grade 4, would like to walk to school or ride his bicycle, but Lo Lim asked: "Is it safe to walk? The street is dangerous." We talked about the advantages of letting him walk as a form of fitness because there will not be more physical education classes at the school. We discussed the strategy of her going to meet him at the corner of their street and the street leading to the school instead of going all the way to the school; but this was not acceptable because she said, "daughter never comes out of school at the same time" and she certainly is not about to let her daughter be alone under any circumstances. Her daughter is in Grade 2.

The use of the telephone was a great problem for all the mothers from the very beginning of the groups sessions. Lo Lim said that she is somewhat more comfortable using the telephone now. Then her older son said: "she called to get car appointment herself," and she acknowledged that it is easier to use the telephone now although she still makes her oldest son talk on the telephone if she can. May Wan is obviously also using the telephone much more as she calls Hui Wo or Lo Lim or they call her each day.

There appears to much more sharing of the work load in the house this year than last.

Lo Lim: family more close now; son not do anything in Hong Kong, not communicate, now help each other

May Wan: my daughter and son help me; daughter clean up her room, share the work

Hui Wo: daughter helps sometimes.

Interviewing Hui Wo gave me the feeling that she is still somewhat insecure in her life here. She really did not want to talk about her own personal life but instead always came back to the school and what her older daughter should be doing, "she is not doing good,

the teacher said she does not talk." Hui Wo was already worrying about having to go to a parent-teacher interview right after Winter Break. She said her older daughter would be able to translate with the teacher of the younger daughter, but she did not know what to do when it came to the teacher of her older daughter.

Her other main concern was her son. He is presently in nursery school and a Montessori school. He is to start kindergarten in September and Hui Wo wants him to go to the same school her two daughters go to so that she can drive them all together each day. The problem is that they do not live in the catchment area for the school they are attending. Initially the girls had to go to a different school because the school they were supposed to go to was full and then when space became available, the girls did not want to leave the few friends they had managed to make. Now the school in their area is not full and the administrator expects Hui Wo's son to go to the school. The principal is, of course, concerned about keeping staff members by maintaining his enrollment. Hui Wo asked for help in dealing with this issue. Just as the women had asked for help during our sessions the year before, they still see me as one who would help them in their dealings with Canadian bureaucracies and services.

I agreed to talk with the principal of the school to which Hui Wo wanted to send her son. The issue was resolved when the principal agreed to take Hui Wo's son if she agreed to get him there everyday, since no bus would be available. She agreed to this as she is already taking the girls each day.

I had believed that the relationship that developed between the women themselves had enhanced their living here and the responses to the follow-up showed this to be the case. Having been in their homes, gives one a feeling of understanding and knowing. I believe this has also enhanced the power of the results of this study. However, even though all said their lives were better now, all three cried at some point in the interview. They still

seem very fragile when they allow themselves to let go. They still seem to be mainly concerned about how their children are fitting into the Canadian scene and less about their own issues.

### 5.7 Principals' interviews

I followed the same pattern for the interviews of all three principals. I initially wrote each of them a letter outlining what I was trying to do. I then called each of them to request an appointment and the name of a Grade 7 teacher they felt would be best for me to interview. I made appointments with the principals and met each in his/her office. I gave each a copy of the consent form to sign and a copy of the questions I wanted them to discuss with me. As it turned out, they had all also heard about what I was doing from others, my principal, the ESL consultant.

I first asked about the characteristics of their schools in comparison to the school in which I teach. According to their descriptions each of their schools is very different and also very different from mine. The school that is closest to mine (3 blocks north) is similar to the school in which I teach for numbers (over 700 students) but the majority of students are from other parts of East Asia, not Hong Kong, approximately 70% -designated school 1.

The two schools that are about 3 kilometers west of mine are different again. One is much smaller with only 350 students and having 15% from East Asia - designated school 2. The third school is a senior school with only Grades 4-8. The size is also smaller than mine- 460 students - designated school 3. The majority of students in the third school come from areas other than East Asia. They come from Russia, Iran and European countries.

The principal in the smallest school (2) openly talked about the problems with integration in her school: "Lots of speaking of Cantonese among the Chinese students and this tends to isolate them from the other students and since they are in the minority they are really set apart."

According to the principals in the other two schools, the students also speak their first language, especially "in the halls and lunch room".

All three principals talked about the high expectations that they and their staff have of the students no matter where they have come from or how recently they have arrived. They believe that it is these high expectations that make their schools good for the students. They do recognize the need for "transition time" (School 2) when the students have come from non-English speaking countries and the difficulty of speaking English but they still want total integration as quickly as possible.

They all believe they have a "welcoming" atmosphere in their schools and that the "values, beliefs and experiences" of the students are respected by the staff and other students. Each school has a parent group of some kind. In School 2 there is an ESL parent network. They phone each other when special events are happening. There are also adult ESL classes in the portables in the school yard. The principal in School 1 said that there is a "strong network for parents" in his school. However, it is not particularly for newly arrived parents. There are monthly parenting groups in School 3 and according to the principal the parents are personally contacted by other parents prior to the meetings.

All three principals expressed concern about getting the parents more involved in the school, but recognize the constraints for women who are here without their husbands. The principal in School 1 said, " I am frustrated because many constantly say yes and nod

their heads even when they do not understand. There seems to be a delay in contact with the school when dad is not here. I perceive that the mothers may not be allowed to go out on their own." At School 2, the principal expressed that, "it is hard to reach moms because some don't drive and therefore cannot get to the school easily." The third principal said that we, "need to recognize that parents are doing what they have to." He also recognized that there "are cultural perceptions of the role of women and some seem fearful of expressing themselves."

When it comes to providing specific cultural experiences and integrating the diverse cultural groups, all three talked about having special events, and since they were interviewed just prior to Chinese New Year, this was the most recent event. Yet, this is what they have: special events, not on-going integration of the cultural traditions of the groups in their schools. The special events still seem to revolve around "food and festival" that is having children bring traditional food and demonstrate special dances, and special songs rather than an integration of all cultures throughout the day and the year. Canadian content is viewed as the most important service they feel they can render the students.

As the principal in School 1 said, "there are curriculum constraints" and in School 2 the principal expressed the belief that, "the board could be doing more." In contrast, the belief that "immersion is wonderful; the students need to fit in as soon as possible" was the response of the principal in School 3. Therefore, it seems that without board policies on how minority students are to be integrated, the principals have only the current curriculum to rely on.

Each also expressed the need for more communication between the school and the home because as the principals said, "awareness is crucial" (School 1), and "parents' attitudes are crucial and their priorities need to be expressed" (School 2). "There is a need for parents to talk with each other", was the view of the principal in School 3.

The principals did not seem to be reluctant to talk about their schools or programmes, but they all seemed to feel that integration is the key to good education. Since none were aware of the numbers of Hong Kong students that are in their schools, they also do not have the numbers of "astronaut" families. In fact they seemed to find it difficult to state whether there were children in their schools in this situation. This is not an issue about which they believe they should be worried.

The principal in School 1 said he was grateful for the opportunity to talk about the issues involved in this study. He had some frustrations as expressed above and he said that he felt he had a better understanding now. He was especially concerned about the number of parents who drive their children to school. We talked for a while about the fears the mothers have for the safety of their children, but came to no conclusions about what could be done.

I reported to the principals some of the mothers' concerns about: homework, textbooks, physical education. While all three principals acknowledged that the mothers had legitimate concerns, the main response was, "they need to understand that in Canada we do things a certain way"; "our hands are tied when it comes to these issues"; "I would like the parents to come and talk with me". At this point there does not appear to be any awareness of the need for or move to get policy changes that would assist in these areas.

#### 5.8 The home room teachers

The teachers were selected by the principals according to my criteria that they be Grade 7 homeroom teachers and were interviewed privately in their homerooms or the staff room after I had talked with the principals. I gave each of them a copy of the consent form and

the questions I had prepared. The Grade 7 teacher in School 1 has been teaching for three years. She appeared to be very aware of some of the issues regarding children from other cultures. She said she feels comfortable modifying programmes for the students, although she does not teach all the subjects. She stated that her main concern regarding children and their parents who do not speak English is that: "parents do not make us aware they need a translator. Students do not acknowledge they need help and parents are really pushing the students."

She stated that she had witnessed some anxiety behaviours, but was not specific about what these behaviours were, on the part of some of the "astronaut" children she knew of in her class, but she said she is trying "to get to know the students and make a real personal connection to them." When I discussed what I have seen in my students, the irritability, the real push on homework just before their fathers arrive, she concurred. However, since she had not offered this information without prompting, I could not be sure how accurate her impressions were.

When it comes to the parents, she stated her belief that it is up to the administration to provide the bridge between the parents and the school and therefore, she has not been involved in any particular parent activities.

I met the teacher whom I interviewed in School 2 in his home room class. He said that he has been teaching in that school for a long time and it has changed a great deal in the past few years. The area had been a lower middle class mainly white area for most of the time he had been teaching there. Now houses are being torn down and very large homes are being put up. He said that he sees many problems with the children in his class who do not speak English as a first language. He stated his belief that: "students should take

learning seriously, and that they should be aware of the culture they have come to and try to fit in." He felt the learning problems that some were experiencing were not really because of their language, but because they did not want to fit in. He complained that, "they want to stay together inside and outside the school." He stated that he believed, "there is a danger of losing sense of Canada by trying to accommodate too much." He believes he can help the "astronaut" children best by "letting them look to me as a male to fill some of the gap they are experiencing by being in a family in which the father is not always present." He did not apparently see that a family can take many configurations and that his belief that a family must consist of two parents may be interfering with his ability to establish a rapport with his students. Instead of trying to find ways to help the students he simply kept repeating "integration faster".

He does not see his role as one of being the mediator between the parents and the school. He is aware of language classes in the portables attached to his school, but he has no role to play in these groups. He said that "there are many other cultures besides those from Hong Kong and all need to be treated the same. There should not be special attention paid to those from Hong Kong." He did not seem sympathetic to the situation of the children in the "astronaut" families.

In School 3, the teacher and I met in the staff room with many other teachers coming and going. She said from the outset that she was in a hurry and could not spend too much time. We were interrupted by a teacher coming in to put up a sign about the imminent strike in the board and this led to a short conversation about this matter. She said that there are so few students in the school from Hong Kong that she doesn't give them any special attention. She stated that, "they need what any other student would need." The only real issue involved is teaching them English and that there are only real problems when LD ( that is, if they have learning disabilities not related to their language) is a

factor." To date she has not seen any "astronaut" children as far as she knew. When I pointed out the reason I was talking with her was because there were some, she simply repeated what she had said previously. Her obvious anxiety to leave quickly interfered with the interview. However, I also believe that she was feeling somewhat defensive about the subject as she had not ever recognized "astronaut" family children and this could be perceived as a reflection on her as a knowledgeable teacher.

## 5.9 The Children

The three children interviewed, Joseph, John and Mary, are attending different schools but seem to be having similar experiences. While the names I have given them are made up, they are English names because each has an English name now that they are in Canada. This is a common practice and does not detract from their Chinese names. The teacher in my school from Hong Kong told me that it is quite usual for children to assume English names even in Hong Kong. I tried to make the interview a conversation rather than asking a lot of questions. We talked in their own rooms where I sometimes help them with school projects. They all said that their biggest concern is: having to speak and learn English.

They all said they had liked living in Hong Kong and were very upset when they found out they were moving to Canada. Mary said that, "my parents told me on the morning that we got on the plane that we were going to Canada. I was very scared." This still seems to be a traumatic episode for her and she is reluctant to talk about that part of her life. She still writes letters to friends in Hong Kong and always talks about the most recent letter she has received back from a friend. However, she is sad that, "I probably will not see them again, and they will be different." It is interesting that she already

realizes that changes are happening in her life and her friends, and that even though they were close when they lived in Hong Kong, they would not have much to talk about now.

Joseph talked about having "a best friend in Hong Kong that I really miss". This best friend was much older than Joseph, but he was very important in Joseph's life. Joseph is concerned that, "now we do not even write." Yet he does not do anything about it, and doesn't think he will in the future, "I will not write to him now". He said this with such obvious sadness that I asked him why. His reply was a shrug of the shoulders and no probing could get him to go further.

John is the one who is least happy about being in Canada. He said he does not particularly like it here because, "there is not as much to do here." John enjoys eating out and one thing that makes Canada sort of "okay" is that, "there are more good places to eat now that more people are coming from Hong Kong." He resents his mother calling him lazy, but he does manage to avoid doing school work whenever possible. He is not really interested in learning English and he does not seem to be worried that his teachers say he is not meeting his potential and learning English as well as he can. In terms of academic achievement and English development, John is the closest of the three children to the students in my school, those who are not progressing as expected. Yet in his school, John has not been flagged as an at risk student and no special programmes have been suggested for him. John says that, "I will get what I need when I need it."

In spite of their feelings about learning English and doing school work in general, this school year is going along better than last year because they do know more English but Mary said, "I still don't like to talk English"; and John admitted that, "It is hard for me". All three agreed that they had to learn English eventually, but as Mary asked, "Do we have to learn everything so fast?" Mary's teacher is somewhat concerned, and her ESL teacher

has reported that Mary is not doing very well in her English development. Yet Mary is not doing anything particular about it. When I suggested she read more in English, she said, "maybe".

There is more to living in Canada than learning English and the two boys mentioned their new interest in sports. Joseph said that he "likes Canada more now that he can play hockey"; and he plays on the street with some friends as often as possible. Joseph is hoping to join a "real" hockey team sometime. John said that he, "loves playing basketball with my friends" and complained about being, "very sorry because we have had so much snow this year and so cannot play outside so much".

Mary is eager to talk about her life in Hong Kong and her chief complaint about Canada is that, "it is not a good place for shopping." In Hong Kong, "I could always find what I wanted to buy". She gets most of her clothes when her mother comes back from Hong Kong after a two or three week visit or when she has been to Hong Kong herself during holidays. She is also worried because, "it is too hard in school because I do not understand English". Yet she is not prepared to do much about the learning of English at this time.

The children do not appear to be worried that their mothers cannot or do not help them with their English. They see that their mothers are going to ESL classes too and so they are "okay" with having to do things for themselves. Several times they simply shrugged their shoulders and said, "it doesn't matter". I believe there are some issues they should be talking about with their mothers, a guidance teacher at school or a friend of the family, but they recognize that their mothers are dealing with many problems and are reluctant to make their tasks more difficult. Mary said, "I would not talk to the guidance teacher as

school, he is not easy to talk and I don't have the right words". Each have siblings and this complicates matters also. In the home, I have observed the typical Anglo-Saxon teenage - younger sibling interaction - "get out of my room", "leave me alone".

The children have very large rooms and they are pleased about this. However, both Joseph and John said, "I don't like having to keep it clean" and they seem to expect their mothers to do the work most of the time. They have models (both boys enjoy making models, Joseph - transformers and John - cars), a computer, books, pictures, posters and many other things they have either brought from Hong Kong or received from their father as presents when he has come to visit. Each expressed different views about their fathers' visits. John said, "he always brings new things from Hong Kong and we go out more." Mary is pleased because, "I don't have to look after my brother and I get to miss school to go to the airport".

The children say they are working hard to please their parents when it comes to school work most of the time, even though they are finding it difficult. They believe that it is their duty to do as well as they can. Mary is particularly concerned because her teacher has said she is not working hard enough. She knows her mother is worried, but it, "all seems so hard" and therefore she tends to avoid it as much as possible. John believes his mother will be less worried once he goes to high school.

All three children answered mostly in monosyllables and were not particularly forthcoming in their conversation even when pressed somewhat. Much of what I gleaned came as much from what they did not say as what they did actually say. Of course, this could be partly because of their limited ability in English; they do not have a large vocabulary especially when it comes to emotions and issues that are quite private for them. They are spending their English learning time studying academic language and they have not spent

an equal amount of time on the language of feelings and relationships. Also even though they do see me as somewhat of a friend, I am still a teacher, albeit in a school different from theirs, and they acknowledge that I am more their mothers' friend than theirs.

All the interviews were conducted to try to get more information and to see if there were any consistent themes that could be linked to the original surveys. The interviews with the mothers brought me up to date but they did not add any new substantive information.

While they had agreed to be interviewed and taped in English, it was obvious during the interviews that their still limited English facility got in the way of fuller conversation.

They are still very private people no matter how friendly they appear. Their lives have not changed substantially: they are still mothers alone in Ontario with their children. They have not had any real opportunities to make changes. They are limited by obligations to their children until the situation in Hong Kong is resolved.

The interviews with the principals and teachers made it very clear that there is still a long way to go in our methods of integrating children from other cultures. It is obvious that we, as teachers, are not ready to work with the parents on an on-going basis in the schools. It still appears to be up to the parents to initiate any contacts unless there is a problem, at which time the teacher would initiate the contact or raise the matter in a scheduled parent-teacher interview.

Throughout the interviews and my analysis of the results, I was looking for something that came up consistently and would be of specific relevance to the purpose of this study - what teachers and administrators can do to help the children in "astronaut" families develop English skills and try to involve mothers more in the schools their children attend. One theme did come up that could have special relevance, and that theme is - communication. This will be one of the foci of the subsequent discussion section of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 6

### Discussion and Recommendations

#### 6.1 The mothers

The "Astronaut" family is a unique contemporary sociological phenomenon worthy of many studies from different perspectives. The issues and their aftermaths faced by the parents and children will last for many years as they become more integrated into or stay isolated from Canadian society and culture. I believe that it is necessary for teachers and administrators to find innovative ways to assist in the academic achievement of students who come to Ontario/Canada without a firm comprehension of and ability to use English well. Some long-term studies conducted on the students would be very valuable as well as studies on students from past waves of immigration. If we can better understand what happens when people come to a new country even in special circumstances like this, we may be able to help students and their parents sooner and avoid problems that can arise later, such as difficulties in getting into universities and finding employment equal to their abilities. Of course, this will also be affected by the economic times, but I believe the schools have a duty to at least prepare the students for the future.

The idea for this particular study began as a result of looking at the academic progress and especially the English acquisition of students in my school, relatively newly arrived in Canada and particularly those who had been here and had taken ESL courses for three years. Using this background I asked the question: Why were some of the students, newly arrived from Hong Kong, not progressing in their English development as well as expected and in the time frames recommended by the board of education? The policy of the board is that students may only remain in stage one of their English development for one year and then they are expected to participate fully in the regular academic programme, with some modifications. This policy is expected to be adhered to unless the

student has been tested for a learning difficulty or there are particular circumstances. We have students in my school who have been here for three years and their ability to converse in English has not advanced enough for them to be able to participate successfully in all the academic subjects offered even with programme modifications. While we do not expect that most will be fluent speakers within three years, yet from all the research on language acquisition, they should be further ahead than they are.

From these early concerns, the next questions ensued: What is the students' home environment? What are parents doing to support and assist? What could the school be doing differently to improve the students' success rate and help the parents at the same time?

These questions led to the next step - a search for literature and people that could begin to answer the questions and perhaps provide ideas and assistance for changing our methods of teaching and interacting with the students and parents if that is what is necessary. Also, since we have had minimal contact with the parents of these children and usually only through interpreters, could the literature and other people involved in the issues under investigation provide ideas for ways the school could bring the parents into the school community more, and would this be efficacious?

The teachers and administrators whose schools have received the bulk of new immigrants recently have expected that the majority of these new students would be above average in their academic studies. They expected that the students would quickly adapt to the new environment as a great deal of research on Asian immigration in the past has documented that the students were overachievers who worked exceptionally hard. However, these expectations have not always been fulfilled in the case of many of the children in this most recent wave of immigration in my school. Some new research (mainly done in the United

States) is beginning to question the assumption of earlier research and bring up the issues around what the teachers in the school in which I am teaching and several nearby schools were seeing - students who could do some academic subjects well, for example, math, were experiencing problems in English and social development. While the early research on problems that were arising noted what was happening, this research did not give any insight into what could be done about it. There was one suggestion that was offered in areas where there were many students from one culture and language group. The suggestion was to initiate first language instruction for academic subjects as was being done in California and Florida with children whose first language is Spanish. This literature suggested that first language instruction continue along with special English instruction until integration has occurred. Teaching the major academic subjects such as history, science, geography in a first language is not a viable option in the schools in my area at present. We do not have the staff nor in these economic times, according to the board administrators, the money. There is also no policy at present to support the concept of first language instruction. To initiate a first language programme would require a very different approach and policies would have to change drastically.

Students from Hong Kong come from a culture with many unique traditions. Initially, Hong Kong was an extension of the province of Guangzhou (Canton). The inhabitants who came to Hong Kong brought their cultural traditions with them - mainly built around Confucianism. Confucianism is not only a religion but a way of life and value system. Patriarchy is a main tenet of Confucianism and provides a stability and cohesion for the family. When a family moved within the East Asian community, the stability of an age old system could provide support until the family became acclimatized to a new environment even if it were a totally new cultural environment.

Enter the phenomenon of the "astronaut" family. Instead of a traditional Chinese family, headed by a present patriarch, the "astronaut" is a split-household with a mainly absentee husband and father. This disruption in the normal pattern of family life has put added stress on all family members and especially the mothers- more stress even than that normally experienced when people from one culture move to a country in which the dominant culture and language is entirely different. The research by Aggarwal (1990) supports this. She found that many immigrant women were unable to use strategies from their home country to confront issues in their new countries. Fortunately, it seems the women in this study have begun to construct new methods and learn how to make sense of their lives in the new Canadian context. Aggarwal also found that most newly immigrated women were extremely self-conscious while speaking English. This is also true of the women in this study. Even as their English improves, they are reluctant to use it and unless they become more comfortable, it will continue to be an exercise rather than a way of life. This of course makes the transition even harder.

Immigration from Hong Kong may increase again once China takes over the colony on July 1, 1997, especially if things do not go well for the Hong Kong people, that is, if they are not allowed to continue to have the say in their governance and money making as they have had in the past. It may take a few years for the increase to occur, since in each wave of previous immigration, there seems to be a time lag between events in Hong Kong and when people leave, but it may come. Of course, some of the people may choose to return to Hong Kong if the economic situation remains stable. However, this study has relevance for any potential immigrants from Hong Kong and also for anyone else coming to Ontario from a culture that is very different from what has been the white middle class cultural norm for many years in Ontario and for the teachers who will be charged with teaching the students. If we expect to assist in the integration of students we need to be better prepared than we are at present. We need methods of inquiry that can be adapted and

applied to any cultural group. We need strategies in place to involve parents in their children's learning right from the start. I hope that this study will be the beginning of raising awareness of the needs of the children and families new to Ontario. There is a great deal of work to be done to assist in the integration of newcomers and the sooner we start, the sooner their lives will be better.

## 6.2 Methodological implications

The results of this study have shown that these mothers are remarkably similar. The literature on ethnographic research states that is is the best type of group to study - one that is similar in as many ways as possible. The similarities could be a function of the criteria set at the beginning of the study - the mothers had to be here three years or less, with children in the education system and husbands presently living and working in Hong Kong, traveling to Canada only once or twice a year. Another reason they may have seemed similar is a result of the questions and the way they were asked. However, knowing the mothers the way I do now, I believe the mothers are similar in ways important to this study and do face similar problems and concerns. This belief is also confirmed by the translator, herself in an "astronaut" family. She concurred with the responses and said that they mirror her present experience in Ontario.

The criterion for the selection of the mothers in this study was that of having been in Canada three years or less. This was set not only to develop strategies for the students as early as possible but also because the board has set three years as a point of time when we are to look closely again at the progress of our ESL students. We need to decide whether it is simply a language problem they are having or if there are other concerns. Prior to three years, the main issue can be language acquisition and we tend not to place as much emphasis on academic achievement. We do have first language assessments for students

who have been here less than one year if there are obvious difficulties and we can get the permission of a parent. However, waiting three years to get help for students may jeopardize their entire academic career. They could fall so far behind that they might not be able to catch up. Therefore, I believe we need to be talking with their mothers and fathers as soon as possible and much earlier than we are doing at present so as to provide as much help for the children as we could.

The criterion of being in an "astronaut" family was set because this situation seems to encompass the majority of families in this wave of immigration in our school and many of the children from these families are the ones who are not progressing as well as expected in their English development, according to the teachers' observations. The teachers in my school have discussed, at many meetings, what to do about children's learning when we cannot get help from the home because the mother is involved in her own issues, such as looking after a large house, interacting with outside people and doing these all by herself. During parent interviews some of the mothers expressed the hope that the school will look after their children.

All the women who agreed to participate in the study appeared to be very open in their own way and honest about their situation. Even though they had not known each other prior to meeting at the church for English classes, they seemed to recognize that they were in a position to request and give support to each other once a level of trust had been reached. Being in a similar situation and being close in age helped also. Now I am not so sure about their openness. I believe there was some holding back and some unwillingness to say what was really on their minds. For example, according to the translator and several women I know from Hong Kong (not part of this study) many husbands who remain alone in Hong Kong have mistresses. This was never openly discussed and never came up in the written responses or interviews. It is likely that this situation is part of

what some of the mothers in this study are dealing with and yet they never brought it out into the open in my presence.

The first sessions in a learning programme are crucial to a process of learning and becoming a cohesive group. The women needed to see that they could have input into the classes and that the classes were such that they would be able to communicate better with people outside the Chinese community. The first sessions were planned around using simple vocabulary about the every day things around and how to begin, continue and end a conversation. At the beginning we negotiated the length of each session, time of each session and the overall length of the process. Right away there was some sense of empowerment. The level of schooling of the women was unknown at the beginning of the sessions; however, each said she was eager to learn to talk in English in order to know what was going on in Ontario and Canada and with their children in school. From the start it was established how important it was for them to understand what was happening in their children's schools. This was mainly done by asking about their children and concerns regarding schooling in Ontario that we could discuss during our sessions. This made it clear to the women how alike they were in their situations and concerns.

All initial communication was conducted by using very simple English, checking that at least one person understood what was being said and then that person providing a translation for the others if necessary. Since the women were so motivated, they quickly began to learn words and phrases and their ability to communicate with me expanded. It also became quite easy for me to understand what they were talking about, even though I only know a few Chinese words. The context was a big help and they soon realized that they could get their point across using both English and Chinese and we could all understand.

Several women apologized for not being able to read and write in English, but they were helped by all the others. They each were given a notebook to write ideas, vocabulary, phrases along with being given many pictures and concrete, experiential learning.

The high motivation of the group was a great asset in the sessions. However, such motivation also made it very clear that the women needed to not only learn English, but to interact with other women and develop a support network for themselves. They knew they were isolated but up until the offer was made to come together in the ESL classes, they had done little or nothing to break out of this isolation.

### 6.3 The lives of the mothers

That the women had remained in isolation is not surprising when looking at what they said about their daily lives. Their houses are extremely large compared to their homes in Hong Kong. They do not have the benefit of maids here because they believe that maids are too expensive in Canada. Without their husbands to do all the outside contacting, the women appeared to be overwhelmed with what they felt they were required to do. Only one mother in the group reported working outside the home in Hong Kong. The mothers talked about spending their days in Hong Kong doing household work or supervising a maid, visiting with friends and family and shopping. Their household tasks included some cooking and cleaning, even when they had domestic help, and seeing that their children went to school and did their homework when they got home.

In Canada, the mothers must also do household tasks. The main difference is that here they must do it all. In Hong Kong, many had maids to do the basic cleaning and since most lived in apartments in a tropical climate, there was no need to worry about such things as furnaces, snow removal, gardening. They stated that in Hong Kong they had

husbands to look after things such as taxes, car repairs and other tasks which they did not want or need to attend to. In Hong Kong, there are clearly defined roles for all members of the society. The mothers knew their roles and were apparently comfortable in them; at least they did not report trying to avoid the roles and responsibilities they had. Once they moved to Canada, their roles changed dramatically and there are no norms to help them deal with and adapt to the new roles they have to play. Having all come at the same time, these women do not even have friends who have been here for a longer time to help them adjust. The roles that the mothers need to play now are still not clearly defined for them because they have husbands who come to Canada once in a while and expect their wives to behave in the traditional ways as they did in Hong Kong.

The mothers in the follow-up did note that their children are beginning to help more now, but I have noticed when visiting or driving in the neighbourhood that the mothers are doing the snow shoveling while the children remain inside. Obviously there are still some tasks that the mothers are expected to do.

The mothers are also now responsible for the outside of the houses, an area that was not even an issue in Hong Kong. Many had their driveways redone with stones as soon as they moved in and hired professional landscapers to put in trees and flower beds so that the outside looks good. Now all that is necessary is maintenance and they do not have to do what might have traditionally been their husbands' work. However, the mothers have to see that the maintenance is done so they are really still taking on this role. Since the families live in an area in which there are many others from Hong Kong, the people they have had come to do their landscaping speak Chinese and there was no need for them to interact with English speaking people right away.

Hong Kong is a consumer society for those who can afford it and the women in this study were fairly well off in Hong Kong and so did a great deal of "shopping" when they were living there. Here, in Canada, they expressed the desire to continue this activity as a way to get out of the house and be with other people and perhaps as a way to keep in touch with their previous lives. Being in malls can also provide a sense of social activity. However, they say the malls here in Ontario are all the same - the same stores, the same food courts and they do not like to eat in the mall food courts as they do not provide traditional Chinese lunch food. They also do not believe we get consumer goods such as they do in Hong Kong. They are beginning to adopt the Canadian shopping style - go and get what you need and go home rather than spending hours wandering from store to store as they did in Hong Kong. During the follow-up, one mother said she was glad she had a friend to go shopping with now and that made it better. The weather is also a factor in shopping. It is possible to wander from shop to shop in Hong Kong all year round as the weather is quite consistent. While they do have indoor shopping areas, they are smaller and therefore, people tend to walk around outside in most of Hong Kong. Here, our malls are completely indoors and once one has walked from end to end, that is it. Therefore, the mothers said that their time outside the house is limited by this adaptation. When the mothers who went to Hong Kong during our year together were preparing to go they would talk about taking empty suitcases with them and planning to fill up there with the newest items and especially clothes for their children and themselves. One mother said she was not even taking a suitcase. She planned to buy new luggage there.

The mothers do not watch television in the daytime as many North American housekeepers are purported to do because they do not understand the language well enough. Also, the stories are very hard to follow with their use of idioms and the speed with which they actors talk. There is a misconception that watching English television can improve English language development. This is a recommendation made in many papers

and books on English development. However, for this activity to be of benefit, one must at least understand the context and some of what is happening. A person's language development must be at a certain stage for this activity to be beneficial.

I have observed the great need the mothers have for adult contact and conversation. Das Gupta (1994) found that immigrant women are isolated both within their own and the larger society and through the ESL group process they are breaking that isolation. They have expressed their desire to continue to attend English classes or other such activities. This is where the school could be of great benefit. The mothers realize that they are isolated in their homes. Even as they acknowledge that there is a lot of work for them to do, they do believe they can find time to get out for activities other than grocery or clothes shopping. Indeed, this group of women found the time to attend English class two days a week from October to May and have continued this activity this second year.

The women do not have a great deal of time for themselves; they always seem to have to be doing things for their children, taking them to school, to lessons, or looking after the house, cleaning, laundry; as Davies (1990) found, women's time is other's time. The number of children and their ages is significant in this instance. Most have children in both parts of the pre-university education system - that is, elementary and secondary. Only one mother had a child at nursery school. It is interesting that she has chosen to send him to nursery school since she is home most of the day and could take care of him. However, the norm in Hong Kong is to start school (real school) at three years of age, and nursery school is the closest to going to school here. If we had junior kindergarten, she said, he would go there half-time and nursery school the other half.

Knowing that the move to Canada had been a conscious choice as a way to provide a better life for their children made all the work acceptable, but it was still very hard. I

believe that the support network they have developed has taken some of the pressure off. I also believe that they now feel more at home here and that has also helped alleviate some of their anxieties. The fact that the women report being less lonely, feeling comfortable traveling around and having meals together shows how far they have come in the year.

Only one mother has a child not in the public education system. Therefore, they must spend time and energy each day taking the children to and from school; to and from all the after school activities, for example, math classes, Chinese classes, English classes, swimming, and supervising homework and all the other matters necessary to bringing up children. Each of the women initially expressed concerns that they did not know what their children did in school and did not understand how the system worked here. They felt they could not communicate with the teachers or administrators in their children's schools because their English was not good enough. During interviews with parents whose children are experiencing difficulties, most teachers ask parents to help their children at home with English acquisition. However, in a parent-teacher interview, especially when the parent does not speak English, miscommunication can happen so easily. In my school we have two teachers who speak Cantonese and they are generally present at all interviews where we believe they are needed. Yet when talking to the principals in the other schools, I discovered that only one has a teacher on staff who speaks Cantonese and the other two principals expect that the parents would ask for help in translation if they need it. May Wan said she had enlisted the aid of a sister-in-law who lives in a near-by community to come to the school and translate for her, but not all the mothers have such help and as the interviews have shown, they do not ask for the help. The school board will provide translators but the teachers and administrators had not communicated this information to them. The mothers seemed to be expecting the teachers and principals to communicate with them while the teachers and principals are waiting for the parents to ask for help. This gap in information and communication needs to be addressed.

Each of the women expressed the hope that their children would be able to attend university here. The chance for their children to go to university was a prime reason for coming here in the first place. The education system in Hong Kong does not permit the majority of children to attend university there and they did not want their children to go to mainland China to university. Canada has an aggressive recruiting programme in Hong Kong regarding coming here for education purposes and the mothers recognize that their children have a greater chance of getting to university here than they would have had in Hong Kong. However, the political situation here is impacting greatly on the education system and the children will be required to do much better in the future, particularly if the Ministry of Education brings in mandatory exit exams for secondary schools. The teachers and administrators all expressed the belief that the children must integrate, become part of Canadian society. This means they must learn English, use it in their daily interactions and academic careers. We have come a long way in our ability to assist young people with their English skills development, however, unless there is a concerted team effort between the school and home, students may not reach their full potential.

All the mothers initially said they could not help their children with English because they themselves did not have enough proficiency. Even at the follow-up, while acknowledging the improvement in their own English, the mothers still did not believe that they could really help in this area any more than they had been doing. They have English tutors for their children, buy them great electronic dictionaries and encourage them to watch English television and read English books. When asked specifically if they converse in English for any part of the day at home, they said it was still too hard. I have tried to encourage the mothers and children to try talking English with each other for a part of the day. However, they remain reluctant to do so. Since the mothers do not directly work with their children in their English development, it is not surprising that they also do not assist

in any other subject areas either. All the school subjects are taught in English so the mothers perceive that it would be too difficult to help in this area also.

The mothers did not get involved much in their children's schools in Hong Kong. There are several different types of schools in Hong Kong and depending upon which school students attend the expectations are different. The religious schools expect the parents to provide uniforms and discipline so the children will get their homework done. The public schools expect the parents to monitor homework and leave the running of the school to the administrator. Therefore, it is not surprising that they do not perceive that it is vitally important to become involved here and since the mothers must deal with both parts of the education system, they solve the problem of not yet knowing what the priorities or expectations are, by not getting involved in either. They say they do not go to events in the school. This year, however, Lim Lo said she was glad she went to hear her daughter sing in the school concert. Yet, she does not intend to go to the school more often. The mothers said they would rather have a tutor help their children as this is a familiar process for them. Having tutors is very common in Hong Kong; a student can have as many as four or five different tutors depending upon how he/she is doing in school.

There is a Chinese parent group in one school and even though Lim Lo knows the leader of this group, he never told her about it and she has not attended it. She expressed the desire to begin attending. However, I spoke to her last week (March, 1997) and she has decided not to go. She does not want me to speak to the leader of the group either.

#### 6.4 English skills development

English development is the first priority when students arrive in our schools from countries where English is not the first language. Parents also perceive that the learning of

English is very important for their children to succeed in Canada, especially if they wish to go to university and become professionals in the mainstream community. All the mothers in this study are expecting that their children will complete university; therefore, one would expect that English language development would be a high priority for both them and their children.

Seventy-two percent of the children (16 out of 22) of the mothers in this study attend ESL (English as a Second Language) classes in their schools. These classes are intended to assist the students in learning English and also help them learn about Canada and its customs so that they can feel comfortable in their new environment. While these classes can be of great help to newly arrived students, it is generally not enough. Students have a maximum of 80 minutes a day of special ESL assistance and it is usually less, and then are expected to attend regular classes the rest of the school day where they are required either to meet the same requirements as the other students or have slightly modified expectations. The principals said that they want students to become integrated as soon as possible and putting them into the regular classes with the other students for the majority of the day is a way to make them integrate. Yet this does not seem to be working with many students. Students may request the help of the ESL teachers in their schools to assist them in the regular classes, but the time is limited when there are so many needing help especially in a school where the enrollment of new immigrants is particularly high. Some of the children in the school in which I teach are not particularly happy with all the work they are asked to take or do at home. They say they are very tired when they go home from school and clearly having to work all day in a strange language can be very tiring. The students say they would like to go home and relax. They know they have to do some homework, but they would rather play video games, watch Chinese television, listen to Chinese singers and read Chinese books, as that is much more familiar and comfortable. Even though the students complain that they do not want to do all the

homework, the mothers still perceive that the teachers here do not give enough homework. The mothers say in Hong Kong their children had several hours of homework. In our schools our homework policy states that Intermediate (Grade 7 and 8) students should only have one hour to one and a half hours of homework each night. We are obviously not communicating our policy messages adequately to the mothers and all they see is their children doing a little bit of homework and then having too much time to play.

Reading is one area that teachers stress as a help for children in language acquisition. Many research studies have been done on parental assistance with school work and especially reading, and they point out that it is direct parental involvement that is the key. While tutors can certainly provide some assistance, they generally see the student only once or twice a week for an hour each time. Much of this time is spent on helping with daily homework and projects. There is little time for specific language development activities and therefore tutoring is not the whole answer to keeping language development progressing quickly. Also students often perceive that the tutors are there to make them work, and the reading done with a tutor may not be as pleasurable as with a parent. The mothers are with their children every day of the week and most importantly, at night, when reading can be done in a quiet, supportive atmosphere.

As well as reading English material, research shows that continued reading in one's first language is of great benefit to students who are learning a new language. Students can continue their conceptual development in their first language while they learn the words to apply to these concepts in the new language. In this way their conceptual growth is not hindered and the learning of the second language is enhanced. The mothers do help in this area. All but three said that they encourage their children to read in Chinese. These three mothers expressed the opinion that English must come first and therefore, they do

not encourage Chinese reading at home. The schools could play a strong role in this area by helping the mothers to see the advantages of continuing Chinese reading at home and also talking about the reading so that conceptual growth is enhanced.

Providing help in other areas of academic achievement goes along with assistance in English development. Here again, it is assistance by the parent that is so important. However, the majority of mothers said they did not provide direct help in other areas of school work. The mothers in this study may feel that it is too difficult to help in academic subjects because they themselves have not gone beyond high school. Research has shown that continuing to discuss academic concepts in one's first language can help students understand the English expressions when students are exposed to them in the classroom (Modiano, 1979). In California, many schools actually have first language instruction in academic subjects and they have had great success with this process according to their reports. The tutors hired by the mothers for academic assistance provide help in English not Chinese, and therefore, I believe they cannot be as effective in fostering conceptual growth as they could be if they could discuss concepts, issues and academic work in the children's first language.

Along with learning the English language goes the learning of the Canadian culture. In many ways this can be even harder than learning the English language. The mothers expressed the belief that they do not yet understand the Canadian way of life and they must rely on their children to be the mediators for them in many ways. It is the children who often have to interpret when problems arise in the house, for example, fixing the furnace or air conditioner. Tutors are often asked to assist in these areas also. One mother and her two daughters did not understand the circuit breakers in their house and asked the tutor how to find out which one controlled each area of the house. The tutor showed the two daughters how to operate the circuit breakers and helped label them.

These are things young people will need to know; however, it would be preferable, in my view, if they could learn these things as part of their growing up not because no one else can do the tasks.

The children are also called upon to interpret report cards, their own and their younger siblings. The school is not doing its job when these activities are being mediated by the children they are supposed to be teaching. The schools should be providing the help for these mothers to become better informed about Canadian culture and then they in turn can interpret it for their children. Therefore, for the time being it seems that the mothers in this study do not feel very confident or comfortable that they can directly do the job of working with their children in helping them to develop their English skills.

In this area the school could offer a valuable service. If the mothers were helped in their own English development and be helped to understand the education system as well as Canadian culture, they could take on more of this vital role. They are in a difficult position vis-a-vis learning English. As Ng (1991) has said, as dependents, they cannot have free access to language and other training courses. While money is not the issue for the women in this study, it is the perceived attitude toward the women, that they are not as worthy to take the courses that can be a hinderance. Also while women may be well off, they do not spend their money on themselves easily. Also, though, there are many women who do not have the financial resources to attend classes that cost money and therefore, there needs to be a change in the policy of delivering language classes to immigrant women. The women in this study have taken the initiative and found their own solution by asking for language classes from the secretary of the church. I believe this would not have happened had they not spent a year in the original group classes and this again shows how important it is for an outside force sometimes to begin the process and then let them take over their own learning.

## 6.5 Involvement in the school

As far back as Ancient Greece, there has been a belief in the joint responsibility of parents and the state - schools (Escobedo, 1983). However, early in the development of the education systems in Canada, the home and school became divided (David, 1993) each having its own role and expectations. The educators have expected that parents would provide a home environment conducive to studying and the essentials of life so that children could come to school healthy and ready to learn. While things have changed a great deal since the early 1800's, (for example, it is now expected that parents will become involved in some way in the school their children attend), not all educators or parents have encompassed that change. Many parents still expect the schools to educate their children and are quite happy to stay out of the process. Obviously, families and schools differ in their major purposes, but since they have the same children in common, there should not be static boundaries (Connors and Epstein, 1995; Lightfoot, 1981). As discussed in the introduction, the literature is virtually unanimous that it is beneficial for the children to have parents involved in some way in the school. Yet, actual parent involvement is really quite low according to Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brissie (1987). This is as true for those who have been born in Canada as for newly arrived immigrants. Both parents and teachers must recognize the validity and necessity of each other (Lightfoot, 1981). Also, educators must change their frames of reference and attitudes (Williams, 1991). However some schools do not want parental contacts, except in the mandated ways because to have effective parental involvement takes teacher and administrator time (Chavkin and William, 1988) and many see parental involvement as a threat to their positions.

Dauber and Epstein (1993) stated that they believed the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home are the specific school programs and teacher practices that encourage and guide parent involvement. Their research

showed that when parents believe the schools are doing little to involve them, they report doing little even at home. However, little is known on how involved parents must be to be effective (Singh, Binckley, Keith, Keith, Trivette and Anderson, 1991) in schools where the majority population comes from a culturally different background than the middle class white population.

There is a range of possible parental involvement. Some parents may opt for helping with homework and other assignments. This could involve going to the library, helping with computer searches, asking questions, shopping together for materials, providing a quiet place with a study desk. This kind of involvement is crucial. In this way a parent lets his/her child know how interested the parent is and how important homework and projects are.

The mothers in this study are quite willing to assist in this way. They ask what homework their children have; what they need to do the homework. For the mothers who drive, they can take the children to the public library. The use of the library computer had been one of the first questions a mother asked when the classes started at the church. This guiding role certainly fits into the view the mothers have of their position and it seems only their perceived inability to use English that prevents them from being even more involved in the homework and project aspect of their children's academic careers.

The next step on the continuum of parental involvement is going to the school and participating in the activities there. At a minimum, parents can attend concerts and other performances put on at the school. It was disturbing to see how close one mother came to missing out on her daughter's choir performance because the letter that went home was not appropriately handled. The letter was in English only and did not require a response.

This kind of communication is seen as too difficult and therefore, we need to rethink our modes of communication.

Another entry into the school is the parent-teacher interview which must take place at stated intervals. Parents expect to be kept informed of where the children are in their learning (Goodnow, Cashmore, Cotton and Knight, 1984). However, these intervals tend to be wide apart and interviews are often very short - 15 minutes is the norm. Some of the mothers must struggle to communicate with the teachers in their limited English or bring a friend or relative to assist. Since they do not know there are translators available to them they cannot ask for this assistance. While many may not wish to take advantage of this service for reasons of privacy, they should at least know the service exists. However, this is a poor substitute for having someone in the school who speaks the language. The students and mothers do not see themselves reflected in the schools' personnel and this is another subtle message. Not having teachers from the backgrounds of the students is a real problem today. We need teachers from many different cultures in our classrooms. Recently, the Toronto Board of Education has said that it will try to redress that situation by hiring more visible minorities for their schools. To judge from the comments being made in the newspapers and on the radio, this policy is meeting with a great deal of resistance and the resistance, while seeming to be logical, will only continue the racism and keep valuable people from the teaching professions. We must encourage young people to attend faculties of education. Yet not one mother in this study saw teaching as a possible career for her children and the children, themselves never mentioned that teaching would be a choice of theirs. We are obviously not being great advocates for our profession.

Too often the parent-teacher communication is poorly done. The new report cards are very difficult to read and understand even when English is one's first language. Teachers

sometimes use jargon and try to put the best spin on the results of the children in their classes. Even though a student is not doing well, she may be promoted as a "social promotion". This can be confusing to a parent (as well as the child) from a culture where success or failure is clear-cut. The potential miscommunication can lead to resentment, apathy and alienation (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). The communication needs to be more effective (Berliner and Casanova, 1985). Lee (1995) found that many parents from Asian countries preferred written to oral communication from the teacher. The parents were more comfortable with a written form because they could take time to read, get help, perhaps talk about it and understand the communication better. Therefore, schools would find it useful to ask parents what they want and need to know and then examine and perhaps change their communication processes (Connors and Epstein, 1995).

The instance of one of the mothers attempting to volunteer in the school points up again how communication is a real problem. It took great courage on her part to extend herself to say she would be a volunteer and the school never acknowledged her. It does not take many such stories for others to say they will not even bother to ask if they can help.

The mother who had been willing to volunteer could have been a free on-site translator, and would have given children from Hong Kong a familiar face and opportunity to be heard in their first language if needed. When children come new to a school, they are "buddied" with a child who comes from their culture and speaks both their first language and English. This is intended to assist the new student to feel more comfortable in her first weeks and to ask questions about what is happening in the first language. However, there are times when only an adult should be consulted. A recent example pointed this up all too clearly. A child new to the school became involved in a scuffle with another student by pushing him against the lockers in the hall because the student who had been here for a while was using language that the new student considered offensive. The

language they were both speaking was their first language. Using another child to mediate this problem would not have been appropriate in this instance because the student who began the altercation needed the assistance of an adult. While student mediators are used in the school, there needs to be a level of trust between the student having the difficulty and the mediators. There needs to be an understanding of the role of peer mediators and the student in question had not been here long enough for this process to be used. He had only been in the school two days. Luckily, the Chinese speaking teacher was there and could take both children aside and work with them. The result was much more satisfactory than if no adult had been involved. This points up further the need for teachers in the schools to be from the cultural groups represented in the school.

The school library is another place where parent involvement could be very helpful. We need books in first languages and also books in English that reflect the cultures in the schools. If a parent from another culture is helping in the library, that parent could be a great resource as to what books are appropriate and would be valued by the children.

The most comprehensive way a parent can become involved in a school is to become a member of the provincially mandated school council. Each principal is charged with the responsibility of setting up the school council. However, no matter how much lobbying a principal may do, the mothers represented in this study would not have come forward. Firstly, communication about the elections and function of the school council has been in English only. Secondly, as one mother said, she only tries to read material that must be signed. The information that went home regarding the school council only stated that any person could come into the school to get further information. The mothers probably would not do this kind of follow-up. Thirdly, in the front hall of my school, there is a bulletin board with pictures of the present school council members. There is one Chinese man and one woman from the East Indies on the council. The mothers would certainly not

see much of themselves in the make-up of the council. In the schools, in which the principals and teachers were interviewed, no persons from cultures other than the dominant culture were on their councils.

Research into parent involvement continually mentions the under-representation of minority groups. As recently as May 29, 1996, the make up of school councils was being questioned in the *Liberal* (our local newspaper) "School Parent Councils a Mixed Bag" (Brown, 1996, P.3). This article quoted board personnel as saying that the school councils in some areas are mirrors of the now defunct parent-teacher liaison groups that were traditionally run by the Anglo-Saxon community parents, and therefore, it is likely this will be the case for the newly constituted school councils. Of course, there has been a strong tradition of parent-teacher groups in the schools in the past and so it is logical the same people would participate in the school council. However, such school councils do not necessarily represent the community they are now supposed to serve.

Gerald Caplan (co-chair of the Provincial Royal Commission on Learning) is quoted in the January 24, 1997, *Toronto Star* ( "Parent councils the wrong way to go" P. A23), as saying "Nor is there any reason to expect the new councils to attract greater parental participation than PTA's have done". The article goes on to talk about numbers: There may be up to eight parents on each council for a total of 40,000 parents across the province. But close to 4 million adults have kids in those schools. Parent councils offer nothing to these millions of parents. Caplan believes, "It needs a new contract between schools and parents that involves far more meaningful contact between the two. We need teaches and principals to inform parents immediately when their child is having problems, and provide advice on how to deal with it. We need parents feeling comfortable about calling the school if they're unhappy with their children's schoolwork. We need trustees making constituents aware of their rights". Each of these points is very important, but the

mothers in this study are not part of the process. They are not informed immediately, they are not given advice, they are not comfortable about calling the school, they are not aware of their rights.

Some schools do not want parental contacts, except in the mandated ways, because to have effective parental involvement takes teacher and administrator time (Chavkin and William, 1988). It can also be threatening to have to explain oneself and account to the parents. Unfortunately, some teachers and administrators, even today, still hold racist attitudes and do not want parents from minority groups becoming involved in their schools. Once parents become involved, there inevitably is some devolution of power and this is extremely threatening to some teachers and administrators. Some educators believe that minority parents are not interested in getting involved with their children's school and some minority parents feel educators assume they are not interested (Chavkin, 1989). Also, schools are still setting the agendas rather than having parents help in this area (David, 1993). School councils may begin to address this issue, but for the reasons stated above, minority parents will be underrepresented on school councils. The mothers in this study should be among the parental representatives on their school councils, yet they said that their English is not good enough even to participate in school meetings. They also do not understand fully the purpose of the school council and the contributions they can make to its functions.

One way we may be able to get parents such as the mothers in this study into the schools is by using a process already available. In some schools in which there is a high concentration of minority parents, the Federal Government has provided funding for "Parent Centres". These centres are areas within the local school where parents can come together during the day, meet with other parents, discuss concerns, learn English and discuss the expectations of the schools in comparison with their own expectations. The

centres can be a classroom set aside for the purpose. The room is to be furnished with adult furniture and incorporate a play area for younger children who may have to come with their parents during the day. This could address the cautions of Bruder (1992) who found that many adults find a classroom setting stressful because it reminds them of being children. There can be a drop-in aspect to the situation as well as a formal time for learning and discussion. The greatest advantage this programme has is that the classes are right inside the school. The parents (mostly mothers) according to one principal in Toronto where this is going on, come right into the school building and see the children in their classes. They meet the teachers and administrators in informal ways, not just when they have to come because there are problems. The comfort level of the parents in this school was very high.

Doherty (1992) found that many women do not get the programmes they need in the way they need them. She believes there is systemic sexism in the language programmes provided by the federal government. The times must be flexible as Astin (1990) said. Such programmes must provide for women's aspirations and be flexible enough to meet their every day needs. One very great concern of the mothers in this study was that formal language classes are impossible for them to attend. The administrators are not paying attention to women's lives as Atkinson, Ennis and Lloyd (194) believe is so necessary. The local board of education has many adult classes, but they generally operate early in the morning and later in the afternoon. For mothers who are the sole caregivers in their family at present, this is not practical. The board does not provide alternatives, and especially the one most needed - continuous entry.

The mothers need to be able to come and go as their time allows. They should not be punished by having set schedules that they cannot adhere to. Since only one mother in this

study has a child too young to attend full-time day school, most could probably attend on a regular basis, but they need the flexibility they perceive is important to them.

The language classes provided by the formal courses also do not appear to fit their needs. They want to talk about what is happening in their lives at the moment, learn vocabulary they need when it arises, not according to some set curriculum decided by outside forces (Golian and Pellen, 1994). Many times, the best thing for the mothers in this study was for me to drop any prearranged lesson and simply problem solve with them: for example, how to read their children's report cards, how to get in touch with bureaucracies in the town and province, where to find certain things, what to do during long weekends and Christmas/March Break holidays with their children when they get tired of visiting other families and eating out.

The value of the adult education process for the women involved in this study cannot be over-emphasized. Alan Tough (1979) outlined many kinds of adult education and reasons why adults choose to participate in the various offerings of programmes and courses, both academic and interest. The women in this study had several reasons for participating in English classes. One reason was the classes were free. While availability of money is not an issue for these women, they are, nevertheless careful with their resources. I find it interesting that often it is said paying for courses increases commitment, but in this case the opposite was true. The women felt an obligation to attend because I was giving of my to them without cost.

The second reason was to learn to converse with the English people with whom they come in contact, albeit there are not very many in the area in which they live. However, their perceived need to understand and communicate with the people within their children's

**schools was the strongest motivation. This reason became clearer after the first two months and was evident in the questions they asked.**

**The location of the classes was also critical. The local church was familiar to them and non-threatening. While the women did not know each other prior to the first class, they knew they all belonged to the church as that was the only way they could have learned about the classes. The church provided an added sense of security, aided by the endorsement of the minister.**

**Following the principles of adult education also allowed the women to feel more secure as time went on. While we could not discuss the principles, they quickly realized that this experience was not like going to school as they had done in their youth. They were able to set their own agenda and have significant input into the learning process. There was some learned submission to the "teacher" at first, for example accepting how the classes were formatted. However, as they gained in confidence and began to recognize and articulate their needs, they took more and more control. They began asking for specific grammar lessons and for practice in how to talk with their children's teachers.**

**Even while the women were beginning to feel more confident in their ability to use the English they were practising, the actual teaching-learning process became secondary to the developing support system among the women. The sessions became more and more a meeting place to learn about each other and develop the relationships that have lasted now for two years. As I later found out, they began telephoning each other and getting together at other times.**

**When the study began, I believed adult education was mainly about learning something one could use to enhance one's everyday life. The use of adult education as a means of**

developing friendships and supports had not seemed to be so important. I had seen this aspect as an interesting and positive side effect for many participants in adult education programmes in the past; however, I see this in an entirely different light now. The relational support is probably as important or even more so in the adult education process especially in the area that is the focus of this study. I think that those of us in the adult education field should become more observant and plan for such outcomes. We should not allow a curriculum or course of study to get in the way of the more important "people aspect" of adult education.

Allowing the relations to develop is also another reason why the women stayed with the classes and even organized their own continuing classes after I formally left them. A rigid programme is not the way to get the most benefit for adults in situations such as this. I do not believe that having exams, as many ESL adult classes have in community colleges, would have increased their learning. One assumption that we work with in adult education is that the adult learner is self-motivated. In making adults follow set curricula and complete exams we are not accepting this tenet and maybe that is why some courses fail to attract adults over the long run.

During the interviews with the principals in the three schools in the area the question of special programmes for parents was addressed. One school offers language classes to parents. However, these classes take place in a portable out in the school yard. There is no need for any parent to ever come into the school building. If we want parents to be involved in the school, putting them outside in the field is certainly not the most welcoming way to accomplish this.

We need to find out parental attitudes about education and educators (Chavkin and Williams, 1993) and to know what parents would like their roles to be - what is possible

and reasonable. Parents want to be able to help their children at home, but they often do not know what to do. They want the school and teachers to advise them about how to help their children at home (Duaber and Epstein, 1993). Parents, who are new to the education system are often reluctant to ask for help. They are unsure of their rights and how to access the information they need. Often parents do not get the help they want from the school. The administration must be proactive. Participation of parents of cultural minority students must be enlisted (Howe, 1992), we cannot wait for them to come to us.

The mothers needed help in finding resources on summer activities for their children. We spent several sessions looking at the advertisements for summer camps for children. They needed to talk about rules and regulations in Ontario schools, such as, when they can take their children out of school for trips and doctor's appointments. One parent needed to take her children back to Hong Kong before the school year ended and she was unsure if they would still be able to complete their school year if she did this.

A parent centre in the local schools could go a long way to helping mothers become part of the Canadian climate and also provide them first hand experience with the schools. They could also accompany classes on field trips. This would help the teachers become better acquainted with the mothers and show the mothers places they can go with their children in non-school time.

Many teachers and administrators are not trained in ways to help parents and get parents involved in the school and their children's learning, especially if the parents come from different cultures to their own. Teachers and administrators must learn how to support and encourage Asian parents to become educational partners (Lee, 1995) and be convinced of the value of parental involvement (Haynes, Comer and Hamilton-Lee, 1989).

I have been lobbying for a parent centre in our school because of all the issues that prompted this study in the first place. At first the principal refused, then recently he said maybe. I suggested the room in the school that would be the most appropriate, but he said we would use the portables because parents cannot take precedence over children. This is a valid point, but there have to be ways to accommodate both.

The reasons the mothers gave for the academic success and failure of their children make it unlikely that they will see their involvement in the school as a factor in their children's achievement. The main reasons the mothers gave for academic success were studying hard, listening in class, respecting the teachers and taking the initiative. These are factors for which they believe their children are mainly responsible even though the mothers can encourage and assist. They did suggest that success can also be related to more general factors, such as reading, consulting parents, asking questions and attitude. However, these are also mainly under the control of the children themselves. As a result, the one area over which the mothers and the children have no control is also seen as important to success, that is, having the necessary intelligence.

Except for two factors - too much freedom in the schools in Canada, and an unsuitable curriculum - the mothers were consistent in their attitudes. The beliefs held by the mothers are also consistent with those held by people brought up with Confucian values. The mothers said they believed academic failure could be attributed to the children not listening in class, being lazy (i.e. not studying hard enough), not doing homework and having problems in relations with teachers. Each of these is, to some extent, the child's responsibility.

Along with their beliefs about academic success and failure, another aspect that could affect the perceived utility of becoming involved in the school is the expectations the

mothers have of the schools. They expect that the teachers should be highly qualified. This is a decision made by the board and the principal using the Ministry of Education guidelines on teacher qualifications. The parents, at present, have no input into the qualifications of the teachers in the schools in the region in which I teach. While some parent councils have expressed the belief they could have input into who is hired and fired in the schools they represent, and this is one role of school councils in some states in the United States, the Ministry of Education in Ontario has made it very clear that this not one of the mandates of the school councils as currently conceived.

The mothers expressed the belief that the schools should be well-equipped. They have some concerns about the number of text books in the school. It seems that many of their children have to share books. This is a budget issue and here again the Ministry of Education has said the school councils will not have control over the school budget. The school council may advise on the budget, but ultimately the decisions in this area are to be made by the principal. Therefore, the two major issues in which the mothers in this study want to have input, are not up for discussion, at present, on the school councils, nor as matters of policy for which parent input will be requested. Thus there is little incentive for the mothers to ask to be heard on these matters.

There is another aspect to the text book issue in York Region. The board has mandated Outcome-based Learning for all students from Kindergarten to Grade 9. The theory of Outcome-based Education presupposes that text books are not the main resource in the school or classroom as subject content is not to be the driving force of classroom teaching. Instead, students are expected to develop skills in different areas, for example, note taking, writing reports. Thus, the school board expects that students will use resources other than content text books. Students are expected to use journals, computer data bases and newspapers, not to find information for the sake of knowing the information but to

develop the skill of finding information when needed. Also, with the world changing so fast, many text books are out of date as soon as they are printed. Our atlases, printed in 1990, still show two Germanys. This is an area in which we need to do some work in helping parents to understand the rationale behind the way their children are learning and why textbooks are no longer in widespread use in the schools. This understanding will be necessary for all parents, not just those from other cultures.

Good discipline, by that they mean strict with detentions and added homework, in the school is important to the mothers in this study. This is another area over which they can very little control. Here is an area where their beliefs and the beliefs of the schools probably do not converge. Good discipline in Hong Kong consists of total obedience to the teacher, not speaking unless requested and corporal punishment if the teacher deems it necessary, carried out by the principal. While this is very rare, the students do talk about some instances of corporal punishment in the schools from which they came. Here we encourage debate, albeit with respect, and certainly corporal punishment is not allowed. In this area the school systems should be giving more explanation about the style of discipline used in our schools, for example, time-out rooms, peer group discussions. However, it would be better if we could discuss these issues with the parents directly and involve them in the disciplinary measures carried out in the school. Too often, the children are sent to the time-out room and no parent is advised this has happened.

In the research already conducted, as seen in the literature review and the comments made by the mothers, contact between teachers and parents is viewed as very important. However, each of the mothers in this study believes that it is the responsibility of the school to take the initiative to contact the parents not the other way around. The mothers would not need to become heavily involved in the school to make their wishes known in this area, although it would be helpful if they want to do so.

The mothers expect that their children will be exposed to more physical education. At the present time the Ministry of Education sets the time parameters for each subject in the schools. Although the Ministry sets the minimum standard, there is room for some maneuvering and this could be an area where the parents could possibly change the policy of the school. However, it can be very difficult to change policy and the mothers do not perceive that they would be listened to at this stage. While they say they want more physical education for their children, they still want their children bussed to school or they drive them themselves. The schools now have walk to school programmes, where teachers and other adults assist in seeing that students get safely to school. The bussing is being limited because of cutbacks. Therefore, the schools could encourage the parents to allow their children to walk more as part of their overall fitness programmes.

By and large the mothers like the schools their children are attending. One mother, over the course of this past year actually moved so that her son could change high school, and other mothers said they chose to live in the neighbourhood they are in because of their knowledge of the neighbourhood school. They recognize that the schools in Ontario are not Hong Kong schools and even if they do not agree with all that is going on, they are willing to accept what goes on because they believe this will ensure the ultimate goal is achieved - attendance at university. There are a few changes they would like to see made and these ideas are very important for the administration and teachers in the schools their children attend.

The suggestions of the mothers about how to make the schools better follow their beliefs about education and academic success. The majority of mothers want to see their children have more homework, especially on weekends and holidays. Since they believe hard work

is the key to success, it follows that a lot of homework can foster the habit of hard work and the more homework, the more likelihood of success.

In a school with a high proportion of culturally diverse students, involving parents may be very important but can be much harder than if the majority of parents come from the dominant culture. Teachers must understand the backgrounds of the culturally diverse students, and must ask parents for their views (Marjoribanks, 1980). Teachers and administrators need to ask what is success to parents. They must also have a basic understanding of the traditional childrearing attitudes, values and practices (Coll, Meyer and Brillon, 1995). Bowman (1989) found that school learning is enhanced when the family values reinforce the school expectations. It can be very difficult for the minority culture parents and especially for the Hong Kong mothers here alone to talk to the school administrators and share their beliefs.

While education is a value of families, they often do not understand the system or expectations of the schools here and simply valuing education does not mean the means of achieving that goal is the same. If school and parent expectations are different and not perceived as amenable to change, the contact between the school and the parents will not be particularly productive. Therefore, the schools should take the initiative (Moles, 1993) in inviting the parents into the schools and opening up the discussion. It is only through open communication and dialogue that the parents will understand the teachers' point of view and the teachers will understand the parents'.

The education system was established in North America, originally, as a cultural invention to prepare middle class children to participate in their own culture (Saville-Troike, 1979). Therefore, it behooves the teachers and administrators in the education system, to explain itself to minority parents and get their input to make the changes necessary to include the

values the parents have. Parents must be involved in making decisions about what learning is most appropriate for their children (Ashworth, 1992).

It behooves the schools to try to adapt to the beliefs and values of the students and their families while ensuring the students are being adequately prepared for life in Ontario. Therefore, there needs to be an ongoing mechanism whereby parents can dialogue with the schools. Administrators have a responsibility to make their school more welcoming to parents and to ensure that there are effective channels of communication and that these channels are being used on a continued basis.

There is a need for appropriate pre-teacher training and in-service for experienced teachers (Feng, 1994; Moles, 1993; William, 1991). Anti-racist education should be included in teacher training to assist the teachers to see the worth of all students. It should include studying patterns in the homes of culturally diverse students and preparing teachers to work with minority parents. In the area of in-service, principals play a key role in developing teacher efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brissie, 1987).

The teachers' role is changed when parents enter the scene in an active way (Epstein and Becker, 1982). Teachers must realize how dependent they are on parental support (Hewison and Tizard, 1980) and give much more help to parents in the areas where parents can help. Parental involvement often begins strongly as their children enter the system and then tapers off as the children get older. This should not happen (Clark, 1988) and teachers need to be aware of ways to make sure parents stay interested and involved. However, many of the newcomers have children entering the education system in higher grades and therefore parents have not developed a pattern of interaction with the school.

Research has made us more aware of the needs of minority language children. In the early 1900's, ethnic groups coming to Canada were expected to give up their own languages and become assimilated as soon as possible. Some of the people who were brought up in the system where they were expected to only speak English are teachers today since this concept lasted for decades and so still have the feeling that this is the way to do things (Cummins and Danesi, 1990). Now we know that this is not always the best way to deal with minority language children. This is another area where teacher training and in-service can be of benefit.

Some parents do not want their children instructed in their home language. They believe it can reinforce the "old ways" (Glen, 1992) and that their children will not learn English quickly. Teachers and administrators need to understand this belief and learn ways to help parents see that they value the home culture and that reinforcing it contributes to the whole child development. In this study, three of the mothers specifically stated that they did not want their children to keep their Chinese. Hopefully, this idea will change.

For all the above reasons, Burnaby (1992) stresses the importance for teacher pre-service and in-service. Ashworth (1992) believes that there is insufficient training and support for ESL teachers. However, it is not just the ESL teachers that need training. Today, there is a movement to eliminate ESL teachers as separate from classroom teachers. Therefore, it is necessary that all teachers receive training.

France and Hager (1993) believe that the most successful parent school involvement program is a program that teaches parents how to read to and with their children. Therefore, this may be a place to start involving mothers in their children's schools. However, we have to get them into the school or find alternatives that can be equally effective and that is another challenge itself. It is hoped that this study can be a beginning

to getting more effective programmes for both the mothers/parents who come from minority cultures in our schools and thus improve the chances of their children succeeding in this their adopted country.

## 6.6 Communication

### 6.6.i. Mothers, services and bureaucracies

As this project proceeded, one theme kept surfacing - communication. The students whose progress prompted this study were having difficulty communicating in English. They were unable to speak, read and write with sufficient skill to achieve the academic success of which their teachers and parents believed them capable.

The mothers in this study initially came together to improve their ability to communicate (mainly orally) in English. They wished to be able to communicate with their children's teachers during parent-teacher interviews and learn more about what their children are doing in school on a daily basis. They also expressed the desire to be more comfortable when they had to talk with service personnel, for example, the gas maintenance man, the plumber, the mechanic who services their cars, on the telephone and in person. They also wanted to talk to clerks in department stores and to have their desires understood. There are many other people with whom they might come in contact and these situations also require that the women speak English. Therefore, the issue of communication was of prime interest to the women in the group right from the start. Similarly, Rockhill (1994) discusses women's literacy needs and some of the areas she identified are mirrored by the women in this study, for example, their need to learn the language to purchase goods and services, the need to converse with their children's teachers, primarily using the written word for communication, feelings of impotence when not being able to communicate as fluently as they would wish, and being isolated in their homes.

The first incident that began to break the ice in the mothers' group classes was a question for clarification regarding a communication - a child's report card. One of the mothers brought in the report card that her son had brought home the night before. She knew that she was expected to respond to the report card and attend a parent-teacher interview. However, she did not really understand what the report was saying. There were no marks only check marks and comments. The discussion that ensued around this communication got the mothers talking about many other personal communication issues which led to much more open communication within the group.

The mothers expressed their desires for the method of communication from the schools they believe would be most understandable for them. They said they wish communications to be written to allow time for reflection and as one mother said, "it needs to require some written response" so that it is perceived as important enough to spend the time to read and get help if needed.

The mothers in the study have substantially increased their verbal communication skills. Three of them felt comfortable enough to be interviewed in English. All feel comfortable enough to meet me for lunch and converse in English. They have telephoned me and spoken in English. One mother even made the appointment to get her car serviced. They have improved enough to want to continue their English classes. Several mothers, over lunch, have expressed the desire to learn how to write better in English now that they can speak better. They are eager to expand their communication skills.

There are substantial concerns regarding communication outside the group. This study began by looking at mothers' relationships with the schools their children attend. All relationships require some form of communication. The concerns expressed by the mothers regarding communications from the schools have not been resolved. The mothers

recognize that there will not always be communications in their first language, but I believe that they would feel more accepted if some effort was expended in providing first language communication especially in schools where one or two groups are in the majority. Surely, Lo Lim would not simply throw away communications if they were in Chinese.

The mothers in this study have quite specific expectations of their children and the schools they attend. Here again communication is a vital missing link. Ontario's school system has a long history, even though it has gone through both minor and major changes over the years. However, the basic underlying philosophy has remained the same throughout the decades. There are still some holdovers from our rural roots such as having two summer months vacation, but that is beginning to change as some jurisdictions embrace year-round schools. However, school administrators and board officials have not been particularly forthcoming in explaining why the education system is run the way it is. Teachers have not explained how marks are achieved and what new teaching methods are in practice. There has been little or no dialogue between immigrant parents and the leaders in the schools, little attempt to reconcile the newcomers' expectations with the day to day realities of the system.

The teachers and administrators have not asked for parents' input because this has never been necessary before. Parents, in the past, accepted the role the schools played in their children's lives. Now, however, there are many parents from different cultures who do not know what the schools in Ontario are all about. They have come from many different systems with different values and expectations. They bring valuable ideas that administrators should be listening to. As the schools become more autonomous, there should be incorporated mechanisms to be able to change things in ways that parents would like and bring the values of other cultures into the system here. This may happen in

the future with School Councils, but it is not going to happen soon as the School Councils are not made up of diverse cultural groups at present.

However, we, as educators, have also not effectively communicated our philosophy or our policies to the parents so that they could adjust their expectations or make other decision based upon fuller knowledge. At present we are all operating with less than the full information that could be available.

The mothers asked that more text books be available so that their children could bring them home to study. This would seem a reasonable request. However there are several issues involved here from the standpoint of the teachers. Firstly, many of the textbooks currently available are not appropriate in a setting in which minority cultures make up the school population. The text material is written from an Anglo-Saxon perspective and other cultures are rarely represented in the illustrations. For example, most science texts show only young, eager white faces doing experiments; other cultures are simply not represented yet. Yet we have little choice in texts since it is the Ministry of Education that tells us what we can and cannot buy through Circular 14.

The philosophy around the use of text books is changing. They are not used as much as in the past. We have begun to realize that a text should only be one of many tools available to students. The days are gone when slavishly learning facts from a text book is the accepted way to teach and learn. Yet we have not communicated this change in philosophy to parents, many of whom did their learning from texts and feel comfortable with this mode of learning.

During this present round of parent-teacher interviews a parent asked why her son did not have access to any text books. As it turned out, there were several in his desk. He had

neglected to tell his mom about them, perhaps to justify his failing grade. However, the point is she believes that text books are important and that they could help her son.

Trying to explain why the text books are not a valuable resource tended to fall on deaf ears in this case. It will take more than a 15 minute interview to explain what is now being done. Also, the time of an interview is not when this sort of communication will be most effective. A parent who is upset because of her son's grades cannot be expected to hear a communication on educational philosophy. This kind of communication requires more time, in a different setting, with only this purpose, such as a specific parent night.

Thirdly, the majority of text books currently available are written in such a way as to be almost incomprehensible to those whose first language is not English and have never been exposed to Anglo-Saxon culture. The long sentences and paragraphs with many new and/or technical words are very difficult to read with full comprehension. We need to enlist the parents' help in purchasing alternative books that use simple English but still have the content that is part of the curriculum.

The mothers also expressed the wish for more homework. In Hong Kong, it is common for children to come home with two to three hours of assigned homework even at the junior grade levels. Schools have homework policies about amount of time to be spent and expectations of the level of homework. In our school we do not always assign specific homework every night, but there are expectations that students will read each night, go over notes, work on long-term projects and assignments. Many students have not yet developed the ability to do other than specifically assigned work. Yet here again we often do not communicate our expectations well. I have surprised many parents by saying that nightly reading is a part of homework. We should be doing a much better job of communicating our expectations. If we cannot put out ad hoc communications in first languages, surely we can make translations of policy and expectations that do not change from year to year.

The mothers want their children to have more physical education yet they continue to drive their children to school. As one mother said, she is not sure if it is safe for the children to walk or ride their bicycles. However, here again communication could make a big difference. The teachers and administrators could help the parents organize groups of children to walk to and from school. Since most elementary schools are neighbourhood schools, the distances that children have to walk are relatively short, yet long enough to enhance fitness levels. The parents are not communicating effectively to the schools and the teachers and administrators are not reaching out through effective communications to the parents. Instead of meeting together and communicating for the benefit of our mutual concern - the children - we continue to communicate past each other.

#### 6.6.ii Communication among administrators, teachers and parents

The administrators and teachers expressed their frustrations around communication with some parents from minority cultures. The administrators expressed the belief that they are open and that their schools are welcoming. They said that they can only do what they are asked to do and they need the parents to ask for services and help when needed. The main frustration in face-to-face communications, as perceived by the administrators, is that parents are not as open. Many parents look at the teacher or principal and nod and appear to agree to whatever is being said. Many times, there has not been understanding and the school personnel do not know that until later when some follow-up does not happen. We are not following the advice of Hsuing (1995) to listen instead of telling Chinese parents what to do. The administrators would like to communicate with the parents in writing also. It is important to acknowledge the difficulties for school administrators to be able to provide first language communication. There is no policy within the school board that requires first language communication and therefore, no money is directly allocated for this purpose. This means that the individual schools must make their own arrangements

for any translations. Translations can be done at the central administration offices, but the turn around time is several weeks. In most schools communication with parents is done much more quickly and so such a long turn around time makes it virtually impossible to use this resource.

In a school where there is a staff member who is from the minority culture in question, it could be possible for some communications to be translated. However, when the teachers in my school tried this, the Chinese teacher was being handed long letters and being asked to have the translation next day. This meant she had to spend several hours at home working on this. It quickly became obvious that this was not an answer. She simply could not handle all the translations other teachers wanted. Several times parents have been enlisted to help. However, many have been reluctant because they feel their writing is not good enough. There are computer programmes available to do translations, but there is difficulty getting any one qualified to use them.

The other problem is size of the communications. To have translations made requires using twice the paper and in these days of tight budgets, it is almost impossible to justify this expense without an expressed policy from the board administration. Our school newsletter is usually several pages long and to make it available in other languages is prohibitive at present.

One year our principal put a question into the monthly newsletter asking if parents would like/prefer material translated. This was certainly a catch 22. Nobody responded that they wanted translations. Now I realize that either the mothers would not have read the initial communication, or would have felt too self-conscious to ask for the translation. There is a problem here. Some mothers said they want communications from the schools to be in writing so they have the time to think about them. Then other mothers said they only try

to read something that requires a response. We need to find out more about how parents perceive communications from the school. Perhaps there are differences depending upon the form and perceived relevance of the communication if we could get the mothers in this study and the administrators together, perhaps they could come to some solutions that would benefit both sides.

The teachers in this study want the minority students to integrate with the rest of the students, and this can only happen if their communication is in English as this is the only common language in their multicultural classrooms. The teachers recognize the value of communication for the students and the parents. They are doing their best to see that the students are getting exposed to English, however, unless they initiate the contact, they do not see the mothers. The teachers could be helping the administrators more in this area as well as offering constructive criticism about problem areas

## 6.7 The Children

The children, as many pre-teens no matter what the culture, have some difficulties with communication. They do not particularly want to learn English, and they said it is very hard. These children, like their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, would much rather be doing other things. Mary would rather be talking with friends although she admits she does not have as many here. Joseph and John would rather be playing sports with their buddies or watching television. While these attitudes are typical in Canada, they are not going to make the children successful in their academic careers.

The children's concerns regarding communication are not being addressed. Each teacher and administrator constantly asks the children to speak English during class time. Some teachers and administrators also expect the children to communicate in English in the halls

and during lunch in the lunch room. All recognize the impossibility of requiring English to be spoken consistently during recess. However, how reasonable is it to expect the children to use English at all other times? There are exceptions of course, for example, when a translation is necessary for clarification or safety, this is acceptable. It is understandable that the students would rather communicate in their first language - it is immeasurably easier. We also recognize the benefits of continued learning and communication in one's first language - just not at school. All but the students acknowledge that the only way to get a skill is to practice it, yet, we are obviously not doing a good enough job of explaining this to the students. Instead, we tend to harass them and try to find ways to coerce them into speaking English.

I feel somewhat ambigious about this study. On the one hand I have learned a lot about "astronaut" families, yet I still feel there are a lot of gaps in my knowledge. I believe the mothers have done their best to help me learn about them and their lives, yet I also believe they left a lot unsaid. I think the principals and teachers generally tried to put the best light on what is going on in their schools. Surely, my school is not the only one that is experiencing difficulties. The children told me only what they felt comfortable saying; this was certainly not all that was in their minds. I have wondered about the methodology and believe it had many challenges. Yet I do not know how else I could approach participants such as the mothers in this study. Language and power were problems as well as confidentiality. I would like to think that I have started some teachers and administrators thinking about how they interact with minority parents, but when issues like strikes get in the way, I am not sure that the issues raised here take a back seat.

With these reservations, I will make some specific recommendations about what parents, teachers and administrators and students could be doing to more effectively work in Ontario schools.

## **6.8 Recommendations**

- 1. There should be changes in access to the Federal government's language instruction programmes.**

**All minority groups and genders should have equal access to language programmes. LEAF has been trying to get the Federal Government to make some changes in this area for women, but the changes have not yet been enacted.**

- 2. The schools need to consider taking the initiative in contacting parents from minority cultures.**

**As this study has shown, minority group parents can be reluctant to take the initiative when it comes to contacting the teachers or administrators in their children's schools. Therefore, if we truly believe that our schools and the education of the students will be enhanced by parental involvement, it is up to us to start the process.**

- 3. Schools need to develop procedures to be able to investigate the expectations and values of the parents from minority cultures.**

**This study was an attempt to set up a procedure that could be used to find out about minority families and their values and expectations. However, this process is not readily transferable because it showed the need to get to know the participants well and even then the minority parents may not be as forthcoming as one would wish for. Attempts to gather information from parents without personal contact and on-going discussions may result in useful information, however, with the experience of this study, I do not believe this. A better process, as followed in this study, is to involve the parents in an education process and include investigation as part of the whole process.**

- 4. There need to be parent education groups in the schools to assist the parents in reading with their children.**

**There are many issues that the schools can help parents deal with, but the issue under consideration here is reading and many minority parents need help when it comes to helping their children with English reading. Therefore, courses and seminars in the schools could go a long way to filling this need.**

- 5. School libraries need to stock more multilingual, multicultural story books. Also there is a need for resource books with a multicultural aspect and basic vocabulary in the library.**

**Authors and publishers need to be informed about the cultural make up of our schools today and should write and publish books that reflect those cultures. If they do not do so, we should not purchase their materials.**

6. **Schools need to purchase classroom materials that show many cultures in multiple settings participating in multiple activities.**

**Policies need to change so that teachers can have more input into Circular 14 so that they can recommend books that are more in keeping with the cultural make up of their schools.**

7. **There is a need for special parents' meetings to explain school policies and expectations.**

**Communication between parents and administrators is vital. We must ask what they want and how they would like it presented.**

8. **There is a need for opportunities for dialogues with parents around policies and expectations.**

**Large scale open meetings are not the venue for dialogues around policies. Instead small group discussions need to be held where parents can state clearly their values and expectations and collaborate with administrators to come to working solutions.**

9. **There should be a mechanism for communication between home and school regarding the custodial position of the children.**

**Administrators and teachers should develop a trusting relationship with parents so that notification of parents' comings and goings be given. This would assist the teachers in helping students to deal with the ambiguities and uncertainties that arise and also the legal issue involved when a non parent is temporarily in charge of the children.**

10. **We need to find ways to get the children to talk more.**

**One of the difficulties expressed by the children is speaking English instead of their first language. We need to help them feel more comfortable with English and prove that it is necessary. We need to provide opportunities for students to discuss issues that are causing them problems. We need to have teachers who speak their first language and have these teachers trained in helping students with problems.**

11. **We need to explore, with parents, diverse methods of communication.**

**We need to have more than one method of communication with parents. This may require changing policies at the board level so that there is money to use alternative methods. We need the help of parents to achieve the necessary policy changes. We need to make it easier for parents to participate in board decisions.**

12. The faculties of education need more course time on multicultural issues.

There is not enough time given to multicultural issues and how to work with parents of diverse cultures in the faculties of education. If our future teachers are to do better with multicultural families, we need to teach them more about the cultures, their values and expectations.

13. There needs to be more in-service for teachers in the classroom.

Multicultural issues do not come up very often during in-service sessions. There needs to be built in dialogues between those in the classrooms and parents. There needs to be discussions of expectations and values and how to implement changes.

#### 6.9 Future research

This study was intended to explore the lives of a small group of women and I believe that it has opened up questions for possible future research. It would be beneficial for longitudinal studies to be conducted with the mothers to follow their continuing adaption to Canada. Similarly, longitudinal studies with the children would help the teachers and administrators in our schools. More studies conducted on families and the changing roles of women from many cultural backgrounds would add to our understanding about of the issues involved.

There would also be benefit in evaluating intervention programmes within and outside the education system to help us design appropriate programmes to help particular type of families. There is also a need for further studies on the adult language programmes offered for second language learners within our schools, colleges and community agencies.

I hope this study is the beginning for many more studies that can further illuminate issues that are so important to the future generations of students and families.

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## APPENDIX

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. This study is part of the requirements for my Ed.D (Doctor of Education) at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto.

I also hope the results of your information will lead to recommendations for the teachers and schools in the York Region Board of Education about how you want your children educated.

This is a chance for you to speak to the school through me, so I hope you will tell everything you want the teachers and the school to know. Your name will never be used in this report, only I will that they are your comments.

Enclosed in this package are:

1. this covering letter,
2. a blank cassette
3. a series of questions for you to think about as you give your opinions
4. a form for you to sign to say you have given your consent for this study
5. a form for you fill out giving some information about you and your children

I would like you to think about the questions and then talk into the tape cassette with your answers. The questions are just to get you started - you may say anything you like and in any order you like. You may go back and add things when you think about them also. You may speak in Chinese, a bilingual translator will translate what you have said and you can check the translation.

Again, thank you very much. I hope this gives you a positive opportunity to reflect on your children's education here in Canada.

### Questions for reflection

I would first like you talk about a regular day in your and your children's lives using the following ideas. This is to get an idea of your time commitments and your children's demands on your time.

1. How do you usually spend your day -
  - a. in the morning - before your children go to school  
after your children go to school
  - b. in the afternoon - before your children come home  
after your children come home
  - c. in the evening - before your children go to bed  
after your children go to bed
2. Whom do you see in your typical day, apart from your children?
3. How do you and your children usually spend your weekend?
4. How is your life different here from what it was in Hong Kong?

Now I would like you to think about the things you have to do to manage your household, for example, household repairs, paying bills, dealing with businesses. Everybody needs help with this things sometimes and I would like to know what you do if you need help.

4. Whom do you call on if you want help with paying bills,  
getting repairs done,  
buying things for you, your children, your house  
anything else you can think of?

Everyone also needs help sometimes, when she has to deal with the government offices, for example, hydro, water, income tax, citizenship, the school.

5. Whom do you call on if you want help with these?

**These next questions for you to think about are concerning your children and their education.**

- 6. What do you believe is your role in the education of your children?**
- 7. What do you believe is the role of your children in their education? What do you believe your children need to do to succeed in school? If your children do not do well in school, what do you believe is the reason?**
- 8. What do you expect of your children's school?**
- 9. What do you like about the school your children attend?**
- 10. What do you think the school could do better/what changes would you like to see in your children's school and the way they are taught?**
- 11. Do you help your children with learning English? If yes, in what ways?**
- 12. Do you help your children with other school subjects? If yes, in what ways?**
- 13. Do you help your children reading Chinese books and newspapers? If no, why not?**
- 14. Would you like to be involved in your children's school? If yes, in what ways would you like to be involved? (some people volunteer to read to children, be teachers' aides, help with special needs children, take part in the parents' group, etc.)**
- 15. If you could tell the teachers in your children's school three things, what would you want them to know about your family and the way you believe your children should be educated?**
- 16. Would you attend an ESL programme for you at your children's school? What would you like to learn?**
- 17. Would you attend social hours to meet other mothers at your children's school ?**

**Finally:**

- 18. What do you like best about living in Ontario?**
- 19. What do you like least about living in Ontario?**
- 20. Is there anything else you would like to tell me and/or the teachers in your children's school?**

**Please fill out this form. It is to give me information about you and the kind of family you have.**

**1. How long have you been in Canada? \_\_\_\_\_**

**2. Why did you pick this part of Canada? \_\_\_\_\_**

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_**

**4. What ages are your children? \_\_\_\_\_**

**5. Do your children take ESL classes at their school? \_\_\_\_\_**

**6. How far do you expect your children to go in their schooling?**

**finish high school \_\_\_\_\_ college \_\_\_\_\_**

**university \_\_\_\_\_**

**7. What do you hope your children will do after finishing school?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**8. What level of education do you have?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Consent form**

I have read the introductory letter from Margaret A. Sheppard about the research she is undertaking for her doctoral thesis and agree to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time and all records will be destroyed. I further understand that no names will be used in the thesis.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Letter and Consent Form for Principals and Teachers**

**Dear**

**Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. This study is part of requirements for my Ed.D. (Doctor of Education) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto.**

**I have worked with a group of mother in "astronaut" families and have been learning about their lives here and how they feel about the education system and their expectations for their children's learning. I would like to get some insight into the issues as you see them. I hope the results will lead to recommendations for teachers and administrators here who work with children from cultures other than the dominant culture.**

**I ask that you sign the consent form below so that I may use the information you give me in my thesis.**

**Thank you.**

**Margaret A. Sheppard**

**\*\*\*\*\***

**I have read the above from Margaret A. Sheppard about the research she is undertaking for her doctoral thesis and agree to participate. I understand that all information is confidential and real names will not be used.**

**Signed \_\_\_\_\_**

**Date \_\_\_\_\_**

## Questions for Principals and Home Room Teachers

1. What can you tell me about your school that makes it different from other schools in the area?
2. What are your expectations of students who come from other cultures?
3. In your opinion how does race and culture influence teaching/learning?
4. What styles of teaching are most appropriate for students from minority groups and especially for those from Hong Kong?
5. What is your greatest challenge in teaching students from Hong Kong?
6. How many astronaut families do you think you have in your school?  
What do you think is important for the education of students in astronaut families?
7. Do you have any special programmes for the students in astronaut families?
8. Do you have any special programmes for the mothers of your students in astronaut families?
9. The mothers have some specific expectations. I would like to share them with you and ask what we can do as educators to assist in these areas or help the mothers understand us better.
10. What aspects of the curriculum are Sinocentred or could be Sinocentred?

親愛的 \_\_\_\_\_ :

多謝您參加本研究計劃。此研究計劃是我在多倫多大學安大略教育研究院教育博士課程的一部份。

我期望您提供的資料可用以向約克區教育局轄下學校的教師，作出有關家長們對他們的子女之教育期望的一些意見。

這是一次您經過我向學校當局傳達您希望教師及學校知悉的事情。您的姓名絕不會在報告中出現；只有我才知道那些是您的意見。

謹此附上：(1) 本信件；(2) 一空白錄音帶；(3) 一系列的問問題給您在提供意見時作參考；(4) 一表格給您簽署，證明您同意參加本研究計劃；(5) 一表格給您填寫，以提供有關您和您的子女的一些資料。

懇請您考慮所附上各問題後，用錄音帶錄下您的答案。各問題祇是一些啟示。依您的意願隨意答問，您也可以暢所欲言。若您覺得要在那些問題再作補充，無任歡迎。您的意見會由一位雙語

轉下頁

人士翻譯成英文。我歡迎您核對翻譯本的正確性。

我再一次衷心感激您的參與。我希望本研究可為您提供反映您對子女的教育期望之一次上位機會。

## 問題探討：

首先，請就以下問題，談談你和你的子女平日的的生活。希望從這些問題的答案，了解你如何分配時間，和知道你的子女用了你多少時間。

(1) 通常你如何渡過一天？

(a) 上午 - 在你的子女上學前： 上學後？

(b) 下午 - 在你的子女回家前： 回家後？

(c) 晚間 - 在你的子女睡覺前： 睡覺後？

(2) 除了你的子女外，平日你會見到什麼人？

(3) 通常你和你的子女如何渡週末？

現在，我希望你想一想你管理家庭時要做的事，例如：家居修理、繳費、處理公事。任何人有時都需要別人幫忙。當你需要別人幫忙時，你會怎樣做？

(4) 你會請誰人幫你繳費、處理家居修理事宜、為你和你的子女添置東西、做其他你能想反的事？

轉下頁

需要別人幫忙。

(5) 你會找誰人幫你處理上述問題？

請你考慮以下關於你的子女和他們的  
教育問題。

(6) 在你的子女的教育過程中，你認為你的職責  
是什麼？

(7) 你認為你的子女在他們的教育過程中應  
負什麼責任？

你認為你的子女應該做些什麼，才能學業  
有成？

如果你的子女在學校表現不佳，你認為是  
什麼原因？

(8) 你對你子女的學校，有什麼期望？

(9) 你子女就讀的學校，有那方面是你喜歡的？

(10) 你認為你子女的學校應作何改善？或  
你希望學校和教學方法作何改變？

(11) 你有沒有幫助你的子女學習英文？若有，如何  
幫助？

轉下頁

- (12) 你有沒有幫助你的子女學習其他科目？  
若有，如何幫助？
- (13) 你有沒有幫助你的子女閱讀中文書籍和報刊？  
如果沒有，請說出原因。
- (14) 你是否願意參與你子女學校的活動？若是，  
你會以什麼途徑參與？（有些家長義務讀書  
給學生聽、作老師的助手、幫助有特別需要的  
同學參加家長會等等。）
- (15) 如果你有機會告訴你子女學校的老師三件事，  
關於你的家庭和應該如何教育你的子女。你會  
讓他們知道些什麼？
- (16) 你會參加你子女的學校為家長而設立的 ESL  
（英文為第二語言）課程嗎？你喜歡學些什麼？
- (17) 你會否參加你子女學校內的社交活動，跟其  
他家長見面？

最後，

- (18) 在安省生活，你最喜歡的是什麼？
- (19) 在安省生活，你最不喜歡的是什麼？
- (20) 你還有別的事情要告訴我和/或你子女學校  
的老師嗎？

## 子女的資料。

(1) 你在加拿大住了多久? \_\_\_\_\_

(2) 你為何選擇多倫多?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(3) 你有多少個子女? \_\_\_\_\_

(4) 你的子女是什麼年紀? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(5) 你的子女是否在校內修讀 ESL 課程?

\_\_\_\_\_

(6) 你希望你的子女能達到什麼教育程度?

完成 高中 \_\_\_\_\_

大專學院 \_\_\_\_\_

大學 \_\_\_\_\_

轉下頁

(7) 當你的子女完成學業後，你希望他們  
做什麼？

---

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(8) 你的教育程度是什麼？

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### Consent form

I have read the introductory letter from Margaret A. Sheppard about the research she is undertaking for her doctoral thesis and agree to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time and all records will be destroyed. I further understand that no names will be used in the thesis.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### 同意書

本人已經看過 Margaret A. Sheppard 給我的信。信中介紹她為博士論文所作的研究。本人同意參與這個研究。本人知道本人可以隨時退出，也知道所有記錄會被毀滅。本人亦知道論文內不會使用本人的名字。

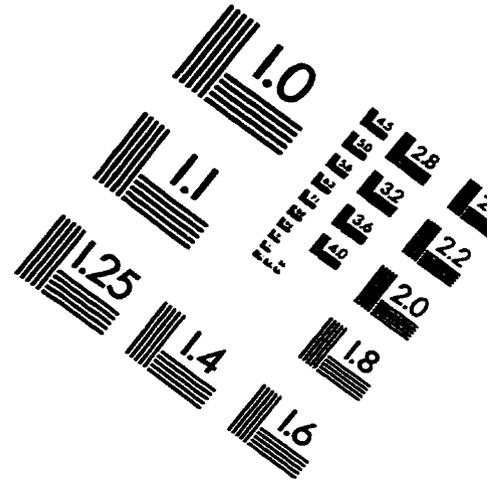
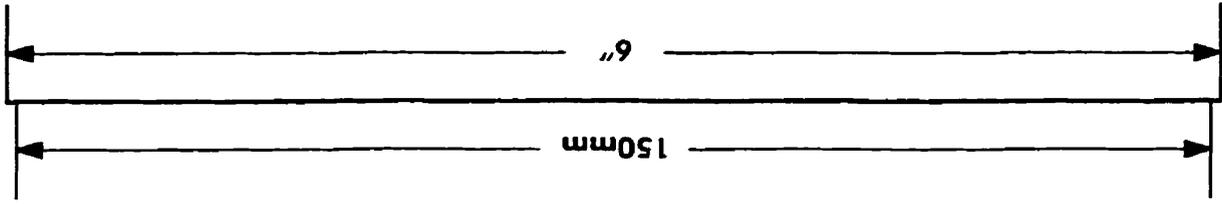
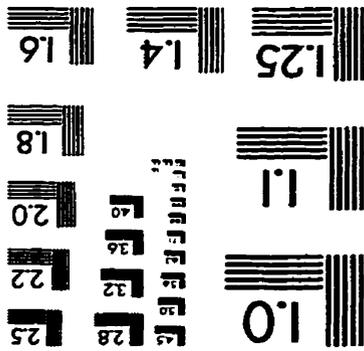
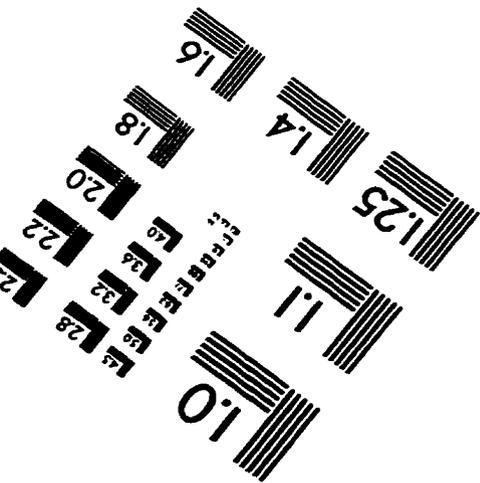
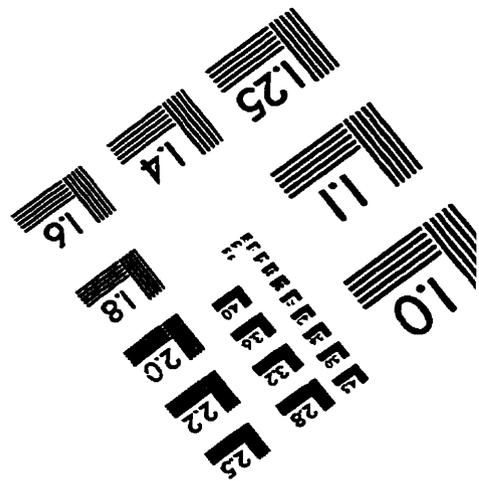
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