"Why Didn't They Show Up?" Rethinking ESL Parent Involvement in K-12 Education

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When I visited Canadian elementary and secondary schools over the past 10 years, many teachers told me that it was difficult to get English-as-a-second language (ESL) parents involved in K-12 education. I was often asked by teachers, "Why don't they show up at school?" The absence of ESL parents from school is often misinterpreted as parents' lack of concern about their children's education. However, many ESL parents indicated that they cared passionately. Instead of assuming that ESL parents do not care, educators need to understand the barriers that hinder some parents from participating in their children's education. This article explores the barriers affecting ESL parent-teacher communication based on relevant literature and the author's reflections. It goes on to identify parents' and teachers' varying perspectives on ESL learning, followed by indication of successful strategies to improve ESL parents' participation. The article concludes that schools and teachers must take the initiative if the resource of ESL parent participation is to be fully utilized.

Au cours des dix dernières années, pendant mes visites dans des écoles primaires et secondaires au Canada, plusieurs enseignants m'ont dit qu'il était difficile d'impliquer les parents d'élèves de la maternelle à la 12e année en ALS dans l'éducation de leurs enfants. Se demandant pourquoi les parents ne venaient pas à l'école, les enseignants se faisaient souvent une idée fausse de l'absence des parents et l'attribuaient à l'indifférence de ceux-ci par rapport à l'éducation de leurs enfants. Plusieurs parents d'enfants en ALS ont indiqué le contraire et ont manifesté un vif intérêt à cet égard. Plutôt de conclure à l'indifférence de ces parents, il faudrait que les enseignants comprennent les obstacles qui empêchent certains parents de participer à l'éducation de leurs enfants. Partant d'une analyse de la documentation pertinente et des réflexions de l'auteur, cet article expose les facteurs qui limitent la communication entre parents et enseignants dans un contexte d'ALS. Il traite également des différentes perspectives des parents et des enseignants sur l'apprentissage en ALS, ainsi que de stratégies éprouvées qui visent une meilleure participation de la part des parents. La conclusion souligne l'importance, pour les écoles et enseignants, de prendre l'initiative et assurer que la ressource que représente la participation des parents soit utilisée à bon escient.

The 2001 Census of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2003) reports that almost 5,335,000 people, about one out of every six in the country, speak languages other than English or French as their mother tongue. The Canadian K-12 English as a Second Language (ESL) population includes considerable numbers of students at risk of educational failure (Gunderson, 2004; Watt & Roessingh, 2001). Watt and Roessingh's Calgary study reports a 74% dropout rate for the ESL high school population, and Gunderson finds that 61% of the ESL high school students in Vancouver disappeared from their academic courses.

There are many reasons why ESL students may experience such a high rate of school failure. One reason is poor home-school communication (Ogbu, 1982; Osborne, 1996). Some research suggests that whereas white parents were increasing participation in their children's education, ESL parents' contacts with their children's schools were actually decreasing (Moles, 1993). Over the years, research has also repeatedly revealed that limited communication between ESL parents and teachers has been a serious problem confronting educators (Naylor, 1994; Gougeon, 1993; Salzberg, 1998; Yao, 1988); in fact, the Alberta Beginning Teachers' Survey (Malatest & Associates, 2003) indicates that the difficulties beginning teachers have in communicating with ESL parents[1] also plague many experienced teachers (Faltis, 1997).

In the past 10 years when I visited Canadian elementary and secondary schools, many teachers told me that it was difficult to get ESL parents involved in K-12 education. I have often been asked by teachers "Why don't they show up at school?" This article is an attempt to explore various barriers that affect ESL parent-teacher communication based on relevant literature and my reflections followed by an overview of successful strategies to improve ESL parent participation. It concludes that schools and teachers must take the initiative if the resource of ESL parent participation is to be fully utilized.

ESL parents' involvement in the public schools presents a significant challenge (Moles, 1993). For example, Cumming (1995), in his *Review of ESL Services in the Vancouver School Board*, comments,

> The VSB has translated numerous relevant documents into a wide variety of languages, which are clearly displayed and readily available at VSB offices and at the Oakridge Reception and Orientation Centre. But problems of communicating with ESL students' parents and families on an ongoing basis, after initial stages of students' receptions into the VSB, seem acute and need to be addressed programmatically. (p. 90)

The relationship a school has with ESL parents needs to be seen in the wider context of the international community. For example, the Calderdale

decision was formulated in the United Kingdom in the 1980s (Leung & Franson, 2001) after a group of ESL parents successfully sued a school authority because they felt that their children were being "ghettoized" in an ESL program. On the basis of this decision, the Ministry of Education prohibited ESL programs throughout the UK, and ESL teachers now work as support teachers in content classes. In the United States, California Proposition 227, known as the Unz Initiative (Crawford, 1997), passed with a 61% approval in 1998 and eliminated all forms of ESL instruction and bilingual programs in that state except a one-year sheltered English immersion. As in the UK, the dissatisfaction and misunderstanding of some of those closely associated with these programs were factors here too, with large numbers of Hispanic parents voting against ESL and bilingual education. Parents believed that their children were not learning English quickly enough. The message from this is clear: Even if most parents are satisfied with ESL programs, it is important to reach smaller groups who are not satisfied and may not fully understand the program. It is important for educators to listen to ESL parents. And the two examples above reveal another mechanism as well: politicians can take ESL parents' dissatisfaction as an excuse to cut ESL funding. As a result, ESL students may not get the support that they need.

The issue of communication between schools and ESL parents has moved to the foreground recently. In British Columbia, the Vancouver and Richmond School Boards have both been approached with proposals for traditional schools, with claims of support from ESL parents (*Globe and Mail*, February 1, 1999). Most of the parents involved are recent Chinese immigrants who are unhappy with the work their children are doing in Vancouver and Richmond public schools; they have also expressed endorsement of "teacher-led instruction, a homework policy, dress code or uniforms, regular study and conduct reports, frequent meetings between parents and teachers, and additional extra-curricular activities" (Sullivan, 1998, p. 15). It is worth noting that this debate has been presented as being between two familiar sides, the traditional and the progressive, a contrast that does not always fit local conditions. There is a danger that the ready-made rhetoric of the public debate may turn attention away from classroom realities and that calls for simplistic solutions may distract attention from valuable educational approaches to real needs. In the Richmond School District, difficulties of communication with Chinese Canadian parents have become a major political question (Gaskell, 2001). Yet communication between schools and ESL parents is a relatively neglected research area despite the fact that miscommunication has the potential to derail the provision of multicultural and minority education.

Barriers to ESL Parent Involvement

Teacher-parent communication is fraught with complexity for a variety of reasons. Communicating with parents whose first language is not English and whose children are struggling academically highlights the difficulty of home-school interactions in a context of not only linguistic but also cultural differences between immigrant parents and Canadian teachers. Research suggests that many teachers have little idea about how to work effectively with parents from different cultural backgrounds (Malatest & Associates, 2003; Griego Jones, 2003; Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004). In these circumstances, establishment of fruitful parent-teacher communication seems to be challenged by a number of potential barriers, which can be divided into five main categories: language differences, parent unfamiliarity with the school system, teacher attitudes and institutional racism, different views of education, and cultural differences concerning home-school communication.

For ESL parents, language is the major barrier to communicating with teachers. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation reports that many parents of ESL students try to communicate with schools, but are hampered by their English ability and the lack of available translation services (Naylor, 1993b). As Scarcella (1990) explains, "frequently, [ESL] parents avoid going to schools because they cannot communicate in English, and there is no one at school who speaks their native language" (p. 162).

Reciprocally, the school system shows its lack of commitment to ESL parents by predominantly using English in most formal school-parent communication. Gougeon (1993) reports that ESL parents often depend on their children to interpret mail, answer the telephone, translate newsletters, and interpret at parent-teacher conferences. But asking ESL students to act as translators may be problematic, as they are learning English themselves; their language skills may prevent them from understanding the subtleties of coded speech in the school context. Sometimes ESL students may not translate the authentic message. For example, Meza, one of my student teachers reported that he witnessed a Spanish-speaking ESL student deliberately translating the wrong message to his parents when his teacher complained about his behavior problem (Meza, personal communication, 2005). Using a student to translate for the parent in this case creates miscommunication between the teacher and the parent. Finally, the use of educational jargon can also hinder effective parent-teacher communication; although some ESL parents are bilingual, they may not have mastered the particular language of education (Gaskell, 2001).

Unfamiliarity with the school system of the host country is another barrier that prevents some ESL parents from participating in school activities (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Gibson, 1987). In her study of Punjabi students' academic achievement in a US high school, Gibson reports that many parents in that particular setting had little understanding of the US system of educa-

tion, and few were able to help with homework or course selection. Like Gibson, Delgado-Gaitan's examination of the family life of Mexican children in the US also found that many parents in the study were unable to offer their children academic advice because they were unacquainted with the school system.

Regrettably, many teachers misunderstand the lack of parent involvement as indicating a lack of interest and concern about what the children are studying (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). ESL parents' absence from school is often misinterpreted as parents not caring about their children's education. However, many ESL parents indicate that they care passionately (Cline & Necochea, 2001; Griego Jones, 2003). Instead of assuming that ESL parents do not care, educators need to understand the barriers that hinder some parents from participating in their children's education. Educators also need to examine their own biases toward ESL parents. Research suggests that many teachers often do not have sufficiently high expectations for ESL students and parents (Griego Jones, 2003; Ramirez, 2003). Ramirez reports that many Latino immigrant parents in a predominantly Latino community in California felt that teachers have low expectations for their students. They complained that teachers had an inbuilt assumption of Latino parents' inferiority. They believed that the schools did not listen or care to listen to their needs as parents.

Teachers' attitudes toward parents and their efforts to involve parents are critical to parents' participation and to school effectiveness. In addition to some teachers' attitudes and racial biases toward immigrant parents, institutional racism is another major hurdle that can prevent immigrant parents from participating in school activities. Cline and Necochea (2001) suggest,

> The quest for parental involvement comes with a caveat—only parental involvement that is supportive of school policies and instructional practices is welcome here … parents whose culture, ethnicity, SES, and language background differ drastically from the white middle-class norms are usually kept at a distance, for their views, values, and behaviors seem "foreign" and strange to traditional school personnel. (p. 23)

Their study shows how institutional racism can exclude immigrant parents from involvement opportunities. Cline and Necochea report that a group of Latino parents in the Lompoc Unified School District in California wanted a bilingual program for their children, but their request was dismissed by their children's school and the school district. These parents were not allowed to meet with the teachers of their children; they were perceived as difficult, stupid, and selfish. Many Latino parents in that particular setting also complained that their children were treated unfairly as a result of social and institutional racism. However, the district administrators attempted to

silence them. It will be difficult for schools to expect immigrant parents to participate in school activities if they are not welcome and their voices are not heard. Moreover, class and race may also play a role in parent-school interaction. Lareau (2003) found that White and Black middle-class parents were more strategic in intervening at school than Black working-class parents were. Both middle- and working-class Black parents were continually concerned with schools' racial discrimination. In this regard, it is worth noting that Canadian or US models of parent involvement have tended to focus more on middle-class than-working class values and concerns and on experiences more relevant to parents of Anglo-Celtic descent than to those from non-English-speaking backgrounds or of Aboriginal descent. The importance of non-dominant forms of parent involvement from various races and social classes has been overlooked.

In addition, there is evidence that some teachers may actually discourage ESL parents' participation in school curricular activities (Cummins, 1986). These teachers believe that parents' first-language interaction with their children interferes with second-language learning. This belief has been refuted by many scholars (Coelho, 2004; Cummins, 2005). However, during my visits to Canadian schools, many teachers still strongly hold such a belief. For example, some teachers advised their ESL parents: "You should stop speaking your native languages at home so that your children can learn English." Despite the fact that English is a language in which many parents are not easily able to express themselves, these teachers advise ESL parents to speak English at home in order to help their children. As Scarcella (1990) explains, "when ESL parents switch to English, they often deprive their children of exposure to valuable input in their first language, eradicate their children's cultural identities, and expose their children to an imperfect variety of English" (p. 164). There is no empirical evidence to support the claim that English is best taught monolingually. Educators must abolish the damaging view that stamping out immigrant students' languages will somehow ensure educational success. They need to recognize students' first languages as an important component of their identity, a useful tool for thinking and learning, and a valuable medium for effective communication in the family and the community.

Another major obstacle to developing educational partnerships with ESL parents can be teachers' and parents' differing views of education. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss each cultural group; however, the numbers of Chinese[2] immigrants in Canada—the largest visible minority group, reaching 1,029,400 in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2003)—warrant a closer examination of their assumptions about education. Ghuman and Wong (1989) interviewed 34 Chinese families in Manchester, UK. They found that Chinese parents valued education highly, wanted more homework for their children, and preferred a stricter regime in schools. They interpreted the

self-discipline and informality in British schools as being lax and ineffective. The researchers also found that students' perceived lack of respect for teachers in the British education system was a concern for parents rooted in their own cultural norms.

Salzberg (1998) conducted ethnographic interviews with eight Taiwanese ESL families in Vancouver. Her findings show that parents were not satisfied with the holistic learner-centered approaches prevalent in Canadian schools. They also expressed discomfort with the long periods (most students took two to three years) spent in non-credit ESL classes without clear criteria for advancement. Parents were anxious to mainstream their children, as they believed second-language learning was delayed through separate ESL classes. Parents also considered ESL classes as preventing students from learning content-area material. These Taiwanese ESL parents tended to prefer greater use of testing, more intensive homework tied to material that was more frequently tested, and teachers functioning as disciplinarians, urging students to greater academic progress as measured by such tests.

As discussed above, Chinese ESL parents have high expectations with respect to their children's education; yet many voice mixed feelings or even frustrations in their perceptions of their children's ESL programs. How do ESL teachers perceive ESL parents' concerns? Gougeon (1993) conducted interviews with 27 teachers in one school in Alberta. He found that from the teachers' point of view, Chinese parents were distrustful of the Canadian school system: the lack of national entrance exams, and the absence of student discipline. Also, they were confused about the significance of credentials and about the Canadian style of teaching and learning. According to one teacher, "I think they [ESL parents] may feel very disappointed with the Canadian system. They do not view this as real learning" (p. 265). Gougeon's data analysis shows that the teachers were aware that many ESL parents criticized the laxity of the host country school system in general and of teaching styles in particular.

Communication between ESL parents and teachers can be problematic. On the one hand, many ESL parents view ESL learning as not real learning (Ghuman & Wong, 1989; Gougeon 1993; Guo, 2002; Salzberg, 1998). On the other hand, many teachers regard learning English as crucial for ESL students before they move to mainstream classes. Guo's study of an ESL program in Canadian schools shows that teachers believed that ESL programs helped ESL students acquire proficiency in the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing within the shortest possible time. Teachers also believed that ESL classes helped students to acquire basic study skills and to be socialized into North American school culture, which they believed were fundamental to their continued education in Canada. Moreover, many authoritative texts on ESL teaching and learning advocate teaching methodologies that promote critical thinking, reflective teaching, communi-

cative teaching methods, the integration of language and content, and cooperative learning (Brown, 2000; Snow & Brinton, 1997), and ESL teachers are encouraged to use interactive techniques, group or individual self-evaluations, and learner-centered activities (Brown).

Teachers and ESL parents are deeply divided on both what and how students should learn, and schools do not always seem to value ESL parents' views of education (Guo, 2002). Guo finds that both Canadian teachers and immigrant parents have the same aims: providing the best education for immigrant students. However, as Delpit (1988) asserts, parents who do not function in the culture of power often want their children to learn the code of power. The above studies indicate that Chinese ESL parents want direct, intentional, and individual language instruction for their children; lack of attention to this concern has created dissatisfaction among many Chinese immigrant parents.

A further barrier to ESL parent involvement in schools is cultural differences concerning home-school communication. Communicating with schools as one type of parent involvement is the norm in North America. Parents are expected to come to routine parent-teacher conferences before or after they receive their child's report card. They are also expected to volunteer at school functions, help their children with their homework, and initiate parent-teacher meetings if they have any particular concerns (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). However, parent involvement is mainly a North American concept; it is neither expected nor practiced in China (Ogbu, 1995). ESL parents from a focus group discussion conducted by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation reported that "the notion of helping in schools is a 'western idea,' so they need more outreach to involve them" (Naylor, 1993a, p. 2). In fact, parents' presence in schools may have negative associations; Chan (1976) explains that in Hong Kong, Chinese parents seldom attend school functions because if the school asks to see parents, it means their children have got into trouble. This social stigma associated with communicating with teachers might prevent some Chinese ESL parents from interacting with schools when they come to Canada.

Other researchers find Asian parents are reluctant to challenge a teacher's authority because in their cultures teachers are held in high esteem. Scarcella (1990) notes, for example, that

> recalling the traditional Vietnamese respect and awe with which the teacher is regarded, one realises that the teacher can expect the total support of the parents. Learning is highly valued, and teachers are ranked just below the king and above the father. (p. 167)

Asian parents see teachers as professionals with authority over their children's schooling. They believe that parents should not interfere with school processes. Yao (1988) explains that Asian parents usually do not initiate

contact with schools, as they see communication with teachers as a culturally disrespectful way of monitoring them.

Most ESL parents believe that they are responsible for nurturing and educating their children at home, not at school. For example, Espinosa (1995) explains,

> throughout Hispanic culture there is a widespread belief in the absolute authority of the school and teachers. In many Latin American countries it is considered rude for a parent to intrude into the life of the school. Parents believe that it is the school's job to educate and the parent's job to nurture and that the two jobs do not mix. A child who is well educated is one who has learned moral and ethical behavior.

Of course, there is a danger of overgeneralizing about ESL parents, who in reality are a diverse group with complex needs and expectations, but at the same time, it is helpful for teachers to learn about immigrant cultures in order to communicate with immigrant parents effectively. It is also important to keep in mind that teachers should learn and value parents' individual personalities and differences in a particular culture and across cultures.

If parent involvement is not the norm for Chinese parents, how do they communicate with schools? Chinese parents are in fact very much involved in their children's education. In China, parents get plenty of information about their children's education. Parents know their children's progress through looking at their textbooks, daily homework assignments, and the scores of frequent tests (Li, 2002). Chyu and Smith (1991) note how parents of high school students in Taiwan are required to sign the homework booklet before the child returns it to the school. It is generally

> the duty of the individual teacher or school guidance counselor to contact or call parents in case of minor student-related problems. Parents-teacher conferences are rare, and parents assume all is well if their child does not request that the parent see a teacher. (p. 133)

More recently, in some schools in Taiwan, teachers keep contact with parents through electronic mail (T. Yang, personal communication, 2001). A class list server is built for parents of children who are in the same class. The *daoshi* (homeroom teacher) posts daily homework assignments to the class list server so that every parent receives them. The teacher also informs specific parents about individual behavior and other problems. If parents have a question or concern, they can also contact the teacher via electronic mail. In Canada, Chinese parents reported that they supported their children's efforts by providing a print-rich home environment and quiet study areas and by taking their children to the public library (Li, 2002). One parent reported that she sat down with her children when they did their homework to affirm the value she placed on their education, even though she could not

help them with their work (Guo, 2002). This example demonstrates that even though this parent may not be able to show up at the school for school activities, sitting with her children when they were doing their homework signals that she cares about her children's education. This example also shows that even though this type of activity is not a typical parent involvement recognized by Canadian teachers, it is a unique way for this Chinese immigrant parent to help her children's education.

The existing literature on ESL home-school relations has centered on the barriers that hinder smooth communication between teachers and ESL parents with little emphasis on the conditions required for a real dialogue among diverse voices. What can help teachers and ESL parents communicate better with each other? Is it possible to conduct a real dialogue about their differing views of education? I address some of the conditions needed for building partnership with ESL parents in the following sections.

Implications for Successful ESL Parent Involvement

Although a school may be unable to address all the barriers to ESL parent-teacher communication, there are many steps that schools can take that will assist in increasing parent participation. This part of the article addresses mainly the needs of Chinese-speaking parents; I do not claim that all strategies mentioned in relation to Chinese-speaking parents would work for any ESL parent. However, educators can still learn from these strategies and apply them judiciously in their own contexts. The first step is to deal with language issues. For example, for schools serving significant populations of Chinese-speaking parents, it is important that all communication should be bilingual. Schools should provide interpreters for parent-teacher meetings instead of using students to translate for their parents.

Bilingual staff can not only provide translation, but also act as intermediaries between ESL parents and teachers. In their study of Chinese parental involvement in the schooling process, Constantino, Cui, and Faltis (1995) report that the active intervention of third parties, such as Chinese bilingual resource teachers, serving as a bridge between teachers and parents determined the success of parent-teacher communication. Their study indicates that parents and teachers placed different weight on parent-teacher meetings. Teachers believed that all parents should attend the meetings. In contrast, parents chose not to attend because in addition to language barriers, they did not understand the significance placed on the meetings. As a response to this problem, the Chinese bilingual resource teacher attached Chinese translations to all the signs in the school area and translated many school forms and the monthly school newsletter. The resource teacher also offered teachers discussions about Asian and Chinese culture, cultural values, and the myriad roles members play in that culture, as well as a crash course in conversational Chinese. Because of these active interventions,

teachers and Chinese ESL parents were more at ease when they communicated with each other, and more Chinese parents attended meetings with teachers.

Another effort schools can make is to help ESL parents understand the school system. One way to do this is to organize parents' nights. In a study of parents' nights organized by a Canadian secondary school (Guo, 2002), parents said that they were useful in providing them with general information about school policies and the ESL program. In this ESL program, students normally studied noncredit modified-content subjects such as ESL social studies and ESL science for two years, along with credit math and physical education in mainstream classes. For example, at one parents' night, the teachers addressed the following questions: (a) What do we do in our ESL classes? (b) How do students move from ESL into mainstream classes? (c) How can parents help their children in ESL classes? (d) What are some of the problems ESL students have when they reach mainstream classes? and (e) What are our expectations regarding homework? Guo shows parents' nights were effective as an educational event for newly arrived ESL parents. The sessions had good attendance, and a number of the parents who attended expressed their appreciation.

Another step toward increasing ESL parent participation is for schools to ask teachers to examine their own feelings, understandings, and biases toward ESL parents (Griego Jones, 2003; Ramirez, 2003). A school district can also offer professional development workshops on cultural sensitivity to help inservice teachers deal with their attitudes. It is important for teachers to learn what obstacles to school involvement ESL parents face and what they can do to overcome these obstacles. One thing teachers can do is to move beyond the *holiday approach* (Naylor, 1993a) and the *multicultural food approach*, which are popular teacher practices to involve ESL parents. When I asked teachers what they did to promote ESL parent involvement, many told me that they invited ESL parents to celebrate holidays from different cultures. They asked their students to dress in their ethnic clothes. Other school principals told me they organized a multicultural dinner annually and they were happy because many ESL parents became involved. However, educators should move beyond ethnic foods, dress, and festivities when trying to involve ESL parents. As MacPherson et al. (2004) suggest, educators need to invite ESL parents to "participate in all decision-making, but especially decision-making about multicultural, ESL, Aboriginal, and/or heritage language maintenance programs in schools" (p. 16). Teachers can also foster two-way communication by not only providing information to parents, but also listening to parents' input. Constantino (1994) reports that one ESL secondary instructor adopted several approaches to increase parental involvement. For example, the teacher used an ESL Parent Teacher Association in which the parents chose the topics for discussion, ranging from preventing

children from joining gangs to what the students needed to study every night. She also sent home a monthly newsletter and calendar to inform parents of her students' school activities.

Schools must address better the needs of a multicultural, multilingual population. Mohan et al. (1996) suggest that educators and administrators need to recognize that educational tasks may be open to culturally divergent interpretations; that is, teachers, students, and parents may have culturally different views of the educational agenda. Schools, therefore, need to become learning organizations "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, 1990, p. 3).

Learning together with ESL parents is an important task for teachers in multilingual and multicultural schools. Gunderson (2001) notes that "North American educators continue to view education within a 'mainstream' viewpoint, one that focuses on European values and beliefs, even though their school population grows increasing multicultural" (p. 247). Specifically, Ovando and McLaren (1999) posit that minority students are disadvantaged by school culture, curriculum, teaching methodology, and assessment measures that serve the Euro-North American middle-class norm. Schools and districts need to recognize that it is crucial to adapt the educational system to reflect its multicultural and multilingual community. One option is to incorporate ESL parents' home cultures into the school curriculum (Dyson, 2001). For example, parents may visit the classroom to share their knowledge, or students may be given homework assignments that require that they interview their parents or their grandparents about their communities or their immigration experiences (Gonzalez et al., 1993). This kind of activity helps to acknowledge parents' cultural values by showing them that they can provide valuable contributions. This also helps students make better connections between the school curriculum and their personal experiences, which in turn will help students succeed academically.

Another strategy in adapting the educational system is to acknowledge the unique ways that ESL parents are involved in their children's education. For example, Lopez (2001) studied a Mexican migrant family, the Padillas, in Texas; all five of the children had graduated from high school in the top 10% of their classes. His findings led him to propose an expansion of traditional parent involvement. The Padillas did not participate in such conventional forms of parent involvement as bake sales, fundraisers, the Parent Teacher Association, or back-to-school nights. Nor did they volunteer in school, attend school activities, or participate on parent advisory councils and/or school governance boards. Such types of parent involvement emphasize the norm of middle-class status. Instead, the Padillas took their children to work with them in the fields and helped them realize that without an education

they might end up working in similar jobs. By doing so, the Padillas gave their children a choice: either work hard at school or work hard in the fields. They understood involvement in the sense of teaching "their children to appreciate the value of their education through the medium of hard work" (p. 420). Lopez argues that the "transmission of sociocultural values" (p. 430) is also a type of parent involvement. Educators need to move beyond using participation at school events as the only indicator of ESL parent involvement so as to recognize the full range of ESL parents' contributions to their children's education.

Teacher education programs should increase their efforts to prepare teachers to involve ESL parents (Griego Jones, 2003; MacPherson et al., 2004). Gordon (1994) details a model that could add not only more students of color to the teaching force, but also produce teachers better trained to work with a diverse student population. Also, these programs should include information about the important role of the home in minority students' academic success. Student teachers should learn about the needs of ESL parents and become aware of their own and the parents' cultural assumptions about education. Monolingual teachers also need to be challenged to understand what it feels like to be an ESL student (Kubota, Gardner, Patten, Thatcher-Fettig, & Yoshida, 2000). I recently used a language shock activity to introduce the ESL method of Total Physical Response in a teacher education program. The students were asked to follow my directions in Chinese. They were also asked to observe their classmates' physical reactions and share their emotional responses at the end of the activity. Some of them became frustrated and asked me if I could speak English. This language shock activity provided an opportunity for the student teachers to experience first hand what it was like to be an ESL student. I also hoped that they would become more sensitive when later addressing the affective needs of their own ESL students. As MacPherson et al. (2004) suggest, teachers need to develop the intercultural ability to move "across cultures in a way that is tolerant of conflicting perspectives and deeply respectful of people's lived differences" (p. 5). This intercultural ability requires that teachers move beyond learning about other groups to reach the stage of examining the cultural contexts that have influenced their own behavior, attitudes, and beliefs (Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003).

Conclusion

It is critical for schools to adopt successful approaches to working with ESL parents because schools and parents alike share the goal of providing the best education for ESL students. Many ESL parents do in fact participate in the education of their children, but in ways that are not always recognized and valued by teachers. Existing research centers primarily on helping parents to learn about schools. Further research is needed on how teachers

can learn more about ESL families and how they may develop increased intercultural ability: educators often focus on what is lacking in ESL families rather than on the potential resources on which they can build. Schools and teachers must take the initiative if the resource of ESL parent participation is to be fully utilized. The work of achieving social justice must involve ESL parents, and ESL parents' voices must be heard.

Notes

[1]The term *ESL parents* in this article refers to parents of children who speak English as a second language and who are schooled in ESL and mainstream classes.

[2]This is not to say that the Chinese are a homogeneous cultural group. In fact there are significant differences in the political, economic, social, and educational systems between China and Taiwan. Thus caution in generalizations about Chinese parents is needed.

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