

**Experiences of Newcomers to Fransaskois Schools:  
Opportunities for community collaboration**  
**Les expériences des nouveaux-venus dans les écoles  
fransaskoises : des opportunités de collaboration  
communautaire**

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Article abstract

Recently, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of Francophone immigrants to Anglo-dominant provinces in Canada. This paper presents results of an appreciative inquiry-based study into the experiences of newcomers to one Francophone community in a linguistic minority context (Saskatchewan). Transcripts of interviews with twenty-seven participants were analysed to identify potential barriers to inclusion in the Francophone school community. Recommendations are offered as to how culturally reciprocal collaboration and mentoring may be used to address identified challenges.

# EXPERIENCES OF NEWCOMERS TO FRANSASKOIS SCHOOLS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

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**ABSTRACT.** Recently, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of Francophone immigrants to Anglo-dominant provinces in Canada. This paper presents results of an appreciative inquiry-based study into the experiences of newcomers to one Francophone community in a linguistic minority context (Saskatchewan). Transcripts of interviews with twenty-seven participants were analysed to identify potential barriers to inclusion in the Francophone school community. Recommendations are offered as to how culturally reciprocal collaboration and mentoring may be used to address identified challenges.

## LES EXPÉRIENCES DES NOUVEAUX-VENUS DANS LES ÉCOLES FRANSASKOISES : DES OPPORTUNITÉS DE COLLABORATION COMMUNAUTAIRE

**RÉSUMÉ.** Il y a eu récemment une augmentation sans précédent du nombre d'immigrants francophones dans les provinces à prédominance anglophone au Canada. Cet article présente les résultats d'une étude par investigation appréciative auprès de nouveaux-venus au sein d'une communauté francophone dans un contexte de minorité linguistique (Saskatchewan). Les comptes-rendus de vingt-sept participants ont été analysés afin d'identifier les obstacles potentiels à leur inclusion dans la communauté scolaire francophone. Des recommandations sont formulées, expliquant de quelle manière la collaboration mutuelle entre les cultures et le mentorat peuvent aider à résoudre les problématiques identifiées.

The present article provides an overview of findings of the first phase of a study into inclusion of new immigrant students and their families into Francophone school communities in the linguistic minority (Anglo-dominant) setting of Saskatchewan, Canada. In this context, community partnerships and collaboration are integral parts of the project. This multi-phased project explored challenges that may emerge as school populations evolve. This reporting focuses on strategies for enhancing one Francophone school community by making it more inclusive of newcomers, particularly via reciprocal mentoring (Ballantyne, Green, Yarrow, & Millwater, 1999).

In an inclusive community of learners, each student has a meaningful place in the community and the school culture is constructed in a collaborative manner. In this study, inclusion is defined as a coming together of individuals, each having complex and dynamic identities, around a co-constructed vision of what would be most beneficial to fostering meaningful participation of each member of a community of learners in a context of increasing diversity. Exclusion occurs in contexts where some individuals, but not all, have the knowledge to be, or to eventually become, full participants in their own learning. As social beings, each individual needs to be part of the negotiation of meaning as an integral part of the learning process (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The theoretical approach of this study is derived from social constructionism (Gergen, 1999, 2003), cultural reciprocity (Harry, Rueda & Kalyanpur, 1999), appreciative inquiry (Hammond, 1998), situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and communities of practice (Wenger, 2005), where “learning is an inseparable aspect of social practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31).

The first phase of the study included an exploration of educational expectations, strengths, and needs of newcomers to one Francophone community of learners in a minority language context. In his discussion of Lave and Wenger’s model of situated learning (1991), Smith (2009) asserts that for a community of learners to function, “it needs to generate and appropriate a shared repertoire of ideas, commitments and memories” (p. 3). Thus, participants were asked to tell about their present and previous experiences of schooling in order to document their particular repertoire of ideas as part of the accumulated knowledge of the new community in which they have come to live.

The remainder of this article provides a summary of educational experiences and challenges of twenty-seven new immigrants to one Francophone school in Saskatchewan, and describes discontinuities between their previous educational experiences and their experiences of schooling in Canada. A description of the historical context of Francophone minority communities in Saskatchewan and the link between the minority language context and the choice of methodology are explained, followed by a description of the participants. Two key challenges identified through thematic qualitative data analysis are then presented. The article concludes with a discussion of how newcomers and longstanding members of the community may work collaboratively to address emerging challenges, with particular attention to the role of reciprocal mentoring.

## THE MINORITY LANGUAGE CONTEXT

This research focused on one Canadian Francophone community in Saskatchewan. In Canada, French and English both carry official language status federally. However, French is the only official language in the province of Quebec and it is not an official language of the province of Saskatchewan. In this paper, the terms Anglophone and Francophone are used to indicate

the geographically dominant language groups. Francophones outside Quebec are considered to be in minority language situations since the majority of citizens outside Quebec are English speakers and the dominant language, often the only language, in the public domain is English (e.g. signage, language of workplace communication). The percentage of Canadians, outside Quebec, who report having French as a mother tongue has decreased, especially in Saskatchewan where Francophones make up approximately 2 percent of the total population. Between 2001 and 2006, the Francophone community in Saskatchewan decreased by 1800 people (Atlas de la Francophonie, 2007), or 9.7 percent (Statistics Canada, 2009). Known as the Fransaskois, Saskatchewan's small Francophone population is spread out over nine school districts, twelve Francophone school centers, and numerous towns and cities.

In 2006, following a number of incidents relating to inclusion, identity and membership within the Fransaskois community, the *Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise*, the governing body of the Francophone community in Saskatchewan, created *La commission sur l'inclusion*. The commission's report (Denis, 2008) stressed that the Fransaskois have historically been of diverse places of origin and recommended that Fransaskois organizations adopt a policy of respecting and valuing cultural diversity. While such a policy would be an important step, it is equally important to explore further the nature of the cultural diversity present within the Fransaskoisie to understand it and to identify points of cultural convergence between long-time members of the community and newcomers. Developing an understanding of current beliefs can lead to dialogue forging new shared understandings.

## MINORITY CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The minority language context influenced the choice of methodology since the methods used needed to convey a respect for the lived experiences of the diverse group of community partners involved in the study to facilitate a bringing together of groups beginning to enter into contact with each other. Undertaking research into inclusion is a delicate matter in a minority language context where the threat of assimilation into the English majority is very real and where families have fought for many years to maintain a solid Francophone identity (Denis, 2008). By discussing inclusion, one opens up discussions around differentiated learning and creating welcoming classrooms (as in Hutchinson, 2007). However, one also risks re-opening discussions related to identity and questions of who is and isn't Francophone or Fransaskois. Might longstanding members of the community view research on inclusion as re-opening discussion around identity and fear that, by broadening the definition of Fransaskois or Francophone, the identity might weaken and thus the community might be more susceptible to assimilation? In their discussion around the fluidity of Francophone identities, Denis and Dallaire (2000) offer the following:

Senses of nationhood in Canada involve in part the way(s) in which francophones are conceived in discourse: as an ethnic group contributing to the multicultural mosaic, as a founding people, as one of two linguistic groups with “special” rights, as an unduly privileged interest group.... .. But there is no hegemonic definition of the francophone; rather, a discursive struggle is being waged in myriad ways.... Francophone studies recognize the social construction of identity.... (p. 415).

This study is situated within a social constructionist framework wherein identities and realities are seen as socially constructed. An appreciative inquiry approach (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005; Hammond, 1998) was used because of its recognition that realities are multiple and ever-changing. Developed in response to traditional change management theory, the principle tenets of appreciative inquiry include the following: 1) there is something that works in every group or organization; 2) what we choose to focus on becomes our reality and that there are multiple realities; 3) people move more comfortably into the unknown when they can carry forward parts of the past; 4) if we carry forward parts of the past, it should be what is best about the past; and 5) the language we use creates our reality (Hammond, 1998). The present study used an appreciative inquiry approach to explore the complex and dynamic “realities” about schooling of new immigrants in one Francophone school.

The next section of this paper presents the results of the phase one exploration of lived experiences of newcomers to Francophone school communities. During semi-structured individual interviews (Piquemal & Carlson Berg, 2007), participants were asked to tell about their experiences in their country of origin, including their schooling experiences, their reasons for immigrating to Canada, and their experiences in the Fransaskois school community. Interviews were conducted in French, recorded, transcribed and then thematically analysed using a selective or highlighting approach (van Manen, 1990). For this article, statements made by the participants have been translated from French into English.

### *Newcomer participants*

Participation in the present study was invited via announcements at various meetings within the Fransaskois community, at an immigrant settlement agency, and via flyers circulated widely. As well, potential participants were contacted by a research assistant from within the newcomer community. The study was explained to potential participants and, if they indicated an interest in participating, an appointment was made between each individual and the principal researcher to discuss the study in more detail and to obtain voluntary, informed consent.

Eleven newcomer families were interviewed for a total of twenty-seven participants. At least one adult from each family participated. Eleven participants immigrated as refugees, seven came to Canada in the context of family

reunification, and the remaining nine were economic category immigrants. Fourteen participants had school-age children and thirteen were students themselves. The eleven families hailed from the Republic of Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Mauritius, Morocco and Sudan. All self-identified as Francophone. In an effort to maintain confidentiality, identifying information has been modified and pseudonyms have been used.

#### CHALLENGES FOR FRANCOPHONE NEWCOMERS TO SASKATCHEWAN

Numerous challenges were reported by participants. This paper discusses two challenges: 1) the relationship between previous schooling experiences and expectations of the current Francophone school; and 2) racism and discourses of difference.

##### *School life in Saskatchewan: Free, freedom, free for all?*

All participants commented on how different their children's current schooling was from their previous schooling. Differences pertained to teaching approaches, school discipline, amount and kind of homework and teacher expectations of parents. In fact, one participant found the differences between previous and current schooling so great, he said, "It's an upside down world" (Romeo, Parent, p. 11). Numerous differences were noted with the most prevalent relating to universal accessibility of education.

The accessibility of education in Canada was a subject raised by all participants. There were three facets to this topic: 1) public funding of education; 2) diversity of students in regular classrooms, and 3) children's rights and the nature of discipline in the Canadian school their children attended. There appeared to be a belief amongst some participants that there exists a link between children's rights in Canada and a certain laxity in Canada about disciplining children.

Participants routinely commented on public funding of education in Canada. While the door-to-door school bussing service was appreciated, some commented that they had less contact with the school as a result. While free schools existed in their home countries, none of the participants had sent their children to such schools. Some participants believed that, while a uniform approach to discipline existed across schools in their countries of origin, the free schools did not offer the same quality of education as the fee-based schools.

Many participants also commented on how universally accessible education in Canada means greater diversity in the classrooms at many levels, including children's educational needs. Participants reported that in their countries of origin, many children did not attend school at all. While some families appreciated the attention their children were given to address their educational needs, they expressed a preference for special needs to be attended to outside

the regular classroom, such as in a learning resource classroom in the same school. In the words of Mariette, a parent participant, “[For] each new child, there are special classes, the students spend a few hours away from the other children. Every morning, they receive specialized instruction” (p. 9). Participants seemed unfamiliar with inclusive schooling and its inherent benefits and challenges which may relate to their preference for small group specialized instruction, either for their own or other children. In their discussion of how inclusive education evolved in Canada, Smith, et al. (2006) describe four distinct phases of change since the mid-1970s. Having not been part of the Canadian education system during those changes, newcomers may find themselves as peripheral participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the present system.

Participants also commented on the tendency to place children with similarly-aged peers and to keep age groups together, regardless of academic performance. The perception appeared to be that all children’s needs may not be met due to the diversity of needs and related demands on the classroom teacher. Parent participants also perceived that student motivation declined since students appeared to be passed to the next grade level regardless of their level of academic performance. Here is how one parent expressed his concerns:

It is true that, psychologically and otherwise, it is wrong to reject those who are weaker but [their presence in regular classrooms] causes dysfunctionality.... I see that it is a veritable puzzle for the teachers and it is a bit difficult.... Here, promotion from one grade to another is according to age. Even if your grades are mediocre, you will be promoted. In our home country, that wouldn’t happen. (Jean, p. 24)

The third sub-theme related to accessibility of education was type of discipline and rights of children in Canada. Parents expressed concern over the differences in discipline and its potential impact on their children’s level of respect towards adults, following through with their school work, and grades. Some participants, both students and parents, stated that the freedom Canadian children have to “do as they like” is linked to Canada’s human rights orientation and the absence of corporal punishment. For example:

In front of the teachers, [the students] don’t care what anyone thinks, they will kiss each other and the teachers can’t say anything. Only the teachers who are immigrants, like us, they will say, “No, stop, or leave the classroom.” But the other teachers won’t say anything because here in Canada, each person has the right to do what he wants and you can’t say anything. (Martin, Student, p. 17)

Less demanding, more lax...but I think it is because of what they refer to here as children’s rights.... [In Canada], it is taboo to spank. That’s what... makes things less rigorous. ...there are no restrictions that are consequences, be they physical or other, but limits that could guide the child to do what he needs to do and do it correctly. (Jean, Parent, p. 24)

I would call it *laissez faire*. You can't force children to study because you cannot punish them. If perhaps you give the child something to do and she doesn't do it, you cannot punish her, so you find yourself pampering your child despite [the fact that] she doesn't know how to write. (Juliette, Parent, p. 9)

When commenting on the level of respect in schools in their country of origin, one student participant reported that a certain level of respect was common to all schools and explained that this was related to the type of discipline in place, namely corporal punishment. When the same student was asked to explain why he believed his classmates acted they way they did, he said the following:

I think it's because students have much freedom here. If a teacher touches a student, it's a problem. The parents will defend their child but, in Africa, it's not like that... But here, they will pursue you in court... (Martin, p. 22)

Generally, then, participants in the present research had different expectations around disciplinary practices, diversity in the classroom and educational funding. They were struggling with making sense of Canadian school culture and practices. How can the Fransaskois community ensure that cultural differences are not barriers to educational success? In their discussion of cultural practices in communities of learners, Rogoff & Angelillo (2002) talk about "culture as a patterned configuration of routine, value-laden ways of doing things" (p.216). By inviting participants to share their perspectives on past and present experiences of schooling, the study created opportunities to 1) better understand different cultures, or manners of viewing school communities, and 2) reflect on the hows and whys of dominant educational cultural practices in Saskatchewan Francophone schools. Giving voice to newcomers via the dissemination of research results is one step in the co-creation of inclusive school cultures. According to Gergen (2003):

Our ideas about what is real and true are generated, sustained or altered by our relations with others. From a constructionist viewpoint, we must be prepared to embrace multiple truths, realities, and values without unequivocally deciding which is the best amongst them. We can thus appreciate our traditions without being obliged to replicate them. (p. 119) *translated by Carlson Berg*

However, moving towards collaboratively co-creating a more inclusive school culture within the Francophone school community will involve more than a sharing of perspectives but also a naming and dialoguing about a challenge faced by newcomers: racism in the schools.

### ***Racism: "Is brown skin a sign of illness?"***

Participants in the present research described numerous experiences of racism they had encountered since their arrival to Canada. One mother told



the following story about her daughter's experience as a newcomer to the predominantly white culture of the Fransaskois community:

There were some children who thought my children were ill because their skin colour was different from theirs. ...someone said, "No, I don't want you to sit beside me because I don't want to get the same illness as you." My daughter then asked, "What do you mean by the same illness?" [The other child replied,] "Because you are black so if I sit beside you I will get the same colour of skin as you." ...all of a sudden, she decided she no longer wanted to go [to school]. When we tried to question her, she finally told us that she had heard some things said that she wasn't comfortable with and she wanted to know more. So, she came to us and asked us to explain whether indeed being brown, as it was said here, is an illness. Now, we had to intervene, because with that it's the self-esteem that takes a blow. (Véronique, Parent, p. 3)

At the time of the above incident, Véronique's daughter was young and at the beginning of her school career in Canada. While Véronique was very troubled by what her daughter told her, she viewed the above situation as perhaps being the result of the simplistic nature of children's thinking and believed that the young children needed to be educated in the realities of different skin colours, countries and cultures. Nonetheless, the result was exclusion and it caused her daughter to question herself and not wish to return to school. At the base of her peers' thinking seems to be an assumption that white is normal and healthy and that another skin colour is different and indicative of something problematic. Véronique also told about another kind of behaviour:

There were even children who said, "Oh, it stinks of Blacks" and that, compared to the child who thought that having brown skin was an illness (pause) but a child who says, "It stinks of Blacks" that is another way of saying, "I don't want you near me". Those children must have heard something... to have said that Blacks stink. There were very hurtful words that our children heard when we first arrived. (Véronique, p. 3)

As Véronique said, such comments have to come from somewhere. What are children hearing about people of colour? According to Earick (2009), "prominent racial ideologies include color-blind racism, Whiteness as property, the Other, legitimizing invisibility, and racial realism" (p. 15). What are the ideologies and discourses of difference that are prevalent in the Fransaskois host community? Martin, one of the student participants, said he had experienced racism at school. In the following excerpt from his interview, he seems to have difficulty discerning what constitutes racism. He also attributes peers' behaviour to their young age, even though he is referring to fifteen and sixteen year-olds, and says they will grow out of it:

Often there are students who behave badly in class. I can't say they're racist because they are so young that maybe they don't know what racism really is, when they are older they will understand. But that's okay because, even in Africa there are people like that. We are all black but there are people who

will say, "You're not from my country, I don't like you." You can't call them racist because we're all black... Even if the younger students say things like that to me, young people fifteen or sixteen years old, I can't say anything.... (Martin, p. 12)

Seen in the light of Trepagnier's writings on racism, Martin's uncertainty about what is racist is not unique. Trepagnier (2006) gives an overview of the multiplicity of descriptions and definitions of racism, from those of Merton (1967, as discussed in Trepagnier, p. 1) who defined racism as prejudicial thoughts leading to discriminatory behaviour to her own definition of silent racism, namely "the shared images and assumptions of members of the dominant group about the subordinate group" that lead members of the dominant group to act in ways that contribute to the maintenance of racial inequalities (Trepagnier, p. 15). When asked to provide examples of incidents of racism, Martin said he could cite many examples and shared the following:

I remember a time when there were three of us immigrants, and all the rest were Canadian [classmates]. We were together playing but we didn't do everything together because we, the immigrants, were always on one side, we don't get along so well [with the Canadians], I don't know. I felt like we were on one side and they were on the other side. It's not that they didn't want to [be with us], they wanted us with them but maybe there were things that caused us to be on the other side because if there wasn't something there, we would all be together... I think it's because we are not accustomed to them and all they do that is different. It's not as though they are racist but everything they do, it's different from us. (Martin, p. 13)

In the two incidents shared by Véronique, there are examples of overt racism ("It stinks of Blacks") and ignorance ("Is having black skin an illness?"). However, in Martin's story, which he told as an example of racism he had experienced, he talks about "if there wasn't something there, we would all be together." According to Trepagnier (2006), "one must be able to conclusively define an act as racist in order to feel justified in contesting it" (p. 59). When talking about his experiences of racism, Martin said, "I can't say anything, I will only laugh." (p. 12). How can newcomers move from peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to active participation in their new Saskatchewan context? Clearly, given the experiences of Véronique and Martin, something needs to be said; racism needs to be named and discussed.

Trepagnier (2006) asserts that the binary categories of "racist" and "non-racist" impede frank discussions about racism since racially progressive, white people may not wish to acknowledge their thoughts and behaviours as racist. Trepagnier explains that if all whites are somewhat racist, then the "racist" and "not racist" distinction is false, "serving only to protect silent racism, everyday racism, and institutional racism... [and that] passivity can result from apprehension about being seen as racist and from confusion about what is racist – both unintended but direct effects of the "not racist" category" (p. 61). Trepagnier contends that

current “assumptions – that racism is hateful and rare–deny that racism today is often unintended and routine” (p. 3). Trepagnier invites white people to replace the binary categories with a continuum of less racist to more racist so that they can explore and acknowledge how racism often manifests itself in routine acts that are not considered racist by the person performing them and are thus unintentional. If inclusion means learning within a context where one is a full participant, it is important to identify any imbalances of power in relationships as such imbalances could impede entry and participation in a community of learners (Smith, 2009).

Yet another challenge to social inclusion of new students by their peers may be related to the close knit nature of the Fransaskoisie:

The teachers... try to integrate the children. I have noticed that the community is very difficult to get into because the people, the students have been together since Kindergarten, if not pre-Kindergarten... so it's these little cliques that are difficult to get into, that's what worries me. (Olga, p. 10)

The close knit nature of the community may be part of what helped it to survive. Now, when its survival depends on opening to others, this characteristic may be working against the community. How can a spirit of openness to others be fostered? Véronique made a presentation to her daughter's peers which may have enlarged their thinking about the many faces and cultures that together make the global Francophone identity. How can this global identity be embraced as a local identity?

Indeed, a number of concerns emerged when participants were asked to comment on their children's, or their own, previous schooling experiences, cultural norms and expectations of the Francophone school where their child was enrolled. These concerns heighten the need for dialogue amongst all members of the school community to foster greater understanding of perspectives on schooling so that there can be more cultural reciprocity in Fransaskois schools.

One form of cultural reciprocity is a two-way dialogue, in which the expertise and lived experiences of both newcomers and long-standing members of the community are invited and valued (Harry, Rueda, & Kalyanpur, 1999). Such dialogue can be seen as an opportunity to negotiate meaning (Lave & Wenger 1991) and begin co-visioning for a more inclusive school community (Gergen, 2003). Cultural reciprocity can also be facilitated through reciprocal mentoring, in which participants have equitable status (Ballantyne et al., 1999). In the following section, recommendations are offered on how Fransaskois school communities can collaboratively address issues arising from the present research.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

For each member of the Fransaskois community to participate in the co-construction of an inclusive school culture, individuals need to have the op-

portunity to meaningfully participate in the dialogue. Consequently, strategies related to reciprocal dialogue and mentoring are proposed to address two issues raised by newcomers to one Francophone school community in Saskatchewan, namely: 1) the discontinuity between previous and present schooling experiences and 2) racism and discourses of difference.

### *Experiences of schooling*

Participants described their prior experiences with schooling as vastly different from the present. In their discussion of multiliteracies and social futures, the New London Group advocate an extension “of the scope of literacy pedagogy to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies” (1996, p. 60). Indeed, as the Fransaskois community becomes increasingly diverse due to both immigration and the impacts of globalization, attention needs to be given to what kinds of knowledge, or indeed literacies, are necessary for newcomers and long-time members of the community to come together in a way that permits the Fransaskoisie to be strong in its diversity. Denis (2008) summarizes the complexity of changing community landscapes:

The planetary unification of humanity, as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin called it, has led to a growing interlinking of societies, whether this interconnectivity be the result of economic globalization, the evolution of humanist ideas or information technologies. ... Today’s world, marked by an increase in dialogue and communication, is also characterized by frequent and complex social relationships. Changes in the social landscape are increasingly rapid. A “worldculture” is emerging and local identities are either growing stronger by opening up to international networks or feeling threatened and remaining entrenched in defensive, often isolationist, behaviour. (p. 7)

### *Building bridges between past and present school experiences*

Accessibility of education was the overriding theme that emerged from the data analysis. Public funding provides students with transportation to and from school. While appreciated, this service also changed the frequency and nature of contact with the school. Many schools emphasize professional communities practice (Wenger, 2005) and collaborative learning with their students. Now, schools need to collaborate as a community to ensure that newcomer parents have a positive contact with the school. At present, many schools hold information sessions for all parents at the beginning of the school year. Often, these sessions follow a transmission model, where the teacher or administrator provides information to the parents. Moving towards more collaborative and reciprocal interactions would mean that the perspectives of each person are valued (Harry, Rueda & Kalyanpur, 1999). Thus, information sessions may be held with small groups of newcomers so that a mutual, reciprocal sharing of information and perspectives on schooling can occur between newcomers and school personnel. Such:

“Legitimate peripheral participation” provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29)

The newcomer participants in this study also spoke about inclusion in Canadian society and schools and had concerns regarding age-based placement of their children and expressed a preference that special needs of children be addressed in small group settings outside the regular classroom. Newcomers are not alone in querying inclusive school practices. Indeed inclusive education is a new and controversial topic in Canada and in other countries (see Hutchinson, 2007, pp. 18-19). One way of responding to parental concerns is through mentoring programs. In the Fransaskois community, teachers, university students and community members can be paired with parents and students to undertake mentoring activities to support the mutual educational, social and personal growth of participants. Ample information is available on how schools could set up community partnerships for mentoring and provide training to potential mentors, including mentors roles (Cohen, 2003), relationship building, and problem-solving (Ballantyne et al., 1999; Mullen, 2009; Terry, 1999). Setting up a program requires the collaboration and support of school personnel, particularly the school administration. Local teacher educators may also support and even oversee a mentorship program.

Freedoms enjoyed by Canadian students were perceived by numerous participants as more of a free for all. There appears to be some confusion around behaviour of students and discipline practices of Canadian teachers. Various community members, including university researchers, may collaborate with newcomers and school personnel to explain historical and philosophical orientations influencing Canadian schooling, particularly in minority contexts. Once again, newcomer parents are not alone in their questioning of current school discipline practices and in their desire to find new ways of responding to their children’s behaviour. Certainly, ways of explaining some current pedagogical views in Canada and how they relate to discipline practices may also be explored for newcomers and other parents alike. It is important, however, that the perspectives and values of newcomers be valued for their potential to enrich present educational thought and practice. It is important that Franco-phone schools not transmit a message that other ways of viewing schooling are deviant from a presumed Canadian norm, especially since newcomers may be experiencing minoritization on several levels (skin colour, religion, gender) as well as being speakers of French, a minority language in an Anglo-dominant context. As well, given the widely differing educational views and practices in Canada and indeed worldwide, can one genuinely talk about a norm?

Martin, one of the student participants, talked about not understanding the way his new peers acted and mentioned that only immigrant teachers understood his point of view. Having school personnel that are more representative of diversity within the Francophone population may facilitate dialogue about different ways of conceptualizing teaching and learning. Newcomer parents and teachers could also be involved in focus groups asked to give input into new curricula being developed in Saskatchewan.

In the meantime, schools could explore the possibility of two-way mentoring, whereby a newcomer parent and a classroom teacher would each participate in the teaching of the students and learn from each other's ways of teaching and dialogue in order to uncover some of the assumptions and beliefs underlying the various ways of teaching and learning. Unlike traditional mentoring, which is often more hierarchical in nature, reciprocal mentoring involves the social, interpersonal and educational development of both partners engaged in the process (Ballantyne et al., 1999). The work of Mullen (2000) provides insights into how co-mentoring can be facilitated. First, the results of the co-mentoring must be mutually beneficial. For example, a teacher might gain a heightened ability to re-think and solve classroom problems and the newcomer parent might gain a heightened understanding of an example of teacher-student dynamics in Canada. Second, co-mentoring pairs may need guidance from a school administrator or a university researcher as to how to jointly develop goals and how to reconstruct their individual identities to become collaborative mentors in a way that prevents "engulfment" (Hargreaves, 1998, as cited in Mullen, 2000, p. 4) wherein one co-mentor loses their sense of individual identity within a pair where one person has more institutional power or status. Thirdly, to facilitate trust and respect, the co-mentors need to attend to the non-evaluative aspects of the relationship. As Mullen (2000) explains, successful co-mentoring relationships are equal in their totality but may be unequal or uneven from one situation to another.

Local action research projects (Mullen, 2000) or other situated learning activities could also be used to build bridges between newcomers and long-time community members to facilitate discussion of cultural narratives related to learning and teaching (Staikidis, 2009). Perhaps newcomers and longstanding members of the Fransaskoisie could come together to work on student codes of conduct, which could also include references to human rights and anti-racism, and have the opportunity to collaborate and mentor each other in different philosophies around discipline. Government departments such as Immigration Canada may provide information to newcomers about Francophone communities outside Quebec and about societal beliefs that influence education and childrearing. Once again, this is an area where schools, universities and community organizations can collaborate with their counterparts in government. However, the issue of racism, raised by the participants in the

present study, needs to be addressed for the aforementioned bridge-building initiatives to succeed.

### *Racism and discourses of difference*

As Véronique commented, it is necessary to talk about race and colour, especially since there is a growing population of people of colour in Saskatchewan's Francophone community. As Nabavi writes, "we are all part of the relationship between oppression and resistance" (Lund & Nabavi, 2008). A first step to recognizing the part each community member plays in oppression and resistance would be to acknowledge the silent racism, and other forms of racism, present in the white majority within Saskatchewan's evolving Francophone community. According to Trepagnier (2006), the existing binary of racist/not-racist

does not recognize racism unless it is blatant and/or intended; neither does it acknowledge institutional racism. Furthermore, the view overlooks subtle forms of racism that have emerged since the civil rights movement and that are color blind; that is, forms of racism expressed in non-racial terms that are not obviously race-identified. The white definition of racism also ignores acts of everyday racism: routine actions that often are not recognized by the actor as racist but that uphold the racial status quo. (p. 3)

As Trepagnier (2006) asserts, "racially progressive whites will welcome the suggestion of a racism continuum, knowing perhaps that without realizing it, they have racist thoughts at times and may act on them" (p. 43). When community members can openly discuss racism, they will be better-equipped to collaboratively work for racial equality within Saskatchewan's Francophone community. Indeed the final report of the *Commission sur l'inclusion* (Denis, 2008) encourages academics and community leaders to dialogue around questions of identity and inclusion. The findings of this research will be an important starting point for such dialogue, which will also include members of the school community and the wider Fransaskois community.

Marx (2006) explored with white teachers their own talk about racism and their interactions with students of colour. Her work may be used as a framework for Francophone schools and community organizations, and faculties of education to examine their own thoughts and practices. Such frank discussions would facilitate reciprocal mentoring through awareness of potential power imbalances. Faculties of education can also play a key role by studying "schooling and society as arenas of conflict in which social relations are mediated by race, ethnicity, and other constructions of social difference" (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003, p. 80).

### **DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Francophone minority language communities in Canada lobbied both provincial and federal governments to encourage Francophone immigration

(Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). New immigrants have now come to and continue to arrive in the Francophone communities of Saskatchewan. The community is in flux and for the evolution to result in a stronger Francophone community, collaboration and reciprocal dialogue between community members, both new and old, is essential to co-construct a more equitable community.

In this paper, it has been proposed that Francophone communities receiving new immigrants use reciprocal mentoring and situated learning approaches to include newcomers in a way that respects their experienced knowledge and potential contributions to their new community, and values diversity as strengthening the community. Lave and Wenger (1991) remind us that people, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other and that learning involves the whole person as an active participant rather than a receptacle that receives a body of factual knowledge. Thus, knowledge and learning are about negotiating meaning and ensuring that each member of a school community has the necessary tools to participate in the learning context. This paper has presented the initial experiences of new immigrants to francophone schools in an attempt to foster an understanding of how they are making sense of their new school environment. Recommendations have been provided as to how school communities could enhance the participation of newcomers and move beyond the conceptualization of schools as purely organizations to become democratically negotiated spaces (Sergiovanni, 1992, as discussed in Mullen, 2009) where school community is co-constructed through reciprocal dialogue and co-mentoring.

Important questions emerged, during the first phase of the present study, which merit further inquiry: How can a spirit of openness to others be fostered in Francophone school communities in Saskatchewan? How can a global identity be embraced as a local identity? Thus far, a description of a small group of newcomers in one Francophone community in Saskatchewan, Canada has been established. In future phases, the strengths of newcomers and school personnel will be highlighted so that points of intersection and potential meeting ground between the two groups can be identified. The statements of the small group of participants reported here are not necessarily representative of the views of all newcomers to francophone minority communities.

Building on the results of phase one of the present study, future work will explore the perceptions of school personnel in Francophone schools in Saskatchewan about evolving school populations. Sharing with the community both the perspectives of newcomers and school personnel will stimulate community dialogue. The present research will help provide members of the established community with the knowledge and opportunity they need to engage in reciprocal mentoring. Acting as a facilitator, the principal researcher will undertake to facilitate reciprocal dialogue (Harry, Rueda & Kalyanpur, 1999), following



the principles of appreciative inquiry (Hammond, 1998), to explore how community strengths can be used to address the challenges currently faced by new immigrants. Such future research initiatives will endeavour to be consistent with best practices in co-mentoring (Mullen, 2009) and community collaboration (Cousins, Mickelson, Williams & Velasco, 2008) by including various stakeholders in the research process, employing an empowerment model that builds on strengths, and taking into account the social and cultural norms that are meaningful to community members.

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