

THE VOICES OF SOUTH ASIAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS: HOW THEY
CONCEPTUALIZE, NEGOTIATE AND DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR
CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS

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Author's Declaration

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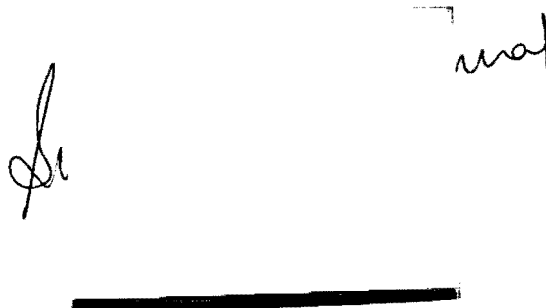
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Abstract

This study finds out how South Asian immigrant parents conceptualize, negotiate and develop their relationship with their children's schools. The qualitative analysis of interview data collected from nine newcomer parents provides an insight into the processes involved in conceptualizing, developing and negotiating parent-school relationships. This study is important as current trends in immigration reveal that the South Asian population is the largest visible minority group in Canada. Findings show that most immigrant parents are heavily invested in their children's education and go to great lengths to become acquainted with the new system they encounter. Implications for including immigrant parents in their children's education are discussed.

Key words: parent expectations, teacher expectations, parent-teacher interaction, information-gathering.

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Introduction

In order to understand the complex narrative of family-school relationships we must recognize the interaction of forces and consider the voices, perspectives, and actions of the excluded and ignored groups. It is only when we view the asymmetric relationship between families and schools as a dynamic process of negotiation and interaction that we will gain an authentic picture of the nature of conflict and the potentials for resolution.

(Lightfoot, 1978, p. 37)

Parental involvement in their children's schooling is widely understood to enhance children's experiences and academic achievement in schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Epstein, 1990). Researchers studying parent-school relationship have written about a variety of aspects that influence parental participation in their children's schooling. Some researchers have focused on factors that determine parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Coleman & Karraker, 2000; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Pelletier & Brent, 2002) while others have researched on how to empower parents and increase their involvement through school reform (Addi-Raccah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008). The meaning and function of parental involvement (Lawson, 2003) and a model of parent-school connections based on an overlap of the work of schools and families (Epstein, 1990) enhance our understanding about parent-school relationships. Some researchers have written about immigrant parents' involvement in their children's schooling (Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan & Ochoa, 2002; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009) and the loss of parenting self-efficacy faced by immigrant parents (Ali, 2008). The marginalized parent's role construction has been analysed to understand how they influence their children's access to educational opportunities (Auerbach, 2007). Lightfoot (1978) discusses the differences in structural properties and cultural purpose of families and schools. School culture and social class interact to shape parent-teacher interactions (Lewis & Forman, 2002). In

sum, the literature discusses factors that impede immigrant parents' participation in their children's education. However, the literature fails to address the question of how immigrant parents gradually learn to develop a relationship with their children's schools.

Current trends in immigration reveal that the South Asian population is the largest visible minority group in Canada with a total of 1.3 million of a total of 5.3 million minorities reported in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006). It is estimated that by 2031, 24% of the population in Toronto or 2.1 million would be South Asians and would continue to be its largest minority up from 13% in 2006. This study is timely as it draws our attention to the voices of parents who belong to the largest visible minority in Toronto.

The new knowledge created by this study will help teachers and administrators of the school boards in Toronto to understand how newcomer parents from South Asia conceptualize, negotiate and develop their relationship with their children's schools. It is expected to help professionals working within the context of schools to establish working partnerships with this culturally and linguistically diverse population from South Asia. The study will explore the development of South Asian immigrant parents' relationship with the schools in particular. It is also expected to add to the knowledge base about the dynamics that influence the immigrant parent and school relationship, in general. The key question of this study is "How do immigrant parents from South Asia conceptualize, negotiate and develop their relationships with their children's school?"

1. Literature Review

In the following review of the relevant literature I will begin by listing benefits of parental involvement in schools and a typology of parental involvement, followed by a description of the most common types of parental involvement. I will then highlight the significance of cultural capital and social class in parental involvement in school, and describe how immigrant and minority parents are positioned with reference to their involvement in their children's schooling.

Benefits and Types of Parental Involvement

Educational researchers generally agree on the importance of parental involvement to strengthen family and school connections. Epstein states that families and schools, as a set of overlapping spheres of influence, shape interactions among parents, teachers, students, and other members of the two institutions, which in turn affect student learning and development (Epstein, 1990). Epstein further states that parental involvement in the school improves parents' knowledge of the school system, parent-child interactions and parent-teacher interactions. It also improves student performance and success in the school (Epstein, 1990). According to Epstein (1988), performance means "test scores, school work, the persistence of students in school, and the general development of attitudes and behaviours that characterize 'successful students'" (Epstein as cited in Epstein, 1990, p. 110). Parent involvement also helps "school administrators and teachers [to] conduct more effective school programs" (Epstein, 1990, p. 112). In addition, it is also helpful in generating positive feelings in teachers about parents, irrespective of education or family characteristics. In sum, parental involvement has a three-fold benefit. The parents' role as an educator improves, children make gains in their academic performance, and teachers' understanding of families improves (Epstein, 1990).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) identify three psychological constructs that influence parents' perception of the school's attitude toward them. These are "(a) parental role construction, (b) parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school, and (c) parents' perceptions of the general invitations, demands and opportunities for involvement presented by children and their schools" (p. 31).

Epstein (1990) suggests a typology of five major types of parental involvement that should be part of a comprehensive program for family and school connections. These are:

TYPE 1. The basic obligations of parents, which include ensuring school readiness, the general well-being of children, and providing positive home environments that support school learning.

TYPE 2. The basic obligations of schools, which include oral and written communication from school-to-home, about programs in the school and the children's progress.

TYPE 3. Parental involvement in their children's school, which includes volunteering in school related activities such as assisting teachers or administrators, as well as supporting and watching student performance.

TYPE 4. Parent involvement in learning activities at home. It may be parent-initiated, a request by the child, or by the teacher to monitor and assist their own children.

TYPE 5. Parent involvement in governance and advocacy, which refers to parents' roles in decision-making at the school, district, or state level. This also includes activist roles in advocacy groups that monitor schools.

The Problem of School-Centric Parental Involvement

Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) claim that parents' interactions with schools usually accommodate the needs of the schools, perpetuating socially constructed norms which "develop

informally and come to denote the proper ways organizations should function” (p. 87). Other scholars also agree that parents learn to take on roles that schools expect them to, such as supporting their children at home, volunteering in the schools and organizing fund raisers (Smrekar, 1996; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). When parents’ involvement is based on the needs of the school, both parental role construction and sense of self-efficacy get limited (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001).

Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) argue that across cultures teaching the school curricula is considered the job of the teacher and that the parents ought not interfere with the teacher’s work. However, parents reinforce the importance of schools by explicit or implicit engagement in their children’s education (Epstein, 1995; Auerbach, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). In addition to creating the home environment for learning for school success, parents must establish and maintain communication with the teachers and enhance their own skills in order to support their children (Epstein, 1995; Pelletier & Brent, 2002). This determines improvement in academic performance as well as cognitive development (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997).

Lightfoot (1978) conceptualizes parent-teacher relationship as overlapping worlds with fuzzy boundaries, where teachers feel a sense of autonomy inside the classroom while parents feel “with shocking recognition, the exclusion and separation from their child’s world” (p. 26). Lightfoot (1978) argues that the lack of meaningful dialogue between teachers and parents results in confusion over boundaries between the two worlds. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) define parent-school relation as “dually formed; that is to say, how parents perceive their role in their children’s schooling may be a function of how the school organization treats them” (p.76). It is influenced by different perspectives as Lightfoot (1978) states:

Children in the family are treated as special persons, but pupils in school are necessarily treated as members of categories. From these different perspectives develop the particularistic expectations that parents have for their children and the universalistic expectations of teachers (p. 22).

Parental involvement with their children's school might therefore help in reconciling their differential expectations of the child.

Cultural Capital and Social Class as Factors in Parental Involvement

The nature of a parent's participation in the child's education can be elaborated using Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. "Bourdieu argues that schools draw unevenly on the social and cultural resources of members of the society by invoking particular linguistic styles, authority patterns and types of curricula" (Bourdieu as cited in Smrekar, 1996, p. 3). The influence of the family on the linguistic competence of the child, as assessed by teachers, is explained by Bourdieu (1970/1977) as:

The influence of linguistic capital, particularly manifest in the first years of schooling when the understanding and use of language are the major points of leverage for teachers' assessments, never ceases to be felt: style is always taken into account, implicitly or explicitly, at every level of the educational system and, to a varying extent, in all university careers, even scientific ones. Moreover, language is not simply an instrument of communication: it also provides, together with a richer or poorer vocabulary, a more or less complex system of categories, so that the capacity to decipher and manipulate complex structures, whether logical or aesthetic, depends partly on the complexity of the language transmitted by the family (p. 73).

Parents' cultural capital defines their social class, which shapes their involvement in the school's functioning (Smrekar, 1996). Lewis and Forman (2002) state that "in the complex process of home-school relationship building, the role of social class, particularly with regard to status, power and authority is often relational rather than absolute, with neither teachers nor parents universally powerful or powerless" (p.4). However, Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) suggest that interactions between families and schools are highly regulated with meetings

organized in schools as opposed to community centres or parents' homes. Letters are sent home to inform parents and telephone calls from the school to parents are signs of problems (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). "These patterns of communication are lodged in an established social order that suggests that school personnel possess a certain body of knowledge and expertise" (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001, p. 92) which is not available to parents.

Lewis & Forman (2002) state that social class is an active part of everyday relations shaped by tastes, preferences, knowledge base, modes of interaction and other characteristics that parents and teachers bring to schools. Addi-Raccah and Arviv-Elyashiv (2008) found that on the one hand, high socio-economic parents' participation in the school led to the decentralization of the teacher's power because parents shared the dominant social and cultural resources with the schools. On the other hand, a failure to address cultural differences in teaching practices led to a discord between minority parents and teachers leading to the alienation of parents from school involvement (Lawson, 2003; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Auerbach, 2007).

Parent-school relations also depend on parental self-efficacy. Coleman and Karraker (2000) define parenting self-efficacy as "Parents' self-referent estimations of competence in the parental role or as parents' perceptions of their ability to positively influence the behaviour and development of their children" (p. 13). Parents' ideas and experiences about their own teaching efficacy, their beliefs of themselves as the child's primary teacher and their abilities to influence their own children, affect their involvement in children's education (Pelletier and Brent, 2002). Coleman and Karraker (2000) state that "high parenting self-efficacy seems to be strongly associated with the parental capacity to provide an adaptive, stimulating and nurturing child-rearing environment" (p. 13). A positive sense of efficacy leads to increased involvement by the

parent and similarly a weak sense of efficacy reduces parental engagement in their children's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Bandura, 1997).

Pelletier and Brent, (2002) found that when teachers encourage parent involvement in schools, barriers such as lack of knowledge of the systems or minimal English language skills can be overcome. Through the School Readiness program, teachers invited parents to engage in their child's activities. A culturally responsive environment generates greater self-efficacy in parents. Positive feedback and workshops encouraged parent involvement. However, many studies have also found a lack of teacher initiative as barriers to parent efficacy in supporting children (Lawson, 2003; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Auerbach, 2007). Factors such as new immigrant status, language barriers and low SES forced parents to relinquish power over children's education to teachers (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Auerbach, 2007).

Immigrant and Minority Parents

Immigrants encounter the values and beliefs of the dominant host culture. Constant interaction with the host culture brings about a gradual transformation in their beliefs and values. Ayman and Kanungo (1998) used Berry's (1984) model of acculturation attitudes to analyse Indo-Canadian immigrant's acculturation attitudes and how these related to socialization beliefs and behaviours of the immigrants. Of the four possible alternatives that the model identified, integration was the overwhelming choice made by this population. Integration means "an interest in interacting with the larger society while conserving one's ethnic identity" (Ayman & Kanungo, 1998, p. 451). Ayman and Kanungo (1998) attribute this to the Canadian government's 'multicultural policy' which advocates maintaining one's cultural heritage, while seeking full participation in the host society. Immigrant communities by virtue of their status as minorities in the host culture (Ayman & Kanungo, 1998) begin their relationship from unequal positions.

Ali's (2008) study revealed the challenges faced by some categories of immigrant families based on the human, social and cultural capital they possessed upon arrival. In the quest for fulfilling the basic needs of family members, parents in her study felt they were unable to adequately help their children navigate their new environments. Other studies (e.g. Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan & Ochoa, 2002; Auerbach, 2007) confirmed that immigrant parents' social and cultural marginalization limited their participation in their children's education.

Ji and Koblinsky (2009) conducted a study with low income Chinese immigrant parents of public school children living in an urban community. The researchers found that low socio-economic status (SES) parents felt their ability to support their children's learning was limited by taxing work schedules and lack of language skills required to understand performance and report cards. The participants had minimal direct involvement with the school, and contact with the teachers was limited to discussing children's school progress. Teachers did not entertain requests by parents to know more about their child's behaviour or performance at school. Lawson (2003) stated that the powerlessness felt by minority parents made them either confrontational or uninvolved in their children's schooling. Ali (2008) also pointed that children of immigrant parents were discriminated against and language barriers made adapting to the school environment difficult.

Schechter and Sherri (2009) assessed the value of involving the minority parent in the child's academic activities. Through a qualitative interview of three educators in a public school setting in Greater Toronto Area (GTA) the study revealed the difficulties that the participants faced growing up as minority children. Melissa, a participant in the study, was an ESL student whose parents were not involved in her schooling. Having faced difficulties, she wanted to address this issue in a way that would benefit the families. She saw potential in every family,

which could help transcend linguistic-cultural barriers and improve the self-esteem of minority students. According to her, ESL parents face the risk of a weakened influence over their children who need to assimilate and feel accepted by their peers. Therefore, she stressed the need to invite parents into schools to learn about work done by their children and to get involved in projects. By engaging in reading books in dual language with their children at school, parents can strengthen the child's home language skills, which in her case were weakened due to emphasis on English language instructions only. Another participant of the study (Japanese-Canadian) expressed disappointment with loss of her native language because her parents were not encouraged to maintain their heritage while she was growing up. Her personal experience showed her the value of parental involvement as a way of supporting both the student and the teacher. The holistic development of the child, in her opinion, could only take place when parents and teachers were engaged in collaborative work. This study reveals a growing awareness amongst professionals about the need to help minority parents preserve their heritage and their self-esteem.

Huang and Mason's (2008) study of African-American parents' attitude toward involvement in their children's schooling revealed that despite hardships, parents considered it important to develop partnerships with schools. They expressed the need for power to influence their children's learning and felt that education was a key to success in life. This negates the assumptions made about African-American parent's lack of interest in or an uncaring attitude toward their children's development. Accessibility to family education programs, such as the Head Start initiative, by disadvantaged communities address factors such as poverty and lack of knowledge to effect positive change in the lives of children in order to help achieve success (Lawson, 2003).

Building meaningful relationships with *all* parents requires the schools to establish communication. School readiness programs help establish contact with parents very early i.e. at the point of entry by preschool children in the school system. It is also important to ensure that this contact is a positive experience to parents from diverse backgrounds. Pelletier and Brent (2002) analysed a pilot project which addressed school readiness needs of parents and their 4-year-olds in the GTA, acknowledging the challenges faced by new immigrants.

This 12 week program was designed to help parents acquire skills and knowledge to help their children with school-readiness. The study found that ESL parents were comparatively less actively involved in the school sessions as compared to English speaking parents. Moreover, they did not extend the literacy experiences in their homes. The ESL parents rarely questioned the teachers primarily due to lack of familiarity with the educational system. When parents evaluated the usefulness of this project for their future involvement, it was found that the ESL parents' purpose for participation in the program was primarily to learn English. This suggests that language literacy is important for parent involvement in the school. Schecter and Sherri (2009) also found that language was a barrier to minority parents' involvement in the school system.

Meaningful and honest parent-teacher relationship is associated with optimal socio-emotional development and educational success in children. However, immigrant parents' choice of involvement is influenced by many internal and external factors such as belonging to marginalized communities, living in poverty or lacking English Language skills. Through legislation, the government has attempted to address some of these factors to ensure that parent involvement happens. The Head Start program in the United States is one such research-based program. Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, and Skinner (2004) examined the extent and pattern

of parent involvement in the Head Start programs. Through its two-generational strategy disadvantaged families got the opportunity to volunteer in the program. They helped in the classroom and on field trips. Over time, the nature of involvement improved, with attending parent meetings considered as the highest form of participation. The study found that working parents were unable to volunteer due to less discretionary time. It recommends accommodating the needs of working parents' schedules to improve participation as one of the cornerstones of the program is to elicit parent involvement in children's schooling. Duch (2005) also found that the welfare-to-workfare policy countered the Head Start program's initiative to improve parent participation.

In summary, the literature review discusses some challenges that constrain parent-school collaboration. Immigrant parents from South Asia in particular experience a great shift in the cultural climate upon arrival in Canada. Barriers such as loss of parental self-efficacy, under-employment and unemployment, and English as second language have been well-researched and recognized as factors that impede parent participation in their children's schooling. However, the literature fails to address the influence of parent's conceptualization of involvement on their relationship with the schools. It is necessary to explore the source of parents' understanding of the nature of parent-school relationship by listening to the voices of the parents, especially at a time when immigration from South Asia is high. The study is expected to add to the knowledge base about the dynamics that influence the parent-school partnership. The key question of this study is "How do immigrant parents from South Asia develop their relationship with their children's school?"

2. Methodology

The key question that guides this study is “How do immigrant parents from South Asia conceptualize, negotiate and develop their relationships with their children’s schools?”

My Personal Experience

My interest in this question stems from my identity as a South Asian woman, who now lives in Canada, with two young daughters who attend a local public school. Like many other immigrant parents, I am heavily invested in my children’s education. To me, their education does not only mean their academic performance in school, but also their sense of identity and belonging and successful integration in Canadian society. I would like my children’s school to help me achieve these goals, but I don’t always know what to expect from their school, and don’t always agree with what I think they expect from me or my children. I believe there are many more parents like me among immigrants who have recently moved to Canada.

I am sharply aware of how changes in socio-cultural environments can lead children to feel unsettled and alienated. I grew up in the tea plantations of Bengal, India, and was educated in a missionary school set up by British missionaries. English was the language of instruction and the school culture was permeated with Christianity. My relocation to the state of Rajasthan in my late teens came as a kind of culture shock. The lifestyle, the customs and the language were all new. I felt I was different from all my cousins and neighbours. I began to question myself about who I was and how I should live. Having experienced this struggle personally, I am well-aware of what immigrant children go through, and wonder how their parents and their schools can work together to help children integrate their cultural heritage into their new environments.

I realize that my own subjectivity is implicated in undertaking this study. Some researchers suggest that “it is too easy for the prejudices and attitudes of the researcher to bias the data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 42). However, Peshkin (1988) claims, subjectivities “can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected” (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 23).

The Approach

I selected a qualitative approach to guide my inquiry. This approach fits well with my philosophical orientation toward the nature of reality. In this project I attempted to produce knowledge about the perceptions of a small group of South Asian parents, knowing that they are in no way representative of all South Asians in Toronto or other parts of Canada. I am aware that there are multiple perspectives among them, as well as other immigrant groups. Nevertheless, my study helped to reveal the nature of the participant’s perceptions in a particular setting (Merriam, 1998) which can lead to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The qualitative approach uses an inductive strategy to build abstractions, concepts and theories from data (Merriam, 1998; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). It builds theory, in contrast to the quantitative approach which tests existing theory (Merriam, 1998). Creswell (2009) says that “it is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p.4). This method makes use of the researcher’s insight, as the key instrument, for analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The personality of the researcher bears down upon the qualitative study as Merriam (1998) says, because “the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection” (p. 7). Data collection and its analysis together have a bearing on how the research is accomplished (Glaser & Corbin, 1967). This study focuses on discovery,

insight and understanding (Merriam, 1998) of immigrant parents' voices for the purpose of contributing to the knowledge base on parent-school relationships.

Participants and Their Recruitment

In order to discover, understand and gain an insight into a particular group, the sample selection was non-probabilistic, purposeful and small (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) contends, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth (p. 169, emphasise in original, as cited in Merriam, 1998).

Miles and Huberman (1994) state that "qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth" and therefore samples tend to be purposive (p. 27). In purposeful sampling, all participants must have the attributes essential to the study. The criteria for inclusion of participants were as follows: Participants were new immigrants to Canada (within last five years). Thus the year of arrival determined eligibility. The participants must be native to one of the six South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal or Sri Lanka). Participants were parents of child/children between 4 and 8 years of age. The child/children must be currently enrolled in a public school in the Greater Toronto Area. All the participants in my study were of South Asian origin. All were parents of young children using the public school system. All lived in immigrant-rich neighbourhoods in Scarborough, Ontario and many lived in high-rise apartment buildings. All had a home language which was not English and many knew more than one language.

I used the snowball technique to recruit participants for my study. Miles and Huberman (1994) define snowball sampling as the method of identifying "cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (p. 28). I first identified four potential participants from my circle of acquaintances. I provided them my email address and telephone

number and asked them to refer me to other potential participants, who could contact me directly, if interested. If the persons who contacted met the sample criteria and showed an interest in my study, I proceeded by explaining the purpose of my study and giving her/him a copy of the Consent Agreement. For those who agreed to participate right away, the time and place for the interview was negotiated. For those who wanted more time to decide, I gave them 2-4 days to make the decision and contact me again. One person called and declined while some did not respond. They were not contacted again. All the persons who participated in the study agreed to participate right away.

To include participants beyond my social network, especially those from South Asian countries other than India, I also contacted an Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC) in Scarborough that serves a high Sri Lankan immigrant population and the Nepali Canadian Community Centre (NCCC), in Toronto. A letter and a flyer giving a brief description of the purpose of the study were sent to both OEYC and NCCC (Appendix). However, I could not locate an association of the immigrant Bhutanese community in Toronto. My attempt to reach out to communities served by OEYC and NCCC did not yield any recruits. All parents who responded were from my social circle or people known to them. Of the twelve parents who met the criteria, only nine showed interest in participating in the study. For the demographic details of the nine participants please refer to Table 1.

The Setting

Parents who agreed to participate were invited for the interview to be held in a neutral setting, such as the local community centre, the coffee shop, a meeting room in a local library, a quiet corner in a park (provided the environment was quiet and no one could overhear the conversation in each case), or an office space arranged by my supervisor at Ryerson University.

In most cases, I was asked to select the location. Interviews were conducted in local parks, a private space in the apartment complex, or in the meeting room of a local library. Only one participant insisted on being interviewed in her home at a time when no other member of the household was present.

The four interviews in the park were challenging for logistical reasons. I held up a digital audio recorder to ensure good sound quality during the course of the interview (between 30 to 45 minutes) which was a physical strain. The participants and I had to endure mosquito bites, light showers and strong winds during the interviews. Two other interviews scheduled to be held in the park were rescheduled due to rain, and the location was changed. Therefore, the park, though convenient, was my least favourite setting. I recommend not using a park for conducting face-to-face interviews due to such environmental distractions.

I tried to make sure all meetings had a professional undertone to them (Merriam, 1998; Locke, Silverman & Spirduso, 2004). The date, time and location of the interviews were negotiated through telephone conversations with prospective participants. When I met with the participants I explained the consent form, focusing on the terms of confidentiality and the rights of the participants, and asked for their written approval.

Data Collection

The recording of the interview began after orienting the participant to the purpose and nature of the study (Locke, Silverman & Spirduso, 2004). I took on the role of a data collector with sensitivity to the physical setting, the respondents and their non-verbal behaviours. This also involved a sense of timing, knowing when to pause, when to probe more deeply and when to alter the direction of the interview (Merriam, 1998). I realized that my identity, the interviewees, the purpose of the meeting and the recording device were some of the “researcher effects”

(Locke, Silverman & Spirduso, 2004) that together shaped the data generated. I tried to build rapport with the participants to ensure that they felt comfortable expressing feelings and opinions (Merriam, 1998). My sex, age and social location was similar to that of the participants yet other factors such as the use of a recording device may have had a bearing on the data generated.

Most interviews were conducted on schedule and the task of data collection was started and completed in June, 2010. A total of nine interviews were conducted and the total interaction time for each interview ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. In order to ensure confidentiality, all identifying characteristics of respondents have been removed from the transcribed data. Pseudonyms replace actual names throughout the study.

A semi-structured Initial Interview Guide (IIG) (Appendix B) was used to collect data, which allowed me to get comparable data across subjects (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982). The participants were first asked to fill a brief, non-intrusive questionnaire with demographic details (Table 1). A one-to-one interview which Dexter (1970) refers to as a “conversation with a purpose” (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 71) was then conducted to collect information that was “in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 1990, p. 278 as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 71). To maintain neutrality with regard to the participant’s views, I avoided debating with them or letting my personal views be known to the participant.

Open-ended questions were used to capture the respondent’s worldviews and flexibly worded questions allowed me to make adjustments to participant interests. The Initial Interview Guide (Appendix B) that I started with was gradually adapted to match my own evolving understanding of my research question. When I prepared the interview guide, I was much more focused on the parents’ expectations from their children’s schools. However, I soon realized that I had moved on to exploring parents’ sources of information about schooling in Canada, and

finding out how they developed their relationship with their children's school. The flexibility of the qualitative approach allowed me to fine tune my research questions, as well as to add more pertinent questions to my interview guide.

Interviews were audio- recorded and later fully transcribed. All identifying information was removed and pseudonyms replaced actual names. All transcriptions satisfy Bogdan and Biklen's (1982) concept of good interviews as each had details and examples. Nevertheless, Miles and Huberman (1994) argue: "data collection is inescapably a selective process that you cannot and do not 'get it all' even though you might think you can and are" (p. 55-56). The personality and skill of the interviewer and the attitude and orientation of the interviewee influence data collection (Dexter, 1970 as cited in Merriam, 1998).

Data Analysis

All nine interviews were transcribed with a margin on the right for comments and code-names. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), "Analysis involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 145).

Analysis in grounded theory is a cyclical process which involves open coding, axial coding and selective coding. "Coding represents the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.57). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), "Codes are efficient data-labelling and data retrieval devices. They empower and speed up analysis" (p. 65).

I began coding after all the transcription was complete. I began with open coding, which is “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). I manually coded words and phrases. “Analysis of a word, phrase, or sentence is an especially valuable exercise because it can teach you how to raise questions about possible meanings, whether assumed or intended, by a speaker and those around him or her” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 81). A name was given to a phenomenon, thus creating concepts. Conceptualizing is the first step in analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Codes were written on the right margin or between lines, wherever I found suitable space. The coding process was tedious and was spread over a number of days. I read the text line-by-line and assigned a code name either to a word, a phrase, a sentence or a block of text depending on the nature of the information. Coding involved asking questions about what was being said, why it was being said, by whom and in what context. Questioning helped me identify the dimensions of the code.

For example:

In the beginning **(phase)**, she **(the child)** had to go for ESL classes **(treatment)**. Then she used to become very nervous **(effect)** and for 2-3 weeks she said, ‘I don’t want to go to school’ **(response)**. Then I explained to her **(counsel)**, ‘you are very good **(encouragement)**, you only have to improve your reading and writing by yourself **(counsel)**’.

In the initial stages of open coding I often struggled with the various levels of codes I was creating. Gradually, I saw my skills emerge and felt a sense of accomplishment at being able to

code at a level which adequately represented the patterns in the data, without getting either too micro or macro in my conceptualization.

The concepts identified by the codes were then categorized. I grouped similar codes and *axial coding* helped rearrange data in new ways “by making connections between a category and its sub-categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.97). Categorizing is the “process of grouping concepts that seem to pertain to the same phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 65). The patterns of behaviour and themes that emerged were sorted and written down to physically separate them. When all codes that pertained to one category were collected, these were then further sorted and organized depending on the nature of the category. Diagrams and flow-charts were used to sketch out relationships (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). A process of limiting codes was followed to develop an outline.

For example, the first category “**expectations**” had sub-categories: “**parent’s expectations**” and “**teacher’s expectations**”. The pattern that I saw in the data for the category “**teacher’s expectations**” reflects a range of responses. Three parents understood “**teacher’s expectations**” as information sent home for parents to read and act upon. Four parents felt that the teachers had no expectations from parents. Two parents stated that expectations were not explicitly stated, but they came to know about the school norms through experiences such as being sent a reminder to teach self-help skills to a kindergarten child. Some parents understood “**teacher’s expectations**” as invitations to volunteer. The sub-category “**parent’s expectations**” was further categorized into: “**initial expectations**” and “**later expectations**”. The next category “**Building a Relationship**” had two identified sub-categories which were “**information**” and “**communication**”.

The final category **“Nature of Relationship”** was a process code. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982) “Process codes refer to coding words and phrases that facilitate categorizing sequences of events, changes over time, passages from one type or kind of status to another” (p. 159). This category has a sequence of four sub-categories: **“Comparing Systems”**, **“Familiarizing with the New System”**, **“Building a Relationship with the Child’s Teacher”** and **“Becoming a Confident Supporter”**. In the sub-category, **“Comparing Systems”** all nine respondents compared their past experiences of schooling with their current experiences. The responses varied, for example, one parent said that she frequently indulged in making comparisons and referred to her experience with schooling in her previous country as “a really clear picture of schooling” and added “I never felt I did not know what was being taught”. She explained her experiences with the school in Canada as “it has been two years but still I don’t have any idea”. On the other hand another parent compared the two school experiences based on academic work. She said that in her previous country of stay homework was highly emphasised and there was too much dependence on rote learning. In contrast, the Canadian school system made children more confident through emphasis on research-based work. In the second sub-category, **“Familiarizing with the New System”** many but not all parents looked for opportunities to understand the schools that their children attended. Two parents cited attending workshops in school, four parents talked about volunteering as a way to get familiar with the new system. Looking at work samples and inquiring from the teacher about curriculum were some other ways in which parents took the initiative to adapt. The third sub-category, **“Building a Relationship with the Child’s Teacher”** showed the progress some of the parents had made to the next stage. All parents engaged in some form of communication with their child’s teacher at some point in time. Nevertheless, only those parents who had developed a mechanism for

frequent and regular communication, often initiated by the parent, were considered to have reached this stage. For example, some parents communicated on a regular basis using the child's agenda. Some engaged in regular conversations with teachers during drop-off and pick-up to discuss their child's progress. **"Becoming a Confident Supporter"** was the fourth and final stage that some of the respondents had reached. These parents understood the curriculum followed by their child's teacher, asked the teacher for guidance in supporting home-based activities to re-enforce learning in their children and worked closely with the child's teacher.

Selective coding is the stage of integrating categories to form a grounded theory. It is "done at a higher more abstract level of analysis" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 117). The core category was developed at this stage and its properties were identified. Core category is "the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116).

I read over my data and began writing memos of what I felt were emerging themes. For example, communication was a theme that was identified in every transcript. To identify the pattern of the flow of information, the methods used, the content and the frequency I organized data manually to represent each sub-category. I also engaged in writing memos about such sub-categories. Glaser's (1978) definition is the classic one: [A memo is] the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding" (cited in Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 72). These memos helped me reflect on "issues raised in the setting and how they relate to larger theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 149). Memoing helped "tie together different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster, often to show that those data are instances of a general concept" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 72). Memos helped generate ideas, capture thoughts and systematize my thinking (Miles &

Huberman, 1994). Flow-charts were used to develop cause-and-effect relationships from the data. It helped me understand how the actors (parents, teachers, children and others around them) played their roles and influenced others, thus building a relationship.

Validity

Qualitative research must be rigorously conducted in order to be considered a trustworthy source of information. The study provided an insider's perspective to the extent that I shared many characteristics with the subjects of study, and began the inquiry with common understandings with my participants based on language, culture, origins and experiences (as an immigrant parent myself). I drew upon my personal experiences while framing questions for data collection.

According to Kirk and Miller (1986), "In the case of qualitative observations, the issue of validity is not a matter of methodological hair-splitting about the fifth decimal point, but a question of whether the researcher sees what he or she thinks he or she sees" (p. 21). While collecting data, I maintained the tone of a quiet inquirer. Initial rapport building gave way to listening more than talking. As Walcott (1990) states: "A rather inevitable consequence of being inquisitive without being a talker is that my conversational queries usually prompt others to do the talking" (p. 127). The interview was focused and lasted approximately an hour. However, not all data on the issue were exhaustively captured. Walcott (1990) argues that "Since no one ever can say everything about anything, in virtually any conversation, and especially during fieldwork, I find myself pondering what part of the whole story is being told and what part of that I am actually understanding" (p. 128). Reflecting on the transcripts, I was able to identify how the different interviews were shaped. Some had strong advocacy undertones, some appeared to be detailed stories and some as Wolcott (1990) aptly says, "I think I sense when I am on a

detour of my own or another's making" (p. 129). To know what was on the minds of the participants, I was "willing to look a fool for the sake of science" (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 49).

As a novice in the field, I collected data first, transcribed it and then began to write about it. This was contrary to Wolcott's (1990) advice: "Regard writing as an integral part of fieldwork rather than as a separate stage initiated after fieldwork is completed – I often begin preparing a rough draft soon after fieldwork begins" (p. 129).

Some primary data are included in the findings "not only to give readers an idea of what my data are like but to give access to the data themselves" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 129-130). Presenting the thoughts of the participants verbatim helps avoid "relying too singularly on what I have observed and interpreted" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 130). My supervising professor who has expertise, both in the field of inquiry and in research methods continuously assessed all my memos and manuscripts for "correctness and completeness" (Wolcott, 1990, 132). By giving details of processes involved in drawing the research to a close, there is an attempt "to create the impression that my accounts are credible" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 133).

In the following section I have attempted to "describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). The chapter on my findings began with the writing of the first draft in order to focus progressively on my topic. I have made extensive use of examples from the data to support my claims and also to inform and reach out to my readers (Wolcott, 1990).

3. Findings

In this section I identify and elaborate the key findings from the study. This section is loosely organised on the basis of the order of South Asian immigrant parents' processes of engagement with their children's schools. I begin with a description of the parents' expectations from their children's schools and their understandings of what the school expects from them. This is followed by their needs for information, their strategies for gathering information from other sources, and their communication with their children's teachers and school administrators. Finally I describe the stages the parents go through in establishing good relations with their children's schools.

Parents' Expectations

Immigrant parents have expectations from the schools their children attend. These expectations depend upon prior experiences of their own and their children's schooling, as well as what they had learned about Canadian schools from other sources. Some of the earlier expectations the immigrant parents had arrived with, were modified as they had direct interactions with their children's schools. When asked, Jyoti based her expectations on her experience with the schools in Canada. She said,

When I came here I did not know that children were admitted to kindergarten at age 4. In our country in India, children began preschool at 2 ½ years. At that time I was a little uncomfortable because young children need some activity level, so what should I do to keep them engaged.

Tanu, another parent, also seemed to modify her expectations as a result of her interaction with schools here. When asked to talk about her initial expectations, Tanu said,

I lived in East Africa for 10 years, my kids were good with the language, English as a First Language so they were o.k. and in fact in East Africa they were following British Curriculum, so that was a little challenge for me especially my daughter who was in Senior

Kindergarten, as the British Curriculum used phonics and here, it was a little challenge for me and its good that teachers had supported and I involved myself and we figured it out the best way to do it with her.

Some of the parents held the opinion that Canadian schools would provide a better future to their children. This was based upon information collected from other sources and compared to their own experiences of schooling. A typical example of this was Aafreen, an Urdu-speaking parent, who said, “Back home, I had heard that Canada had a very good education system and we actually moved here for our kids’ future”.

Some parents expected their children to be transformed by the approach to schooling here. They compared the educational system they were familiar with to the educational system that their children were experiencing. Chandrika, a Sinhalese parent, said: “I know compared to my country, this is relaxed”. Aparna, a Hindi-speaking parent, said:

My children actually grew up in Dubai and which follows the Indian system of education, so there is lot of pressure, lot of homework and what I had heard from people who had visited Canada and come back to Dubai, said there is not much emphasis given to homework here and it’s very easy.

Jaspreet, a Punjabi-speaking parent said, “We were just expecting something that would be different and somewhere, something that would make my child more independent”. She now feels that the relaxed, slow-paced environment provided by the school here has made her reflect on its usefulness. The experience with schooling here has changed Jaspreet’s attitude which is reflected in her comment, “normally I usually talk to my husband and I tell him oh! The system here is like, ‘What are they learning?’ They are not learning anything and then we have this conversation”.

All respondents, at the time of the interview, had had some direct experience of the school system through their young children. Their expectations were now clearly influenced by

their own and their children's experiences. Jyoti, who had a seven-year-old child in school, felt that teachers need to know the characteristics of the new immigrant families, especially those who were learning English as a second language (ESL), in order to serve them effectively. She acknowledged that a kindergarten teacher had to attend to twenty children yet she felt that the children who were learning ESL deserved more attention from the teacher. Chandrika said that teachers also needed to learn more about immigrant parents' views on education, which would dispel their impression that immigrant parents were over-bearing on the children with regard to homework.

The School's Expectations from the Parent

The parents' understanding of the school's expectations from them depended on their varied experiences. However, in general, they thought their children's schools had relatively low expectations from them. Their expected role in the school was confined primarily to contributing to extra-curricular and fund-raising activities, to off-set the shortage of staff time and funding for these. The school's interest in parents' participation in governance was limited to attending school council meetings. As Aparna put it:

The school wants us to be participating in the extra-curricular activities in the sense as a support to encourage children to be taking part in folk-dance, in music, in choir which they have, the program they have and other than that there are fundraisers and things and more recently there has been the school-nutrition program in which they wanted volunteers from parents and also they were looking forward to parents helping them in giving out snacks and there are the council meetings so they look forward to parents to be a part of the council, come for those meetings.

Tanu said she was expected to teach her child to be more responsible for dressing herself and taking care of her belongings because fewer teachers were available to the school. She said:

Now I realize, the number of helpers [assistants] are not many compared to back home so teachers were expecting children to be responsible, to put things on the right places, to do their own things like wearing their jackets, scarves, boots and other things, so that was the main expectations from the teacher of my children so I got couple of times a reminder for that, if I had known that before, I would have prepared them for that in advance.

Sonia felt that the school also expected parents to learn about parenting school-age children.

They are giving us free workshops for homework and how to handle a teenager, about school safety and so all this is for free and usually available to all parents and it's up to them that if they go for it or not.

The parents' views on how their children's schools expected them to contribute to their children's academic learning were both varied and more complex. Jyoti said: "I have seen that when they [teachers] give the curriculum, parents are expected to contribute 50% support to the child at home". She said that the teachers supported the parents by giving information about websites that the parents could consult, to learn about how to re-enforce their children's learning at school. Jaspreet's views on the curriculum guidelines given by the teacher were quite different. She said that the curriculum is like a general list of things that the teacher will do with the children and it failed to give details of textbooks used or the content of lessons taught in class. This, she said, made her feel left-out of her child's academic learning at school.

Aparna recognized that it was important for her to participate in her child's schooling. She said:

The school kept on sending us circulars from time to time and they had parent-teacher interviews at the end of the term and initially before the school term started, so they wanted our involvement right through. So parent involvement is an important aspect which the school or the teacher look forward to. So that is very much understandable because without the support of the parents, it's not possible for children to imbibe learning and to shape, I mean to develop the learning habit, to develop the culture of studying, of reading.

However, Aparna also claimed that the schools expectations were often understated and implicit. She said, "The school wants us to be a part and parcel of the system and to know what

is going on". She said that parents do not necessarily understand the school's expectations because these are implicit in the messages received from the school. Mahek agreed that her child's school did not have any expectations from her, even though her child was unusually 'quiet' in the school for a long time.

The school did not have any particular expectations from me. When the child is going to school and if he is not participating or is quiet, for example my daughter started to talk in class after about 5 months, she was very shy, so in the beginning they did not do anything about her being shy, after 5 months she began to talk.

Jaspreet was similarly clueless about what the school expected from her, when she said: "Right now I don't think so there is [any expectation]. I didn't see any expectations from the school like I didn't find there was any expectation".

However, according to some parents, the schools required parental support to address a deficit in a child, especially to develop language skills, self-help or social skills. The parent's help is solicited by the teacher as Jaspreet put it:

If the child was not able to socialize or mix up with other children, even then they contacted parents so they even consider the, not only the academics but also the other aspect like if the child is being mistreated or left out they tell you about it and which I find is quite good.

Need for Information

All respondents felt the need to familiarize themselves with what their children were learning at school. They felt that they needed to know exactly what their children were learning, and in the absence of textbooks and notebooks that they could examine, they seemed not to know how to find out what they were learning. Chandrika's child began school in Grade 1 as soon as

they came to Toronto and she expected the teacher to keep her informed about his performance in school:

I want to be aware of what he is doing at school or what he did at school because the kids, they sometimes never tell exactly what is going on, specially my one, he sometimes twists the things and it's hard to understand, in that case I have to go every time and ask, I don't like that because I know that's irritating for them also, I'm just going every time and asking. If there is a proper way we can be aware of what's going on in the class room, that I think is good for both parents and teachers.

Tanu, a mother of two, wanted the school to guide parents in order to reduce confusion about what is taught, and how it is taught, and said:

My son doesn't get any homework and I feel really bad that why, I don't know what they've done in school, I know they are doing enough but how much is enough? I don't have any measurement, what exactly they're doing because we never got a chance to know exactly what they are doing, we just get a progress report that o.k. he has not done this, he has not done that, he's here, but what are the efforts that teacher has taken to help them, that I'm not sure.

Surabhi, a Bangla-speaking parent, contends that instead of inviting parents to discuss performance after the progress reports are out, the schools must keep parents informed about what "is going on" so that parents can help their children at home.

Jaspreet reflected on her past experience and said that she was very involved in her children's education,

I was too involved with my children when I was at the other school but here when they go to school, like, I feel like they have entered a different world and this is my true feelings. Like, when they go to school whatever they do there, sometimes I am not at all like aware of what's happening there. It's a total different world, when they are there, they're different. Whatever they do and when they come back you know they come back.

Jaspreet said when she asks her children what they did, they respond in a “very reluctant” manner about the work at school. She felt she needed their notebooks to find out what they had done at school. She also emphasised the need for more information and said:

In spite of my even asking the teacher, like, even I ask my daughter if you can bring your work what you are doing at school, if you can bring it home but no, sometimes I feel it's just top secret (laughs). So it's all just being kept there like we're excluded from that which I feel is not (laughs). I don't know why I just feel it's not helpful.

Information Gathering from Other Sources

In order to familiarize themselves with the different system, participants in this study tried to gather information from multiple sources. Chandrika took the initiative to get a commercially available book and checked with the teacher if it met the requirements of the curriculum. She had this to say:

Fortunately I got a book because one of my friends recommended that that book is set according to the Ontario curriculum. It is a little big book and all four components are in that book. So in the parents meeting I went to the teacher and I asked her, ‘just tell me, kind of, extra activities book, I mean I can do at home’. Then I said, ‘I have this one, is it o.k. with you? I don't know if it is the standard or not’. Then she said, ‘it's o.k.’. She also has the same type of book so every time when I go and ask, she said, ‘That book is o.k.’ Right, but she is not giving any other books. I know that she has some other books but she is not giving the list of any other books I can do at home and that's why so I go to the book and I ask my kid, ‘this is what you did at school, this is what?’ Like that I have to find out what he did at school.

Mahek consulted her friends to find out how she could support her Grade 1 child. She said:

I heard about the curriculum from my friends. They teach their children using this book at home and last year I had attended a meeting at school where they suggested some books available in the stores and that we could buy those books. I bought books at the start of the year after listening to other parents talk on the books they use for their children, there is one book called, ‘Math Start’ and available at Cole's and Toys-r-us and which we buy for our children. I haven't gone to the TDSB website to find out about the curriculum, I haven't taken any interest in going to the website and reading the information available.

For some of the parents the use of alternate books or their efforts to help with homework seemed to create more confusion for the child. Jaspreet commented:

I would try to help them but then I don't know whether we would be both at a different level of understanding because they would be, it's the same thing, only the method is different. Sometimes when even if we are doing a simple sum, she would have, she would use a different method and then I would tell her 'no, it's not that method, I used to learn this method' and so I think that difference is going to be, I think it's going to be building up and so I'll definitely be guiding them and making sure that they pursue their goals but at the same time I guess they'll just be more independent than they would have been when we were at, you know if they were still at the same school before.

Similarly, Tanu evoked her own experiences of learning mathematics to help her children but met with a mixed reaction. She said:

I always tell my children how to count quick without using calculator, that I learnt when I was a child and I thought of giving this great gift to them so they don't have to use calculator all the time and the other thing is that their brain will always work, its more brain functioning. So I tell them, I tell them, 'let's do table'. My son is good, he can do 1 to 10 but the multiplication taught by school, he gets confused there. Sometimes I feel I'm guiding him, I'm helping him to learn something but at the end it confuses him so I want to know how they are teaching multiplication. If I know then I can teach in the same way at home and it will be better for him.

Sonia advocated for a different approach by parents. She said:

I would recommend that don't make a notion in your mind that the child will be going through the same school board and the same school system which you have studied or you have seen back home in your country and you have to keep an open mind and you have to go with your child through everything the child is going. Try to talk to your child a lot more to know what's happening in the school.

Some parents found it useful to examine their children's work samples to find out what their children were learning. Aparna pointed out: "The files and the journals are sent back home so we can review it over the week end, so we really come to know what is going on." Others acknowledged that although teachers sent them relevant website information and encouraged

them to seek help from such resources, only some of them had tapped into that source. Jyoti, a proactive parent, had made extensive use of websites in helping her ESL child adapt to the system. She said:

I have seen that by giving website information, children's practice level is given, and many different methods are used to question. This makes fundamentals clear for children because they do not have to go according to one curriculum. There are many additions related to the topic, so when we do it in this way, children like the fact that they are doing something different and because it is on the computer, so they get practice of working on the computer. This makes it interesting and supportive and we are able to prepare them for Grade 2. My daughter is an average student and I know I need some time to work with her, I ask the teacher and this is helpful for me, I ask her, 'If you have any website please let me know', I will work with her at home so that in school she does not feel left out or feel a lack of something.

However, Chandrika expected her child's teacher to give her information about what is taught in class rather than being referred to websites for information. She said:

I know that simply we can go to the internet and download the things and if you are so curious then you can have these things. But as a normal parent sometimes you don't have much time to do all these things, poke all these things so I think the best way is the school system can introduce us to what's going on or what the classes, what they hope from the kids to do.

She said she had made an attempt to find out what her child should be learning by asking the teacher at her first parent-teacher meeting.

I can remember the very first, what do you call that, parents meeting when I met his teacher. I asked, 'Can you, teacher, please show me, if you don't mind, show me a[n] average student's book.' Right, because I don't know their standard. I only know the standard of my kid. I don't know what they expected from him. At that time she showed me a book and it was really nice and I know that I have to admit the reality, my kid just came recently and I can't expect that much but any way like that I have to compare the standard of the others.

Some parents found it useful to volunteer in their children's schools in order to find out what they should be learning. Aparna said:

I have volunteered twice for the scientist-in-the-school program...So it's very enriched experience because the children are so involved and they enjoy every aspect of it, so if we are there as a help or guide, it motivates the child because he is happy because the parent is there and the other thing is that we can see for ourselves how the teaching goes on.

Sonia also volunteered in classrooms to understand teaching styles of her children's teachers.

She said:

I have volunteered in the schools a lot. I have been in the schools from the time it starts to the end of the day until 3:30. I think I learnt a lot about the school process through that and sometimes I was just observing the teacher, what they are doing in the class and I was able to make out like how the learning goes, how the children learn in the school.

The parents also learned about the school through their children's experiences. All respondents also used their observation of their children's emotions, both positive and negative, to inform themselves about their schooling. Many parents reported that their children were happy going to school here for a variety of reasons, such as more recess time, no homework, pleasing personality of the teachers, lack of pressure to perform and a hands-on approach to learning.

Aafreen said:

My younger son started school here in Junior Kindergarten and they did not put burden of too much studies on him. Kids here play in a very comfortable way and it's very good to see that kids don't cry when they have to go to school. Back home when kids start school, they begin to cry as they don't want to go to school. But here my kids never refused school, they were always willing to go to school, they like it here.

Parents also take note of negative emotions displayed by their children. For example, both Jyoti and Chandrika noted their children did not want to attend their ESL classes:

In the beginning, she had to go for ESL classes. Then she used to become very nervous and for 2-3 weeks she said, 'I don't want to go to school.'

[My son said] ‘Every time the teacher takes me to the ESL classes, now I know my English. I don’t want to go now for ESL because when I go for ESL I just miss some important things.

The parents in this study were also aware of the bullying and teasing their children were experiencing. Aafreen learned about this from her children:

Bullying is a big issue in schools. I have noted this a number of times and this disturbs the children a lot. Children come and tell me about this. They tell me, ‘Mummy, Chris hit me a lot, he said, “I’ll break your head, I’ll do this, I’ll do that” so this disturbs the children a lot.

Parent-Teacher Communication

An effective parent-teacher partnership relies on timely and honest communication between them. Immigrant parents have experience raising their children and their expertise comes from their situated knowledge. Teachers are professionals with knowledge of the system of education here. Children are best served when both parents and teachers invest themselves in knowing more about each other.

All respondents emphasised the need for effective parent-teacher communication. Some parents battled time limitations, as well as language and cultural barriers to initiate communication with teachers or to respond to their initiatives. Some of them also described formal and informal mechanisms to keep in touch with their children’s teachers, which included attending parent-teacher meetings, setting appointments to meet with the child’s teacher, brief conversations during drop-off and pick-up, writing notes in agendas, or sending email messages. These can be categorized as teacher-initiated, parent-initiated, or school-initiated invitations for communication.

Teacher-initiated interaction.

In most cases, teachers initiated interactions with parents to get help in resolving issues related to their children, and to ensure conformity with their expectations. For example, a teacher sent a reminder to the parents of a kindergarten child asking them to train the child to independently put on his/her jacket or boots. Another called the parent to report a child's pant-wetting accident. According to Jaspreet, her child's teacher contacted her generally when she did not perform well. She cited the example of the teacher's message to come and discuss the socializing issues faced by her child. She said

Mostly they [the school] only take care if the child is not performing well in the class. They would usually contact me. But in this case if the child was not able to socialize or mix up with other children, even then they contacted parents so they even consider other aspects like, if the child is being mistreated or left out they [the school] tell you about it and which I find is quite good rather than just concentrating on academics. They make you feel at home, I guess and they take care of you like we take care of our children. So that's a good plus point about the education system here and in the schools, at least in the schools that they are going to right now. That's what I feel and that's the reason I'm happy about the whole situation.

However, Aparna said the purpose of teacher initiated interactions were varied, and included sending a note home to inform her about a derogatory word used by her child, but also to commend a piece of writing her son had done.

Some respondents felt that their child's teacher had failed to initiate contact in a timely manner. Jyoti said that the kindergarten teacher had failed to convey her child's struggles with language, which adversely affected the child's performance. It was only in Grade 1 that the teacher raised the issue with the parent.

Our complaint was mainly that when she started Grade 1, they said that she is very poor in English. But the Kindergarten teacher did not once write and convey this through my child's report card. The teacher did not say that according to Junior Kindergarten and Senior Kindergarten she did not have the knowledge of ABC or of numbers. She wrote that all was fine in her report card. I feel that she should have written at that stage that my

daughter was struggling with the basics rather than stating that she has done this naughtiness and she runs instead of walking.

Mahek had a similar experience with her kindergarten child who did not interact for the first five months in school and the parent felt that the teacher should have communicated with her about this issue. She said,

The school did not have any particular expectations from me. When the child is going to school and if he is not participating or is quiet for example my daughter started to talk in class after about 5 months. She was very shy, so in the beginning they did not do anything about her being shy. After 5 months she began to talk. So I think, some of this also depends on the teacher. If the teacher is involved a lot with the child, is of a friendly nature then the child also feels easy.

Parent-initiated interaction.

Many respondents talked about interactions they had initiated with their children's teachers, primarily to address their lack of knowledge about what was expected of their children, or to address issues concerning their children. Commonly used methods of interaction were writing a note in the child's agenda, looking out for the teacher at the time of drop-off or pick-up to have brief conversations, or leaving messages via telephone in the office. Setting appointments was the least favourite choice of interaction for these parents.

Jyoti considered it important to inquire from the child's teacher about what was taught in class and she said:

If I have any doubts regarding my children's studies I ask the teacher. For example 'If you are doing subtraction or division, then what is your pattern?' because the studies are very different when we compare back home schooling with schooling here. Any other questions, such as if I want my child to move from one book level to another, I write in the agenda and she replies me.

At pick-up time, Chandrika, a mother of a Grade 1 child had brief conversations with her child's teacher. She enquired about what was taught in class, and asked for worksheets which she could

use to reinforce learning at home. Jaspreet sent notes to her child's teacher inquiring about homework, while Aafreen met with the teacher, or sent a note, whenever she felt there was a need to do so. Aafreen and her husband met by appointment with the Vice Principal to complain about bullying experienced by their child. Sonia frequently inquired from the teacher about her kindergarten child's performance, and asked the teacher for guidance on teaching techniques that she could use at home. Sonia communicated with her child's teacher in a variety of ways. She called either during school hours or after school and left a message for the teacher, she wrote email messages, put a note in her child's snack pack, or had brief talks with the teacher at the time of drop-off in the morning.

I can call my child's teacher during the school hours and after the school hours and leave a message for him. I am able to communicate with the teacher through email. Most of the time if I go in the morning I can talk with the teacher. What's going on in the class and how she is handling it, if she is having some difficulty and if she is seeing somebody pushing or pulling her, I can go and talk to the teacher easily.

Jyoti had developed good communication with her child's teacher and said that the teacher supported her efforts 110%. Jyoti had found unique ways to advocate for her child in the school. She said:

I told them that my daughter speaks Hindi. Here children who speak in English speak fast. She was unable to cope with that and so others would tease her, due to that she would remain a little disturbed in school. That was my main complaint and I requested them to support her which was fulfilled by the Grade 1 teacher but the Kindergarten teacher did not help at all. I also told them that if they wanted to know, I would tell them about the qualities she displays at home. She behaves very well with me at home and I wrote her qualities on paper and gave it to the school and the Grade 1 teacher considered that and included that in her report card.

School-initiated general invitations.

Several of the parents reported that their children's schools scheduled term-end discussions on student performance, and mailers to invite them and/or to solicit their support for events such as the curriculum night, literacy night or cultural programs. All respondents talked about attending parent-teacher meetings to discuss progress reports, and some parents considered these meetings as their primary form of communication with the teachers. Mahek said:

The meetings are scheduled for the end of term. Mainly weak points are discussed in subjects that my child has not had a good grade, that's what is discussed and otherwise they give a good report about her performance in class. She is good in this, she has improved, she is doing well. But I do not talk about what my expectations are; I do not share my views. I haven't built any kind of relationship with the teachers but I feel that in future I may think this way. I hadn't thought much about this because my daughter is still young. She was in JK, then SK and in that phase we are carefree in a way and gradually work increases. I do not know my child's teacher well, only when we have to go and meet to discuss the report card, or if there is a problem otherwise there is no other reason for meeting with the teacher. Until now I feel comfortable with the school environment.

Stages of Developing a Good Relationship

The interviews show that interactions initiated by these parents with their child's teachers were directly related to the parent's level of comfort with the school. It seems that the more proactive the parent is, the more the parent feels at ease with the school in general, and her child's teacher in particular. Establishing and maintaining a relationship with the teacher helps the parent clear doubts, or get guidance in understanding the teaching and learning processes. Many parents indicated that they went through a few stages before they developed a zone of comfort in interacting with their child's school. These are described below.

Comparing systems.

Understanding and acknowledging differences in the schools systems they knew, and the ones they encountered upon their migration is the first stage in adapting to the new environment.

All interviewed parents acknowledged that the system of education in Toronto was different from those they had experienced in previous countries of residence. The method of teaching was different here, with more hands-on work at school and no or very minimal emphasis on homework. Independent thinking and learning through play was encouraged here. The usual textbooks and notebooks had been replaced with worksheets and folders.

While all parents had been through this stage of noticing and appreciating these differences, some have moved on to the next stage. As Jaspreet said:

It's not a very long experience so I'm not getting too involved in it because right now we just recently migrated here and our main concentration is trying to settle down. Surabhi echoed similar feelings when she said:

My role is nothing because the kids come from the school and they don't want to discuss what they are doing in the school and they don't answer me properly I think...so I don't understand some times and I ignore it. However, making comparisons did not always translate into empowering knowledge. It may simply mean an inchoate sensing of differences.

Familiarizing with the new system.

The second stage was to begin to learn the new system, and parents looked for opportunities to do so, by gathering information from various sources, including volunteering in their children's classes. Chandrika participated in a workshop on homework and discussed ways in which to encourage children to work at home. She also frequently requested her child's teacher to send home worksheets. Aparna volunteered for 'scientists-in-the-school' and she learnt:

How things go on and how children understand, you know for scientist-in-the-school program, the bridges, they were teaching how the bridges are, they span, that was one term that was used. And the other time when I was involved as a volunteer myself was when I went, during the nutrition month but it was me who was giving presentation at that point, but that itself was also a learning experience.

Sonia volunteered in different schools and said:

I was trying to learn the school system here and I used to help the teacher with the checking of the journals and helping the teacher with decorating the class and sometimes in making up the journals for the children, printing something for them, printing some questionnaires for them. Sometimes the teacher would ask me to help the student individually and whoever needs my help in the class I was there for them and sometimes if there is a child who needs a special attention, I was there for the child because the teacher was busy with the other class-students so I learnt a lot.

Building a relationship with the child's teacher.

The third stage is to build a relationship with the child's teacher. Some parents engaged in frequent communication with their child's teacher. They would frequently write in the child's agenda, seek out the teacher and have informal conversations during drop-off and pick-up times, meet with the teacher during scheduled parent-teacher meetings. Jyoti said:

I had a lot of communication with her teacher through the agenda because the teacher is busy and so am I and therefore we could not do so many meetings. I would write to the teacher in the agenda about the book level that I wanted my daughter to switch from K to L or something. So we would have such communication about once or twice a month, or if I did not understand the math homework. The teacher would give a math homework every Friday, it was a game and we had to play with our children every weekend. In that if I had any difficulty, I would ask her, 'I didn't understand but I did with her', the teacher was very particular about replying to my notes and would respond immediately.

Jyoti further elaborated:

If I have any doubts, any immediate doubts for tomorrow, I clear it. When there is literacy night and if I have to take any information from the teacher or give any information, I used to do so, whenever I see the ESL teacher passing by, I greet her and ask her how my daughter is doing. 'Are you happy with her now?' I did not have to call and set an appointment to meet with the teacher. I was able to communicate using the agenda or talked after school and they clarified my doubts.

Jyoti felt that in order to build a relationship with the teacher it was important to not "keep any confusion in your mind, try to discuss with the teacher and they will tell you their criteria".

Becoming a confident supporter.

The fourth stage is to become a confident supporter of the school. Newcomer parents begin to use the school system, learn about the teaching style, about the curriculum and the criteria for evaluation used by the school. Some, but not all parents reach this stage. Some parents feel they are able to support their children in lower grades, but they may not be able to support them in higher grades because of their inability to comprehend more complex subject matter. As one parent put it:

I feel that in the higher grade maths I will need help, as I have heard from others the style of doing maths is different from what we have learnt. So when my children go to higher grades, then my husband will have to help me.

The involvement of parents in their individual child's school work reflects their desire to see their children succeed academically.

4. Summary and Discussion

South Asian immigrant parents' efforts to establish a relationship with their children's school is best understood by getting the information "directly from parents about their understanding and practices concerning their children's education" (Epstein, 1990, p. 107). Data collected for this study show that South Asian parents are highly motivated to support their children's education. They overcome language barriers and familiarize themselves with the new system which shows their commitment to their children's education. The most important feature of the findings is that these parents demonstrated learning, change and progress in developing a working relationship with the schools. They articulated their own expectations, the sources of information that they tapped into and the strategies they used to reach their goals regarding their children's education.

Though transient in nature, the parents' initial expectations from their children's schools reflected the images of schooling they had brought with them. Some of them had also arrived with the belief that the schooling here was comparatively better than what their children had experienced before, and that it would help their children become more self-reliant. The parents modified their expectations as a result of their engagement with their children's schools, as well as other sources of information, including their own children and other parents.

Some parents felt that the school gave them the options for involvement, however it was left to them to decide whether and how to be involved with their children's schools. According to Epstein (1990, p. 99) "this means that some families are highly involved in their children's education and provide important guidance for their children, whereas other families are not involved much at all". Most parents wanted to help their children in their academic work, but many felt they did not know enough about what their children were taught at school to make this

effective. Indeed some of them felt they may end up confusing their children, rather than helping them.

According to Epstein's (1987b; 1988b) model of parent involvement, there are five types of parent involvement. The data showed that the parents interviewed were at different levels of involvement. Although the study did not focus on finding out whether the parents were fulfilling their basic parental obligations (TYPE 1), given their stated descriptions of how they were supporting their children's learning, it seems safe to assume that they were indeed fulfilling the basic obligations. In their interviews several parents mentioned the different opportunities they had to communicate with their children's schools, which show that the schools were fulfilling their basic obligations for communicating with the parents (TYPE 2). However, it is clear that only some parents volunteered in the school (TYPE 3) while almost all engaged their children in learning activities at home (TYPE 4). None of the immigrant parents identified themselves with decision-making or advocacy roles at the district or state level (TYPE 5). This suggests that while the parents in this study met their basic parental obligations, and engaged their children in learning activities on their own, there was a disconnect between children's learning activities at home and in school. Only very few of them volunteered in the school, and neither they themselves nor the school considered them adequately equipped to take on decision-making or advocacy roles.

The data also showed that most of the parents' actions and attitudes were shaped by the real or perceived expectations of the teachers. The parents in the study constantly stated their desire to know what the teacher expected from their children. Through various communication strategies only some parents were able to successfully find out the specific expectations and demands of teachers and administrators (Smrekar, 1996).

The data showed widespread recognition of the need for teachers to inform parents about the academic work done at school. Children, when questioned, were unable to explain their work with clarity to their parents, and not all parents were able to access or interpret the web-based resources. The parents had relied in the past on easy access to their children's textbooks and notebooks, and assigned homework, as sources of information to learn about what their children were doing at school. Some of them acknowledged receiving weekly folders of their children's work, but for most this was not an adequate substitute for textbooks and notebooks.

The communication between the parents and teachers emerged as an important way for parents to learn about the new school system. All the study participants said that they attended the parent-teacher meetings to discuss the progress reports. However, many of them were not satisfied with these formal and short meetings and wanted teachers to give them more time and discuss progress in ways that would help parents know how they could help their children. Through a process of casual, friendly chats with the child's teacher during pick-up and drop-off some parents collected more useful information. A few parents and teachers used the agenda to communicate on a regular basis, but the parents continued to feel the need for face-to-face communication as well.

As a result, many parents began to seek opportunities to talk to their children's teachers informally during pick-up and drop-off times. This form of communication is neither facilitated nor impeded by the school. However, not many parents favoured the formal opportunities provided by the school, i.e. meetings with their children's teachers arranged by appointment. The hesitance to utilize this option may be a residue of their assumption that parents and teachers contact each other formally when there is something 'wrong.' For some but not all parents, this assumption had indeed been reinforced in their interactions with their children's schools.

With no or little reinforcement at home, many children are on their own and wholly responsible for following instructions in the class. Lightfoot (1978) calls this the child's precarious journey from home to school who alone experiences the contradictions between the two settings, "and must incorporate the myriad and often dissonant norms and expectations, while the adults seek to shape the environments and define the path in an attempt to assure the child's educational success" (p. 21). With little information about the curriculum, and the expected standards of academic performances, parents in this study felt that progress reports and formal parent-teacher meetings at the end of the school year were an incomplete way of informing them about their child's performance. Furthermore, this lack of information contradicts the message that schools explicitly give, *i.e.* they want parents to be involved in their children's schooling. If the school takes upon itself the complete responsibility of work done by the child, then the progress report must have another component which informs parents about strategies in place to help improve children's academic performance.

The data suggest the role of the schools as "major institutions for social order and social control" (Lightfoot, 1978, p.31). The parent's role is limited to volunteering and parent-teacher meetings and attending "open-house rituals at the beginning of the school year are contrived occasions that symbolically reaffirm the idealized parent-school relationship but rarely provide the chance for authentic interactions" (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 28). Parents feel that the school is also the site for parent-education through workshops about how to tackle challenges in their parent-school relationship.

At the kindergarten level, parent help is solicited to educate children in self-help skills. But the data show that South Asian immigrant parents want and expect to do much more than that. The brief overview of the curriculum guidelines does little to help them understand what their

children are expected to learn and how teachers facilitate that learning. In the absence of this knowledge, they either use alternate content and teaching strategies to teach their children, or gradually relinquish their control over their children's education. Furthermore, their realization that their cultural capital they have is of little value in the new environment could potentially lead to further reduction in parental self-efficacy (see Ali, 2008).

The study shows that South Asian parents in general are interested in playing an active part in their children's education. Some of them are able to go through all the stages, beginning with making comparisons between their own images of schooling with the on-the-ground realities of their children's schools, to gathering information from various sources, and establishing a strong relationship with the teacher, to finally become a confident supporter of their children's schooling. However, many of the parents do not reach this level and simply give up on the way. The final stage is reached only when the teacher and the parent work closely and in a co-ordinated manner to support the child. For a parent and the teacher to reach this stage, both of them must take the initiative to get to know each other's expectations from the child, but also to develop a common understanding of what roles they can and want to play in the child's schooling. Both parties need to be transparent in what they want the child to learn, and what strategies they use to support that learning. Only then can they openly discuss and negotiate what is best for the child that both of them are trying to educate.

Implications for Practice

To begin with, parents, teachers and school administrators must clearly define what parent involvement in a child's schooling means to them. Following that, they need to re-negotiate the nature of their relationship with each other, and their roles in young children's schooling.

Second, teachers and school administrators need to realize that parents, such as the ones who participated in this study are highly invested in their children's education and capable of supporting the children's academic learning. By providing more details of the curriculum, standards of performance, and teaching strategies they use in the classroom, they would support both the parents' and the children's learning. Parents could be invited to spend a day in their children's class, even if they are not volunteering. Samples of textbooks or other instructional materials, their own children's work as well as other children's work could be made available to them. When parents and teachers work together in a coordinated manner, it is very likely that the children they teach will become both effective and efficient learners.

Third, both teachers and parents also need to communicate clearly and frequently about what they want to know from each other, what are their preferred ways of communication, and how far they can accommodate each other in this regard. For immigrant parents, who are less familiar with school systems in Canada, it would be very helpful to have early and more frequent meetings with school staff, particularly when their children first begin school in this country. These meetings should focus on an *exchange* of information, rather than just passing on information about the school to the parents. Teachers should take the time to learn about the parents' expectations, habits and routines for supporting their children's learning, and parents should do the same for finding out what their children will experience in school. Building rapport

early in the academic year is likely to serve both parties well for the rest of the year, and serve the children they are trying to educate in the long run.

Recommendations for the School Board and Policy Makers

Expectations, information and communication were the three over-arching themes that emerged in the study. For migrant parents to develop good working relationship with their children's school there is a need for school boards and policy makers to rethink service delivery. I recommend the designing of courses for parents whereby they are given a detailed understanding about teaching methods used by the schools. These courses should be periodically evaluated to determine parent satisfaction. I recommend courses over individual workshops as migrant parents experience a completely new school system which can best be understood over time rather than through individually designed workshops. Thus course-based work will help them undergo intensive training about the new system.

Similarly, special courses must be designed for teachers to understand immigrant parent characteristics and needs. Teachers need to be trained to better understand this population. It will help them to move towards a collaborative relationship with parents, thus helping them educate a diverse student population.

Directions for Future Research

This work focused on how immigrant parents conceptualized, negotiated and developed their relationships with their children's schools. It found that only some parents reached stage four while many others remained at stages one and two. There is a need to know what factors impede the movement of many parents from level one to level four. Therefore, those interested in research in this area can focus on finding out the challenges that hinder the development of

relationships between many immigrant parents and their children's schools. It will be interesting to study the influence of factors such as race, gender and preconceived notions on defining parent-school relationships.

This study focused on the immigrant parents' perceptions. Similarly, future studies may be designed to ask questions to teachers about what their expectations are from immigrant parents and determine the nature of their relationship with immigrant parents.

APPENDIX A
Ryerson University
Consent Agreement

Perspectives of Immigrant Parents from South Asia on Parent-School Collaboration in the Education of Their Children

Dear Parents and/or Guardians,

This is a request for you to participate in my study. The study is being undertaken in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies (MAECS) program at Ryerson University. Please read the form carefully before you consent to volunteer for the study. You can ask questions to be sure that you understand the purpose and nature of the research study.

Investigator:

Sunita Khandelwal B.A.(India), M.A. English (India), M.A. in Early Childhood Studies
Candidate (Ryerson University)

sunita.khandelwal@ryerson.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Mehrunnisa Ahmad Ali B.A. (Punjab), Ed. M (Harvard), Ph. D. (Michigan State)

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of the study is to learn what parent-school collaboration means to immigrant parents of children (between 4 and 8 years of age) from South Asia. The main purpose of the study is to examine parents' perception of the nature of this relationship with schools. The study will add to the repertoire of research on South Asian immigrant parents' conception of parent-school relationship.

Your Participation in the Study Means:

You will be asked to participate in a one-to-one interview with the researcher. The duration of the interview will be for approximately 60-90 minutes. This will also be the total interaction time for the study. The one-to-one interview will be tape-recorded for later transcription.

Study Location:

The interview will be conducted at a location that ensures confidentiality to the participant. The participant may choose to be interviewed in a private room such as at Ryerson University, a local library or a local community center, where s/he cannot be seen or heard by others.

What is Experimental in this Study?

Neither the procedure nor the questionnaire used in this study is experimental in nature. The only experimental aspect of this study is the gathering of information for the purpose of analysis.

Risks or Discomforts:

You may find some of the questions in the interview personal in nature. You may choose to not answer the question without giving any reason for your decision. You may withdraw from the study at any time. You may also request that certain comments/remarks made by you not be included in the transcription.

Benefits of the Study:

By participating in this study, you may help to advance parent-school collaboration which is responsive to expectations of immigrant parents from South Asia. You will be given a copy of the study, which could help you understand South Asian immigrant parent's perception of parent-school collaboration. However, I cannot assure you of any direct personal benefits.

Confidentiality:

Your participation in the study is confidential. Your name will not be used anywhere in the study. It will be replaced by a pseudonym. Your name will only be present in this consent form which enforces ethical accountability on the researcher. The consent form with your name will only be maintained in the records until two years after the completion of the study.

The interviews will be audio-taped and then transcribed for the purpose of the study. Only the primary researcher will have access to the audiotapes. The audio-tapes will be stored in a secure place in the researcher's home. Two years after the completion of this study, the tapes will be erased and the agreement forms will be destroyed.

Incentives to Participate: You will be given a copy of the study upon completion of the research report (October, 2010).

Costs and/or Compensation for Participation: There is no compensation for participation in the study. You may incur minor costs, such as transit fare or parking fees to come for a meeting. I shall consider that a part of your contribution to this study.

Voluntary nature of participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or your child's school. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular questions or stop participation altogether.

Dissemination:

The findings of the study will be presented orally to a panel in the MAECS program at Ryerson University. A copy of the study will be provided to the participants. Findings from the study may be presented to parents, immigrant community groups, teachers and administrators of schools. They may also be presented at academic conferences or published in an academic journal. In order to ensure confidentiality of the participant, pseudonyms will be used for all participants.

Questions or Concerns about the Study:

If you have any questions with regard to the study please ask. If you have any questions later about this study you may contact:

Dr. Mehrunnisa Ahmad Ali
Telephone Number: 416-979-5000 x 6330

If at any time you have concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042

AGREEMENT

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Your signature indicates that the interview can be audio-taped. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Please check one of the following:

_____ I agree to participate in the research study

_____ I do not agree to participate in the research study

Name of Participant (PLEASE PRINT):

Signature of Participant:

Date:

Signature of Investigator

Date:

APPENDIX B
Initial Interview Guide

One-to-One Qualitative Interview

Demographic Questions

You are a: Mother Father Legal Guardian Other

Number of children you have: _____

Age of your children: **Child 1**

Child 2

Child 3

Child 4

The School Board used: TDSB TCDSB Other (name)_____

Immigrated to Canada in (Year): _____

Country of Origin: _____

Your Ethnicity: _____

Your Home Language: _____

Guiding Questions

Tell me about your initial expectations from the school.

What were your reasons for having these expectations?

What do you think were the school's expectation from you?

What surprised you?

Probing questions arising from this

What were your experiences with schools in your previous country?

How do you perceive your role in your child's education?

Probing questions arising from this

Is this role different from what you expected? Why is that so?

Is this role easy or difficult for you to fulfill? Why is that so?

What/who supports you (or could support you) in fulfilling your role obligations?

What do you think or feel about the teacher's role in your child's education?

Probing questions arising from this

Is this role different from what you expected? Why is that so?

How is this likely to affect your child? And you?

What changes do you notice in your role as a guide for your child?

Is there any other issue you think informs your perception of the relationship with schools?

Thank you for participating!

APPENDIX C

To,
Nepali Canadian Community Services
276, Hiawatha Road
Toronto, Ontario, M4L 2Y4
June 1, 2010

Dear Sir/Ma'am,

This is to inform you that I am a student at the Master of Arts for Early Childhood Studies program (MAECS) at Ryerson University (Toronto). As a requirement of the program, I am undertaking a research study about challenges that recent immigrant parents from South Asia may face when building a relationship with their children's schools. In order to make my study-sample representative of people from all the countries in South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), I would like to recruit one or two participants from the Nepali Community in Toronto.

The recruited participants must be recent immigrants to Canada (in the last five years) and be parents of children between the ages of 4 and 8 years. A consent agreement form will be provided to the prospective participants if they decide to participate. The participant will engage in an interview with the researcher. The interview will be for a duration of 60 minutes to 90 minutes. Those who meet the criteria and wish to participate in the study are not obligated to inform anyone at the Nepali Canadian Community Services or the individual who passed on the information about the study to the participant. This is to ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees is respected throughout.

I have included a flyer for distribution to members of your community living in Toronto. Those interested may directly contact Sunita Khandelwal through telephone (416) 751-8141 or by email: sunita.khandelwal@ryerson.ca

Thank you,
Sincerely,

SUNITA KHANDELWAL
Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies
Ryerson University, Toronto
Phone # (416) 751 8141

APPENDIX D

To,
Manan Fazli,
Coordinator of Volunteer and Outreach Services
Ontario Early Years Centre
2555, Eglinton Avenue East, Scarborough, ON, M1K 5J1
Phone # (416) 266 8289
June 1, 2010

Dear Sir,

This is to inform you that I am a student at the Master of Arts for Early Childhood Studies program (MAECS) at Ryerson University (Toronto). As a requirement of the program, I am undertaking a research study about challenges that recent immigrant parents from South Asia may face when building a relationship with their children's schools. In order to make my study-sample representative of people from all the countries in South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), I would like to recruit few participants from the South Asian Community in Toronto.

The recruited participants must be recent immigrants to Canada (in the last five years) and be parents of children between the ages of 4 and 8 years. A consent agreement form will be provided to the prospective participants if they decide to participate. The participant will engage in an interview with the researcher. The interview will be for a duration of 60 minutes to 90 minutes. Those who meet the criteria and wish to participate in the study are not obligated to inform anyone at the Ontario Early Years Centre or the individual who passed on the information about the study to the participant. This is to ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees is respected throughout.

I have included a flyer for distribution to members of the community living in Toronto. Those interested may directly contact Sunita Khandelwal through telephone (416) 751-8141 or by email: sunita.khandelwal@ryerson.ca

Thank you,
Sincerely,

SUNITA KHANDELWAL
Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies
Ryerson University, Toronto
Phone # (416) 751 8141

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

WHAT DO IMMIGRANT PARENTS THINK ABOUT PARENT-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP?

Participants needed for social research conducted by a Masters student at Ryerson University. The study will find out what immigrant parents from South Asia feel about parent-school relations. If you are a parent of child/children 4 to 8 years old, immigrated to Canada within the last five years from South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka), and living in the Greater Toronto Region, you qualify for the research study. If you wish to participate, please contact Sunita Khandelwal directly at (416) 751-8141 or sunita.khandelwal@ryerson.ca . Those who meet the criteria and wish to participate in the study are not obligated to inform anyone or the individual who passed on the information about the study to the participant. This is to ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees is respected throughout.

Table 1

| Demographic Details of Participants | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Pseudonym | Mother/Father | Age of child 1 | Age of child 2 | Age of Child 3 | Year immigrated to Canada | Country of Origin | Home Language |
| Aafreen | Mother | 12 years | 8 years | 7 years | 2005 | Pakistan | Urdu |
| Aparna | Mother | 15 years | 8 years | - | 2006 | India | Hindi/English |
| Chandrika | Mother | 6.5 years | 3.5 years | - | 2009 | Sri Lanka | Sinhalese |
| Jaspreet | Mother | 10 years | 7 years | 4 years | 2008 | India | Punjabi |
| Jyoti | Mother | 7 years | 1.5 years | - | 2005 | India | Hindi |
| Mahek | Mother | 6 years | 5 years | 2 years | 2006 | Pakistan | Urdu |
| Sonia | Mother | 5 years | 4 months | - | 2006 | India | Punjabi/Hindi |
| Surabhi | Mother | 10 years | 6 years | | 2005 | Bangladesh | Bangla |
| Tanu | Mother | 8 years | 6 years | - | 2008 | India | Hindi |

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