

**Early Literacy Experiences of Punjabi Children in  
an Ontario School: Exploring Parents'  
Perspectives and Experiences**

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# Table of Contents

	Pages
<b>Acknowledgement</b> .....	i
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	v
<b>Abstract</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 1 - Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Chapter 2 - Background to the Study</b> .....	9
Introduction .....	9
Changing Concept of Literacy .....	9
Socio-cultural Influences of Families .....	13
Influences of Socio-cultural Background on Children’s Early School Experiences ....	14
<b>Chapter 3 - Methodology</b> .....	19
Introduction .....	19
Research Design .....	19
Considerations for a Qualitative Approach .....	20
Procedural Methods .....	21
<i>Participants</i> .....	21
<i>Researcher’s Position</i> .....	22
<i>Data Collection and Instrument</i> .....	23
<i>Data Analysis</i> .....	26
Ethical Considerations .....	29
Dissemination of Results .....	30
Conclusion .....	30
<b>Chapter 4 - Analysis</b> .....	31
Introduction .....	31
Cultural Models .....	31
<i>Importance of Mother tongue</i> .....	32
<i>Maintaining Traditions</i> .....	36
<i>Perceptions of Schooling</i> .....	37
Social Identity .....	39
<i>Outward Expressions</i> .....	40
<i>Language as a Source of Identity</i> .....	41
<i>Interaction with Others</i> .....	43
Literacy Traditions .....	45
<i>Process of Learning</i> .....	46
<i>Learning Context</i> .....	48
<i>Educational Outcome</i> .....	49
Conclusion .....	52

<b>Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion</b> .....	53
Introduction .....	53
Discussion .....	53
Conclusion .....	60
Significance of the Study .....	62
Limitations .....	63
 <b>Bibliography</b> .....	 64
 <i>Appendix A - Interview Guidelines</i> .....	 70
<i>Appendix B - Letter of Invitation</i> .....	73
<i>Appendix C - Consent Forms</i> .....	75

## List of Figures

	Pages
<b>Figure 1:</b> Domain 1 - Cultural Models	28
<b>Figure 2:</b> Domain 2 - Social Identity	28
<b>Figure 3:</b> Domain 3 - Literacy Traditions	28
<b>Figure 4:</b> Enculturation Continuum	55

## **Abstract**

This study examined the perspectives and experiences of Punjabi parents of sending their children to school in Brampton, Ontario. The data was analyzed in terms of the differences in socio-cultural practices that impacted the integration of Punjabi children in the ‘westernized’ school culture of Ontario. Cultural differences in students within a dominant school discourse are often misunderstood or misinterpreted as impoverished skills and knowledge. Consequently, children whose skills are not congruent with that of the mainstream culture are seen as less successful and they have to make substantial efforts to ‘integrate for success’ in the school discourse. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with a small parent sample drawn from the Punjabi community from the researcher’s Grade One class. The analysis highlighted three themes in terms of socio-cultural differences: cultural models, social identity, literacy traditions; that reflected aspects of the Punjabi ethnic culture which were consistent with, or deviant from, the mainstream school culture. The study reflected on the social and educational realities that Punjabi children brought to school and concluded that their perceptions, knowledge and skills shaped by their early enculturation into the Punjabi community can facilitate or inhibit their enculturation into the ‘westernized’ school culture. The findings are helpful in giving a better understanding of the challenges Punjabi children face when adapting to the new dominant school discourse in Ontario.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

As a Grade One teacher, when I hear the distinct little voices of excitement, laughing, singing and walking, down in the kindergarten hallway, I am reminded, “It’s kindergarten registration time!” As a new batch of 5-year old recruits enlist to join our merry band of kindergarteners, I feel the rush of anticipation and the knot of discomfort, the one that challenges me year after year to model the potential of literacy to give a ‘new voice’ to the learners. Why ‘new’?...one might ask. Although my classroom looks like any other Grade One classroom with word walls, the alphabet trains, the number lines and colourful bulletin boards, my classroom demographics have changed considerably in the past few years with many different faces and voices, and what was once a less heterogeneous group is now enriched with students from many ethnically diverse backgrounds (Arabs, Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, Europeans etc.). Through the voices of these children coming from culturally defined social environments, I get a glimpse of their history, values, social identities and beliefs. When they enter school, they not only begin to negotiate culture and language both inside and outside of school but face the challenge of preserving their traditions and practices, and discovering, forming and giving a new voice to their cultural identity in the Canadian context.

I began my teaching working with my group of English language learners in a Mississauga school in Ontario. It was truly a multicultural experience. There was no



single ethnic group that stood out prominently as a visible minority in the English as a Second Language (ESL) cluster in the classroom. The immigrant population that filled my classroom reflected a range of countries, from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Jordan, Iraq, Vietnam, Ghana, Nigeria, to name a few. Since they came from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, interestingly, the only language that linked these children within the school and outside during play and other social interactions in their local community was the English language.

Unlike the Mississauga school, my experience in the Brampton school where I have been working this past year, has been more of a Punjabi monocultural ESL population. Although both the Mississauga community and the Brampton community form a large part of one of the largest School Boards of Southern Ontario, the ratio of ethnic representation vary within the two communities. A look at the changing school demographics in the last decade revealed some interesting statistics. Most school districts have seen an increase in the number of students from other countries particularly in urban areas. According to Elizabeth Coelho (1998), in some areas like Toronto more than 50% of the student population has arrived from other countries. Census published by the Toronto Star (April 3, 2008) revealed that there are about 1.21 million Chinese, 784,000 blacks and 1.26 million South Asians in Canada. The South Asian population has become the largest visible minority in Canada. According to the Star, in Ontario the largest growth in visible South Asian minorities was seen in Brampton, Ontario, with an increase from 40 to 57%. In my current school in Brampton situated in a new housing development, it was estimated, during the initial half of the school year, that there were at

least 24 languages spoken of which, the most common first language of our ESL group was Punjabi (approximately 192/303), distantly followed by Tamil (approximately 42/303). In this school in Brampton, it was not uncommon to hear the Punjabi language spoken in the hallway or the classroom, and in most school ethnic activities the Punjabi culture was showcased through dance, art and traditional attire. Reflecting on my experiences with the ESL populations of the two schools in Mississauga and Brampton, I notice that children from the two clusters move at a different pace when adapting to the school culture. It is my assumption, that because of the diversity in ethnic backgrounds, the multicultural student population in the Mississauga school is inclined to draw on elements of the school culture such as the English language, to identify with each other. Children from the (predominantly Punjabi) Brampton school have elements of their own culture in the school and the local community to relate to and therefore move at a relatively slower pace of adaptation to the Ontario school culture.

As a teacher of South Indian origin and a recent migrant to Canada, I share the same values, heritage and historical background of the Punjabi community from the North of India. However, differences in spoken languages, religion, geographical locations, cultural norms and traditions distinguish our discourses within our cultural mosaic. Although commonalities with their background have helped nurture mutually respectful interactions with the Punjabi students in my class, the pedagogy and curriculum have seen very little changes to include the cultural realities of my classroom. The rhetoric of an inclusive approach has placed minority students like my Punjabi students in a program that has categorized them as English as Second Language Learners. While specialized

programs like the ESL programs have yielded positive outcomes in facilitating their linguistic development, it fails to value their cultural capital in terms of knowledge and skills that these minority students bring to school for educational success. As a result, these children are less confident about their ability to succeed at school and to convey their knowledge to others (Cummins, 1986). Clearly, to provide opportunities for educational success and to meet my students learning needs, I feel the need to provide a learning context that is sensitive to the cultural differences of my students and that builds upon the learning experiences that they bring to school. It is, therefore, important for me to understand the ways that cultural context of Punjabi children's home and school systems interact.

When sending their children to kindergarten for the first time, parents face a lot of anxiety. For some parents this anxiety might revolve around their child's social and emotional adjustment, and yet, for others the concerns are more about their child's academic/cognitive preparedness, or even physical health to be successful in school. In order to ensure a smooth transition from home to school, most parents prepare their children in different communicative language competencies and social skills through their interaction with adults at home and in the community. Children grow during their pre-school years, to become linguistically and socioculturally competent members of their own community. At the time of school entry the constructs of school preparedness calls for homogeneity (Petriwskyj et al, 2005), and so children in the same chronological age group are expected to have a certain level of social maturity and academic knowledge to be ready for school. In Ontario, the concept of school preparedness or readiness is

linked to the nature of the schooling system, parent-child interaction patterns and educational practices in Ontario which are based on the expectations and beliefs about child development for the dominant English speaking group living in a Western industrialized society (mainstream culture). However, as stated earlier, in the past decade, schools in Brampton, Ontario have seen a high proportion of student enrollment from the Punjabi community. While the pedagogy and curriculum in Ontario develops learning opportunities for early learners within the mainstream culture, the Punjabi minority group, enter the education system with different cultural values and development goals that have shaped their early learning experiences which are likely to affect their school readiness (Magnuson, 2005, Ramey et al, 2004, Heath, 1989) in Ontario schools. Despite the fact that there is a growing population of ethnically diverse groups, schools have been inadequately prepared to provide these early learners with a continuity of culturally relevant coherent experiences to meet their heterogeneous needs during their early transitional years. Ethnic minorities such as the Punjabi children are particularly neglected when faced with discontinuity created by change in culture between home and school experiences. As a result, when trying to generalize child behaviour and development in Ontario schools, educators often underestimate or misinterpret cultural differences in students as impoverished skills and knowledge (Park et al, 2003). Consequently these students often get marginalized and are academically less successful because their skills are not congruent with that of the mainstream culture.

Although schools continue to advocate school transition practices through information night, brochures, and visits to school, to enable adjustment and smooth transition between

home and school context, the pressure to conform to the dominant school practices, routines and discourse for social and academic success remains. While on the one hand, I am consciously aware as a Grade One teacher, of my responsibility to create a classroom culture that celebrates creativity, motivation and expression that will enable children to use their background and their repertoire of life's experience to make meaning of their world using the language rules and the mechanisms of language learning, on the other, I am faced with uncertain practical problems in my teaching such as what my students know and bring to the class, how my teaching would affect my students, and what approaches would be most suitable on a particular child, the instructional content, the reliability and validity of tests, etc. When reflecting on my experiences both as an insider and outsider within the school discourse, I question the nature of 'integration' that defines the pathway to educational success. I suspect that my fears were no different from those experienced by ethnic minority groups, in that, I faced the similar challenges of acquiring the knowledge and skills to be successful without having to give up all or even some of the practices and beliefs that enculturated me into learning. In response to these challenges I found myself adapting to a new class of people, the Shape-Shifting Portfolio people (Gee in Alvermann D (Eds) 2002), by classifying myself as a portfolio of skills, achievements and experiences to which I could add value by way of new knowledge and skills, so that I can adopt new literacies, shape shift and blend into the various networks of rapidly changing opportunities while still retaining my own cultural identity. My suspicion is that educational success as seen by the ethnic immigrant Punjabi population does not value full integration as viewed by the dominant school culture, but is seen as an addition of the cultural capital (knowledge and skills) gained through accommodation

and assimilation. In light of the struggles that I face as a teacher to gain a greater insight on how Punjabi children mediate themselves within the school, it is important to explore how the socio-cultural context that entails cultural heritage, language, family, values and beliefs of the minority Punjabi group shape school experiences and influence integration and learning in the Canadian school.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Background to the Study**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides information into what is already known about the topic of literacy, socio-cultural influences of families from different backgrounds and its influence on children's school readiness and early school experiences. In the first section, the changing concept of literacy is discussed in order to show the struggles and tensions that arise in individuals when transitioning to a new learning context that entails new ways of producing knowledge and meaning as well as representing oneself. The second section deals with social and cultural influences of families from different backgrounds, to show that cultural elements and understandings within a discourse community are crucial factors in the organization of socializing context. The third section explains the socio-cultural influences of families on children's early school experiences, to show that children's perception and realities are shaped differently by their experiences in the cultural understandings of the group they interact in.

#### **1. Changing Concept of Literacy**

Literacy can be defined in several ways. In a very basic level it is about being able to master the fundamentals and processes of language and to communicate in it so that we can decode significant information within the society. At another level it can be about educating and upgrading skills in a particular field and to be able to reflect and reason in a particular socio-cultural group.

Research shows that educational practices “reflect certain assumptions specific to the time and culture within which they are produced” (Vadeboncoeur, 1997, p.16 in Richardson, 1997). Schools merely serve as an ideological apparatus in the hands of the dominant socio-cultural views of that time. Schools drew on specialized languages and interpretations of evolving concepts such as objectivism, constructivism and situativity to design its learning context. While schools saw a shift in the learning theorizes over time, what I have come to understand is that the underlying educational ideology of ‘conformity for success’ remained the same, and what changed within the learning context are the contents of the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) and the goals for success. So when the traditional model of learning asked for absorption of prescribed knowledge and skills, the socio-constructivist perspective totally changed the essence of literacy teaching and learning, suggesting that “knowledge is situated, being in part a product of activity, context and culture in which it is developed and used” (Brown et al, 1989, p.32). Since different communities and ethnic groups are aligned differently to the concepts of literacy, a change say, from a traditional learning to a situated learning context can cause considerable struggles and tensions in individuals because individuals whose success was previously determined by the quantity of knowledge and skills they could reproduce from their learning are now expected to conform to the new cultural capital that entails producing knowledge and meaning, and new ways of representing oneself within a context and culture that is not necessarily similar to their own cultural context of learning. Struggles and tensions in individuals arise from this transition when deciding what aspects of one’s cultural attributes should be maintained or compromised when trying to meet the new educational demands of alignment or ‘integration’ for success



within a new cultural context. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of the complexities within the struggles that individuals go through when transitioning and adapting to a new learning context, it is important to have an understanding of the ideological framework and the expectations of learning and representations that constitutes the learning contexts.

Under the traditional learning context, the underpinning concept of objectivity rejects subjective interpretations of reality and hold standards that the learner must assimilate with. In one such context, students are exposed to classrooms where emphasis was on the ‘correctness of the language over expression’ (Finn, 1999), knowledge is presented as isolated facts not related to students’ lives and experiences, instruction is merely copying notes, meaning is transmitted, writing is merely completing worksheets, expectations are low, discourse is limited and a quiet classroom and obedience are prized. This traditional model transmits prescribed cultural capital (knowledge and skills) from teacher to student, and serves the purpose of equipping students with the functional and cultural capital necessary for the workplace. This model of learning views functional literacy as the key to success based on the cultural myth that with hard work and a good education, every citizen can reasonably hope to achieve some measure of social and economic success (Luke, 1998). The traditional pedagogy merely assigns students the role of empty receptacles open to receiving, “knowledge that is officially declared to be useful and socially necessary” (Osborne, 1991, p. 27-28) and where voices are suppressed with little interaction with texts. Epistemologically, the traditional model assumes that the goal of

learning is to know the world objectively, to learn as much as the teacher knows, and modify behaviour through reinforced practice.

Under the constructivist view, learning theories in schools underwent a paradigm shift. Constructivists believe that one cannot isolate the mental cognitive processes from the interpretation of reality. “Individuals are assumed to learn better when they are forced to discover things themselves rather than when they are instructed. The learner must have experience with hypothesizing and predicting, manipulating objects, posing questions, researching answer, investigating, in order for knowledge construction to occur” (O’Loughlin, 1992, p. 379 in Li and Hsieh, 2001). Individuals in a constructive classroom are seen as portfolios of knowledge and skills, gaining and applying new knowledge through discovery, thereby demonstrating the ability to transform and improve work.

Social constructivist believe that every knower constructs meaning somewhat differently of their external world based on one’s past experience and the connection one can make. “In other words, the social context of learning has a significant impact on the construction of meaning.” (Bainbridge and Malicky, 2000, p. 4). Classrooms that conform to the social constructivist’s view that ‘knowledge is situated’, introduce authentic activities that are framed by its culture, where meaning and purpose are socially constructed through negotiations among present and past members (Brown et al, 1989). This change supplements the traditional banking model of literacy by going beyond the rudiments of grammar and style of language learning to include ways of making meaning to achieve individual purposes. Heath (1998) for example, revealed that while in some

communities, social practices engaged their children early on in aspects of valued secondary Discourses (Gee and Lankshear, 1996) in an attempt to advantage their children's acquisition of these secondary discourses, other social groups focused on particular modes of representation such as oral traditions or even basic literacy events that may be culturally relevant but limits the mind's pattern-recognizing and assembling capabilities and the ability to respond critically based on their understanding of their context and their past experiences.

## **2. Socio-cultural Influences of Families**

The shift from traditional learning to socio-constructivist approach (Vygotsky, 1978) theorizes that learning activities and social interactions take place through culturally mediated tools - "that is, by artifacts, symbols, technologies, and forms of language that have been historically and culturally shaped to carry out certain functions and that carry certain meanings" (Gee, 2000, online reading). This approach takes the focus away from the literate individual as a body of skills and knowledge, and gravitates towards learning and child development through participation and interaction in a particular discourse community. From the perspective of the social semiotic theory, (Hall et al, 2003) it implies that literacy results from interaction within a social context rather than in isolation or in a vacuum. Each community of practice (Lave, 1996, Wenger, 1998) is laden with its values and ideologies that shape their discourses which includes the ways of taking meaning, the quantity and quality of activities engaged in and the patterns and ways of interaction that come to be seen as a norm within that semiotic domain. The perspective of socialization within distinctive discourses draws on the notion that

individuals' perception and realities are shaped differently by their experiences in the cultural understandings of the group they interact in. Ochs and Schieffelin (1984 in Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986) view language and culture as crucial elements in the organization of these socializing contexts. According to them language and culture are, "bodies of knowledge, structure of understanding, conceptions of the world, and collective representations (which) are extrinsic to any individual and contain more information than any individual could know or learn. Culture encompasses variations in knowledge between individuals." (1984, p.166 in Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986)

### **3. Influences of Socio-cultural Background on Children's Early School Experiences**

Research has shown that there is considerable variance in the quality and quantity of learning opportunities that children from different familial background such as economically disadvantaged homes, the Black American race, minority families or ethnic groups such as the Chinese, Punjabi, Urdu and Gujarati speaking population, experience in their sociocultural context (Greenwood, 1991, Heath, 1998, Walker et al, 1994, Heath, 1989, Li et al, 2000, Hirst, 1998, Yamamoto et al, 2006, Rush, 1999). Decisions around how to socialize their children in the early years are made by parents or primary caregivers, whose beliefs and views influenced by cultural practices shape the home contextual factors in which parent-child interactions impact child development (Chao, 1996). Variations in parental views and beliefs regulated by cultural customs structures the micro-environment of children with respect to time, space and value for social interactions, literacy socialization patterns and activities and the quantity and quality of

the learning opportunities and resources provided (Super and Harkness, 1986). Therefore, parents from different cultural backgrounds practice different kinds of literacies shaped by their socioeconomic background, cultural values, religious beliefs and customs. As a result, “the values they hold and the messages about educational expectations and school success they transmit to their children may be different from those advocated in school” (Li, 2006, p. 28). Children from diverse ethnic backgrounds thus enter school with varying skills and knowledge that may or may not meet the school expectations because of one or more of the several reasons. They start school with different cultural assumptions, may lack certain concepts and linguistic skills and abilities that are necessary for school readiness, or are accustomed to different teaching and learning styles (Ogbu, 1992). Thus, in the early years of schooling, these children face challenges in learning that do not necessarily result from their inherent abilities to learn. Other research and anecdotal evidence from school teachers suggest that there are misconceptions and conflicting expectations on both the parents and the school, which are likely to impact on successful literacy achievement in children of minority backgrounds. It is possible that immigrant parents’ expectations experiences a shift in the face of new social changes that demands new ways of representation, building new portfolios of knowledge and skills that would enable them to shift and integrate into the various networks to be successful.

According to Ogbu (1992) although cultural and language differences are important, the problem also lies in the nature of the relationship between minority cultures and languages and the dominant culture and language. Ogbu argues that voluntary minorities

“interpret the cultural and language differences they encounter as barriers to be overcome”, whereas “involuntary minorities interpret the cultural and language differences as markers of their collective identity to be maintained, not as barriers to be overcome.” (1992, p. 9-10). In Canada, voluntary Punjabi immigrant minorities bring with them their own culture and their distinct ways of communication, learning and interaction, and perceive new learning as instrumental and additive to existing knowledge and skill for successful participation in relevant context (Chung, 1992 in Ogbu, 1992). Although in the past, education was the means by which Punjabi students were expected to completely assimilate, in Canada, under the policy of multiculturalism, the ethnic groups are encouraged to maintain their unique cultural backgrounds while being part of the Canadian experiences. Schools and communities celebrate ethnic diversity through multicultural initiatives that focus on extrinsic values such as language, food, tradition, clothing, religion etc. of different cultures. These cultural events and activities bring about social cohesion and tolerance. Elizabeth Coelho in her recommendations (2001) on Program Planning and Assessment for ESL/ELD learner, suggests a flexible program, appropriate modifications for teaching, learning and assessment strategies, opportunities for interaction with English-speaking peers, designing lessons and activities and choosing resources that recognizes the students’ background knowledge and experiences, opportunity to share about their own language and culture etc. for successful integration.

Although models of multicultural education embrace inclusion by focusing on cross-cultural understanding in content and curriculum, the program design excluded the social realities and cultural understanding of learning that these minority students bring to

school. As a result, the immigrant student has to maneuver, reposition and rearticulate themselves through the inclusionary and exclusionary features within school. The nature of their mediation within the school however, is seen from different perspectives. Gordon (1964) suggests that unidimensional enculturation assumes the adoption of the dominant culture by disengaging and disconnecting with the culture of the ethnic group. A bidimensional enculturation process however proposes (Berry, 1980, 1990, 1997, Berry et al, 1987 and 1989) that the enculturation process involves the adoption of relevant aspects of the dominant culture while simultaneously retaining ties with their ethnic cultural group. According to Berry (1980, 1990, 1997), maintaining cultural distinctiveness and interethnic contact, results in the selection of one of the four modes of adaptation viz. segregation, marginalization, integration and assimilation during the enculturation process. This would mean that (Berry, 2001 and Castro 2003), those who maintain their cultural integrity and, at the same time adopt and participate with members of the dominant social groups are considered to endorse an integration strategy. In contrast, those who exclusively value their cultural distinctiveness and do not value interethnic relations are assumed to take on a separation strategy. Individuals who are less concerned with maintaining their cultural heritage but move with the dominant social views are seen to identify with assimilation strategies. Finally, those individuals who neither identifies with their ethnic identity nor with members of the dominant group are considered to be marginalized.

While integration seems to be the most desired outcome, visible minorities such as Punjabis encourage their children, “to adopt the mainstream characteristics necessary for

social and academic success in school without necessarily buying into the beliefs or meanings on which these characteristics are based.” Finn (1999, p. 41). In other words, these children are encouraged to engage in accommodation without assimilating with the mainstream culture. Interestingly, Padilla et al (1985) found that the first generation immigrants are less inclined to move towards assimilation but the second generation is usually the one that face the challenges of integration. What we gather from these perspectives is that in the Ontario school, the pace and extent of Punjabi children’s adaptation to their new cultural values and social realities depends on the family’s socio-cultural factors and attitudes towards the dominant culture.

Thus, in order to understand Punjabi children’s early school experiences, the salient characteristics within the categories of cultural models, social identity and literacy traditions of Punjabi groups will be examined. Specifically these characteristics will be explored by:

- Examining the perceptions and experiences of Punjabi parents of sending their children to an Ontario school
- Identifying those aspects within the Punjabi socio-cultural practices that were consistent with or deviant from the Ontario school culture
- Examining the influence of parental attitudes towards cultural differences



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter includes an outline of the research design, participants, data collection, ethical considerations, the researcher's position and data analysis, for the study. This chapter also describes the qualitative approach employed to explore Punjabi parents' perspective of their children's early school going experiences in Ontario.

#### **Research Design**

During the research process the following structure was adhered to in the planning and empirical stage:

- The conceptual and theoretical phase to frame the research purposes, aims and objectives. This included the formulation of the research question and drawing on a sound theoretical and conceptual framework.
- Literature review to inform the study. Literature review was done prior to data collection to obtain more background knowledge of the early literacy experiences of immigrant and ethnic population.
- While planning the study, the design of the research involved selecting an appropriate research method, selecting participants, choosing the data collection

instrument and developing the tool, and designing the analytical framework for the analysis of data, and linking these to the conceptual and theoretical phase.

- At the empirical phase, data is collected through an empirical qualitative inquiry, analyzed and interpreted through effective methods that supported the analyzed data, and pertinent to the conceptual and theoretical phase (chapter 3)

The research method is the techniques or procedures of inquiry adopted to collect and analyze data. In order to tap into the lived experiences of participants, the study was designed to explore, describe and investigate the real-life situations through empirical inquiry. Methodologically, therefore, the study was designed to be a small sample qualitative study, to understand key elements or themes within six Punjabi children's experiences of going to school in Ontario from the parents' own perspective.

### **Considerations for a Qualitative Approach**

A qualitative approach was deemed suitable because 'qualitative research is differentiated most easily from documentary and quantitative research approaches by its strong reliance on gathering information about events, processes, programmes, issues, activities and the like as they occur within real-life contexts by interviewing eye-witness' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). Qualitative approach is pertinent to this research because of the very change in the philosophy of knowing and interpreting the world. There has been a shift in the universal systems of thought and about what constitutes reality. The belief that knowledge is derived from objective, universal and stable reality has been criticized for its a-historical and a-social position. Although positivists have comfortably explained the

non-observable aspects of reality like ‘ethical principles, aesthetic judgments or theological premises’, as beliefs or opinions outside the real world, it appears that the process of knowing is ‘a product of past and ongoing interactions with the world, and interactions within a very specific historical and social context.’(Harris, 1979). Therefore knowledge that is constructed in a specific space and time within the social dimension depends on views and opinions influenced by preconceptions, prior knowledge, experience etc. The focus then shifts from the reconstruction of an object reality to the construction of knowledge through the interpretation and negotiation of the social context (Kvale, 1996). The result is a multiplicity of meanings from different perspectives. Therefore, Punjabi parents’ experiences of sending their children to school in Ontario reflect views and opinions that are shaped by their preconceived notions of education that are influenced by their cultural understandings. In order to yield knowledge of the perspectival reality of the participants’ experience, a qualitative approach to data collection through conversation and narratives was deemed more reliable than quantitative measures based on assumed criteria. A qualitative method allows exploration to gain new insights, descriptive data to probe experiences, and room for constructing knowledge and interpretation of meaning.

## **Procedural Methods**

### ***Participants***

Although the focus of the study was on the experiences of children, the target population in this research was adult parents of a minority group in Canada. Six parents of South Asian Punjabi origin, whose children are currently in Grade One in a publicly funded,

predominantly ESL school in Brampton, Ontario were invited to participate in the interview session. However, one parent declined, due to health issues. Most of these children are either recent immigrants or were born in Ontario to parents who are immigrants to Canada. Parent sample was diverse in ethnic background, parental education and family income. All families spoke English as a second language, and are exposed to at least two languages (Punjabi/Hindi and English) at home and different cultural values and religious beliefs (Hindus and Sikhs). Although geographical location, religion and languages point to cultural distinctiveness among these Punjabi families, there exist common features within this ethnic group that have direct implications on the patterns of interaction and the early learning environment. These include, socialization to pass on the unique values and behaviors of their cultures (Julian et al, 1994), family as centre, socialization towards interdependence, parental control on child's development (Bornstein, 1995), and educational goals being achievable through effort (Goyette et al 1999).

### ***Researcher's Position***

Parent sample was chosen from among students of my own class and, therefore, I was confident to handle any issues that might arise from research with the ethnic Punjabi minority group because:

- I had already built a professional relationship with the parents of my students during the course of this academic year.
- I belong to the general cultural background of this minority group and understand their cultural sensitivities.

- I was aware of language difficulties and had been able to establish appropriate communication with these parents during this academic year.
- I could use the voluntary services of my Punjabi colleagues from the same school as well as local organizations like the Brampton Multicultural Community Centre, the Guru Gobind Singh Children's Foundation, the Punjabi Foundation of Canada etc., to render support in my field study (for e.g. translating interview questions to be made available at the time of the interview).

Throughout the study I had maintained an attitude of reflexivity. This was achieved by verbalizing to research peers and advisors, personal feelings and experiences that may have emanated from interacting with issues under study.

### ***Data Collection and Instrument***

Data was collected through an informal unstructured open interview method to promote a good interview interaction, so that participants would have the opportunity to talk about particular experiences and tell their own story. The purpose of the interview was to generate:

- Content about an event from an 'insider's' perspective
- Access a person's definitions and understandings of concepts and processes that are of interest to the teacher
- Tap into beliefs, values, worldviews, and the like, on the part of the interviewee
- Collect personal oral narratives

(Lankshear and Knobel, 2004)

Preparation for data collection included:

- Carefully preparing open-ended guiding interview questions that reflected the research purposes, aims, and questions
- Sending out invitation letters (see Appendix B)
- Selecting a convenient location conducive for one-on-one interview
- Follow up calls and clarification of research purpose with participants
- Providing a comfortable setting for informal conversation
- Setting up a digital recording device
- Signing of consent forms for publication and voice recording (see Appendix C)
- Establishing rapport with the participants
- Briefing and debriefing before and after the interview on the purpose of the study
- Assigning numbers to interviewees and their respective data as part of the ethical measures
- Transcription of data
- Feedback and question time after the interview
- Reading and approval of transcripts by participants

The interview was conducted by a list of pre-prepared guiding questions (Appendix A) to prompt respondents' opinions and responses around areas of social and emotional adjustments, approaches to learning, language and cognitive expectations as well as parent-school partnership. The suggested questions were of a descriptive form to prompt spontaneous responses, and the various dimensions of their answers were pursued to gain richer access to new themes in their lived experience. Participants were briefed on the

context of the interview before the session began and debriefed on the main points at the end of the session, with an additional opportunity to discuss any issues regarding the interview. In this study, the interview took place after school in the researchers' classroom or staffroom. Each interview lasted at least an hour.

Participation in this study was voluntary. A letter explaining the purpose of the study (Appendix B) was sent home with the children. Parents were invited to take part and appointments were made to conduct the interviews. Follow up letters were sent to parents who did not respond. Informed consent was allowed at two key stages, at the time of the interview and at the time of transcription analysis. Consent forms were signed live at the time of the interview. Two consent forms were signed (see Appendix C). One obtained consent for participation and publication of interview data. The other obtained consent for voice recording. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for not only accuracy but to evoke the contextuality of meaning. This is because a decontextualized and detemporalized transcription alone would miss the actual conversational context (Kvale, 1996). A second interview was set up to allow participants to review transcripts and highlighted themes of analysis of the first interview and for further clarification where needed. Parents were required to initial the transcripts to indicate approval. Parents were guaranteed total anonymity and confidentiality. Interviewees were assigned numbers and the tapes are preserved in a container at the residence of the researcher and was accessible only to the researcher. As the study did not focus on a vulnerable group, there were no known or anticipated risks for the participants.

### *Data Analysis*

‘Data analysis is the process of organizing these pieces of information, systematically identifying their key features or relationships (themes, concepts, beliefs etc.) and interpreting them.’ (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). Basic steps for data analysis in this study include:

- a. reading and re-reading the text
- b. comparing and contrasting patterns within data
- c. reflective questioning of data
- d. coding of data for specific categories
- e. categorizing data by category analysis
- f. identifying cultural domains
- g. creating a preliminary taxonomy
- h. completing the taxonomy

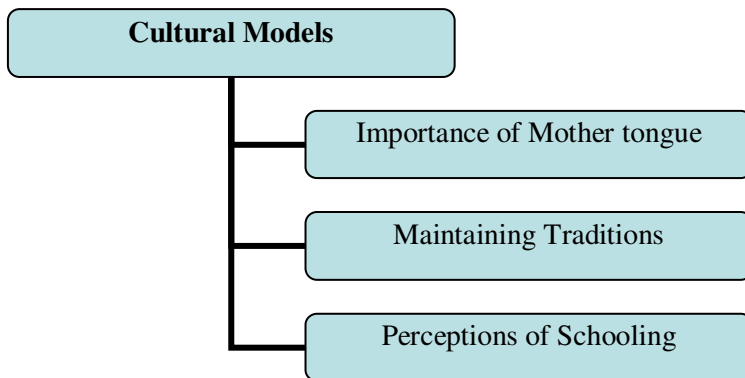
(Lankshear and Knobel, 2004)

The transcribed text was read critically to highlight and examine the participants’ point of view, the underlying assumptions, and the theoretical coherence. It required a few readings and reflective questioning of data, to determine by way of comparing and contrasting if there were sufficient data examples for particular themes and topics. Reflective questions centered on what data pertains to the research question, what particular responses meant, what are the underlying assumptions, why place certain assumptions or statements in specific categories, how will the categories be labeled etc.

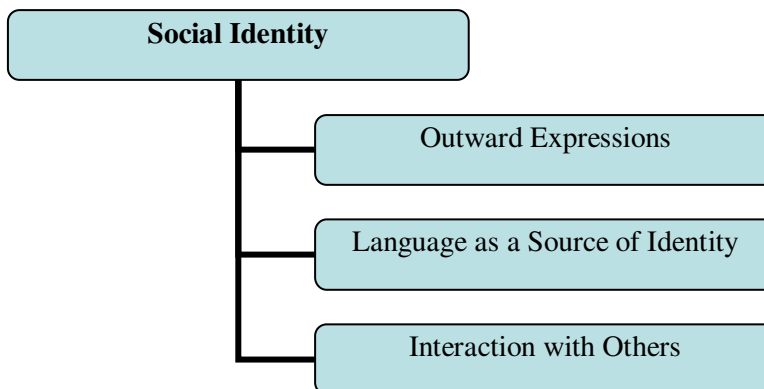


Examples are coded for specific categories for easy retrieval. Qualitative categorical analysis was found suitable to determine themes within the texts and clustering of experiences by way of coding into specific categories of information according to recognizable patterns with respect to the purpose of the study. In order to refine the number of categories, semantic relationships between data items were recognized first and then the logical relationships among categories of item (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). Subsequent analyses required new codes for new categories that emerged from the data. By looking at the relationship of included terms within a broad category a cultural domain was identified. Each cultural domain was named with a cover term, based on the key knowledge constructed within each domain. A preliminary taxonomy was thus created by laying out visually elements of analysis from each cultural domain. By relating the taxonomic analysis to the research aims, questions and theoretical consideration, results were generated and interpretations of the analysis were made. The taxonomy as an analytical tool was considered appropriate because it provided a visual representation of analyzed data that was helpful to focus on essential elements for deriving results and interpretations. The multiplicity of claims derived as evidence to support a cultural domain within the theoretical framework strengthened the trustworthiness and validity of the study. The analysis was re-examined by the research supervisor to ensure reliability by way of consistency and stability. An examination of the various cultural domains showed that the experiences of Punjabi students revolved around the following cultural themes: Cultural models, Social identity and Literacy traditions. Categories and sub-categories within each domain reflected the parents' perspective of their children's social and educational realities.

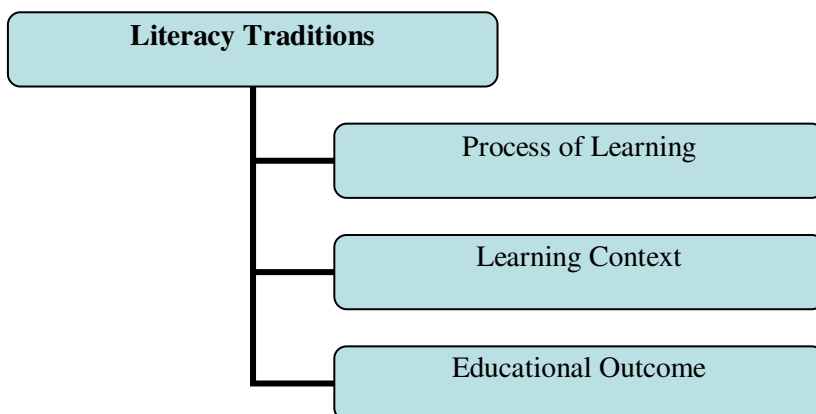
**Figure 1: Domain 1 - Cultural Models**



**Figure 2: Domain 2 - Social Identity**



**Figure 3: Domain 3 - Literacy Traditions**



## **Ethical Considerations**

‘Within educational research, ethics is concerned with ensuring that the interests and well-being of people are not harmed as a result of the research being done.’ (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004). In addition to the ethical and moral codes maintained during transcription, analytical, verification and reporting stages, ethical considerations were also maintained in the following three stages (Kvale, 1996):

***Thematizing:*** The study sought to investigate key issues that have impacted the integration of minority Punjabi students into the mainstream school learning environment. This supports the purpose to identify possibilities for improving the supportive behaviour of schools and parents, so that minority Punjabi students can experience the greatest possible success.

***Designing:*** The study met the ethics approval of the University as well as the school principal’s permission to conduct the study with its school population on its premises. Study participants were informed of the purpose of the study and received and written informed consent was sought from the participants for the interview, voice recording and publication of results. Participants were informed prior to the start of the study of their right to withdraw from the study at any time or to refuse to answer questions that they do not wish attempt without any repercussion.

***Interview Situation:*** Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity by ensuring that their names do not appear in the report, voice recordings and transcriptions

are numbered instead of using participants' names, and data sources were only known to the researcher. The researcher was respectful of the background of the participants and therefore, questions were framed around cultural sensitivities.

### **Dissemination of Results**

Results are published in the form of a research report. Key findings/points from the study were made available for an easy read to the participants at an informal group meeting.

### **Conclusion**

Explicit reporting of methodology, appropriateness of methods, selected data collection and analytical tools, and justification of selection has enhanced the credibility of this study. Ethical measures included confidentiality and anonymity of source of data, the right to withdraw without repercussion, participant consent for voice recording and publication, ethics clearance through the University Research Ethics Board, and consent from the school principal to conduct the study in the researcher's school.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

Parents' responses in the data collected suggested that the ethnic values, ideologies and social practices that are fundamental for framing their child's identity are compromised when integrating into the school culture. Although parents afforded several opportunities for their children's school integration, they simultaneously imposed traditional cultural practices at home to maintain ethnic solidarity. This is because parents felt particularly concerned about the full effects of integration into the Canadian school culture, because differences in socio-cultural practices threatened to alienate their children from their ethnic identity and values. The interview data were analyzed in this chapter in terms of those differences and were grouped into three distinctive cultural domains or themes: cultural models, social identity, and literacy traditions. Through the early school experiences of Punjabi children, the sections below attempt to explain those aspects within the Punjabi socio-cultural practices that were consistent with or deviant from the Ontario school culture.

#### **1. Cultural Models**

Common social practices, values, beliefs and experiences that build the cultural knowledge and capital within a socio-cultural group are consciously or unconsciously made available to members of that group through the use of language and actions. Gee

(1999) calls these common patterns seen rooted in the practices of socioculturally defined groups of people as 'cultural models'. Because of the many cultural models and discourses that surround us, social messages that form the undercurrents of cultural understanding are not necessarily consistent with one another. In the present analysis, the domain 'cultural models' point out that the Punjabi children receive social messages and values from the Canadian school that are different from those received at home. As seen in the sections below, the domain 'cultural models' are reflected in the parents' accounts of the importance of mother tongue, maintaining traditions and their perception of schooling.

***Importance of Mother tongue:***

Parents reflected on the experiences of their children and spoke of the importance of a mother tongue. The analysis revealed that parents felt that the English language taught in schools is a language of education to be used in other contexts and does not advantage their children with the unique values, cultural beliefs, and ideologies of the Punjabi community. One mother who grew up in Canada since Grade 7 expressed this view as a regret from some Punjabi families who did not continue with the Punjabi language in their homes:

*P5: Mostly the kids get older they will forget their own language. Because I know lot of families over here, the parents they don't have time when they are small, they usually go to work, they come cooking, clean up and tell your kids to go do your homework and go to sleep. They don't teach the Punjabi and the own language. When they get older the parents feel they should have learnt.*

Although in schools children learn the English language to maximize their learning opportunities, there were three main societal differences that highlighted parental beliefs about the importance of maintaining Punjabi as a mother tongue for their children: a) maintaining community ties b) differing community values c) unequal language status afforded to the mother tongue.

a) *Maintaining Community Ties*

One mother commented:

*P5-Because their own language they will forget,...their own language, who we are, where we live, then what culture we are,...what they gonna tell their kids then.*

Parents who were interviewed live in a joint family structure, and for them, learning the Punjabi language primarily ensures sound network with family and community, a link to the historical past of ones social identity, and a hope to pass on their cultural inheritance. Learning English at school on the other hand ensured further educational opportunities and employability for their children. This need for identification with the Punjabi culture and bequeathing of cultural capital were reflected in the mother's comments.

Similar comments were made by at least two parents who have their immediate and extended family in Punjab, India. They felt that children would have the opportunity to maintain ties and extend communication beyond the local ethnic community in Brampton, Ontario to include those from in the far East in India. The parents expressed these views:

*P4- At least they can write, they can read and write Punjabi too, they can read the letters that comes from India from grandparents, they can talk in Punjabi, like when they went to India.*

*P3- In Canada, my roots are in India. When they go back with me at least I know they speak Punjabi, so they can communicate with other people in Punjabi right, they don't have no problems right. So what happens tomorrow, we are going, they want to go back, they have the benefit.*

#### b) Differing Community Values

While the underlying value structure of a westernized school literacy development encouraged children to make 'personal choices', parents felt that it was not in keeping with the underlying value structure of 'conformity' to the Sikh community, found embedded in the Punjabi language and identified in the Sikh religion. This view was reflected in one mother's comment:

*P1- Our culture is more like we always want our child to follow, it's because of how we are brought up and the trend is just going on and on...*

Parents' responses emphasized the importance of maintaining the mother tongue to convey religious, social and moral rules to their children within the home and religious institutions such as the Gurudwara. Some of the comments made by parents elicited these views:

*P1- We will take him to church (Gurudwara), he understands, like if he sees some one outside with a turban, he knows when we say hello in our language....When we go he knows to say 'Sashrikal' that's our way of saying hello ...We've had priest come to our house to do prayers. He knows how to sit,.....he knows what our culture is about and how to pray to our God and what our beliefs are..*

*P4 - We have values at home and we are teaching them at home and I don't think they are losing culture.*

*P2- At home she doesn't hear English. Actually the atmosphere at home is Punjabi.*



c) *Unequal Language Status*

Parents pointed out that their children are expected to fare well in the learning of the English language at school, because they come away from school with the notion that mastery over the English language, and parity with their western counterparts is necessary in order to get ahead in other learning contexts. Parents felt that this message of homogeneity, represents power relations and gives an unequal status to the Punjabi language in a ‘western’ but predominantly Punjabi populated school. At least two parents expressed that children should enjoy learning the Punjabi language along with the dominant language of the school so that their children understand the equal value of knowing their mother tongue. This sense of value and status afforded to the Punjabi language came across in their comments when asked how she saw the balance between learning Punjabi and English.

*P4- Not equal. ....Is it not possible that in every school like, kindergarten.., they have so many Punjabis, they should have in the evening or in the morning Punjabi classes too. So if I want to teach my child Punjabi I have to go to the Gurudwara so far from school, my house right? So if there is something in every school in the evening, so it will be good right, they come to school for 1 hrs or 2 hrs, so in the weekend too. So I want that, I want to teach my children my language too.*

*P3- So over here, I'm pretty satisfied, that not bad, but (for no) Punjabi class.*

Only one mother, who had all of her upbringing in Canada, was concerned about having her child speak Punjabi in a Canadian school, because she believes that he might not get enough exposure to the English language.

*P1- I didn't want him to speak Punjabi in the class with the other kids.....if you are in a school you should speak in English, 'coz you are going to forget how you are going to speak English. He knows how to speak in both languages*

Overall, in the development of their children's literacy, parents felt that the school's dominant language was not justified in providing the range of connections that the Punjabi language could provide in preserving their children's socio-cultural background.

***Maintaining Traditions:***

Another finding in the data suggested that the underlying 'western' social ideology of 'individualism or independence' that frames educational practices, is not consistent with the, 'interdependent, collectivism or community value' of the Punjabi society. This distinction was expressed by parents through fears that emanated from social trends they see among children in the local 'white' community that are not acceptable with the Punjabi cultural practices. For e.g. within the joint family structure of the Punjabi society, the social relationship is vertical i.e., the expectation is that the younger generation will respect and look after the older generation. Whereas in the western culture relationships are horizontal at all age levels (Kim, 2004). One parent expressed this fear of her children losing the community values within their family context:

*P4- I am happy that my children are in school with so many communities right. They know each other. I wanted to keep my values too. So there's some problem with us right, like kids don't....like from other cultures they don't have sometimes people violent right....sometimes they don't have respect for parents, for us we live in a joint family, kids grow up, I want them to have same value, I don't want them to leave us in old house, I don't want to live that way.*

Further, parents' accounts revealed that their children are not exposed to school practices that are culturally sensitive to the Punjabi traditions such as religious observances, social courtesies and celebrations, to establish in them a sense of self within a Canadian setting. For instance, one parent felt that their children participated in all Canadian celebrations,

but the schools did not instill in their children the importance of their own religious celebrations by way of special days set apart as holidays.

*P3-She likes both, Christmas. Let them celebrate. We have to celebrate but the other thing we should have a day to celebrate our religion too. We have to merge in.*

Parents explained that instead, these norms and practices are usually taught at home and in their religious institutions.

*P1-. When we go to church, (Gurudwara), he knows we have to cover our head....it's just to have respect, if he knows that then he will know how to sit and pray*

In all the interview responses, parents felt that their children are missing not so much the external considerations (such as ethnic food and clothing) at school but the internal development of self and Punjabi personality in accordance with traditional considerations.

### ***Perceptions of schooling:***

Parents' remarks during the interviews suggested that their perception and expectations of schooling were different from those held by the schools in Ontario. Their responses indicated that their value for education and high expectations for their children are a reflection of their cultural characteristics. Parents further explained that it is evident from their children's school experiences that often these elements of cultural understandings are missed within the school discourse within which their children are engaged in. For instance, one parent who works as a truck driver reflected this view in a narrative of a teacher who did not inspire a child to opt for a profession of status for a school project:

*P3 - My friend he was complaining sometime, because the teacher showed discrimination. He was saying (the teacher asked the child) what (do you) want to be (when you grow up). His child say(s) (that the) teacher say you can be a baker. He doesn't like it. He said anyone can do that.  
I am a truck driver, I don't want my son to be a truck driver. He just do something better.*

However, the analysis also showed that parents' greeted with appreciation the comparatively high level of creativity and close interaction during instruction that teachers provided in the Canadian schools as opposed to the teacher-centered instruction in their home country.

*P4- Some here teachers are more closer teachers. Teachers have time to make projects and making things altogether and all these things and we don't see this kind of classroom in India. Nothing on the walls, only a blackboard over there and they just go and the teacher comes.*

*P5- Over here, the teacher teaches you from the fun games. From the games they teach you everything. Over there (India) they always have to stand straight and 2x2 table memorize it. That's it. The kids have to do it. Otherwise there is no reason. No excuse.*

Parents recognized in their reflections that the distinctive feature of the Canadian schools is the expectation that their children will develop their meta-level thinking through application strategies. Whereas, in their home country it was more top-down control and learning was usually achieved through practice and memorization. Parents contrasted the two systems:

*P1- Here I see more, I see more practical education we are trying to give our kids. In India, I noticed it's like ok this is  $2 \times 2 = 4$ , that's it. That is the rule. It's kid of like they memorize it instead of learning how, why, where it come from, if we do this way, then what happens, you know that sort of way. That's the difference.*

*P5- How you teach them in India, they just tell you  $2+2=4$ . They won't tell you now you get 4. Here (she says) mama, if I do this and this I will get 4; minus this I will get 4. She would do lot of things.*

*P4- I think I like about the Canadian system, they have more practical things. So like in India, we always, we have to , ...I don't know like what we call, we have to read all the things again and again. ...So here they are doing the practical things, making things everyday and they go home to show us, we feel proud. In India, it is different and in India even math this way is different than that way, right. They teach us and we have to practise it, each day at home and here it is more practical.*

Overall, parents' responses reflected differences in schooling in Ontario and their home country. All parents in the interview welcomed the change with respect to school environment and educational activities and considered these new trends less burdensome on the children and the parents, a sure relief in workload over the traditional styles valued in their social practices.

## **2. Social Identity**

Ethnic identity is a 'subjective feeling of belongingness to a particular ethnic group' (Noels et al, 1996 in Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). This sense of identity emanates from distinctive social practices that convey meaning through oral, written and other forms of expressions and representation that positions members: a) centrally because they are able to identify with these practices through ongoing interactions within their affinity space or b) marginally or peripherally in relation to other social groups when conventional social practices differ from the normative practice. In this analysis, the second theme, 'Social identity' reflects on how Punjabi children's ethnicity and language, position them differently within their home and the Canadian school system. In the forthcoming sections the domain 'Social identity' is framed by parents' narratives of outward expressions, language and interaction with others, as indexical of identity.

### ***Outward Expressions:***

Participants believed their children do not experience a distinct sense of belonging in the Ontario school. They felt that outward expressions such as the dress they wear and their distinct social etiquettes are not significant in their children's school experience, to instill pride and a sense of belonging. At least two parents associated school uniform with school identity. According to one father who had his early school background in the army school of India (Sainik school), this outward expression of dress code, seen in Indian schools has the power to position the child within a (school) social space. He commented:

*P1- Like my concern is uniform in the public school. Nobody wears a uniform and when I saw my kid first day going to school, wearing jeans, check shirt and I thought this is not....I didn't feel like he is going to school...it's like something like sending your kid to a club or something. But in India, small kids, everybody is designated a uniform for the particular school and for the particular zone. ....If some student is visiting some other school by looking at him you can tell that this student does not belong to this school.*

Another element of outward expression that parents referred to was ways of showing respect for authority. Social behaviours that would have been seen as evidence of respect and powerful indicators of respectful positions within their ethnic social spaces, were perceived by parents to be less appreciated when expressed by their children within their school climate. One parent reflected on the school and social practices within their community where children do not address teachers or elders by their names, and be seated only when the teacher or elder is seated and/or has requested them to be seated.

*P3 - Why do they say the name of the teacher. Back home we never say the name of the teacher. It shows no respect. And even here, a 50 year old teacher, they call the name.*

*Like when I went back home, if I meet my teacher, I touch his feet. We don't shake hands.*

*When we have marriage in India, we give money to the school.*

*One teacher make the foundation, roots for thousands of students.*

*What we experience the teacher come to the classroom, everybody stand up and we don't sit down until he take a seat. That kind of respect if they learn in school they will know that they have to respect their elder. It must start from there.*

These comments suggest that ethnic attributes of outward expressions that have positioned Punjabi children centrally within their society, are not regarded as powerful indicators of social positioning within the Canadian school.

### ***Language as a source of identity:***

The analysis also showed how language plays a role in positioning the Punjabi children differently in the school and home community. Parents' accounts reflected the need to encourage Punjabi as a monolingual solidarity-based linguistic practice at home, so that children index their membership with the Punjabi community.

*P2- At home she doesn't here English. Actually the atmosphere at home is Punjabi.*

*P3: (At home, we speak) just Punjabi. My roots are in India, When they go back with me at least I know they speak Punjabi, so they can communicate with other people.*

However, they felt that the language that indexed their children's inclusion in the Punjabi community has, on the contrary, positioned their child at a wider social distance in a (predominantly Punjabi) school community in Ontario. One mother who brought her daughter into the school system after having spent her first three years in India, and attending an English medium school there, felt that in spite of having a Punjabi teacher in

Kindergarten to help her child transition smoothly, her child's lack of proficiency in the English language caused her to face considerable difficulty integrating into the social and academic circles of Canadian schools. She explains her story as follows:

*P5- Actually she was in India. She was only 5 months when she went to India. She spent 3 years in India. It was very difficult to move here and to learn English. Actually she went to a Public school and natural she got the Indian teacher over there. She does not understand anything, so I ask the teacher, so some of the words she would tell in Punjabi for her so she understand. She has almost one and a half year difficulty. She doesn't know how to make friends, because friends were all speaking English. Every time she comes home crying, 'mama, nobody wants my friends and I can't speak with my teacher, I don't know how to do this, I don't know how to do that, nobody is playing with me.' All difficulty things I have from her. Sometimes I have to stay there for a while, tell the kids, 2-3 kids, 'can you play with her please'. She was sent to English school over her. She knows how to write ABC, capitals and alphabet everything. Small ABC and big ABC. Also she knows the 1-2. She knows that. But when teacher tell her to do it, she get confused with that.*

Another parent also expressed a similar experience:

*P2- Actually previously actually she was feeling difficulty and was hesitant to come to school because of the English problem.*

For others who were aware of the English language as a major component of inclusion in the school system, felt the need to equip their child early on with the linguistic skills of the dominant school language.

*P1: I think you've got to know English more....Because it's important when they go to school to communicate with their peers, they can communicate with their teachers, they know English...English is what you need to..you need more language though to get around.*

*P4: English is more important. It is an international language.*

Although parents generally encouraged the learning of the English language, children came from homes that spoke mainly the Punjabi language. That is not to say there was no



evidence of bilingualism. Parents' accounts did reveal some level of bilingualism at home, as children spoke both English and Punjabi with other siblings. However, in general parents' accounts suggested that their language choice, in terms of proficiency, at school entry, marks their children's social distance (wider or narrower) with the members of the dominant English speaking school discourse.

***Interaction with others:***

Another component regarding integration within the school discourse is the 'nature of interaction with others'. When asked what parents remember their child finding difficulty with in adjusting when they first entered school, they recounted that their children were generally very shy at school entry.

*P1- When he entered school, he was really, really shy and if anyone would say something to him, he would just stand there, he wouldn't know how to speak up for himself.*

*P4- Only thing is he is shy to participate.*

Parents in the interview reasoned that the contrasting 'nature of interaction' in the two systems posed an obstacle for their children's full participation in the early school years. On the one hand their children are taught to speak with 'fear and reverence' to teachers and elders within their community, an experience they come to school with. On the other hand, they are given the 'freedom to speak or voice their opinion without fear' at schools in Ontario. Some of them explain their experiences as follows:

*P4- I'm like one or two teachers. I was so close to them right. Most of the other teachers, I was afraid of them. So here this is not the thing. (My child) like all his teachers from Kindergarten to now and they are more open to the teachers, they can talk to the teachers. Even India you can't talk to the teachers, on the point you want to talk right. Here they are more open and more respectful to the*

*teacher and we respect our teachers too but it's kind of fear that we have in our minds. Over here it is different...Because they are more open, they can talk more with the teachers and they have no fear for the teachers that teachers going to punish him this and that and even they are not so worried of their homework.*

*P5- Especially in India mostly kids can't go to the principal and talk to them. But here, most important things, (she says) I should tell the principal....Yeah she got confidence now. Tells everything, that's good. Everything, 'mama, when I go to school, can I tell my teacher this'.*

Surprisingly, one parent contrasted the 'freedom of expression' in the public schools in Ontario with the 'religious and socio-political suppression' in the religious Punjabi schools in Malton, Ontario, namely the Khalsa schools. This parent points out the following:

*P4- I don't want to make my kids fanatic, all the time thinking about the religion right. So that's what they teach over there. They take them to the Gurudwara and ...I want them to follow my (religion) but I want them to attach to all cultures right....*

*In our Gurudwaras, they are telling them to be a Khalistani and that's the separate thing they want from India..., separate country they want to make. They are preparing kids for that. That kind of thing I don't want for my kids. So I just want them to learn Punjabi at school anywhere, not that kind of classes where they make their brains think something else.*

While the message of interaction at school is one of 'inclusion' of all immigrant nationalities, cultures and social classes, children can bring with them the inaudible message of segregation based on class or race. In the area of class, social status and language competency, one parent considered certain linguistic varieties within their own community as having lesser standards, and therefore limits the child's experiences among such groups. Parent responses suggest that it is possible that children come with this 'message of segregation' to school that could limit mixing with certain social classes.

*P1- When we were registering him for JK that was the only concern I had, was if he was around too many Indian people, I didn't want him to be a typical Indian boy where he doesn't know English or he has no manners.*

With reference to race, although parents generally felt that their children experienced positive interactions with many of the different cultural groups at school; media influence has caused them to associate violence with the moral and character traits of the black community. Therefore, children may come to school with this ‘message of caution’ that could limit their interaction with certain communities, to minimize risk of confrontation.

*P1-...and every year it will be the same cultured kids that cause trouble...I've never said to him don't play with a black person or don't play with a white person, I never said to him that....I guess with what we see on T.V. , we hear on the news and I've worked with them, I just totally have a bad image about them, not that all people are like that but more percentage I do.*

*P4: Some people say black people are more violent....I say not everybody can be good. It's not like black people are not good but they are good too but it depends on the right person right.*

Reflections of parents’ experiences suggested that children’s interaction with others in the school is influenced by home practices that will position them in particular ways or allow children to position themselves in their social spaces.

### **3. Literacy Traditions**

Children’s communicative competencies are developed by socialization through the use of language and socialization to use language through an interactive process (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). During the early years, children are socialized into particular cultural discourse and equipped with a body of knowledge, practices, skills and language structures and habits. Different social groups differ in the way they socialize their child through literary events into their cultural discourse. The organization of literacy practices in different social groups has different impact on the process of learning, cognitive skills

and educational outcome. In this analysis, the third theme, 'Literacy traditions' points out that, children's learning experience and the educational expectations that they bring to school differ from those received at school. Within the domain of 'Literacy tradition', parents account of children's experiences revealed differences in learning process, learning context and educational outcome received at school.

***Process of learning:***

Parents reflected on the experiences of their children and spoke of the differences in the way their children learned at home and at school. Their responses revealed that they trained their children for school entry based on their perception of school expectations within their ethnic community. Accordingly, they engaged their children in early literacy experiences that equipped them with the functional capital, i.e. for example, learning their alphabets, numbers, colours, and basic printing and oral English. The expectation was that their child would generally pick up the language skills and habits from school without explicit teaching of these skills. Some examples of parent responses that point to this style of teaching and learning are:

*P1- I think it would have been difficult for him just to jump into kindergarten, just stand there and not know anything, so I wanted to prepare him before and plus I was working with him at home, so by the time he went to Junior kindergarten he know a lot, I think most of his letters, most of his numbers, he knew how to spell his name, the address, everything...*

*P5- Her writing was good. She knows how to write ABC, capitals and alphabet everything. Small ABC and big ABC. Also she knows the 1-2. She knows that.*

*P4- Actually from 2yrs of age, I teach him ABC, 123, everything he knows when he goes to school and he was writing his name before he goes to school.*

*P2- First step that is difficult to speak in English and talk in English and after sometime they pick up and fit in, then there is no difficulty.*

*P3- She knows a little bit of English because our neighbours are playing with her, and my niece is also speak, she come here, she talk in English right,...she know a little bit of English but I know it is little bit hard. When kids go to school right...Yes she gonna pick up. I know that.*

However, upon school entry, parents indicated that children's learning entailed explicit learning of various parts and sequences, and the development of higher level thinking to be used in critical learning processes. Therefore their responses suggested that the learning experiences and expectations that the Punjabi children brought to school, limited their ability to understand new practices based on their past experiences. One mother explained how her child did not have this explicit learning experience for language early on.

*P5- (For English language learning) Also they don't told her vowels. All the sounds they don't tell her in India. The sound right. So she doesn't know the sounds. So if you tell her to say the 'A' sound. She says 'Ahhh', kind of problem with that too.*

Others compared and contrasted the cognitive and higher thinking skills between the two system. As stated in the previous section, some of the parents' comments that reflected this comparison are:

*P1- Here I see more, I see more practical education we are trying to give our kids. In India, I noticed it's like ok this is  $2 \times 2 = 4$ , that's it. That is the rule. It's kind of like they memorize it instead of learning how, why, where it come from, if we do this way, then what happens, you know that sort of way. That's the difference.*

*If I were to compare him with other kids back home, it's totally different. ...Knowledgewise, thinking, the way he thinks, like, I mean, if he sees something, he won't just see it, even he will try to get behind that stuff ok,... why can't we do this way, what is this, where this comes from.....that type of questions I don't think I will see in kids back home.*

*P5- How you teach them in India, they just tell you  $2+2=4$ . They won't tell you now you get 4. Here (she says) mama, if I do this and this I will get 4; minus this I will get 4. She would do lot of things.*

*P2- Over here is like thinking like brain, what the child thinking, how they know....big difference here, like they read the brain and not read book.*

Analysis of this data suggests that the early literacy events of Punjabi children are influenced by how parents conceived of education and literacy within their social group. This in turn, determined their children's readiness to develop their meta-level cognitive and linguistic skills through the school's teaching and learning process.

***Learning context:***

Data analyzed elicited differences with respect to learning contexts. Social practices and parents' perception of their children's learning context in their social group differed with the learning context in the Ontario school. Parent responses indicated that in keeping with the traditional methods of learning, their children were exposed to learning and understanding of facts that were highly decontextualized. In contrast, schools engaged their children in more constructive and situated learning that are relevant and purposeful to the children's everyday experiences. Parents greeted with optimism the shift in their children's learning context from a traditional view of an independent learner and an isolated mind engaged in regurgitating knowledge through test and exams, to a participating member of a learning community who derives independent understanding from situated and meaningful activities through collaboration.

Parents contrasted key elements of the two learning contexts through several comments in the interview. Their responses below looked at the shift in their children's learning contexts from:

Rigid and controlled to informal:

*P1- Back home they use the stick if you do not bring your homework back.. In our culture it is more like we always want our child to follow, it's because of how we are brought up and the rest is just going on and on.*

*P2- Actually the child itself gets training by coming to school (in Brampton). Because the system is so good and at the kindergarten there is no burden of studying.*

Traditional to constructive/situated:

*P4- Actually from 2yrs of age I teach ABC, 123 everything he knows when he goes to school and he was writing his name before he goes to school. Now, I think I know about the Canadian system, they have more practical things, so like in India we always have to, I don't know like what we call, we have to read all the things again and again.*

Independent learner to participating member of a learning community:

*P4 - So here they are doing practical things everyday and they go home and show us. In India...they teach us and we have to practice it and here it is more practical and I think this is the best way of teaching....Teachers are time to make projects and making things altogether and all these things and we don't see this kind of classroom in India.*

The distinctive features of the Ontario school learning context are that knowledge is not presented as a list of information, and the child negotiates meaning and develops understanding through interaction with real problems. These comments suggests that most Punjabi children are accustomed to the traditional learning environment and, so when entering school they faced the challenge of maneuvering themselves through the inclusionary and exclusionary features of a new learning context.

***Educational outcome:***

Parents' responses related similar differences in the way learning was assessed. Their perception of assessment and evaluation had a great impact on how children perceived

their learning outcome. Most parents said in the interview that their perception of educational outcome was influenced by the traditional view focused on the product of learning by way of reproducing the knowledge and skills taught through written or oral tests and exams. However, according to the parents, children's experience at school was, an assessment of the learning attributes and skills developed during the process of independent understanding and construction of meaning. Their reflections of their children's performance showed that the shift away from the traditional methods of assessment was less stressful for the child and also gave a clearer picture of how their child performed throughout the year. Two parents contrasted these two methods of assessments and evaluation in the following way:

*P4- Over there we have to tell them what we are in just 3 hrs. Sometimes it is less for us to write. All the things we have to write, no practicals right. So whatever we do the whole year doesn't mean. Over here, this is the thing I like, that at least they count all the things that they do the whole year. There if you are sick at the time of the exams right, one day before, and you reach there late, you couldn't write in 2hrs or 3hrs that much....Those things writing on the paper doesn't mean that much.*

*P5- I think it is better to show the different ways, showing how to do it in different way. Writing on the paper and doing it is nothing. They will forget everything after that.*

When asked about how they viewed their child's success in Ontario schools now, interestingly none of the parents reported grading as the ultimate measure of success. Instead, all parents reported an improved knowledge and skills brought about by positive changes in the attitude towards learning. In the various areas of success, they gave the following examples:



In the realm of confidence, motivation and independence, the following statements were highlighted:

*P1- When he entered school he was really, really shy...within a year he took a 360...not just behaviour but his work in general. ...He has picked up so many words all of a sudden, he is writing so neatly, I don't know he is more motivated to do work. He was not like that before...He is working hard. How we went to the falls on the weekend, he said I want to take my journal with me, just to write in the car,...ok...no problem...but he wouldn't do that before. Before mummy had to say, ok, go get your homework...but now, he knows le me do my homework,...then I can go play. Here like we are trying to enhance the kid's personality and stop trying to make him bookish or a bookworm type of personality.*

*P2- Attitude towards learning is positive. She is very excited to come and very happy to come to school*

*P5 - She is getting lots of confidence.*

In the development of cognitive skills and resourcefulness:

*P1- In India, I noticed, it's like ok this is  $2 \times 2 = 4$ , that's it that is the rule. They memorize it instead of learning how, why, where it comes from. I would say, he is now way ahead than Grade on in back home. ..knowledgewise,, thinking, the way he thinks like I mean, if he sees something he won't just see it, even he will try to get behind that stuff, ok, why.... He is not trying to memorize things, he is trying to experiment different ways instead of memorizing it. I think that's the change I see.*

*P2 -But here is like brain...they read the brain and not read the book.*

*P5- In India, they just tell you  $2+2=4$ . They won't tell you how you get 4. Here, mama, if I do this and this I will get 4..she would do lot of things.*

In the enhancement of communication skills:

*P1- I would think communicating. Well, if you can't communicate with anyone, you are not going to get anywhere. You can always learn to do the multiplication, but if you can't communicate from day one...*

*P5- You are teaching her 2D and 3D shapes, she said, 'mama, do you know that , mama this is sphere, this prism, this is circle. Every time I do something or put something over here, she says mama this is triangle.' I said who says. 'Teacher tells me. Every kid knows, my friends know it.'*

Overall, parents' responses suggested that their children are more likely to feel successful and to achieve success in one area of learning or another because assessment in the Ontario school focuses more on individual progress of various skills during the process of learning than just on the product of learning as seen in the traditional methods.

## **Conclusion**

Data analysis showed that Punjabi children's early literacy experiences, attitudes and educational expectations framed by their socio-cultural practices are not congruent with the expectations of the mainstream school culture. As a result of the differing background, these children face the challenge of finding their way through the inclusinary and exclusionary aspects of the Ontario school system. Evidence suggests that as parents become more receptive to the new 'western' cultural characteristics, their children are encouraged to 'participate in' rather than 'resist' the new school's discourse. The analysis is further discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter looks at the data analyzed in chapter 4 and discusses the impact of the various cultural domains on the enculturation process of the Punjabi children in the Ontario school. By examining the Punjabi parents' perception and experiences of sending their children to school, the present study attempted to determine socio-cultural factors that facilitated or inhibited the enculturation of their children into the dominant 'western' school community of Ontario. Similar to the findings in the study by Kwak and Berry (2001), the data interpretation suggest that the underlying values of 'cohesiveness, conformity and kinship' within the Punjabi community have developed in them a protective attitude towards their own culture and tradition. Depending on the emphasis parents placed on the different cultural elements within each domain, children are situated at various stages on the 'continuum of enculturation' within the school discourse.

#### **Discussion**

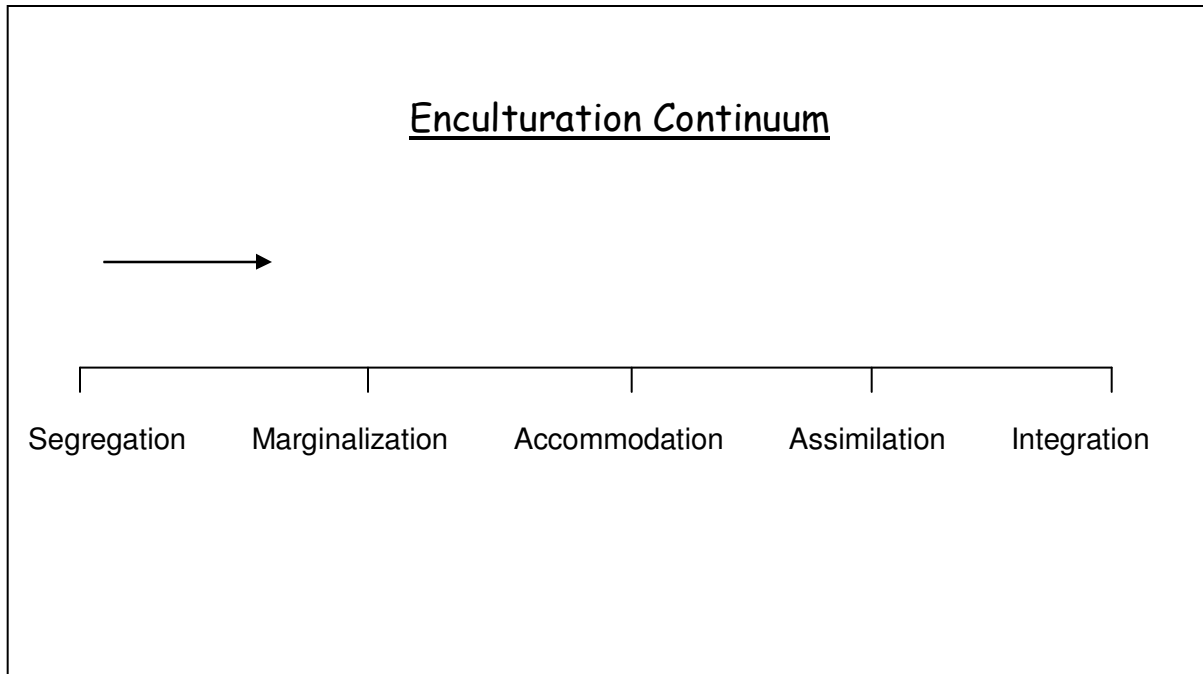
Minority Asian groups such as the Punjabi community, voluntarily immigrate to Canada with the expectation that this would result in better economic and social conditions for their family. Many of them feel that their hard work has helped them overcome issues of language and skills to be relatively successful in the western society. However, their experience of sending their children to the Ontario school shows that differences in

cultural backgrounds of the parents and their experiences as migrants, can be a barrier to their children's learning and integration into the Ontario school.

It is evident from the data analyzed that Punjabi families in Ontario feel strongly about maintaining their relationships and traditions in their community. Parents strongly expressed the need to encourage their children to bond with their ethnic culture and form ties with their ethnic roots. Consequently, Punjabi children in Ontario are faced with the challenge of retaining their socio-cultural beliefs and practices while simultaneously adjusting to the Canadian school culture. Data analyzed suggest that the challenges that children face in adjusting to the Ontario school system were not developmental but one of adaptation to the school culture. Children adapt to new discourses and cultural knowledge in different ways. Berry (1980, 1990) in his study of adolescent immigrants from Asian countries indicates that children adjust differently by selecting one of the four adaptation modes: assimilation, integration, separation or marginalization. Kwak and Berry (2001) points out that the adolescent immigrant child is more inclined towards integration than the Asian immigrant parents, who generally favour separation to maintain the core cultural elements of their ethnic group. The current study however suggests that parents' attitudes within the three cultural domains impact their children's adjustment in school through an enculturation process. Unlike adolescents (Kwak and Berry, 2001), parental attitudes towards ethnic cultural understandings significantly influences their children's acculturation process, such that Punjabi children who enter the school system as early as Kindergarten pass through 'sequential stages of adaptation' to integrate within the 'western' school system. These stages are segregation, marginalization, accommodation,

assimilation and integration. The process of enculturation and its stages are mapped along a continuum provided below (Figure 4):

**Figure 4**



Depending on how strongly Punjabi parents' advocate cultural elements or understandings that are different from school discourse but pertinent to their ethnicity, in their children's school experiences, the perception is that their children's mode of adaptation situates them and moves them at varying paces along the five stages of adaptation along the continuum of enculturation. According to Ogbu, "a minority group's cultural frame of reference and collective identity may lead its members to interpret the cultural and language differences they encounter as barriers to be overcome or as markers of group identity to be maintained"(1992b, p. 292). Parents who interpret language and cultural diversity as barriers to be overcome, influences their child's attitude to acquire

the necessary school language and skills to move along the continuum of enculturation, as opposed to those who see school culture as detrimental to their language and cultural identity and therefore make little effort to overcome these differences.

As reviewed earlier, parental support for literacy in the home environment is based on how parents conceived of education and literacy within their social group (Heath, 1998). Punjabi parents' perception and support of education for their children included their beliefs and socio-cultural characteristics about a) transmitting the underlying cultural values of obedience and conformity b) believing in the Sikh religion and maintaining strong kinship through the use of their mother tongue and traditional practices c) instilling in their children a coherent sense of self in accordance with their ethnicity d) conveying high educational aspirations and expectations e) controlling their learning through teacher-centered methods f) motivating through control, their child's academic and social achievement. According to Gee (2003), this means, "recognizing various distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, knowing, and using various objects and technologies that constitute the social practice." (p.15). In other words, parents' socio-cultural practices expected their children to develop customs, beliefs, habits, values and skills that were distinctive to their ethnic group. According to Ogbu, "these community forces, (the group's cultural models and the coping responses the models generate, the degree of the group's trust in the White-controlled school systems, and its culturally sanctioned beliefs about cultural and language difference) ultimately influence how the minority students perceive and respond to schooling"(1992b, p292). Initially, children entered school identifying themselves within the sociocultural

characteristics that acculturated them into the Punjabi family. Parents' strong feelings for maintaining their cultural heritage therefore suggest that children were instilled with a sense of 'separation' with respect to cultural models and cultural frames of reference from the dominant school culture. As a result, during their early school experiences children become cognizant of their cultural characteristics that are different from those ascribed by the school, and reflected strong parental attitudes that are in favour of 'separation' or 'segregation'.

The analysis discussed in this chapter show that parents prepared their children for school with functional literacy, and so Punjabi children were not literacy impoverished, but lacked the social, linguistic and cognitive developmental skills necessary for Ontario school readiness. Consistent with the three notions of semiotic domain, design grammar and affinity group expressed in Gee's study (2003), it is evident that these children were enculturated into their semiotic domain's values, knowledge and norms, such that they could make connection and reproduce meaning within their affinity group, by developing the ability to recognize and assemble patterns that constituted the design grammar of their domain. Evidence suggests that children were not socialized with an attempt to advantage them with the reflective metatalk, oral and written literacy events, and educational resources that reflected aspects of school discourse. Since schools valued only certain kinds of cultural knowledge, Punjabi children who were not pre-tuned to the school discourse were unable to use their precursor domains fruitfully to master other school semiotic domains. Punjabi parents' responses suggested that when they preferred design grammar within their domain that does not extend their child's literacy experiences to

other semiotic domain, it limited the child's pattern-recognizing and assembling capabilities to make meaning in other domains. Learning was therefore passive and ways of taking meaning in schools required substantial effort and adaptation on the part of the students. Early experiences of these Punjabi children reveal that when engaging in new learning practices and literacy events at school, children often tend to be 'marginalized' within the school context. Therefore, they must now learn the new ways of taking meaning or the design grammar (Gee, 2003) in a collaborative school learning environment. Parent responses suggested that they chose to interpret these cultural and language barriers in school as hurdles to be overcome to be successful at school and in the broader 'western' society.

Evidence from the analysis suggests that as parents became more receptive to new literacy practices, and began changing their perceptions of schooling, and interaction with new social groups, their children were encouraged (and less restricted), to participate more in their new learning opportunities. Evidence suggests that with parental support, children began to 'accommodate or assimilate' within the new school culture. It has been argued in literature (Finn, 1999) that immigrant minorities such as the Punjabi community in Ontario are willing to engage in "accommodation without assimilation". What we see here is that parents' change in attitudes reflects an acceptance of the monolingual bias and the western educational ideologies of freedom of choice and opinion within the school culture. This is because they realize that these skills and attributes are essential to enable their children to be successful in the mainstream culture rather than provide them with national identity (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004).



Consequently, depending on the level of reception to dominant cultural traits, parental attitude towards linguistic and cultural assimilation coerces children to take on an appropriate position within the stages of accommodation or assimilation on the continuum of enculturation in the Ontario school.

The shift in the acculturation process along the continuum for Punjabi children who enter school in the primary years can be explained as the impact of the degree of emphasis and change in the attitudes of parents towards the new dominant cultural elements, on their child's school experiences. There is no question that while parents strive to maintain their ethnic identity in their children they are simultaneously imposing mixed attitudes and social messages that conveys differences with the school culture. At this juncture, it is important to note that although parents' attitudes is seeing a shift towards integration, the results of the current study is unable to show that children may have eventually moved along the continuum to full integration. There are several reasons for this: First, integration is a process and not an academic learning. Punjabi children in this study are yet in their primary years of schooling and so the process of integration will have to be measured after a length of time. Second, parents' attitudes convey that they are only willing to consider those elements of 'western' cultural understanding that enable their children to be successful in school or the broader 'western' society but are not detrimental to their ethnic solidarity. Third, children's home and school practices surrounds them with 'eastern' and 'western' linguistic and cultural differences and, therefore, they are constantly negotiating their boundaries, to find solidarity, to be heard and to identify with the new Indo-Canadian school setting.

## **Conclusion**

The questions that arise are ‘Does integration really take place? If so, what would integration look like within the social and educational realities of these Punjabi children? Data analyzed suggest that integration ‘probably does not’ really take place. While the conclusion may be speculative in a sense, data from this study is consistent with the findings from similar studies of Asian communities (Kwak and Berry, 2001, Kim, 2004), that show cultural understandings are contested in their children’s lives as Asian parents always tend to be protective of their culture and are inclined towards a segregation attitude in order to preserve their cultural heritage. It could be argued that at a younger age, because children are enculturated into the dominant ideology of ‘conformity’, they assume their parents’ ‘separation’ attitude towards the ‘white culture’ and do not negotiate cultural barriers. However, within the educational system in Ontario, they are groomed in the dominant school ideology of ‘integration for success’ and attempt to fit into the dominant ‘white’ culture. Over the years, children move towards integration, constantly redefining themselves and negotiating their boundaries in the ‘western’ world. The struggle to negotiate and cross cultural differences is not a short or easy process for these children because although over the years parents become more receptive to new cultural understanding that are beneficial for their economic and social conditions, they continue to engage in and maintain socio-cultural practices that define, exclude or marginalize their children in terms of ethnicity and linguistic identities. When children move around new social spaces in their Canadian context, they are constantly challenged to ‘make choices’ and ‘reposition themselves’ within their social world. What happens is

that, when they become young adults, as part of their survival mechanisms within the demands of a bicultural world, i.e., the two different dominant discourses at home and school, children develop the ability to switch between spaces by ‘selecting’ one of the five modes of adaptation. It is speculated that the selection of modes depends on the level of confidence they have within the cultural understandings of their social context. For e.g., in the case of language, if they are less confident in the English language, they may choose to engage in ‘accommodation’ for the purpose of say academic achievement at school or economic gains in the working world. On the other hand, proficiency in the English language may engage them in ‘assimilation’ within the new social community.

Moving towards integration however, requires overcoming barriers namely, that of the dominant community’s need for assimilation and the Punjabi community’s need to protect and differentiate their identity from the dominant ‘white’ community. Since integration does not mean homogeneity, it requires a compromise of the diverse issues of cultural values and cultural traditions of the dominant and immigrant communities. Achieving integration would mean being free of much of the tensions and conflicts that arise from the compromise, and constructing an identity that is receptive to change and does not have feelings of injustice, segregation or marginalization. Integration as an achievable possibility is questioned because it cannot be taught but may be cultivated over a period of time with the help of educational policies that support and encourage solidarity through compromise. Since there is no ‘universal’ policy for integration, educational policies are built on frameworks that suit the need for assimilation often

failing to realize the current empirical realities of the cultural differences that make up the Canadian society, thereby, making integration a more distant goal.

### **Significance of the Study**

The assumption of this study is that when attempting to understand Punjabi children's behaviours and development in the Ontario school, we must go beyond what we see in the classroom or what we know as the extrinsic characteristics of their ethnic identity. We must examine their social and educational realities in light of the historical context and the challenges of the new age of globalization that has changed and challenged the very nature and concept of their 'social spaces', 'identity' and 'enculturation' in the global world. I realize that the static nature that was once associated with these terms, of being rooted to recognizable and reproducible attributes within a familiar monocultural setting, is being replaced by bicultural, multicultural and globalcultural spaces, where ethnicity is a thing of the past and hybridity is the new identity that can shape-shift into the various academic, social and economic portfolios of their global and technological world. Those who study literacy issues among minority immigrants will recognize that the challenges and responsibilities in facilitating the enculturation process are huge in the light of these changing circumstances. What we come away learning from this research for our classrooms is that homogeneity is not an aspect of 'integration for success', instead, by understanding our own cultural assumptions as well as that of the student population, it is possible to work towards restructuring the possibilities of the students in order to achieve the greater possible success. For policymakers, it is time to revisit, rethink, redefine and challenge the perceptions of integration to include cultural differences that reflect the

social realities of Ontario, and perhaps discuss the possibility or impossibility of measuring integration.

As an educator, my developing portfolio is also shifting, ever adding to the existing knowledge and skill to enable me to support student learning using the literacy tool to shape their developing portfolios for entry into the global technological world.

### **Limitations**

The current study is limited in that it is a qualitative approach and no ethnographic results are made available from within the South Asian culture. Despite this limitation, this study provides an understanding of the sociocultural perspectives of Punjabi parents that shapes the early literacy experiences of their children. The results are beneficial in that it will help educators restructure their program and their beliefs about the possibilities for their South Asian Punjabi groups, so that they can experience the greatest possible success. Results of this study will also add to the limited literature on the impact of socio-cultural perspectives of Punjabi parents in Brampton, Ontario on child development. For a full understanding of the enculturation process along the continuum of enculturation, future longitudinal studies that follow the experiences of Punjabi children at school entry along the course of their academic life is needed.

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## **APPENDICES A, B & C**

# Appendix A

## Interview Guidelines

### Section 1: Establishing rapport

e.g., How is your child finding school lately? Is he happy to come to school?

### Section 2: Perception of child's experience

- Could you describe in as much detail as possible, your experience in sending your child to school in Ontario?
  - What was your understanding of the school system?
  - How did you prepare your child to meet the school expectations when entering school?
  - Schools expect children to have certain knowledge and skills before entry. Was your understanding consistent with school expectations? Are they asking too much or too little of your child? Could you please elaborate?
  
- How did your child first adjust to school?
  - Did you notice that your child needed more adjustment in one area than the other?
  - In what areas did you see that your child needed the most adjustment at school and Why?
  
- How do you find the academic system in the school?
  - Do you understand the curriculum that is being taught?

- Do you feel the need to have prescribed textbooks? Why?
  - Do you feel there is too much or too little play at school?
  - How do you feel play has contributed to your child's development?
  - How early do you feel they should be exposed to writing materials?
  - How often do you feel that your child should be read to?
  - Is your child receiving enough homework for the week?
  - Is the report card easy to follow?
- What is your understanding of the ways in which the schools prepare your child to learn?
    - How is it different from your expectations? (Perhaps your expectation is to.. master knowledge, to be a better person, to cultivate virtues, economical advantage- like to get a job, social recognition, status etc.)
    - Are your expectations different for boys and girls? If so, Why?
- Is learning to read and write at school different from the way you have exposed your child to print and written expressions?
    - Do you view drawing as a form of written expression?
    - How did you prepare your child to read? What is your understanding of reading behaviours, reading strategies and reading comprehension?
    - Do you feel that the school has communicated enough information for reading and writing expectations, so that you can help support your child at home?

- What was your child's experience in communicating orally at school?
  - What languages are valued at home?
  - What experiences at home helped develop your child's language competencies for school entry?
  - How beneficial, or not were these experiences in helping your child communicate effectively? Why?
  - What is your understanding of the school's expectation for effective communication?
  
- What in your perception is the role of the teacher, parent and school in the development of the child?
  - What is your experience of being involved with the school for the development of your child?
  - Are you actively involved or do you feel that there are some limitations?  
Can you describe your experience in detail?

**Section 3: Wrap up**

Thank you for participating in the interview. Do you have any questions for me?

I will contact you with a copy of the transcript and relevant sections for analysis in our second interview.

## Appendix B

### Letter of Invitation

Dear Parents:

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University under the supervision of Professor Andrew Manning. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

There has been an increasing interest in the early life experiences of young children and how these early learning opportunities might shape their school readiness for successful participation in the school environment. I believe that parents are actively involved in the development of their child and would be best suited to speak to the capabilities of their child as they enter school. Recently, schools in Brampton have seen an increase in the number of South Asian students. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of South Asian Punjabi parents' experiences of sending their children to school in Ontario in order to examine the issues of integration within the Ontario school system. This study will be helpful for educators to provide the necessary educational support to improve literacy achievement.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Decision to participate is entirely yours, and there are no repercussions if you choose not to be involved. The study will involve two interviews. First, the individual interview will be approximately 1 hr. in length to take place in the classroom or a mutually agreed upon location. The interview sessions will be tape-recorded in order to ensure accuracy. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. A second interview will be set up to allow participants to review transcripts and highlighted themes of analysis of the first interview, and for the researcher to seek further clarification if required. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. Any data collected to that date will be immediately destroyed and will not be used in the study. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you choose to participate in the study, please indicate so by filling out the form below. You may return the confirmation slip with your child and I will contact you to set up a convenient time to meet. If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me directly at [REDACTED]. I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you wish to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office at (902) 457 6350 or via email at [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca).

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,  
Annie Suman

-----Tear and return-----

By signing below, I agree to participate in the study being conducted by Annie Suman of the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University.

You may also contact me at Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ to set up a time to meet for the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of the Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Adapted from:  
[http://iris.uwaterloo.ca/ethics/human/application/samples/B1\\_InfoLetter\\_DoortoDoorInterviews.htm](http://iris.uwaterloo.ca/ethics/human/application/samples/B1_InfoLetter_DoortoDoorInterviews.htm)



## Appendix C

### CONSENT FORM-1

I agree to participate in the study being conducted by Annie Suman of the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University. I have based this decision on the information the researcher provided me in the invitation letter, regarding the purpose of the study, as stated below:

“There has been an increasing interest in the early life experiences of young children and how these early learning opportunities might shape their school readiness for successful participation in the school environment. I believe that parents are actively involved in the development of their child and would be best suited to speak to the capabilities of their child as they enter school. Recently, schools in Brampton have seen an increase in the number of South Asian students. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of South Asian Punjabi parents’ experiences of sending their children to school in Ontario in order to examine the issues of integration within the Ontario school system. This study will be helpful for educators to provide the necessary educational support to improve literacy achievement.”

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

**I am aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.**

**I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. Any data collected to that date will be immediately destroyed and will not be used in the study.**

I understand that if I have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information in reaching a decision about participation, I can call the researcher directly at [REDACTED]. I am also informed that if I wish to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, I may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office at (902) 457 6350 or via email at [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca). I am assured that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University.

\*With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

\*I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

Date:

Signature:

Adapted from:

[http://iris.uwaterloo.ca/ethics/human/application/samples/B1\\_InfoLetter\\_DoortoDoorInterviews.htm](http://iris.uwaterloo.ca/ethics/human/application/samples/B1_InfoLetter_DoortoDoorInterviews.htm)

## CONSENT FORM-2

I agree to participate in the study being conducted by Annie Suman of the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University. I have based this decision on the information the researcher provided me in the invitation letter, regarding the purpose of the study, as stated below:

“There has been an increasing interest in the early life experiences of young children and how these early learning opportunities might shape their school readiness for successful participation in the school environment. I believe that parents are actively involved in the development of their child and would be best suited to speak to the capabilities of their child as they enter school. Recently, schools in Brampton have seen an increase in the number of South Asian students. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of South Asian Punjabi parents’ experiences of sending their children to school in Ontario in order to examine the issues of integration within the Ontario school system. This study will be helpful for educators to provide the necessary educational support to improve literacy achievement.”

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

**I have been informed that the interview session will be tape-recorded for accuracy.**

I understand that if I have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information in reaching a decision about participation, I can call the researcher directly at [REDACTED]. I am also informed that if I wish to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, I may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office at (902) 457 6350 or via email at [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca). I am assured that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University.

\*With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Date:

Signature:

Adapted from:

[http://iris.uwaterloo.ca/ethics/human/application/samples/B1\\_InfoLetter\\_DoortoDoorInterviews.htm](http://iris.uwaterloo.ca/ethics/human/application/samples/B1_InfoLetter_DoortoDoorInterviews.htm)