

Recognition of Chinese Immigrant Parental Engagement in Their Children's Education

Guo, Yan (郭燕)

Faculty of Education, University of Calgary, Canada

Parent involvement is the norm in Canada. Parents are expected to come to routine parent-teacher conferences before or after they receive their children's report cards. They are also expected to volunteer at school functions, attend the school council meetings, help their children with their homework, and initiate parent-teacher meetings if they have any particular concerns (Epstein et al., 2002). However, "parent involvement" is mainly a North American concept. It is neither expected nor practised in China. In fact, there are negative associations to parents' presence in schools. Chinese parents seldom attend school functions, because if the school asks to see parents it means their children have got into trouble. This social stigma associated with communicating with teachers might prevent some Chinese immigrant parents from interacting with schools when they come to Canada.

The absence of Chinese immigrant parents from school is often misinterpreted as parents not caring about their children's education. However, many Chinese immigrant parents indicate that they care passionately (Dyson, 2001; Guo, 2007; Ran, 2001). After immigrating to Canada, many Chinese parents are unable to intervene in their children's education at school due to, among many other factors, loss of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Guo, 2006; Li, 2002). This study explores how Chinese immigrant parents support their children's learning at home and how they are learning to advocate on their children's behalf at school. It is based on individual interviews with parents who had recently arrived in Calgary, Alberta from China. These immigrants were in professional or managerial positions in China. However, following their arrival in Canada, many experienced unemployment or worked on several low-paying jobs. Despite their constrained time and finance, these parents demonstrated unique ways to involve in their children's education.

The results of the study indicate that many Chinese parents emphasize the importance of combining the best values of both Chinese and Canadian cultures, maintaining Chinese language, and self-teaching Canadian curriculum in order to support their children's learning of academic language and content. The results of this study will lead to an expansion of traditional parent involvement to recognize immigrant parental engagement (Lopez, 2001). Thus, an effective model of parental participation would need to recognize a full range of socio-educational norms, values, and cultural knowledge and to develop a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of Chinese immigrant parents in their children's education.