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Georgio, Carla Di

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FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

Mothers' and Fathers' disparate experiences in Francophone Schools: The connection between language, social capital and power in accessing 'inclusive' spaces for their children

Carla Di Georgio

1. Introduction

As a result of improved government support for their efforts in recent years, French Canadians have established an alternative school system for those who wish to educate their children in French (Charter of Rights and Freedoms 1982; Colello 2003). Parents must meet specific criteria before their children can attend school. In the past, parents also had to prove their mastery of the French language. However, in recent years this requirement has been changed to allow more students of French heritage to be admitted. The pride that Francophones have in their schools represents many years of fighting for the right to educate children in their ancestral tongue (Gilbert et al. 2004). The youth represents the future, and the public investment in this school's resources represents a power that the French boards, and their stakeholders, have in the community.

The goals of inclusion of students with learning and physical challenges with their peers in neighbouring classrooms parallel the notion of cultural inclusion by providing students and their families with access to the least restrictive environment, through collaborative decision-making between school and home. The aims of including students with disabilities and building a minority language community are both synonymous with a broad definition of inclusion, as "a philosophy that brings diverse students, families, educators, and community members together to create schools and other social institutions based on acceptance, belonging, and community" (Bloom, Perlmutter & Burrell 1999; as cited in Salend 2005: 6). In this definition, the idea of belonging applies to not only students but parents and educators as well.

Many studies have looked to stakeholder views to analyze the particular effects that inclusion has on the people involved. Teachers, resource personnel, principals, teacher assistants, parents and students have been explored as sources of information on their experience with inclusion (Priestley & Rabiee 2002; Daniello et al. 1998; Frederickson et al. 2004). Stakeholder views have

provided the opportunity to examine individuals' and groups' identities as they relate to their positions in the school society (Reid & Button 1995; Spillane 1999; Kugelmass 2003). They have revealed shared experiences that reflect the perspectives of various participants in inclusion. In this case, it is necessary to understand groups' perspectives and analyze within group differences in order to appreciate the effects of communication and power exchange between individuals and groups.

However, few studies have connected the experiences of stakeholders in order to understand the combined experience of inclusion at the school level. This study aims at gaining a better understanding for the relationship between parents and school.. The inclusive approach taken by the case study school in this study involved not only language but special needs as well, ranging from physical (e.g., cerebral palsy) to academic (e.g., learning disabilities). Many students had attended English schools in the past and their parents prefered this school because of its attention to individual students' needs, its safe environment and family-like atmosphere (Di Giorgio 2005). The combination of language and ability differences in this school provided the opportunity to study gender differences among parents in their relationships to school and their reasons for choosing a Francophone school for their child.

Reay (1998) studied mothers' involvement in their children's primary schooling and found that parents who were trying to improve their capital in order to improve the lives of their children, often did not have the time for their children. As time without money, effort and material and psychological resources is not very beneficial, likewise middle class mothers with time and resources were more able to help their children succeed in school. Reay (1998) and McKeever and Miller (2004) have introduced the psychological effects of economic capital on mothers' ability to look after their children's needs, and this psychological capital is a new addition to Bourdieu's types of capital.

Reay's (1998) study has far-reaching implications for studies such as my own, as the economic and psychological capital of parents, as part of their habitus, affects the way their children are served both at home and at school. To add special needs to the equation forces researchers to recognize the interacting effects of all of these potential limitations and demands on parents who do not have the means or social clout to demand service from schools that prejudge them. Conversely, parents with support from partners have more hope of receiving services through their social networks. McKeever and Miller (2004) also explored mothers' perceptions of their children with physical disabilities and found similar results.

Yet fathers have not been targeted as a possible influence on their children's inclusion in school. There are very few studies that mention fathers' influence as being potentially different from mothers'. Nichols and Read (2002) found out by a case study that teachers may see fathers' contribution

to a child with learning difficulty as different from that of the mother. There is an implication that the gender of the child is also important here, as fathers and mothers may unconsciously produce different gender-specific identities in their children. Having a disability may further complicate the relationship, as was found in studies of mothers (Reay 1998; McKeever & Miller 2004). Tafa and Manolitsis (2003) found that fathers are less worried than mothers about sending their typically developing children to preschools with severely disabled children, and are more supportive of the potential positive impact of inclusion on the children with disabilities. They speculated that this might be due to mothers' greater concern for their own children. Otherwise, there is little research to explore the relationship between father and child with learning difficulty. This study illuminates some of the connections between gender of parents and children, and the social, economic and cultural implications of choosing a Francophone school for a child with a challenge.

2. Conceptual Framework

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1995, 1998) has been very influential in his analysis of society. He used theory and close observations of practice to help explain how people approach their place in society and make decisions about how they can improve their futures. Through his concepts of habitus, capital, and fields, Bourdieu posited that individuals act in regular though strategic ways in order to find their place within a group. They come into new social situations with a preconceived notion of their place in the social hierarchy, and through identities such as language, culture, and wealth, are able to negotiate with others to establish new levels of importance. Likewise, groups within society negotiate their power by giving and taking from each other in order to find a balance which all come to accept. In this way, Bourdieu's theory represents "a practical, conceptual schemata that simultaneously reproduces and generates, is structured by and structures individual expression and the social order" (McKeever & Miller 2004: 1178). Bourdieu uses the terms habitus, capital, and field to build his theory.

Bourdieu used the concepts of habitus, capital and field to delineate and explain individuals' and groups' positioning in society. I used this theory to better understand my data on stakeholders' views and experiences of inclusion. The relatively new philosophy of inclusion, in order to succeed, needed to be accommodated by other current priorities within the field of education (Clark et al. 1999). As in the case of many other movements in education, reforms such as inclusion require a shift in the rules of the game of the field, or at least a repositioning of the roles of its members (Fullan 1982). Yet this

change requires time to take place (Fullan 2000). I was interested in the processes of habitus (which I called identity) and power (capital) through which stakeholders manoeuvred in order to improve their own goals in the midst of an inclusive directive from school authorities. These three processes of identity, power, and inclusive practice, with their incumbent contradictions and issues, formed the basis of my analysis. With the help of Bourdieu's theory, I was able to articulate a process whereby identity and power relationships were able to help explain and connect the beliefs, experiences and practices which study participants had shared with me.

There are four types of capital: economic (referring to wealth); cultural (which encompasses language, communication, appearance, and educational background); social (membership in groups and/or networks); and symbolic (such as that associated with one's role, authority, and prestige from reaching a level of society). Each type of capital may present itself in concrete material or symbolic form, and specific fields determine its value at particular times. Social capital is very important in a school as social networks represent an individual's worth in the community, and allow him or her access to specific information, and resources which add to the capital he/she already owns. Social capital means that an individual belongs to a certain level of society, and is able to demand service based on that level. The different levels of social capital available in this study school were dependent on not only economic, but cultural capital as well. As a result, social networking and exclusion were predicted to be important means by which groups and individuals asserted their rights to education for their children. Social capital belonged not only to students, but parents and staff as well. The overlap between staff and parents also affected social groupings and membership. Social capital would form the basis of inclusive practice, as communication or lack thereof between stakeholders at the school would have a great influence on the inclusive practices and feeling of belonging that students and others would experience.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The results in this paper were taken from a larger ethnographic case study of inclusion in a minority-language school in the school year 2003/04. The ethnographic study reflects a wish to spend extended periods of time in a school culture, learning how it works on day-to-day basis (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994). As such, the interest was not in testing a hypothesis but

working with "unstructured" data to build understanding. Ethnography involves only one or a small number of cases. Schramm (1971) explained that the "essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions; why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result" (22, as quoted in Yin 1984). In my case, the decisions I was interested in were those pertaining to the implementation of inclusion in a French language school.

3.2. The School

One Francophone school was studied; it was part of a provincial French school board of 19 schools. This school was four years old at the time of the study and was situated in a mainly English community of about 350, 000 people. As the school gained public attention, the image of reclaiming language attracted the interest of many new families in the area. Not only Francophones and people with French ancestry from the community and across the province, but also Francophones from other provinces, registered their children for the school as they moved to this community to work (Colello 2003). Some parents removed their children from the English system to study here, and the attached daycare allowed for the easy transition of new kindergarten students each year. Many children's first language at home was English despite having a parent(s) with French heritage. The school graduated its first three university-bound students in 2003, a feat which was celebrated in the papers and on the internet (MacDonald 2004). At the time of this study, there were 173 students attending the K-12 school. About 20 children had been identified as having physical and/or learning challenges, ranging from cerebral palsy and developmental delay to learning and behavioural disabilities.

3.3. Data collection

Data was collected through interviews with several students with physical and learning difficulties and their parents, staff, and the principal; observations of the school classes, staff meetings, and other goings on at the school; and analysis of documents such as newspapers and publications distributed by the school board and school to its parents. Semi-structured interviews addressed the participants' involvement and experience with the school's inclusive and linguistic/cultural practices. These were the basic questions I wanted to find answers for:

- How did the school implement inclusion?
- How were stakeholders involved in this implementation?

- Did their views and practices reflect an acceptance of inclusion?
- What was the effect of inclusion on the experience of students with special needs?
- How did inclusion affect teachers' and other staff's practice?
- How did leadership and other aspects of the school's circumstances affect the way inclusion was carried out?

Children in the study had various learning and physical challenges, which sometimes involved behavioural issues. Children were interviewed with their parents present, either at home or at school. Some children could not be interviewed due to disability or health issues. Parents, teachers, teacher assistants, principal, resource teacher, guidance counselor, speech language pathologist, and contracted psychologist were interviewed. Several parents had students without disabilities attending the school and were able to comment on their education as well. All staff but one teacher were interviewed. Language of interview was French if completed at the school, but could be done in French or English according to the participant's wish if at home. All interviews were 45–90 minutes in length, and were taped. Observations were also made of day-to-day life at the school, including classes, community events, and parent-teacher meetings.

3.4. Data analysis

Data from interviews was transcribed, translating from French to English in some cases, and coded for themes. Transcripts were labelled by hand, and common themes were collected and compared on an ongoing basis by the researcher, according to Glaser and Strauss's 'constant comparison method' (1967). In this way, observations, interviews and document analysis supported each other as triangulation methods, and a strong and deep sense of the relevant issues around parenting at the school was developed. The themes relating to the data are listed below (Table 1).

Table 1: Themes across stakeholder data

Issue	Theme	Teachers	Special Services	Principal	Parents	Students	Teacher Assts.	Whole School
School issues	secondary versus elementary divisions	√	√	√	√	√		
	collaborative versus uncollaborative practices	√	√	√	√		√	
	alignment with principal	√	√		√		√	
	positive versus negative attitude toward resource program/co-teaching	√	√	√	√	√		
	internal vs. public persona of school			√	√			√
	marketization of school	√	√	√	√			√
	special education versus language and culture	√	√	√	√	√		√
Personal issues	English versus French use and identity	√	√	√	√	√	√	
	connection and involvement with French school	√	√	√	√	√	√	
	type of disability and experience of student, parent/practice of schools	√	√	√	√	√	√	
	choice of school	√	√	√	√	√	√	

4. Findings

The findings will be presented in two groups: the point of view of a Francophone father; and that of English mothers.

4.1. The Francophone parent: The case of André and his family

First I will present André, who is the father of one child, Genevieve, a teenage girl in Grade 8 at the time of the study. André is a Francophone from outside of the island who came for business reasons. He has his own profitable business in town. Genevieve has been going to the French school since kindergarten, and is now in grade seven. Both André and Genevieve are very close, and share the French language together at home. Genevieve's mother is English and is not involved in French school or social activities, and was not involved in our interview. Genevieve is diabetic and has missed some time from school, but is very sociable and takes part in dances at the local English school. The school made an arrangement with the local junior and senior high school with French immersion programs that students could attend their dances and even prom graduation nights because there were not enough older students at Royale to warrant putting on their own dances.

Social capital leads to power

André has been able to connect with the school and the school has connected with André as well. Since the number of truly fluent French parents willing to get involved with the school is small, the school quickly took advantage of André's willingness to participate and used him in a variety of capacities, both volunteer and salaried.

As a result of his involvement with the school, André was able to meet many people, both on staff and families, and was able to see first hand the inner workings of the school, while developing a social network which would come to help him culturally and economically in his new hometown. André not only connected to peers with the same language and culture, but was able to watch closely the way that the school operated on a daily basis. As a result of his knowledge, André was able to see why his daughter was having difficulty in school once this problem arose. He was able to act on his own knowledge to improve the situation for his daughter. His relationship with the principal was one in which he knew the man not only as an authority figure but as a man and a friend as well.

The strict implementation of French only social activities for families outside of school hours had ramifications for the development of social ties between families and staff for years afterwards. The efforts on the part of the current principal and select French parents to alleviate the pressure on parents to speak only French with each other, and to welcome families to social events have only done so much to counteract previous rules. André commented:

And I asked the principal at the time ah and I think it was Monique…about the English and if we could conduct the meetings of the Home and School in both languages. And she said no. She didn't want to. It was to be in French, no English at all in the school. Um and that's what turned off a lot of people, okay? And we, uh, Philippe (new principal) tried to turn, started to turn it, slowly to help, but the damage was done for a long time.

As a result of the isolation of English parents, a few Francophone parents are continually asked to participate in school activities. These parents get to know the school very well. Some even eventually work for the school. This extensive experience informs their knowledge of the way the school works and provides the means for them to garner services for their child:

André: Everybody knows everybody in that school. Kids and me being in the home and school? All those kids know me. So it's not like another parent who never got involved in the school. They don't know them. But I've done a lot. A lot of stuff for…even they have the Acadian Games. I used to go and help them with track and field stuff.

One can see that this parent accumulates much more capital than most parents due to his linguistic, cultural, employment and gender ties to the school. He is privy to information that other parents would not know:

Me: Do you know a lot of the teachers there?

André: I know quite a few. Most of them…There's the way things are run. We've all seen that. And they could be overworked. Because I know a lot of them are telling me how much work they have to do, the extra work that they have to do, and there are only so many teachers.

But the kids are, I'm telling you, they are…Because I worked there for a while, so I was the janitor. And it was unreal how the respect is not there from the kids to the teachers. And the teachers are getting frustrated. The principal is doing nothing about it. Because not to say nothing bad about Philippe. Philippe is a good vice principal. He is not a principal. Uh. Wherever he was before, he was a good vice principal. In Arichat, or I think Petit-de-Gras it was…He's not tough. There's kids going. I'm sure they get away with murder out there. And still he'll be nice to them. Ah, he's afraid of losing the kids…But what it's doing is backfiring on him.

André not only had economic capital in the form of his own business, and a job at the school, but also cultural capital in the form of French language. He had social capital in that he knew all of the parents of the school community

and beyond, both English and French, he knew the students, and he knew the principal. His membership and leadership of the parent associations gave him symbolic capital, which he could wield for his own child. He had the knowledge and the confidence to assert his own views, and he had the social connections to make his alternative strategy work. All of these forms of capital build on each other, and cross the boundaries of language that hold other parents back (Bourdieu 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron 1996; Hanson & Gutierrez 1997).

In contrast, other parents who are not part of the school's social community would have difficulty procuring services for their children, or even removing their children from services that they do not approve of. Other parents, such as Valerie, rely on reports from teachers and their children. Some may not be aware of discipline issues at the school. The ability to scratch below the surface made Andre know exactly what was going on at his child's school. Capital fed into this knowledge, and was a by-product of it. As a result, the child was more successful at school.

Genevieve and Resource

When Genevieve was in Grade 4, she started experiencing difficulty with her subjects:

André: She started kindergarten no problem. Most of the people in grade kindergarten were like her, didn't speak French. So they were all in the same group. They all go and started…Um she went grade one, grade two and she was going with flying colors. And she was very good in school. Now suddenly going I think it was grade three or four, she started having a bit of difficulty with some pronunciations, and reading, stuff like that. They gave her some tutoring, or resource to help her.

Genevieve: English was my most difficult subject. Even now, I am getting better, but I'd say mostly writing and French.

Genevieve was placed in a resource program, and kept her father up to date on her activities and progress in that program. As she related her experience in the special class to her father, Genevieve also shared her disdain over missing regular class. André felt that she was missing valuable class time by going to this resource program, and that this was holding her back from progress rather than pushing her forward. As a result, André decided to take Genevieve out of the resource program and set her up to tutor younger students. Her ability to speak French well as a result of her father's tutelage, resulted in Genevieve's success with children of other parents that André knew socially through the school. Her father's social network helped Genevieve to improve her marks by taking the initiative to control her own education by teaching others rather than remaining as a handicapped resource student, apart from the mainstream of her grade. The unwillingness of her father

to allow her to falter in the resource program due to social stigma and what he saw as lack of academic vigour, resulted in Genevieve improving beyond the expectations of her teachers or the principal. André actually removed his child from the resource program because he did not see her time in resource as helping her in the regular curriculum. His perception of the school from his involvement with it led him to believe in his own view and he no longer trusted the view of the school:

André: So once a child goes in resource, they stay in resource no matter what. Uh I don't know if it's because they don't want to lose the program. It's...that's what I felt…From my experience, sometimes a question from another student while the teacher is teaching something, might just help her with that subject. Am, while she's not in that class that she was missing at the time, uh, she was missing too much of valuable, the real stuff, you know what I'm saying? I said no, after I think, not last year but the year before, I said that's enough. She's not going no more to resource.

As an alternative, he encouraged her to tutor some of the school's younger students after school. The contacts he made through his work with the school allowed him to connect his daughter with this fulfilling work. By knowing the teachers and student body he knew what was happening at the school, and made an informed decision regarding her education.

Genevieve and discipline

Another situation in which Genevieve benefited from her father's social connections was in the area of discipline. He was also able to advocate for his daughter when she had social difficulty with her peers:

Genevieve: So things happen like last year a girl was picking on me. And we went all down, 'cause she was picking on us. And we told we told the principal. He didn't do nothing when we went. So when our parents started going, that's when he kind of like started talking and saying to us what would happen.

Genevieve also felt ostracized by some of her male peers, and defended female friends who were picked on by these teenage boys. While the principal chose not to discipline them, citing "boys will be boys" as his reasoning, André had other ideas about the principal's lack of assertiveness in dealing with this issue. He cited the principal's reputation, from earlier posts, as being a nice guy rather than a strong leader. André also figured that the principal did not want to tempt these teenage boys to leave the school, thereby reducing the student population. As a result, he put up with their behaviours, because they were subsidiary to the school's goals of French first language. Although he punished Genevieve and her female friends for commiserating in English during class, the principal allowed the harassment of girls to continue.

The issue was not addressed until André was told of the situation by his daughter of the situation, and went in to speak with the principal, along with the parents of the other girl. The power that André and his daughter had as a result of their social connection to the school was able to be mobilized in times when the child's educational and emotional/social well-being were being threatened. This had great repercussions for Genevieve in terms of building her self-confidence and learning. She became a leader in and outside the school and used her connections to other French students to build her own strength as a learner. While Genevieve did not continue at the school the next year and went instead to an English school, her level of academic and social awareness probably followed her. She was able to decide to leave the school with her father's support.

French fathers' roles

André's maleness could also be seen as influential in this regard. He was assertive, and used the power he had. By this I was led to study the difference between male and female approaches to the school, based partly on their language, and partly on their view of the role of school, and their role as parents.

The reliance on the male parent for communication with school in some cases further diminishes the mother's role. In many cases, the father is the French person in the family. Yet most often fathers are not as involved in their children's education as mothers (Reay 2002). When fathers are in control of the communication with school, their interests may be different than mothers' interests would be. This could make the home-school relationship more about hard issues such as academics, career planning, and discipline, rather than soft issues such as emotional well-being, friendships, and self-esteem. One father, Peter, was intent on helping his son choose a career that would serve him well in the future:

Me: And I guess you (Peter) would have lots of information on that to share with your kids. Do you find that your Dad helps you think about, what you want to do in the future, maybe more than others?

Jeff: The army.

Me: Is that what you're keen on?

Pat: No not at all.

Peter: (laughs).

Me: Ya, is that what you would like to do?

Jeff: That's not what I want to do. That's what he wants me to do.

Me: Oh.

Jeff: And all my uncles.

Me: Is that right? Is it a family-

Jeff: All my uncles want me to do it.

Me: Why do you think that would be?

Peter: It's a good profession actually. I was actually offered to go into the Armed Forces but in the end of it we didn't actually. Mom was pregnant actually when I had the opportunity to go. But it would have meant my going out to BC I guess, I forget where we were, was it PEI or Moncton?

Peter suggested the army, because he had wanted to join the army when he was younger, but did not have the opportunity. However, the child had no interest or inclination to join the army. He was not interested in violence. Meanwhile, the mother had allowed the father to communicate with the school because she did not feel equipped to do so in another language. As a result, communication between Peter and school with regard to Jeff's education had a particularly masculine approach. Peter comments on the principal's problem solving style:

Peter: Yes. I think that was very good. Very conscientious. And he made sure he called me up early on and we had some good discussions, and everything, and tried to say well what do you think about this, what do you think about that? So if he sees that kids are having a little bit of trouble with a certain subject, let's try to find ways to at least number one be aware of it, so that if we start getting more trouble, we can figure out an action plan so it's not a surprise? I find him quite good that way.

French fathers were much more likely to go to the school and communicate with the principal or staff directly. One father (Eddie) told of the day he registered his child for the school. He simply walked into the school, and spoke with the principal:

Eddie: I went there and I met the principal, and I told him, "I didn't even realize there was a school here"…He asked me where I was from, and a lot of the people, the parents, their kids, they're not even French, right?

Another father (Bill) called the principal whenever he had a concern with his child. The fact that the principal, who communicates with parents, is male may also contribute to this phenomenon. Other male parents remarked on the ease with which they could communicate with the male principal:

André: And this year, even Philippe (principal) was telling me that she's doing fine, you know.

This approach of solving problems with home and school relations with regard to students' needs is characteristic of the principal at this site. Although

this approach is proactive and pragmatic, it may be less interested in students' feelings than their academic and future career progress. Fathers' interest in child-rearing has not been explored extensively with regard to inclusion, but differences between fathers and mothers have been found in early literacy practices (Nichols 1997). This data may tie findings in gender leadership research to those of parental gender influences, and bring new understanding to children's inclusion in schools where these relationships exist. Principals who adopt traditionally male interests in academic and pre-professional success for their children may work well with fathers who are culturally tied to the school, but their unintentional exclusion of mothers who do not speak the language may affect children's relationships to school, and their inclusion as a result. Children's experience of the more academic and less social aspect of school may affect their social and affective connections to school. The lack of mothers' involvement may also have repercussions for relationships to teachers, who are predominantly female in elementary school.

4.2. Cases of English families: Isolation of mothers

Mothers are traditionally and still today the main participants in students' home education (Silver 2000). Mothers traditionally look after children's homework, appearance and basic skills learned before school begins (Reay 1998). Before and after students start school, mothers often look after children's school choices, communication with teachers, transportation, social associations, extracurricular activities, and cultural events. They build relationships with extended family and friends, creating social networks for their children that they believe will help them succeed and build a positive identity that reflect their early experience in the nuclear family (Nichols 1997). As such, mothers are usually central to the child's experience of life and school outside the home as much as inside. The anomaly of fathers' involvement in this school presents an alternate view of the usual and mothers' involvement is also different than one would normally expect due to the differences between many mothers and the school's cultural and social identity. I will look at the experience of two mothers of students with special needs, and explore the different ways that they experience the school based on their social capital there. I will look at a mother who is at the helm of an English home, as well as the experience of a mother (wife of Peter above) whose husband is French. In both cases language prevents the women from participating fully in their children's education.

Susan: English mother at the helm

In contrast, many English parents do not have the access to the school that French parents do as a result of their language and culture. This has just as strong implications for their children with special needs. Susan is a mother who chose the French school because she wanted her son to learn in French according to his heritage on her side of the family. She and her husband moved to the city to raise their only child away from their own backgrounds, and did not know many people in their neighbourhood. As a result, they learned later on that the neighbourhood did not have many children for their child to play with. Her husband was English and was not involved in his son's homework to the extent that the mother was. While she did not speak French in conversation, Susan was well-equipped to help her son with his homework and was committed to the choice of school she had made. Nonetheless, she also felt prepared to take her child out of the school should his progress not be up to expected standards.

She had contemplated this once in a previous year, when she felt that her son's teachers were not reaching expected levels of academic progress, or were babying her son. Her son Conrad had experienced trouble initially with reading and had been placed in a resource program, but recently he had progressed well beyond grade level and was enjoying being back in the regular classroom. In this case, the resource teacher had taken the family under her wing and provided extra service and care despite their lack of French language at home. Yet the mother still felt out of the social network of the school.

Susan: That's the only thing about that school. They don't make you to feel unwelcome, but you can't volunteer to do things, because I don't speak French well enough? Like you know to go and dole out pizza or something you know what I mean? That's the only thing. So I don't get to.

Susan felt that the liability of her exclusion from the school and her questioning of some teachers' ability to approach teaching as rigorously as she would like, were worth her son's progress in this school as opposed to attending others. However, her disdain over the lack of social connection to the school made her life as home educator more difficult. She could not do the things which she naturally was inclined to do for the school. As a result, the school suffered from this lack of input, and Susan suffered as well because she could not get the insight into her child's education that parents such as André were able to get. Her femaleness may also have impacted her lack of power at the school level. André was able to lead school groups, work as a janitor, and socialize with the principal due in part to his habitus as male and professional, while Susan had to be satisfied with her lack of input into the school's lunch programs. She used her husband's power as well when she went into

the school for meetings. André, on the other hand, could act on his own without his wife's presence.

Pat: English mother/French-speaking father

Another family, with Pat as mother, came to the city from other communities across the country where their children had attended French school. The father worked in a bilingual setting, and was able to communicate with the school and other community members in French. The mother was not bilingual. As a result, the father did most of the communication with the school. The mother felt similar to Susan in her isolation from the school and the participation that she felt she would normally have involved herself with at the school. She felt that because the school was less English-based, she was left out of feeling comfortable as a member there. Their child Jeff had experienced reading, writing and other academic difficulties since early childhood. They felt that it would be good for their child to continue to attend French school in this new neighbourhood despite the fact that his sister moved on to English school for high school. When asked her opinion of the school, she opted not to comment due to her limited knowledge of it. Yet she had a marked impression of the lack of welcome that she felt the school imparted to parents such as her, based on her experience elsewhere:

Pat: I think I'll let Dad answer that, because it's in French. I just don't feel as comfortable going in there? I know the other schools are French too, but they, in (former town), where we lived, like it was more English-speaking people there. (Dad?) Did you find? I found it that way, you know?…Yes you weren't really supposed to (speak English). But ah, it was just more comfortable.

Gendered social capital

These last two cases are about females, and the effect that language rules have on ostracizing some English mothers from participating in school activities permeate their whole experience of the school (Reay 1998). This is similar to the experience felt by immigrant parents in American schools with regard to use of the English language (Hanson & Gutierrez 1997). English parents keep their children at the French school for the benefits it provides them, but they do not communicate with teachers as they would with English school staff. Their lack of participation makes it necessary for them to rely on their children for information regarding school. Children with special needs are less able to fill in the gap of communication. As a result, their academic needs are not met because parents and staff do not establish social connections at the beginning of the year. For parents, it is a matter of saving face. As André explains, English parents will not put themselves in embarrassing

situations in not knowing the dominant language of French operating in the school. This has repercussions for supervision of homework:

André: They have, like me they have my name down if anybody didn't understand and wanted me to explain (homework)… So because they all come from all across (towns), anyway a lot of times you know one or two people in the school and that's about it. So people would not call just for saying, they would say well I don't know this person. I'm not gonna call and disturb them by asking them what is this all the time. Because I don't understand. They wouldn't do it. They wouldn't.

The lack of social contacts these mothers have means that they do not have the network of friends that mothers usually make at school (Reay 1998; Barge & Loges 2003). As a result, they are unable to feel comfortable and confident in their role as parent. Their access to the school is restricted, and as such their access to potential friends is restricted as well. This makes them feel isolated and less self-efficacious as a result. As André says, it is very rare for a mother to overcome her feelings of isolation and volunteer anyway:

André: I think that's one of the big reasons. They're shy. They're afraid of making a mistake when they talk. And because we have one other parent uh, Alice, which is Julie's mother. She's from New Waterford or Glace Bay. I'm not sure. But she's always there when there's an activity. She speaks English. And her she accepts that and and and they know that if Alice comes, she'll be speaking in English. So they accept that too so. So if everybody was like her, everybody would get involved.

Research has found that mothers tend to accept the rules of school as they parallel the rules of home, which they direct (Reay 1998). The strong presence of a male parent group leader such as Andre also may have intimidated mothers who may have been used to female leaders of parent groups in the past. The additional barrier of language served to push mothers even further away from getting involved in the school. As one mother Marie says about the school, " 'Cause they want it to encompass you whole life" and later "you know they're really encouraging you to embrace the language".

This coincides with Reay's (1998) and others' findings with regard to mother's involvement with school. Mothers need to feel that they are accepted by the school. The hegemonic stature of the school is already intimidating to mothers, as they respect its authority. At Royale, some are made to feel less powerful by the language rule established by the principal. As a result, they stay away. In particular, some mothers are not as able to help their children at home with their schoolwork as they otherwise would, and their children's schoolwork may suffer as a result. This quote from a mother of a child with a learning difficulty illustrates how the child's difficulty in school is heightened when parents and teachers do not communicate:

Valerie: I wrote a note a couple of days ago. I found that note in Timothy's school bag. Now I don't know if he gave it to his teacher today or not. I have to talk to him later on. He forgets everything, eh? He forgets.

The reliance of the mother on her child for information belies the necessary relationship between parent and teacher for optimal progress to be made. The fear that the mother has for the teacher goes on to further underline the cycle of hopelessness that permeates the educational experience of mother and child.

5. Conclusion

Social capital is an issue that affects parents, students and staff. Making networks with others in the same stakeholder group is necessary for people to be able to gain access to information, relate personal experience, and feel part of the group (Bourdieu & Passeron 1996; Chenoweth & Stehlik 2004). As a result of their cultural difference, some parents who do not speak the language or have the same cultural background as French parents are isolated from making friends with other parents. As a result, they are cut off from finding out about services, and making the unofficial contacts that serve to connect them to the school and get the most for their children there. Other French parents are connected to the school, through friends and co-workers, and come to know the way things really work in the school. As a result, they are able to secure what they need for their children and themselves. This finding is similar to that discussed by Barge and Loges (2003) and Brain and Reid (2003) with regard to parents from backgrounds which are different from that of the school's staff.

The usual social connection between mothers in particular was cut off at the Francophone school by their lack of welcome to participate in French events. This left fathers, who may be French, to communicate with the male principal and teachers regarding their children's schooling. This shift in the gender connection between parents and staff is a new one in the research and has not been studied extensively (MacKenzie et al. 2003). However, it would seem that the traditional concerns of males for academic information and their different ways of interacting with the school make for a different association for students with the school. Fathers in this study seemed to be more interested in their children's career preparation, academic independence, and less concerned with their social and emotional feelings toward school. This paralleled with the principal's and male teachers' priorities and ways of communicating, resulting in the message for children that school is about making progress academically.

Mothers were sometimes left out of communication with the school, and as a result, were unable to comment and gain information on their children's program planning or inclusion at school. The advantage of inclusion and individual attention took the place of social and cultural involvement for these mothers, although at home they often helped with homework instead of the fathers. Mothers paid this price of social disconnection for the perceived good of their children. However, this social disconnection further isolated the children from the school, as it did not allow them to socialize with other fellow students outside of school, and the usual motherly involvement in extracurricular activities at the school was virtually non-existent.

So the advantage of the school on the one hand for students with special needs, resulted in some cases as disadvantage from the point of view of socialization and inclusion of families in the extracurricular life of the school. The lack of volunteerism of parents to get involved with the school due to the language barrier also hindered teachers from reaching out into the community and getting more activities done with parents' help. Teachers' isolation also resulted, leaving teachers frustrated by the lack of parent involvement, and bewildered by the lack of cultural interest at home. As a result, teachers did not make normal contact with parents, even though contact between teachers in regular school environments has been found to be limited by cultural, economic, and educational differences (van Zanten 2002; Oplatka, Hemsley-Brown & Foskett 2002).

The only difference in this scenario is in the case of some parents of children with special needs who are willing to take on the responsibility and commitment of learning French, for the good of their children. These parents tend to be more appreciative of staff for taking their children at the school, and are motivated culturally and economically to participate in the activities of the school. It takes a leap of faith and courage to overcome the feelings of inadequacy in order to participate even though the parent may feel less than confident about his/her command of the French language. However, as a result of their involvement, these parents do connect with staff more and do secure better service for their children as a result of this shared responsibility and accountability in which staff are expected to participate. In this case, inclusion does work here because children are part of a conjoined system in which parents and staff understand each other, communicate on a regular basis, and work together to develop a good education for their child.

This would seem to contradict the situation in many schools where, because of their child's disability, families are ostracized from the social and educational mainstream of the school (Bagley, Woods & Woods 2001; Chenoweth & Stehlik 2004). In this case, inclusion can actually give advantage to parents of children with special needs, as parents who get involved with the school make it a better place for teachers, students, and improve the school's ties to the community (Barge & Loges 2003). However, this in-

volvement of parents required a great deal of courage on the part of parents, since they had to overcome the cultural, professional and economic blocks of the school in order to break through this barrier.

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