

## 6. THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Antoinette Gagne: The role of the teacher varies in different cultures, in some cultures the teacher has a parental role in their students life and has the authority to guide and discipline the child just as a parent would do in the Canadian context. Newcomer parents may not know the role of their child's teacher and their expectations may differ depending on their country of origin and cultural background. It is commonly believed that in order to communicate successfully all we need is to speak the same language that is not always the case as is illustrated by this parent.

Arabic Speaking Parent: I am able to manage everywhere. But my problem is the clash of civilizations; because in my culture you don't question a teacher. You don't question it: he is like a prophet. He or she will always do what is right. And he knows more than you do, always for the best interest of your child. But here when we saw things that required us to ask, we did not ask. You just submit.

Russian Speaking Parent: We have gone through the Russian school where teacher activists were fighting for their students to be the greatest. I am talking about good teachers. Here teachers do a job, working conditions of which they are secured, heavily secured by the teachers' union. Their job consists precisely in making the student attain the expected level. The student passes - that's it, full stop, period. The rest doesn't interest them.

Mandarin Speaking Parent: From my observation and my contact with the teacher here, I find their teaching style here is completely different from the traditional style we had in China. Look at their young teachers. They look like they are in their twenties and have little teaching experience. They've learned something very new and modern. They are very energetic. They have a very uplifting positive influence on the children, which was not part of our education as parents in China.

Antoinette Gagne: Many teachers try to reach out to parents, they are aware of the different challenges many parents are dealing with and are careful as to how they deliver bad news.

Educator: When I phone home with the parents, especially the ones that are struggling academically I'm very sensitive to not creating lots of upset because, at home, because the child's having so much difficulty I try to tell them what their options are, what we're doing to support them. Like, I make a plan ahead of time, I present it to them, I saw "this is what we're going to do to help them. Do you have any suggestions? Because they're having problems." So they're not just presented with something out of the blue. I can imagine that after all they've been through then hearing their child's not doing well at school it's just another, thing, for that family to deal with.

Antoinette Gagne: Communication between teachers and parents should also be about sharing good news. Sharing positive aspects may be an effective way to bring proud parents into schools.

Somali Speaking Parent: There are times when we comfortable and times when we feel less comfortable. It depends on that day's situation and the problem you have. If your child is starting

the school and the school welcomes you or you are positively involved, you go to the school and feel happy. If your child is having problems you will not feel comfortable going there. So it depends on that day's situation. For me I am involved in my children's school until they go to college or university.

Antoinette Gagne: Once parents are in schools, they may learn more about the Canadian school system, teacher's roles and the different ways to get assistance.

Questionner: And how have you found that the way when parents volunteer in the school, like how do think it helps them, you know, in what way do you think it helps them to be in the school to be volunteering in the school?

Educator: Well I think it's important because some of them are learning the culture and things are very different. If they're newcomers things are quite different from one country to another, the expectations are quite different. For example, one parent said to me that the, she just left the child at home alone, and she thought that was quite alright because when she was in China she always left that child alone and it was quite safe, but it's not acceptable in our community. So that's, one thing they'll learn very quickly in our school, we have a lot of support and they learn where they can get the support if they need support.

Antoinette Gagne: Teachers and school administrators play a crucial role in their students' lives and have a significant impact on how comfortable parents are in communicating with their child's school. Newcomer families' cultural backgrounds and previous educational experiences influence how at ease they are in developing a relationship with their child's teacher. It is important that schools clarify to parents what the role of the teacher in Canada is and acknowledge that parent expectations extend beyond their child and include teachers as well as school administrators.