

GRADE SEVEN AND EIGHT LATIN AMERICAN MENNONITE  
IMMIGRANT STUDENTS: AN EXAMINATION OF SELECTED ASPECTS  
OF THEIR ADAPTATION TO SCHOOLING IN MANITOBA

BY

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## Abstract

Grade 7 and 8 Latin American Mennonite immigrant students were studied in order to examine selected aspects of the adaptation process. Four randomly chosen male and female Grade 7 and 8 students from the Winkler Elementary School took part in individual interviews focusing on the following themes: a) the meaning of work and what constitutes "good work", b) gender roles within the family and parent - child relationships and c) the meaning of "education" and the role of schools. The tape recorded interviews were later transcribed verbatim and then resequenced and restructured to provide continuity of meaning.

Common themes which emerged from the students' stories included a vastly different school experience in Mexico, initial language acquisition difficulties in Manitoba, prejudice and a lack of acceptance at the outset and parents' misunderstanding particularly of high school education. Furthermore it appeared that most of these students moved into the educational system with relative ease and that parents placed considerable confidence in teachers and schools despite their concerns. A more troubling finding was the

longer term exclusion of immigrant students by their Canadian-born peers.

It was concluded that the significant difficulties which arose in the resettlement of these immigrant families were centered to an extent in cultural differences and the poverty of this group, but also in the stereotyping and uninviting attitude evident at the institutional as well as the individual level in the community at large.

A good deal has already been done in educational and community institutions in order to facilitate the resettlement of this immigrant group. Initiatives such as a multicultural week at school, English Second Language classes and special evenings for immigrant parents are a few examples. The establishment of the Winkler Resource Board represents a community response. What is ultimately called for however, at the institutional as well as the individual level, is a change of attitude and a more inviting, accepting response. Immigrant students must be granted dignity and a sense of worth and parents must be given a legitimate voice in educational decisions affecting their children.

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## Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine some of the experiences of selected Latin American Mennonite immigrant students as they adapted to schooling and life in the Garden Valley School Division (GVSD), the mutual accommodations which occurred and the tensions which arose.

The majority of families in GVSD are of the Mennonite faith and culture and this group has considerable influence with regard to educational policy in the Division. In my experience, there has been tension over the years as educational leaders have sought to address the opposing positions held by the traditional, fundamentalist and the more progressive Mennonite groups in the community. During the 1980s a major increase in the local population of Mennonite immigrants from Latin America, the vast majority from Mexico, has presented new challenges for educators in GVSD.

Bruce Wiebe (personal communication, January 14, 1991), director of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Family Services unit under the auspices of the Winkler Resource Board, reported that the Winkler area saw its largest influx of Latin American Mennonite

immigrants between 1986 and 1988. Since then numbers have tapered off dramatically and in fact some recent immigrant families have either returned to Mexico or have moved to other provinces. Wiebe offered the following breakdown of numbers of immigrants dealt with through his office.

YEAR	FAMILY UNITS	SINGLE PERSONS	TOTAL
1986	70	9	416
1987	89	16	461
1988	98	21	535
1989	34	9	169
1990	27	10	133

Bill Braun (personal communication, January 17, 1991), Special Education Coordinator for GVSD, provided the following statistics to reflect the impact which Latin American Mennonite immigrant families have had on this school division.

#### ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE ENROLLMENT FROM 1984 -1990

1984	42
1985	83
1986	125
1987	147
1988	172
1989	167
1990	144

While some of these ESL students may have been born in the Winkler area and spoke only German at home prior to attending school here, according to Braun, fully 95% of them are immigrant students.

In order to provide a context for the current situation in GVSD, this study included a brief consideration of the history of Mennonite settlement in Canada, the reasons some of them moved to Mexico and the subsequent return of large numbers of these Mennonites to Canada during the 1970s and 80s.

#### **Historical Background**

As might be expected, the settlement of this Latin American Mennonite immigrant group into GVSD has not been without tension. The situation may be best understood when viewed from the perspective of tension arising between two cultural groups with significant differences in values. Additionally, in this instance it is not simply a matter of two equal groups vying for power but rather a dominant group, represented by the established Mennonite community, and the minority immigrant group.

From my observations it appears that members of the majority group value job security and employment which assigns status to the individual and is

satisfying beyond the income it provides. Financial independence, home ownership and a secure future for the family are important goals; in short, it is the "North American dream". Individual freedom to make career and other life choices is highly prized and a broadly based education is seen as the means to this end. Considerable value is placed on schooling through high school and beyond.

There appears to be a general perception that Latin American Mennonite immigrants, on the other hand, value a simpler, less structured, "uncluttered" life-style. What is important in terms of work is the ability to provide the necessities of life for the family. There is no shame in manual labour; indeed it is respected and skills such as welding are valued. The church strongly encourages this life-style and promotes a humble attitude. A junior high school education is usually considered sufficient and schooling beyond the mandatory age of sixteen is seen as unnecessary. The preservation of a life-style apart from the secular world is important and higher education is viewed with suspicion.

As a result of my preliminary investigations and my own professional experience in the community, I identified a range of interrelated tensions and

conflicts arising between these two cultures which appear to bear directly and indirectly on the experiences of students in school. For the purpose of this study these tensions were organized according to the following broad structure: a) the meaning of work and what constitutes "good" work, b) gender roles within the family and parent - child relationships and c) the meaning of education and the role of schools. Underlying these three broad areas was the tension between the dominant group view tending toward individualism, materialism and freedom of choice and the minority view stressing community, a simpler standard of living and a life narrowly circumscribed by the dictates of their religious beliefs.

Viewed through the eyes of the majority group it appears that the Latin American Mennonite immigrants lack a sense of self-improvement or self-actualization. For example, Bruce Wiebe (personal communication, January 14, 1991) suggested that, rather than thinking in terms of self-preparation for job advancement, there is a tendency among Latin American Mennonite immigrants to move from one job to another in search of a better hourly wage. Likewise, Betty Goossen (personal communication, January 22, 1991), a former attendance officer for GVSD, who has maintained a supportive role

with many Latin American immigrant families over the years, related the following experience as illustrative of this same tendency. An immigrant man who was an excellent welder had a secure position with a local manufacturer and had attained a small house with appliances. When summer came he quit his job and took his wife and children to hoe in the beet fields because there was more money to be made. Then they promptly moved to Ontario to pick tomatoes. There they encountered financial difficulty and subsequently returned to Manitoba with nothing.

Although this man soon had another job, he displayed no sense of working his way toward seniority within a firm or toward security as understood by the dominant group. Such life choices present an enigma for members of the majority society who value job security, financial independence, material success and a certain future. Consequently, immigrants may be viewed as lacking ambition or motivation, their appreciation for a simpler life-style disregarded.

A second area of difference between the two cultures revolves around gender roles and parent - child relationships within the family. Bruce Wiebe characterized the Latin American Mennonite culture as one that is highly patriarchal where the man is the

clear "master" of the household and the woman's role is to serve her husband. Furthermore, parents expect to exert absolute authority over their young; children are not deemed to have individual rights. The father assumes the right and responsibility of total control and discipline. This attitude may find its origin in the church and is certainly influenced and encouraged by the church. Ken Sawatzky (personal communication, January 25, 1991), a social worker with Child and Family Services in Winkler, reported that the church tends to be strict and fundamental in its outlook. A conservative church doctrine has its pervasive influence on community life and a strong leadership enforces church discipline. Sawatzky suggested that if the church has been viewed as being God's representative to ensure the maintenance of certain moral standards and values, then the husband sees himself as being an extension of that control within his immediate family. This system has served the Latin American Mennonites in their determination to maintain their distance from a secular world which they view with suspicion and which they see as a threat to their spiritual well-being.

However, this view runs counter to that of the majority group which has come to value individualism

and the freedom to make one's own choices. Attempts by immigrant men to exert a strict control over wives and children are seen as harsh, restrictive and limiting of the life choices individuals may make. As more immigrant children continue on in school and increasing numbers of immigrant women attend English as a Second Language classes it may be the men particularly who are left without a means for coping with this new reality and who require support.

Finally, the purpose of schooling and the meaning of education become points of concern and contention between the immigrant group and the majority culture. Again, as generally perceived by the population at large, the influence of the church with regard to higher education is a factor. Sawatzky (1971) reports that school curricula in Mexico are under the direct control of the clergy. Materials consist of a simple primer, the catechism, a hymnary and Scriptures. Simple arithmetic is taught and in some cases a little geography, simple hygiene and limited amounts of English and Spanish may also be included. Education is important as it relates to an individual's knowledge of the Bible, God and salvation.

Given a strict, fundamental interpretation of the Bible, too much education is seen as a dangerous thing.



This attitude is linked to specific Bible verses such as Luke 12:48 which states, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (New International Version). The feeling is that, the more people know, the more they will ultimately be held responsible for before God. In a group which has historically maintained its separation from the world, sometimes at considerable cost, there is an understandable fear on the part of parents of losing their children to the secular world through extended schooling in the public system.

Such a view of education and schooling clashes with that of the dominant group where higher education is seen as a means of assuring a wider range of career choices, a secure financial future and the more general prerequisite of "being educated" and knowledgeable. In the dominant Mennonite cultural group the working out of one's salvation is a more individual pursuit. While it does not become a central part of the school curriculum, there is a strong desire to have Christian principles and values reflected within schools. The prevailing opinion is that parents who do not encourage their children to continue through high school or indeed who actively work against such an endeavor are

intentionally limiting their children's life choices. Again, in a broader Canadian society where individual achievement and competitiveness are rewarded, such a stance is deemed irresponsible.

The observed results of this tension between the two cultural groups in GVSD range from disillusionment and discouragement for some men, to exhilaration at the opportunity for new growth and freedom on the part of some women and children, to experiences of discrimination and racism for many immigrants regardless of age and gender. Although men and women find employment in the area they are frequently barred from advancement beyond the shop floor, according to Henry Rempel (personal communication, January 23, 1991), a member of the Winkler Resource Board. Rempel further stated that a local church congregation, comprised over 90% of Latin American Mennonite families, has not a single immigrant member serving in a leadership role. Children at school face name-calling and teasing with regard to their clothing and hair styles. Often members of the immigrant group are viewed as the ones having the problem and there is considerable pressure on adults and children alike to conform to the style and ways of the dominant group.

### Problem Statement

Emigration to Canada presents significant difficulties for the adult Latin American Mennonite population. While the difficulties are sometimes severe, often these adults are able to find their niche within the immigrant culture in the community and in the workplace. With some adjustment, they are relatively free to live out their lives in the accustomed, traditional way. It is the next generation however, which is most directly caught up in the tension between the two cultures, particularly children in school. It is for this reason that this study focused on the experience of Latin American Mennonite immigrant students in GVSD.

The way in which immigrant students talked about life in school may be understood in terms of competing cultural values around the themes of work, family and education. More specifically, this study sought to address the following questions:

- I. What do immigrant children perceive family expectations to be with regard to their role as students?
  1. To what extent is schooling linked to preparation for a life of work?

2. To what extent does schooling contribute to personal growth and development?
3. Do expectations in the above areas differ for boys and girls?

II. What do immigrant children perceive the expectations of others, such as friends and teachers, to be?

1. Is the broad curriculum necessary or useful?
2. To what extent do immigrant students feel excluded from educational and social experiences?
3. Do teachers' expectations of girls and boys differ?

III. What are the ways in which immigrant students resolve these conflicts?

1. How do students make decisions with regard to subject choices, dropping out and so on?
2. How do immigrant students make career choices?
3. How do they form friendships?
4. Where do these students seek support?

Other areas of tension which became apparent during the course of the study were also explored.

## Research Design

### Students

GVSD is a school division located in the south-central region of Manitoba including the towns of Winkler and Plum Coulee and numerous smaller villages. It was suggested by Bill Braun (personal communication, January 17, 1991) that well over 30% of the students in GVSD are from families who have immigrated to Manitoba in the last decade or so.

The student sample for this study was drawn from the Winkler Elementary School, a K - 8 school, which is centrally located in the town of Winkler and has a substantial number of students who come from immigrant families. I was employed as a teacher in this school for the past fifteen years and at the time data were collected was teaching at the Grade 8 level. I was acquainted with most of the students at this level and enjoyed a friendly and open rapport with many students and parents alike. Grade 7 and 8 students face the usual adolescent concerns of styles of dress, friendships, transition in life, continuation through high school, obtaining part time jobs and so on. Immigrant students are additionally burdened with the difficulties outlined earlier. For these reasons Grade 7 and 8 students were chosen for this study.

To ensure anonymity and equal representation, a random sample of four male and four female students was selected from the total population of Latin American Mennonite immigrant students in Grade 7 and 8.

### Methodology

Selected students participated in individual, semi-structured, tape recorded interviews dealing with the topics already identified: the concept of meaningful work; gender roles / family relationships; and schooling / education. A copy of the interview schedule is included in Appendix A. These interviews were later transcribed in their entirety and then restructured in order to facilitate analysis.

Signed letters of consent, granting permission to proceed with the interviews, were received from the superintendent of GVSD, the principal of the Winkler Elementary School and the parents of individual students involved.

### **Significance of the Study**

In the past decade, large numbers of Latin American Mennonite immigrant families have settled in GVSD. For the sake of immigrant students and their families as well as teachers and administrators within

the system, it is important that there be mutual understanding, tolerance for differences and genuine acceptance. This can only occur where individuals from different cultures respect and value each other and are willing to learn about and from one another. Members of the dominant cultural group must recognize that newcomers' values may be different without being inferior. And, while some adjustments may be necessary for immigrants, it is not in order for the majority group to expect absolute and unconditional assimilation to the new culture.

Through a reflection upon the history and experience of Latin American Mennonite immigrants, a review of the relevant literature and by offering immigrant students a hearing, this study sought to promote a deeper commitment to mutual understanding and acceptance between the two cultural groups in GVSD.

It is important to note here that, although the study was initially framed in light of generally held perceptions regarding these immigrant students, as the data were gathered and the analysis done, there was a significant shift in perspective. A thoughtful consideration of the actual experiences of "real" students challenges existing stereotypes about this cultural group.

## A Brief History of Mennonite Resettlement

### Mennonite Emigration from Russia to Canada

Mennonites have had a presence in Canada for more than a century. The first wave of immigration occurred between 1874 and 1879 when Mennonites from colonies in the Russian Ukraine settled in the Canadian mid-west. This group and their descendants became known as the "Kanadier" (Francis, 1955). A second wave of immigration took place between 1923 and 1930, following the Russian Revolution. This group and their Canadian-born children became known as the "Russlaender". In Manitoba the Mennonite immigrants settled in two main areas south of Winnipeg: the East Reserve which included the Steinbach, Niverville area and stretched south toward the U.S. border and the West Reserve surrounding the Winkler, Altona area and extending south to the border. By the year 1881 Mennonites represented almost 13% of the total population of Manitoba.

It is instructive to note the historical causes of these major movements of Mennonites since similar dynamics influence the current influx of Latin American Mennonite immigrants. Francis (1955) outlines the following push and pull factors which were involved in



the emigration of Mennonites from Russia to Canada at the turn of the century.

To begin with, certain conflicts of a religious nature developed within the group in Russia. Secondly, as the population increased, there was mounting pressure for employment. Mennonites in Russia formed essentially an agrarian society. Social prestige and personal satisfaction were based on the possession and successful use of land. Individuals who did not own land were barred from participation in public affairs. However, there was an increasingly landless population made up of those who lost their land through mismanagement and the presence of more and more non-inheriting children. At the same time the winds of political change were beginning to blow in Russia. The government imposed the use of Russian as the official language, thus affecting official records, correspondence and other documents. Mennonites were compelled to teach Russian in their schools and furthermore, Russian teachers were appointed for this purpose. The government also imposed redistribution of land in order to give land back to the landless.

The author points out that while many of these new policies presented more of a perceived than actual threat, since they were not actually implemented for

several years, they did sow the seeds of mistrust and unrest among the Mennonites. The final and determining factor for those who emigrated was the official abrogation of the privilege of military exemption for all former foreign colonists. With that the Mennonites lost one of the key concessions they had been granted upon first settling in Russia.

In stark contrast to the worsening picture in Russia the Mennonites saw in Canada the opportunity for economic betterment and freedom. They had heard glowing reports of cheap and fertile land in Canada. Through negotiations with the federal government of the day the Mennonites won the guarantee of exemption from all forms of military service and the promise of religious freedom extending to the education of their children in their own schools (Janzen, 1990). It is important to note that some documentation was significantly misinterpreted at the time.

During the 1870s some 7000 Mennonites moved to Manitoba, virtually transplanting their social system from Russia to here, settling in blocks exclusively by themselves and living in villages. Once settled on their lands they set up their own school system and from 1874 to 1883 they enjoyed complete school autonomy (Francis, 1955). Education was the sole responsibility

of the church which laid down general rules, appointed teachers and strictly supervised all matters concerning education. The main objective of schools was religious instruction and moral education in addition to teaching the three R's. There was an eight month school year and compulsory school age was six to twelve for boys and six to fourteen for girls. The language of instruction was German.

#### **Issues Surrounding Mennonite Emigration to Latin America**

It was perhaps an idyllic state which, in part at least, contained the seeds of its own destruction. Historically the Mennonites were a closed group, keeping very much to themselves. Now their education system suffered from this isolationism since their teachers had no interaction with other areas in education and this in turn led to a state of stagnation. There was also a lack of qualified teachers (Francis, 1955). Because of this deterioration of their schools, some Mennonites began replacing their parochial schools with public district schools. Adherents of the school reform movement held that students needed improved schooling and instruction in the English language in order to give them a better

chance in the competitive society around them. Education was one of the major issues in a division that began to develop among Mennonites in Manitoba. William Janzen (1990), Director of the Ottawa office of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Canada has prepared an informational video on the Latin American Mennonite immigrant history and experience and he outlines the following events as they unfolded.

The government of the day offered financial grants to help Mennonites operate their schools. While the conservative Mennonites refused these offers, others accepted even though it meant that teachers were soon required to pass certain examinations in order for schools to receive those grants. In the late 1880s these Mennonites established a modest teacher training institute with further help from the Manitoba government (Janzen, 1990).

The year 1890 marked the passage of the Manitoba Public Schools Act which established the modern principle of state-controlled, secular and tax-supported schools. Although the act allowed for only one official language, it was amended in 1896 to provide for a bilingual system of instruction as well as the teaching of religion in schools. However, participation in this system was not compulsory and

conservative Mennonites continued to operate their own schools with the German language only, a religious emphasis and a limited curriculum. These schools taught reading, writing, arithmetic and religion but not world history, science or geography, thus preparing children for life within a narrowly defined, sheltered group but not equipping them to become fully-participating, contributing citizens of the country. Thus bilingual government schools and church-run German schools continued side by side for the next decade.

Around 1918 both the Manitoba and Saskatchewan governments made it compulsory for children to attend public schools where English was the only language of instruction. While most ethnic groups eventually accepted the governments' plans, the conservative Mennonites did not and their determination to continue with their own schools resulted in a severe and tragic confrontation. When these areas in Manitoba and Saskatchewan refused to elect school trustees, the governments appointed trustees from outside. When no one was willing to sell land for school sites, the governments expropriated land. When people refused to build schools, the governments sent in construction crews. In spite of government-hired trustees and teachers, in some cases no children attended these

schools for the entire 200 day school year.

Approximately 800 children in each of the two provinces continued to attend church-run schools.

The governments' first response was to imprison some parents, but they soon turned to fines instead. Many parents paid fines of \$15 per month for each school-aged child who was not attending the public school. In the 1920 - 21 school year, conservative Mennonites in Saskatchewan paid a total of \$26,000 in fines and court costs. People began to sell land and cattle in order to keep up with the fines. Janzen (1990) reports that in one case police took three horses, one hog and five cured hams and sold them. When the proceeds of this sale failed to cover the fines, police returned and took five cows, two heifers and two horses in order to cover the balance. When the Mennonites pleaded for the promises they had been given at the time of their immigration, they were told that the federal government had not had the constitutional authority to make such promises in relation to education. Warkentin (1991) states: "The special school privileges extended the Mennonites in 1873 came from the federal secretary of agriculture who didn't have authority to make that promise in the first place

and, besides, schools and education came under provincial, not federal jurisdiction" (p. 10).

In Manitoba, Mennonite schools were condemned as inadequate and private schools built by Mennonites were requisitioned for use as public schools. Parents who refused to send their children to recognized schools, and the church ministers who counselled them, were brought to court, fined and occasionally jailed. All appeals and petitions by the Mennonites in an effort to save their parochial schools were unsuccessful.

Francis (1955) states that,

it was no more a question of educational standards which prompted the authorities to destroy the Mennonite private grade schools once and for all, and to replace them with English public schools. It was part of a consistent national policy aimed at the assimilation of ethnics to safeguard national unity and cultural uniformity.

In this policy the school figured prominently as the most effective means to wean the children of immigrants away from the traditions of their group and to indoctrinate them with the ideals and values of the dominant majority. (p. 186)

In the decade following 1920 approximately 6000 Mennonites, one third of the Mennonite group in

Manitoba, left for Latin American countries. In 1921, after successful negotiations with the Mexican government, the Mennonites received all the concessions and guarantees which they had traditionally desired. It is an indication of the depth of their commitment to their ideals that, with this emigration, economic motives played no role in the decision. The move involved well-established farm families, and members from groups leaving Canada who stayed behind, usually were forced to do so by their poverty (Francis, 1955).

Henry Rempel (personal communication, January 23, 1991) states that those who stayed behind originally were left without any leadership. The entire church and community leadership, including the "Vorsteher" or colony administrator, along with other colony civic officials, the ministers and the deacons, left Manitoba. The "Witwen und Waisen Amt", a benevolent fund for the care of widows and orphans, was also taken along. It was the feeling of the church leadership at the time that the true church was leaving Manitoba and that if those left behind were obedient church believers they would eventually follow. Although it is no longer strong, the resentment on the part of those left behind has been passed down through the generations and may account in small part for the cool



response toward Latin American Mennonites returning to southern Manitoba in the 1980s.

The relocation to Mexico was a relatively simple one often involving the use of trains. Warkentin (1987) states that between 1920 and 1926 some thirty-six trains filled with Mennonites from Saskatchewan and Manitoba together with household goods, agricultural implements and livestock unloaded at the Mexican village of San Antonio de los Arenales in the eastern front ranges of the Sierra Madre Mountains in the state of Chihuahua. It is important to note, considering the present situation involving Latin American Mennonite returnees, that many Mennonites at the time were careful to ensure the possession of properly acquired Canadian citizenship (Francis, 1955).

### **The Mennonite Experience in Mexico**

There can be no complete understanding of present-day Mennonite immigrants from Mexico without some knowledge of their experience in that country in the intervening decades. In the more than sixty years of the Mennonite experience in Mexico, the living standard of many has decreased markedly from that enjoyed in Canada at the time of emigration. Many families know little or nothing about nutrition and children suffer

the results of improper diet. Children of poor families remain barefoot throughout the winter and develop chronic colds and coughs. Infant mortality is high (Sawatzky, 1971).

The people who are poorest and worst off in the Mennonite colonies in Mexico tend to be the "Anwohner" or landless; people who do not own land and are largely unemployed. In a situation similar to the experience in the Russian Mennonite villages, due to the rapidly increasing population in the colonies over the past decades and a custom of equal treatment in inheritance for all children, more and more people are becoming landless and impoverished with no way out.

Janzen (1990) indicates that any improvement with regard to such areas as education or agriculture has been effectively thwarted by a severe and determined leadership. Individuals who wanted to improve things were labeled proud, self-seeking, and not humble enough. Such criticism has, over the years, blocked most attempts at improvement. Restrictions applied to technology as well, the most common being the rule against the use of rubber tires on tractors. With steel wheels young people were less inclined to take pleasure trips to Mexican towns and this in turn helped the Mennonites to remain a separate people. Farmers

who used rubber tires were excommunicated from the church. This meant that they were also socially and economically ostracized.

Formal education of the young, by any conventional standards, has not fared well among the Mennonite colonies in Mexico. Sawatzky (1971) suggests that the manner in which secular schools were imposed upon these Mennonites in Canada had a traumatic effect and led to a denigration of learning. Janzen (1990) states that the education system for these people has remained virtually unchanged since the time in Russia. Although the basic thinking with regard to education is still to teach children what is important to know, there has been a decline in standards of secular learning. Three quarters or more of the portion of the Mennonite population which has received its education in Mexico is below the level of functional literacy (Sawatzky, 1971). Students, for example, do not receive even a working knowledge of German in their schools, most women never learn enough Spanish to make themselves understood, and the majority of men learn only enough Spanish vernacular to get by. For most Mennonites there is little communication of ideas beyond face-to-face exchanges in their own Low German vernacular. As a result adults have little access to outside

information and are therefore even more isolated from the world around them.

Sawatzky (1971) draws a rather bleak picture of schooling in the Mennonite colonies. Although there are slight differences from one group to the next, as mentioned earlier, school curricula are under the direct control of the clergy. Materials are limited and the curriculum is basic. With a school year of 140 days or less, all children begin school at age seven; girls leave at age twelve and boys continue on to age thirteen or fourteen. Children of all ages are commonly kept out of school for varying periods of time to help with farm work. Finally, and perhaps most devastatingly, teachers today are themselves products of the system, with all that this implies, and receive no professional training.

All these factors contribute to a social system in which a growing number of people are becoming marginalized. Janzen (1990) states that people have been economically impoverished, religiously alienated, and educationally unequipped to seek out other positive options. Significantly, it is often these marginalized people from Mexico who have made their way to Ontario and Manitoba.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

It would be reasonable to assume that, given the common heritage, Latin American Mennonite immigrant families would find ready acceptance in southern Manitoba and that they would make their way with relative ease into a new life here. However, many of the immigrant issues discussed in this literature review hold for this immigrant group as well.

The review begins with a challenge to the assimilation model and the popular perception that immigrants should conform to the ways of the dominant group. Mutual acceptance is seen as a more appropriate goal and schools are the proposed vehicle. It is suggested that while immigrants bring with them certain cultural baggage, it is the receiving institutions which determine their long term outcomes.

Within the realm of education, multiculturalism must become an integral part of core curricula at every level of institution. The streaming of immigrant students into inappropriate programs is questioned and the view of immigrants as precious assets rather than a burden is promoted. It is further suggested that adjustment difficulties are a problem of institutional structure rather than a concern that faces immigrant

students only. The review concludes with a brief summary of the literature related to the development of self-esteem among immigrant children.

### **The Assimilation Model Challenged**

John Dewey (cited in Eiseie, 1983) identified himself as a cultural pluralist and in early writings rejected the melting pot and Americanization model. He writes, "To maintain that all the constituent elements, geographical, racial, and cultural in the United States should be put in the same pot and turned into a uniform and unchanging product is distasteful" (p. 151). And again, "... genuine assimilation *to one another* - not to Anglo-Saxondom - seems to be essential to an American" (p. 151). This suggests a mutual acceptance and a genuine desire on the part of all ethnic and cultural groups to recognize each other's strengths and contributions. In Eiseie's view, Dewey wanted cultural contact, not cultural separation. He valued immigrant culture and supported cultural pluralism, however he also recognized its inherent tendency toward conflict. Dewey (cited in Eiseie, 1983) states, "In any state of enduring organization for the future, we must secure for each nationality an opportunity to cultivate its own distinctive individuality to the point where it

does not become dangerous to the welfare of other people or groups" (p. 152). In Dewey's view schools were central to this process. He felt that schools bring integrity, cohesion and a feeling of sympathy and unity among the elements of the population. It is important to note that "uniformity" is conspicuously absent from his list.

Hirschman (1982), in challenging the assimilationist school of thought, has looked into the question of immigrant and ethnic group socioeconomic progress and provides a discussion of the questions and issues that should be considered. This author suggests three broad sets of factors which are relevant to this endeavor: the initial characteristics of immigrants; the structure of economic opportunities; and the reception or response by the gatekeepers of the system (the host or dominant population).

In the area of immigrant characteristics, human capital variables are important. Included here are such things as the learned skills that are rewarded by wages in the labour market, amount of education, length of work experience and specific vocational or on the job training. The list may also include length of residence in the country and language skills. The problem is that immigrants may receive less than equal

labour market outcomes because of the devalued skills or qualifications which they bring to the labour market. Since human capital differences do no account for all the economic inequality between majority and minority populations, Hirschman (1982) states that such things as employer or institutional discrimination are frequently cited. Unmeasured differences such as quality of schooling or on the job performance may also explain the remaining inequality. Hirschman seeks to broaden the scope of the inquiry by including variables representing "social origins", that is, the supports available from the family or community of origin. These are measured by the education and occupation of respondents' parents, the size of the place of birth, the number of siblings and so on. Linguistic skills, especially a knowledge of English, are also an important factor in the labour market success of immigrants. Finally, in addition to human capital, immigrants occasionally bring physical capital or money which may be invested in entrepreneurial activity. Family and broader kin links may provide physical and human capital resources upon which minorities and immigrants can draw.

Immigrants then bring with them a certain amount of cultural baggage which shapes their initial



preferences and orientations. However it is the economic, residential, political and social institutions which absorb them in the new environment that shape their long-term outcomes in both cultural and socioeconomic patterns (Hirschman, 1982). The low paying and menial jobs which are most often available to minority youth are not ones that provide chances for mobility nor create positive attitudes toward work. It is important here to note the reversal in the causal direction of attitude and behavior from that implied by the assimilation model.

City-, industry- and firm-specific influences may also facilitate or constrain the socioeconomic gains of minorities or immigrants. For example, the "percent minority hypothesis" (Frisbie and Neidert, cited in Hirschman, 1982) argues that the larger the percent of a minority in a given area, the greater will be the discrimination by the majority against them. Because new immigrants and minorities typically have fewer resources (skills, knowledge of local markets, contacts with employers) than the majority population, they are poorly equipped to enter the highly rewarded sectors of the economy. Most minorities begin in industries which are short of labour or which offer lower wages, and once populations enter into particular institutions,

the natural forces of informal networks tend to reinforce concentrations in those organizations, ie. the same firms or similar industries (Hirschman, 1982).

Finally, closely related to the above economic opportunity structures, is the response of these organizations toward minority group members. Hirschman states that decisions about hiring, promotion and wages are not made by the public at large, but rather by gatekeepers in the institutions whose interests may or may not coincide with popular sentiments. Geschwender (cited in Hirschman, 1982) points out, for example, that Henry Ford, one of the more bigoted men of his era, made a practice of hiring black workers in some of his automobile plants, not to break the barriers of racism, but rather to retard the spread of unionism.

Hirschman (1982) admits that there are many other important factors to consider in the area of race and ethnic studies. The real problem however, is the intellectual blinders of the investigator; the theoretical perspective that consciously or unconsciously shapes the choice of variables thought to be important. His challenge is to move beyond the assimilation model, which emphasizes the characteristics of minority populations.

Samuda (1982), in examining the way in which the Ontario education system has accommodated itself to the needs of ethnic minority immigrants, found that where ethnic concentrations were higher assimilation was more favored. Specific responses within the assimilation category of the study included suggestions for a "holding center", the need to "culturalize them" and a more thorough screening of immigrants. The underlying attitude appeared to be that it is the duty of the immigrant to adopt Canadian ways, to join the melting pot, to assimilate into the dominant majority culture. Yet, as stated in a Task Force report, sponsored by the American Jewish Committee [AJC] (1989), past experience has taught us that we cannot focus on newcomers alone. In order for successful integration to occur, in schools and elsewhere, there must be a receptive host population as well as a willingness on the part of newcomers to adjust. Historically, bias and discrimination have only posed barriers to the integration of immigrants. If new groups are to acculturate successfully, bias in the general public must be reduced.

Reflecting a common theme with regard to immigrant and minority group education, Samuda (1982) found that the reception, placement and programs for minority

students are often placed under the rubric of Special Education. This demonstrates an insensitivity to newcomers' real needs and potential for learning, and tends to perpetuate the attitude that if students are culturally different they are also academically inferior. Immigrant children may score poorly on tests not because of low intelligence but because of language difficulties or culture-based misunderstandings. Those who develop tests and those who evaluate them must become more sensitive to this issue (AJC Task Force, 1989).

Samuda (1982) suggests that classroom teachers are central to the process of multiculturalism and calls into question the teacher-training programs at faculties of education. Without training in the concepts of multiculturalism, attitudes of ethnocentrism, of Anglo-Canadian conformity and assimilation will continue to exist as the expected model for new Canadians. "Re-training requires the deliberate act of repudiating the ethnocentric melting pot model and the acceptance of ethnic minority cultures as different rather than deficient. Such a stance implies respect and a new mode of thinking" (Samuda, 1982, p.258). Furthermore, it is not enough simply to offer training in multicultural education in

teachers colleges. The subject should be an integral part of the required core curriculum. This would demonstrate the educational system's genuine commitment to this concept (AJC Task Force, 1989).

Samuda (1982) concurs with the warnings mentioned earlier with regard to the assimilation model and holds all sectors of our political structure accountable. He states:

The implementation of multi-ethnicity requires planning at the federal-provincial level, at the provincial-municipal level, and at the community level. It is not just the business of teachers, or the school boards, but of the average citizen. Multiculturalism represents a change of values and a shift of attitudes from the melting pot model of acculturation. (p. 260)

### **The Education System and Immigrant Concerns**

In spite of the many legislative initiatives of recent decades, some Canadians still do not accept the multicultural commitment, and the consequent lack of regard for minority rights and equality has resulted in confrontation, misunderstanding and blatant racial discrimination across a broad sector of society. Chodzinski (1988) found in his review of the literature

that racism is deeply imbedded in the structural, institutional and cultural aspects of society in Canada. Minority group children are often harassed, excluded from events, placed more frequently in non-academic programs, assessed as less intelligent and, as mentioned earlier, placed in special educational programs more often than other groups.

Like others mentioned previously, Chodzinski (1988) expresses the need for more thorough preparation of teachers. "The lack of specialized training with respect to multicultural concerns and issues at the pre-service or in-service level of teacher education handicaps the professional who desires to provide services to minority group students" (p. 67). Teachers and school counsellors are the primary agents empowered with the opportunity to enhance levels of acceptance and tolerance within school based community structures. This author however agrees that half-day workshops and guest speakers have little effect on changing the overall direction of teacher strategies with respect to major instructional issues. He feels rather that there must be a revision of the traditional model of teacher education and an obligation by administrators to support the continued education of teachers committed to the provision, implementation and delivery of non

biased and ethnically sensitive services to minority and culturally different children.

Teachers are the professional facilitators of student aspirations and should represent and model the values, ethics, policies and philosophies to which Canadian society and its educational system are committed. Most students, regardless of ethnicity or gender, are motivated and ready to embrace and access the structure of Canadian society if they are given the opportunity, facilities and encouragement. Chodzinski (1988) insists that it is not acceptable for students to be streamed into an educational program which is not consistent with their attributes and abilities, simply because of color, race or handicap. Furthermore, curricula which fail to accommodate the needs of pluralistic school populations must be adjusted accordingly.

Poorly supervised instruction and program monitoring often lead to educational inequities for minority children. In reviewing the literature, Chodzinski (1988) found that on the basis of wrongly evaluated test scores an unusually high proportion of minority or culturally atypical children are considered for and eventually placed in special education programs. Student evaluation should lead to an

accurate, unbiased understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of an individual as they relate to school life and should provide focus points on which to base instruction. This author again highlights the need for enhanced teacher training programs by concluding that teachers must be skilled at developing and providing accurate and informed student appraisal and program management.

Wilson (1986) is another author who recognizes the potential for harm with ESL classes for immigrant students. While ESL classes provide these students with critically important skills, they can also become traps. ESL teachers may become protective and be reluctant to graduate immigrant students into traditional classrooms where they would have to confront the prejudice of students in low ability classes. Furthermore, immigrant students may have trouble in higher ability classes because of limited English proficiency and because expected behaviors, such as working independently or asking questions, are unfamiliar to them. Wilson suggests that immigrant students are successful where classes are warm and supportive, where teachers praise liberally and recognize the possibility of immigrant students sharing their perspectives in classes.



Luke and Seesahai (1983) have focused on the particular needs of secondary ESL students who are recent immigrants to Canada, noting that the acquisition of basic skills is merely a beginning. The goal for these students must be the enhancement of their long term occupational mobility, enabling them to be re-educated later in life. Too often, in the rush to mainstream ESL students, they are placed in occupational programs which terminate in less than Grade 12 achievement and focus on narrowly defined job and consumer skills. Entry into the mainstream often means admission into modified courses designed for low achievers whose first language is English. Consequently, as these authors point out, streaming and tracking systems continue to have a markedly negative effect on students from minority groups.

Additional pressure to find short term solutions to the immediate occupational needs of secondary ESL students results from the fact that many find it necessary to contribute to the financial support of their families. Luke and Seesahai (1983) believe that to ensure the possibility of further formal education we must teach skills necessary to get and hold jobs, but more importantly, we must also cultivate the

ability and desire to learn. This will enable students to continue in various educational programs.

It is important for educators to recognize the positive aspects of cultural and ethnic diversity within classrooms rather than view new immigrants as another problem to be solved or a burden to be endured. Immigrants are a precious asset to schools, not only because of their talents, linguistic resources and eagerness to learn, but also because of their potential contribution to the other students (AJC Task Force, 1989). Wilson (1986) believes that because of their life experiences, most immigrant students have a more global perspective and are less culture-bound than their U.S. peers. Rather than viewing language and cultural differences as barriers which need to be overcome, they should be celebrated as advantages and used as bridges to integration. King and Holton (cited in Wilson, 1986), reporting on Britain's Mother Tongue project, state the following:

In the past in British and American schools, children speaking a language other than English were seen not as possessing a set of valuable skills but as struggling against an impediment that needed to be eradicated before they could successfully acquire the English language and thus

take advantage of the learning opportunities available in society. (p. 192)

The point is that when people are labeled as deviants the problem can always be defined in a way that requires others to make the adjustments (Agbayani, cited in Wilson, 1986). It is important to note that the same phenomena can be viewed as a problem of the institutional structure rather than a problem that faces only immigrant students. Gibson (cited in Wilson, 1986) also concluded that student cultural differences are not necessarily dysfunctional and that the issue was not how to create the home setting within the school (or vice versa) but rather how to help young people deal constructively with discontinuities between the two settings. Attention must be given to school programs, majority - minority relations and cultural differences.

#### **Adjustment Concerns for Immigrant Children**

Aronowitz (1984) has reviewed the existing research of the prevalence of social and emotional adjustment problems among immigrant children. It has been widely argued that migration between nations, entailing significant cultural change, is necessarily attended by relatively grave psychological risks for

children. The author notes the wide range of conclusions suggested by these studies:

This review of studies of a variety of kinds in disparate settings with diverse populations suggests that cohorts of immigrant children may adjust socially and emotionally better, no different, or less well than the native populations into which they migrate. (Aronowitz, 1984, p.243)

However, when disorders do occur, they do so with certain regularities, permitting broad generalizations to be made about the kinds of adjustment difficulties faced.

According to Aronowitz (1984), the most commonly reported pattern of disorder was behavioral deviance. Researchers discovered that the conduct disorders, which were so prevalent among the immigrant children, were manifested almost entirely at school. Rutter (cited in Aronowitz, 1984) suggests the association between learning difficulties and conduct disorders, racial discrimination and the high pupil turnover in the predominantly immigrant schools as possible explanations for this. He states further that since behavioral disorders are manifested mainly at school it suggests that learning difficulties do indeed have an

important role in mediating conduct disorders. However, Rutter also offers a more interactional explanation with his finding that behavioral disorders are strongly associated with disturbance and disruption of family relationships. Other school induced stressors leading to behavioral deviance among immigrant children are prejudicial attitudes on the part of teachers or native students and the experience of segregation and discrimination within the school (Goldman & Taylor, cited in Aronowitz, 1984).

A second major area of disorder among adolescent immigrant children is in the domain of self-concept, identity conflicts and conflicts with parents. The literature suggests that the experience of migration and culture change may exacerbate these normal developmental crises in adolescents (Aronowitz, 1984). Self-depreciation and low self-concept were reported among immigrant adolescents who came from minorities which were devalued by the majority cultures. Immigrant adolescents who felt impelled to make a forced choice between the values and identities of their old and new cultures experienced acute identity crises. It was also reported that intense intergenerational conflict resulted from the divergent identifications and values of immigrant parents and

children (for example, Takac, Nann, Verdonk, and others cited in Aronowitz, 1984).

Wittkower and Fried (cited in Aronowitz, 1984) offer the following social-anthropological explanation:

[I]ndividuals in transition from one culture to another increase the probability of behavioral disorders, because the traditional bonds of practices and values that hold families and communities together are disrupted.

If minority children hold onto their heritage, they are likely to experience... deprecation and alienation from the dominant society. If, on the other hand, they abandon their old cultural values... they run the risk of alienation and rejection from their own subculture without being assured of membership in the new culture. (p.246-247)

Wilson (1986) lists the difficulties faced by immigrant students as being refugee trauma, differences in language, culture and religion, social stratification and prejudice in our society. Cayonne (1982) has studied the adjustment process of Junior High West Indian immigrant students and elaborates on some of these areas. Cayonne believes that the degree of social pressure experienced by immigrant students

varies and depends on the number and nature of their cultural norms and values that are significantly different from those of the hosting culture. The state of these factors determines the speed and comfort with which individuals achieve socio-cultural adjustment. The greater the distance between two cultures, the longer and more demanding the period of effective cultural adjustment will be. The author calls this period of cultural adjustment a state of "liminality" and argues that certain individuals fail to complete the transition and remain trapped in liminality indefinitely.

The physical environment alone contains major obstacles to immigrant childrens' adjustment. These may include differences in the classroom such as unfamiliarity in terms of availability, content and scale; things which are often taken for granted by the totally integrated person. Furthermore, immigrant children become involved with two sets of conflicting values - one reflecting home standards, customs and aspirations, the other the values of the school community (Cayonne, 1982). For most newcomers certain values within the school will not be sacrificed. The acquisition of status and self-confidence are important in the sense that everyone needs to feel accepted,

included and liked. According to Cayonne, the price for this is conformity, even when a good deal of conforming behavior contradicts norms in the home. When this situation arises it often leads to confrontation within the home. And while such parent - child confrontation is not unusual, in the immigrant context, the supportive role of the extended family is not a resource which is readily available. With no effective intermediary to foster a degree of equilibrium and restraint, nothing prevents a complete breakdown between parent and child. This causes emotional strain and suffering for parents and children alike (Cayonne, 1982).

Bhatnagar's review of the literature (cited in Berryman, 1983) suggests that immigrant children's attainment at school is considerably less than that of Canadian children. Immigrant children often suffer from feelings of inferiority, insecurity and loneliness, and their confusion about Canadian culture often makes them objects of ridicule for their peers. Berryman (1983) argues that this lack of social acceptability is one of the prime reasons for lower self-esteem among immigrant children. Coopersmith (cited in Berryman, 1983) has defined self-esteem in the following way:



By self-esteem, we refer to the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that the individual conveys to others by verbal reports and other overt expressive behavior. (p. 4)

Self-esteem is a learned behavior based partly on feedback one receives from the significant others in one's life.

According to Coopersmith (cited in Berryman, 1983), children with a high degree of self-esteem trust their own perceptions and reactions and trust that they will be successful and well received by others. They possess a sound self-evaluation of their abilities, social skills and personal qualities. Children with a medium level of self-esteem are optimistic, expressive and able to stand criticism, although they are very dependent on social acceptance. Because they are uncertain of their own worth they tend to be active in seeking social approval and experiences that will lead to the enhancement of their self-evaluation. Finally,

children with low self-esteem appear discouraged and depressed. They often feel isolated, unlovable, incapable of expressing or defending themselves and are too weak to confront or overcome their deficiencies. They tend to remain in the background, listening rather than participating, sensitive to criticism, self-conscious and preoccupied with their inner problems. Berryman (1983) concludes that immigrant children enter the Canadian school with high, medium and low levels of self-esteem.

Brown (cited in Berryman, 1983) suggests four successive stages to demonstrate the development of self-esteem through the immigration experience. Initially there is a period of excitement over the new surroundings. This is followed by culture shock, when newcomers feel the intrusion of more cultural differences into their image of self and security. In the third stage individuals gradually recover, accepting the surrounding differences and slowly becoming more empathic with persons in the second culture. Finally, recovery occurs as newcomers accept the new culture and the new self that has developed.

Maslow's five stages of development, survival, security, social interaction, self-esteem and self-actualization, offer another perspective. An

individual's needs at each level must be met before movement to the next level can occur. Berryman (1983) points out therefore, that immigrant children must have their survival and security needs met before they can move to the higher levels of development such as social interaction and self-esteem. Before these children can communicate with others in the school system and take pride in their schoolwork, they must feel secure. That means the learning climate must be conducive to security. To this end, the verbal and non-verbal messages from significant others, which imply respect, dignity and acceptance, will help immigrant children develop a positive self-image (Grant, cited in Berryman, 1983).

In conclusion, Harrington (cited in Wilson, 1986) offers a thoughtful reminder of the attitude every educator must cultivate if our immigrant students are to settle happily and successfully into their new home:

However much a child may be like other children because of ethnicity, there are still ways in which he is like all other children regardless of ethnicity. That is, he is still human, able to learn, able to think, and able to feel. The ethnic differences we have been describing are small compared to these. In other ways a

particular child is like no other and knowing something about the culture from which he comes or the ethnic group to which he belongs does not excuse an educator from his obligation to know the child as an individual unique from other individuals and respond to his own special needs with a personally designed plan of instruction.  
(p.193)

## Chapter Three: Student Interviews

This chapter presents the data collected from interviews with eight Grade 7 and 8 students from Winkler Elementary School; four girls and four boys. The atmosphere during the interviews was relaxed and informal and while the questions were directed by the prepared schedule the general discussion also followed the students' own recollections and inclinations. Parents were very supportive of the process and students shared their experiences freely. By nature, certain individuals were more outspoken than others. The degree of commonality between interviews suggests that the picture which emerges is one that is shared by many students. The experience of schooling in Mexico provides important background information, particularly with regard to immigrant students' adjustment to our school system.

Taken together, the eight stories suggest more so than was expected, that Latin American Mennonite immigrant parents value a high school education for their children. While there are misunderstandings and misinformation, both students and parents demonstrate trust in teachers and in the school system in general. Students appear satisfied with the support they have

received within the school. On the other hand, no students have escaped instances of prejudice and discrimination, particularly at the outset of their resettlement. More than merely unfortunate, such occurrences may impact on their school experience. Even more troubling is the sense that, despite the best efforts of immigrant students and their parents, unqualified acceptance by their Canadian-born peers has proved elusive for immigrant children.

#### Jacob's Story

Jacob\* is a fourteen year old Grade 8 student in our school. Although he was not one of my students he and his brother were a friendly pair and we frequently stopped to chat in the halls. Jacob's story reflects the marked differences between schooling in Mexico and schooling in Manitoba. It underscores the process of rethinking and adjustment Jacob and his parents experienced; a process not particularly aided or enhanced by many of his fellow students.

Jacob was six years old when he came to Manitoba and he had had two years of schooling in Mexico. Like

\*The names of all students interviewed have been changed in order to assure anonymity.

many other immigrant children, Jacob experienced several relocations before the family finally settled at its present address.

**"Sometimes it is hard"**

Life in Manitoba began in the village of Schanzenfeld. "Then we moved to Blumenfeld and then to Plum Coulee, then to Horndene and then to Royal Crescent and now on 7th Street [in Winkler]." Asked how the frequent moves affected the making of friends, Jacob responds simply, "Sometimes it is hard."

The problem of English language acquisition only compounded the difficulty of fitting into a new setting. When Jacob began school in Manitoba he spoke only Low German and often felt lonely. (It should be noted that people who speak in the Low German dialect are often accorded less status within the larger community.) "The first year we were here, on our field trip we went to the Assinaboine Zoo and there I was quite left out. ...I was always alone. I was the only person from Mexico in the class." And what would he do during class, not understanding the teacher's instructions and unable to ask anyone for help? "Just look around till the teacher comes."

Since then Jacob has learned to speak English and school work has become easier for him. He is no longer lonely. "Now I know more people that have come from Mexico so I can hang around with them." However, it has been difficult for him to break into the circle of Canadian-born students in his grade and Jacob articulates the strategy which he has developed and which has proven effective for him. "Well, if this one person in this group is quite lonely and nobody else likes him, and you go up to them and you sort of talk to him, pretty soon he'll start liking you. And you can sort of break into their group like that."

Language was not the only, merely the most obvious obstacle for Jacob to overcome when his family moved to Manitoba. The vast differences in the nature of schooling between Mexico and Manitoba and their impact on the adjustment process are not lost on Jacob. He describes schooling in Mexico: "Okay, out there we had a one room school. Here there were like a different room for every grade. [The teachers] were strict. If you just looked at the girls' side they would punish you. Strap you with the belt or something like that." The following seems a typical example: "My cousin took my jacket away because they didn't have jackets. Like my dad always came here [to Manitoba]. He bought



clothes and then went out there... so we always had nice jackets; better ones than they did. And my cousin, he was something like jealous and he wanted my jacket. So I pulled it away from him and he goes and tells the teacher and I got whacked with the belt. That really made me mad."

### "Hung in a sack"

Jacob shares examples of other forms of punishment which he witnessed in the schools in Mexico. "Ya, there you would get hit with a ruler or you'll get strapped on the rear. With a belt. And you'll get hung in a sack. They put you in a sack and hang you on the roof." Asked to elaborate on this treatment Jacob explains that a boy about his size was hung in a sack from a rafter in the ceiling of the school, some eight feet above the floor. "I remember this one guy had to stay in there the whole day." The type of behavior that might lead to such drastic measures was, "painting on the bathroom, school, chucking rocks at the school." On occasion the guilty party was apparently able to avoid such consequences. "Well, this guy that got hung up in the sack - this one other time he was going to get punished and he ran across a river and exactly the same time this whole bunch of water just came pouring.

So we couldn't chase him again." Asked who was all involved in this pursuit, Jacob replies, "The whole school would."

Understandably, it is the memory of this kind of treatment in the school in Mexico which preoccupied Jacob when he first entered school in the Manitoba system. While he expected the same kind of treatment here, he noticed in time that, "the punishment was not as bad." Jacob concludes evenhandedly that, "I've had some mean teachers in Canada and some very nice ones." He is quick to add that in general, teachers have been supportive.

#### **"No Shakespeare in Mexico"**

Cultural differences between Jacob's old and new homes extended to the school curriculum and caused further difficulties in adjustment. The subjects taught in Mexico were basic and appear to have depended largely on repetition and memorization. "They gave you Math and writing. And then you study the Bible, Catechism and this other little [reader]." The entire school day was carried out in German. Jacob describes difficulties he had with teacher assignments during his first years here in Canada. "Well, I didn't know anything about the subjects and I'm supposed to do some

assignment that I don't know nothing about. ...In Mexico you don't do anything like study different writers like Shakespeare or any of those. And here when you get into these classes you study about them and they're like totally new people."

Jacob describes another early problem area. "The first few years that we were here, in Science we were studying space and I thought that it was impossible to go beyond earth." However, he "did some research" and became convinced of the truth of these concepts. Jacob's parents have had more difficulty. "They said, 'I don't believe that's possible.'" His attempts to convince them met with resistance. "My dad, like every time I mention something about space he disagrees. He said that our planet was the only planet on this world. He thinks the sun goes around the earth not the earth going around the sun. ...And how I get him to agree on things: I never tried."

Yet Jacob's parents have been generally supportive of his school experience here. "Well, they'll ask me what we did during the day and ask me for my report card. And look at it and if they have any questions they'll call the school." They also encourage the prompt completion of homework assignments. "Well, as soon as I get home from school I can have a snack or do

my homework." Jacob suggests further that there is the occasional reprimand for not getting homework done on time. There are also times when he is called upon to help his parents with their English or Math. "Well, like these last few days we've been hoeing beets. My mom's sitting here, 'Okay, we've done so and so many acres. How much would that be?' So I just go to her, 'Ten bucks.'"

At the same time the family has some misgivings about the school system, particularly at the high school level. "My grandma and grandpa don't think I should go to high school. All they think about is all these drugs." Jacob's parents, like many others, are also concerned but they show some flexibility and appear willing to trust in their son's judgement. "Well, when I discussed this with my dad, first he said that if there's anything like that going on then I should quit. And I told him that this school here wasn't like that and he said it was up to me." This implies a blend of control and freedom which is further demonstrated by the following anecdote related to beet hoeing. "I think last year I missed a couple of days in school. This year I would have had to do it again. But I told my mom and dad I'm finishing this school year. So I could do it."

Jacob expresses a determination to complete high school and is clear in his career goal. "I want to graduate from high school and then go into police academy [RCMP]". Failing this he says, "I could be a mechanic," and as a last resort, "Well, I could repair video thing-a-ma-jigs. Our video was broken a couple of days ago and I fixed it." Jacob's interest in Industrial Arts underscores his enjoyment of working with his hands and he is able to apply the lessons learned, at home. "Me and [my younger brother] do a lot of woodwork at home. So some of the things we learn in I.A., we use those things at home. [We'd build] a big wooden box maybe, shelves." Curiously, while Jacob has considered the RCMP as a career for some time, he has never discussed this with his father. "There's no reason. The subject never comes up." And his one attempt to share this with his mother was not encouraging. "She just laughed."

### "King Taco"

A recurring concern for Jacob, especially in the early years of his life in Manitoba but more recently as well, has been the teasing of other students. "Okay, there were these grade eight guys bugging me and it would be hard to concentrate on my work. ...Name

calling. Last year I was called "King Taco". In Mexico you eat lots of tacos. And that's something like calling me a Mexican or something like that. And then there were some rumors." Asked to explain, Jacob becomes guarded and offers merely, "Well, they try to get us in trouble like um, say something that isn't true and they call the cops."

At other times the teasing has centered on Jacob's clothes. "I guess it's what I wear; my clothes. They wear clothes that are more in style. Florescent is in style right now. Last year I wore a pair of bluejeans. They're called Toughskin. And these girls would always walk around and look at my rear end. And they'd say 'Toughskin, Toughskin' and all this." This is apparently not a brand worn by the other students and Jacob indicates that his parents sometimes shop for his clothes at the local thrift shop. "Sometimes they'll bug me about that."

Jacob suggests that the teasing occurs, "Because I'm a different background," and he admits to being left feeling, "hurt and angry." In response he has developed strategies for coping with the teasing. "Sometimes I'll start a fight and sometimes I'll ignore it. ...Okay, these guys are spreading rumors. So I just went up to this guy and socked him a couple of

times. And I was called to the office." Jacob has also responded in other ways. "Last year I talked to a counsellor. Like there was some of that going on in our classroom too. And [the teacher] talked to the whole class and it stopped." Asked if this made a difference Jacob replies, "In our classroom it did. But in Grade 8 it didn't."

All of this has had its effect on Jacob's performance at school. "Well, you can't concentrate on tests or your other work. And like, when you're studying in class it's hard work, and like, when you've got tests you get a bad grade." And he is left to ponder his fate. "Ya, I've done some wondering. What I did to them or if I did anything to them."

#### Mary's Story

It becomes clear in the following interview that Mary's parents, like many other Latin American Mennonite immigrant parents, value a high school education for their daughter and possibly more. It is troubling to note however, that in spite of the best efforts of both Mary and her parents, acceptance by her Canadian-born peers is at best limited.

Mary is a fourteen year old grade eight student at Winkler Elementary School. By all appearances, her

adjustment to life in Canada has been a relatively easy one, although this may be attributed more to her personality than to conditions as they existed around her. It is apparent that Mary has received crucial support from her parents in making this adjustment and that in fact, better opportunity for her was one factor in their decision to move to Manitoba.

Mary recalls that her family moved to Manitoba for a seven month period in 1982. They moved back to Mexico however and lived there until their final move to Manitoba in 1988. In the intervening years Mary attended school in Mexico and completed her program there. She remembers her experience: "About a hundred [children]...all in one room." There was one teacher "and his wife helped sometimes."

"We first had to read for an hour and then he started with the smallest kids, the youngest. And they had to read their part; they had to read and you had to listen. And everybody just obeyed him." According to Mary, while one student read, the others all sat and listened. "Then we did writing and after lunch, Math. [Writing consisted of] just copying and trying to improve our writing. I kind of forgot, but he had these little papers he gived us [containing verses] and we had to write it into a book." The afternoon began



with another hour of reading, giving every student the opportunity to read every day. "Well, we only read for a minute, every person." During this time the little children "were usually talking and quiet. Or they got to go outside."

This was followed by Math. Over the years "we started with adding and then worked our way into problems." There were no text books, instead "he had papers handed out. And we had to hand them back in at the end of the class." Friday afternoons were reserved for Spelling. "We had to write on our piece of paper and he would write it on the board and we had to get the mistakes out." Student work was done "on a slate and notebooks."

#### "A better education"

Mary is determined to complete high school and dreams of going on to become a teacher. In her own words, school is important "because I want to have a better education; better than my parents have." Her keen mind was already evident in Mexico. "I was out of school before we came here. I skipped one grade. My dad said it was okay because I wasn't learning anyway. I was so bored and I already knew everything I was supposed to know. We didn't learn anything about

education, those kind of things. [My dad] said as long as I could read and write, then I could quit." Asked if the importance of education, in part, prompted the move to Canada, Mary responds, "Ya, and because of all the pollution there. People drink there a lot when they're at a young age, so they wanted to come here." One senses clearly that the parents hope for a better future for their daughter. "They say they are happy for me to have a better education than them."

Mary indicates that her parents show an interest in her school work. "Well, they listen if I talk about it and they think it's good that I'm learning; getting better at my subjects." Mary shares her work with her parents and asks them for help on occasion. And "most of the time" they are able to help. Mary's chores include "cooking and [helping] my mom keep the house in order." But these never take priority over homework assignments. "If I do it right after school, then my homework in the evening, then I always have enough time. ...We can't watch TV very often in the evenings. No, not unless we have our homework done." Neither is Mary perturbed at her parents' insistence, concluding simply, "if they wouldn't, then I don't think I'd get my homework done." Mother and father are also clear in

their position on part time work for Mary. "They say as long as I would keep up my grades it would be okay."

Mary has given some tentative thought to her future in education. "Maybe just through university or something. Sometimes I think about being a teacher. [A] grade one teacher. I like being with kids. I don't know, it looks like fun." Asked what might help her achieve this goal, she responds, "Maybe helping a teacher out sometimes. Maybe babysitting or something like that."

Art and Social Studies are her favorite subjects. "It's interesting to learn. Last year we did History and I kind of like History. [In Mexico] we never learned about History." Mary shares what she has learned in school with her parents and indicates, "but my dad kind of doesn't believe that they went to the moon, sometimes, because they never taught him that. We would argue for a while and then finally I just go out of there. We just don't talk about it any more."

#### "Kids ignore me"

Asked what was frightening about coming to Manitoba, Mary responds, "Mostly the language." She had little English at the time and felt, "well, nervous...and felt I would say something stupid." ESL

assistance together with a teacher assistant helped Mary with her English in the first few years.

The issue of clothing also created some difficulties early on. "I kind of had trouble matching things up. It was uncomfortable wearing pants and then I wanted to wear a dress but my mom said it would look better, I fit in better, if I wore pants and sweaters and T-shirts. ...It was more comfortable and not so hot [in a dress]. I kind of like to wear comfortable clothing. In the beginning it was very uncomfortable but I got used to it." While Mary suggests that the change in styles helped somewhat with acceptance, she admits to being troubled at the time. "At home, my mom was wearing a dress, and I thought, well, why should I if she's wearing a dress and I should wear pants, but after a few weeks..."

When she thinks back to her first years in Manitoba Mary remembers that acceptance by the other children did not come easily. "Well, the kids kind of ignored me most of the time and it was kind of hard for me to get friends then. And I'm kind of shy." But she persevered. "Well, I participated in more things. Like I talked to them and tried to be friendly. I was learning [English] slowly and that helped." She admits that her friends now tend to be other immigrant

children from Mexico and adds, "But I can have other friends if I want to. Some of them I do." She states that sometimes she has these friends over to her house. And does she get invitations to their houses and play with them? "Uh, no but we always talk on the phone."

#### Ann's Story

The interview with Ann is more extensive and reveals strong opinions on a variety of subjects. A discussion of schooling in Mexico stirs happy memories but underscores the repetitive, rote nature of learning there. Ann's reflections vividly portray the tendency of immigrant children to center responsibility for the community's lack of acceptance within themselves, their background and character.

Ann is a fourteen year old Grade 8 student who will be entering the Occupational Entrance program at the high school next year. She was eleven years old when she came to Manitoba and entered our school system at the end of Grade 5. Decades ago Ann's grandparents moved to Mexico, where her parents were born. Although one of Ann's older brothers moved to Canada some ten years earlier, the rest of the family remained in Mexico. Then, three years ago, Ann's father at the age of sixty, gave up farming there and moved the family to

Manitoba. "The guys are all married and the girls can't do everything and so he gave up his farming," says Ann.

Ann misses her friends and admits, "Well, my dad sometimes talks about going back, and how he misses the farming and everything. But otherwise I think they're happy here." Asked if she herself would like to move back, Ann responds with news shared by a friend who had recently been back to Mexico for a visit: "She said, well, they've been here maybe a little bit longer than we have and she said that [young] people get drunk there. They can smoke whatever they want to and they can drive. I have a friend there, they had a big factory and you know, they had trucks and cars, whatever, and she was driving with her mom. Her mom was kind of sick and whenever they wanted to go somewhere, she was driving." The girl was under age and had no driver's licence.

**"I knew everything"**

Ann had only one year of schooling left in Mexico. "Actually I didn't really learn because I didn't stay at one [school]. My dad he liked to buy houses and move on, and well, when I started I went one month for one teacher. Like they didn't have school for ten

months. They just had breaks in between. And I went for one month and then my dad moved and then I had two different teachers in that village. And you know, they kind of had different stuff for teaching, so I really didn't learn much."

"There were sixty or seventy kids. There's one teacher and like he rules the whole school. Usually it was a man for a teacher. And his wife helped. ...Like I was way at the top of the first bench. They have lots of benches there. I was the fourth from the top [front]. And the girls were on one side and the guys were on one side. And then there was an oven in between. See, they had an oven over there. And the teacher had a blackboard, whatever. Each kid had to have a little blackboard like this and they had to do their Math on there. And the bigger people, they got, well, they got kind of like a book. They called it 'Heft' [notebook]. And you had to practise your writing and you had to really improve. If you didn't, like the teacher told you to, you know, do your best. And on Fridays you could, in the afternoon, you could bring a book or markers and you could color or draw."

Rote learning appears to have been heavily stressed in Ann's school in Mexico. Referring to the Catechism questions and answers she states proudly, "I

knew the whole thing. I knew everything. I didn't have one mistake in there. ...And so on Friday afternoon the small kids didn't have to do it. Just the ones in the Bible and the Testament, those people had to do it. And they asked questions about that until they were through the whole thing." Continuing on to Math, Ann points out, "And the biggest people had to memorize the multiplication. And you know they had it on a piece of paper like this. And well, like me, the biggest people, the top bench those people, girls and guys, they couldn't look at it." The motivation for all this memorization was made clear to the students. "You were supposed to know before you could learn in the Bible. You couldn't bring a Bible to school, in other words. So I worked and you know it takes me a long time to memorize something. But then suddenly the teacher, you know, he said I could bring one, because I knew both of those things."

Ann points out that in Mexico parents shared in some of the responsibilities which in Manitoba are attended to by the school system. "Ya, like there in school in Mexico you never did any Home Ec. like they do here, or I.A.. And you were supposed to learn that at home. Like the girls they were supposed to do that at home. And the guys, well, they could, you know, do



I.A. at home. ...You know, I cleaned around the house and started to make food, whatever, but I hate it."

At times the teacher would demonstrate his sense of fun. For reading, Ann points out, "first we had the Fibel [reader]. And then every once in a while there was a rooster in, at the bottom. And then, you know, you got money. The smallest kids, they got money. When they opened the Fibel. Like, they went out [and] when they came back, there was a quarter or whatever in. The teacher wanted to have fun with the kids. Say that, you know, the rooster laid a [coin]. I think that was when they were really good or something."

#### "The gossip bag"

Of course there were certain rules to follow and consequences for those who failed to do so. "The guys were supposed to stay on their side and the girls were supposed to stay on their side. Actually it was really funny. ...When one of the girls did something wrong or the guys, the girls sometimes had to go sit on the guys' side and the guys had to come sit on the girls' side. And that was really funny [for] all the people because they never sat among each other." Excessive talking during class sometimes resulted in a unique consequence. "Well, once me and my friends we were

really talking in school, most of the time. And like one of my friends she went to the United States; she wasn't there. So my other friend was there. She always moved back and then me and her were talking, laugh, whatever. And then he had this bag and this teacher, his wife was checking stuff and she saw that me and her were talking and laughing. She went and told the teacher and he brought a bag between me and my friend. And he said, I don't know, we were supposed to talk in it and then close it and bring it outside. They called it the 'Pludalusch' [gossip bag]. ...They put a bag between us and, I don't know, me and my friend we were so quiet, we didn't move. ...But once I was reading and then this girl on the top bench, she had to do it and she was crying. And she went outside and she had to empty the bag and bring it back in." In the end however, Ann concludes that school in Mexico was an enjoyable experience. "It was nice."

**"I want to fit in"**

Making friends in Winkler has been difficult and asked to describe her present circle of friends, Ann replies, "Basically they are people from where I come from, like my niece and T.F.. And my friend E.L., she's in high school, except she comes from somewhere

else, but it's part of Mexico too. Just basically those people who come from where I come from." Ann admits she would like to expand her friendships and speculates about the difficulties she faces. "Well, I think that they have their own groups of friends. That's what it always looks like. I'm shy around people; I don't really want to talk to them, like start a conversation or something. Like it embarrasses me. I embarrass myself really easily and so I don't really talk to people. I want people to talk to me first before I talk to other people. So I'm kind of hard at making friends." However, Ann does claim a measure of success. "Like in my class, in Grade eight. There were S.T.. She was really good. Not that me and her ever came...like I didn't go to her house or she came to my house, just in school. And you know, we were classmates."

Ann has her own explanation for the difficulties she has faced in forming friendships with other Winkler children. "I think it's because I come from a different culture. Because I dress differently and I wear my hair differently. And because I don't really speak the language they do." There is some pressure on Ann to wear clothing styles that are traditional in Mexico. "My mom wants me to wear clothes that I wore

there, but I just hate it. Dresses all the time. ...I used to when I was in Grade 5 and Grade 6. And I kind of looked at other people and they weren't wearing it so I thought, why shouldn't I fit in. I mean, I think I have the right to. ...Well, I just [told my mom] that I want to fit in here. And I want to wear the same clothes whatever."

Ann goes on to tell a story which demonstrates her own willingness to be sensitive to the lifestyle of others. "Well, when we go on vacation or something, like I have some cousins [in Mexico] that are really back[ward]. They didn't even want to drive a vehicle. They always took the bus to go to town and they are way out there. So my mom feels that, and I think so, that I shouldn't be wearing [pants] there. My mom always says that I should, you know, be the same everywhere because God is everywhere. He's always with me no matter where I am. And, but if I was wearing pants there, or whatever, I think I would really not fit in."

More than once, Ann has had the feeling that she was not welcome or appreciated because she was different. Group work in school is one example. "You know, you always have to go in front of the class with the other group. And when you're in a group, like I said, I was shy. I never really talked about it. And

well, other people talk and then when they ask me questions I answer them but that's it. And they really don't want you in their group." On the other hand, Ann has a kind word for teachers. "Well I think the teachers are fair. I think they're treating the kids who come from Mexico exactly the way they treat the people here. At least they should be."

In general though there have been hurtful situations for Ann. "I go to the store and I think, I shouldn't have to think I don't belong there. I mean I don't... Not that they say anything or do anything. Just that I look at other people and I think that they are perfect and I'm not. Because they've been here, and I guess they dress better. They wear their hair better and everything and I don't. And I shouldn't feel left out." And thinking back to the first years Ann admits, "It was really difficult for me to start because I only had a couple of friends. And other people calling you names and everything. And you know, just like you don't belong anywhere."

#### **"Help from the teachers"**

At the same time, there were things which helped make the transition to a new culture easier. "I couldn't [speak English] but E.K., she had been here

maybe a year before we did and they put me in her class and the teacher spoke German and it was real easy to try to help me out." In looking back, Ann is now able to see humor in some of the situations which arose at the time. "Once the teacher came up to me and asked, 'What's a tree?' And I quickly started telling a picture, 'It's a three.' And then they said, 'No, it's a tree. You know outside...tree.' And I said, 'Oh.' And then they say, 'Three the number has with an H but tree isn't.' So, that was good."

#### **"Parents don't understand high school"**

Ann was provided with ESL help through Grades 6 and 7 and while she is appreciative of this, she takes a measured view of the program. "I got lots of help from the teachers. Like ESL teachers." But she indicates her reasons for preferring to stay with the regular program as much as possible. "It was really, like it was better than going to ESL because you're not left behind all the time in the subjects. Like they sometimes came...like right when we were in Social Studies I had to go to ESL and then sometimes they had a seating plan or something or did something different and then I always was behind. I didn't really enjoy that."

Ann has very definite feelings about school and its importance. "I think school is really important because you want to get a good job. And I really enjoy school. Some people they just hate it but I don't. I like it. I would like to go to high school." Ann indicates that she would like to complete high school, but asked whether she actually will, her answer is less certain. "No. Well, because my parents think it isn't really a good thing. You see, they don't understand high school. They haven't, like they always went there to school. The girls went to school till they were twelve and the guys went till they were thirteen. And that's the end of school. And they could get a job no matter what. It didn't depend on their school. So they don't really understand why people have to go through school here to get a job. And they think I just have to go to high school until I'm sixteen. But I would like to finish Grade 12 since they say it is better to finish high school."

Ann feels that her parents may ask her to quit high school after age sixteen and indicates that this has happened to others she knows. "You know M.W.? Well, she dropped out. Like you know, they always went back and forth [to Mexico]. And she didn't want to go to high school but she just had to. So I think now

she's sixteen and I don't think she would go back to school." In Ann's extended family there are further discouraging examples. "Well actually I have this cousin, he just went till he was sixteen. He's born here and he just went to high school till... I think he's sixteen now. My mom said that every time they came there like he didn't really have a job or something. He just dropped out of school. And he wanders around. And I don't know, I don't see that's good, dropping out of school, not having a job. Doing anything but just walk around." Ann hopes that such examples will help persuade her parents to allow her to complete Grade 12.

There are also positive role models in Ann's family from whom she draws obvious hope. Referring to the cousin above she continues: "But then his older sister, she graduated. She was in the Pembina Times [local newspaper]. Then there was my other cousin; she graduated too." Ann becomes very serious as she ponders her goal and how she might gain her parents' support. "Well, proving that I was really doing a great job and everything and I would tell them that other parents would force their children, right? Don't some parents? And they force their children to go through Grade 12. And I think that's a good idea. And



some of my cousins did and I would like to do that too." Ann concludes by stressing support from another quarter. "Friends. Some people, you know, they really support you, whatever. They think that's good what you're doing and you should just keep on trying to be better."

#### "Work in an office"

Beyond high school Ann has considered secretarial work as a possible career. "I've been thinking about being a secretary, but I hate typing and a secretary has to do typing." Asked how she became interested in this work Ann responds, "Well, I always watch TV usually. And I see that these secretaries, you know, they tell you whatever. And they answer the phones and, I don't know, it seems like fun. You get to work in an office." Ann seems somewhat aware of the effort such a goal would require. "Like you would have to catch on. Like me, I said I wasn't very good at typing. Like I'd really have to learn about typing...and try to finish my other work." Ann mentions another possibility that would appeal to her. "Well, I have a cousin, she lives in Winnipeg. Her parents live here in Hochfeld. She moved there and she was a [bank teller] once, I think. And I was like,

when I was smaller I was really thinking of being a [bank teller]. I don't know why."

Ann seems to have only a vague notion of her parents' expectations for her. "Well, they want me to get a good job, you know [but] we never really talked about it, really." Neither do Ann's parents appear to have more than a passing involvement with her school work. "Well, they say, 'Good.' You know, 'Be better. You can always be better.' And [they] see that I'm always nice at school." About homework, Ann states, "They always know I have homework because I always come home with a bagful. I always do it by myself. I always finish my chores and then I go upstairs and finish my homework. [But] they never go through my homework." She continues, "Like I told [the resource teacher] here that I enjoy doing homework and she gave me homework over the summer." Ann concludes with a thought that may convey more than she intended: "I'm so bored at home I'll be glad. I'm always glad to do homework then." Ann's description of her previous summer gives some insight as to why homework might be viewed as an attractive alternative. "My mom and dad were both coming home for lunch and all I ever got to do was do dishes and sweep the floors or whatever, and I just don't like it."

She admits that she does not share much of what she learns at school with her parents. "Not a lot. Me and my brother kind of talk English to each other and that helps you to learn more. And sometimes my dad, well, I tell my dad once what that and that means. He went to school, but you know, my parents think that old people don't really learn as fast as the young people do."

**"OEC lots of fun"**

In spite of Ann's efforts, her results in school have not been remarkable and may already have begun to affect her future. She begins by sharing a disappointment. "Well, I enjoy Art. I picked Art in high school but I didn't get it on my timetable. ...This one teacher came to my school [and explained] that special program. ...Ya, OEC. And they encouraged me to take it and I did. Like [the resource teacher] she tested me. I don't know, she said I had trouble with my vocabulary words. So that's probably one reason." Then, "They came and talked it over with my mom. And my mom thought it was a good idea. And now I have so many different subjects in there like Life Skills and Work Ed. and I only have Social Studies and Science and Home Ec. and English."

Ann explains that she would rather have taken the regular program at high school but she is not disappointed. "Not really because the teacher said it [OEC] was lots of fun. And I have a friend and she said her friend went to that program and she said that it was really fun." And she continues to hope that this will be a step toward her career goal. "Ya, they said that if you went out of the classroom, went into a factory or whatever, and then you could work there. And later on when you want to get a job those people would recognize you and then they would know that you were that and that kind of person. They would hire you or not hire you."

Asked how her Grade 8 year had gone Ann explains, "I think I did pretty good. I didn't fail any subjects. Mostly D's and C's. ...I hate Math because it confuses me. I don't know, like here I did special Math. I didn't do exactly what the class did because I wouldn't be able to. It was too hard for me, the one that the class did. So I did special Math and that was adding and subtracting, and I have lots of trouble with dividing. The multiplication I always do in German, always. I always, you know, talk it out in my head, and then I just wrote it down. Because it really confuses you because they say it differently in Mexico.

Because it's here kind of different than there." And Ann admits, "Well, I do have lots of trouble with vocabulary words. Sometimes when people say big words, I say, 'Now what does that mean?'"

Ann seems to have enjoyed Social Studies and when Science is mentioned, she echoes the sentiments of other immigrant children: "See, my parents they don't believe that people went to the moon. And my mom thinks it's impossible. And well, teachers made me believe that people went to the moon. They showed me many stuff, like videos and everything. I believe it that men went to the moon. And my mom still can't believe it. My mom just thinks, no, it's impossible. Men can't get to the moon. And then I just drop the subject." However, Ann does not think that her parents are bothered by these differing perceptions. "No, not really. Like they believe in their stuff that they learned in school. And I believe my stuff that I learned and I don't think it bothers them."

### **"Speaking for my dad"**

There are often occasions where Ann is called upon to help her parents with their English. "My dad understands but when he talks it gets, it sounds really confusing and I always speak for him then. Like once,

this woman was calling at our house. I don't know, you know they went around town and every other house, or something, or the odd number, they gave something. Papers to fill out. And they called to our house and she was asking for my dad, and so I went and got my dad and, you know, he was kind of talking. And my dad said he didn't understand anything and then he says, 'Come here.' 'No, I don't want to do it again,' I said. Because I want him to do it. And so I said I was speaking for my dad again because he [didn't] really understand. And, you know, I help her out, whatever, answer the questions and I think that helps."

Ann admits that at times she is bothered by the necessity of helping her father with his English. "It's kind of embarrassing. Somebody starts the phone call and then says you have to start it and, I don't know. Like once [my teacher] called here. That was the beginning of Grade 8. He wanted to talk to my mom and he said he didn't really know Low German, not much anyway. And he called to our house and my sister answered it. And so he wanted to speak to my mom. My sister gave it to my dad. And then my dad, you know how he is, he understands but he doesn't really talk. Like, is there a problem or something? And Mr. B., I

think he hung up or something. And then the next day I explained to Mr. B."

Asked if her father appears bothered by the fact that he must call upon his daughter to help out at times like this, Ann responds, "Well, he does lots of stuff on his own. Like most of the people they talk German to him. Or he understands lots of English but the problem is he can't really...well he can speak but when it comes to hard words, he really can't. But I don't think it bothers him because he never says anything."

#### Frank's Story

Frank is a strapping, fifteen year old Grade 8 student in our school. Although he is a reluctant conversationalist he highlights several important themes in this interview. Frank points out that a supportive circle of family and friends in Winkler was central to his family's successful transition. Like other Latin American Mennonite immigrant children he describes his ESL experience as helpful and pleasant. The trust that both Frank and his parents display in teachers and the school system also appears to be common among immigrant families.

Following three years of schooling in Mexico, Frank came to Canada at the age of eight but like many other immigrants students, there were several intermediate relocations. "Well, I was born in Mexico and I came here when I was eight. We first moved to Morden. In Morden I only went to Grade 3. I skipped Grade 2 so I was only there for two years." Because of his initial placement in Morden, Frank has been one year behind throughout his school career. Subsequently, Frank reveals that this was not the family's first move to Canada. "Well, before I went to school here it was kind of off and on. We came here, then moved back to Mexico. Maybe when I was two years old we came here [for] four or five months." The family moved back to Mexico, "till I was about five," then back to Canada, "for a couple of months," and finally back to Mexico, "and then I stayed there till I was eight." Asked the reason for these frequent moves, Frank responds, "I don't know. I think we weren't doing so good in Mexico part of the time. We wanted to make it better here and we hated here and moved back." But, "Now I like it here." As for Frank's parents: "Well, some more relatives moved here and they have more friends here."



The family still returns to Mexico every three years or so to visit relatives. A visit usually lasts, "two weeks to a month" and they stay with an uncle. Frank points out that his parents made a conscious effort to have their children wear Canadian styles shortly after their arrival here and that they do not change styles when they return to Mexico for a visit. "They want us to wear the same clothes. They don't want us to dress up very weird like they do. They want us to be different." Frank describes a typical visit with his cousins: "We drive around town and stuff like that. I don't know, get drunk once in a while. We go visiting. Basically party." He seems to indicate that this lifestyle is the norm for the youth down there. "Yes. Every Saturday or Sunday they just lie around and drink. [Liquor] is cheap out there...maybe a dollar to buy liquor out there. Anybody can just go buy."

**"Education not very good"**

Frank's recollections of life and schooling in Mexico are somewhat vague. "Well, they just basically work all day. Go to school. Their education there is not very good. There were four months of holidays. Usually summer holidays...and farming and stuff, lots

of holidays." According to Frank, the school year began in November and went until May or June. About school he says, "Oh, they were very strict. Actually if you would go to school there it would be very easy for you. Because it is quite easy work. Teaching isn't very good."

As outlined by other students, Frank states that the curriculum was basic. "Well, just reading and writing. They each basically read all day out of the testament or Bible. You just read by yourself. There's Math there too. Just basic adding, dividing, just the simplest." According to Frank, the writing class consisted of some Spelling practice and handwriting drill; "Not really stories."

"There were a bit over a hundred [students] maybe. One teacher. It was weird but that's how it worked. [The teacher] just gave one bench an assignment. Then if you didn't know what to do it was too bad. [You would] just sit there. ...Once you're thirteen you quit." Girls quit school at age twelve. Frank's explanation: "The girls learned faster than the boys for some reason." Asked about rules, Frank responds, "Not really rules. You just did what the teacher said and if you didn't, get strapped."

"I started fighting back"

Coming to Morden and beginning in a Grade 1 class at the age of eight was not easy. "I found it quite hard. Everything...I didn't really know any of it. I guess the language is the hardest part. Learning a new language and then you're behind already your other classes. You have to catch up there. But then I had ESL and everything. [In the] ESL class there were more people who didn't know the language and stuff. So there it would be easier. [Also] there was one teacher that helped a different student; she helped me once in a while." Frank appears to have had regular and frequent ESL help through the first two years of schooling in Morden. And even in Winkler he received, "one period a cycle maybe, till Grade 6. [ESL classes] helped me quite a bit to catch on."

Frank's difficulties with the language and adjustment in general had a social impact as well. "Well, people would call me names. Stuff like that. I just started fighting back. I got into quite a few fights and stuff. Frank reflects back on this time and concludes that the fights occurred, "probably because I was a new guy. Probably I was having difficulty adjusting." Frank feels that this behavior did not mark him as a trouble maker because, "it was basically

away from school." The move to Winkler two years later alleviated many of Frank's problems. "I guess everything changed since we moved [to Winkler]. [I] made new friends and stuff. I was probably left out more there than here. I remember sometimes they didn't let me play certain sports. ...Here there were more...I had more friends here, more cousins." Frank agrees that this broad support group of people from a similar background was important in helping him feel at home.

### **"Not crazy about school"**

Frank is not clear about the importance of secondary education in his life and does not seem to have a firm commitment to it at this point. "I don't really want to go to high school. I mean, ah, university or anything. I'll probably have to finish high school. My parents will probably make me." Frank indicates that his parents would like him to complete high school and adds, "It would probably help me get a better job." He is philosophical about his friends who have dropped out of high school. "They sit around all day usually. Well, if you sit around at home it doesn't help you much either. You might as well go to school." He agrees that a high school education could pay dividends. "It would for some jobs. The better

jobs, it would, ya." But Frank is not interested in schooling beyond the secondary level. "Not past high school. I don't really like it. I'm not crazy about it. I don't know, I find it boring for some reason. I'd rather do something else than sit in a classroom all day." Neither does he have suggestions to offer by way of making school a more attractive place to be. "Not really. Probably can't make it better than it is now. There really is no way. Just have to do it." Asked about alternatives, Frank replies, "I don't know. Go around, work maybe, make money. That would be a lot better."

Frank enjoys working with his hands and is quick to respond with his favorite subjects at school. "Gym and IA. All the fun ones, sometimes." Asked what he did with the dart board case he built as his project this year he admits. "I sold it." Interestingly, when asked about his favorite academic subject, Frank responds like many other immigrant students. "Probably Social Studies. I don't know, I just find it interesting." English and Math are listed without hesitation as being his least favorite subjects. "I don't know, never liked them. I find English hard. I'm not very good at it. I'm not a very good writer, reader, so on. I should probably do more of that,

that's probably what it is." On the other hand, about Math Frank states, "That's pretty easy...just find it boring. You just sit there and think what you could be doing instead of this. Time seems to drag on. It takes forever in other words. Sometimes I don't agree with all that extra Math that you have to take; all that equations and stuff. It seems to be useless."

Frank's parents appear to have a genuine concern for their son's school experience. "Well, they don't really want me to get into trouble and stuff...do good. If they find out I'm doing bad they want me to do better." Frank's parents go over his report card with him and have attended parent-teacher interviews in the past. "Well, they did. Junior high I don't think they have." Frank's mother usually asks about homework. "Ya, she does. I never really take homework with. I haven't so far. Usually I don't have any; just studying is all I ever have." And there are occasional questions about the school day. "Ya, once in a while, if I had a test or something, they usually ask." On the other hand there appears to be little sharing about the things that are learned at school. "Next to never. Once in a while."

"Teachers wouldn't lie"

Like other immigrant students, Frank points out that Science is an area that creates some differences of opinion between parents and child. "Space and stuff like that. They believe there's only one world and stuff, on earth." Frank agrees that on these occasions he must choose between believing the book and believing his parents. "In a way it would kind of be like that. I don't really think about it that much. I just learn what they teach me and that's it." This does not seem to create tension for either Frank or his parents. Both seem to have an implicit trust in the teachers and the system. "Well, I just do it, what they say. Teachers wouldn't really lie to you." And his parents: "Well, they pretty well trust the teachers. I don't know, they never really complain that there's something wrong. They're just happy as it is. They say it's a lot better than it was in Mexico...learn more and stuff like that." Both Frank's parents have done a bit of work in English classes here in Winkler and Frank concludes: "My parents kind of, well some of the ideas they used to have in Mexico they kind of dropped here and, so they've kind of changed."

"All the wealthy people"

Frank hopes to become an auto mechanic after high school and has his concept of what achieving this goal entails. "Well, I guess after you finish high school you work for a garage to get experience. You wouldn't get paid as much. You work there and in five years you get your exam." Frank is planning to enroll in automotive courses at the high school and knows someone from a similar background who is currently working in an apprenticeship program. He explains how he arrived at this career goal: "I don't know. I figured I would probably never be a businessman or anything. I'm not really into that type of stuff. So I thought [auto mechanic] would be a good job." Frank mentions that his father works in a local factory and when asked whether he has his parents' support for his career goal, Frank states simply, "We never really talk about it. Well, they want me to be real rich. They'd probably support me whatever I would do, unless it would be too bad of a job; factory or low pay or something."

Frank seems to agree that earning a good wage is important. He says that his role models would be, "just basically rich people. I don't know, all the wealthy people with...smart guys and stuff." Asked if



auto-mechanics would bring him the kind of lifestyle he has in mind, Frank replies, "Hmm, not really. But it would be a beginning." Where would he go from there? "I don't know, probably own my own shop or something."

Frank sees the importance of school in reaching his goal. "I guess take the proper courses. I guess you have to be a pretty good student, in some cases in order to do some of those." He seems confident in his own ability to complete his schooling through Grade 12. "Ya. I'll probably make it. Uhh, maybe a ninety percent chance that I won't [drop out]." Frank is determined that a part time job or eventual car ownership will not deter him from his goal. However he admits that his present social life interferes with school work to some extent. "Well, I usually hang around with somebody. I usually get home late from school. I just come home for supper and then leave again." One reason for this may be Frank's being one year behind his peers. "Most of my friends are already at high school. I don't know, they're not the most popular people around." His circle of friends includes immigrant as well as Winkler youth. "Most of them...well, a few were born in Mexico, but they lived here all their lives. Sort of a mix." Asked whether his Mexican background has ever been a concern for him,

Frank responds, "No. I don't really care. Most of the people are from there here in Winkler

### Neil's Story

Neil is a fourteen year old Grade 7 student who describes a transient lifestyle which, while extreme, is not uncommon to Latin American Mennonite immigrant families. Neil is candid in his assumptions concerning gender roles within the immigrant family; a latent premise in most of the interviews. While Neil's parents do not always understand the school system, they encourage and support the children's education.

Neil was born in Mexico but, unlike many of the other immigrant students interviewed, lived in that country only until the age of three. Consequently he has had all his schooling either in the United States or in Canada. Neil's mother died several years ago and his father has since remarried. Neil's stepmother has lived in Mexico all her life.

Neil begins: "I was born in Mexico and then lived there till I was three. And then we moved to the States [Oklahoma]. Just some of our relatives [lived there]. And then we worked on the farm there. On a dairy farm and then, in Plum Coulee for about six months I think and then here to Winkler." Neil

attended school while in Plum Coulee. "Grade one I think. One or two. So and then we moved here to Winkler and then stayed here for five years. I was up to Grade 5, just beginning of Grade 5. And then we moved back to the States to Oklahoma and Weatherford, there again. Then we moved to Kansas and there at Liberal and then back here."

Neil goes on to explain the reason for the frequent moves. "My dad wanted to become a farmer in the States but, and then we had found some land there, about three hundred acres. Really nice land and it was three thousand [dollars] I think, for... and then we couldn't afford that right then. And then, my dad asked my grandparents [stepmother's parents] if they would lend us some. My grandparents didn't like the land. Then we had paid about ten thousand [dollars] already just for, ummm [downpayment] or whatever. And then the grandparents didn't lend us the money for it, because they didn't like it. They wanted us to live here in Canada. My dad doesn't want to. My grandpa said this was very good land here. It was nice and straight. But it's a lot cheaper in the States than here. So we lost all that money and then we had to come back. They didn't give it back."

Because he left at the age of three, Neil has few recollections of Mexico. "Oh, I can remember some stuff that my dad said. Like I'd often, like when he'd work on the fields I'd have to go with him. I had to go with him on the tractor 'cause snakes and everything and stuff like that. So I often slept on his lap while he was driving." However the family has frequently returned to Mexico for visits. "I've been there about five more times I'd say. Usually in summer holidays." A visit usually lasts about two weeks and they stay with an uncle. Neil notes the cultural differences. "Oh, they live quite differently than we do. The houses and stuff like that and the food. Almost everything is different there." He concludes: "No, I wouldn't want to move back. Maybe my mom, because she's the one who lived in Mexico for all her life except for three years, she lived with us. She might, but I don't think my dad would."

**"You get used to it"**

Neil admits that all the family moves have made school more difficult. "Oh, it's pretty ummm... you feel lonesome in school, but after a while you get used to it and then. I got used to it already." In Neil's opinion, school was very similar in the United States

and Canada. "It was actually almost the same. A couple of stuff was different." He has done his best to make the repeated social adjustments required by these moves. "It was pretty good. Better than I thought it would be. I always try to be nice to them and then we knew each other a bit better, like on that. The last time we moved to the States I really didn't want to but and then we had to. It was right in the beginning of this year. And then we moved to Oklahoma. There we went to a little town there for, till about half the year and moved to a bigger city. And then I had to go in that year to three different schools. Had to get used to all the different styles of what they did. It was pretty good though." Neil concludes that he does not spend much time looking back on difficult times but rather looks ahead.

### **"Stay with the crowd"**

Today most of Neil's friends are, "kids who are born in Winkler. When I tell them where I'm born they would never believe it that I was born there. I look much different." Neil reflects on the problems faced by Mexican immigrant children. "Well, they get teased a lot about their clothing and stuff like that. We're all human beings." Although Neil says he has never had

that problem, he states, "Actually I've heard it every year at school, the teasing." Asked whether he's ever been a part of it, he admits rather sheepishly, "To say the truth, ya I have. I guess to stay with the crowd; peer pressure." Neil remembers the conscious effort he made to fit in. "Oh ya, I often told my parents to buy such and such clothing. Although his parents have supported him for the most part, Neil has sensed reluctance at times. "Ya, like some clothing that we kids want, to them it's so ugly and everything. And some hair styles, to them it's pretty gross."

**"Girls don't build houses"**

Favorite subjects at school include IA and gym. He continues, "Math is pretty good and Science. But English and Social, don't really care about. In Social I get good enough, passing and in English good enough too, but I just don't like them. I don't think there's any use for them. Or in English probably, but in Social..." Neil recognizes some Industrial Arts applications for the Math he learns. "Oh ya, like all the measurement you would have to, and the angles." However he sees no need for Home Economics classes for boys. "I don't think I need Home Ec. because it's for girls anyways." He qualifies his need for cooking

knowledge. "Well in cooking ya probably but I might just always dine out when I'm older. In sewing I wouldn't really care if...just buy new clothes." Then Neil reveals the possible source of his bias. "My dad doesn't think that I need any Home Ec. and stuff like that and my sister [doesn't need] IA. Like girls, you don't usually see them go building on a house or something."

There seems to be some misunderstanding of the school system with regard to issues such as homework. "I barely ever have homework. My mom, she doesn't say anything but my dad says, 'Well, it's school work. It should be done at school and not at home,' and stuff like that. Sometimes he blames it on us kids for not getting it finished. And then he gets pretty upset that we don't get it finished at school." Father appears to think that the children are not working in school and that's why they have homework. "That's what he thinks a lot. Like some teachers they talk for almost the whole period and then they...you have five minutes left and then they give you a huge assignment and the rest you have to do at home. [My dad] hasn't gone through so many years like we have. He's old fashioned and we're, I guess, new fashioned."

Beyond such incidents, there seems to be little sharing of school related issues in the home. "I don't ever share at home. Only around report card day. Then they start asking. That's about it. We never talk about school at home; barely ever." Even where Neil's parents have had concerns about curriculum, they have said little. "Once you get into the Grade 9 Health I think the sex education they wouldn't agree [with]. AIDS [education] we've had. My little sister, she's in Grade 5 now, she was last year. And for Health they had AIDS too, and my parents thought she was a little too young. But they still let her have the classes. I know they don't appreciate it much but they don't talk about it."

Neil's parents have attended Parent-Teacher interviews in the past but have not gone recently. Neil's impression is that it has not been a particularly good experience for his parents. "I don't think so. They don't really talk about it much. They just say what the teachers say to them and that's about it. They don't go because, not any more, because they are scared that they're...like usually...bad stuff that teachers tell them and stuff like that." Neil elaborates, "Some teachers always say I just want the attention. I guess that's true. I guess I'm the clown



or something like that." In spite of his parents' concerns, Neil concludes, "I'm pretty sure that they want me to stay in school."

**"Don't want to be a bum"**

Neil will enter Grade 8 in fall and has intentions of completing high school. "I think I will. I want to go all the way. I don't want to be a bum or anything like that...dropout. Because it's so important to have an education. If you don't have it you don't make money or nothing." Neil continues, "Like in town I know lots of guys that, like they're not relatives but they're not friends either, but like they just come into crime and stuff like that and I don't want that." And his parents encourage him in the present setting. "Well, they always say I'm supposed to try my best and stuff like that. When I get...fail a test or something they say, 'Well, you know you could have done better. You should have studied more,' stuff like that."

Neither of Neil's parents have been involved in English education classes although Neil suggests that his father has some interest in up-grading. "He would like it but I guess his reading and writing are that he can't do. I've often told him that he should go to school and then you get paid for going to school. I

told him to do that and he doesn't say anything. He just tries to change the subject right away or something." Like other immigrant children, Neil finds himself having to help his father with his English. "Oh, all the time we have to read letters and stuff. He just tells me to read it and then, and asks me what it means and then...well sometimes he can understand it, what it means and then, that's it. [Phone calls] they can handle themselves."

Neil senses his parents' support for a high school education while at the same time he is aware of their concerns. "Drugs and stuff like that. They don't want to really talk about it but I'm pretty sure that they do [have concerns]. One time, at the dinner table, we were talking about it once. And they were talking about all the drugs that were there and stuff like that. And my dad said, 'If that keeps on going I don't think our kids will go to high school.'" But Neil seems bound to continue. "I guess they're just going to have to live with it." Asked about alternatives, Neil expresses his determination. "I think I'd still go. I think I'm going to go through college too." There is also some indication that Neil's parents support post-secondary education. "Well, when I was younger, then they once said that they were saving up

for college. But now they don't talk about it any more."

Parental support for Neil's education may also be evident in the fact that there has been no significant pressure for him to get a part time job. If he were to earn money Neil states, it would be shared, "half and half. We'd give half to our parents and half we can keep." Neil feels that this arrangement is not really fair and explains. "'Cause, like my dad always goes, 'We have to pay for food and everything.' I've often wanted to tell him, 'Well, it wasn't our fault that we came.'" Asked when he might begin looking for part time work, Neil responds, "Well, I'm trying to get some now but, probably when I'm a little older." And if work ever began interfering with school, "I'd have to quit one of them. I wouldn't want to quit any of them. I'd probably quit the job first."

#### **"Truck driver or IA teacher"**

It is evident that Neil has given some thought to possible career goals. "Well, I want to be two things maybe. I might be an IA teacher or a truck driver. I just love trucks. I want to become [a driver]. [Also] I love building. I think that'd be great, to be [an IA teacher]." Asked why he would want to be a teacher

instead of a carpenter, Neil continues, "Well then you wouldn't have to be out in the hot sun all day. It would be fun to meet so many kids, I guess." He also points to a role model. "Like in IA when I see Mr. P. working there, he looks pretty exciting and stuff like that, and I'd like to be that. He's a very nice teacher and I'd like to be that." Going on, Neil says, "When we go cruising around a little bit, like when we see people building new houses, that looks pretty fun, like...and some people might think I'm pretty strange, seeming to look like that would be fun, building in the hot sun or something, but I think it would be fun."

Neil considers what would help him reach these goals. "For an IA teacher you need pretty well lots of schooling." And beyond that, "Build stuff and stuff like that. Like at home, we've built quite a few stuff. Like, we've built some fences and this past week I was at DVBS [Daily Vacation Bible School], that's our church club thing for a week, and we built some wood work there."

According to Neil, the support of his parents is important to him and he has shared his goal with them on more than one occasion. "I often tell them that I want to be a truck driver or an IA teacher. When I tell them I want to be a truck driver then they go,

'Well, then that wouldn't be very nice if you're married, then just leave your wife at home and you're on the road all the time.' I tell them I wouldn't get married or take the wife with everywhere I go." When Neil shares his goal of becoming an IA teacher, "They don't say much about that." But he feels they would be excited about the possibility, "because then I'd have a decent life." For both Neil and his parents this means, "You've got to get an education."

#### Margaret's Story

Margaret is a fourteen year old Grade 7 student who has lived in Canada with her parents and only sister for the past seven years. In this interview Margaret suggests that what is most important in schools is that teachers demonstrate a caring attitude. She shares the common experience of immigrant children, helping her parents communicate in English, interpreting for them and reading the mail. Margaret values her parents' support for her education and is particularly encouraged by the example of her mother who has attended English classes in the past.

Although the family moved to Canada permanently seven years ago, Margaret did have an earlier exposure to Canadian culture. She explains: "Okay, well I was

born out there [Mexico] and when I was about three or four years old we moved over here. And then we moved back out there after two years. One time we moved; ya one time I think we were living at my grandma's house [and then] we had our own house. [Dad] worked in a factory thing. It was where he made some kind of machines. I think we moved back here when I was seven." When they moved back to Manitoba for the last time, Margaret continues, "We lived with relatives in Morden for about a month and then we lived in Carman with some other relatives for about two weeks and then we moved to Winkler."

The family maintains contact with relatives in Mexico and travels back for visits on a regular basis. "Ya, every other summer. No longer than two weeks. We were there last summer." And when they go, Margaret's wardrobe changes. "I wear dresses, but not the kind that I used to." Asked to elaborate, she continues, "Because like, I feel if we wear pants, like all eyes on me, right. Just like if I come here, like if a newcomer comes from out there. Like they feel the same way if we come like that out there."

Having attended school for only one year in Mexico, Margaret's recollections are vague. "Well, there weren't grades. I don't know, they didn't have

regular classes. They had religious...like Bible. Sometimes there was like fun activity; like you had those little chalk plates [slates]. [You would] practise writing your name like if you're little, and the alphabet. The older kids used it for drawing but the little kids use it for the alphabet and practising writing their name. Mainly writing things you did was write your name and the alphabet, that's all. That's what I remember."

Margaret's one room school had approximately forty students and one teacher. "We sat biggest to smallest. I sat right in the back. Girls on one side and boys on the other, and strict teachers. They carry a strap over their back. One time I was just saying something to my neighbor here and pretty soon I feel this thing across the back. The guys and girls could not play together at recess time. If one group of girls wanted to play one game then of course you have to go too, right; like they make you play their game. The guys, they got to play like football or soccer. But the girls they just had, I don't know, Ring Around the Rosey and Duck, Duck, Goose, stuff like that, right. Drop the Hanky."

"People don't accept you"

Like others, Margaret remembers that getting started in a new culture was not easy. "Well, I think I started a little late and then I had to stay back." This meant one and a half years in Grade 1. "[It was] difficult because you didn't know what the person beside you was saying or the teacher. Like no one would speak German." Margaret spent part of every day with the ESL teacher and concludes that it was helpful. She also had the support of a teacher assistant as late as Grade 5. And beyond the difficulties with language, "Well, people like don't accept you the way they accept the other kids right. [But] I think in Grade 2 I knew pretty well what I was doing." Margaret explains what made the difference. "I don't know, probably the change of clothing. Like when I started in Grade 1 I wore dresses but closer to the end I wore pants." Margaret had her parents' support in the matter but she does not agree with this pressure to make accommodations for the sake of acceptance. "No. Because I know, sometimes when other people move here like, I really think, 'Oooh, those Mexicans are here,' right. That's how I feel but I've grown out of that. Like some people they treat Mexican people really bad. I used to be just like them [Mexican immigrants] and I



didn't like the way people treated me then so I don't want to treat people like that either."

Margaret remembers the teasing and name calling all too well. "Well, at first we moved here, I thought I'd wear what I felt like wearing so I went to school and this happened. I come to school and all these kids are just here laughing at me and calling me names. I went back home and I changed; changed part of it but that didn't change the language."

Today Margaret receives no more abuse and she reflects upon the role of the teacher in curbing such behavior on the part of other students. "Be more stricter about it, like the name calling and teasing." She agrees that it is useful for the teacher to talk to the class, "because it would teach them all then. If it's not the whole class, that doesn't help nothing to talk to that person individually. Like some teachers, it seems like they don't care what's happening outside. They probably know it's happening but they ignore it. [Teachers should] not just go up to them and say, 'Don't do it again,' but really talk it through. Like take it seriously." However, Margaret cautions that teachers should not mention names, "because then you might really get embarrassed." Most important for Margaret is to sense that teachers care. "It depends

what kind of teacher I had. Like, some teachers were nicer than the other ones. They really care what's happening to you. They talk through it, about what's happening, like the name calling."

**"Friends are different"**

Margaret admits to some difficulty with friendships at school and acknowledges that her circle of friends here is different from the one she is a part of after school. "Well, they're different people. Because like, the people I hang around with [at school], like during Grade 7, I don't know, in other words, I can't stand them. Because like, they always talk behind my back and I didn't like that." Margaret's after school friends are Mexican immigrant children like herself and she explains: "Like I still hang around with them in school sometimes. Like I walk to school with them but they're in different classes, so I can't spend so much time with them."

In other ways, Margaret's concerns about school seem to be those which are typical for any junior high school student. "Well, friends you know. Like they all of a sudden just want to not be your friend any more, so that gets you worried and then you can't concentrate on your school work." Test anxiety is also

mentioned. "Like when big tests come, like you really worry and then when you finally study, by the next morning it seems like you have forgotten everything. And then you think you're going to fail it and then you're really worried."

"If you don't graduate"

School has a high priority for Margaret. "Because if you don't get your school education then it doesn't help you nothing for the future. Like, if you don't graduate then you can't find a decent job. Like my parents, they both didn't graduate, so my mom works in a sewing factory and my dad works at Triple E [a local manufacturer]." Margaret adds that, while her mother is experiencing employment difficulty related to medical concerns, "My dad [is] happy with his job. Dad is satisfied with the work he does." Margaret is determined to complete Grade 12 and shares her opinion concerning those who drop out. "I think they're nuts." Would anything deter Margaret? "No. Like maybe if I get my driver's [licence] and I get a car but I still want to graduate and get a decent job."

While she is hopeful of getting part time employment next year Margaret puts school work first. "I'd rather quit the job than the school work." Her

parents are not opposed to a part time job for their daughter but at the same time are not insistent.

"Well, they say if I'm ready for it then it's okay with them." How would the income be divided? "Well, I have to give some of it to my parents because like, they feed me and buy the clothing. I think I get to keep twenty-five percent and seventy-five goes to them. If I keep all of it I would feel kind of guilty, you know. Because they do everything for me."

Margaret lists IA and gym as favorite subjects. She likes woodworking and was glad to help her father remodel the basement of their home. "When we moved to our place it was like empty and dry and hot and so now we have split it into rooms. When my dad works downstairs I can always help him cut." Margaret enjoys Social Studies but dislikes Math and Science. "I don't know, I don't like Science because I'm not into space and frog work and stuff like that." She also shares her opinion of Language Arts. "I like Language Arts but not writing stories. Like sometimes when they tell us to write a story about a problem and a solution or stuff like that, it's hard for me. Like I don't like writing stories." Margaret sums up by saying, "I like school the way it is."

It appears that in spite of some questions, Margaret's parents support schooling for their daughter. Their concerns include, "drugs and guys, or stuff like that, not just for high school but otherwise too. Like all these different things happening in the world. Because one of my sister's friends, she's fourteen and she just had a baby." Margaret has not been held back from taking potentially controversial classes such as AIDS education either. "I'm allowed to [take it] because my parents like that idea." Margaret seems sure of her parents' interest in her education. "They always ask me how I'm doing in school and then what I do in school. Like, when I have tests I always talk about it and then, like in the morning then I tell my mom or, like the night before. The next evening she asks me how I do on it." Margaret explains why her parents interest and support is important to her. "Well, [it] shows that your parents care. Or that they don't want me to end up like they did."

**"They're our parents"**

Margaret describes the situation in her home. "You could say my parents they both speak a little English but it doesn't sound the way we speak. Like we speak English to them but they speak German back to us."

Like they understand, but they can't speak it."

Margaret explains that because her parents read no English, she and her sister read all mail for them, "[but] phone calls they handle themselves." She is quick to point out the logical reason for her parents' academic deficit. "Because out there when they went to school in those days they never had Social, Science or Health. They never worried about their health." And she dispels any thought of awkward feelings associated with helping her parents with their English. "Because they're our parents. There's nothing to be embarrassed about." Margaret adds that her mother has taken some English classes in the past. "Ya, my mom did once. Like she can write short sentences. She can read short sentences. And she can talk, like build stuff. Like not heavy duty. ...I don't know about my dad, but my mom sure would [be interested in taking more classes]. Like she's really interested in learning more."

**"I'm going to become a nurse"**

The support Margaret receives in the home and the example of her mother's own interest in further education are reflected in Margaret's attitude regarding future employment. "Well, like a good job is when you like it and a bad job when you don't like it

or when you don't want to do it." The consideration of money is added almost as an afterthought. And Margaret has a goal in mind. "I think I'm going to become a nurse. It sounds interesting; sounds like fun. I wanted to be a nurse already for a long time."

Margaret explains that part of her inspiration has come from watching the nurses at work when she has visited her mother in the hospital. She has also had a role model. "Well, one of my TAs, like in my class, Grade 5, she took...she stopped teaching during Christmas time and then she went to nursing school." Margaret has shared this goal with her parents and feels confident of their support. "They say, like, it's very interesting. They're proud of me."

#### George's Story

George came to Canada at age eleven and at age thirteen has just completed Grade 7. He is the most recent arrival of the immigrant children to be interviewed. Consequently George's experience of the criticism and teasing of other students is more immediate and the inevitable frustration and hurt more poignant. Being relatively new to Winkler it appears George and his parents are more easily swayed by misleading and false rumors about the school system.

More so than the others, this interview highlights the fact that the older children of immigrant families are expected to work and contribute toward the financial maintenance of the family.

George's English is somewhat labored and he finds it necessary to answer in Low German\* on several occasions. He is still struggling with the adjustments of his move to Winkler and his thoughts about life here are often tentative and uncertain. "I came here at first and then I was eleven, and then we moved to Mexico a little bit yet and then we came back here again." When asked about the move back George explains that there were actually two extended visits back to Mexico after the move to Canada, one lasting a month, the other two months.

**"Getting 'stretched across'"**

George had almost completed his schooling in Mexico when the family emigrated and he remembers: "There you don't have grades. There you just have a big room with all the kids in there. About forty of them. Two teachers. On one side there were girls and the other side boys. If we do [look at the girls] then

\*Translation in italics.



we have to go to the girl's side and say sorry. That's pretty bad. I hate that. ...Like the teacher said we weren't supposed to look at them. And if we did we had to go over there and ask if we suddenly had things too good."

Corporal punishment was used for more serious misbehavior. "Like when they make trouble or something; tease somebody. Then they *get stretched across* [spanked]. Sometimes we say bad words and then we get a strap." George explains that the instrument of choice in his school was a big leather belt taken from a sewing machine. School discipline was further reinforced in the home. "*If [my parents] knew it then I would get it at home too.*" George admits that the frequency of this punishment for him was "about once a week." Another form of punishment seems to have been more favored by students since it released them from regular school work for a time. "There was a big bench in front of all the kids and then we have to go and sit there. Just sit, and we laughed at what the other kids are doing. That was good."

The recess break offered another reprieve from classroom work. "And then there was recess for about ten minutes. Just in the afternoon. The kids just play. We play, I don't know what it's called in

English... 'Faustjegriepa' [Prisoner's Base]. Like two people are standing here and then one group has to run and then whenever they get one then they have to go to the side. ...The girls on that side [of the school] and the boys on this side."

The school curriculum appears basic and straight forward. Math included practice in addition and subtraction, "multiplying and dividing, that's all." For writing class, "They have a big paper and then they have a writing on there and then we have to look at it and print it in our books." George explains that children also worked on slates. His summary of the reading program agrees with other children. "First when they started they had like a 'Fibel' [reader] and second Catechism and third have Testament. That's all."

Reading at the upper level was from the Bible; "Just all kinds of stuff and then we have to read it. And then when I did that and then it was the end of school for me. Thirteen." It appears George is thinking ahead in his explanation here because he adds, "I just missed the Bible because then we were here [in Canada]." Reading however seems to have taken up a good part of the school day. Whether it was from the primer, the Catechism, Testament or the Bible, everyone

read by turns and the others listened. "Like there were students there and then everybody has to read it. *Always a little further.* You had to listen. Like the girls, they have to read in the Bible too. First they did the girls and then the boys. And Catechism, girls and boys, and like that all that kind of stuff."

George adds, "*We have to write out of the...we had to read and write, both.*"

#### "Big kids don't like me"

George seems to have pleasant memories of growing up in Mexico. Life for him was a blend of school, chores and playing with friends. "*We always cleaned the cow barn,*" George states and there is the sense that this responsibility was accepted without complaint. Since homework was never assigned there was ample time for play in the evenings.

By contrast, George's experience here in Winkler has not always been a happy one and he dreams of moving back. "I like going to school in Mexico better than here. Because there they don't bug us like they do here and that kind of stuff. Some kids call [us] Mexicans and all kinds of stuff. I hate that. And they throw erasers at me and all that kind of stuff. [They tease me about] the way I talk and sometimes they

say I have to take a bath more often. And I always take...three times, I think...four times a week a bath. Four times a week. And then sometimes they say, 'You have girls' pants and you stink. George, don't stink up the whole school.' And then [a student] drew a picture of me and he write all kinds of names and all that kind of stupid on there and that's what I don't like. I feel bad. Then I always get mad."

George speculates that this treatment stems from his being different, "And because they hate me. I don't like them either." It has not escaped George's notice that his younger siblings enjoy their school experience and that his sister in Grade 2 is not plagued by the problems he has encountered. Asked to comment on this he replies, "I don't know. Maybe the little kids like her better. Like the big kids don't like me and maybe the little kids like her better than somebody else or something. Maybe little kids are better than big kids."

George readily admits the anger and hurt he feels as a result of the harsh treatment he receives from some of the other students. He outlines his strategy for dealing with these situations. "Then I just be quiet until the teacher comes and then I tell. Sometimes [these students] have to go to the principal.

And sometimes the teacher talks about it and then they stop for a little while and then they start again." George can think of no other solutions to the problem but he expresses confidence in the way teachers deal with these incidents and he believes that teachers genuinely care about him.

It is clear that Georges' parents have also become frustrated with the situation at times. They have discussed the matter with George and he states that, "If [the children] will do that again then I don't have to come to school ever again." The school response has been a visitation to the home. "Well, I think they have talk to the principal once. Ya, like Mrs. K [home-school liaison worker] and the principal were, the last month or when it was, at our house and then my mom and dad talked about all that. Sometimes they say I have to go to school [but], 'If the kids bug you, you don't have to go to school ever.'"

Apart from an understandable concern about the teasing their son receives George's parents appear to support schooling for their children. Furthermore, George states that both his parents have expressed an interest in attending adult classes in order to learn English. "I think that they want to stay in Manitoba. Like there they can't have a job like here. There they

just have like working for other people. Like hoeing beans and that kind of stuff." Here they feel they can get better employment. "Yes, like working at some place...like there where they're making house trailers and stuff like that."

**"All sorts of nonsense"**

Like other immigrant parents, George's parents express some concerns about high school education. Asked how far he will take his education George replies, "Just till Grade 8. I don't want to go to high school." He quickly adds, *"My mom and dad said I couldn't go there."* His own fear: "There are too big kids. I'm too little." But there are also fallacious stories which have influenced his parents' opinion. *"What the kids always did here...had to go to school naked...taking art or something, and all sorts of nonsense I've heard. ...They said, the kids said they had to smoke or something like that. And that I didn't want to do."* Upon investigation it appears that George has been given false information about nudity in art classes and smoking in school. After the school policy has been explained to George he concludes, with reference to his informants, "Well, then they're dumb kids."

**"Feeling dumb"**

George thinks back to the experience of a brand new start in a Grade 5 class in Winkler at the age of eleven with no knowledge of English and sums up the way he felt, in a word, "Dumb." However, he began learning quickly. *"The teacher knew a little bit of German and then I would always say it in German and he would say it in English and so we continued on and I could learn to speak English in this way."* George adds that he has received ESL help from the start to the present time. "I think about one hour," every day at the beginning. Since then he has had the help of a Teacher Assistant.

**"We don't have enough money"**

The subjects which George enjoys are Art, ESL, IA and Gym. He is particularly proud of a small wooden stool he built as his IA project this year. However, he didn't quite finish this work. "Because I had to hoe beets this year and then I didn't finish all of it. But the other kids did." George explains that he missed two weeks of school in June in order to help his father in the beet fields even though he would rather have been at school. Like other immigrant children George is expected to pay a substantial portion of his income to his father. "Well, I can keep two dollars a

day. And now I got already a hundred and two bucks." He adds that part of that sum comes from mowing lawns as well. However, George expresses his displeasure both at having to share his income and at missing school. "It bugs me if I can't keep all the money and if I can't go to school something, like if I have Art and that." At the same time he expresses his sense that things are difficult for the family financially. "Like we don't have sometimes enough money. We have to borrow some money and that."

George finds Mathematics hard and Science beyond understanding. "Science? There I just always sit and watch what the other people are doing and listen because I didn't know how to do that." He does talk about his school experiences with his parents and seems to have their support. "My mom and dad say, 'Well, you should keep trying.' And then we will understand all that kind of stuff."

It appears that George has not given much serious thought to the future in terms of employment. Among his choices of career: artist, "Like painting. Like if there is a big hill, painting all that kind of stuff;" carpenter, "Like in IA. Like [building] a house and all kinds of stuff;" and farmer, although he has no idea how he might get started. He is equally ambiguous



about the prospects of his completing high school. "It could happen but I don't know. Maybe then we'll move to Mexico or something and then it won't. I don't know." And although he earlier expressed a desire to move back, he now admits some reluctance. "Like if I couldn't learn all of that like the other kids could. I like having a job and that." George states that as he learns more English his situation is improving. "Yes, it's getting better." He concludes that high school graduation is something that could happen for him and that his parents would be happy to see it. Somehow his words are not convincing.

#### Eva's Story

This final interview touches on several common themes. Eva expresses a strong sense of closeness with and responsibility toward her family. She reflects the tendency of immigrant children to devalue their own abilities and skills. As demonstrated in the majority of interviews there is little communication between students and parents regarding the school experience. It also becomes apparent how poverty limits choices for these children.

Eva is a thirteen year old Grade 7 student. She was born in Mexico but moved to the United States when

she was only nine months old and she has not lived in Mexico since. Although she has no recollection of that country, to this day she experiences the stigma of belonging to a family of Mexican Mennonite immigrants. Furthermore, she must constantly balance the influences of an immigrant home with those of the community and school in which she functions.

Not given to lingering on things past, Eva explains her family's history of moves briefly and with little detail. "Well, we used to live in Mexico and then we moved to the States. Like the first time we went there [U.S.] I think it was about four or five years and then we came here and then we lived here about four years, and then we went back to the States one year and then here another one and a half, I think. I don't know. I don't keep track of where we lived." She has also attended a number of different schools. "Well, first we went to Plum Coulee school for kindergarten. Then we came to J. R. [another Winkler elementary school] to Grade 1. And then [Grades] 2, 3, 4, 6, we went there [J. R.] and 7 here. In Grade 5 I was in Kansas and then we only lived in Kansas for a year. Then we wanted to move back."

As a result of regular family visits back to Mexico she has some experience with that country.

"Well, we usually [went back] about once a year but now we haven't for a while. We've always gone for two weeks. [We stay] at my grandparents' house and relatives if they want us to stay there. It's fun. I barely know them though 'cause I've only met them once 'cause this is our second mom, and I've only met them once and it's kind of nervous." What stands out in Eva's mind? "I find it really weird is that the little eight year olds, they drive to school with cars and all that."

Although Eva learned English when she lived in the U.S. she also received ESL help when she arrived in Manitoba. "Ya, I did. Not before I came to Winkler but when I was in Winkler then I did. Grade 4 and 6 I think I did. [My English was good] but like, I always had trouble putting it into sentences. And then I needed help for that. Just one class a day. And then that's it. I find it pretty easy now."

**"I'd like to graduate"**

Eva expresses some sense of determination about school. "Ya, it's important to me. Because then I can get a better education and I want to have a good job when I grow up. I'd like to graduate [from] Grade 12." Her parents appear to support a high school education

but have some reservations. "Ya, they want me to do well in school but like, high school they're not sure of. ...Because my grades are a bit low and then they want me to just like, go on with my school year and see if I can do better. ...They talked about it once and that was because of all the drugs and all that in there. I don't know what they meant, but like they just didn't really want me to go. But I think they want me to go now. And I want to graduate."

Eva's parents hear the inevitable stories which put them on their guard about the high school. " 'Cause my mom works here [school cleaning lady] and then all the ladies tell her and then she always tells my dad and then my dad worries about it." Eva has her own opinion about the stories. "Well, it depends how bad they are. Some of them I believe but some of them I don't believe. I heard one time that this guy flushed this other guy down the toilet, like a 'swirly'. And I believe that. ...But like I forget all the things [my parents] said about drugs. They don't really say it in front of us. But they just say there's all these sorts of things happening in the high school. And we don't want you to go there and all that. [But] they'll let us go."

Mother and father show their concern for schooling "when the report card comes, like on tests and all that. And then when I tell them I had kind of a low mark and my mom kind of gets upset. So I have to kind of get my grades up. They just say, do my best and don't give up and all that." The apparent motivation for this: "Well, they want me to get As and Bs so I can get a better job when I grow up. We need money."

**"Just a good job"**

Eva's thinking around the theme of work is not focused but offers some insights. "I just want a good job. Where I can get minimum, or like just enough money so it pays. Like so I can help my parents with all the things that they've helped me. And I don't know, just so it's enough money so I can pay for everything. And just have fun doing it. I'd like the job to be fun and not too hard. ...It wouldn't really matter [if the job were physical] but depends what it is though. Like something that I can barely do. Like if I keep on bending down my back starts hurting and I can't do that." Are there examples within Eva's circle of acquaintances that she can follow? "Not really, because like my relatives they just, they're just like, almost exactly like my mom and dad and I don't want to

be like my mom and dad. My dad has done welding all his life and I wouldn't like to do that. But I like my mom's job which she does [cleaning lady]. I would like to work in a school."

Eva continues with other types of work that might interest her. "Well, I'd like to work, like in the hospital with babies. I would see myself working with little kids because I love little kids and they're very cute so I would like to work with them. Like a nurse kind of thing." However, reality in Eva's mind is something different. "I wouldn't [become a nurse] because I wouldn't go to college and university and all that." She has considered college. "Ya, I have thought about it. Like one of my neighbors used to go to college. I've thought about what it would be like and all that." Her conclusion: "Scary. Because like, I know I wouldn't be able to make it through because I'm not a person for As and Bs. Because like, school is very hard for me and I know I wouldn't be able to make it through college or university. I know it wouldn't work."

The alternative for Eva: "Well, I'd just like to be a housewife or something like that." Although she concludes with, "Just stay home," she admits a need to have some form of outside work. "Ya. I would like a

job outside the home. Like, whatever I can get or something. I would like to work in a restaurant or be a waitress; something like that." While Eva senses her parents' support for each possibility, she has not been helped to establish a clear direction. "Well ya, I think [they support me]. Because my dad was the one that wanted me to be a nurse with kids and he wanted like, he wanted me to be a waitress. And I think he wants me to marry and just have a normal family." Eva is concerned about pleasing her parents with the choices she makes, "Because like I don't want to get them mad and then they would be mad at me for the rest of my life."

**"It's hard to catch on"**

Eva reflects on her current school experience. Industrial Arts is her favorite subject, "'Cause I like working with wood. And I find it very fun, working." Interestingly, Eva enjoys her French class and says she would like to learn to speak the language fluently. "Ya, I would. That would be pretty weird, but I would. Because like, my dad always talks Spanish and then I can always talk French to him. Like then he doesn't know what I'm saying."

Eva lists Mathematics as her least favorite subject, "Because I'm very bad at Math. Because I don't know how to do it. It's kind of reading the problem and it's working the numbers. Because like, I really, I can't catch on to it that well. It's hard for me to catch on. I find fractions very difficult." Furthermore, it is Eva's opinion that some teachers are selective in their help for students. "It depends if [the students] are from Mexico. Like if they're from Canada then I think [the help] is general, but if they're from Mexico then I think they kind of get ignored. Because like, in Math, my teacher never really helps me. I've noticed that [with other immigrant kids] too. I don't know. Maybe the teachers are too lazy to help."

Language Arts presents another area of difficulty for Eva, sometimes leading to a moral dilemma. "Like, we always read short stories and, I've understood the story and everything but I always forget the story and then I have to read it all over again. And by that time it's already due and all that. I find it very hard to do the questions of the short stories. And I can't do them and then I always just have to copy off another person and I don't want to do that. And then it's like really hard for me to do."



"There are hard times"

Eva's parents appear to give mixed messages with regard to schooling. "They want us to learn it all. They want us to know about school. But there are like really hard times that I can't get my dad to let me do the things, but he always lets me anyway. Like in school, you have to pay for everything, like Industrial Arts, right. And my dad really doesn't want to pay for it because like, he thinks the school should pay for it and all that. He does anyway but he doesn't really want to [give me the money] though. Then I have to work on him pretty hard."

When asked about things that interfere with her learning, Eva becomes candid. "Well, there used to be when my dad kept on drinking. Because like, my dad didn't work and I would never know what he would do at home. And like, my mom was always at home and I would, like I wouldn't know what he was going to do to her, or something like that. I was scared." Eva explains that her father has since been attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and that things are now much better. "Now there's nothing really."

There are times when Eva has difficulty accepting a concept presented in school that does not quite mesh with the view at home. Corporal punishment is one

example. "Well, like we don't learn about abusing and I don't find anything wrong about, like some people think it's wrong. Like German people have been taught to spank their kids right. And then like, people from Canada, they don't believe in that so that's what really kind of worries me. Because I think that's how my dad was taught to do it and that's how he should but, I don't know. ...[You shouldn't spank] too hard but like, I think it's right. Not too hard, like not that they get bruises or anything but I think that that helps a lot. Just give them punishment." However, when the topic comes up for discussion in class, Eva is reluctant to share her view. "I don't just say anything. I'm just all quiet then."

Eva is similarly reluctant to share ideas from school at home. "Well, my dad doesn't really care. He's just here, 'Ya, whatever.' Then I don't really care to tell him." Neither are current events discussed. "My dad always knows about it already because in his work they always talk about it and then I don't probably talk about it then." Finally, are there occasions for Eva to debate an issue with her father? "Well, not really because like, if I do think [differently] then I'm quiet. I don't say anything

because then he always gets mad at me and I always get in trouble. So I just don't say anything."

### "Ugly clothing"

Eva and her parents have had their differences concerning the issue of clothes. "Well, at home [I wore dresses] but to school I wore pants. But they were kind of ugly clothing but my mom made me wear them so I had to. People would always tease me. Like I used to always just wear red and pink and that's really clashy. And then they would always tease me and I don't like that. I just didn't know why they were teasing me." Eva's talks with her parents did not change things substantially. "Well, I just told them that they would tease me and then they just said, 'Just leave them alone.' That's all they would say."

As Eva continues, her complaint becomes that of any adolescent. "My mom wanted me to wear dresses and well, like me and my sister used to always wear the same thing; exactly the same thing, every day. And I think that's pretty sickening, 'cause, the Bobsy Twins or something. ...Like, I always want to try and be in style and all that. But we don't have the money to buy all those clothes and then, I don't know, I just always have to wear all these yucky clothes. And all these

other girls are wearing these like beautiful dresses and I'm just all..." Eva admits that finances tend to limit decisions about clothing. "Because like, [my parents] just always go shop at the MCC [thrift shop] and the ugliest skirts and all that, they make me wear them. It's so gross."

Eva has considered buying her own clothes but that has not worked out. "Ya. I have some money that I've saved up already. [But] when I save it up then my dad always asks for it and then he never really gives it back. Well, he does but it takes kind of long. And then during that time, then I always want the money and that's when I really need it. And then I just can't spend it."

There is some pressure on Eva to get part time work, even odd jobs, in order to earn money. "Ya, my parents want me to work already now, because just see if I can mow lawns and all that." Eva shares another motivation. "I would just like a job so I can do something, not just sit around at home and watch TV and that." And if part time work were to interfere with school? "Then I'd want to quit the job or just take not even part time. But like I would think school is more important than a job." She concludes that her parents may not quite agree with this opinion. "I

think they would tell me to keep the job and stop visiting with my friends."

**"We're humans just like them"**

With this, Eva goes on to describe her friends. "Like the people I hang around with at school are more wilder than the outside friends. They're really rowdy and they just run down the halls and that's kind of embarrassing." Eva admits that the friends she spends her evenings with are not from the same group. Rather, "I think they're born, like J. is born in Mexico and I think A. is. And I think almost all of them are just like me, just from Mexico." Eva explains the reason for this distinction. "Because like my, like the group, S. and her group, like they have about seven people in their group and like, we used to be, I used to be in their group, like very good friends with them. But like they never, after school they never invited me over or anything. They just kept on ignoring me after school and at school they were always nice to me. And then like, I was just going to think, okay, fine, I was just going to drop out of the group. And then I decided to just go with J. and A.. Because they like, pay more attention to me." Asked to speculate on the situation Eva concludes, "I think it's because of my

background. I'm pretty sure it is. I don't know why, but I think it is. They won't tell me but I think it is that."

Eva's background has also made her the brunt of other people's insensitivity. "Ya, I think so, because lots of people they always tease me like, that I'm from Mexico and all that and I don't like that. Not [kids] in my class but people from high school like, some guys they always call me bad names, stuff like that. Like they just say swear words and all that, and I don't approve of that so I just ignore them. They think they're better and they think I'm way down there and I'm nothing and then they always think they're so good and then they tease me. I've seen like lots of people from Mexico get bugged." Eva seeks comfort in talking to her friends J. and A. but admits to the hurt. "Ya, it does [hurt]. I just wish they would stop. Like 'cause, I think we're humans just like them."

#### Summary

These eight stories show that Latin American Mennonite immigrant children share many common experiences. Those one might have expected include the vastly different school experience in Mexico, initial English language acquisition difficulties, prejudice

and lack of acceptance at the outset and parents' mistrust particularly of high school education.

Other outcomes would have been less predictable. These include the relative ease with which immigrant students seem to move into the system and the confidence that parents do place in teachers and school despite their concerns. The longer term exclusion of immigrant students by their Canadian-born peers is a more troubling conclusion. The next chapter will provide an analysis of these and other experiences drawn from the interviews.

## Chapter Four: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

### Discussion

The premise of this study was that the experience of Latin American Mennonite immigrant students could be understood in terms of competing cultural values; the more progressive majority group on one side, the traditional minority immigrant group on the other. It was further believed that this cultural 'clash' would be reflected in the way immigrant students talked about the themes of family, education and work. It must be stated at the outset that this view, at least in its original conception, is an inadequate one. It seems that many of the commonly held views regarding this immigrant group are unfounded and that with a degree of understanding, difficulties associated with their resettlement either disappear or are relocated. This analysis begins with a discussion of those aspects of the adaptation process which appeared as expected.

Many of the students interviewed have experienced a considerable number of family relocations, prompted most often by a desire for a better life. Mary's parents are typical, having moved to Canada in part at least to remove their daughter from influences they



found unacceptable. As Mary described it, "People drink there a lot when they're at a young age, so they wanted to come here. They say they are happy for me to have a better education than them." Or as George indicated, "I think we weren't doing so good in Mexico part of the time. We wanted to make it better here."

Whether these moves have been local or beyond national borders, they have required children to enter new schools, new communities and to form new circles of friends. When these moves took families outside Mexico, children were required to learn a new language and a new set of customs. Often children have worked at establishing themselves in a new environment only to be uprooted and moved again. As stated by several students, it has not always been easy to start over. Jacob echoed the common experience: "I was always alone. I was the only person from Mexico in the class." George's experiences were more poignant. "[They tease me about] the way I talk and sometimes they say I have to take a bath more often. And then sometimes they say, '...George, don't stink up the whole school.'" One can only speculate about the degree to which these moves and the consequent periods of adjustment have affected individuals' success in school.

Schooling in Mexico, as described by the eight students, places these children in a relatively disadvantaged position when they enter our schools. Apart from the difficulties posed by the cultural differences within the systems there appears to be a lack of a thorough knowledge of the basic concepts in several subject areas as well as a total lack of experience with other subject areas standard to our school curriculum. Jacob's comments captured the essence of this concern. "I didn't know anything about the subjects and I'm supposed to do some assignment that I don't know nothing about. ...In Mexico you don't do anything like study different writers like Shakespeare or any of those. And here when you get into these classes you study about them and they're like totally new people."

At a time when the whole language process and a collaborative style of learning are being promoted in Manitoba, these immigrant students are poorly served by their background of drill and rote learning. Having grown up in a system where the end product is stressed and evaluated, they are ill-prepared to function in a classroom where process and the development of critical thinking skills are crucial. The older immigrant students would of course be more affected by these

considerations. Ann's pride was obvious as she reflected on her achievement of memorizing the Catechism in school in Mexico. "I knew the whole thing. I knew everything. I didn't have one mistake in there." This is in sharp contrast to her experience with group work in her Canadian school. "And when you're in a group, like I said, I was shy. I never really talked about it. And well, other people talk and then when they ask me questions I answer them but that's it. And they really don't want you in their group."

Without exception it appears, Latin American Mennonite immigrant students face ostracism, name calling and teasing when they first arrive in Winkler. The degree of severity of this treatment seems to vary with age, the older children having the harder time of it. While at the outset teasing centers on hair and clothing styles, later it appears to be more generalized, prompted merely by the fact that these children were born in Mexico. Parents, forced by their financial situations to buy used clothing for their children, are understandably disheartened to see their children rebuffed by their more fortunate peers. It is a measure of George's courage that he returns to school at all, given the abuse he has endured.

This adverse treatment of immigrant children is not only unfortunate in a social sense; more importantly, it is a potential detriment to their attainment of a quality education. It denies students an opportunity to be accepted, to want to stay and learn in a safe, supportive environment. As stated earlier (Berryman, 1983) immigrant children must have their survival and security needs met before they can move on to social interaction and self-esteem. Before they can communicate with others in the school system and take pride in their schoolwork, they must feel secure.

George's statements clearly demonstrated his present level of functioning. "...[A student] drew a picture of me and he write all kinds of names and all that kind of stupid on there and that's what I don't like. I feel bad. Then I always get mad." His desire to move back to Mexico is understandable. Even Eva, who has been here for years, often struggled at this level. "They think they're better and they think I'm way down there and I'm nothing and then they always think they're so good and then they tease me." Jacob's conclusion made the connection with school work. "...You can't concentrate on tests or your other work...and you get a bad grade."

English language acquisition is another common challenge faced by immigrant students. Here however the unanimous conclusion of the students appears to be that ESL teachers and classes and regular classroom teachers have been helpful in speeding the process of adjustment. Their support for immigrant students has gone beyond strictly instructional involvement with regard to teaching language skills. In my experience they have tried hard to develop and present a school climate that is safe, friendly and accepting of these students. Neil for example, described his Industrial Arts teacher in the following way: "...He looks pretty exciting. ...He's a very nice teacher and I'd like to be that." Ann also had a kind word for teachers. "I think the teachers are fair. I think they're treating the kids who come from Mexico exactly the way they treat the people here."

Most students reported feeling competent with the English language within a relatively short period of time and all seemed to indicate that mastery of English enhanced acceptance by their peers. Interestingly, all these students also reported having to help their mothers and fathers with English. One senses that this task is taken for granted by most immigrant children and is performed without embarrassment on the part of

children or a loss of self-worth on the part of parents.

The maintenance of both the immediate and the extended family emerges as an important concept for these immigrants. The majority of students reported regular family trips back to Mexico to visit relatives. Many of the students expressed a sense of responsibility toward family, demonstrated by their willingness to share substantially from their part time income and their desire to please their parents with the life choices they make. Margaret stated, "If I keep all of [the money I earn] I would feel kind of guilty. Because they do everything for me."

Parents too have made obvious sacrifices for their children and show a sense of trust in their children's opinions and decisions. The extended family and the circle of established Latin American Mennonite immigrant friends were cited by several students as being crucial components of an easier resettlement in Canada. Frank explained his parents' contentment with their move to Winkler in the following way: "Well, some more relatives moved here and they have more friends here." Hirschman (1982) sees in this the family and broader kin links which may provide physical and human capital resources upon which immigrants can draw.

Although not to the degree I expected, the low sense of self-esteem referred to in the literature was apparent in several of the interviews. It was expressed most poignantly in Ann's comments that, "I'm shy...I embarrass myself...others are perfect and I'm not." And, while not overtly expressed, the sense of it was there in other interviews as well. As George put it when referring to his younger sister's ease with making friends, "Like the big kids don't like me and maybe the little kids like her better than somebody else or something. Maybe little kids are better than big kids." The message that he seemed to be struggling with was the degree to which he was worthy and likeable. Eva's closing remark too sounded more like a cry for dignity and recognition than a self-assured statement. "I think we're humans just like them." Again, it appears students who arrived at an older age were more troubled in dealing with self-esteem. They were more likely to question their own abilities and appear less likely to complete a regular high school program.

While all the above outcomes might have been expected, given a reading of the literature and some experience with immigrant families, other outcomes were less predictable. Indeed, some of the findings of this

study run counter to commonly held beliefs regarding this group.

Given the persistence and meanness of the teasing and name calling these immigrant students have endured, one might have expected a more physical response than that expressed. Fighting as a result of teasing appears to have been an infrequent occurrence, especially at school. This is contrary to what was suggested in the literature. Both students and parents appear to have been content to take their complaints to teachers or other school authorities, or simply to endure this treatment quietly. As reflected in the interviews and in my own experience, school personnel take a proactive role with regard to such incidents. These situations are never ignored and are dealt with either on an individual or group basis depending on circumstances. The classroom teacher, guidance counselor or principal may be involved and handling of these incidents moves well beyond discipline to education with regard to tolerance and acceptance.

Immigrant parents in fact show a willingness to place trust in our teachers and schools that is little understood or appreciated in the larger community and perhaps within the school system as well. The questions these parents have with regard to smoking,



drugs and sexual promiscuity in high school are those of any concerned and caring parent. These immigrant parents, struggling with a cultural gap and a language deficit, are additionally burdened and influenced by inaccuracies in understanding, exaggerations and rumors centering on high school life and curricula. Yet they are reportedly willing and in some cases eager to see their children graduate from Grade 12.

A number of students agreed in their assessment that living conditions in Mexico were less than wholesome. Mary said her family moved "because of all the pollution there," referring to the increasing degree of drinking and drunkenness among young people. Several students, having returned to Mexico for a family visit, expressed surprise at the apparent lack of restraint parents exercised over their children. They cited examples of under age children drinking at weekend parties as well as driving automobiles. While this may be the case, it is important to note that such a stereotype of Latin American Mennonite immigrants ignores the fact that these people chose to leave this situation for something they thought was better.

The students interviewed agree that for the sake of the children, their parents sought to escape this unfavorable life style in Mexico. More than once, a

better education and a brighter future for the children were cited as the reason for their move to Canada.

A troubling but inescapable observation based on these interviews is the persistent and unrelenting rebuffs these students, and by extension these families, face in this community. Even after years of living in Winkler most of these students continue to count only fellow immigrant children as their friends outside of school. Regardless of their sincere and determined efforts to fit in - pressuring parents to purchase the 'right' clothes; changing their hair styles; struggling to learn the language; making conscious efforts to befriend Canadian-born students; quietly enduring the insults and teasing - they have failed to make any inroads. Not a single respondent reported visiting and playing regularly, or at all, in the home of a Canadian-born schoolmate. To have "paid all the dues" and yet be denied the prize seems unjust in the extreme. It is even more troubling when one considers that the attitudes of children in school must, to a significant degree, reflect attitudes in the home. Together with the experiences of adult immigrants discussed at the outset of this study, the stories of these students suggest the presence of an attitude of intolerance and discrimination; this in an

area where the majority of people, whether progressive or traditional in their views, share a common heritage of brotherhood and community.

Another generally held perception of Latin American Mennonite immigrant families which would appear to be false has to do with the value placed on schooling and education. None of the students interviewed indicated any significant parental pressure compelling them to leave school at the age of sixteen. Most parents appear to see the value in completing high school, particularly with consideration to better employment opportunities. Most of these parents seem genuinely interested in seeing their children attain a better life, a higher standard of living than they have experienced. Margaret was candid in her assessment. "...They don't want me to end up like they did. ...They're proud of me."

On the other hand, any sense of the pursuit of knowledge as its own intrinsic reward, a view of education as anything more than utilitarian is not indicated by these interviews. Parents appear firmly committed to the limited knowledge they have gained through their own restricted education. Furthermore, as reported by most of the students, there is a complete lack of interaction and discussion around

educational or current events themes within the home. Jacob's comments serve to illustrate both points. "My dad, like every time I mention something about space he disagrees. He said that our planet was the only planet on this world. He thinks the sun goes around the earth not the earth going around the sun. ...And how I get him to agree on things; I never tried." This provides little stimulation or encouragement for exploration, debate and critical thinking for these students. The only real interaction with parents with regard to school work centers on report cards.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

All these immigrant young people experienced some hardships in making the transition to life in a new country. The period of adjustment varied in degree of difficulty as well as duration. As suggested above, some of the difficulties experienced appear normal and expected. Others may not be. There is nothing in the data to suggest that the cause for the discomfort experienced by these students can somehow be blamed on their own shortcomings or dysfunction within their families. Rather, it must be concluded that the hosting community has been somewhat inhospitable in its welcome and integration of these immigrant families.

This is not to say that a great deal has not been done at the institutional level. Individual schools and the school division, for example, have responded positively and in a variety of ways. ESL classes, teachers and teacher assistants represent the most obvious initiative and students are in agreement as to the benefits of this program. Extra curricular reading clubs for ESL students, which also include other students, not only aid immigrant students in acquiring English language skills but also help to build bridges. This process is further enhanced by the establishment of friendship circles within classrooms. Evening programs especially planned for ESL parents, and featuring performances by their own children as well as Low-German presentations and program explanations by teachers, represent another bridge to the home. The appointment of a home-school liaison worker has also been a positive step. All these initiatives are apparently valued and appreciated by immigrant students and their parents. Several division-wide in-service days dealing with the concerns of and for immigrant students have aided teachers in understanding somewhat the background and needs of these students.

Neither have the institutions of the larger community overlooked the Latin American Mennonite

immigrant group. The Winkler Resource Board mentioned earlier was established with the express purpose of helping these immigrants make a successful transition to life in Winkler. This is the initial contact for the majority of Mennonite immigrant families settling in this area. Here they are given practical assistance in dealing with government bureaucracy as well as finding housing and employment. The establishment of a Low-German church congregation for immigrant families is a further response to their perceived needs. The response at the institutional level then has been exemplary and gratifying.

The question remains, has it been appropriate? Why, after three or six or more years in a community and school division where so much has been done to assist immigrant families in their resettlement and integration, do immigrant children still fail to receive invitations into the homes of their Canadian-born schoolmates? Why are they still subject to teasing and harassment regarding their background and immigrant status?

It is possible that in our community and in our schools we have adopted an easy, detached, institutional, response of 'service to' the Latin American Mennonite immigrant group. What each of these

individual students cries out for, on the other hand, is empathic understanding. Put more simply, these children long for acceptance, a friend, a touch. In short, they long to be visible. Eva's words are convicting: "I think we're humans just like them."

Do we in our schools approach these children as an educational problem or as individuals struggling for recognition? While much has been done, we must do even more to make our schools caring and inviting places. The principal, the teachers and others working in schools must see to it that immigrant students are treated with dignity. There must be a consistent, conscious effort to demonstrate caring for children who receive little. Immigrant children should be made to feel proud of their heritage. It should be promoted as something which is an asset to the classroom; something these children may be rightly proud of. They have valuable experiences to offer. Teachers must find ways to incorporate the study of and an appreciation for aspects of Latin American Mennonite culture into the curriculum. Opportunities must be provided to draw on the relevant experiences these children have had in Mexico and other countries. Finally, we must be reminded once again that their cultural differences do not make these immigrant students inferior.

The emphasis here has been on a more individual response toward immigrant children and families. However, both within the school system and in the community, there are concerns at the institutional level as well. While high school teachers and guidance counselors report encouraging signs in the past few years, they admit that the dropout rate among these students remains an issue. There is a need to study in detail the dropout rate among immigrant students in the high school as well as the specific reasons for its occurrence. If, as suggested by the data in this study, poverty or at least financial hardship is a reality for immigrant families, ways must be found of allowing young people to meet their family maintenance obligations while at the same time continuing with their education. There is a need for cooperation here between schools and the community.

While it was alluded to only in passing in a few of the student interviews above, the practice of streaming immigrant students into less challenging courses as they enter high school bears review. To what extent does this occur? Are the criteria, used to determine placement of students into such programs as the Occupational Entrance Course, culturally biased in a way that puts Latin American immigrant students at a



disadvantage? Are programs in the junior high school grades sufficient to allow these students their best chance of attaining a regular high school education? Do parents fully understand the implications of the choices they make regarding their children's placement in various high school options?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a discussion of all these concerns does nothing to address the perceived undercurrent of stereotyping that exists in the community. Educators, business and community leaders must make it a priority to see that, at the very least, an attitude of intolerance is not allowed to become or remain institutionalized. At every level measures must be taken to dispel myths and stereotypes. Furthermore, Latin American immigrants must be given a voice. Currently, it appears, they are either misunderstood or not heard at all. We must find ways to meaningfully involve these parents in the decisions which affect their children at school.

True community among people cannot be legislated, rather it must be encouraged and nurtured. It can occur genuinely only at the level of individual meeting face to face with individual. In schools and in our community we have a responsibility to create such opportunities. It is time that we stop focussing on

our differences and begin to celebrate the things we have in common; not the least of which are the expectations parents have for their students and the dreams that live in children's hearts.

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## Appendix A

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

## I. Family expectations

1. Is a formal school education important to you? Explain.
2. How far would you like to take your formal schooling?
3. How do your parents demonstrate their interest in and support for your school experience?
4. To what extent is schooling necessary for the kind of job you would like to have?
5. What are the things which may interfere with your school work at school / at home?

## II. School-based expectations

1. What are your favorite / least favorite subjects at school? Why?
2. Do you agree with all the things you are taught at school? Discuss.
3. Do you readily share your new knowledge at home?
4. If you could, how would you change the school curriculum?
5. Are there teacher expectations which cause difficulty for you at school / at home?
6. Are there times when you feel excluded from educational or social experiences at school, or when you may not participate?

## III. How conflicts are resolved

1. What would you like to become some day? How did you reach this decision?
2. What things will help / hinder you in pursuing this goal?
3. Is it important that your parents support you in this choice?
4. Who are your friends at school / outside of school?
5. Do you ever feel discriminated against in the school setting? Describe the circumstances.
6. How do you deal with hurtful situations when they arise?