

# Graduate Student SYMPOSIUM

Selected Papers\*

Vol. 5

2009- 2010



Queen's University

Faculty of Education

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SCHOOL CHOICE CONNECTIONS AROUND THE GLOBE AND  
IN  
FRANCOPHONE MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN CANADA: A  
CRITICAL READING OF SCHOOL CHOICE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This article compares the tendencies that have been noted in academic literature at the international level as well as research regarding the particular school choices of Francophone families in minority settings in Canada. Research regarding school choice has focused primarily on parents' views. This literature can be divided into the following themes: the impact of parents' socioeconomic status, parents' roles as consumers who "shop" for schools and the marketing strategies used to recruit parents, the influence of school choice on student achievement, the role of culture and the importance of bilingualism. In other studies, school choice is presented as a family process by focusing on parents' influence on a child's school choice and the importance of the student's friends' choices. Yet, students are rarely involved in studies focusing on school choice and so their voices are not often heard. This article highlights the need for more extensive research in Canada regarding student agency in school choice.

INTRODUCTION

This article takes a critical look at literature regarding school choice. In Canada, a better understanding of the school choice process is very relevant for the Francophone community given that French-language schools have become indispensable agents of cultural and linguistic reproduction (Deveau, Landry & Allard, 2006; Martel, 2001). Martel's study (2001) indicates that, nationwide, only 54.4% of children who are eligible to attend French-language schools do so. There are, therefore, a large

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<sup>1</sup> The Francophone identity is dynamic and is therefore difficult to define. In the context of this article, the term Francophone is used in its broadest sense. It is not limited to those whose first language is French and does not exclude those with limited French-language proficiency.

number of parents who have the right to the French-language school system since the implementation of Article 23<sup>1</sup>, but do not choose this system for their children. Furthermore, even when parents opt for a French elementary school, there are a significant number of adolescents who choose to leave the Frenchlanguage system during the transition to high school. This is reported in French-language schools in Ontario between the eighth and ninth grades by the loss of 9.6% of the student population, or 632 students, in 2004 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). However, English-language schools saw a gain of 6.5%, or 9,726 students, during this same period of transition (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Yet, these statistics reveal very little as to how parents or families go about choosing an elementary or a secondary school. It is therefore important to better understand the school choice process around the globe and in Canada.

Research regarding school choice has been conducted around the world. The following literature review includes authors from the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia (Bagley & Woods, 1998; Bagley, Woods & Glatter, 2001; Bulman, 2004; English, 2009; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bove, 1995; Goldhaber, 1999; Hirsch, 1994; Holmes, 2008; Lucey & Reay, 2002; Neild, 2009; Reay & Ball, 1998; Reay & Lucey, 2000) and Canada (Arsenault, 2008; Bosetti, 2004; CIRCUM Network, 1999; Dalley & Saint-Onge, 2008; Davies & Aurini, 2008; Deveau, Landry & Allard, 2006; DiGiorgio, 2006; Ferguson, Tilleczeck & Rummens, 2005; Lamoureux, 2007; Laveault, 2006; Martel, 2001; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). In these countries, the options for school choice vary considerably. At times, it is a debate between private and public schools, the language of instruction, and so on. Deciding among schools with the same district or school board or from various programs offered by a school also falls under the school choice umbrella. These choices have important similarities and differences with the choice of a French or English-language school in Canada. Thus, this review compares the tendencies that

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<sup>1</sup> Since 1982, Francophone Canadian citizens who reside outside of Quebec have a constitutional right, under Article 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to have their children educated in the minority language of the province or territory where they live.

have been noted in academic literature at the international level as well as research regarding the particular school choices of exogamous couples and Francophone students in Francophone minority communities in Canada.

The majority of the articles treated in this literature review describe school choice as a process that solely concerns parents. These writings are divided into themes such as the impact of socioeconomic status, parents as consumers shopping for schools, the influence of school choice on student achievement, the role of culture, and the importance of bilingualism for Canadian parents. Nevertheless, a small number of other works present school choice as a family process that includes the child. These articles will also be presented and are divided into two themes: the influence of parents as well as the priorities of students. This article will speak to the fact that students are rarely involved in studies focusing on school choice and so their voices are not often heard. Lastly, several conceptions regarding the future of school choice research are unveiled. The present article highlights the need for more extensive research in Canada regarding student agency in school choice.

#### STUDIES REGARDING PARENTS AND SCHOOL CHOICE THE IMPACT OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

The scholarly literature in the field of parental school choice indicates that parents' socioeconomic status plays an important role in choosing a school (Bagley & Woods, 1998; Bagley, Woods & Glatter, 2001; Bosetti, 2004; Bulman, 2004; Davies & Aurini, 2008; Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995; Reay & Ball, 1998; Reay & Lucey, 2000). It also specifies that there are two categories of parents: the "active school choosers," informed parents

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<sup>3</sup> In Francophone minority communities, the term 'exogamous couple' is often used when referring to a couple that is formed by a Francophone and an Anglophone. This "couple reflects Canada's linguistic duality; it embodies the country's two official languages and is shaped by francophone and anglophone culture" (Allard, Essiembre & Arseneau, 2004, p. 16).

who evaluate the different schools and possible programs before choosing the best option, and the "non-choosers," those who are not informed and who send their children to whichever school they

are assigned to geographically (Bosetti, 2004; Bulman, 2004, Gewirtz et al., 1995). Research indicates a significant correlation between a higher level of education as well as higher income amongst those who actively choose schools (Bosetti, 2004; Gewirtz et al., 1995), while working class parents are presented as less motivated to make a school choice (Bosetti, 2004; Reay & Ball, 1998). This is explained, in part, by their apparent insecurity as "many working-class parents appear to feel deskilled in the choice process, as they do in other kinds of commitments with school" (Reay & Ball, 1998, p. 433). This uncertainty regarding school choice could also result from the paucity of resources available for people of the working class.

The quality and quantity of resources available to parents is unequivocally associated to their income (Bagley & Woods, 1998; Bagley, Woods & Glatter, 2001; Bosetti, 2004; Bulman, 2004; Davies & Aurini, 2008; Hamilton & Guin, 2005; Reay & Ball, 1998; Reay & Lucey, 2000). Access to a more informed social network, or increased social capital, is indicated as a crucial resource for parents when making their school choice (Bosetti, 2004; Reay & Lucey, 2000). Walberg (2007) notes that "disadvantaged sections of society rarely have the right information at the right time to enable them to make the right [school] choices" (p. 9). These families are often excluded from the school choice process because of the lack of resources at their disposal. Bosetti (2004) indicates that varied social capital amongst parents "raises the question of equal access to accurate, quality information about the choice options available as well as information that helps parents understand the learning needs and preferences of their child" (p. 400). Bosetti (2004) also takes notice of this inequality and explains that the choices parents make, and perhaps even their opportunity to choose, are affected or altered by the lack of information available to certain parents.

Reay and Ball (1998) point to another significant difference related to parents' socioeconomic status: their priorities concerning the happiness of their child. Working class parents are more interested in their child's immediate happiness at school; however, parents of the middle class instead refer to "a conceptualization of future happiness" (Reay & Ball, 1998, p. 439) for their children, regardless of how the child feels about the school choice in the present. Furthermore, other research (Lucey

& Reay, 2002) reveals that middle class parents experience more anxiety during the school choice process than others, mainly due to a fixation on the choice of the "right" school for their child.

Ultimately, the numerous differences according to socioeconomic status listed may generate substantial consequences. Goldhaber (1999) warns that if only middle class families carry the right to choose a school, which current literature suggests (Bagley, Woods & Glatter, 2001; Bosetti, 2004; Bulman, 2004; Davies & Aurini, 2008, Reay & Ball, 1998; Reay & Lucey, 2000; Bagley & Woods, 1998), we could see even greater racial and economic segregation in schools. Furthermore, if school choice is limited to middle and upper social classes at the international level, it is important to take a closer look at this phenomenon and its impact on Francophone school populations in Canada.

Research concerning Francophones in Canada correspondingly indicates that parents' socioeconomic status is a determining factor of school choice in their community (CIRCUM Network, 1999; Dalley & Saint-Onge, 2008; Deveau, Landry & Allard, 2006). Dalley and Saint-Onge (2008) suggest that school choice for exogamous couples is directly related to social class as parents from professional backgrounds often choose the French-language school system. Similarly to numerous renowned international researchers (Bagley & Woods, 1998; Bagley et al. 2001; Bosetti, 2004; Bulman, 2004, Reay & Ball, 1998; Reay & Lucey, 2000), Deveau et al. (2006) state that the number of resources available to parents, and their level of "social naiveté" (or "naiveté sociale"), is directly related to parents' level of education and their professions. Middle-class parents thus have a lower level of "social naiveté" than lower-class parents. These researchers also found that a higher level of education among parents is positively associated with the choice of Frenchlanguage school, as 75.5% of parents who choose Frenchlanguage secondary schools have completed high school compared to 41.6% of high-school graduates who opt for schooling in English and 43.8% who opt for an immersion program for their children (Deveau et al., 2006). In these circumstances, it is important to explore how parents shop for schools before choosing the right one.

#### SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP: PARENTS AS "CONSUMERS" AND SHOPPING FOR SCHOOLS

Educational theorists often use the analogy of shopping for schools (Bagley & Woods, 1998; Bosetti, 2004; Davies & Aurini, 2008; Hirsch, 1994). According to these authors, the educational market "transforms parents into consumers and transforms schools into mere service providers; the student, therefore, is more or less in the same situation as a vehicle being polished in a garage" (Hirsch, 1994, p. 25, own translation<sup>1</sup>). Bulman (2004) criticizes this analogy as it does not include culture as a determining factor in selecting a school, a theme that will be analyzed in greater detail in the section *The Role of Culture*. Furthermore, other researchers, including Lucey and Reay (2002), Reay and Ball (1998) and Tardif (1995), articulate the fact that children do not appear in most theories and analogies of school choice. The often limited role of children in school choice will be presented in the second half of this article.

According to Bosetti (2004), parents perceive school choice as a process of calculating the costs, benefits, risks and probabilities to find the solution that will ensure the success of their children. This school shopping theory is also consistent with an aggressive new relationship between parents and educators, as Davies and Aurini (2008) note in their research in Canada. According to these authors, it "alters parental relationships with public educators from mere supportive roles to more directing and even adversarial roles" (p. 55). This then has a dynamic impact on the competition between different schools, including schools in the same board. In addition, the theory of shopping for schools has been likened to the theory of social selection cited by Bagley, Woods and Glatter (2001). These authors state that "social selection involves parents selecting the human environment (pupils and staff) according to the social type (social class, ethnic mix) that they consider suits or will most benefit their child" (p. 320). This then results in segregation in schools. The term "social targeting" is also used in scholarly literature regarding schools that use multiple marketing strategies to recruit specific types of students, in particular middle class students (Bagley et al. 2001; Hirsch, 1994). Thus, the choice process seems reciprocal as schools play an increasingly active role in recruiting students.

Although many researchers focus on the process of selecting schools, Bagley, Woods and Glatter (2001) instead choose to study different forms of rejection. These researchers conclude that parents and schools alike can reject one another. Consequently, certain schools are able to do the choosing in highly competitive areas. In addition, Bagley and Woods (1998) argue that "consumer" parents, and in particular parents of children with various learning difficulties or physical disabilities, as well as the students themselves, are often marginalized in this competitive environment. Schools, on the other hand, utilize enrollment strategies to market themselves and recruit the highest number of students. The preferred way to do so is by promoting higher rates of success in national tests as well as other major evaluations (Bagley et al. 2001; Bosetti, 2004; Davies & Aurini, 2008). In accordance with the international literature, research indicates that this competitive environment is also present in the minority Francophone school milieu.

DiGiorgio (2006) explores in detail the marketing strategies that a French language school in Nova Scotia employed to recruit students. This particular school was looking to boost public support to increase student enrollment and maintain its existence. The author explains that "even though legal rights exist [re: Article 23], principals and parents of French-language schools must market their schools in order to increase numbers. Potential clients need to see that the French-language school is a better alternative for their children than French immersion or English programs" (p. 93). The researcher observes that the school implements various marketing strategies which include distributing pamphlets, creating a school website and releasing newspaper articles. DiGiorgio also notes that the school's inclusive spirit regarding students' various linguistic, physical and learning abilities appealed to a large number of parents. Similarly, Martel's research (2001) explores ways to enroll more families in French language systems across Canada. Martel claims that it is important that schools inform parents about the importance of educating their children in the minority language. Thus, both DiGiorgio and Martel mark the recent interest in recruitment strategies French language schools utilize to increase their enrollments and to compete with other school systems' marketing plans. The increase in rivalries between schools has therefore been extensively noted in the literature, but how does this competition impact students?



#### GREATER SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS?

The postulation that competition between schools improves the quality of institutions, education, and therefore ensures greater success for students, is often found in school choice literature (Bosetti, 2004; Card, Dooley & Payne, 2008; Davies & Aurini, 2008, Gewirtz et al., 1995; Goldhaber, 1999, Levin, 2002). Bosetti (2004) indicates that "market theory suggests that a system of school choice will create competition among schools for student enrolment resulting in schools being more responsive to the needs and interests of parents and students" (p. 387). For instance, Card et al. (2008), in a research project conducted in Ontario, specify that when parents are open to the possibility of changing schools due to abundant competition, school systems respond in a way that can translate into the improved success of all students for provincial exams. Their research compares neighborhoods in which there are several competing schools with other areas that have fewer schools and limited potential competition. Their report indicates significantly improved performances both in third grade and sixth grade provincial assessments in the areas with high competition (Card et al., 2008). However, Goldhaber (1999) and Gewirtz et al. (1995) establish that most research in this domain focuses solely on test scores and short-term improvement when assessing students' success. In fact, none of the studies in this review look at long-term success of students in relation to accrued competition between schools.

Furthermore, some researchers (Bagley et al. 2001; Bosetti, 2004) argue that the positive impact of competition between schools is not present for all students, but rather limits itself to students of higher social classes. Bosetti (2004, p. 400) adds that the existing competition "does little to address issues related to equity, diversity, and social cohesion" in schools. The limited data in this area makes it difficult to confirm or refute the hypothesis of improved academic performance because of competition between schools. Furthermore, studies concerning Francophone minority communities are silent regarding this issue.

#### THE ROLE OF CULTURE

Several studies note the remarkable influence of culture on school choice (Allard, Essiembre & Arseneau, 2004; Arsenault, 2008; Bosetti, 2004; Bulman, 2004; Dailey & Saint-Onge, 2008;

Deveau et al., 2006; English, 2009; Tardif, 1995). Yet, researchers have varying definitions of culture. Bosetti (2004) indicates that common values and beliefs were one of the most important determinants of school choice in a sample of 1,500 parents. Bosetti (2004) adds that the definition of culture is not limited to religious beliefs, but rather includes the entirety of parents' values. In like manner, Bulman (2004) states that "culture should be seen as the fabric out of which all families make sense of education" (p. 493). He adds that one cannot assume that culture is only the ethnicity, gender, social class or religion of a person, but rather the many tools, or the "tool kit," that accompanies a person through daily life.

The literature in this domain maintains that parents who are influenced by their culture while choosing a school do so for emotional and affective reasons (Bagley & Woods, 1998; Bulman, 2004; Deveau et al., 2006). Moreover, culture is an important factor for all parents, regardless of socioeconomic status (Bulman, 2004; English, 2009) and therefore seems to be a universal factor related to choice school. In her study, English (2009) draws on Bourdieu's work and focuses on the development of cultural capital in a school setting. The author specifies that "the right cultural capital," according to parents' values, is a priority for parents during the school choice process. The Australian schools included in this sample are aware of this reality. English (2009) reports that these schools have conceived specialized programs which focus on the arts, music and certain sports. The promotion of such programs simultaneously works as a marketing strategy to promote the idea that children who enroll and participate will develop more cultural capital and become exceptional members of society. Culture is therefore an important factor in parents' school choices both internationally and in the particular case of selecting a French-language school in Canada, which will be demonstrated in the section that follows.

In research that focuses on Francophones in Canada, several researchers have discovered that cultural factors, which include common values to the Francophone minority group and a sense of belonging to the Francophone community, are among the most influential in the school choice process (Arsenault, 2008; Dalley and Saint-Onge, 2008; Deveau et al. 2006; Essiembre et al. 2005; CIRCUM Network, 1999). Arsenault (2008) explains that

children's appropriation of their parents' cultures was a determining factor for the exogamous couple she interviewed. The researcher adds that this couple's choice of a French-language school was based, in part, on the importance of French culture to their family. Similarly, Dalley and Saint-Onge (2008) note in their study that parents that choose the French-language school system do so because the culture and values conveyed by the school are consistent with their own. Yet, those who choose another school system do so because they do not identify with the culture projected by the French-language school. Essiembre et al. (2005) correspondingly conclude that the motivation for exogamous couples to send their children to a French language school is heavily influenced by the desire to "pass on French language, culture and francophone identity from one generation to the other" (p. 2, own translation<sup>11</sup>). Moreover, Saint-Onge (2002) determined that culture is unquestionably the most important factor for parents who choose a French-language school.

Parents' support for schooling in French, based on their identity and their attachment to the Francophone community, is associated with a motivation that is to a greater extent emotional and intrinsic than pragmatic (Deveau et al. 2006; CIRCUM Network, 1999; Tardif, 1995). The desire to be part of the Francophone community is thus presented as a crucial factor in the school selection process. DiGiorgio (2006) explains that schools recognize this and accordingly promote the enrichment of linguistic and cultural capital as part of their marketing strategy. Additionally, researchers from the CIRCUM Network (1999) indicate the significant impact that culture can have on student retention. They also state that any policy that increases the sense of community among parents would increase enrollment in French-language schools. Though the role of culture is a central factor related to school choice, it appears that acquiring a second language also tops parents' school choice lists.

#### BILINGUALISM: A PRIORITY FOR CANADIAN PARENTS

Another priority that is present both for Anglophone and Francophone parents in Canada is the importance of bilingualism for their child. Therefore, an important aspect of school choice in Canada includes immersion programs, yet this factor was not mentioned in the other international literature reviewed for the purpose of this article. Perhaps this choice is most notable in

Canada, a country with two official languages, as immersion programs originated in this country in the mid-1960s (Johnson & Swain, 1997) and have spread widely and rapidly ever since. Indeed, there are a large number of Canadian couples who choose to send their children to French immersion schools. First and foremost, the goal of these programs is bilingualism. Holmes (2008) adds that "French immersion schools or discrete programs within schools for Anglophones are widely available throughout Canada, uniquely subsidized by the federal government" (p. 200) and so, the choice of an immersion program is available to all parents. However, though all parents have access to the immersion programs, Johnson and Swain (1997) note an important exception to the rule: "for the most part, French immersion in Canada has served the economic, political, and social aims of the middle-and upper-middle-class English-speaking majority" (p. 4). The research in immersion schools therefore seems to follow suit with other school choice literature which indicates that choosing schools leads to segregation of social classes. Though immersion programs widely attract English parents, Francophones are also likely to opt for this choice.

In several studies reviewed regarding the Francophone community, parents indicate that the transmission of the French language is a top priority for Canadian exogamous couples (Allard et al. 2004; Arsenault, 2008; CIRCUM Network, 1999; Dailey & Saint-Onge, 2008; Deveau et al. 2006; Essiembre et al. 2005; Tardif, 1995). In fact, parents from Halifax, Sudbury, Calgary and Vancouver reported that a certain prestige associated with bilingualism was among the top determining factors of their school choice (CIRCUM Network, 1999). However, this same study reveals that the main reason parents choose an English school or immersion program, rather than a French-language school, is due the couple's negative perception of the likeliness that their child will master the English language while attending a French-language school, a fact that Deveau et al. (2006) also report in their study. The researchers suggest then, at the end of the CIRCUM report, that "more parents would choose the French-language school system if they believed their children would master the English language at the end of their schooling" (own translation<sup>H1</sup>). Research indicates that parents want their children

to develop a balanced additive bilingualism<sup>2</sup> (Allard et al. 2004; Johnson & Swain, 1997). Allard et al. (2004) state that to do so, parents should act on the following principle: "it is by focusing on the language that is most fragile in the region, therefore French, that an exogamous couple will ensure that their child shall develop a balanced additive bilingualism" (p. 12, own translation<sup>1V</sup>). This aforementioned team of researchers therefore recommends that parents select a French-language school to ensure the development of additive bilingualism for their children while living in an English-speaking community.

Dalley and Saint-Onge (2008) note that every parent in their sample discussed the importance of their child's bilingualism, but with certain nuances. The majority of parents did not favour a greater proficiency of the French language at the expense of English-language skills, but some parents did favour acquiring English language skills at the expense of the child's ability to communicate in French. These researchers also observed that the choice of an English school is not necessarily a dismissal of the French language on the part of parents or children because all exogamous couples expressed their desire for their children to be bilingual. Research conducted in minority areas thus determines that the French-language school is an environment conducive to learning both official languages. In addition, this literature reveals that French-speaking parents recognize bilingualism as an important value. Yet, priorities, and therefore school choices, vary according to parents' preferences and concerns regarding their diversified definitions of bilingualism.

#### STUDIES REGARDING STUDENTS AND SCHOOL CHOICE PARENTS JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND...

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<sup>2</sup> "Balanced additive bilingualism, as it applies to children of francophone-anglophone couples, means that the children are highly proficient in English and French, possess a strong sense of belonging to both the francophone and Anglophone communities, enjoy a strong bicultural identity, display a positive attitude toward Francophone and Anglophone culture, and give equal social status to both languages" (Allard, Essiembre & Arseneau, 2004, p. 17).

Some of the studies reviewed from various countries introduce the concept of choosing a secondary school as a family process which includes both children and parents (Hirsch, 1994; Lucey & Reay, 2002; Reay & Ball, 1998; Reay & Lucey, 2000; Tardif, 1995). In France, Hirsch (1994) concludes in his study that the extent of a youth's participation in the choosing process is all a question of age. According to his field research, Hirsch notes that "at 11 years old, students play an equal role in selecting and at the age of 14, their opinions begin to dominate those of their parents, especially when the choice of school determines the program" (1994, p. 26, own translation). This conclusion can also be linked to data from the Ontario Ministry of Education (2006) which indicates that the period during which most students make a school choice is during the transition from primary to secondary school, thus at the age of 13 or 14 years.

Nevertheless, other research suggests that a child's influence on choosing a secondary school is largely determined by his/her parents' socioeconomic status (Reay & Ball, 1998; Reay & Lucey, 2000). In two major studies conducted in England, the majority of working class parents let their child choose his or her secondary school. Reay and Ball (1998) indicate that this is linked to feelings of inferiority in regards to the educational world and the fact that these parents consider their child to be the "educational expert" of the house. Indeed, the working class children that were interviewed by Reay and Lucey (2000) "saw their own choices as having primacy over those of their parents" (p. 89). However, most parents of the middle class ultimately made the final decision regarding secondary school. Several of the interviewed parents mentioned the importance of their child's opinions and the need to have an open discussion. However, all of the parents felt that their choice was best, even when it was not what their child wanted. Some even made reference to using bribes in order to convince their child as to the "right" school choice.

Moreover, by analyzing the incredible involvement of some parents in the school choice process, it seems that this dominant role amongst parents could have important repercussions for their children. A study by Lucey and Reay (2002) focuses on school choice as a source of anxiety among students during the transition from primary to secondary school. These researchers conclude that anxiety and stress experienced by students in their sample are

caused by their parents' numerous expectations in regards to their choice and acceptance into the "right" school.

In Francophone minority areas in Canada, very few studies treat school choice as a family process. Only Tardif (1995) conducted a survey with Grade 9 and 10 students in three francophone schools in Alberta. She also contacted students' parents to better understand the family process of school choice. Tardif concludes that parents, regardless of social class, have a major influence on the school choices of their children. Data from this study indicates that parents' judgments towards the importance of studying in French, as well as their opinion towards the French language, is crucial because children often opt for English schools when their parents do not believe in the importance of attending French-language school. Though parents have an incredible impact, there are also other social networks which influence a student's school choice.

#### FRIENDS FOREVER: THE PRIORITY FOR STUDENTS

Students can potentially be involved in an important way in the school choice process, and so, recognizing their priorities is of the utmost importance. Literature suggests that the choices made by a student's friends have a major influence on his/her choice of high school (Bagley, Woods & Glatter, 2001; Bulman, 2004; Reay & Ball, 1998; Reay & Lucey, 2000). Researchers note several references, regardless of social class, to students' concerns about their friends' school choices (Bulman, 2004; Reay & Ball, 1998). An important reason indicated for rejecting a school was also linked to which friends or classmates were attending or not attending an institution (Bagley et al., 2001). Furthermore, friends also influence students during discussions amongst peers about various school options (Reay & Ball, 1998; Reay & Lucey, 2000). The social aspect of school choice is thus an important factor among students when selecting a school.

Yet, this is the only factor that has been identified as a priority for students, according to students themselves. Literature suggests that adolescents aren't active in the school choice process, even when the choice regards their secondary school. Yet, their involvement is incredibly important in this decision as Lucey and Reay (2000) explain that

[for primary school] pupils who [are] in the process of selecting a school, the very idea of secondary school [opens] up a space in their imaginations that [is] not entirely filled by what others [have] told them. This space [provides] highly fertile ground in which half-formed ambiguous and contradictory fears, fantasies and hopes of their own [can] be planted; a contradictory space constructed in the present around an unknown but inevitable future. (p. 192)

This imaginary space that is available to students while selecting a secondary school allows for an alignment with their postsecondary goals, and is therefore an important step towards the future and the career of their choice. Though the student's role in the school choice process seems fundamental, the vast majority of the scholarly research in this area delves only into the needs and wants of adults, whether it be parents, teachers or administrators. Thus, students' priorities are often silenced.

#### CONCEPTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL CHOICE RESEARCH

This critical, though non-exhaustive, literature review presents school choice articles from around the globe and also includes studies that show the specific reality of the process as it is lived by Francophones in minority settings in Canada. The school choice factors elucidated in this article provide an up-to-date account of research in the field and identify areas for reflection and future study. Firstly, a conclusion that emerges from this review is the growing desire of parents and students to have the option to choose their school. This then results in a higher level of competition between schools and a richer variety of options for families of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Secondly, the links between socioeconomic status and school choice are numerous. The result remains the same, regardless of geography: a variety of resources and options are available to middle-class families. However, other families from less affluent social classes are marginalized. This finding was observed in all of the countries listed in this review, including Canada, and therefore appears to be a major issue in the field of school choice



in Canada. In this context, it seems imperative to provide access to various resources that would facilitate the school choice process for all families, regardless of their social status.

Thirdly, several studies also look to culture as an important factor regarding school choice. An unquestionable priority for parents is their children's appropriation of culture and this is seen internationally as well as in Francophone minority communities. Nevertheless, little research focuses on the varied definitions of culture. In addition, research indicates that parents' choices which are associated with culture are based on emotional and intrinsic motivations. This seems to be an interesting notion for further research and reflection. Aside from culture, the development of a balanced and additive bilingualism remains a priority for Canadian parents, in particular for Francophone or exogamous couples. Despite evidence to the contrary, parents continue to fear that their children will not develop proficiency in English when they are educated in a French-language school. These parents, therefore, often opt for English or immersion schools based on these fears. This is presented in Martel's study (2001) as she indicates that 45.6% of children who are eligible to attend French-language schools do not do so.

Finally, it is imperative to note that most items listed focus primarily on the crucial role of parents in the process of school choice. Moreover, they neglect to consider the experience of children who are treated more as "cars being polished in a garage" (Hirsch, 1994, p. 25, own translation) or voices that are recognized, but ultimately ignored by their parents. Of course, this is a significant weakness in the scholarly literature regarding school choice. Students have their own priorities in choosing a school and should be encouraged to be involved in the process based on their interests and postsecondary goals for the future.

It is then up to researchers to consider the views of children. Focusing particularly on students' roles in school choice, it appears that the crucial moment of choice is during the transition years. These are the years during which a student makes the transition from primary to secondary school and is a recent research interest as students face a number of challenges during this transition. However, research in the field of primarysecondary transition (cf. Laveault, 2006, Lucey & Reay, 2000; MEO, 2007; Neild, 2009; Zittoun & Perret-Clermont,

2001) focuses on improving the support provided by the school staff to ensure student success during this important transition. These researchers are silent regarding the question of choices made by students at this point in their school careers.

Although this literature review includes several articles regarding Francophones in Canada (Allard et al. 2004; Arsenault, 2008; Bosetti, 2004; Deveau et al. 2006; Dalley & Saintonge, 2008; Lamoureux, 2007; Martel, 2001; CIRCUM Network, 1999; Tardif, 1995), only two articles focus specifically on the reality of school choice options for Francophones in Ontario (Lamoureux, 2007; Martel, 2001). The lack of studies conducted in Ontario marks the importance of studying this phenomenon in more depth closer to home. Insofar as parents' school choices are concerned, school visits and discussions with teachers can have an important influence. It is, therefore, crucial to have access to more generalizable data that could guide administrators and teachers as well as parents and students during the school choice process. It is also important to develop more group-specific knowledge regarding the factors that are related to parents' and children's positioning towards the language of instruction. We are a long way from being able to guide or support Canadian families adequately as they go about selecting a school. Consequently, it is important continue to study the determinants of school choice to explore outreach strategies that could help families choose a school according to their values and priorities.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Les parents en consommateurs et font de l'école un fournisseur de services; quant à l'élève, il est plus ou moins dans la même situation qu'une voiture en train d'être astiquée au garage » (Hirsch, 1994, p. 25).

II « transmettre la langue, la culture et l'identité françaises d'une génération à l'autre » (Essiembre et al., 2005, p. 2). <sup>III</sup> « Davantage de parents choisiront l'école française s'ils sont convaincus que leurs enfants maîtriseront la langue anglaise à la fin de leur scolarisation » (CIRCUM Network).

IV « C'est en mettant l'accent sur la langue la plus faible ou fragile dans la région, c'est-à-dire le français, que le couple exogame s'assurera que son enfant développera un bilinguisme additif équilibré » (Allard et al., 2004, p. 12).

<sup>V</sup> « Dès l'âge de 11 ans, les élèves choisissent sur un pied d'égalité avec leurs parents, et qu'à partir de 14 ans, leur avis commence à prédominer, surtout lorsque le choix de l'école détermine celui du programme » (Hirsch, 1994, p. 26).