CHAPTER ONE

Literacy Instruction and Cross-cultural Discourses

> Literacy is a discursive practice in which difference
> becomes crucial for understanding not simply how to read,
> write, or develop aural skills, but also to recognize that the
> identities of "others" matter as part of a broader set of poli-
> tics and practice aimed at the reconstruction of democratic
> public life.
>
> —Henry Giroux,"Literacy, Difference,
> and the Politics of Border Crossing"

Literacy achievement has become one of the most critical issues for immigrant and minority education. For the theoretical framework in which this study is situated, I turn to research that examines the social effects of literacy practices across the various social institutions such as school, home, and communities. I look at literacy as a socio-cultural construction through interactions among the members of these social institutions. To address the cultural conflicts involved in the teaching and learning of Chinese immigrants, I first embed my understanding of literacy education within the larger context of the on-going debate between progressive and traditional pedagogy. I also draw on minority literacy research to examine the impact of teacher perspectives on minority students' learning and development, the interrelationships between cultural diversity and parental involve-ment, and the influence of modes of immigration and assimilation on English literacy acquisition. Each perspective helps me to look at the experiences of cultural conflicts and their impact on the focal children from a different angle. The combined perspectives bring to light ways

different cultural values have shaped the literacy experiences of immigrant children and influenced their success with social integration and academic achievement. Thus, I begin by examining the definition of literacy and its practices, and then I explain the different theoretical perspectives that inform my research on battles over literacies and cultures in immigrant children's schooling.

Literacy as Sociocultural Discourse

Over the last four decades, literacy researchers have developed a view of literacy as multiple and situated within social and cultural practices and discourses (Gee, 1996; B. Street, 1993). Literacy is no longer thought of as the technical ability to read and write, nor the ability of individuals to function within social contexts associated with daily living. Rather, beyond these capacities, it is an ability to think and reason, a way of living, a means of looking at the world we know and how we behave in the world (Langer, 1987; Schieffelin, 1986). In Gee's words, literacy constitutes ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are embedded within particular discourses and are tied to particular sets of values and norms (Gee, 1996).

Literacy is therefore inseparable from culture. In this book, I adopt McLaren's (1998) critical concept of culture to signify "the particular ways in which a social group lives out and makes sense of its given circumstances and conditions of life" (p. 175). As a set of practices, ideologies, and values from which different groups draw to make sense of the world, culture is deeply rooted in the nexus of power relations. According to McLaren, the link between culture and power is embodied in three aspects: (1) culture is intimately connected with the structure of social relations that produce forms of oppression and dependency; (2) culture is analyzed as a form of production through which different groups in either their dominant or subordinate social relations define or realize their aspirations through unequal relations of power; and (3) culture is viewed as a field of struggle in which production, legitimation, and circulation of particular forms of knowledge and experience are central arenas of conflict (McLaren, 1998, p. 176). The negotiation of these power relations, that is, the definition of who has power and how it is reproduced, is dependent on the ability of individuals (as well as the

collective) to express their culture through their particular language and literacy practices.

Bakhtin's (1981) dialogic perspective maintains that language and literacy are the means by which people position themselves in their social worlds and that learning to use language involves learning the truths of human relationships. In order to understand these truths about human relationships, it is necessary that members of this dialogic learning community locate their understanding in the contemporary as well as historical social locations of the participants in literacy events. Therefore, literacy is an interactive sociocultural process, a process of different voices coming into contact (Toohey, 2000; Wertsch, 1991). These different voices are members of the learners' particular sociocultural contexts—teachers, peers, parents, and community members. Each of these members represents a voice of learning and knowing, and together they form a "dialogized heteroglossia," or multivoicedness in which multiple layers of values of knowing and learning are embodied (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272).

According to Gee (1989), learners' dialogized heteroglossia can be categorized into two overarching domains: the primary Discourse of the home and community, and the secondary Discourse of the public sphere—institutions such as the public schools. Nested in these two sociocultural Discourses are different social languages—concrete literacy belief systems that define distinct identities within the boundaries of the Discourses (Bakhtin, 1981). These social languages or sets of social beliefs intersect and interact with one another in a multitude of ways, and shape what the individual member's voice can say (Wertsch, 1991). For example, power struggles between the social languages in primary and secondary Discourses may affect an individual learner's choices of appropriating or speaking a particular social language and becoming a member of that social community. In some cases, learners are capable of repositioning themselves in the contesting social languages, and recreating their own social languages such as counterword (Bahktin, 1981) or counterscript (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). In this sense, these different literacy belief systems become "zones of contest" in which cultural borders and Discourse boundaries are negotiated and defined (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

Literacy learning as a sociocultural practice emphasizes the relational interdependency of agent and world, persons-in-activity, and situated action, and learners' participation in learning is inherently "situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world"

(Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 51). McKay and Wong (1996) explored the multiple identities of a group of Chinese immigrant students in a junior high school in California. They conceptualize minority students such as English language learners as complex social beings who actively exercise their agencies in their particular learning environment. By exercising their agencies, children take ownership of language and literacy (Pierce, 1995). Au (1998) defines ownership of literacy as "students' valuing of literacy, including holding positive attitudes toward literacy and having the habit of using literacy in everyday life. Students display positive attitudes by willingly engaging in reading and writing, showing confidence and pride in their own literacy and taking an interest in the literacy of others" (p. 169).

Literacy researchers have discovered that children can develop an understanding of what literacy is and what it means from a young age (Wells, 1986; 1989). Children can acquire not only the conventions of reading and writing, but also the sociocultural values that are attached to their particular literacy practices (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). However, motivation theorists point out that children's continuous development of literacy is related to their motivation to learn and that learners' beliefs, values, and goals for learning are crucial to their school achievement (Guthrie, McGouch, Bennet, & Rice, 1996; Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992). Wigfield (1997) further argues from a socioconstructivist perspective that learners' continuing engagement in learning depends on their intrinsic motivation, that is, their on-going participation in learning is motivated by the thoughts and feelings that emerge from their meaning making processes. Therefore, learners' continuous engagement in learning involves personal investment in that learners not only exchange information with others, but they also constantly reread, reflect, and revisit a sense of who they are and how they are related in their complex social relationships with others in their everyday lives (Pierce, 1995). In this sense, language learning is not simply a matter of the individual learner's mental functioning; it is also a mediated action situated in the cultural, historical, and institutional settings in which learning occurs (Bakhtin, 1981; Wertsch, 1991).

Literacy learning and teaching as a dynamic social process is also highly political. It is not static, nor always harmonious. Many tensions and dissensions are inherent in the discourses of literacy learning and schooling in the contexts of home, school, and community. In the apprenticeship of new social practices, minority learners have to become complicit with a new set of values and norms that may not

match their initial enculturation and socialization within their primary discourses (Gee, 1989). Their cultural and personal knowledge is often in conflict with the schools' ways of validating knowledge, the nature of school, or main tenets and assumptions of mainstream academic knowledge (Banks, 2002; Gay, 2000). Indeed, home and school discourses often collide because of the sociocultural (and linguistic) incongruencies, especially when one discourse maintains its dominant status over the other (Lopez, 1999). These tensions and collisions often result in the surface of minority groups' antagonistic voice, resistance, and opposition that counteract the hegemony of mainstream pedagogy (Giroux, 1991). These counterhegemonic actions are often related to ways in which our discourses (both local and public or authorized) surrounding the pedagogical practices are connected or disconnected, and ways in which the issues of power, class, race, and identity within and across communities are interplayed (Rogers, Tyson, & Marshall, 2000).

In this book, the concept of pedagogy connotes both a professional or teaching activity and a political activity that shapes students' learning experiences. It is not just an act of teaching and instruction, but a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within and among particular sets of social relations (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 239). In Simon's (1987) words, "pedagogy" refers to

> the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, a time and space for the practice of those strategies and evaluation purposes and methods. All these aspects of educational practice come together in the realities of what happens in the classrooms. Together they organize a view of how a teacher's work within an institutional context specifies a particular version of what knowledge is of most worth, what it means to know something, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment. In other words, talk about pedagogy is simultaneously talk about the details of what students and others might do together and the cultural politics of such practices support. (p. 371)

The concepts of literacy as a sociocultural discourse and pedagogy as a form of cultural politics are important to the present study

as its emphasis on historical situatedness, multiplicity of voice, and dynamic human agency is embedded in the battles of literacy and schooling between mainstream schools and Chinese immigrant parents. The interplay of these three elements is reflected in the parents' and the teachers' different sets of beliefs about pedagogical practices. In the next section, I examine these contested pedagogies.

Competing Discourses of Literacy Education

At the forefront of the cultural conflicts between the Chinese parents and Canadian teachers were the methods of literacy instruction. The Chinese parents preferred traditional, teacher-centered, code-emphasis education while the Canadian teachers believed in progressive, student-centered, meaning-emphasis education. What is the best practice for literacy instruction? Is there a best method? In order to better understand these cultural conflicts, I situate the battles at Taylor Elementary within the larger context of the on-going debate in the field of literacy education in North America.

The debate about the best method to help students achieve high levels of literacy has lasted for over one hundred years in North America and is still alive today at the peak of the push for standardized testing. At the center of this disagreement is whole language (meaning-emphasis) versus phonics (code-emphasis) debate. Proponents of the whole language approach believe that learning to read and write are natural to human development, and language is best learned when students are provided with opportunities to learn for real purposes using real examples of language; therefore, direct, systematic instruction of skills and grammar is not necessary (Goodman, 1977, 1986). Phonics, defined as an approach to teach children about the orthographic code of the language and the relationships of spelling patterns to sound patterns (Stahl, 1992), is based on the philosophy that education is not a natural act, but consists of imparting certain information and skills revered in the past to a new generation of learners (Chall, 2000). Proponents of the phonics approach believe that direct, systematic instruction is not only necessary, but also essential for more effective learning, especially for early literacy instruction.

Chall (2000) extended the original debate on reading instruction methods to other subject areas such as math, science, and social studies. She summarizes the main aspects of this great debate as follows:

1. Curriculum: The progressive, student-centered approach integrates materials across subject areas, bases learning as much as possible in students' interests, and follows students' individual development pace. On the other hand, the teacher-centered approach has standards established for each grade level and specific subject areas are taught separately.

2. Materials: The progressive, student-centered approach uses a rich variety of materials including manipulatives, different trade books and authentic literature; and it permits students' choices. The teacher-centered approach uses commercial textbooks such as basal readers that focus on building phonemic awareness and systematic, sequential progression of knowledge and skills in language.

3. The role of the teacher: From a progressive, student-centered perspective, the teacher is a facilitator of learning who provides resources and helps students plan and follow their own interests. The teacher's role involves "constant planning, continuous innovation, and a sensitive system of monitoring students' performance, and well-developed skills in maintaining order without being authoritarian" (Gage & Berliner, 1992, p. 486). In a traditional approach, the teacher is a class leader and is responsible for content, learning lessons, recitation, skills, seatwork, and assigning homework. In this approach, learning is seen as the responsibility of both students and teachers. Facilitating in and of itself is not enough, and interests alone cannot be relied upon. Teachers are seen as the knowledge source from whom students can learn.

4. Evaluation: Evaluation of student performance in a progressive, student-centered approach is based on comparisons of learners with themselves rather than with their classmates or grade standards. Diagnostic rather than norm-referenced evaluation is preferred, and formal testing is deemphasized. In a traditional approach, evaluation is based on norm-referenced tests and grade standards, and both informal and formal testing is emphasized.

After reviewing research findings over the last several decades, Chall (1967, 1983, 1996, 2000) concludes that phonics and teacher-

centered instruction are more effective for beginning reading instruction than various progressive, student-centered methods because they result in higher achievement in word recognition, reading comprehension, and reading speed. These three skills are predictors of students' later literacy achievement. She also concludes that traditional approaches are particularly more effective for at-risk children who are from lower socioeconomic status and different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, bilingual children, and children with learning disabilities, and the more progressive approach only benefits children from families where children are well socialized into English literacy before school. She also explains that traditional phonics programs appeal to many well-educated, upper-middle-class parents as well as to culturally disadvantaged parents such as immigrants. Based on these findings, Chall points to a need to change beginning literacy instruction from a meaning-emphasis, student-centered approach to a code-emphasis, teacher-centered method, especially for children of disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, Chall and her associates suggest the code-emphasis, teacher-centered approach should be used at all elementary levels, especially given the research evidence that many students' literacy achievement begins to slump at grade 4 and this slump continues to intensify through grade 7 (Chall, 2000; Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991). The factors that result in this slump mainly include the students' lack of phonemic awareness, spelling-sound knowledge, lexical knowledge in early grades, and skills which can be improved through systematic phonics instruction (Juel, 1988; Juel, Griffith, & Gough, 1986).

However, phonics instruction has often been protested and even rejected by many educators due to a perceived dichotomy created by the media. Proponents of phonics attribute the confusion over phonics to the politics of the debate in that phonics is often misunderstood as devaluing or rejecting meaning-based instruction. Many phonics proponents emphasize that advocacy for traditional, teacher-led direct instruction does not mean that whole language instruction is of no value, and they warn against ignoring meaning-emphasis in literacy instruction (Delpit, 1995; Stahl, 1992; Stanovich, 1990). Many literacy educators propose an eclectic approach combining both methods—they maintain that these approaches should complement each other to achieve optimal results for literacy instruction. Adams (1990) takes the position that systematic phonics instruction is most productive when

it is conceived as "a support activity, carefully covered but largely subordinated to the reading and writing of connected text" (p. 416). She points out that "children must learn to think not just the letters and their sounds; rather they must understand the basic nature and purpose of the system and reflectively use that understanding to contextualize the letter-sound parings productively" (p. 255).

Meaning-emphasis instruction can benefit children in many ways: it gives students freedom to experiment with and explore literacy and to become members of a community of readers and writers, and exposes students to the rich resources of children's literature, especially trade books (Spiegel, 1992). Therefore, in addition to traditional phonics instruction, children should be exposed to meaningful written text as soon as possible so that they will begin to notice and develop an interest in the many things around them that there are to read, and to sense the utility of their phonics lessons as soon as possible (Adams, 1990). The goal is to ensure that students can use phonics with new, authentic materials for authentic purposes (Spiegel, 1992). Adams (1990) argues that phonics without connected reading amounts to useless mechanics: "Connected reading provides the meaningful exercise necessary for linking the spelling patterns to the rest of the cognitive system, for ensuring that they are understood and learned in a way that is useful and usable toward the tasks for which they were taught" (p. 286).

Adams concludes that phonological awareness, letter-recognition facility, familiarity with spelling patterns, spelling-sound relations, and individual words must be developed in concert with real reading and real writing and with a deliberate reflection on the forms, functions, and meaning of texts (p. 422). Recent research on effective early-grade literacy instruction provides evidence that excellent early literacy instruction does not support theory that emphasizes only one approach such as phonics or whole language; rather, it involves multiple instructional components articulated with one another. This exemplary instruction is characterized by an integrated and comprehensive teaching of skills, literature, and writing; scaffolding and matching of task demands to student competence; encouragement of student self-regulation; and strong cross-curricular connections (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2000; Pressley et al., 2001). This infusion of different approaches is also found in expert instruction for language minority students (Gersten & Jiménez, 1994; Gersten & Woodward, 1992; Jiménez & Gersten, 1999).

The questions remaining are: What is the right balance between code and meaning instruction and what should be taught? What is considered "best practice"? Though there are no definite answers to these questions, many researchers believe that it depends on teachers' solid understanding of the principles and goals of the approaches and their ability to be conceptually selective in combining practices that work well in order to address the needs of students of diverse backgrounds (Adams, 1990; Gersten & Jiménez , 1994; Gersten & Woodward, 1992; Pressley et al., 2001). That is, effective teachers use a continuum of instructional approaches (rather than one single approach) to ensure students' high academic engagement and competence.

In light of the on-going battle between the Chinese parents and Canadian teachers in this study, the debate seems to suggest that it is necessary for the Canadian teachers to have a solid understanding of their own beliefs and practices as well as the Chinese parents' traditional, teacher-centered approach. Such a solid understanding may help them better communicate with the parents and make decisions on what aspects of traditional instruction can be included in their meaning-emphasis instruction. It is, however, equally important for the Chinese parents to have a solid understanding of the teachers' meaning-emphasis instruction because it may help them recognize the limitations of their own beliefs and practices and become more aware of the benefits of student-centered instruction. This kind of mutual understanding, however, as the data in the study will show, is hard to achieve due to profound power imbalances and cultural differences between the two groups.

The traditional and progressive binary has focused narrowly on instructional dimensions and sees these dimensions as culturally neutral and nonideological. It has neglected the social and political dimensions of literacy education (Cummins & Sayers, 1995). The battles over literacy instruction between Chinese parents and mainstream teachers have gone beyond being simply about the methods of teaching, but are about the legitimacy of a particular set of cultural knowledge in schooling. While the mainstream teachers tried to maintain the progressive pedagogy, the Chinese parents actively fought for their preferred traditional pedagogy. The parents' struggle for voice suggests that the pedagogical divide between the teachers and the parents has gone beyond the binary to become a political activity that attempts to redefine the power structure between school and home. In this sense, the teachers' and the parents' particular cultural knowledge

and preferences become sites of multiple and heterogeneous borders where relations of power and privilege are negotiated. To make sense of the instructional as well as the political nature of the battles between school and home, it is necessary to look at not only how literacy is taught, but also how cultural borders are negotiated and defined through underlying social assumptions (Cummins, 1996; Giroux, 1992). In the next section, I discuss the relationship between cultural differences and teacher perceptions and how other school discourses may have an impact on minority schooling.

Cultural Differences, Teacher Perspectives, and School Discourses

Culture is seen as a vital source for developing an understanding of minority schooling. Cultural differences are often seen as a risk factor in the school experiences of minority children (Erickson, 1993; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990). Educational anthropologists argue that how teachers perceive cultural differences plays a key role in the success or failure of minority students in overcoming the discontinuities between school and home. Teachers who have a deficit view of minority cultural differences often assume that minority students lack ability in learning or have inadequate parenting or both (Pang & Sablan, 1998). Teachers with this perspective often attempt to change minority students through instruction so that they will better fit into mainstream schools (King, 1994). This type of instruction does not build on students' skills and knowledge or affirm their cultural identity and often results in "subtractive schooling" that reinforces the existing home/school dichotomy, and limits children's access to school literacy learning and achievement (Valenzuela, 1999).

On the other hand, teachers who view minority cultural differences not as barriers to overcome but as resources usually have a positive attitude toward students' ability to achieve and often see students' background knowledge as funds of knowledge (Moll, 1994). Teachers with this perspective often develop culturally relevant and linguistically congruent instructional approaches to translate school and home differences for minority students, for example, adapting their speech patterns, interaction styles, and participation structures to adhere more to those of minority students', or using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Au & Jordan, 1981; Banks, 2002; Gay, 2000). These equity pedagogical approaches build on

students' strengths, affirm their cultural identity, and help them make meaningful connections between school and home.

How teachers perceive students' cultures can have significant implications for minority students' academic success as it is often translated into their instructional practices. Many instructional factors can contribute to students' success or failure with literacy (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). One key factor is whether the teachers' instructional approaches incorporate the language and culture of minority students (Au, 1998; Cummins, 1996; Moll, 1994). These approaches include factors such as goal of instruction, instructional materials and methods, classroom management and interaction with students, the role of the home language, and assessment.

Research has suggested that literacy instruction that is not made personally meaningful to minority students will likely impede their reading development. Also, inappropriate teaching materials and content such as isolated, formalized worksheets or culturally irrelevant materials have adverse effects on students' reading development (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Use of such materials rather than multicultural literature that accurately depicts the experiences of diverse groups will decrease students' motivation to read and devalue their own life experiences as topics for writing (Au, 1998; Banks, 2002). Besides instructional materials and content, ineffective or insufficient instruction can also cause reading difficulty for students. If teachers of minority students do not provide them with authentic literacy activities and a considerable amount of instruction on specific literacy skills needed for gaining a command of the mainstream discourse, their literacy development will likely suffer (Delpit, 1995).

Another important aspect of pedagogical influence is whether teachers are culturally responsive in their management of and interaction with minority students. Students from diverse backgrounds exhibit culturally different learning styles, and instruction that caters to different learning styles can enhance their academic achievement (Banks, 2002; Irvine & York, 1995). Chinese students who come from families that emphasize skill-based instruction and rote-memorization tend to be structure-oriented learners who are more accustomed to definite goals and specific tasks. Because of this, they may require more reinforcement rather than subjective questioning or opinion-based instruction from teachers; they may also perform poorly on creative writing and analytical commentary tasks (Yao; 1985; S. Y. Zhang & Carrasquillo, 1995). Classroom instruction that does not build on

these learning characteristics will have adverse effects on the learning of many Chinese students.

Teachers' attitudes toward students' home language in the classroom is also a significant causal factor in students' underachievement. Most teachers in regular classrooms perceive that using English exclusively in a classroom with students of different languages is a natural and commonsense practice, and if other languages were to be used in the classroom, the standards of English would drop (Auerbach, 1993; Phillipson, 1988; Valdés, 1998). These attitudes often prevent teachers from utilizing students' literacy skills from their first language in order to facilitate learning of English and knowledge of content (Freeman & Freeman, 1992). Research has demonstrated that schools who value students' languages and cultures have higher rates of academic success with ESL students (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990; Moll & Diaz, 1993). Contrarily, the exclusive use of English often prevents low English proficiency students from understanding teachers as they explain and present material or from comprehending the content materials that they are expected to learn (Wong Fillmore, 1982). Lack of understanding instruction and material often results in nonparticipation, frustration, negative attitudes toward learning, low self-esteem, and even dropping-out among many ESL students (Auerbach, 1993; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1983).

In addressing the impact of cultural differences on teaching and learning, scholars and educators have proposed to incorporate multicultural education into the basic school curriculum (Banks, 1993; Fillmore & Meyer, 1992; Nieto, 2002). This will require teachers and schools to transform their curriculum in five dimensions (see Banks, 1993, 2002, 2004):

- *Content integration:* Teachers use content from diverse cultures to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area.
- *An equity pedagogy:* Teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse social, cultural, and social class groups (for example, use a variety of teaching styles to match students' learning styles within various cultural groups).
- *The knowledge construction process:* Teachers help students understand and investigate implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and bias and how these

influence individuals' and groups' social positioning and identity.

- *Prejudice reduction:* Teachers modify teaching methods and materials to help students develop more positive racial and ethnic attitudes.
- *An empowering school culture and social structure:* Teachers and schools establish a school environment that empowers minority students. For example, teachers can establish fair and culturally sensitive assessment procedures, show respect for students' first languages and dialects, set high expectations, and help students realize positive career goals.

In sum, many pedagogical factors may have an impact on minority learners' motivation and investment in learning. These factors suggest that we need to contextualize learners' literacy experiences not only in their sociocultural contexts, but also through their particular schooling and pedagogical experiences that may or may not connect with their cultural backgrounds.

Cultural Diversity, Parental Involvement, and Home Discourses

It is widely recognized that parental active interest in and continuing support of children's learning have a positive impact on school effectiveness and students' academic achievement. Epstein (1992, 1995) theorizes that there are different levels of parental involvement, ranging from involvement in the home, to participation in activities and events at school, and to participation in the schools' decision-making process. Parental involvement at home includes attending to children's basic needs, discipline, preparing for school, and supporting school learning or engaging actively in homework. However, the degree and the ways of involvement vary from family to family and from culture to culture as families of different races, classes, and religions have different ways of transmitting and socializing literacy, different perceptions of families' and schools' roles in their children's education, and different ways of involvement in their children's academic learning.

The influence of social class on parental involvement has been well documented. Research shows that parents of higher socioeconomic status place more emphasis on education, feel more confident

of their right to be involved in the school, and consistently take a more active role in their children's schooling than parents of lower socioeconomic status (Heath, 1983; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987; Lightfoot, 1978). Parents of different social classes also differ in their patterns of involvement in their children's schooling. Lareau (2000) found that parents in both working-class and upper-middle-class communities wanted their children to achieve academic success, but they took very different steps to try to ensure that success. In the working-class community of Colton in the San Francisco Bay area of northern California, parents perceived education as something that took place at school and as the responsibility of teachers. At home, they helped to prepare their children for school by teaching them manners and rudimentary educational skills, but they did not supervise, compensate for, or attempt to intervene in their children's program. In contrast, parents in the upper-middle-class community of Prescott in the same district demonstrated much more proactive involvement: "Rather than preparing children for schooling and helping to support the teacher, parents actively supervised, supplemented, and intervened in their children's schooling. When faced with a weak teacher, some parents compensated with additional tutoring. Parents also hired additional educational consultants, particularly during the summer. While not always successful, upper-middle-class parents sought a more individualized education for their children" (Lareau, 2000, p. 169).

Social class, however, is not the only variable that affects the degree of parental involvement. For immigrant and minority families, active involvement is also influenced by parents' educational background, their English proficiency, their knowledge of and familiarity with mainstream schooling, and their socioeconomic status (G. Li, 2002). For example, immigrant parents who have limited education or lack fluency in English would be seriously handicapped in supporting their children's education as those factors not only restrict employment and interaction in the mainstream society, but also impede their effective interaction with teachers, understanding of schoolwork, and ability to assist their children academically at home (Moles, 1993).

Parental educational experience in both the country of origin and the host society is also an important factor. Parents who are more highly educated tend to be more familiar with how the educational system works in the culture in which they were educated, and it becomes easier for them to follow the educational patterns. Immigrant parents who have more education in their home country would likely

find it easier to draw on their own educational experiences and replicate some of those instructional approaches to support their children's learning. This phenomenon is especially common among Chinese immigrant families. Moreover, parents who have educational experiences in the host culture will likely have a better understanding of the educational system and therefore can better work with teachers to help their children to adapt to the culture of mainstream literacy (G. Li, 2002; Purcell-Gates, 1996). Immigrant parents of limited educational experiences often do not understand their children's school experiences, nor do they know how to facilitate their children's school success. Some examples of this are the Juarez family in Carger's (1996) study, the Liu family in G. Li's (2003) study, the Ye family in G. Li's (2001) study, and the Hmong families in Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton's (1990) study.

Because literacy is a cultural practice, parents from different cultures have different beliefs about what it means to be literate, how to acquire literacy, and the role of schooling in achieving literacy. For example, several studies on Hispanic families in the United States have documented how their ways of learning and familial values are distinctively different from other cultures such as white and Asian. Parental involvement in these Hispanic families often includes providing opportunities for children to learn through observation, to achieve gradual mastery of skills, to cooperate in tasks, and to collaborate in negotiating life's everyday trials (Carger, 1996; Valdés, 1996). These practices are different from the white middle-class families' emphasis on independent learning (as described previously), and from the Asian families' preference for a direct instructional approach (Anderson & Gunderson, 1997).

Social class and cultural differences also shape how families view their involvement in school settings. White working-class parents, for example, view education as the school's responsibility and often resist parental participation in school settings. Many immigrants from other cultures such as Hispanics and Southeast Asians also share similar perceptions that teachers are the authority and specialists and that parents are to avoid trespassing on those territories. For example, in Huss-Keeler's (1997) study of the mainstream teachers' perceptions of Pakistani parental involvement, many Pakistani parents demonstrated their interest in their children's education by supporting and assisting their children's studies at home and not by being actively involved at school. Their culturally different expectations, however, were perceived by teachers as disinterest in their children's education, and

consequently, their children's learning and achievement were frequently undermined.

These different patterns of parental involvement have a profound influence on family-school relations since they may affect how parents and teachers view each other's roles and hence their attitudes and communication to each other. Schools' communications and actions can convey positive, family-oriented attitudes that show concern for family needs and perspectives as well as negative attitudes, for example, viewing differences as deficiencies or parents' active participation as overinvolved or intrusive (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). The latter attitude, which often places families in a powerless position, is detrimental to healthy family-school relationships and might increase the potential for conflict between school and parents (Fine, 1993). As Moles (1993) points out, "Disadvantaged parents and teachers may be entangled by various psychological obstacles to mutual involvement such as misperceptions and misunderstandings, negative expectations, stereotypes, intimidation, and distrust. They may also be victims of cultural barriers reflecting differences in language, values, goals, methods of education, and definitions of appropriate roles" (p. 33).

These cultural and social barriers are important for understanding the conflict between the Canadian teachers and Chinese families in this study. The Chinese parents and their children at Taylor Elementary were influenced by social class, racial, and cultural factors. Social class shaped the parents' confidence to challenge the schools' performance in educating their children, and influenced the resources the parents could invest in their children's learning outside school. Race and cultural backgrounds have determined their ways of parental involvement, resulting in child-rearing and value systems that are different from Canadian mainstream practices. How the teachers responded and understood these differences significantly affected their communications, attitudes, and actions toward the Chinese parents and students, and ultimately the parent-school relationships.

Literacy, Education, and Chinese Immigrants in North America

As familiarity with schooled literacy discourses is the mark of school success, students from nonmainstream cultural backgrounds have to learn a different set of literacy conventions and often experience difficulties with schooling (McCarthey 1997; Lopez 1999). Cultural

differences between Chinese home practices and mainstream practices have been well documented largely to explain the "model minority" myth. Chinese parents' cultural values on education (high expectations, parental sacrifice for their children's education, and emphasis on obedience and close-knit family relations) are reported to have determining effects on their children's academic performance (Peng & Wright, 1994; Siu, 1994; Xu, 1999; S. Y. Zhang & Carrasquillo, 1995). However, within Chinese ethnic groups, parents' expectations, strategies, and investment in their children's education are influenced by their social class, their educational backgrounds, and their level of English proficiency (Louie, 2001; G. Li, 2002, 2003). Middle-class parents with more educational background and more access to mainstream resources are likely to be more actively involved in their children's learning, by either teaching their children themselves or hiring tutors, than are parents of lower socioeconomic background and little educational experience.

Despite the within-ethnic differences, there are some generalizations that can be made about the Chinese, especially middle-class Chinese immigrants. Several comparative studies have found that many middle-class Chinese parents hold cultural beliefs that are fundamentally different from their mainstream counterparts. For example, they are more likely to engage their children in varying literacy activities every day or at least provide a nurturing literacy environment; they also provide more structured and formal educational experiences after school and on weekends than their white counterparts (Yao, 1985; Xu, 1999). Chinese parents (especially mothers) also have different beliefs from Caucasian parents about their specific roles in their children's education. They place greater value on education and are willing to invest more in their children's education, and they also use a more direct intervention approach to their children's schooling and learning and therefore convey a much stronger belief that they can play a significant role in their children's school success (Chao, 1996). Furthermore, different from other ethnic parents, Chinese parents are more likely to take an active part in remedying the shortcomings of the school at home if they lack confidence in the school (Pang, 1990).

Chinese parents also hold different beliefs about specific literacy instruction and practices from mainstream parents. Chinese parents are reported to favor traditional, skill-based approaches over holistic principles of literacy learning (J. Anderson, 1995b; G. Li, 2002). They are more concerned with basic literacy skills and with monitoring and correcting performance such as teaching a child to print and write prop-

erly, checking for reading comprehension, teaching a child how to spell correctly, and having a child recite a story that the child has read. They also appear not to recognize the effects sociocultural dimensions of literacy (such as providing role models and encouragement to their children) may have on their child's literacy development.

These beliefs are antithetical to the emergent literacy perspective that is commonly adopted in Canadian and American mainstream classrooms (J. Anderson & Gunderson, 1997, p. 514). Anderson & Gunderson (1997) conclude that Chinese parents diametrically oppose many aspects of mainstream literacy instruction. For example, Chinese parents believe that accuracy and precision are important from the beginning and see little value in children's early attempts at reading or invented spelling; they view the teacher as the authority in the classroom rather than as a facilitator of learning; and they expect large amounts of homework from school and emphasize rote memorization.

Pai (1990) posits that the effectiveness with which a child can learn in school depends on the degree of continuity between the school and the learner's family environment. The cultural differences between Chinese parents' beliefs and mainstream schooling suggest that to many Chinese children, going to school requires students to function in two divergent and sometimes contradictory arenas of literacy learning. Unless teachers are aware of these cultural differences and are able to transform mainstream discourses, these cultural differences and discontinuities often become a source of misunderstanding and conflict. This may in turn result in inappropriate educational evaluation and planning for these children (Delpit, 1995; Pai, 1990).

Immigration, Integration, and English Literacy Acquisition

From a sociocultural perspective, the practices of literacy, what they are and what they mean for a given society, depend on the social and cultural contexts. These contexts have an overwhelming influence on literacy purposes, demands, and processes (Mikulecky, 1990). The outcomes of an individual's literacy learning are shaped by the social contexts in which the learning is embedded, and can only be fully understood in relation to these social contexts (Langer, 1987). These contexts are particular "modes of incorporation," that is, the immigrants' particular social context in the host society (Portes & Rumbaut 1990, 1996). Three modes of incorporation can shape their downward or upward assimilation and hence their educational success or failure:

strength of ethnic solidarity, socioeconomic level of their schools, and societal reception (Portes & Rumbaut 1990, 1996). Immigrant children who are positioned in favorable social contexts and receive positive societal reception are likely to succeed in their socioeconomic mobility and integration in their community. This social capital will in turn have a positive effect on the children's educational attainment. Conversely, unfavorable social contexts and negative societal reception (such as racism) will result in negative educational attainment (Gibson, 1988; Portes & McCleod, 1995; Zhou & Bankston III, 1996). Moreover, as Portes and McCleod (1995) found, the contextual advantages and disadvantages are often transmitted to the second generation.

The Chinese immigrant children in this study are favorably situated in a higher socioeconomic status school, but unfavorably in a racially divided social environment (this aspect will be discussed in detail in the next chapter). British Columbia has had a strong antioriental sentiment since the mid-nineteenth century, and historical racial stereotypes continue to exist in the contemporary social structure (K. J. Anderson, 1991; Chow, 2000; P. S. Li, 1998; Ward, 1978). Many of the parents in this study expressed the view that racism existed and was affecting their children's future social and educational attainment. These perceptions were passed on to the children through the Chinese parents' strong emphasis on education.

The Chinese immigrants' ethnic solidarity, though favorable for preserving their first language, was not favorable for their acquisition of English literacy—a vital skill necessary for "making it" in the mainstream society. In research literature, ethnic solidarity is usually considered favorable for immigrants to preserve ethnic cultures and traditional values, and for accumulating social capital through ethnic networks (Zhou & Bankston III, 1996). However, ethnic solidarity, in my view, can also have negative effects on immigrant children's schooling in that it prohibits immigrant children from having frequent contact with the culture of power. This lack of contact often prevents the children from effectively acquiring the "codes of power," such as mainstream language and literacy that are the gateway to the upward social mobility in the mainstream society (Delpit, 1995).

Several studies on Asian immigrant youths have indicated that living and learning in highly ethnically concentrated schools and communities have also made it difficult for Chinese immigrant students to acquire English literacy. First, ethnic solidarity means that there are fewer speakers of the target language (English) who know it well

enough to provide ESL learners with access to the language, and few social settings which bring learners and target language speakers into frequent enough contact to make language learning possible (Wong Fillmore, 1991a). Second, ethnic solidarity also influences ESL learners' choice of language. ESL students often choose the comfort and familiarity of their home language and culture rather than acquiring new ones. For example, in studying Cantonese-speaking students' language choice in a school with a large Chinese population in Toronto, Goldstein (2003) found that many Cantonese-speaking students chose to use only Cantonese with other Cantonese speakers and therefore limited their opportunities to use and practice English. In a similar study situated in Vancouver, Minichiello (2001) also found that the large numbers of Chinese students in one school exacerbated their adjustment difficulties and slowed their English development. Third, high ethnic solidarity can also lower the students' motivation to acquire a new language and culture, as they do not see the immediate need to achieve high levels of English literacy (Wong Fillmore, 1991a). Similar findings on the negative effects of ethnic concentration on immigrant and minority children's academic achievement were also reported in studies of other ethnic groups in ethnically concentrated communities in the United States, for example, Hmong students (Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990), Latino students (Valdés, 2001), and Vietnamese students (Zhou & Bankston III, 1996).

In the current study, although the majority of the students were Canadian born, they also faced similar problems when acquiring English literacy. Furthermore, these students also faced the challenge of acquiring first language literacy in Chinese. Though many of them are fluent in oral language, many struggle with reading and writing in their first language. Due to the limited time to learn reading and writing and to practice literacy, many immigrant parents have much lower expectations for their children to learn native language literacy than to acquire English literacy, which is necessary for educational advancement in the host society. Many parents only expect that their children will be able to speak the language and communicate with family members. This factor, combined with schools' and society's push for monolingualism, often results in rapid first language and literacy loss in immigrant children (Portes & Hao, 1998; Portes & Schauffler, 1996; Wong Fillmore, 1991b). Thus, if these children fail to learn English literacy, they may become doubly disadvantaged in both literacies and cultures.

A View from Both Sides

In the chapters that follow, I bring into focus the perspectives and beliefs of two Canadian teachers and eight Chinese parents who were engaged in on-going battles over literacy and culture concerning the education of the children they shared. I will also provide a detailed description of the lives of the eight children amid the paradigm war on literacy instruction between school and home. In exploring the conflicts between the teachers' and the parents' values and beliefs as well as the impact these differences have upon the education of immigrant children, my objective is to raise serious questions about the current educational practices that may constrain the learning of immigrant children inside and outside school in a new socioeconomic context.

As the stories and experiences of the teachers, parents, and children will demonstrate, the new Chinese immigrants, empowered by their socioeconomic capital and their collective power, challenged the mainstream schooled literacy practices in direct and indirect ways. And the teachers, shaped by their own class, culture, and experiences, tried to maintain their ways of knowing and practices. The power struggle between school and home had a profound influence on immigrant children's literacy development and identity formation. By offering a view from both sides, my intention is not to show the superiority of one set of cultural beliefs over another, or one set of literacy practices over another; rather, by providing "hetereoglossic voices" from both home and school, I hope to shed light on how to resolve the cultural conflicts, build a bridge between school and home, and make recommendations for future theory and practices of teaching immigrant children in a new social climate.