Class Struggles: Public Education and the New Canadian

Why Canada's schools are failing newcomers

In Room 212 of Brampton's Great Lakes Public School, teacher Charlotte Mullin stands in front of a Grade 8 class in which there is one white face other than her own.

At 27, four years removed from teachers' college, her challenge is this: To explain the science of light to 30 students, few of whom grew up speaking English. In this classroom, Punjabi, Tamil, Urdu and Vietnamese are more likely first languages.

Some of the students breeze through the material, while others with more modest English skills are mystified by dense words such as phosphorescence, fluorescence, incandescence. Equipped with the boundless energy of all good teachers, however, Mullin halts her description of the types of light for a brief vocabulary lesson.

Then she presses on, circling back again and again to test students' understanding of words and ideas. She relies heavily on pictures to convey the properties of opaque, translucent and transparent materials. She keeps her instructional language simple.

"Which material likes to share the light?" Mullin asks.

"Translucent," comes the reply.

At Great Lakes Public School, more than 60 per cent of the students speak a first language other than English. In Mullin's class, one-third of students are officially designated as English-as-a-second-language learners, which means they came to Canada within the past four years with few English skills. These students are withdrawn for daily language lessons tailored to their needs, but they spend most of their day in regular classes.

Bernard Weil/Toronto Star

Teacher Charlotte Mullin, here with Sunny Singh, says the reason she wanted to teach at Brampton's Great Lakes public School was the challenge of working in a classroom where one-third of her students are designated ESL learners

For Mullin, it means she must constantly reinvent her lesson plans, infusing them with language lessons and illustrations.

"This is why I chose this school," says Mullin, "I knew it would be a challenge."

Her daily challenge is one shared by teachers in every big city across Canada - and it is one that has become more pointed with each passing year.

Canada has settled 3.3 million immigrants during the past 15 years, an average of 221,000 a year.

The immigrants, 60 per cent of whom come from Asia and the Middle East, are less likely to speak English at home than previous waves of newcomers. Those speaking English as a second language make up 20 to 60 per cent of the student populations in large cities such as Toronto and Vancouver.

In the Vancouver School Board, for instance, only 39 per cent of students reported English as the primary language spoken at home. Meanwhile, in the Toronto District School Board, there are 117 schools that have at least one-quarter of their enrolments made up of students who have arrived in Canada within the last five years.

Those actively studying ESL make about 13 per cent of the school population in the Greater Toronto Area and 25 per cent in the Vancouver School Board. Language experts contend more immigrant students need support, but don't get it.

Indeed, while demands for English-as-a-second-language (ESL) instruction have increased, school board resources have not kept pace. Many boards have curtailed their spending. And the classrooms where immigrants learn English have been particularly hard hit, with Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia cutting deep into ESL budgets during the past decade.

In recognition of the needs of ESL students, the Ontario government recently increased its funding for them. The province will spend $225 million on ESL services in 2004-05, an increase of 20 per cent over the previous year.

But how that money is spent still depends on school board trustees and individual school principals, many with a track record of dipping into funds earmarked for ESL services to finance smaller class sizes, improved library services and other school priorities.

To make matters worse for immigrant students, many provinces have embraced standardized testing. Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and Nova Scotia all have at least one provincial English exam that students must pass to graduate from high school.

Concerned parents and teachers fear that the combination of reduced services and rigid provincial standards will drive an already troubling dropout rate among ESL students - particularly those from poor families - still higher. "That we're wasting all this talent is a tragedy; it is scandalous," says University of Calgary professor Hetty Roessingh, who co-authored one of the country's most detailed studies tracking ESL students between 1989 and 1997.

Her study of one Calgary high school pegged the dropout rate for ESL learners at 74 per cent (as opposed to 30 per cent for the general population of high-school students). Those findings have been echoed in other studies.

"ESL learners are consistently over-represented in dropout statistics, failure and enrolment in non-academic track programs in both Canada and the United States," Roessingh wrote in a recent study.

"It would seem that 20 years of program development and research into best practices has done little to alter the pernicious effects of chronic underfunding of these programs. An entire generation of ESL learners has passed through our school system who may never come to realize their potential."

What makes the situation more maddening, she says, is that Canada has successfully structured its immigration system to draw the best and brightest from other countries, yet it seems willing to squander both their talent and that of their children.

"We're getting immigrants with double the number of university degrees than the general population. But the parents are having a really hard time integrating into the economy because credentials aren't being recognized because of higher language thresholds and a lack of Canadian experience.

"So, the next big hope is for the immigrant kids to make it in school, but the evidence suggests that by and large, they're not making it," Roessingh says.

In this country, public education has traditionally been looked upon as the great leveller, as the vehicle that gives all students an equal chance to succeed. But the state of ESL services in Canadian schools - and the existence of such high ESL dropout rates - raise troubling questions: Why are ESL students struggling in school? Do these students have the same chance to succeed as their Canadian counterparts? Are we in danger of creating an immigrant underclass in Canada, one fuelled by persistent dropouts?

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The 2001 census redrew the demographic portrait of Canada's largest cities. For years, anyone living in Toronto or Vancouver recognized that these cities served as magnets for newcomers. But the census - and the social change that it

About the winner

National Newspaper Award-winning reporter Andrew Duffy is the 2003 recipient of the Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy. The Ottawa Citizen reporter, formerly with the Star, recently completed his year-long study of the relationship between immigration and education in Canada.

Andrew Duffy
Atkinson Fellowship

About the Series

Journalist Andrew Duffy's year-long Atkinson Fellowship project, Class Struggles: Public Education and the New Canadian, examines critical flashpoints in the relationship between immigrants and the public school system. Why do so many school boards cut ESL programs even as the demand for them increases and despite evidence that the mastery of English is the key to higher learning? Are we in danger of creating an underclass in which children in need of the most help are left to languish?

‘You can cut ESL with relative impunity’

mapped - still managed to awe Canadians.

Three million people in Ontario called themselves immigrants in 2001. In the Greater Toronto Area, 40 per cent of residents told Statistics Canada that they spoke a first language other than English. Toronto is made up of more immigrants (44 per cent) than Los Angeles (41 per cent), Vancouver (37 per cent) and New York City (36 per cent).

In British Columbia, 1 million people - more than one-quarter of the overall population - said they were foreign-born. The vast majority lived in Vancouver and other cities on the Lower Mainland, where fewer than half the residents consider English to be their mother tongue.

With more immigrants landing in Canada with fewer English skills, the demand for English-as-a-second-language classes has skyrocketed. In Calgary, ESL enrolment has more than tripled since 1992 to 14,000 students. In Coquitlam, B.C., the number of students enrolled in ESL jumped 580 per cent during the 1990s to 5,178 students from 761. In Vancouver and Surrey, almost one-quarter of the entire school populations are now studying ESL.

But it’s not simply ESL programs that school boards finance. With the influx of ESL students come demands for translation services so that parents can be informed of school events; bilingual tutors to help ESL students in their first language; cultural liaison workers to bridge cultural and religious divides; and new classroom materials comprehensible to those who have not grown up in Canada.

School boards have also been forced to wrestle with unusual problems. In Richmond, B.C., so many Chinese immigrants have enrolled in some schools that the ability to absorb English by listening to native English speakers has been lost. Students are being sent into the community to learn English.

In Toronto, the board had to develop a program to assist older high school students, oftentimes refugees, who were arriving without the most basic of academic skills.

For Canada’s big-city school boards, the biggest challenge created by immigrant students remains the provision of English-as-second-language instruction. For the students, it is an essential service. As Hetty Roessingh says: “You can’t do chemistry, and you can’t do physics and you can’t do social studies without English.” Indeed, it is the acquisition of English that gives immigrant students the chance to pursue their dreams in Canada.

But consider their challenge. These students must adjust to a new country while learning English quickly enough to finish high school and compete with native English speakers for places in university, college or the workplace.

Roessingh compares it to a horse race in which immigrant students are initially set well behind, and must challenge for the lead by the time they reach the finish line.

In Grade 2, a typical student can use about 7,000 words of English. A Chinese student who emigrates to Canada in Grade 2 can, with hard work, gain the ability to use about 5,000 words of English after two years. But by Grade 4, his classmates have now vaulted ahead and most have added thousands more words to their vocabularies while absorbing more of the general curriculum. “Often,” Roessingh said, “they keep moving ahead faster than the immigrant kids can catch up. It’s a never-ending race for them.”

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In recognition of the extraordinary challenge faced by students, most large school boards in Canada began offering ESL classes during the 1960s.

> *“I think ESL kids need not only a good teacher, but a good language teacher.”*
>
> **Hetty Roessingh,** University of Calgary

The program expanded dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s as immigration levels rose and more newcomers came to Canada from non-English speaking countries: China, Hong Kong, Somalia, Sudan, Croatia, Afghanistan, Russia and Iran. The expansion of ESL programs was supported by research that suggested these students needed help to develop the advanced English skills that would allow them to deal with the sophisticated language of textbooks in high school, college and university.

Although most immigrants can develop a working knowledge of English within a few years, the range and accuracy of their vocabularies are limited, making it difficult to perform well on tests and exams.

Some critics, however, point to earlier waves of immigrants - those who came after World War II from places such as Italy, Portugal, Germany, Poland and Ukraine - to argue that ESL classes are an unnecessary luxury. Those newcomers made the transition to life in Canada by being thrown into mainstream classrooms, so why can’t the new generation do the same?

But those earlier immigrants likely suffered from dropout rates that were as bad or worse than today’s ESL students. (Such statistics, however, simply were not kept then.) Moreover, those immigrants who did leave high school during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s still made comfortable lives for themselves in Canada. There was little stigma attached to being a dropout and high-paying union jobs in construction, mining and manufacturing were largely filled by post-war immigrants.

Circumstances have changed for more recent immigrants, especially those to arrive during the past 20 years. High-school education is now considered a bare minimum qualification by most employers; many high-paying, low-skilled jobs disappeared in the 1980s as the economy was reshaped by free trade and technology.

Elizabeth Coelho, a University of Toronto professor and the former co-ordinator of ESL services at the Toronto Board of Education, says post-war immigrant students could drop out in Grade 8 and still live a life of full employment. “Well, that’s absolutely not possible anymore,” she says.

University of Calgary professor Roessingh’s work has helped to establish the importance of intensive English-language training in an immigrant student’s academic chase.

While a teacher at Queen Elizabeth High School in northwest Calgary, Roessingh was disturbed by how many immigrant students had stalled in their language development at or near a Grade 5 level. She saw many of them later drop out of high school.

With the help of her principal, Roessingh re-ordered the resources at Queen Elizabeth to more than double the annual hours of ESL instruction. With 750 hours of ESL instruction, the success rate soared. Roessingh tracked her students through high school and found that 78 per cent of them (47 out of 60 in the study) managed to pass the Grade 12 high school English literature exam and enter university.

“I think ESL kids need not only a good teacher, but a good language teacher,” Roessingh says, “since all the other kids who come to school have the language and have the basic grammar.”

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In many places, however, immigrant parents are beginning to fight back.

In Toronto, Somali-Canadian parents, worried about the academic achievement of their children, have started to advocate on their behalf. They feel that too many Somali students are being sent to special education classes and into applied programs that rule out university. What the students need, the parents insist, is more help with English.

“We need more ESL,” says Maryan Abdi, who once had to move schools to get the appropriate language help for her 11-year-old daughter, Asha.

Immigrant parents in Calgary are the best organized. They created the Coalition for Equal Access to Education in the wake of school board cutbacks in 1992-93 that decimated ESL services.

“No other program suffered the same kind of destructive cuts,” says coalition co-ordinator Hieu Van Ngo, who estimates that more than 50 per cent of ESL services were slashed. “We realized it was too easy for them to do it since nobody fought for the immigrant children and youth.”

Van Ngo says school boards have steadily replaced qualified ESL teachers with other instructors who have no formal training in the complex learning needs of immigrant students. The cuts have been such that for every qualified ESL teacher in Alberta, there are now 119 ESL students, according to the coalition’s statistics.

The government of Alberta recently increased its annual per student funding for ESL students to $1,028 from $736 - something the coalition considered an important victory.

But Van Ngo says much remains to be done. Among other things, the coalition wants school boards to track ESL students through high school to determine how many succeed; it wants the provincial government to establish ESL as part of the core curriculum to make it harder for boards to dismantle the program in times of restraint; and it wants the federal government to develop national benchmarks for ESL and set a national ESL curriculum.

“They talk a lot about diversity,” says Van Ngo, “But they (governments) are reluctant to move to the next step, which is to integrate diversity into the way they work, and to give our children a meaningful education.”

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In Ontario, a survey published in September, 2003 by the parent advocacy group, People for Education, showed that 76 per cent of urban elementary schools reported having ESL students, but only 26 per cent had ESL teachers. The number of elementary schools with ESL programs has declined by 33 per cent since 1997-98 despite the fact the number of immigrants in Ontario has increased annually by an average of 13.5 per cent during the same period.

It means in elementary schools, ESL students are often being taught by parent volunteers or by special education teachers, says Annie Kidder, a spokesperson for the group. It also means regular elementary teachers are having to play a much larger role in the language development of ESL students.

At the York Region District School Board, for instance, the number of elementary school ESL teachers has been slashed during the past decade despite a steady increase in the number of immigrant students. About 1,700 new immigrant students enrol each year in York Region public schools. But the board now employs 60 ESL teachers in elementary schools compared to the 120 that it employed in 1994.

> *“We realized ... nobody fought for the immigrant children and youth.”*
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> **Hieu Van Ngo,** Coalition for Equal Access to Education

In Toronto, librarians and ESL teachers bore the brunt of staff cuts that were ordered to reduce the board’s $100-million deficit in 2002-03. ESL staffing has been reduced by about 30 per cent over the past two years.

Toronto board assistant director Gerry Connelly says provincial laws that mandate class sizes left officials few other targets. Mainstream classroom teachers had to be retained, she says, to keep classes within legal limits.

Each province makes its own rules for what constitutes adequate ESL services. Although ESL experts say it takes immigrant students five to seven years to acquire the English skills required to succeed in high school, most provinces do not fund ESL classes that long. British Columbia is the most generous province, paying for up to five years of ESL assistance; Ontario recently increased its funding to cover four years from three.

Nova Scotia earmarks no funding for ESL.

In the complicated world of education financing, the province grants school boards money based on the size and the make-up of their student population. Supplementary grants, for instance, are issued for students who require special education, French immersion and ESL. In Ontario, the province gives boards $3,960 for each elementary

school student and $4,771 for each high school student annually. Each ESL student now attracts an additional $7,847 over four years.

"When school boards are really in a bind about money, like the Toronto District School Board has been, and at the same time, they're told they have to maintain class sizes, they have to find the money somewhere," says Elizabeth Coelho. "If you tried to close the swimming pool, you're going to get a lot public awareness and criticism. You would never dare cut special-ed programs; they wouldn't let you. If you tried to abandon French immersion, you'd hear about it from the parents. But you can cut ESL with relative impunity."

Toronto District School Board budget chief Don Higgins concedes administrators have had to rethink their delivery of ESL - and deliver more of it in regular classrooms - because of other budget demands. "That's the only way we've been able to manage it," he says.

An award-winning teacher and ESL researcher from Toronto, Mary Meyers, has authored a scathing criticism of the handling of immigrant students' educational needs.

Her report, *Myths and Delusions: The State of ESL in Large Canadian School Boards*, contends governments and school boards have sold to the public a false bill of goods: that the wholesale integration of ESL children into regular classrooms is appropriate to bring their language skills up to speed.

The move, she says, has allowed boards in Ontario and B.C. to curtail the growth of expensive ESL programs and to redirect money.

But Meyers says most classroom teachers are not trained to deal with the needs of ESL students. Teachers' colleges in Canada offer ESL instruction only as an elective.

To complicate matters, most ESL students are assessed on the basis of the same tests administered to native English-speakers. Meyers believes it "sets the ESL students up for failure" and leads to many being streamed into applied education and special education programs designed for those with learning disabilities, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

"The state of ESL in large, multi-ethnic school boards is abysmal, and in essence, a betrayal of public trust," Meyers concludes. "The reality is that ESL students are denied access to supports necessary for their academic success, and contravene Canadian laws for equal rights."

Public Education and the New Canadian

Struggle for success

Journalist Andrew Duffy examines why immigrant students who speak English as a second language — particularly refugees and those from poor families — face long odds in becoming high school graduates

Photo Illustration by Raffi Anderian/Toronto Star

Burnaby, B.C. - student Khesro Amin, second from right and Jarvis Collegiate's Kadijo Afrah, far right, are just a few of the exceptional students Andrew Duffy encountered during his year-long Atkinson Fellowship project.

Although the high-school dropout rate among immigrant students has raised alarm with some educators and parents in Canada, the phenomenon remains little studied and poorly understood. In Toronto, home to the largest population of immigrant students in the country, the analysis of their academic achievement all but stopped in 1998, the year the city's seven local school boards were amalgamated. Toronto's once-vaunted research department — when it was amalgamated, the board had 20 analysts — has been reduced to three full-time researchers.

Most of their time has been spent introducing a common computerized records system, leaving them little chance to answer what should be a fundamental question for all big-city school boards in Canada: Are English-as-a-second-language students succeeding? And if not, why not? Elizabeth Coelho, a professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and the former co-ordinator of ESL services for the Toronto board, contends that few board officials want to know how ESL students fare, much less why. "I think how immigrants are doing is a very progressive question in a time that hasn't been very progressive in education," she charges. "I guess people just don't want more bad news."

Moreover, exceptional ESL students and their remarkable storiesof determination and success have often overshadowed the dropout problem. Top academic prizes in Toronto and Vancouver are routinely won by newcomers from places such as China, Taiwan and Korea.

Indeed, Canadian research has shown that as a group, Asian students perform so well, particularly in maths and sciences, that they mask the achievement deficits of ESL students from other countries.

"For every one of the ESL kids who makes it, there are hundreds who don't," says Hetty Roessingh, a University of Calgary professor and a former ESL teacher with the Calgary Board of Education.

Although the Toronto District School Board does not track its ESL students to determine their graduation rates, ESL district co-ordinator Paula Markus says the dropout rate recorded in other jurisdictions does not reflect a crisis in the school system. She says the numbers need to be understood in a larger context.

"You have to keep in mind that when ESL students leave high school, it has nothing to do with the ESL and other supports, but it has everything to do with family and economic pressures when they arrive here," she says. "It doesn't necessarily correlate with what's happening in the school, but rather with what's being expected of them in their lives, in terms of helping the family make a living and get established here."

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Why are ESL students

Faces of a language crisis

Funding for programs and teachers is being cut, yet the need for English-as-a-second language instruction continues to grow, especially in large inner cities where most new immigrants settle. Here's why:

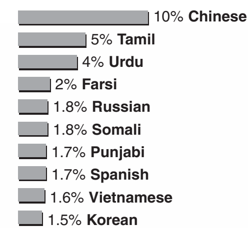
Immigration is increasing ...

- More than 200,000 immigrants arrive in Canada each year. The target is 300,000 – 1% of the population.
- Immigrants make up about one-fifth of the population.
- In the last 10 years, 60% have come from Asia and the Middle East.
- 31% of Toronto elementary and secondary students were born outside Canada, in 175 countries.
- More than half come from China, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Jamaica, Iran and Afghanistan.

... and fewer immigrants speak English.

- 61% of recent immigrants speak neither English or French at home. Ten years ago, the number was 55%.
- Chinese is the first language of one-third of new immigrants.
- Immigrant families also face higher unemployment and lower income than average Canadian families.

Top 10 languages
Primary home language of non-English-speaking families in Toronto schools



SOURCE: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Statistics Canada, Toronto District School Board, Vancouver School Board

The research that has been done on the performance of ESL students presents a complex, troubling picture.

Ten years ago, Roessingh and her Calgary colleague, David Watt, conducted one of the only long-term tracking studies of ESL students in Canada. They followed 540 ESL students in one Calgary high school between 1989 and 1997. About 40 per cent of the school's population spoke a first language other than English, with Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish and Punjabi being the most common mother tongues.

Their study found an overall dropout rate of 74 per cent among ESL students - a rate two-and-a-half times that of the general student population. Not surprisingly, ESL students who arrived as beginners in English were the most likely (93 per cent) to drop out.

(There are many ways to define a dropout. Roessingh and Watt determined the dropout rate by calculating the number of students registered in Grades 10 through 12 who withdrew from high school without having fulfilled the requirements for graduation.

Included in this calculation are students who are "pushed out" of school because they haven't completed the requirements by the time they turn 19, when they must pursue adult education.)

They found that over the eight-year study, the high dropout rate remained relatively stable. "The general profile of the ESL student who can attain graduation requirements has remained unchanged," Watt and Roessingh observed. "In broad terms, successful ESL students have a good educational background prior to entering the high school and have studied English before, either in the Canadian junior high-school system or prior to arrival in Canada."

Students who do not have strong English skills, Roessingh says, cannot deal with the complicated language that they encounter in textbooks and cannot translate their academic ability into decent marks on written tests.

Watt and Roessingh also tried to determine how many of the dropouts later earned their high-school diplomas through adult education. The overall dropout rate fell slightly to 71 per cent.

The researchers concluded: "The loss of so many academically competent learners needs to be understood as lost human and educational capital."

Concerned by Watt and Roessingh's initial findings, which were reported in 1994, the Edmonton Catholic School Division commissioned a study of its ESL population.

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University of British Columbia professor Lee Gunderson has recently completed one of the largest Canadian studies of immigrant scholastic achievement. Gunderson compared the test scores of 2,213 immigrant students with a similar-sized sample of Canadian-born students in the Vancouver School District. The board is the most linguistically diverse in Canada.

He obtained grades for the students from 1996 to 2001. Grades were recorded in subjects essential for university entrance - English, math, science and social studies - as students moved through high school, which in B.C., includes Grades 8 through 12.

Gunderson made some important findings. First, he encountered a disturbingly high "disappearance rate" of more than 60 per cent among immigrant high-school students. (He called it a disappearance rather than a dropout rate because he was unable to distinguish between students who transferred out of the district and those who left the school system permanently; others in the study "disappeared" because they moved off the university track and ceased taking English, math, science or social studies.)

> *'For every one of the ESL kids who makes it, there are hundreds who don't.'*
>
> **Hetty Roessingh,**
> University of Calgary

His study, for instance, recorded 1,576 immigrant students in Grade 8 math, but four years later, only 498 of them (31 per cent of the initial cohort) were enrolled in Grade 12 math. Only 25 per cent of immigrant students were still in Grade 12 science and 23 per cent were still in social studies.

The disappearance rate was highest for those who came to Canada as refugees. These students, often from impoverished and traumatized families, frequently had significant gaps in their educations due to turmoil in their homelands.

Gunderson said the disappearance rate represented a "phenomenally high" number of immigrant students, but he was unable to establish exactly why those students left high school.

"It's obviously a concern," he said, noting work continues at his university to uncover what happened to those students.

Overall, the portrait produced by the existing studies of ESL students in Canada is depressing. Said Watt and Roessingh: "The findings of these studies suggest that ESL learners remain disadvantaged in high school and that graduation remains an elusive goal for the vast majority of these students."

As for the fundamental question raised by the research - Why do ESL students drop out in such high numbers? - there are only tentative answers.

Gunderson found that ESL supports are vital for some groups of students. In Vancouver, Punjabi students - Punjabis comprise about 85 per cent of Indian immigration to B.C. - and those from the Philippines tended to disappear soon after moving out of ESL classes and into the mainstream. Most of the students could not handle regular classes without language support.

"As the ESL net disappeared, so did students," he concluded.

He also discovered a strong correlation between socio-economic status and grades. Although it was not initially his intent to generate race-based statistics, Gunderson found it necessary to break down the grades of immigrant students along linguistic and ethnic lines to better understand his results.

left behind?

Children are less exposed to English ...

• 75% of immigrants settle in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, often in ethnic neighbourhoods – areas where more than 30% of the population is from one visible minority.

• Urban ethnic neighbourhoods more than tripled from 77 in 1991 to 254 in 2001. One- third are South Asian. In 1981, there were just six such neighbourhoods.

• 20% to 50% of the school population in large urban centres are non-English speakers. In Richmond, B.C., it's 60%.

• Meanwhile, established families move out of downtown, increasing the concentration of non-English speakers in the neighbourhood and in the classroom.

• The result is immigrants have difficulty finding English role models from whom to acquire language skills.

... and struggle to keep up in school

•It takes five to seven years for most new-comers to develop the nglish skills necessary for succes in high school and university.

• ESL students have lower academic performance. EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office) tests have repeatedly shown that the majority of ESL students do not meet provincial standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

• Problems are masked by high performance in some subjects such as math and sciences among students from Cina, Taiwan and Korea.

• Dropout rates for ESL learners is more than double the high-school average. One eight-year Calgary study found a dropout rate of 74 per cent among ESL students.

• Fewer ESL students participate in French immersion and gifted programs.

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He found Chinese students who spoke Mandarin outperformed all other groups, including Canadian-born students. Mandarin-speaking students scored math averages that were "phenomenally high," Gunderson said. Although they scored lower than Canadian-born students in English and social sciences, their math and science marks made up for the deficiencies in their overall averages.

Most Mandarin-speaking students in the study were from Taiwan and from affluent families that could spend money on private English lessons and tutors, Gunderson said.

By contrast, the students who scored poorest and were the most vulnerable to "disappearing" were Spanish and Vietnamese-speaking students, many of whom came from refugee families that lacked financial resources.

"The causal relationships associated with these amazing differences in achievement are complex," Gunderson wrote. "They are associated primarily with socio-economic status and the alternatives families have to help their children succeed in school."

Gunderson's findings dovetail with the work of Toronto researcher Rob Brown, who established an overall immigrant dropout rate of 31 per cent in the former Toronto Board of Education. For students from immigrant and single-parent families, however, that rate more than doubled in Regent Park, the poorest neighbourhood in the city, to 77 per cent. The board has not tracked ESL students.

Gerry Connelly, associate director of the Toronto District School Board, says the board cannot track those students who have moved through the ESL system because so many of them move to other schools and other school districts.

There was no system in place until recently that would allow for that kind of tracking to take place, she says.

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Elizabeth Coelho says the results beg more questions.

None of the studies tracked elementary school ESL students into high school to determine their success rates. And there is little understanding of the extent to which ESL students are taking advantage of adult education courses to complete high school. Similarly, few studies have tracked former ESL students to college and university to determine their graduation rates there.

"The only people asking these questions are ESL teachers, who are dismissed as bleeding hearts or self-interested," Coelho says. "Yet, if you ask immigrant parents why they came, one of the top reasons, if not the top reason is: 'a better education for our children.' But we're not hearing enough immigrant groups saying: 'How are our kids doing?'"

What's more, she says, too many parents and administrators in Ontario look for answers in the results of the province's standardized tests, administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office.

But the tests only offer a snapshot of how ESL students are doing at a given point in their academic careers: Grades 3, 6 and 9. Not surprisingly, since these students are by definition new to the country, the tests have repeatedly shown that the majority of them cannot meet provincial standards. Yet the EQAO does not track ESL students from Grade 3 or Grade 6 through the higher grades, a process which would allow researchers to assess their progress.

"EQAO testing would be an ideal opportunity for us to find out how well ESL or former ESL students are doing if we just asked the right questions," says Coelho. "Yet, there's no longitudinal tracking through high school, no tracking of dropouts as well."

But researchers frustrated by their inability to track students are about to receive a powerful new tool. The provincial government has approved a plan to give every student a computerized number that will follow them throughout their academic careers. Remarkably, such student numbers were not in place until this year.

"This is something we've been talking about for 20 years," says Connelly, of the Toronto board. "We track graduation rates and credit accumulation (a key indicator of future success) but we can't identify students who have moved through the ESL system.

"We'll be able to do that much more easily once we get these student numbers."

In the United States, immense resources have already been poured into the longitudinal tracking of immigrant and ESL students. Unlike Canada, American immigration is dominated by a single linguistic group, Spanish-speakers, who make up 75 per cent of the language minorities in U.S. schools.

Among all youth aged 16 to 24, immigrants to the U.S. are three times more likely than native-born Americans to have dropped out of high school before completing a diploma or obtaining an equivalency certificate. More than 29 per cent of immigrants aged 16 to 24 did not have any kind of high-school qualification. Among Spanish-speaking immigrants, that number rises to 46 per cent.

Importantly, the Americans have also studied what programs work best for ESL students - an undertaking that has not even been contemplated in Canada, even though Toronto and Vancouver are already home to more immigrant students than most U.S. cities.

In Canada, there is so little information about the academic performance of ESL students that few concerns are raised about the quality of our existing programs.

In making the case for their massive U.S. study of 210,000 ESL students, Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier, of George Mason University, wrote:

"It is urgent that federal and state governments know what school practices are most effective for language minority students because this demographic group is fast becoming the largest minority group in U.S. schools ... Our data analyses from 1985 to 2001 show that most U.S. schools are dramatically under-educating this student population.

"As a country, we cannot afford continuation of current practices, at the risk of under-preparing a large segment of our workforce for the 21st century."

Atkinson Fellowship Recipients

Toronto Star founder Joseph E. Atkinson

- 2002: Ann Rees: The Right to Know (freedom of information laws)
- 2001: Margaret Philp, Patti Gower: When the Bough Breaks (adoption)
- 2000: Linda Goyette: Here to Stay (Natives and their Western Canada neighbours)
- 1999: Alison Griffiths and David Cruise: Hear No Evil (deafness in Canada)
- 1998: Frances Bula: No Place Like Home (homeless policy in Canada)
- 1997: Scott Simmie: Out of Mind (Canada's mental health-care system)
- 1996*: Andre Picard: A Call to Arms (charities)
- 1996: Lisa Priest: Operating in the Dark (accountability in health care)
- 1995: Lois Sweet: The Fourth "R" (religion in schools)
- 1994*: Sandra Martin: The Politics of Job Equity (employment equity)
- 1994: Miville Tremblay: Hostage to the Debt (Canadians and foreign investors)
- 1993: Anne Mullens: Euthanasia: Dying for Leadership
- 1992: Marci McDonald: Taking Orders (Canada's foreign policy and the U.S.)
- 1991*: Daniel Stoffman: Pounding on the Gates (the immigration system)
- 1991: Linda McQuaig: Canada's Social Programs: Under Attack
- 1990*: Andrew Nikiforuk: AIDS Policy in Canada
- 1990: Dan Smith: The Native Peoples: The Struggle for Self-Rule
- 1989: Paul McKay: Plundering the Future (environmental policy)
- 1988: Ann Pappert: The Reproductive Revolution

*Two winners in these years

ABCs of teaching ESL

In Room 5-185 of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, professor Elizabeth Coelho relates the story of a Grade 4 teacher who would award Raptors basketball tickets to the student who talked the least each term.

"A good classroom is not a quiet one," she warns the 30 teacher candidates in her class, ESL Across the Curriculum.

The class is a rarity. Indeed, few newly minted teachers in Ontario are taught how to meet the needs of English-as-a-second-language students even though many will have to bear considerable responsibility for that endeavour in big-city classrooms.

Only 60 of 1,300 graduating students at the University of Toronto's OISE will take the ESL elective in any given year. It means the vast majority of teachers going into Ontario classrooms will have had little or no instruction in how to teach students learning English as a second language.

Coelho believes that's a shame.

"There is no teacher education for ESL, at least nothing mandatory. Very few universities even offer an elective like I teach at OISE," she says. "But the fact is that any teacher teaching anywhere in Toronto, and many other parts of Ontario, is going to have students in their class who are learning English at the same time as the curriculum. So, it seems to me that every teacher needs some understanding of how to support those kids."

In Ontario, student teachers cannot graduate as ESL specialists. Instead, they must take additional courses open only to graduated teachers.

Teachers can qualify to teach ESL classes in elementary and high school by taking one university course, which includes about 120 hours of instruction and 80 hours of classroom practice. To become a fully qualified ESL specialist requires three such courses.

But schools, particularly elementary schools, rely less and less upon ESL specialists to teach English to newcomers. Budget pressures have led many school boards to curtail intensive ESL programs in favour of limited withdrawal and in-class programs.

It means the regular classroom teacher is often the one primarily responsible for an immigrant student's English language development.

> *'There is no teacher education for ESL, at least nothing mandatory.'*
>
> **Elizabeth Coelho,**
> Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

In recognition of the classroom teacher's increasingly complex role, OISE professor Antoinette Gagne has spearheaded the development of an "ESL infusion" program, devoted to providing resources and a discussion forum for teachers interested in learning how to better serve ESL students. The program features a seven-member team that delivers workshops to OISE students and a website (eslinfusion.oise.utoronto.ca) that offers advice to working teachers.

"We have developed this site because recent education policy in Ontario has led to a significant decrease in the amount of ESL support provided to students by ESL specialist teachers," the website reads. "Cutbacks have also affected other important services for ESL students and their parents. The new policy is that every teacher should be an ESL teacher."

Gagne says the project was born out of her concern that teachers were ill-prepared to deal with the complex language learning needs and adjustment problems of newcomers.

"Out of sheer desperation, I felt I needed to make sure that there was some way that every future teacher who came through our doors at least had some notion about ESL and ESL learners," she says, "and that they would at least know where they could go to find information if they were faced with students that they didn't really feel all that prepared to support."

Paula Markus, district-wide co-ordinator of ESL for the Toronto District School Board, says the board has difficulty finding teachers with ESL qualifications.

As a result, the board has launched an internal program to help young teachers gain that experience.

"We're encouraging a lot of our teachers as soon as they do start teaching to get that training," she says.

The board last year paid for 115 teachers to take an ESL qualification course and another 125 teachers will do the same this year.

Markus says it just doesn't make sense for new teachers not to be equipped with the skills to handle the language needs of newcomers.

"I've been part of a provincial group of ESL co-ordinators who have been trying to lobby for years: We think ESL training should be part of the teacher's basic certification training," she says.

Teachers' colleges, however, have so far rejected calls to make ESL training part of the basic teacher education program, saying the one-year curriculum is already jam-packed with material.

In Coelho's class, teachers learn some basic strategies for dealing with a classroom in which some of their students will be skilled users of English while others will be learning the fundamentals.

"You will be teaching students who are catching up with other students who have five to 10 years of language learning," Coelho says.

Here is some of her advice and that of other ESL experts:

★ Use simple, highly contextualized language, and emphasize key words by changing your tone of voice.

★ Use figurative language, metaphors and idioms carefully and only after a concept has been introduced to students.

★ Avoid complex sentences and passive verbs. For example, instead of saying, "You must finish the work and give it to me by Friday," it would be better to say, "The homework must be completed and handed in by Friday."

★ Encourage group work to allow accomplished English speakers to model language for newcomers.

★ Teach the key words of vocabulary before launching into a lesson that relies upon the understanding of those words.

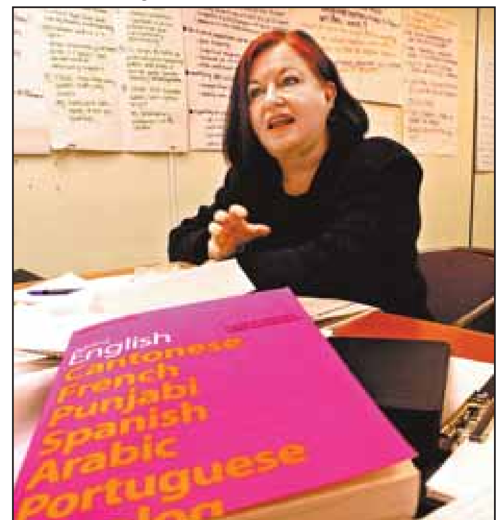
★ Use a "word bank" that defines on a chalkboard or handout those words necessary to understand the concept being taught so that students can constantly refer back to them.

★ Use non-verbal clues to help students understand the meaning of words through facial expressions, gesturing and acting.

★ Refrain from continually correcting students who make mistakes in their use of language and instead model back to them the way they should have phrased something.

★ Give ESL students more time to respond since they sometimes need time to think in their first language before translating an idea into English.

★ Be aware of the cultural context of the language employed on tests, understanding that newcomers, for instance, won't necessarily know what maple syrup is or what it means to portage a canoe.



COLIN MCCONNELL/TORONTO STAR

OISE's Elizabeth Coelho says most teachers "are going to have students who are learning English at the same time as the curriculum."

ESL 101: A Glossary

ESL student: A student officially enrolled in a program that teaches English as a second language. In Ontario, these students are funded for four years of ESL services. The vast majority of these students are recent immigrants, but there is a small percentage of ESL students born in Canada to immigrant parents who speak a language other than English at home.

ESL speakers: Those students who speak a first language other than English. These students tend to be immigrants, or the children of immigrants, who learned languages such as Mandarin, Punjabi or Portuguese at home, often alongside English. Their English skills are often as good as Canadian-born students.

Immigrants versus ESL students: Not all immigrants are ESL students, since many come to Canada already proficient in English. Today, only about half of all immigrants who come to Canada speak English or French.

ESL services: The programs offered to ESL students; they come in many shapes and sizes. In elementary school, some ESL students are withdrawn from class each day for 30 minutes to two hours of English instruction from a trained ESL teacher; others receive help from a trained ESL teacher within the regular classroom; still others are coached by tutors or parent volunteers.

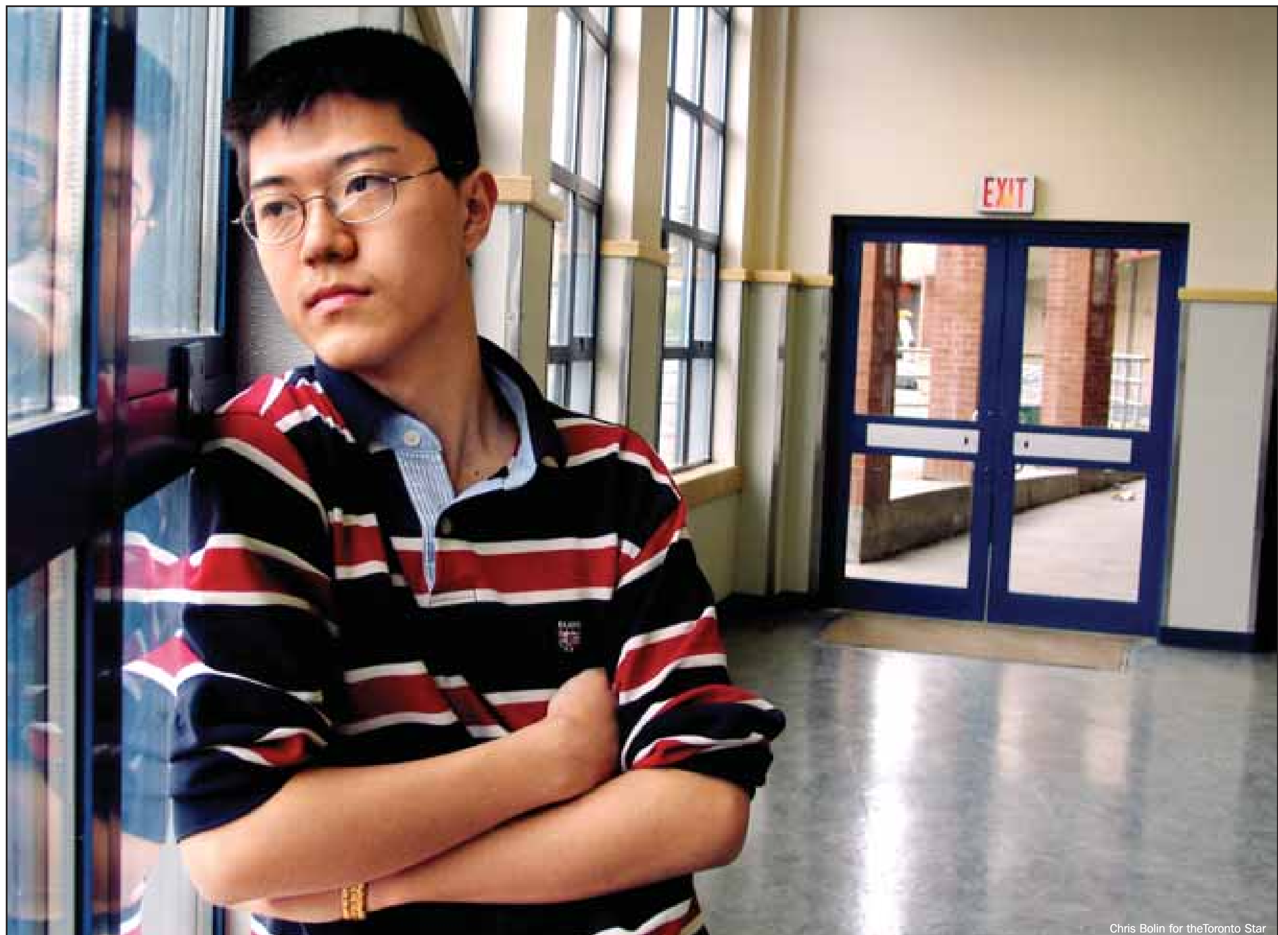
Non-academic track: To reach college or university, students in Ontario and in most other provinces must enter the academic track of high school; applied programs prepare students for the workplace.

Dropout rate: There are many ways to define a dropout. Unless otherwise specified in this series, a dropout refers to a student who withdrew from high school without having fulfilled the requirements for graduation by the age of 19. Included in this definition are students who are "pushed out" of high school because they haven't completed the graduation requirements by the time they must move into adult education classes.

Determined pupils overcome hurdles

Limited English only first obstacle

Learning curve long and steep



Chris Bolin for theToronto Star

Grade 10 student Allen Zhang, who immigrated to Burnaby, B.C., from Beijing two years ago, says the keys to success have been hard work and his willingness to speak English even if he makes mistakes.

When nine-year-old Khesro Amin marched through the front doors of Burnaby's Maywood Elementary in May, 2001, it marked the end of one epic journey - and the beginning of another.

A Kurd from northern Iraq, Khesro arrived in British Columbia as a government-sponsored refugee, along with his parents and three siblings. The Amins had sold their home and possessions to send Khesro and his father to Syria in 1995; it had taken another five years to earn enough money to smuggle the others out of Iraq, where Saddam Hussein was waging a violent campaign against Kurdish rebels.

Reunited in Syria, the family received offers of asylum from Britain and Canada, and chose the latter. They arrived in Toronto during a late-season snowstorm and were put up in a Mississauga motel.

"Is this going to be our life?" Khesro's older sister asked dejectedly. A friend recommended Vancouver and the family moved to south Burnaby, to a densely populated, mostly immigrant neighbourhood.

Once settled, Khesro faced the prospect of going to school for the first time in his life. He did not know how to read or write in his native Farsi, never mind in English. He spoke only a few words of the new language. "I didn't know anything," he remembers.

On that first day, his heart swimming in his chest, Khesro was escorted into a classroom during recess to await the arrival of his new Grade 5 classmates. They flooded into their desks and stared at the new arrival, a small boy with dark eyes, close-cropped hair and an even stare. "I wondered what are they looking at?" remembers Khesro. "I'm a kid just like them. What are they looking at?"

One of his classmates, Morgan, volunteered to show him around the school and introduce him to things like gym class and library books, basketball and bathrooms. Morgan, himself a recent immigrant from the Philippines, would become Khesro's best friend, even though at first the two shared only the shortest of conversations. Soccer was the language of their young friendship.

Although almost everything about school was new to Khesro, he was not intimidated by the learning curve that loomed before him. He was too excited to be scared. After watching other children parade to school in other places, he was thrilled to finally join their ranks.

"When I was young, I liked

Studies in success

For nine-year-old Khesro Amin, a Kurd from northern Iraq, Burnaby's Maywood Elementary School, which offers a sense of community for families, has proven to be almost like a second home.

school really much," he says. "I thought it was something cool. I'd wake up in the morning and think, 'Ahhhh, school!' I thought it was cool, so I practised so much."

Maywood was, in many ways, well suited to Khesro's needs. Maywood Elementary is a V-shaped building crowned with a smaller second storey. It looks like a miniature airport, which is appropriate, since the school lands a steady stream of newcomers.

During the past seven years, the school's English-as-a-second-language population has skyrocketed from 150 to 610. Foreign-born students now make up 75 per cent of the student body. Most are from China, but there are also many from Iran and Afghanistan.

Because of its student population and location in one of Burnaby's poorest neighbourhoods, Maywood has been designated by the local board of education as a "community school." Such schools receive extra financing from both the school board and the City of Burnaby to meet the challenges posed by a student population with profound educational and social needs.

"Here, the belief is that the children belong to a family which belongs to a community," says Doreen George, who co-ordinates the extra programs that operate on school premises.

There's a family gym hour so that those living in crowded apartments can exercise with their children in the evening; there's a preschool program and a parenting class for pregnant women. The school offers adult ESL classes with child care so that immigrant parents can learn English. Maywood stays open each night until 10.

"I think it makes families feel they belong to a community and to a school," says George.

For Khesro, the school has proven to be a second home during a difficult time. Unable to adjust to life in Canada, Khesro's father has left the family; his mother suffers from a chronic illness. But none of it has kept Khesro from his schoolwork.

By dint of his dedication, Khesro's literacy skills have improved dramatically. During his first summer holiday, he did little else but read books, carefully sounding out each word. He produced book reports based on question sheets from his ESL teacher.

"I got pages that said, 'Who was the main character? What was the plot?' These things make it easier for me. It gives me the idea. There's not just a blank piece of paper."

He returned to Maywood that next September and amazed the teachers with his progress. Most students who are illiterate in their first language take years to build reading and writing skills in English. But Khesro was placed into an advanced ESL class and quickly outpaced work in that one as well.

Now in Grade 7, Khesro is expected to begin regular classes in high school this fall, giving him a good chance to graduate and pursue higher education.

For Khesro, handwriting has been the steepest part of his learning curve. He has found it difficult to master the fine motor skills needed to craft small letters. "I've never done it," he says by way of explanation. "It's just something new," he adds, making sure it's understood that he will conquer this challenge, too. "I'm learning."

Khesro, who now earns mostly Bs and Cs in school, dreams of one day joining the Canadian military. He's already enlisted as a naval cadet with his best friend, Morgan. For now, though, he's focused on improving his school marks.

"I want to get better marks and go to school. You have to study hard now in school. And if I want to go to military school, I have to get good grades to go. Everything right now, they're trying to make you get good grades."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

On her first day at Western Technical-Commercial School in Toronto, 15-year-old Memuna Kamara brought a large jug of water to class.

She didn't know that Canadian schools were equipped with drinking fountains, since the ramshackle school she had attended in Sierra Leone's Freetown had none. She had not set foot inside that school for more than a year because of the 11-year civil war that has ravaged her homeland in West Africa.

"There was no school: We'd just sit at home and cry and wonder if the war was coming," Memuna says.

Her father was in Canada during those war years. Memuna's father had come to Toronto in 1990 as a family-class immigrant, sponsored by his uncle. He worked long hours at a local food-processing plant for 10 years to save enough money to bring Memuna, her older sister and mother to Canada.

Months after that happy reunion, Memuna walked through the heavy wooden doors of Western Technical in September, 2000. She had no idea what to expect. She did not know a soul at the school, located near Bloor St. W. and Bathurst St., and she spoke only a few words of English.

Memuna was identified as a student with serious academic needs and was placed in a program designed for those who have significant gaps in their educations. The Literacy Enrichment Academic Program (LEAP) was created to deal with an influx of refugee and other immigrant students who show up on school steps ill-prepared to face the challenge of middle school and high school. Many have such poor literacy skills in their first languages that English-as-a-second-language classes are too tough for them.

In small classes, LEAP instructors assess the gaps in each student's educations and teach to those needs, concentrating on literacy and numeracy. The idea is to accelerate their development, doubling the learning they would normally achieve in a single school year, so they can join mainstream programs as quickly as possible.

Memuna's Canadian education began with the alphabet. Her teachers taught her how to hold scissors, how to use a paper clip. "Everything was a new experience," says her teacher, Genine Natale. "It was like having a newborn."

Memuna remembers being full of nerves those first weeks. "I was kind of scared," she says. "I was lost in the school. I didn't know how to find my way out."

Memuna's father was almost as nervous as she was during those fledgling school days. He took vacation days to help her navigate the bus from Albion Road., north of Highway 401, to Western Tech; the trip would routinely take more than 90 minutes.

"He was here every day," she laughs, remembering this man she hadn't known since she was four. "He wanted to check on how we're doing. He wanted to know if we were getting used to the system, making some friends, getting used to the teacher. He was here every day. He wanted to show me everything about Canada."

Three years after entering Western Tech, Memuna takes four regular credit courses, but keeps one foot in the LEAP program. She's 18 years old, so it will be impossible for her to graduate before she moves into adult education programs at 19. Memuna will be classified as a dropout by some researchers, even though her progress will have been nothing short of miraculous. She has gone from deciphering the alphabet to studying Grade 10 Canadian history in just three years.

"I thank my teachers every night and day because if it wasn't for them and this (LEAP) class, I wouldn't be in school," she says.

Memuna understands that her academic road will be a long one, one that will likely lead to adult-education classes at Humber College this fall, then, if she succeeds, into regular college courses. She has serious disadvantages to overcome, yet Memuna is determined to become a businesswoman.

Memuna draws inspiration from her father. He gets out of bed every day at 5 a.m. and goes to work faithfully whatever the weather; he dresses like a "crazy person" in the winter, Memuna says, with two hats and layer upon layer of sweaters.

"I admire him so much," she says. "I hold onto that. No matter what people think about me, I don't care. But for myself, it's about what I'm going to do, what I'm going to be, to make my father proud."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Allen Zhang likes to make things difficult for himself.

A Grade 10 student at Burnaby South Secondary School, Zhang, 15, emigrated to British Columbia two years ago with a rudimentary knowledge of English. But Zhang quickly came to understand that he didn't need much English to make friends, since Burnaby South's students were, like him, immigrant Chinese.

Although anxious to make friends, Zhang also knew that his language development would suffer if he spoke only Mandarin in the cafeteria and in the hallways. He set a goal for himself: Meet Canadians.

"It was easier to make Chinese friends because you are from the same culture, you can talk to them in your language. But I saw the need to really improve my English in a short period of time, so I tried to take as many opportunities as I could get to speak English instead of Mandarin. That meant socializing more with Canadian friends and others who spoke English. As the days passed, my English evolved faster and faster."

Making Canadian friends is often an enormous hurdle for immigrant students, especially for those in areas dominated by one or two immigrant groups. In many schools on B.C.'s Lower Mainland, for instance, native Mandarin or Punjabi speakers outnumber native English speakers. Studies have shown that acquiring English skills can be slower for immigrants in such schools because they spend so much of their time communicating in their first languages.

But Zhang has too much ambition to be slowed by language. He wants to graduate from high school in two years and study commerce at university. Already, two years after launching his Canadian academic career in ESL 1 - the introductory English-as-a-second-language class - he has graduated to the university-bound stream, English 10 Honours, where he studies alongside Canadian-born students. He takes a full schedule of regular classes and is among the best students in school.

Zhang says the keys to his success have been hard work and a willingness to speak English, regardless of his mistakes.

"Basically, I think, nothing comes for free," he says. "You have to work for it. In my country, they said you'd learn

English automatically if you came to Canada. But it didn't work like that.

"You didn't wake up one morning and start talking and reading English. You have to learn every single word that you can speak now ... You have to take it as a chance to meet new people, and learn new things and that's what really life is about."

Zhang has seen many of his fellow immigrant students follow a downward spiral. Too shy to make Canadian friends, they live largely in their own immigrant communities. Then, frustrated and embarrassed by their continued mistakes in English, they speak in school less and less.

"When you make a pronunciation mistake, you just get a feeling that you're inferior to others because you can't explain things that you know clearly. So, that brings your confidence level down," he says. " When you're not that good at English in the first place and you lose your confidence, you start to talk less. So, when you have the chance to talk, you want to keep your voice down so when you make a mistake people won't laugh at you. You start writing things down. You start eliminating all those opportunities that you could practise. Instead of that, you just sink into a pit deeper and deeper. That's the most scary thing."

Zhang's mother and father - he is a university professor looking for work in Canada - left Beijing in search of a new and more interesting life. In China, Zhang says, students felt intense pressure to compete for places in universities and some pursued prestigious programs such as computer engineering even though they were uninterested.

"Here, it's totally up to the individual. If you want to go to class, you go. If you don't, you don't," he says. Zhang is one member of a remarkably successful cohort of Chinese students who have transformed schools in Burnaby, earning stratospheric marks in maths and science. They have also brought unusual pressures to bear on local school boards.

"There was no school: We'd just sit at home and cry and wonder if the war was coming,"
Fifteen-year-old **Memuna Kamara,** on her life in Sierra Leone

For one thing, says Mat Hassen, Burnaby's assistant superintendent, many Chinese parents don't put value on ESL classes. As soon as their children can communicate in English, they want them transferred out of ESL classes.

"They see ESL as a stigma and they want out," he explains. "They see us as blocking their progress, delaying their graduation, artificially denying progress. In some cases, it's because there's a misunderstanding of language development by parents, who say, 'The kid seems to speak English OK, so what do you mean he needs ESL?'"

The honour rolls in Burnaby are filled with the names of Asian students, and even that has created problems for school board officials. "Some real animosities have developed," says Hassen. "You have Canadian kids saying they can't compete with the Chinese. It gets that bare in its exposure."

At Burnaby South, Allen Zhang speaks slowly and thoughtfully, pausing between words as if to make sure the next one is correct. He makes few obvious errors. He has also set for himself a new goal, one that has little to do with language: He wants to win a spot on the six-member national team that competes in the International Math Olympiad in Athens. Zhang ranked 15th in a nation-wide math contest in January; he hopes to make it into the top six.

"I think the most important thing for me is to keep setting new goals. Only then will you have the momentum to keep going. Bring challenges to yourself and work hard to defeat them. When you defeat them, you get the feeling of success," he says. "It's difficult but that's what sparks your life. For me, that surge of excitement, that surge of challenge, if that didn't occur to me, life wouldn't be as interesting to me as it is.

The education of Amuthini Wijendra

By 2002, Amuthini Wijendra seemed to have the kind of success that she and her family had sacrificed so much to attain.

Ten years after coming to Canada from her home in war-torn Sri Lanka, and three years after graduating from the University of Waterloo with a computer engineering degree, Wijendra held a lucrative job as a consultant with Deloitte and Touche.

"It was a very good job," concedes Wijendra, 30. "But when I was a consultant, I didn't feel that at the end of the day, I could say I made a difference in this person's life or that person's life."

So, two years ago, Wijendra left the prestige and security of her consultant position to open a private tutoring school in the heart of Flemingdon Park.

A1 Tutors is Wijendra's business, a place where she has found meaning in her work life.

She opened her learning centre to serve those immigrant parents whom, she believed, often could not afford private tutoring for their children.

"Many parents want to give their children something extra," she says. "We're trying to make it affordable for everyone."

Wijendra's learning centre opens its doors at 4 p.m. for an after-school homework club, which costs only $10 a month. The vast majority of her clients are immigrants, or the sons and daughters of immigrants.

Wijendra understands the challenge they face. Within a week of arriving in Canada from Sri Lanka in 1992, she found herself in a Grade 12 classroom at Jarvis Collegiate.

She did not fear math or science, but equipped with just six months of English lessons, she fretted constantly about the extent to which her university ambitions depended on her ability to succeed at English.

"It terrified me every time I sat down for a test," she says. But Wijendra would get the 90s she needed to be accepted into Waterloo University's intensely competitive systems design engineering program.

Many of her current students hold the same kind of university ambitions that Amuthini harboured as a young woman.

Those such as 10-year-old Krishanth Manokaran are already successful students. A Grade 5 student at Grenoble Public School, Krishanth, whose parents emigrated to Canada from Sri Lanka when he was an infant, is always the first to arrive at A1 Tutors when it opens its doors. He spends four hours every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the learning centre, from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., studying math, science and English.

"I just wanted to learn a bit more and be a bit better in class; I love school," says Krishanth, who earns As and Bs and recently scored 24 out of 24.5 on a math test.

He dreams of becoming a doctor or scientist. "I just want to help people who are sick," he says, explaining: "Then, I could show my face in the country and people will notice me."

Wijendra's tutoring school has joined a burgeoning market for after-school services.

A recent McMaster University study found that the number of private tutoring centres - places with names such as Kumon, Score, Sylvan, and Oxford - grew by 60 per cent in the years between 1996 and 2000. In Toronto alone, the number of learning centres climbed to 74 from 10.

And it appears there's an appetite for more. Researchers have found that 24 per cent of Ontario parents with school-aged children employ tutors, while 50 per cent of parents in a national survey said they would hire a private tutor for their children if they could afford one.

For Wijendra, it was an ESL teacher, Jessie Porter, who made the difference. She took an active interest in the lives and success of her students.

"I know I was lucky," she says. "I don't know what I would have done without someone like Miss Porter ... So this is my chance to help."

Postscript: In the time since this story was reported, Wijendra has decided to return to school. She's studying at the University of Toronto, taking biochemistry, organic chemistry and physiology with a view toward pursuing her medical degree. A1 Tutors has closed its door.

Michael Stuparyk for theToronto Star

Memuna Kamara, 15, right, a student at Toronto's Western Tech, takes part in the Literacy Enrichment Academic Program (LEAP), which was created in response to an influx of refugee and other immigrant students who arrive without the skills needed for school.

Needs are vast in ethnic enclaves

Most pressure in Toronto, Vancouver
Sky-rocketing demand for ESL classes

The discussion is one often heard whenever and wherever the parents of elementary school-aged children gather: Where are you sending them to school?

Increasingly in Canada's big cities, and especially among the affluent, that question also includes an unspoken undercurrent: How are you going to avoid the "problems" posed by sending them to public schools?

These parents are concerned, among other things, that teachers in big cities are overwhelmed by the demands of special needs students, immigrant children and others with poor language skills. The concern is not usually racist but is an honest belief that classrooms populated with students struggling with English cannot offer optimal learning conditions for their children.

For some, the solution has come in the form of French-immersion classes, or gifted programs, which are often dominated by middle- and upper-class children. Other families have elected to simply pick up and move.

York Region Superintendent Vicki Bismilla, who is in charge of equity issues for the board, has watched the ethnic transformations of whole schools, such as Armadale and Coppard Glen, in Markham.

More than 80 per cent of the student populations at the schools, built in what used to be mostly white neighbourhoods, now speak English as a second language.

Asked if that transformation is the result of immigration or white flight, Bismilla is unequivocal: "White flight, big time."

White flight from visible minority neighbourhoods and their schools is a complicated phenomenon, driven by factors that include housing prices, aging families and rising incomes. It is not necessarily a new phenomenon, either, as immigrants have always tended to settle in identifiable neighbourhoods.

It is also a highly sensitive topic, as evinced by a recent Statistics Canada study that examined the formation of visible minority neighbourhoods in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. The study never mentions white flight, but instead uses the term "rapid replacement" to describe the combination of white residents moving out and visible minorities moving in.

Tony Carrigan is the ESL co-ordinator in the Vancouver suburb of Richmond, B.C., where six out of 10 residents now speak English as a second language. Carrigan has seen the Canadian-born population in the city's schools drop steadily during the past six years (only 46 per cent of students reported speaking English at home in September, 2003), but he's unable to pinpoint the cause of that transformation.

"Our non-ESL population has dropped, but is that because of white flight? Maybe. It could also be because of economic opportunity; people can get a lot of money for their homes now. It could also be demographic: Their children have grown up and moved out."

Statistics Canada recently studied the way in which Canada's visible minority neighbourhoods were formed. Government researchers Feng Hou and Garnett Picot found a rapid rise in the number of visible-minority neighbourhoods - ones with more than 30 per cent of the population drawn from the same visible-minority group - in Canada's three largest cities.

Between 1981 and 2001, the number of so-called ethnic enclaves increased to 254 from 6, according to the recently released StatsCan report, *Visible Minority Neighbourhoods in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver*. The enclaves were most often dominated by Chinese residents or South Asians. Toronto and Vancouver each had more than 100 visible minority neighbourhoods; Montreal had only eight.

In their study, researchers Feng and Hou also set out to discover how the neighbourhoods were formed. They examined the newest enclaves to determine how many visible minorities moved in and how many non-visible minorities, or whites, moved out.

They then established the "median rate" of decrease in the non-visible minority populations in neighbourhoods losing white residents. When neighbourhoods lost white residents at a rate greater than the median, the phenomenon was referred to by the researchers as "rapid replacement."

Feng and Hou found that in Toronto, 23 out of 26 newly formed South Asian neighbourhoods and 24 out of 32 newly formed Chinese neighbourhoods and five out of six black neighbourhoods were created through rapid replacement. (In Toronto, a neighbourhood was classified as one subject to rapid replacement when more than 24 per cent of the white population moved out between 1981 and 2001.)

In Vancouver, 48 out of 55 newly formed Chinese neighbourhoods and five out of 12 South Asian neighbourhoods were the product of rapid replacement. In Montreal, the three black and three South Asian neighbourhoods were also the result of rapid replacement.

The researchers concluded: "Most of the visible minority neighbourhoods were formed through an increase in the visible-minority group in a neighbourhood with a corresponding decline in the non-visible minority population."

In other words, the formation of most of the country's recent visible minority neighbourhoods involved some combination of white flight and immigration.

Feng and Hou noted that rapid replacement tended to occur only at the "initial stage" of a neighbourhood's transition and was unlikely to lead to a complete turnover.

Most neighbourhoods eventually find an equilibrium of sorts. "This suggests," they wrote, "that co-residence of members from different groups is an essential element of communities, even in visible minority neighbourhoods."

* * * * *

So, what has the phenomenon meant for classrooms?

Mass immigration has obviously increased the pressure on school boards in Vancouver, Toronto and their suburbs.

Boards have had to respond to skyrocketing demand for English-as-a-second-language classes while managing other educational issues - everything from dealing with the cases of Chinese students who refuse ESL classes (some believe they needlessly slow their academic progress) to talking to those Pakistani Muslim parents who do not want their children to participate in music classes (some Muslims consider certain types of music a violation of their religious lifestyles).

In some of Vancouver's concentrated ethnic enclaves, the combined effects of immigration and white flight have left some schools with so many Mandarin-speaking students that students are having a hard time learning English from their classmates.

In York Region, Vicki Bismilla says the board has had to launch a series of school-based workshops aimed at parents in areas with few immigrants, highlighting the need to make schools more inclusive.

Bismilla says she has talked to parents in the mostly white neighbourhoods of Stouffville, for instance, who do not mask their reasons for moving.

"In Stouffville," Bismilla says, "when we even try to talk about race relations, we've had people openly say to us: 'We ran away from Markham because of multiculturalism. Don't come here and talk to us about multiculturalism.'

"Already we have people in burkas that are showing up in some of these schools and they are facing some really weird reactions," she says.

Markham, a city of 207,000, has been transformed over the past two decades.

The city's residents are now 56 per cent visible minority, mostly Chinese and South Asian. According to census data, the visible-minority population grew to 115,000 in 2001 from 79,000 in 1996, accounting for almost all of Markham's growth during that time.

The city's overall white population declined slightly during that same period.

The most important impact of white flight, however, has been the transformation of schools in affected neighbourhoods into front-line settlement agencies. Mat Hassen, assistant superintendent of the Burnaby School District, where about half of all homes report speaking a language other than English, says governments have yet to recognize the challenges faced by these schools.

"We end up feeding people," he says.

"We end up trying to link up social services; we end up dealing with families who have been kicked out of a place because they haven't paid the rent for three months; we deal with family turmoil; we deal with the teenage sister who has now gone hooking; we deal with the drug consequences." We can't help the kid have a good, productive educational experience unless we help some of the things that surround the kid. It's not our work to get involved with the family, but on the other hand, how do you not deal with the family issues if they're affecting the kid's performance in school?"

Worried about how these issues will affect their own children's learning environment, many white parents, it seems, turn to alternative programs to quell their anxieties.

In one of the few studies to assess the student composition of French immersion and gifted programs, the former Toronto Board of Education found poor and non-white students were under-represented in both. The study, published in 1999, found that students with a "high" socio-economic background were three to four times more likely to enrol in such programs

The study also breaks down enrolment in French immersion and gifted programs by ethnicity, finding those most likely to be enrolled in French immersion were students who identified themselves as Jewish (21 per cent), English-speaking white students (19 per cent), Polish (14 per cent), Canadian-born blacks (12 per cent) and Italian (10 per cent).

According to the report, other visible minority students - Chinese (4 per cent), Vietnamese (5 per cent) Tamil 4 (per cent), Latin Americans (6 per cent) and Caribbean born-blacks (3 per cent) - were much less likely to be enrolled in French immersion.

The changing face of classrooms

Jeff Vinnick for theToronto Star

B.C. teacher Cathy Morgan helped develop a program to boost immigrant students' exposure to English through academic study, work placement and career counselling.

By the numbers

- **80%** of students in two schools in York Region speak English as second language
- **6** so-called ethnic enclaves found by StatsCan in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal in 1981
- **254** so-called ethnic enclaves found by StatsCan in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal in 2001
- **19%** of students in French immersion programs in the former Toronto board identified themselves as white and English-speaking
- **4%** of students in French immersion programs in the former Toronto board identified themselves as Chinese

The challenge of a Chinese enclave

Few opportunities to learn English

Advantage of immersion is lost

RICHMOND, B.C. - For Cathy Li, English remains a persistently foreign language.

The 19 year old and her parents arrived in Canada in 2003, and settled in Richmond, which has the highest concentration of Mandarin and Cantonese speakers in the country.

More than 35 per cent of the 166,000 people in Richmond reported one of the Chinese languages as their mother tongue, according to Statistics Canada.

Six out of every 10 people identified themselves as a visible minority.

The emergence of Richmond as a Chinese enclave has presented challenges to school officials, who discovered students like Cathy Li could comfortably operate in Mandarin as soon as they left the classroom. She could go to the cafeteria, walk home from school, shop and watch television with her friends and family, all without speaking English.

As a result, immigrant students were taking considerably longer to master English because they were losing the benefit of immersion.

Many students pressured to graduate quickly from high school and go to university

In Richmond, 60 per cent of the school population speaks English as a second language. In immigrant neighbourhoods, native English speakers can make up just 20 per cent of a school's population.

"Our ESL numbers are so high now, we've lost the advantage of (English) immersion in some schools," says Tony Carrigan, the district ESL curriculum co-ordinator in Richmond.

The problem has been compounded in the Lower Mainland by a relatively new phenomenon: The arrival of hundreds of older teen students, aged 17 to 19.

Mostly from the People's Republic of China, these teens arrive with the equivalent English language skills of a Grade 3 student, but are otherwise accomplished students in their first language.

Many are under intense pressure to graduate rapidly from high school and move on to university.

Local teachers such as Cheryl Morgan watched with dismay as many of these older students grew discouraged because of their inability to navigate high-school textbooks.

"They were hugely unsuccessful in the mainstream, in their sciences and social studies. They lost interest, lost motivation because they were always failing," says Morgan, who heads the ESL department at Richmond Secondary School.

Concerned, Morgan helped to design a program to meet the needs of older immigrant students. The Language Acquisition and New Directions (LAND) program caters to late arrivals, those aged 17 to 19, and attempts to maximize their exposure to English through a combination of academic study, work placement and career counselling.

Work placement forces students to apply their English skills, while career counselling helps students understand the various paths - adult education, community college - they can take to finish their educations.

Board officials have identified more than 170 immigrants older than 17 with low-level English skills in Richmond schools.

Many parents, believing that hard work alone would allow their children to overcome their language deficiencies and eager for them to enter university, have resisted the schools' attempts to place them into work environments.

"The big challenge is convincing the parents that the survival English that the kids have isn't going to cut it," says Carrigan.

"Parents really have these incredible expectations they put on their kids..."

"They don't get it that more than just a little survival English is needed to handle a lecture in biology or accounting or engineering. The parents have made quite a few sacrifices to get here and they expect the kids to do their bit."

"It's very, very challenging for these kids".

Fears of an underclass

Newcomers to Canada struggle to close wage gap

Upward mobility is key to progress, researchers say

For the average male immigrant who came to this country in the 1970s, life was good. Within five years, his chances of being unemployed were lower than those of Canadian-born men. Within 10 years, his yearly earnings caught up to those of the typical Canadian.

But the past two decades have seen a dramatic reversal of fortune.

Today, 10 years after arriving, the average immigrant earns just 80 per cent of what a Canadian-born worker takes home. According to 2001 census data, recent immigrants - those living in Canada for less than five years - suffered an unemployment rate of 12.7 per cent, considerably higher than the 7.4 per cent rate among the Canadian-born.

Even though immigrant men are arriving with much more education than their predecessors, their inflation-adjusted earnings fell an average of seven per cent between 1980 and 2000. That fall was not the product of a poor economy, since the earnings of Canadian-born men went up seven per cent during the same time.

It's not clear when, or if, recent immigrants will be able to close the wage gap. Research shows low-income rates have been rising steadily among immigrants during the past two decades while falling among the Canadian-born. The trend is most pronounced in Canada's largest cities: Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal.

By almost any measure, newcomers are struggling.

These statistics reflect reality for people such as Faduma Mohamed, a Somali immigrant, and the director of the Somali Youth Association of Toronto. An agricultural scientist with a master's degree from Germany, Mohamed says she's maddened by the inability of Somali professionals and university graduates to secure jobs in Canada.

"How long will it be like this for us?" she asks.

The same question is increasingly being asked by civic politicians, social workers and academics concerned about the rise of an immigrant underclass in this country.

Social scientists in the United States and Europe have developed complex statistical models and definitions to identity underclasses: People who suffer on the margins of society, surrounded by others in similar circumstances, excluded from the job market and other "avenues of upward mobility."

They tend to live, the social scientists say, in neighbourhoods of deep poverty with high unemployment rates, significant welfare dependancy and high dropout rates.

Rene Johnston/Toronto Star

Faduma Mohamed, director of the Somali Youth Association of Toronto, says she is frustrated by the difficulties Somali professionals and university graduates have securing jobs in Canada. "How long will it be like this for us?" asks Mohamed.

A critical feature of an underclass is an inability among the second-generation - those born into poverty - to make better lives than their parents.

"The reproduction of poverty is really the key issue," explains University of British Columbia professor David Ley, one of the first Canadian academics to study the underclass issue. "The fact that people who are newly arrived to Canada are poor is not news. This has commonly been the case. The immigrant story is a story of struggle and, for most people over the years, it has been a story of struggle and relative success, and greater success for their children.

"So the issue of initial poverty is not new. What would be new is the inter-generational transmission of poverty. That is really the key ingredient of the underclass argument."

Canadians have never felt much need to examine the growth of an underclass, secure in the belief that Canada kept the door of opportunity open for all. But eroding incomes among immigrants, when considered alongside troubling drop-out rates of ESL students and the concentration of poverty in immigrant and visible minority neighbourhoods, raise disturbing possibilities.

"The vast majority of new immigrants are doing well in Toronto: Two-thirds or more are doing well. But the problem is that the vast majority of poor people are immigrant or visible minority," says Frances Lankin, president and CEO of the United Way of Greater Toronto.

Indeed, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests the symptoms of an underclass can now be found in Canada's largest cities.

In April, the United Way of Greater Toronto published a watershed report, Poverty by Postal Code, prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development. It found that the number of poor Toronto neighbourhoods - neighbourhoods with more than 26 per cent of families living below the poverty line - had increased to 130 in 2001 from 30 just two decades ago. (The study employed the low-income cut-off designed by Statistics Canada; using this measure, a Toronto family of four would, for instance, be considered poor if their income was less than $36,247 in 2004.)

Researchers discovered that instead of living in mixed socio-economic neighbourhoods as they did 20 years ago, most poor families are now far more concentrated in low-income neighbourhoods. Those same neighbourhoods also possess other troubling characteristics: they tend to be dominated by immigrants and visible minorities.

In 1981, the number of Canadian-born families living in high-poverty neighbourhoods slightly outnumbered immigrant families. By 2001, however, "a major shift had taken place," the researchers concluded, with immigrant families accounting for 62.4 per cent of the total family population in these communities while Canadian-born ones made up just 36.7 per cent.

The shift was consistent with rising poverty rates among immigrants. In 1981, 14.8 per cent of immigrant families lived in poverty; by 2001, it was almost one in four immigrant families (24 per cent). With more immigrants flooding into Toronto each year, that produced a staggering 125 per cent increase in the overall number of poor immigrants, from 112,000 in 1981 to 252,000 in 2001.

The report, greeted by expressions of deep concern by civic leaders in Toronto, was the latest in a series of recent studies that paint a disturbing picture of an immigrant's economic life in Canada.

Consider some of the other findings:

★ Statistics Canada found that immigrants in the country for 10 years or less had a low-income rate of 35 per cent in 2000, nearly twice the overall rate in the nation's 27 largest cities. The low-income rate for recent immigrants rose steadily from 23 per cent in 1980.

★ In Toronto, during the 1990s, the growth in the city's poverty rate (it increased 1.9 percentage points) was entirely attributable to deteriorating conditions among immigrants. Canadian-born residents actually saw their poverty rates fall during the decade.

★ York University's Michael Ornstein, who analysed data from the 1996 census, found more than half of Toronto's visible minority families lived below Statistics Canada's low-income line. The rate among white families was less than 10 per cent. The study, commissioned by the City of Toronto, concluded Ethiopians, Ghanaians, Afghans and Somalis were the most disadvantaged, with poverty rates ranging from 52.2 per cent to 70 per cent.

Paradoxically, the deterioration of their economic conditions has occurred during a time when immigrants are coming to Canada with more academic credentials than any of their predecessors. The percentage of newly arrived immigrants with a university degree rose to 34.1 per cent in 2000 from 7.6 per cent in 1980.

The numbers speak to a lack of opportunity for immigrants, even for highly educated newcomers such as Faduma Mohamed. "These studies confirm the feelings people have about the situation of so-called minority communities in Toronto," Mohamed said. "Many people are frustrated.

By the numbers

- **80%** How much of the average Canadian-born worker's salary the average immigrant worker takes home
- **15%** of immigrant families lived in poverty in 1981
- **24%** of immigrant families lived in poverty in 2001
- **54%** of Toronto Grade 10 students born in the English-speaking Caribbean are at risk of failing to complete high school within the next three years
- **39%** of students in Toronto's lowest-income neighbourhoods are at risk of failing to complete high school

We have people who have graduated from Canadian universities - forget about the outside - and they are not getting the jobs ...

"We thought it was only us because of our accent, our English is no good and all that thing. But it's happening to the kids that graduate from here - and that is unacceptable."

Thus, a critical question - and one that is only beginning to be grappled with in Canada - is this: Will the 2.2 million immigrants Canada has settled in the past decade be able to lift themselves out of poverty anytime soon? Or are they destined to become the foundation of an immigrant underclass?

Professor Ley, and his colleague, Heather Smith, are trying to answer those questions. They've launched a year-long study to determine whether an immigrant underclass has taken hold in Canada's largest cities.

In doing so, they will revisit their 1997 study (based on 1991 census data) that found few immigrant communities in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver then fit the underclass profile described by American researchers. They concluded: "While the evidence of a full-blown underclass in Canadian cities is slight, the presence of deep poverty is abundantly evident."

A key question, he argues, is whether that poverty hardens into an enduring feature of the neighbourhoods in which immigrants live. To that end, the University of British Columbia study will assess the economic progress of working-age immigrants, the socio-economic make-up of their neighbourhoods and the educational attainment of their children.

"Education is a really important issue," Ley says, "because low education levels, specifically high-school dropout out rates, are a very important correlant of the underclass scenario. Education is an absolutely central consideration."

* * * * *

The history of immigrants in Canada would suggest there is reason for some optimism.

Canada has traditionally been a place where children born into poor families have a strong chance of earning more than their parents. Statistics Canada researcher Miles Corak has examined "inter-generational mobility" and found that a child born into a poor family in Canada - a family with an income below $28,000 - has only a one in four chance of remaining in that same low-income bracket as an adult.

Corak, however, did not break down his 1998 research to determine if the same story was true for immigrants or visible minorities in Canada. That research, he said, is only now starting.

In Canada, too, immigrant families have traditionally put tremendous emphasis on education, propelling their children to college and university. The 2001 census, for instance, showed that people in their 20s with two foreign-born parents are more likely to have a university degree than those with Canadian-born parents.

"There is an incredible achievement drive," says University of Toronto sociologist Monica Boyd. "Immigrants pick up very quickly the idea that they have to have certain academic credentials to succeed."

Boyd contends there is not yet evidence of a developed underclass in Canadian cities.

And there's reason to believe, she argues, that Canada will not mirror the experience of U.S. cities since this country does not have the same divisive race relations history, has a better social safety net and does a better job of using general tax revenues to bolster schools in poor neighbourhoods - an important bulwark against the development of an underclass.

Still, it may take until the census in 2011 to determine exactly what's happening. There's no doubt immigrants have suffered economically in Canada during the past decade, Boyd says. It could be that immigrants clustered in Toronto and Vancouver compete against each other, limiting job opportunities, driving down wages and inflating real-estate, essentially creating an artificial barrier to their own success.

But if something more profound is taking place - if an immigrant underclass is beginning to take hold - the 2011 census will tell the tale. By that time, Boyd says, the children of the immigrants who have struggled during the 1990s will be adults. Early indications suggest that although well-educated, this generation of newcomers has yet to secure the kind of jobs commensurate with their skills.

"The issue of where these people will be remains to be seen," says Boyd. "Time will tell."

VOICES

Star readers share their experiences with ESL in schools:

'For ESL students to be successful at school, they need a lot of determination. I came to Canada in 1994 as a 15-year-old and I was placed in the ESL program at my school. But I put a lot of hard work into my studies. I managed to get out of the ESL program within a year, graduated from high school a year earlier than my peers and majored in English literature at university.'

Angela So, London

'We live in Markham. In my daughter's class, approximately 80 per cent are of Asian descent. I would love a mix of kids in her class so she could experience different cultures. I fear that many in her class are ESL and I worry that her education will suffer. When I pick her up from school, I don't feel any sense of community; all the other parents talk in their first language. If I feel this way with the parents, I wonder how it is for my daughter when she tries to make friends with their kids.'

Jane Smith, Markham

'I came to Canada in 1986 as a teenager. Since my family was placed in a small city, my experience was very different to those described here in Toronto. My teacher gave me a great deal of guidance and support. The year I graduated, the principal even created a new student award that recognized the efforts of those ESL students who actively participated in the student community. I got the award that year. If it wasn't for their support, I don't think I would have had the courage to go to university and eventually become a teacher.'

P. Montes, Toronto

The bilingual classroom

Edmonton offers dynamic language education program

Students taught in Mandarin, Arabic, German, Hebrew

EDMONTON –The eyes of seven-year-old Marvin Do are glued to the hand of his teacher as it slides up and down an imaginary scale to mark the tone of each Chinese character flashed on a card.

Marvin and his Grade 1 classmates mimic the teacher's hand action as they navigate the intricacies of Mandarin, a language with four dominant tones, each of which can bestow different meanings.

Marvin, the son of Vietnamese immigrants, will spend the morning using Mandarin to study society, health, art and physical education. In the afternoon, with a different teacher, he will study science, math and language arts in English along with his classmates who hail from China, Singapore, Brunei and Hong Kong. Some in the class are better at English than Mandarin; others are more proficient in Mandarin; others still, such as Marvin, speak Cantonese as a first language.

"It's fun," says Marvin. "I like to learn all of the different words."

Marvin's teacher, Sin Ching Pong, an immigrant from Hong Kong, says the biggest challenge she faces is finding the classroom time to cover all of the necessary ground: "On top of all the regular curriculum, you're adding the Chinese language."

Welcome to Caernarvon School, one part of a remarkable bilingual language program offered by Edmonton Public Schools. The most extensive of its kind anywhere in Canada, Edmonton's bilingual program is the country's most dynamic experiment in second-language learning.

The board currently offers full bilingual programs in seven languages: American Sign Language (ASL), Arabic, Mandarin, German, Hebrew, Spanish and Ukranian. A total of 27 schools offer half of each day's programming in the target language and the other half in English.

In four of the languages - ASL, Mandarin, German and Ukranian - students are able to attend a bilingual school from kindergarten through Grade 12. More than 6,000 of the board's 82,000 students are enrolled. (Another 2,000 take part in French immersion.)

The school board began its foray into bilingual education in 1978 with a Ukranian-English program; it has expanded steadily ever since and is now preparing a Punjabi curriculum.

The model is a dramatic departure from the one found in most other large Canadian cities where languages other than French and English can be studied in individual credit courses, or else after school or on weekends in heritage language sessions. Edmonton, although not nearly as ethnically diverse as Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal, has emerged as the leader in second-language learning.

Stuart Wachowicz, Edmonton's director of curriculum, says the city's approach is based on extensive research that shows students literate in their first language are more adept at acquiring English, which in turn improves their overall school performance. "In general, our marks on provincial achievement tests - English, mathematics, social studies and science - are significantly higher for students in bilingual programs compared to students who are not," he says. "The results speak for themselves."

Indeed, bilingual education is now being trumpeted by some of Canada's leading educators as the best way for children - and especially immigrant children - to develop their overall academic skills. The debate is critical in Canada where students who speak a language other than English at home now make up 20 to 50 per cent of the general school population in Canada's biggest cities.

A leading proponent of bilingual education is the University of Toronto's Jim Cummins. Widely considered the national dean of second-language learning, Cummins argues that Canada is failing to take advantage of a major economic resource: its

linguistic diversity.

Research pointing to the value of bilingual education is considerable. Cummins has examined more than 150 studies conducted during the past 35 years; they suggest, he says, that bilingual children develop more flexibility in their thinking by processing information through two different languages.

According to Cummins, bilingual students gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. The languages, he contends, nurture each other and allow students to transfer skills - grammar, syntax, listening and memory development - from one language to another.

The theory is that, as a result, children who study at least part-time in their first language will be better able to develop skills in a second language. In other words, spending classroom time on Mandarin may in fact help students, particularly immigrant students, develop their English skills. At the very least, it won't hurt that development.

"You can have your cake and eat it, too," says Cummins. "You can get better second-language acquisition results at no cost to the student's English."

After more than a quarter-century of experience with bilingual education, educators in Edmonton have found that students in bilingual and French immersion programs perform better on district-wide English language exams than those in regular classrooms. The difference is marginal in Grade 3, but is significant by Grade 9.

A breakdown of 2003 Alberta Learning Achievement Test results generally confirms the board's analysis. The breakdown shows that students in the German, Hebrew, Mandarin and Ukranian bilingual programs all did substantially better than other Alberta students by Grade 6. They extended that lead through Grade 9.

There was one important exception, however. Students from the Arabic bilingual program - many of them from the ranks of recently arrived immigrants and some with significant deficits in schooling - trailed their Alberta counterparts in Grade 9 social studies, mathematics and language arts. Less than two-thirds of the Arabic program members achieved the acceptable standard in the three Grade 9 disciplines.

Those results would seem to suggest bilingual programs cannot overcome all educational deficits. (Wachowicz says figures are based on a small number of students and need further analysis since there's no control group with which to compare the Arabic bilingual students, who may in fact be doing better than their Arabic counterparts enrolled in regular programs.)

Bilingual education has

John Ulan for theToronto Star

Marvin Do, 7, studies at Edmonton's Caernarvon School, part of the city's extensive bilingual education program. The board offers full bilingual programs in seven languages, including Mandarin.

been studied extensively in the U.S. where similar anomalies have been discovered.

In a study of New York City's large bilingual program reported in *The New York Times*, researchers found higher test scores among Korean, Chinese and Russian immigrants, who were most often enrolled in English immersion classes, than among students who spoke either Spanish or Creole. The latter students were most likely to be enrolled in bilingual education classes and come from poorer and less educated families.

One of the most important endorsements of bilingual education came in an August, 2002 study published by George Mason University's Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas. The researchers had followed more than 210,000 minority language students from 1985 to 2001 to determine what programs were most effective in assisting their academic development. About three-quarters of the students were native Spanish-speakers.

Among the authors' conclusions:

★ Bilingual programs and extended English-as-a-second-language (ESL) programs (with at least four years of enriched language support) gave students the best chance of reaching high levels of academic achievement; the fewest dropouts came from these programs.

★ Students with no proficiency in English needed at least four years of enriched support to perform at a language level appropriate for their grade level.

★The strongest predictor of ESL students' academic achievement was the amount of formal schooling they had received in their first language; the more primary language grade-level schooling, the higher their achievement in the second language.

Collier and Thomas argue that bilingual programs offer the best kind of classrooms for poor and disadvantaged immigrants, many of whom are not able to meet the dual challenge of learning new subject matter in a new language. They contend that bilingual programs allow these students to do grade-level work while learning English. Otherwise, the researchers say, these students have to put their educations on hold for several years while learning enough English to understand the curriculum. As a result, many immigrant students never overcome the learning gap that opens up between them and their English-speaking peers.

It is a critical issue in the U.S., where it's projected that by 2030 students whose first language is not English will make up 40 per cent of the school-aged population. The vast majority of them will be Hispanics, who are already being poorly served by the education system, according to the Civil Rights Project at Harvard and the Urban Institute, which earlier this year published figures showing that less than half of Hispanic students graduated from high school in New York state (32 per cent), Massachusetts (36 per cent), Michigan (36 per cent) and Nevada (38 per cent).

But the issue of how best to improve the academic achievement of Hispanics and other immigrant students is highly politicized in the U.S. And bilingual education has become the focus of that debate.

Already, four states have voted through ballot initiatives on the fate of bilingual education and intensive ESL programs. In three of the states - California (1998), Arizona (2000) and Massachusetts (2002) voters have eliminated the use of languages other than English for classroom instruction. The ballot initiatives replaced bilingual education programs with English immersion programs that last a year or less. Parents are allowed to request special waivers to keep their children in bilingual classrooms, but the school boards are under no obligation to grant the requests. Colorado became the first and only state to defeat an "English first" movement in November, 2002.

While the debate over how best to teach immigrants has often been incendiary in the U.S., where 850,000 students were enrolled in bilingual education in 2000, the same cannot be said for Canada.

The debate has simply not taken place in this country, even though about 10 per cent of the country's population use a language other than English or French at home. Big-city school boards outside of Alberta and Manitoba have never made a serious attempt at bilingual education. The question is: Why?

School board officials contend that their French immersion and extended French programs (a reduced form of immersion with some subjects in English) essentially serve as the Canadian version of bilingual education. Moreover, in cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, where more than 80 languages are spoken, bilingual education would be a logistical nightmare, they say, that could result in the creation of "cultural silos."

Critics of bilingual education, which have included Ontario's 1995 Royal Commission on Learning, argue that both Canadian society and the students themselves would be poorly served by grouping Arabic students in one school, Punjabi students in another and Chinese students in still another. (Ontario's Education Act continues to prohibit any language other than English or French to be used as the language of instruction.)

U of T's Cummins, however, says Canada's big-city school boards, particularly those in Ontario, have used the fear of ghettoization as a "cop-out to stop any kind of imaginative thinking" on the issue.

"What we haven't done in Canada is step back and say, 'What kind of outcomes are possible given the mosaic we have? We haven't looked creatively at any of the possibilities." He believes Toronto and other big-city boards should, for instance, develop academies where students can study any one of three or four international languages in a bilingual setting. Such schools could offer French-English, Mandarin-English and Spanish-English programs that would overcome concerns about ghettoization and afford students the chance to develop their home languages.

Edmonton's Wachowiz says the bilingual program, once in place, is not expensive to operate. Curriculum materials need to be developed and school space assigned to accommodate the programs.

"But once that infrastructure is there, the cost of delivery is virtually the same," he says"We believe one style of education, one particular mode of education, is not suitable to meet the needs of all children or all parents."

That belief is reflected in the fact that Edmonton offers 30 alternative school programs, including schools with special focus on Aboriginal history, visual arts, dance, science, sports, even soccer. There's an all-girls program, an International Baccalaureate program, a Canadian studies program. Edmonton Public Schools also encompass religion. The board offers Christian alternative programming at more than 10 schools. And at its bilingual Hebrew-English school, Talmud Torah, a former private school, Jewish religious studies are taught as an extension of the school day.

"That's what we're about: Choice," says Wachowicz. "And because we're meeting the needs of parents within the public-school system, there are very, very few private schools in Edmonton.

"Every time a public system loses a student to a private school, there's a dollar amount we lose, which means we can do less for our students. It means if we want to provide the best possible education that money can provide, then we have to be inclusive.

By the numbers

- **7** Number of languages in which the Edmonton school board offers full bilingual programs, including Arabic, Mandarin, Hebrew and Ukranian.
- **1978** Year in which first Edmonton bilingual education program was started — in Ukranian
- **81%** of Alberta students passed the Language Arts portion of the province's standardized Grade 6 test
- **91%** of students in the bilingual Ukranian program passed Alberta's Grade 6 Language Arts test
- **$126,000** Extra money an Edmonton bilingual school with 460 students would receive to cover special materials and equipment

Paving the way to success

Communities, schools offer newcomers help

Three innovative programs give students support

"When she began her school life at Regent Park Public School almost a decade ago, Kadijo Afrah didn't know it, but the odds were stacked high against her success.

Along with her family, she had arrived from Somalia two years earlier, and had settled in one of Toronto's poorest neighbourhoods, Regent Park, home to Canada's largest public housing development. More than half the area's residents are immigrants.

When she entered Grade 1, Kadijo spoke more Somali than English. The statistics suggested she had more chance of becoming a dropout than a high-school graduate.

According to an eight-year Toronto tracking study of Grade 9 students who entered high school in 1993, Regent Park students were almost twice as likely to drop out of high school as other Toronto students.

Researcher Rob Brown found that 56 per cent of Regent Park high-school students failed to graduate by September, 2001, compared to 29 per cent for the city as a whole.

For students from single-parent and immigrant families in Regent Park, the statistics were even grimmer: 77 per cent dropped out.

The poverty that besets Regent Park obviously plays a role in that dropout rate. The average family income of $16,000 a year is half that of other families in Toronto; seven out of 10 families live below the poverty line.

The community lacks professional role models - doctors, lawyers, teachers - and it means few families can afford tutors for their children should they struggle in school. The expense of university can make post-secondary education seem a futile goal.

None of that, however, deterred Kadijo who blossomed as a student at Queen Alexandra Senior Public School. She dreamed of life as a doctor or pharmacist, but to realize that ambition, she would first have to succeed at Jarvis Collegiate Institute.

As a Grade 9 student in Jarvis last year, Kadijo continued to achieve - she carried an 87-per-cent average - thanks in part to an innovative program designed to motivate and support Regent Park students.

The Pathways to Education Program has demonstrated remarkable success in its first three years of operation, so much so that it is being studied by other community groups from low-income areas of the city and by the provincial government.

Charla Jones/Toronto Star

Fourteen-year-old Jarvis Collegiate student Kadijo Afrah receives help in physics from her tutor, Prem Williams. Kadijo spoke more Somali than English when she came to Toronto almost a decade ago and now, the Grade 9 student carries an 87-per-cent average.

The program was developed by the Regent Park Community Health Centre in consultation with parents, students, dropouts and teachers.

"All of them told us that the most important impact we could work toward was to provide a sense of possibility, of hope, of support for our young people," says Norm Rowen, a key architect of the program who is now its director. "We needed to create a culture of achievement and success for our youth."

The program offers a unique set of academic and financial supports to students. There are individual and group mentoring sessions and tutorial classes four nights a week.

Pathways also provides bus and subway tickets to students who maintain good attendance records. (There are no high schools in Regent Park, so most students commute to Jarvis Collegiate, Eastern Commerce or Central Tech.)

In addition, every Pathways student earns a $1,000 bursary, held in trust, for each year of high school they complete. The money, up to a maximum of $4,000, can only be used to defray the cost of post-secondary tuition. All students taking part must sign an agreement to attend school regularly and to attend twice-a-week tutoring and mentoring sessions.

The program is open to all Grade 8 students from five Regent Park elementary schools. In the first year, 110 students joined the program, 95 per cent of those eligible. (The participation rate has remained high even as the program has expanded.)

And unlike many education programs, this one will have its achievements measured. "I expect to produce demonstrable results, results that matter," says Rowen, once a researcher at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. He has set the goal of reducing Regent Park's dropout rate to the city average.

In the interim, the program uses two important assessment tools: absenteeism and credit accumulation. Both measurements have shown themselves to be strong indicators of future academic success. According to a Toronto study, 90 per cent of students who earn 16 credits by the end of Grade 10 will eventually graduate.

The chances of graduation fall sharply with each credit missed in the first two years; those with 15 credits, for instance, had just a 65 per cent chance of graduating high school.

A similar relationship exists with absenteeism. Fewer than half of the Grade 9 students who missed 10 per cent or more of their classes graduated from high school five years later.

The early results have been promising. Pathways has slashed the absenteeism rate of Regent Park high-school students; students enrolled in the program had better attendance records than other Grade 9s and 10s at Jarvis Collegiate, Eastern Commerce and Central Tech.

Regent Park students are also collecting more credits. And importantly, the percentage of students considered most at risk, those with five credits or less after Grade 9, has dropped in half to about 19 per cent.

There are now about 600 students in the $2.5 million Pathways program, which is entering its fourth year of operation. The program costs about $4,200 per student per year with about half of that going toward bursaries and TTC tickets.

Organizers last year raised $1.7 million from community foundations and private donors. The program also relies heavily on 200 volunteer tutors and mentors - many of them university students - who annually donate about 10,000 hours of their time.

The program has a paid staff of 25, including 12 support workers who monitor students' attendance and build communication between parents and the schools.

For Kadijo, the Pathways program has given her a place of academic refuge. Her father died suddenly last year, and her mother speaks little English.

"At home, there's a lot of distractions," she says. "There's so much TV and other things you can do. Here, other people are working, too."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Eight years ago in Calgary, a group of immigrant parents met to discuss some troubling statistics.

Two University of Calgary professors had just published a study, showing a 74 per cent high-school dropout rate for English-as-a-second language (ESL) students in one Calgary school.

At the meeting, the mostly Arabic parents decided that they needed to help their children meet the dual challenge of learning a new language while studying new subjects.

The need to act, they believed, was made urgent by the fact that the province's ESL programs, particularly those in primary school, had suffered drastic cuts during the early 1990s.

Half a dozen parents spearheaded the founding of a charter school - essentially a provincially-funded, privately-run school - devoted to the needs of immigrant students.

They approached the Calgary Board of Education, but officials didn't want to segregate immigrants. The parents appealed directly to the province, which had recently called for charter school proposals. The minister of education approved their idea.

In September, 1996, Almadina ESL Charter School opened its doors - and a controversy was born.

Almadina - the primary school takes its name from the Arabic word meaning 'the city' - has attracted a broad range of critics.

Some believe that grouping ESL students into one school makes it more difficult for them to learn English since so few of their classmates act as language models. Others complain that the school sets a dangerous precedent of using public money to segregate Arabic students - Almadina's student population is about 90 per cent Arabic-speaking - from mainstream classrooms.

Almadina administrators contend that immigrant students were being so poorly served in mainstream classes that something had to be done to address their underachievement. (There was no breakdown at the time to show how Arabic students were performing relative to other groups.)

"Immigrant children in Calgary weren't getting good results," says school vice-principal Mohammed Hammoud. "Without the proper solid foundation in language skills, they're not going to be able to compete

with their fellow students to get into university, college or into a job placement. That's the kind of drive we have."

Almadina has an enrolment of 520 students from kindergarten through Grade 9. Most of the classes are small, with 18 to 20 students, and all are taught by teachers familiar with the best methods of instructing second-language learners. Group work encourages students to speak English more often and teachers make liberal use of pictures and graphics to help students grasp words and concepts.

The school follows the required Alberta curriculum but every subject includes English-language objectives, says the school's ESL co-ordinator, Carla Johnson, that infuse classrooms with lessons in grammar, vocabulary and English usage. Students in every grade are grouped into classes by their language proficiency.

Johnson argues the focus on each student's language needs is more important than exposure to native English speakers. "It's our philosophy that it's more important to have the support," says Johnson. "Most of our teachers are native English-language speakers and that's where the students find their language models."

The school, however, has struggled to demonstrate the success of its program with academic results. Almadina students have scored consistently poor marks on the province's standardized tests in Grades 3 and 6; it was the second-lowest ranked school in Calgary last year, according to an assessment of test results by the Fraser Institute.

As a result, Alberta Learning has renewed the school's licence for only two years, despite Almadina's request for a five-year renewal. It means the school must show it has improved its standing by June, 2006, or risk losing its licence.

University of Calgary professor Hetty Roessingh, an ESL expert, says questions remain about whether Almadina is an Arabic or an ESL-focused school.

"They have to do a better job of opening up to the public at large," she says. "It's a closed community where kids come to a school where they speak Arabic; they go home and they speak Arabic; on the weekends, it's Arabic ... Where are their native-speaking playmates who could be informal teachers on the playground and in the lunchroom?"

Almadina has the outward appearance of an Arabic school. There are Arabic posters and schoolwork on the wall; girls in headscarves fill the hallways. Gym classes are held separately for boys and girls.

But Hammoud insists Almadina was never intended as an Arabic or Islamic school and continues to welcome all immigrants. "The children that came here, they were predominantly of a Middle-Eastern and South Asian or Islamic background, that's true. But the school was widely advertised. They just happened to be the clients who walked through our door."

The school does not teach religion, but offers Arabic and Kurdish as heritage languages.

From his personal experience, Hammoud believes immigrants will be better students and stronger people if they remain connected to their culture. Hammoud came to Canada as a six-year-old in February 1961, unable to speak a word of English and eventually graduated from the University of Calgary with a degree in education.

"We want the best possible future citizens for Canada, that's our goal ... We have to give them the best opportunities here to allow them to increase their language proficiency to a level where they can compete in the Canadian marketplace. If not for this kind of service, these kids are going to be short-changed and they're going to be a drain on society."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

In his 13-year-old heart, Sunny Singh holds two divergent dreams.

One finds him in the National Hockey League, playing for his beloved Colorado Rockies. The other, more in line with the thinking of his parents - immigrants from the Punjab - has him graduating university as a computer engineer.

Sunny puts in time after school in pursuit of both careers.

He practises for the NHL each evening in the driveway of his Brampton home, while two days a week, he joins about 14 other students at Great Lakes Public School for two hours of additional classroom work.

The extra classes, part of a program called Counting on You, offer students a chance to improve their English literacy and mathematics skills. Introduced in 2002 by the Peel District School Board, it is designed for students who fall below the provincial standards for reading, writing and mathematics.

Most are former ESL students, or like Sunny, come from families where a language other than English is spoken at home. Sunny's parents speak Punjabi. More than 60 per cent of the student body at Great Lakes Public School speak a first language other than English.

"I'm not that good at language," says Sunny, who wears a powder-blue head-covering in keeping with his Sikh religion.

Sunny, a Grade 8 student, will in two years face the Grade 10 literacy test, which he must pass in order to pursue his dream of becoming a computer engineer. (He will also be eligible to take a Grade 12 course, the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course, to meet the literacy graduation requirement.)

The Counting on You program was funded by a grant from the Ministry of Education in light of concerns about the failure rate on the Grade 10 literacy test.

Not surprisingly, English-as-a-second language students have fared poorly on the test. Last year, more than half of the province's Grade 10 ESL students decided to delay writing it until their language skills had improved. Of the 2,391 ESL students to write the test, 67 per cent failed to pass.

Meanwhile, Queen's University professor Alan King has found that the province's overall dropout rate is rising because of the difficulty of Ontario's new curriculum, particularly its math and science courses.

The Counting on You program is offered at no cost to students in Grades 7 to 10 and provides up to 30 hours of extra instruction. Attendance is taken and anyone who fails to show up for three classes must leave.

The program serves the same important function as private tutoring: It offers students an intimate learning environment to focus on problematic academic areas.

"It focuses on what the student needs," says Charlotte Mullin, who co-ordinates the program at Great Lakes Public School.

"One of the things I've found with ESL students is that, because of that language gap, it takes them longer to learn. It's not that they don't get it, but they're learning the language and terminology at the same time."

Sunny Singh says he welcomes the extra schooling, even though it cuts into his time for hockey practice. "I know I need the help," he says.

By the numbers

- **56%** of Regent Park highschool students failed to graduate between 1993 and 2001
- **$1,000** How much a Pathways to Education student earns in a bursary held in trust for each year of high school completed
- **19%** of Regent Park highschool students considered at risk in 2004
- **520** students attend Calgary's Almadina ESL Charter School, from kindergarten through Grade 9
- **67%** of the 2,391 ESL students who took Ontario's Grade 10 literacy test failed

The Dutch transformation

Warm welcome for newcomers has turned cold

Holland's liberal tradition mirrors Canadian attitudes

Rotterdam-Ibrahim Spalburg came to Holland as a nine-year-old boy from his native Surinam and as he matured, he grew convinced that his adoptive home was an ideal place in which to raise a family.

He married an immigrant from Indonesia whose father had fought for the Dutch against the Japanese, and together, they raised three daughters and a son. For years, the university-educated Spalburg was employed by the City of Rotterdam as a liaison to the area's growing Muslim community.

Rotterdam was renowned for its liberal approach to issues such as immigration and the poverty that many newcomers suffered. Dominated by socialist politicians, the city offered extensive subsidized housing; it funded hundreds of ethnic community groups; immigrant children were often educated in their first languages.

But a series of seismic events, triggered by the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, have drastically altered Dutch attitudes toward immigrants.

Spalburg and his family have watched with dismay as Islam was denigrated as a "backward religion" by a rising political star, Pim Fortuyn, a Rotterdam sociologist who declared The Netherlands "full" and demanded that the country put the needs of native Dutch people first. (Fortuyn was shot dead just days before the national election in May, 2002 by a white animal-rights activist.)

"Fortuyn and his party were openly criticizing Muslims, but the people, they voted for him anyway," says Spalburg. "We thought we had a good relationship with Dutch citizens, but this showed us, in reality, it is not true. It was very shocking."

Fortuyn's legacy in Holland has been a painful reassessment of the country's immigration and multiculturalism policies. Rotterdam has been the centre of that backlash.

The city council, now dominated by the Fortuyn-inspired Leefbaar Rotterdam (Livable Rotterdam) coalition, has imposed a moratorium on the arrival of new refugees and low-skilled immigrants. City council is in a fight to halt the construction of a large mosque near the city's revered soccer stadium. And older, low-cost row houses - rented primarily to immigrants and refugees - are being torn down in a controversial attempt at inner-city renewal.

For Spalburg and his wife, the rapid about-face in Dutch attitudes has led them to contemplate a new home.

"We don't know what to do," Spalburg says. "My wife wants to live in Malaysia. But I am also thinking about my children, my grandchildren. I don't think I could live without them."

The sudden change in Holland's relationship with its immigrant population has left many in this country of 16 million struggling to understand how and why it happened - and what it means for other multicultural nations like Canada. Was it the product of pragmatism or racism or fear?

Could the Dutch experience be replicated here?

Canada and Holland share some telling characteristics, including long liberal traditions, a concentration of newcomers in a few cities and visible pockets of immigrant poverty.

But there are also important differences between the two countries that could help explain why Canada has, until now, avoided the kind of backlash that has recently swept Holland and many other immigrant destinations, including France, Austria, Denmark, Italy, Spain and Australia.

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In the Netherlands, immigrants comprise about 9 per cent of the overall population, with the largest migrant groups originating from Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, Surinam and Morocco. Most of the migrants have settled in the country's largest cities, meaning that today, about one-third of the residents in Amsterdam and Rotterdam are foreign-born. (Toronto is among the most multicultural cities in the world, with a population that is 44-per-cent foreign-born.)

Unlike Canada, Holland has never attempted to lure the world's best and brightest immigrants. Instead, as the country's economy boomed during the early 1970s, it went in search of temporary guest workers willing to labour in factories, on farms and dockyards. Men from poor, rural areas of Turkey and Morocco flooded into Holland.

The Dutch government was a generous host, extending unemployment benefits, welfare, health care and housing subsidies to its guest workers. Hundreds of immigrant associations were financed by the state to help them maintain their cultural identities. It was thought that this would make it easier for the workers to return home.

The assumption that guest workers would leave Holland persisted even when their families began to arrive. Their children were encouraged to attend primary schools in their first languages with Dutch authorities believing this would make their eventual re-integration that much smoother.

It wasn't until the 1980s that the government came to understand that most migrant workers had no intention of leaving. That realization coincided with shifts in the Dutch economy that eliminated thousands of low-skilled jobs.

The Dutch government responded with the liberal-minded Ethnic Minorities Policy that promoted multiculturalism, equal opportunity and social justice. Multiculturalism - and its belief that immigrants can successfully participate in society while retaining their cultural identities - seemed a natural fit for Holland, a country with a history of supporting the rights of religious minorities.

Subsidies were offered to ethnic organizations, trade unions, newspapers and schools. Generous education grants - almost twice the per-pupil grant for Dutch-born children - were given to minority children in an attempt to bring them up to speed academically with their Dutch counterparts. And a special law was introduced in 1993, modelled on Canada's Employment Equity Act, that required large employers to report publicly on the number of ethnic minorities in their workforces.

The openness of Dutch society sped the flow of newcomers and refugees into the country, with migration peaking in the early 1990s. The newer influx drove unemployment among immigrants still higher, and despite all of the government's efforts, the social and economic situation of minorities remained poor, says Han Entzinger, a professor of migration and integration studies at Erasmus University in Rotterdam.

It was at about this time, he says, that "doubts began to develop about the effectiveness of facilitating immigrant cultures and of creating separate provisions for them."

Those doubts, however, were not discussed in public until 2000 when Paul Scheffer, an author and historian, published an essay, "The Multicultural Tragedy," in one of Holland's major newspapers.

For Scheffer, the multicultural tragedy involved the rise of an "ethnic underclass" detached from Dutch culture and society. He argued that the insularity of immigrants, particularly Muslims, would eventually undermine Holland's liberalism and social cohesion.

"I think our idea of tolerance was basically an attitude of indifference," he wrote. Scheffer called for intensive integration programs that stressed Dutch culture, history and liberal democratic principles.

Professor Entzinger says that Scheffer's views, if published a decade earlier, "would have been disposed of as conservative or perhaps even racist."

Instead, they struck a chord with many Dutch citizens and sparked a debate that became decidedly sharp-edged with the events of Sept. 11, 2001. Pim Fortuyn dominated the subsequent 2002 election campaign, warning that militant Islam and immigrant overcrowding threatened the Dutch way of life.

In the wake of Fortuyn's murder, Holland's mainstream political parties have adopted many of his ideas on immigration. Earlier this year, an all-party report on immigration echoed his key criticisms.

The 2,500-page report by the Dutch parliament blamed successive governments for policies that encouraged segregation rather than integration.

It was a mistake, the report said, to allow children to speak Turkish, Arabic and other native languages in primary schools rather than Dutch. And it criticized the policy vacuum that still allows between 70 per cent and 80 per cent of Dutch-born immigrants to import their spouses from "home" countries, mostly Turkey or Morocco. The report concluded that Holland's immigrants needed to become more Dutch, and spend more time learning the language.

Some in Holland contend the approach is simple pragmatism, necessary in a small country, and consistent with the open-minded Dutch approach to issues such as euthanasia, soft drugs and prostitution.

Entzinger, however, does not subscribe to the theory.

"It's much more fundamental," he says. "It's not just a debate on immigration, but it's a debate on identity: Who are we? And who are they? And how can we make them more like us?"

For Spalburg, the controversy that has attended the construction of a mosque in Rotterdam epitomizes all that is now wrong with his city. If and when it's built, the Al-Salaam Mosque will be the largest in Europe, with minarets that rise 50 metres, higher even than the light standards on the Feyenoord soccer stadium.

"It will not be Rotterdam; it will be Mecca on the Maas (River)," Ronald Sorenson, leader of Leefbaar Rotterdam, has charged.

Spalburg, who is the director of an umbrella group that represents 44 Muslim organizations in Rotterdam, contends that Sorenson and others have simply not faced up to reality. A recent report has forecast that by 2017, almost 60 per cent of Rotterdam's population will be of non-Dutch origin. Most of that population will be Muslim. (A Rotterdam study found that the average Moroccan woman gives birth to four children compared to just over one for her Dutch counterpart.)

"They don't want to believe that it is true, what is happening in Rotterdam," Spalburg says. "I think people didn't realize that after a few years, there will be a majority of Muslims living in the city. Now, that they realize it, they are afraid."

Surveys show that 62 per cent of Rotterdam residents support new limits on immigration.

Many of them are also voting with their feet as more and more middle-class Dutch residents abandon the city for the suburbs. Rotterdam city officials say they simply cannot handle the social welfare and housing costs associated with more immigrants and refugees. The city now receives about 60 per cent of Holland's newcomers.

"We cannot add to our underclass," says the manager of integration for Rotterdam, Wim Vleugels, who is responsible for implementing the city's latest plan for integration.

Its main goals, he says, are to decrease the number of immigrants, reduce the concentration of poor people in immigrant neighbourhoods and improve the relationship between Dutch residents and newcomers. Under the plan, anyone not born in Holland will be required to take Dutch-language courses; social assistance benefits can be cut for those who drop out.

The backlash against immigrants has been particularly difficult for those, such as Nadia Mouaddab, who was born in Morocco, but has never known a country other than Holland. Like Spalburg, she is exploring a move to another country.

"I am Dutch, I have a Dutch passport so it's strange emotionally because I'm made to feel like an *allochtoon* (a foreigner) here," says Mouaddab, 34. "And then when I go to Morocco, they know I am a foreigner because I speak with an accent ... There's never a home. I need to seek a real home because this is not it."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Most Torontonians would feel at home in Rotterdam.

The city's two-line subway is clean and efficient. The city's main sports venue, Feyenoord, has a retractable roof. In neighbourhoods, such as Delfshaven, vendors from Surinam and Morocco hawk produce and nuts from sidewalk baskets; the rich smells of Turkish coffee and Indonesian spices waft from restaurants. The world lives here, as it does in Toronto.

The Dutch were once polite hosts to the newcomers, as reluctant to discuss race and immigration as Canadians are now. That reluctance to engage debate gave Pim Fortuyn instant power and appeal when he unabashedly spoke his mind about the problems associated with multiculturalism and immigration.

Which is why some observers contend it is only a matter of time before a charismatic figure such as Fortuyn arrives on the Canadian scene and stirs debate about immigration, multiculturalism and integration.

University of Toronto's Jeffrey Reitz believes it is possible. He argues that Canada

Andrew Duffy for the Toronto Star

The minarets of Rotterdam's Mevlana Mosque rise behind an apartment complex. Many residents have opposed the construction of Al-Salaam Mosque, which will be the largest in Europe. Its minarets will be taller than light standards on the beloved Feyenoord stadium.

By the numbers

- **33%** of residents in Amsterdam and Rotterdam are foreignborn
- **44%** of Toronto residents are foreign-born
- **1** Number of children the average Dutch-born woman gives birth to
- **4** Number of children the average Morroccan-born Dutch woman gives birth to
- **62%** of Rotterdam residents support new limits on immigration

has not yet suffered the kind of backlash experienced in Holland because of the overall economic success of immigrants in this country. That success, he argues, is a product of a strong education system and Canadian immigration policy, which has actively sought skilled newcomers while helping them adjust to the country.

(A recent Ipsos-Public Affairs poll found that in Canada 73 per cent of respondents said immigrants were a good influence on the country; in seven other western countries, including the U.S., France, Germany and Britain, more people felt immigrants were a negative rather than a positive influence.)

But the economic prospects of immigrants have suffered badly during the past decade, he says, making the future social climate less certain.

"When you have a welfare state, it's important that immigrants are not seen as a burden," says Reitz, director of ethnic, immigration and pluralism studies at U of T. "Canadian politicians have convinced people that is not the case here. But I think there's an underlying problem waiting to happen because of rising poverty rates and employment problems among immigrants."

Although Canada has yet to produce a politician like Fortuyn, someone aggressively anti-immigrant, that kind of sentiment can be overheard in pubs and other places where people gather, says Reitz.

"I think the potential is there for a backlash - and it could happen quickly. It might not happen, but it could."

Erasmus University's Han Entzinger admits to being surprised at the speed of the transformation in Dutch attitudes. But he also believes Canada may be insulated from the same kind of backlash because, unlike Holland, it has traditionally sought out the world's best and brightest immigrants.

The country has also practised a different kind of multiculturalism, he says, one in which institutions such as schools and political parties embrace immigrants. "We in Holland called it multiculturalism but it was, at the same time, a form of exclusion," he says. "What is more multicultural? To open up your own institutions to newcomers or give them their own institutions as we did?"

Newcomers losing ground

Boards should make immigrant students priority

Little research is being done into their unique needs

Simon Wilson for the Toronto Star

Sixteen-year-old Sear Qaher, who was born in Afghanistan and came to Hamilton last year, volunteers at a newcomers' reception centre.

HAMILTON- Sear Qaher will succeed. You can see it in his 16-year-old eyes, which are chocolate and serene and offer no hint of the turmoil they have seen.

At the age of 8, Sear watched his father die when a mortar ripped into their living room in Kabul, the Afghan capital, as it was being shelled by rival mujahideen factions. He watched his mother lose her long-time job as a schoolteacher when the Taliban later took control of the country. He watched as the family was forced to flee the tyrannical regime, first to Parvan province, then to Peshawar, Pakistan, and finally, to Hamilton.

Sear walked into a downtown high school, Sir John A. Macdonald, in September, 2003, confident in the English skills he had learned as a boy from his father, a university-educated pharmacist. But officials were unsure what grade he should enter, as he had yet to finish Grade 3. Sear himself was unsure of what he faced, and why other students laughed so much when he knocked on each classroom door to ask: "May I come in?"

But he proved himself quickly as a student, passing Grade 9 and 10 math within his first few months; he sped through computer classes as well. The education that Sear had picked up in Pakistan - where he worked odd jobs while teaching English at a local school - was proving remarkably solid. (Sear had to work to support his family and also took jobs in a carpenter's shop, a mechanic's garage and a pharmacy.) He studied computers, math and chemistry by following the curriculum of other classes at the Peshawar school where he taught.

"In school, when I came to Canada, I was really scared," Sear said. "I knew I could speak English very well, but English is not important here. In my country, people respected me because I could speak English. But I only knew a little bit about math, computers and English."

Yet he gained confidence when he discovered that his self-taught skills had merit: "I saw lots of opportunities for myself. I told my friends: 'I can do whatever I want.'" He has already become a solid citizen. He volunteers at a newcomer reception centre and assists other immigrant students with their homework every weeknight on the second floor of Hamilton's central library.

Sear has completed his final year of English-as-a-second-language studies - he still struggles with reading, he says - and will move into Grade 11 English classes this fall. He wants to be a computer engineer, but knows he will have to improve his marks to get into university.

"I don't want to go back to that kind of situation," he says, referring to his days as a poorly paid apprentice and tutor. "I really want to work hard and study and become something."

Sear Qaher will become something by virtue of the determination that radiates from him like a fever. He is among those immigrants and refugees - many of whom I met during my research on the year-long Atkinson Fellowship - who will succeed in Canada by force of will. These are the immigrants who don't need much help, just a chance or two. These are the immigrants Canada has come to know well - maybe too well - because in

mythologizing them we have come to believe that everyone can follow their march to success.

But it is not the case. The past 10 years have proven as much: Newcomers have lost economic ground while the children who study English as a second language have struggled to succeed in high school. Yet Canada continues to take the success of its immigrants for granted.

The past decade has not been kind to adult immigrants, even the highly skilled and educated. Poverty rates have been rising steadily among all newcomers. "Having a degree, no matter what the discipline, did not protect these recent immigrants from a rising probability of being in low income," Statistics Canada analysts Garnett Picot and Feng Hou concluded in a recent study. The trend is most pronounced in Canada's largest cities, Toronto and Vancouver, where almost one-third of the low-income population is now made up of immigrants.

To make matters worse, the children of many of those same immigrants are not doing well in school, especially refugees and others from impoverished families. School boards across Canada, including many large boards in Ontario, Alberta and B.C., have cut English-as-a-second-language services during periods of fiscal restraint while introducing a series of standardized tests and exit exams. It means ESL students often find themselves having to meet higher standards with less help.

Given these facts, it should be a priority for school boards in Canada's largest cities to understand the impact of these changes on their immigrant student populations, particularly among ESL students. But there is precious little such work being done. The only studies that have tracked ESL students raise troubling questions. The University of Calgary's David Watt and Hetty Roessingh tracked ESL students in one high school for eight years and uncovered a dropout rate of 74 per cent. In Vancouver, the University of British Columbia's Lee Gunderson followed a cohort of immigrant students for five years until 2001. He found that more than 60 per cent of immigrant students "disappeared," either dropping out of high school, transferring to other districts or taking courses that did not lead to university.

The Toronto District School Board, formed in 1998 through the merger of seven boards, has never tracked the performance of its ESL students once they leave that program. The province's $15-million-a-year testing agency, the Education Quality and Accountability Office, provides annual snapshots of how ESL students in Grades 3 and 6 and 9 are performing in reading, writing and mathematics. Not surprisingly (since the students identified as ESL have arrived in Canada within the past three years), the tests have repeatedly shown that the majority of ESL students cannot meet provincial standards. But the critical question, which remains unanswered, is what happens to those same ESL students as they move into mainstream classes? Does their performance improve or deteriorate? How many drop out?

The answers to those questions gain a further degree of urgency when placed in the larger context of what's happening to immigrants in Canada's largest cities. In Toronto, researchers have discovered that instead of living in mixed socio-economic neighbourhoods as they did 20 years ago, most poor families are now far more concentrated in low-income neighbourhoods. Those same areas also possess other troubling characteristics: they tend to be dominated by immigrants and visible minorities. The research dovetails with work by Statistics Canada, which has recorded a dramatic rise in the number of "ethnic enclaves" in Canada: neighbourhoods in which 30 per cent or more of the population is drawn from the same visible minority group. There are now 254 such enclaves, the vast majority in Toronto and Vancouver, up from six in 1981. Those enclaves, the researchers found, were formed by a combination of immigration and white flight (a phenomenon that they termed "rapid replacement").

Moreover, the visible minority neighbourhoods tended to have higher unemployment and lower incomes than other census areas - even in Chinese neighbourhoods where a relatively high proportion of people had university educations. Black neighbourhoods in Toronto and Montreal suffered significantly higher rates of unemployment and poverty.

The research suggests there is reason to fear the emergence in Canada of an immigrant underclass. That fear becomes more vivid if the children of immigrants now living in poverty are not being equipped with the language skills and education they need to secure better jobs than their parents.

Which is what brings me back to the classroom. Because it is here, I believe, that equity begins and where the growth of an underclass is forestalled.

Simply put, Canada owes the children of its immigrants more help in the public school system. Because not everyone is made of the stuff of Sear Qaher.

Fortunately, this is not an original notion. In the course of my research, I met a group of ESL teachers who hope to convince the federal government to intercede on behalf of poorly served immigrant students. The fledgling group, headed by former Toronto Board of Education ESL co-ordinator Elizabeth Coelho, was formed at a November, 2003, conference in Vancouver because of a shared concern that immigrants were being shortchanged by public education.

The group, Canadian Educators for Immigrant Children, wants to build momentum for change through a national forum. They intend to press provincial education ministers early next year to sponsor such a forum.

They also have other important policy ideas. Chief among them is the belief that the federal government must subsidize the cost of ESL programs and school-based settlement services now borne entirely by big-city school boards and provincial governments. In Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and their suburbs, boards now spend hundreds of millions to provide ESL, community outreach workers, parent education programs, bilingual tutoring and interpretation services.

Coelho says governments have to recognize through their funding of schools the unique challenge posed by educating Canada's immigrant students, almost half of whom settle in the Greater Toronto Area. There has to be recognition, she says, that as the architect of immigration, the federal government has a role in ensuring the children of immigrants are treated equitably in the public education system. It is not only a question of justice, Coelho insists, but one of self-interest since Canada cannot afford to squander the potential of its immigrants.

There is precedent for the federal government's involvement in language education. In March, 2003, the government announced plans to double within 10 years the proportion of young people who know both official languages, to 50 per cent from 24. Ottawa committed $381 million over five years to language education, justifying its incursion into provincial jurisdiction in the name of nation-building. Coelho says the government needs to broaden its approach to nation-building to encompass the 3 million immigrants that Canada has settled during the past 15 years.

There is also a strong belief from those like Coelho that teachers need to be better prepared to face big-city classrooms, where students arrive with vastly different linguistic abilities.

"We've had 25 years of discussion about multiculturalism, yet we continue to churn out teachers with no knowledge of anything related to language development," an exasperated Jim Cummins, a literacy expert at the University of Toronto, told me. "Building in one required course into the mainstream teacher qualification is essential."

In the longer term, more attention needs to be turned to establishing what methods work best in accelerating the development of ESL students. There are some interesting pilot projects in this country aimed at addressing the needs of ESL and immigrant students. But not enough is being done to help them or to capitalize on their linguistic diversity. "We're suffering from a deficit of imagination," says Cummins.

What's more, there is not enough research being done to determine which programs are effective and which ones are not - and why.

"There's lots of good intentions, but good intentions are not enough," says Hetty Roessingh, a University of Calgary professor and former ESL teacher. "We need money. We need action. We need research."

Some initiatives are so simple - and necessary - that they don't need to be studied. Cummins, for instance, wants all schools with a sizable immigrant population to introduce language policies that require those who teach math, science, history and phys-ed to detail how they will meet the needs of their ESL students. It would force all teachers, he says, to at least familiarize themselves with instructional strategies to assist ESL students.

Other initiatives are equally simple. The Somali Youth Association of Toronto operates an after-school homework club. They're seeking to expand the program to those public housing projects that host large Somali communities. It is an enormously worthwhile endeavour.

Canadians have good reason to take pride in this country's approach to immigration. Indeed, unlike those in other Western countries, a sizable majority of Canadians continue to view newcomers as a positive influence.

But we cannot take good race relations for granted.

Holland, which once had an even more liberal approach to immigration, now finds itself in the midst of a backlash that has poisoned relations between the Dutch majority and immigrant communities, many of them Muslim. Resentment there arose largely because immigrants were seen as an economic drain on society, as a source of crime and terrorism.

It is why Canada cannot allow itself to slip into a state of complacency and assume that its immigrants will succeed, regardless of the hurdles they face. The kind of mass immigration experienced in Toronto and Vancouver is a social and economic experiment, one too important to fail. Canada needs to invest in the success of its newcomers, particularly in those young people, the second-generation, now seated in this country's classrooms.

The future of ESL

Canadian Educators for Immigrant Children is a fledgling group of ESL teachers that wants to implement fundamental changes through a national forum on immigrant children. Here are some of their policy recommendations:

1. The federal government must subsidize the cost of ESL programs and school-based settlement services. City school boards and provincial governments currently bear the costs.
2. Academic achievement of ESL students must be tracked for a better understanding of the scope of the problem. The group wants a comprehensive longitudinal study of the "educational paths and outcomes" for ESL students across Canada.
3. National standards for ESL education are needed in light of the fact that the provinces offer different levels of service. Research suggests ESL students need between five and seven years of language support to catch up to their native-speaking English counterparts.
4. National benchmarks for English-language acquisition would ensure immigrant students would be tested against national standards, rather than through province-wide exams. Consistent benchmarks, based on age and number of years in Canada, would yield more meaningful information on progress.
5. ESL instruction must be a required course for would-be teachers and principals in immigrant destination provinces such as Ontario and British Columbia, where they can now graduate without ever having studied how to teach to a linguistically-diverse classroom.

Black students still poorly served: Study

Caribbean-born pupils at most risk

Report links place of birth, success

Unreported research by the Toronto District School Board shows that English-speaking Caribbean immigrants are those most at risk of failing to complete high school.

The research offers more evidence that blacks continue to be poorly served by the school system a decade after Ontario's Royal Commission on Learning decried the collective underachievement of black students.

While the Toronto District School Board no longer breaks down its academic data by race or ethnicity, according to senior board officials, it does track key "indicators" that have proven to be important predictors of high-school success. The board breaks these down by the geographic regions where students were born.

One of the board's current indicators looks at credit accumulation at the end of Grade 10, when students are supposed to have 16 credits. Previous research has shown that the accumulation of credits early in high school is a telling measure of whether students will graduate.

The results, published in a June, 2003, report titled, "Student Success Indicators, 2001-2002," show that 54 per cent of students born in the English-speaking Caribbean had 14 credits or fewer at the end of Grade 10. The board considers these students to be at risk of failing to complete high school within the next three years.

Forty-five per cent of students born in Western Africa, Central and South America were at risk, as well as 39 per cent of East African students.

Researchers found that 27 per cent of Canadian-born students were at risk based on the same criterion.

Students born in South Asia (24 per cent), Eastern Europe (23 per cent) and Eastern Asia (16 per cent) were less likely to be at risk than Canadian-born students.

According to an earlier tracking study conducted by the Toronto board - researchers followed students who entered high school in 1993 for five years - the vast majority (90 per cent) of those who had earned a full complement of 16 credits by the end of Grade 10 graduated three years later. Those who failed or dropped a course by the end of Grade 10 were much less likely (62 per cent) to graduate. Graduation rates diminished significantly for each additional missing credit. The latest Toronto research raises still more questions about how well the city's public education system is serving certain black students.

The issue was first brought into focus by Ontario's Royal Commission on Learning, appointed by Bob Rae's NDP government in May, 1993, at a time when the education system was under attack for its lack of accountability and its fuzzy standards.

In its 550-page report, a five-member panel said dramatic steps had to be taken to address what it called "a crisis among black youth with respect to education and achievement."

"There must not be the slightest doubt that this commission shares the great concern, the desperation even of the black community about the underachievement of black students as a group," the panel wrote.

The commission recommended that Toronto establish demonstration schools focused on the needs of black students; that province-wide test results be assessed by race, gender, cultural background and family income; that classroom materials be reviewed to ensure they're devoid of bias and that more minorities be trained as teachers.

Few of the recommendations were acted upon. Formal demonstration schools were not developed and the province's testing agency, the Education Quality and Accountability Office, does not break down test scores by race or region of birth.

Today, it's hard to accurately describe the effect of those cumulative decisions on black and other minority students since those statistics are no longer generated. But Toronto's student success indicators, and a cross tabulation performed using results of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, do raise questions.

Researchers found a dramatic relationship between neighbourhood income and achievement: 39 per cent of students in the lowest-income neighbourhoods were at risk compared to 11 per cent in the neighbourhoods with the highest income.

Differences between academic streams were also dramatic when it came to the Grade 10 literacy test: 80 per cent of students in the academic stream passed compared to 25 per cent of students in the applied stream. Blacks have, historically, been over-represented in the applied stream, but again, there is no data to show whether that continues to be the case.

Board officials concede the existence of the literacy test as a graduation requirement raises the possibility that the dropout rate among black students will rise still further.

Gerry Connelly, associate director of the Toronto board insists race-based data is not needed to understand and react to the problem. "Even though we don't have specific data, we know that there's a problem," she says. "We're working with the communities as well as with the particular students. But we need to do more."

Other educators, however, believe it is vital for the education system to accurately identify those students at risk and build targeted programs to help them.

"If you don't know who is not making it, then how do you put your resources where they'll make a difference?" asks Veronica Lacey, president of The Learning Partnership and Ontario's former deputy minister of education. "If you want to change the performance of the system, the best way to do it is to put your resources into the kids who are not achieving."

National Newspaper Award-winning reporter Andrew Duffy is the 2003 recipient of the Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy. The Ottawa Citizen reporter, formerly with the Star, recently completed his year-long study of the relationship between immigration and education in Canada.

The Award

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