

FINAL REPORT

Project Title: Focusing on Meaning: Immigrant Children's Exploration of Non-verbal Interaction Strategies with Peer through Creating Photo Novellas

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Submitted by

Anna Kirova (Principal Investigator)

Michael Emme (Co-investigator)

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary objective of the study was to help new-immigrant children examine the non-verbal strategies they use in gaining access to majority-culture peers. Non-verbal behavior (NVB) plays a central role in the process of establishing interpersonal relationships (Feldman, Philippot, & Custrini, 1991). The importance of studying cross-cultural non-verbal communication among school children is accentuated by the fact that non-verbal expressions are likely to remain unchanged even when a new verbal language is acquired (Schneller, 1988). Thus on the non-verbal level multicultural societies such as Canada, are extremely multilingual. It is, therefore, the presence of unchanged non-verbal language accompanying a newly acquired verbal language that embellishes communication. When there is a discrepancy between verbally and implicitly (non-verbal) expressed meaning, the implicit portion will dominate the total message (Mehrabian, 1972). If young children are taught how to understand each other on a non-verbal level, their overall social competence is likely to increase (Feldman, Philippot & Custrini, 1991) which, in turn, holds a potential for decreasing intercultural misunderstandings at school.

Initially, there were two main research questions that guided the study: 1) What are the patterns of immigrant children's non-verbal behaviours (NVs) that result in peer acceptance and/or evoke peer rejection? 2) Is there a connection between immigrant children's knowledge of their own and their peers' strategies and their ability to interact successfully with their majority-culture peers?

BACKGROUND AND RATIONAL

Although the number of immigrant children is expected to continue growing in Canadian schools, research concerning these students' school experiences is quite limited. There is still insufficient awareness of the relationship between children's struggle with the stressors of immigration and assimilation and the multiple needs reality of their day-to-day life in school (Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester, 2001). However, ethnographic research on immigrant children and their school experiences (Duran & Weffer, 1992; Suarez-Orozco, 1989; 2000) points to the multiple problems these children face in learning a new language while coping with the disruption of family life, poverty, and adjusting to a new culture that often conflicts with their families' cultural values.

In previous research Kirova (2000; 2001) has shown that social isolation and loneliness were common experiences among immigrant children regardless of their racial, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds. Children reported that because they were unable to become accepted members of their peer group, they experienced the loneliness of being excluded, unwanted, and disliked. Findings of current collaborative study of

elementary school recent Chinese immigrants (Kirova, & Wu, in press) suggested that it is possible that the miscommunication that takes place during their adjustment to the school culture period could be largely due to misinterpreting non-verbal cues of their classmates. Peer conflicts were about misunderstandings on the part of both the newcomers and their peers from the majority (non-Chinese) culture. In most cases, as reported by the participants, these misunderstandings occurred on a non-verbal level. In all reported instances, the non-Chinese peers behaviors were perceived by the newcomers as overt rejection and evoked either an aggressive response or hurt feelings, sadness, isolation, and loneliness.

However, immigrant children's loneliness and isolation as a result of peer rejection at school has not been studied systematically in relation to the non-verbal strategies used by the immigrant children with both their English-speaking and non-English-speaking peers to initiate, maintain, avoid or terminate their social interactions. Because research (e.g., Kirova, 2000; 2001; Osterman, 2001) on immigrant children, however limited, has been based on interviews with children, very little is known about the actual non-verbal behaviours (NVBs) used to both initiate interactions with their peers and to cope with their rejection or peer conflict. Research suggests (Hall, 1976, 1984) that cultural differences at a non-verbal level are of the implicit kind and exist at a deeper, more subtle level (Archer, 1997) that people have difficulty describing.

Non-verbal Behavior and Cross-cultural Misunderstanding

Because non-verbal behavior is the product of a continuing socialization process within a given culture (Watzlawick et al., 1967; Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Yousef, 1981; Kendon, 1984, Archer, 1997), an immigrant or any newcomer to the culture, as a recipient, decodes a non-verbal message according to his/her cultural heritage, which is usually quite different from the encoder's intentions, sometimes even contradicting it (Archer, 1997; Schneller, 1985a, 1985b). The difficulty is heightened by the fact that most of the gestures that appear similar differ greatly in their emblematic meaning (Efron, 1941; Leach, 1972; Ekman, 1980; von Raffler-Engel, 1980; Heslin & Patterson, 1982). This leads to false decoding (Payatos, 1984) that produce miscommunication, and misunderstanding (Mehrabian & Weiner, 1967; Mehrabian, 1971).

Although NVB plays a central role in the process of establishing interpersonal relationships (Feldman, Philippot, & Custrini, 1991), its importance has been overlooked in the study of young children of immigrants, especially in the context of everyday interactions in a school context.

Non-verbal Behaviour and Social Competence

Recent research (Feldman, Philippot & Custrini, 1991) suggests that non-verbal behavioural skills are primary aspect of the construct of social competence. The authors viewed the effective use and control of NVB during social interaction as a critical social skill. They also take the position that effective non-verbal skill is manifested when the use of NVB enhances the course of social interaction and the goals of the interaction are more likely to be achieved.

Hanna's ethnographic study (1984) of black/white non-verbal communication focused primarily on different kinds of behaviour, and more specifically the intercultural dissonance found in the United States school setting. These included differences in the

presentation of self, energy and sensitivity evident in the interaction, body emphasis, and personal social and territorial space. The author argues that non-verbal translation is a recognised remedy for potential intercultural misunderstanding. However teaching children non-verbal communication has been largely neglected because of “the pre-eminent status of the word in technologically advanced societies” (Hanna, 1984, p. 400). Feldman, Philpott, & Custrini (1991) found that it is possible to increase the level of non-verbal proficiency through training procedures. Their experimental study with fifth- and sixth-grade students found that subjects who received training showed significantly greater decoding accuracy than did the subjects who did not receive training. Although the procedure was not universally effective, the results indicated that non-verbal decoding can be improved by training.

METHODOLOGY

In this study we used an arts-based methodology with still photography as the primary visual data-collection method. Photography in general has been defined as a valuable participatory technique for eliciting children’s opinions (Ells, 2001). However, the visual methodology used in this study was unique because the still photographs were used not only as a basis of discussion, but were also manipulated and arranged in a narrative format as a fotonovela. As a storytelling form, fotonovela can combine the familiar framing devices, sequencing, and text balloons of the comic book with posed or candid photographs of the participants in place of pen-and-ink sketches. As a form of popular literature, the fotonovela was present in Mexico, Italy, France, Portugal, and Quebec in the 1960s and 1970s. This blending of a highly entertaining and approachable narrative structure with the naturalness or realism of photography (Emme, 1989) suited the melodramatic content of its popular form (Reed, 1998). Sometimes using the anglicized spelling the *photo novella* form has also proven a useful and important communication device in communities where literacy is a problem. As one example among many organizations dealing with public health issues, UNICEF has produced fotonovelas for use in Nepal to tell about AIDS and health care options (Emme & Kirova, 2005). Because it is our hope that our methodology is culturally sensitive, it is essential that we acknowledge the well documented origins of fotonovela in the popular literatures of Mexico and Italy (Reed, 1998, Curiel, 2001). To the best of our knowledge the much shorter 10-15-year history of the anglicized term has not been documented but we have concerns that this English term has the colonizing effect of distancing the service work it describes from the meaningful complexities of its cultural origins.

Current literature on the fotonovela as a research tool is found in the fields of health and nursing. For example, Berman, Ford-Gilboe, Moutrey, and Cekic (2001) used the fotonovela as a research method in encouraging Bosnian refugee children to represent their memories as well as their first experiences in Canada. Wang and Burris (1994) used the fotonovela to gain an understanding of the experiences of Chinese women. In both cases, and typical of the literature, the fotonovela is seen as a leveling and even liberatory medium in contexts where varying literacies create inequities and representational disparity. However, to our knowledge, we were using fotonovela for the first time in educational research with both immigrant and nonimmigrant children.

Other data-gathering methods used were semistructured and unstructured individual and group interviews conducted with the children on an ongoing basis. These interviews took place during the lunch hour while the children were eating their lunch or when they

had finished and returned to their classroom. All interviews were audio taped and then transcribed verbatim. Focused observations and field notes were also regular methods of data-collection.

Setting and Participants

This study took place at “Greenview”, an inner-city elementary-junior high school in a large city in western Canada. Because of the large number of low-income students in the school, it had a free lunch program. Under the lunch program policy, parents were invited to contribute what they could afford toward the lunch program, but all children were entitled to receive lunch.

The school had a high percentage of visible minorities. Some of the main ethnic groups were Aboriginal, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Arab, East Indian, and African. Many were first-generation immigrants. More than seven languages were spoken among the 204 children. Although over the course of the study, which began in February 2004, we have worked with the total of 28 children from grades four, five and six who were members of the photo club, a core of eight children who were in grade 5 at the beginning of the study and in grade 7 at the end of the study produced the three fotonovelas: *Lunchtime, My First Day at School*, and *Getting into Basketball*. (Please see the attached fotonovelas). In this core group, all but one child were recent immigrants from China, Japan, Cambodia, India, Korea, and Vietnam. With one exception, all the children were fluent in spoken English, which allowed for the interviews to be conducted in English. To interview the child who had entered the school a month before the beginning of the study, we used both English and Mandarin with the help of a bilingual research assistant. Because English was a second language for most of the participants, some of the interview dialogue was not always grammatically correct. The original words and grammatical structure of their sentences were retained in the transcriptions of the interview data and edited in only a few cases. The primary concern was always to preserve what was perceived as the meaning intended by the children.

Research Procedures

Candid/documentary photographs & Frame selection

Starting simply with the opportunity to play with a digital camera and printer, over time children who elected to be a part of the club took on a number of photographic identities (as a spy, a reporter and a director). These various approaches were intended to help the children develop ‘camera vision,’ (Chiarenza & Luxenberg, 2004) a heightened awareness of framing and selecting.

Color Coding, Sequencing & Composition

Later the children were invited to categorize their images based on terms they identified for common activities that were part of their daily school routine. Next they were introduced to visual narrative through conversations about their images and by engaging in storyboarding games involving sequencing their images to tell stories about what they were seeing and experiencing.

The children’s visual analysis of their stories functioned on several levels. Introduced to the fotonovela form (Curiel, 2001; Levy, 1998), the process of organizing images in terms of their special relationships and sequencing became a collaging process that exploited the quick and simple availability of the children’s photographs because of current digital technology. The simultaneous impression of story fragments and unity

(Brockelman, 2001) created by collective organizing, cutting and pasting resulted in rich discussions about meaning. Because the images were also digitally processed (Emme & Kirova, 2005) for the sake of privacy and to create a distance between the 'iconic' (Emme, 1989) figures in the final story and the 'indexical' (Emme, 1989) realities of the posed photographs, there was also rich collective discussion about issues of colour and composition as they effected each child's sense of their finished story.

Tableau

Based on Goffman's (1959) notion of dramaturgy in relation to everyday human nonverbal interactions, it seemed natural to use some form of performative art in acting out the scenes that were included in the visual story told by the children. Thus in addition to using still photography, we also used elements of performative research in developing the fotonovelas. Acting scenes to be photographed as tableaux was one such element. In the study, children used their bodies—through hand gesture, facial expression, body posture, and children's body positioning relative to others (Wilson, 2003), to show emotion and action, which Bruner (1986) identifies as two landscapes of story. Through the use of performative gestures, which build on the natural gestures used in communication (Wilson, 2003), as well as through culturally established gestures, the children showed a range of emotions related to situations involving peers. From the point of view of the goal we had for the children to become thoughtful photographers, the performing part of developing the fotonovelas was intended to help the children select *telling moments*, incidents or encounters in their experiences that would later become central images in the development of the visual narrative.

Thought/speech bubbles

The development of the cartoon format of the common fotonovelas involved the use of superimposed structure of speech and thought bubbles added to the sequenced images representing a particular situation. Unlike Wall and Higgins (2006) who used McMahon and O'Neill's (1992) earlier idea of bubble dialogue to look at internal and external factors of the learning context, we asked the children to use speech and thought bubbles according to the conventions of a cartoon format. Speech bubbles were to be used for a conversation among the characters, and the thought bubbles were to represent their internal thoughts.

Thought/speech bubbles were used in three different ways in the study. First, all children who were working on a particular fotonovela (their number varied and was dependent on the individual children's interests in the theme explored in each of the fotonovelas) worked collaboratively to arrive, through negotiations, at a decision about the text of the bubbles that expressed the shared meaning of the situation. Second, the children had a chance to have their own version of the story told through the fotonovela by choosing which bubble to use (i.e. speech or thought) for which character, and writing their own text in the bubbles. Third, pages of printed blank speech and thought bubbles were given along with the fotonovela to a new group of children who did not participate in the development of the fotonovela, and who were asked to write text in them according to their understanding of the visual narrative.

Dissemination: Sharing the Fotonovelas

The dissemination of the results of the students' visual research into their nonverbal communication experiences also served as an essential component of the

study. Final versions of the different fotonovelas were shared with groups of children not involved in the original study. First, each fotonovela was presented to the “authors” classmates and included both the title and the text as originally written by them. The research objective was to observe how the children, who have not participated in the process of the development of the visual narrative, would respond to its content.

The second time each fotonovela was shared with a different group of students who were not authors’ classmates. This time, the black and white copies of the fotonovela that were given individually to each child in the class had no title or speech/thought balloons. Instead, the title of the fotonovela was left blank and separate pages of blank speech/thought balloons were provided to the children to cut out and place as they see fit. The research objective was to find out how the children, who have not participated in the development of the fotonovela, would interpret the scenario based solely on their reading of the body language of the participants of the story.

While the first sharing of the visual narrative gave us a general sense of the “readability” of the narrative by the children, the second sharing experience gave us a detailed understanding of the meanings assigned to each frame by the individual children. The analysis of these meanings provided some insights into the different ways in which children understood and interpreted the non-verbal behaviors of the characters in the story.

RESULTS

An initial goal for this research was to develop specific examples of nonverbal communication and miscommunication among immigrant children in Canadian schools. Although the research provided many examples of these communication events, some of which were documented photographically, the goal of a kind of typological inventory will only be achievable through image-based work involving the fotonovela over an extended period of research. However, the study’s results went beyond this initial goal. They allowed us to expand the notions of reading, writing, and literacy (we are still served, but also limited by the linguistic analogies implicit in these terms) to include expression through visual conventions and technologies, to broaden our understanding of the knowledge and meaning available to us through research (Ihde, 1998). Different aspects of the results of this complex study have been published. The publications are attached to this report.

The main contributions of the study are in the following areas:

Children as self-researchers:

The value of the fotonovela as a research approach is in the role it can play in giving children the tools to become self-researchers. In addition to being active participants in deciding *what* the fotonovela should be about and *how* to tell the story of a newcomer to the school, the children participated in the *sharing and dissemination* of their study findings with their classmates. The initial ‘digital documentary’ stage allows children casually to gather photo-representations of the minutiae of their daily experience. These images can be explored and integrated into classroom experiences such that the children’s sensitivity to their visual details becomes an important foundation for further work. The tableaux and digital manipulations involved in formatting images into the storyboard of a fotonovela encouraged reflection and also allowed children to see their images

transformed. Although still retaining the compelling, indexical-photographic quality of being from a time and place, these images also served as symbolic characters such as *the new kid* in the story presented in ***Getting into Basketball*** fotonovela, for example. This capacity of the fotonovela form used in this way to invoke identifications in an individual ranging from the personal (“That’s me!”) to the socially symbolic (“That’s the new kid!”) has more than 150 years of critical consideration behind it ranging from semiotic theory (Peirce, 1955) through feminist film theory (Mulvey, 1988) and critical theory (Benjamin, 1981). This theoretical grounding of photography and other lens media, combined with its application in human-subject research in the past 50 years (Prosser, 1998), offer a good explanation for our experience of the fotonovela form as a useful approach to illuminating the subtleties of immigrant children’s experiences of nonverbal peer communication.

In the development of the ***Lunchtime*** fotonovela, for example, children created their own spaces for questioning school rules and resistance. The results from this part of the study demonstrated both children’s understanding and resistance of school rules about lunchtime. The combination of visual and textual forms of representation of these rules produced through the fotonovela provided a space for the immigrant children to convey multiple layers of understanding and interpretation. As well, the processes of documentation, interpretation, tableau, graphic design, and negotiated dialogue opened possibilities for multiple forms of depicting their active resistance. This included the use of the physical school during lunchtime, the school’s enforcement of time, school norms of correctness about eating, and rules about eating junk food. Thus the fotonovela format itself allowed the embodied nature of school rules to be explored and represented along with the sometimes hidden contradictions between the “docile body” and the “true” intentions of the person who is embodying it. The study results suggested that the process of developing the fotonovela was a form of active exploration or researching of school rules that allowed the children both to question and to assert their own position in relation to the school lunchtime routine and the choice of food. Thus in the process, the children became aware of the “twin processes of discipline and liberation which shape their everyday time at school” (Cunningham-Burley, 2001, p. 221). The fotonovela as a research tool also allowed both the research team and the children to explore the complex ways immigrant children make sense of these twin processes as they relate to the mealtime routine. On the one hand, many of the children had to learn a new way of being as the timetables, defined use of space, and norms of eating both in its content (e.g., what is eaten) and its form (e.g., acceptable/proper ways to eat) were imposed on them. On the other hand, through this process immigrant children were forced to become self-reflective as they compared what was familiar (i.e., home food, customs, and practices related to eating) with what was unfamiliar (i.e., school routines, rule and regulations, and new types of food) and made choices that allowed them to shape their multiple identities. These contradictory tendencies were intertwined and embodied in one aspect of the everyday lives of immigrant children in school.

**** Note: For more details please refer to the following publications:**

Kirova, A., Emme, M. (under review). Methodological and Ethical Issues in Conducting Research with Children: Lessons Learned from Studies with Immigrant Children. *Diaspora, Indigenous and Minority Education: An International Journal*.

Emme, M., Kirova, A., Kamau, O., Kosanovich, S. (in press). Ensemble Research: A Means for Immigrant Children to Explore Peer Relationships through Fotonovela, *Alberta Journal of Research in Education*.

Kirova, A., Mohamed, F., & Emme, M. (in press). Learning the Ropes, Resisting the Rules: Immigrant Children's Representation of the Lunchtime Routine Through Fotonovela, *Journal of the Canadian Association For Curriculum Studies*.

Fotonovela as a collage methodology:

The research methodology developed as a result of the study, like improvisational performance and recess play, opens up the possibility for a complex convergence of the skills, interests, cultures, and insights brought by each participant. In this case a shared openness in terms of method and an interest in representing the complexities of school life for immigrant children brought students and researchers together to build research stories that crossed the domains of language and image that have been traditionally seen as pertaining to two different methodological traditions: phenomenology and visual arts-based methodology.

The relationship between word and image is complex. "Starting with its first words, [Aristotle's] *Metaphysics* associates sight with knowledge", writes Jacques Derrida (1983) explaining how sight is given preference over the other senses and "provides us with more to know than any other; indeed it unveils countless differences" (*Diacritics*, p. 4). In calling up the possibility of "countless differences", Derrida gestures toward the impossibility of representing, through signifying systems, all the eye sees/knows. He is not alone in choosing a multi-layered ambiguity over a preference for a reductive linguistic model of understanding visual imagery. Jacques Lacan argues that the prediscursive "jouissance" still permeates the the visuality of the letter (Zizek, p. 38). Thinkers such as Stuart Hall, Norman Bryson, Roland Barthes, Victor Burgin, Susan Sontag, Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, Dick Hebdige and Michel Foucault are all to some extent concerned with how and to what degree images are understood as a 'language'. Foucault (1983) for instance, sees this tension between word or text and image as one of "the oldest oppositions of our alphabetic civilization, to show and to name, to shape and to say, to reproduce and to articulate, to imitate and to signify, to look and to read" (p. 21). He describes how the thing and the words cancel each other out in this *rendering* of a moment of misrecognition where one cannot complain that "the text is ruled by the image (painting where a book is represented) or the image is ruled by the text (books with drawings completing the message)": here one cannot say, "subordination is required" (Foucault, p. 32). He admits, however, that this hierarchy where either the figure submits to discourse or discourse to the figure is not a stable relationship. As W.T.J. Mitchell (1994) notes, "we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is...and what is to be done about them" (*Picture theory*, p. 13). While Debray emphasizes the visible is not readable: "an image is finally and forever enigmatic, no 'moral of the story' possible" (1995, p. 60). The essential ambiguity held suspended in the abyss between what one can "show and name, shape and say" becomes a space of possibility, a playground where "countless differences can be unveiled" and new ways of comprehension may be created.

Van Manen (1994) too acknowledges the limitations of the spoken language in phenomenological descriptions, and states that beyond the verbal language, there is the unspeakable which he calls “epistemological silence” (p.113). The fact that the non-linguistic way of knowing cannot be captured or expressed in words has been recognized both within and outside of the phenomenological tradition. Dewey (1991), for example, too asserts that language includes much more than oral and written speech, but he goes on to specify that by this he means paintings and visual pictures and illustrations: ‘...anything consciously employed as a sign is, logically, language” (p. 170). Similarly, Nordstrom (1991) argues that pictures can be regarded as a sort of language that can be interpreted. In our attempt to understand the role of images in phenomenological research, we went beyond this understanding of images as “language.” We argued that images allow for a different way of “seeing”.

In human subjects research the notion of triangulation, of observing and recording from multiple perspectives, is offered as an antidote to researcher biases (Stake, 2005). Having served as the metaphor for human perception (Crary, 1993) and the model for the limitations of both the Enlightenment and Modernism (Stafford, 1996), images, and particularly technical images, are now understood as a mobile, complicating response to the limitations to the reductive effects of linear thinking. Whether introduced as visual phenomenology in the sciences (Ihde,1998); a reconceptualization of Critical Theory from the perspective of geography and spaciality (Soja, 1989); or the radicalization of educational research based on the complexity of the photograph (Lather, 1994)(Pink, 2001) the camera plays a part in introducing multiple perspectives to research. The fotonovela is an important form for exploring and communicating experience. By combining words with obviously manipulated photographs in a fotonovela, three literacies (the first millennial, premodern magic of the hand-made object; the second millennial modern magic of the word/text; and the third millennial, postmodern magic of the technical image) function at once. Each form of expression adds to and critiques the other. The elements and structures of the photographic narrative format of the fotonovela, including color, perspective, framing, and composition can communicate meanings interdependent with and independent from the words. As a form of cultural collaboration between the researcher and the participants, telling researched stories using the fotonovela form does not merely translate verbal into visual representations but constructs a hybrid photo-image-text as a type of new knowledge that changes the way of seeing and has the potential to change the author’s and the reader’s self-understanding.

**** Note: For more detailed information please see the following publications:**

Emme, M., & Kirova, A. (2005). Fotonovela, *Canadian Art Teacher*, 4(1), 24-27.

Emme, M., & Kirova, A. (2005). Photoshop Semiotics: Research in the Age of Digital Manipulation. *Visual Arts Research*, 31(1), pp.145-153.

Kirova, A. & Emme, M. (in press). Using Photography as a Means of Phenomenological Seeing: “Doing Phenomenology” With Immigrant Children. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology Special edition: Methods in Phenomenology*.

Emme, M., Kirova, A., & Cambre, C. (under review). Fotonovela and Collaborative Storytelling: Researching the Spaces between Image, Text, and Body. *Exposure*.

Fotonovela and Understanding the Non-verbal Behaviors:

Analysis of the fotonovelas clearly demonstrates that schools are spaces full of “performers” who form, negotiate, and practice inclusive or exclusive interactions. Understanding the nature and meaning of these interactions depends on one’s familiarity with the larger cultural context in which they occur and on one’s earlier experiences. In the case of immigrant children, earlier experiences of interacting with school peers may not be helpful, as now they must interact with peers from a different cultural background from their own. The results of the analysis of *Getting into Basketball* fotonovela, for example suggests that the understanding of the intentions and meaning of school peer interactions is not uniformed, and it can be a challenge not only for the immigrant children, but for all children in multicultural contexts. The fotonovelas show that ways of expressing and understanding meanings, feelings, and emotions through body language appear to be quite different not only from culture to culture, but also from one individual to another. However, we concur in Feldman et al.’s (1991) conclusion that nonverbal behavioural skills are primary aspects of social competence as they affect and control to a large extent exchanges in social interactions.

Our finding suggest that children regardless of their cultural backgrounds have varying interpretations of the nature and meaning of interactions among peers, especially if they rely solely on observations rather language. Thus social learning through observations (Bandura, 1977) may not be sufficient to allow newcomers to navigate their school social environment. Learning to understand the observed behaviours presents a distinct set of challenges for newcomers who wish to engage in and maintain peer relationships in multicultural and multilingual school contexts. Other studies (Hanna, 1984) have suggested that nonverbal translation is a recognized remedy for potential intercultural misunderstanding. However, teaching children nonverbal communication has been largely neglected because of “the pre-eminent status of the word in technologically advanced societies” (p. 400). The method developed and used in this study provides an avenue for children to explore their own and their peers’ understandings of the various ways that intentions, desires, feelings, and emotions can be expressed and interpreted. Unlike Feldman et al. (1991), who suggested formal training for improving the accuracy of decoding for students in grades 5 and 6, we suggest that developing and sharing visual narratives in the form of fotonovelas that depict life in school can promote understanding of peer interaction between children from varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

***** Note: For more detailed information please see the following publications:***

Kirova, A., & Emme, M. (2006). Sharing Immigrant Children’s Experiences of Schooling through the Development of Visual Narratives. In L. Adams & A. Kirova (Eds.) *Global Migration and Education: Schools, Children and Families*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate, Inc., Publishers. (pp. 151-169)

Kirova, A., Mohamed, F., & Emme, M. (in press). Learning the Ropes, Resisting the Rules: Immigrant Children’s Representation of the Lunchtime Routine Through

IMPLICATIONS

Based on the fotonovela text produced by the children in this study and those produced by the readers of the fotonovela, we suggest that the visual and the linguistic not only complement each other in capturing immigrant children's experiences at school, but allow the reader to engage with the text in multiple ways. Thus although as researchers we had access to the "polyphonic expression" of multiple voices, "allowing for consensual, dissenting and conflicting perspectives to emerge and exist" (Veale, 2005, p. 269), the children had an opportunity to embody and narrate their stories. As a "teaching tool", fotonovela can be used in a variety of ways. Following are some possibilities that have been explored in the study.

The Value of Fotonovela in Working with Newly Immigrated Children

The value of this type of fotonovela is for both the new student and the veteran. It can be a means of expression for the immigrant child with its use of image and limited dialogue. The sharing of fotonovelas promotes understanding between children coming from different experiences. It can also be a means through which children can develop empathy for others and recognize how difficult the first experiences of newly immigrated children can be.

There are advantages in having the students both create fotonovelas and read those created by others. Fotonovelas created by children *for* immigrant children can be used as a tool to assist them in the decoding of language and meaning. The reader benefits from the use of photography and words presented in sequence. This format can offer cues into the cultural workings of the world in which they have entered. The nuances of language and social structure can be seen through the photography accompanying written language. Likewise, a fotonovela format can provide cultural cues to help in understanding unspoken conventions of language, informal communication, social roles, dress and mannerisms.

The *creating* of fotonovelas by second language students offers them an opportunity for expression otherwise inhibited by traditional methods. The product is quickly produced and there is a lack of complicated dialogue. The visual literacy of photography can span cultural barriers and help the child in being understood and therefore less isolated. The visual format of the fotonovela is appealing to children for whom comics are a part of their personal culture and reading community. When the reading and writing is personal for any child it is more meaningful. The experience of creating and reading fotonovelas could also be valuable in creating tolerance, empathy and understanding between students of diverse backgrounds.

ESL teachers too could use the fotonovela to teach writing and speaking skills to new students. Each photograph could be accompanied by blank thought balloons, the students could be asked to fill in what they think would be relevant. Language-arts teachers could use the fotonovela to teach the value of empathy and acceptance amongst culturally diverse students. Drama teachers also can use the fotonovela to introduce plays that deal with themes related to exclusion, rejection, or selfishness.

In addition, fotonovelas that show school routines such as the *Lunchtime*, can be sent home on the first day at school or an information package prior to the child's

enrollment in the school. In our study, *Lunchtime* fotonovela was translated in Cambodian, Chinese and Urdu and sent home with newly immigrated families who had children in the school.

Fotonovelas as a classroom tool, a research tool for the children and the school personnel, a community-building tool and a home-school connection medium, which have been developed and utilized in this study, are only a few examples of the possibilities open to educational practitioners, researchers, and participants in creating more understanding and harmonious school communities.

As anticipated, policy-relevant outcomes of the research are as follows:

- A mutual appreciation of the different ways people from different cultures interact without words was emphasised.
- Students' examination of their understanding of how they use non-verbal strategies in interacting with their peers as well as to explore the different ways in which people from different cultures interact without words was encouraged.
- The awareness and sensitivity of both new-immigrant and majority culture students towards these differences which in turn is expected to lead to fewer instances of cross-cultural misunderstandings in peer interactions and thus a better integration of immigrant students was increased.
- The understanding among school personnel's and school board staff members' about the possible causes of peer conflicts and provide strategies to promote peer interactions among students from diverse cultural backgrounds was increased.