

PLEASE NOTE:

The next meeting has been set for 7:30 p.m. THURSDAY, JANUARY 14,
1971, in the Sikh Temple, Ross and S.E. Marine, Vancouver

Notes on Meeting re Education of East Indian Children

Held Tuesday, November 17, 1970, in the Sikh Temple

7:30 - 9:45 p.m.

Present were:

Dr. G.S. Gill	G. Nath	Norman Ellis
Mohinder Gill	G.S. Neel	Bill Damen
Mrs. P. Siripawa	Mrs. Nath	Mrs. V. Smith
Kehar Sekhon	G.S. Sangra	Art Messinger
D. Sihota	Dr. A.S. Phull	Mrs. Marjorie Haluschak
S.S. Sandhu	Joslin Bohanec	Janet Moody
Miss Raminder Sandhu	Mr. Clair Wark	Marjorie V. Smith

Dr. Gill opened the meeting, welcoming people and explaining that the purpose of the gathering was to consider why some Indian children seem to be having difficulties in the school situation.

Following introductions, Mr. Art Messinger gave a brief report on a survey he had just made of teachers' opinions in the Moberley school area. In brief, this showed that there is no problem re behaviour or attitudes, but teachers are concerned about academic achievement. About one-third of the East Indian children do quite poorly. This is apparently based on difficulties with the English language and on cultural factors.

Mr. Messinger suggested we need:

1. More research.
2. A head-start type of program for 4 year olds developing along with it more awareness on the part of parents.
3. A knowledge of resources among the East Indian people themselves and some way of involving them.

He also suggested the following questions:

1. Re the primary area:
Should we have an East Indian person on staff who would perhaps be able to help the children more, communicate with parents, and help other teachers understand East Indian culture?
2. At the intermediate level -- in the New Canadian classes. He wondered if they should have an East Indian teacher too.
3. At the high school level -- he wondered if the Temple could offer a self-help program for high school students in which they would be assisted by other East Indian students who were doing well?

In the discussion that followed there were many suggestions about the causes of the problem and what might be done about it. To save space, a selection has been made of these points under the headings below; apologies for those omitted.

I Causes of the Problem

1. Probably there has always been some problem as children arrived from India with inadequate knowledge of English and had to fit into the school system, but this is more evident with increased immigration in the last few years.
2. Many of the recent immigrants are families coming from the poorer villages where parents are illiterate and have little understanding of education. The English they learned is taught by poorly qualified teachers.
3. Many Indian youngsters are shy and have a different attitude to authority which makes them reluctant to speak up like Canadian children.
4. The system of education in the villages tends to be learning by rote in contrast to methods in the good public schools in the cities. Also, the children have to get used to a different atmosphere, both in the schools and between the village life and urban life here.
5. Parents may naturally wish to have children speak their own language in the home because of their desire to maintain their culture and language.
6. There are enough children of East Indian background in Moberley school, for example, so that they can stay with their own group and consequently don't practise English with the other children.
7. In kindergartens and other grades there are approximately 28 children to one teacher. Consequently, there is little time for help to individuals or small groups.
8. Many of the parents are from Fiji and frequently both parents work when they arrive here. It's possible children have emotional problems because of lack of sufficient contact with their parents. A question was also raised about nutritional standards.
9. At the adolescent stage, parents are often concerned about their youngsters acquiring habits of Canadian adolescents (e.g. smoking). There is also conflict at times between teenagers and their parents about expectations regarding marriage arrangements.

II What is Presently Being Done

1. Generally, if children are of kindergarten age or in grades 1, 2 or 3, they go right into the corresponding class. In Strathcona, however, children coming in up to 8 year olds go into grade 1 and then are moved along into higher grades as quickly as possible. Moberley now has two teachers with classes of children who have difficulty with English at the primary level. Many of these are East Indian children. Those 9 years old or older go into New Canadian classes to learn English for one year and then into regular classes. Mr. Damen commented that he finds that East Indian youngsters have difficulty in the New Canadian classes too.

Some schools have extra teachers who take youngsters out of their regular classes and work with them in small groups on English.

2. There is no special counselling program for non-English speaking students; the regular services are used.
3. Miss Moody said there was difficulty in testing East Indian youngsters since they lack the experience with the content of the tests. Mr. Nath described a grade 10 student, a recent immigrant from India, who has been allowed to enroll in selected courses and to pick up English as he goes along. He seems to be catching on quickly and will soon be able to move into a regular grade level. Mr. Nath feels that it is not useful to give students intelligence tests since it labels the student because he cannot respond well and this makes him feel inadequate.
4. Re involving parents, Mrs. Nath said that Oakridge School for the Retarded has coffee klatches for the mothers, with one or two who can speak English interpreting for the others in a very informal way, and it is working well. Mr. Sihota said he visits parents and children and talks with them about their problems in their own language. He feels this increases their understanding and involvement in their children's education.

III What Can Be Done

1. There was considerable discussion about the advisability of segregating East Indian youngsters with an East Indian teacher. Some supported this in that the teacher could help the youngsters to learn faster, from specially planned experiences about Canadian life and thus provide a bridge for their transition into regular classes.
Others, however, were against segregating children with a teacher speaking their own language.
We seemed to agree on a compromise that youngsters should not be segregated, but that a small group could go out from the regular class for a period each day with an East Indian person to work with them. This same person could also work with parents and help other teachers understand East Indian culture where this was relevant.
It was suggested that the School Administration might be willing to meet with community representatives about ways of working out solutions to the problems.
2. Volunteers might be of assistance, since there is already a good volunteer program operating in the school system. For example, there might be parents in the East Indian community who would be willing to help.
3. It might be possible that a special class could be organized with a qualified teacher in the Temple on either a voluntary or paid basis. In this connection, Mrs. Bohanec mentioned that it might be possible to have the School Canadiana help with a class in the Temple.
4. It was suggested that perhaps teachers of New Canadian classes could have an orientation program re East Indian culture, using some of the members present as a resource.

5. Mr. Wark said that he felt involving the parents is a long-term project, and cautioned against making them too concerned in case they pushed the children too hard.
However, several other participants felt there was not too much danger of this, and that the natural ambition of parents for their children's education should be encouraged.
6. It was mentioned that considerable numbers of East Indian men are taking New Canadian classes at John Oliver High School, an encouraging indication of their interest.

Mr. Nath said he would be interested in some systematized plan to get a broader picture of all immigrants, not just East Indian children.

IV Next Steps

It was agreed that notes on the meeting would be sent to participants and that everyone would discuss the matter further, both in the East Indian community and in the school system, and that we would then come back together to a meeting in January to work out an integrated approach from various angles, e.g. help to the children, contacts with parents, help to teachers, etc.

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