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**The Education of Portuguese Children in Britain:  
Insights from Research and Practice in England  
and Overseas**

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## Chapter 7

### **Marginalisation, social reproduction and academic underachievement: the case of the Portuguese community in Canada**

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#### **Summary**

Wide-spread immigration of the Portuguese to Canada began in the mid-1950's and lasted principally to the early 1990's. Today, there is a community of approximately 358,000 Luso-Canadians (roughly 1.2% of the Canadian population). In this chapter, Fernando Nunes considers why this minority group, despite its significant numbers, has had relatively little impact on the economic, political and cultural heritage of their new land. In particular, a problem that has most impeded the capacity of Luso-Canadians to integrate into the mainstream of Canadian society, has been the disproportionate academic underachievement of Portuguese-Canadian youth.

The chapter begins with a short profile of the Portuguese community in Canada and an introduction to the historical situation of Portuguese-Canadian children in the Toronto Public school system. It then illustrates how these ongoing educational issues (including, but not limited to, the underachievement problem) were seen by Luso-Canadians, who participated in a recent national study, as underlying most of the major problems which the community is currently facing. It finishes by arguing that the academic underachievement problem cannot simply be attributed to the lack of Luso-Canadian parental support for education, but rather is the result of the ongoing economic, political and cultural marginalization of this community. This marginalization is what both perpetuates, and is itself perpetuated by, traditional patterns of roles, identities and economic choices.

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The Portuguese have been fishing the cold, clear waters of Canada and exploring its verdant shores, since the mid fifteenth-century (Anderson & Higgs, 1976). Evidence of these early contacts can be found in the vast numbers of Portuguese-derived place-names, which dot Canada's Atlantic Coast (e.g. *Bay of Fundy* from *Baía Funda* or, "deep bay"; *Labrador* from *Terra do Lavrador* or, "the land of the tiller of the

*fields,*” named for an early Portuguese nobleman called João Fernandes, whose nickname was *o Lavrador* (Alpalhão & Da Rosa, 1980; Anderson & Higgs, 1976). This early contact is further exemplified by such notable events as the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century explorations of Canada’s Atlantic Coast, on the part of the Corte-Real brothers, the influence of the Portuguese fishing fleet (the *White Fleet*) in the history and culture of Newfoundland and the close association between the Portuguese and Danish explorers, who visited Greenland and Labrador prior to Christopher Columbus’ first contact with the New World (Anderson & Higgs, 1976). Indeed, some historians have even made the claim that it was Columbus’ ties to the Portuguese – acquired through his marriage into a noble Portuguese family and his years of living amongst Portuguese seafarers - which provided this explorer with a prior knowledge of a large landmass to the west of Europe (Anderson & Higgs, 1976).

Yet, despite this historic legacy, wide-scale immigration of the Portuguese to Canada began only in the mid 1950’s, and lasted principally to the early 1990’s. During this period, approximately, 161,000 Portuguese immigrants came to these shores, a migratory wave which was characterized by the presence of disproportionate numbers of people with low education levels and few job skills. These migrants have given rise to a present-day community of approximately 358,000 Luso-Canadians; or roughly 1.2% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census).

Most Portuguese-Canadians achieved a comfortable level of security, in their new land. This was acquired mainly through their hard work in low-paying and sometimes dangerous blue-collar employment, as well as through a disciplined self-sacrifice, which was honed early in their lives by the need to survive amidst conditions of acute rural poverty. Yet, going into the new millennium, the bulk of this community continues to remain largely marginalized from the affairs of mainstream Canadian society and isolated from the forces which are shaping their new nation’s future. The combination of widespread low education levels, persistent second-language difficulties amongst the older immigrant generation, and the latter’s experience of having lived for decades under a dictatorship have all served to promote a tendency amongst many Luso-Canadians to withdraw into the family unit and to minimize their participation in the political, cultural and social life of this nation. The result is a

minority group, which, despite its significant numbers, has had relatively little impact on the economic, political and cultural heritage of their new land.

Within this profile, one of the problems which has most impeded the capacity of Luso-Canadians to integrate into the mainstream of Canadian society has been the disproportionate academic underachievement of Portuguese-Canadian youth. Over the past 35 years, successive generations of Portuguese-Canadian children in the City of Toronto (home to the largest concentration of Luso-Canadians) have been found to be studying and performing at significantly lower academic levels, to be disproportionately represented in Special Education and Remedial Reading programmes, to be leaving school earlier, and to be dropping out in greater numbers than most other students in this city. In fact, in a 1982 survey, Portuguese-Canadian secondary school students in Toronto's Public Board were found to be the least likely to feel that they had the ability to succeed in university (Larter, Cheng, Capps & Lee, 1982).

In fact, the academic underachievement issue is only one of a series of educational barriers, comprising an overall *educational deficit*, which has continued to assail the Portuguese-Canadian community and which does not appear to have been reversed, amongst the newer generations of Portuguese-Canadians. This state of affairs has resulted in the Portuguese being described in a recent report on ethnoracial inequality in Toronto as one of the groups "of most concern" (p. 51) and as suffering "extreme disadvantage," in the sphere of education (pp. 124-125) (Ornstein, 2000).

This chapter will discuss this educational deficit, as well as the role which is played within it by the problem of academic underachievement. It will begin with a short profile of the Portuguese community in Canada and an introduction to the historical situation of Portuguese-Canadian children in the Toronto Public school system. It will then illustrate how these ongoing educational issues (including, but not limited to, the underachievement problem) were seen by Luso-Canadians, who participated in a recent national study, as underlying most of the major problems which the community is currently facing (Nunes, 1998). It will end by arguing that underachievement is mainly the result of an ongoing, mutually self-sustaining relationship between the community's marginalized status within Canadian society and the education problem.

## **7.2 Profile of the Portuguese community in Canada**

### ***Portuguese immigration to Canada***

Wide-scale migration of Portuguese settlers to Canada began with the disembarking of the first boatload of Portuguese immigrant men, who arrived in Halifax Harbour in 1953, in a ship called the “Saturnia” (Marques & Medeiros, 1980). These early pioneers were soon followed by other waves of men, mainly comprised of Azoreans from rural origins, many of whom were recruited by Canadian immigration officials to work on Canadian farms and in the railroads. Virtually all of these early immigrants came to Canada without their wives and children, and endured separations of between two to five years (and in, some cases, 10) (Higgs, 1982). Most of these men soon left their rural jobs and migrated to the cities to work in construction, cleaning and manufacturing, where they set up the core of the first major urban communities.

The peak of Portuguese-Canadian immigration occurred in the mid 1970’s, but slowed to a few thousands in the late 1980’s, and early 1990’s, after the Canadian immigration laws that were introduced in the early 1970’s, were progressively tightened. Thus, the Portuguese-Canadian community is roughly 50 years old, which makes it, one of the most recent of the large European communities in Canada.

### ***The Luso-Canadian Community***

Today, there are approximately 358,000 Portuguese-Canadians and Luso-Descendants, totalling approximately 1.2% of the total Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census).<sup>i</sup> Of these, almost 50% (158,815) were born in Portugal (Statistics Canada, 1996 Census reprinted in Pendakur & Hennebry, 1998). The Portuguese are present in every province in Canada. However, they are concentrated mainly in Ontario and Quebec; more specifically, in the Toronto and Montreal Metropolitan areas, which contain approximately 60% of all Luso-Canadians, (171,545 in Toronto and 41,055 in Montreal) (Statistics Canada, 2001). There are also proportionately significant Luso-Canadian populations in a number of other cities and regions across Canada, ranging from the Atlantic Maritime provinces to the Pacific

coast, in such locations as: Halifax, (Nova Scotia); Sudbury and Kingston (Ontario); Osoyoos, (British Columbia); and Quebec City (Quebec).

The Portuguese in Toronto now comprise the 6<sup>th</sup> largest (non-British or Irish) ethnic group in this city, after the Chinese, Italians, East Indians, French and Germans, (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census). In fact, before a late 1990's amalgamation of the former City of Toronto with its neighbouring municipalities, the Portuguese made up the largest non-English-speaking group in the former city (which now occupies an area that is today seen as the "wider" city centre).

Approximately, 60% to 80% of the Portuguese in Canada come from Azorean origins, while 20% to 40% are from Continental Portuguese roots (Anderson & Higgs, 1976). There are also proportionately more young people in the Luso-Canadian community than in the overall Canadian population (Nunes, 1998). In fact, the Portuguese have the fourth fastest rate of growth amongst children under the age of 15, of any Canadian minority (47% projected growth, from 1991 to 2006) after the Chinese – 98%, South Asian - 73% and Blacks – 51% (Tepper, 2002).

### ***Important community characteristics***

The Luso-Canadian community also displays a number of important characteristics:

#### **• Low education levels**

Firstly, this is a community with exceedingly low education levels. Since the early 1800's, migrants from Portugal have originated overwhelmingly from the poorest and least educated segments of Portuguese society, mostly from the ranks of agricultural and unskilled workers (Arroteia, 1983; Rocha-Trindade, 1973; Serrão 1972). In addition, in the 1940's, 50's and 60's, Portugal had significantly lower mandatory education levels than other European nations (UNESCO, 1973, cited in Anderson & Higgs, 1976). As a consequence, the average education levels of first generation Portuguese immigrants who entered Canada between 1953 and 1973 was only 4 years of primary schooling, a figure which was lower than the norm for other immigrants to Canada (Anderson & Higgs, 1976).

The result of these tendencies is that the Portuguese-Canadian community, today, has the lowest education levels of any immigrant minority in Canada, and the fourth-lowest of any ethnoracial minority, behind only those of the Aboriginals, Inuit and Métis (the descendants of early French settlers and natives) (Census 1996 data cited in Matas & Valentine, 2000; Nunes, 1998). Luso-Canadians display the highest proportions of any minority (including Aboriginals and Inuit) of individuals, 15 years of age and over, with only a primary school education and one of the lowest proportions of individuals with any type of schooling above the level of secondary trade certificate, including university and non-university educational programmes. In fact, only approximately 6% of all Luso-Canadians have achieved a university degree of any kind; a proportion that is comparable only to the university attendance of the Aboriginal groups. This trend is also illustrated in the education levels of Luso-Canadians, over the age of 15, living in the Provinces of Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia (where 92% of all Luso-Canadians reside). The Portuguese within these provinces, display proportions of individuals with a grade 8 education or less, which are significantly higher than a number of comparison minority communities, and approximately twice as high as the general population. Meanwhile, the percentages of Portuguese with post-secondary schooling in these provinces are, once again, comparable to, or lower than, those reported in the Aboriginal communities.

These trends are mirrored in a recent study on ethnoracial inequality in the city of Toronto, which illustrated that Portuguese-Canadians between the ages of 20 to 64 are the group with the lowest proportions of university educated individuals and the highest proportions of those with only primary schooling (including Aboriginals and Black Caribbean populations) (Ornstein, 2000).

It should be noted that these national and provincial figures, which list the education levels of all Portuguese over the age of 15, are not necessarily a reflection of the academic underachievement problem. As stated earlier, what is illustrated by these figures is mainly the disproportionate numbers of first-generation Portuguese-Canadians who came to this country from amongst the rural, poorly-educated and working class Portuguese populations. Yet, these numbers provide one indication of the relatively disadvantaged location of this community, in relation to other large ethnocultural groups. They are also a graphic illustration of the severe educational

disadvantage, which is being borne by Canadian-born Luso-descendants. As we shall see in upcoming sections, there is evidence to show that this disadvantage is being reproduced in the second and third generations.

• **Working-class profile**

Another characteristic of this community is its overwhelmingly working-class occupational profile (Nunes, 1998). For example, Portuguese-Canadians in Toronto are disproportionately concentrated in unskilled and manufacturing jobs, and underrepresented in skilled, professional and management positions (even when compared to other immigrants). In fact, in a study on ethnoracial inequality in Toronto, Portuguese-Canadian men and women were the only group of European origin, to be found working disproportionately in unskilled, or poorly-skilled occupations, amongst approximately 20 visible-minority recent immigrant minorities (Ornstein, 2000).

The Portuguese have also traditionally earned less than other Canadians, or immigrants. For example, in 1990, the average income for Portuguese immigrants in Canada was Cdn\$22,000, while the incomes for the Canadian-born and all immigrants were Cdn\$23,749 and Cdn\$25,3000 respectively, (Statistics Canada 1991 figures, cited in Nunes, 1998). This income difference was most acute in the case of Luso-Canadian women, youth and particularly seniors, who tended to have significantly lower incomes than either the Canadian-born or immigrant elderly (almost Cdn\$7,000 less). More recent data also shows how in 1996, the median income for the Portuguese in Toronto was Cdn\$16,000, compared to Cdn\$22,000, amongst the total population (Statistics Canada, 1996 Census data, cited in Ornstein, 2000).

However, this does not mean that most Portuguese-Canadians earn significantly less than their neighbours. There are many groups, such as the Aboriginals and many of the newer visible minority immigrant groups, which earn a lower average income than the Portuguese (Ornstein, 2000). In fact, the Portuguese in Canada tend ***not*** to be found disproportionately amongst those living in poverty, the lowest income earners, or the unemployed (Nunes, 1998, Ornstein, 2000). What is reflected in these lower average income levels are the limited proportions of Luso-Canadians who are earning above \$60,000 a year (in 1991, approximately 1.3%, second-lowest only behind those

of Aboriginal Canadians 0.7%) (Nunes, 1998, 2000). In other words, there are relatively very few upper-middle or higher income earning Luso-Canadians, in proportion to the population-at-large and to other, similarly sized minority groups.

In summary, the Portuguese community is a largely working-class community, albeit one whose members are not living disproportionately in poverty. Yet, despite this positive finding, there are relatively very few Luso-Canadians who are higher income earners. This lack of a higher-earning sector is a particularly troublesome barrier to the effective integration of the community. The income deficit, along with the high degree of occupational segregation, reflect the community's acute lack of a critical mass of a better-educated, skilled and professional class of Portuguese-Canadians. It is this higher-earning, better-educated sector, which would possess the necessary economic and political clout to lobby governments for the resources to solve community problems and which would normally have the skills to dialogue more effectively with middle-class, mainstream Canadian society (Nunes, 2000).

• **Negligible profile in Canadian society / isolation**

The result of this lack of a better educated, higher-earning sector is the limited projection of Portuguese-Canadians in both the affairs and consciousness of mainstream Canadian society. Despite its size and its 50 year presence in this country, the Portuguese-Canadian community continues to be underrepresented within the political, economic, social and cultural fabric of this country and underserved by its institutions, particularly in comparison with many of the other large immigrant groups. Similarly, the community's language, as well as its cultural and economic activities, are largely ignored by most Canadian business, educational and media establishments. In 1997, Edite Noivo, a Luso-Canadian sociologist stated:

*...after twenty-five or more years in the "land of opportunity" the overall socioeconomic conditions of Portuguese immigrants remain well below the national average. Moreover, this longstanding situation does not appear to be changing, as this group is not represented in Canada's political, cultural, or economic platforms, and shows minimal participation in mainstream society. (Noivo, 1997, p. 33)*

This lack of representation is made more severe by the fact that Portuguese youth are not a designated group within the Federal Government's Employment Equity Act

(1995), which in this country defines the basis for most equality of opportunity programmes in education, culture and employment.

The isolation of the Luso-Canadian community, has also been accompanied by a somewhat negative image of the Portuguese in Canada. The Portuguese are neither physically nor culturally similar enough to those in the traditional Anglo-Canadian mainstream to be considered familiar by this nation's pre-existing power establishment. Yet, they are also not distinct enough to be considered exotic. The result has been that, most Canadian mainstream media and cultural institutions have shown a disparaging disinterest towards the Portuguese. This was illustrated in an article that was written in a Luso-Canadian student magazine, by a young Anglo-Canadian woman:

*I am going to give a description of the Portuguese in the eyes of the typical Canadian: "The Portuguese are dark and short. They speak a strange language that only they understand. They live in a neighbourhood in the City of Toronto - between Dundas and Bloor, Spadina and Dufferin. The Portuguese have a Portuguese market where [only] fish is sold, nothing more. The Portuguese talk a lot and talk loudly, especially on the streetcars where they are very often seen. The Portuguese man is a labourer. He works in construction [...] The Portuguese woman works as a cleaning lady. The Portuguese is not very sophisticated. [He] doesn't like to learn English. [He] doesn't like to live outside the Portuguese neighbourhood in Toronto. [He] doesn't like to adapt to Canadian habits. [He] doesn't like to study. [He] prefers to work and to earn a lot of money." I think that this is an exact description of the Portuguese in the eyes of the typical Canadian. It's sad, but it's true. The Portuguese is an enigma. He lives in a closed world and he is little understood by Canadians. One can say that [his] image is one of the least exotic of all of the immigrant groups that live in Canada. Maybe the image of the Portuguese in public opinion will change in the next generation when they will have time to better establish themselves. I hope so. At least the image which they now have could not be any worse. (Duckworth, 1986) (my translation)*

It must be cautioned that, the author of this piece was probably exaggerating, in order to make her point. By and large, the Portuguese in Canada do not experience conflictual relations with either the mainstream or with other ethnoracial minorities. They are generally regarded as hard-working, peaceful and generally content with their situation in their new land. They also do not normally report being the victims of the same hostility or scorn, that is often described by the members of some visible minority groups. For example, in one study conducted by a Toronto newspaper in the 1980s, the Portuguese were one of the few groups which did not complain about discriminatory treatment (Toronto Star, 1985). However, the description offered by

Duckworth provides some indication of the widespread unfamiliarity, disinterest and lack of respect which characterize the opinions of many people in traditional mainstream Canadian society regarding the Portuguese.

### **7.3 Historical situation of Luso-Canadians in Toronto schools** <sup>ii</sup>

Within the profile already discussed, the issue of greatest concern for the Portuguese-Canadian community is the presence of a serious academic underachievement problem, amongst the second and third generations. For a number of decades, Portuguese-Canadian children and youth have been reported to be functioning below average levels in elementary and secondary schools in Toronto, to be dropping out in disproportionate numbers, and to be severely underrepresented in post-secondary education.

It is important to note that, the problem of academic underachievement is not unique to the Portuguese in Canada. In fact, there is ample information to indicate that, over the years, students from a number of other ethnic and racial minority groups have been consistently having a shorter and less than adequate education in the Ontario Public education system (e.g. Caribbean-born Blacks, Latin Americans, Italians, Aboriginals, etc.) (Brown, Cheng, Yau, & Ziegler, 1992; Cheng & Yau, 1999; Cheng, Yau & Ziegler, 1993; Cheng, Tsuji, Yau, & Ziegler, 1989; Duffy, 1995; Larter & Eason, 1978; Larter, Cheng, Capps & Lee, 1982; Matas, 1984; Royal Commission on Learning, 1994). Nonetheless, for nearly four decades, Portuguese-Canadian students have consistently ranked amongst the groups with the most acute educational problems. Similarly, the reality of early-school-leaving amongst Luso-Canadian youth has, for years, been a familiar phenomenon for many people in the community.

#### **• Elementary School**

Since the 1970's, Portuguese-Canadian youth have comprised one of the largest minorities in the Toronto School System. Yet, a disproportionate percentage of these Luso-Canadian students at the elementary level have historically been reported to be functioning at significantly lower levels than other students, in such areas as reading

and writing (Board of Education, 1962; Coelho, 1973; Nunes & Januario, 1996). For example, in a 1962 Board of Education Report, nearly 50% of the Portuguese immigrant children in the Toronto Public school system were reported to be reading below their grade level; the third-highest proportional group with this problem (Board of Education, 1962). Similarly, in the mid-1990's, the results of standardized testing at Grade 9 showed that schools with high concentrations of Luso-Canadian students achieved marks that fell well below the average for schools with comparable ages and grade levels of students (Nunes & Januario, 1996).

Over the years, a disproportionate number of Portuguese children have also been placed in Special Education (e.g. remedial help for learning disabilities, physical handicaps, emotional or behavioural problems). For example, in a 1986 Toronto Public Board report, focussing on parents of children in Special Education, Portuguese mothers and fathers constituted the second-largest proportion of parents interviewed, (9%), after the sample identified by the authors as "Canadian", (Larter, Draffin, Power, & Cheng, 1986). Portuguese parents had the highest percentages of children in secondary (not Gifted) programs, but the second-lowest percentage of children in elementary Gifted programs. Data from the Metropolitan Toronto Separate School Board also illustrated how, in 1995, 15% of Portuguese-Canadian students in Toronto were in Special Education (mostly in the Remedial and Learning Disabled program), compared to only 9% of the total student population (Nunes & Januario, 1996). More recent data, illustrating similar ESL placement trends is available. However, this information is not here reproduced, due to a request from the Toronto Public School Board to maintain these numbers confidential.

It is clear, therefore, that Portuguese children in Toronto elementary schools - as a group - have been encountering a great deal of academic difficulties, in comparison with other children of their age or grade level.

#### • **Secondary School**

At the Secondary School Level, there are also indications that Portuguese-Canadian students have been disproportionately studying in non-university streams of study. Since the 1970's the Toronto Public School Board has produced a number of Every Secondary Student Surveys (a census conducted every four to six years) which have

gauged the progress of young people in their secondary schools. These reports illustrate that Portuguese students have been disproportionately attending vocational, technical or commercial schools, and studying at the non-university streams of Basic- or General-level courses (Brown, Cheng, Yau & Ziegler, 1992; Cheng, Tsuji, Yau & Ziegler, 1989; Cheng & Yau, 1998, 1999; Cheng, Yau & Ziegler, 1989; Yau, Cheng & Ziegler, 1993). In the early 1980's it was reported that one out of every three high school students in Toronto with Portuguese as their first language was in a vocational program, where most students are at a grade 5 level in reading and mathematical skills, (Matas, 1984). In the 1987 Every Secondary Student Survey, Portuguese students were shown to comprise the second highest proportional representation of any ethnic group in Toronto in Basic-level programs and the highest in the General stream, (Cheng, et al., 1989).

The most recent Every Secondary Student Survey, conducted in 1997 illustrated that students of all backgrounds have experienced a gradual improvement from previous years, in their program levels and graduation rates. However, students of Portuguese-Canadian, Black (foreign-born), Latin American and Aboriginal backgrounds continue to be underrepresented in university-bound Advanced level programs (ranging from 40% to 55%), in comparison to the overall student population (approximately 70%) (Cheng & Yau, 1999).

Historically, Portuguese-Canadian students in Toronto have also been observed to drop out of school earlier, and in greater proportions, than most other pupils (Cheng, et. al., 1989; Cheng, et. al., 1993; Larter, & Eason, 1978; "Royal Commission" 1994 "The Portuguese" 1984). As early as the first half of the 1960's, a report on immigrant adaptation and the social services described how the then recently arrived Portuguese and Italian communities were facing a serious drop-out problem (Ferguson, 1964). Subsequent reports, since the 1970's, have shown how Portuguese students have continued to be substantially over-represented in Early School Leaving Programs, disproportionately found amongst those designated as "at-risk" of dropping-out, and have some of the lowest graduation rates of any of the groups sampled (Brown, 1993; Larter & Eason, 1978; Yau, Cheng, & Ziegler, 1993). In fact, a number of cohort studies, that have been conducted by the Toronto Public Board over the years, have consistently shown how Portuguese-Canadian students have continued to drop out in

disproportionate numbers. As Table 1 illustrates, Portuguese-speaking students had the lowest graduation rate in the 1987 and 1993 cohorts and the highest dropout rates in the 1987, 1991 and 1993 cohorts. The results of another report on ethnoracial inequality showed how the Portuguese in Toronto were one of the two ethnoracial minorities with the fewest high school graduates, amongst youth aged 20-24 (including the Aboriginal and other visible minority groups) (Ornstein, 2000).

**TABLE 1. COHORT DROPOUT AND GRADUATION RATES TORONTO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD<sup>iii</sup>**

Language	DROPOUT (%)			GRADUATION (%)		
	1987 COHORT	1991 COHORT	1993 COHORT	1987 COHORT	1991 COHORT	1993 COHORT
Overall	33	22	21	56	59	53
English Only	37	19	22	53	62	60
Chinese	19	10	9	72	74	74
Spanish	n/a	20	22	n/a	61	58
Vietnamese	22	21	21	64	54	58
<b>Portuguese</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>55</b>
Greek	22	24	22	63	60	64

(Compiled from data in Brown, (1999). A study of the grade 9 cohorts 1993-1998: The last grade 9 cohort of the Toronto Board of Education (Report #229). Academic Accountability, Toronto District School Board.p.4-5)

#### • Post-Secondary Education

As a consequence of these high dropout rates, there are proportionately few Luso-Canadian university graduates amongst the second and third generations. As stated earlier, at a national level, the Portuguese have the lowest proportions of any immigrant group in Canada of individuals, 15 years of age and over, with any post-secondary schooling (Matas & Valentine, 2000; Nunes, 1998).<sup>iv</sup> In fact, only approximately 6% of all Luso-Canadians over the age of 15 have achieved a university degree of any kind; again, a proportion that is comparable only to those of the Aboriginal groups.

The situation of the community in Toronto appears to be slightly better. Approximately 10.2% of this city's Luso-Canadian youth aged 20-24 had graduated from University by 1996 (Statistics Canada 1996 data, cited in Ornstein, 2000). However, this was still short of the 15.1% for all other youth in this age range, and far short of the 16.2% total for Southern European youth. In fact, Portuguese-Canadian young people were amongst the 10 single-origin groups with the fewest graduates from University and had the absolute lowest frequency of all of the Southern European groups (Ornstein 2000). In 1991-92, Portuguese students were also found to be disproportionately less represented than other minorities, on the campus of the University of Toronto, which is situated in the midst of Canada's largest Luso-Canadian community (University of Toronto, 1992).

This underrepresentation of the newer generations in higher education led one researcher to describe the Portuguese as one of the groups "of most concern" (p. 51) and as suffering "extreme disadvantage" (pp. 124-125), due to their "...unique combination of a high proportion of non-high school graduates and very few university graduates"(p. 43), (Ornstein, 2000).

- **Lack of Confidence in Abilities**

The difficulties encountered by Luso-Canadian children and youth have also impacted on their confidence in their ability to enter College and University. In 1982, a Toronto Board of Education report, on the post secondary plans of grade 8 pupils, found that Luso-Canadian youth were one of the two groups that were the least likely to feel that they had the ability to succeed in university and who did not have plans to attend, (Larter, Cheng, Capps & Lee, 1982).<sup>v</sup> Over 20% of the Portuguese students surveyed felt this way. In the most recent Every Secondary Student Survey, in 1997, the Portuguese constituted the group with the second-lowest percentage of students who planned to attend university (29%), the second-highest who were unsure about their post-secondary plans (24%) and who planned to work full-time (17%) (Cheng & Yau, 1999). While the percentage of those who planned to attend university remained the same since 1991, the percentage of those who planned to work full time nearly doubled from 10% in 1991 (Cheng, Yau & Ziegler, 1993).

- **Part-Time Employment**

In 1991, Portuguese-Canadian students also reported the longest average hours of part-time work of any group (18 vs. 14 average), and one of the fewest numbers of hours per week spent on homework (7 vs. 4 average) (Cheng, Yau & Ziegler, 1993). This figure improved slightly in 1997. Nonetheless, Portuguese students still reported the second-highest hours of work (16) and the second-lowest hours of homework (9) (Cheng & Yau, 1999).

## **7.4 The community's response**

The existence of the problem of Portuguese-Canadian academic underachievement has been recognized since the early 1980's by journalists, Portuguese parents, educators and community activists, (Duffy, 1995; Ferreira, 1995; Matas, 1984; McLaren 1988; Nunes, 1995; Ponte, 1994; "Será," 1994). Opinions on the causes of this problem have ranged from condemnation of the attitudes of Portuguese parents, to harsh criticism of the school system for the perpetuation of policies and practices, which some feel disadvantage Portuguese children.

In the early 1980's the Toronto Portuguese Parent's Association (TPPA), was the first community group which confronted the Toronto Public School Board over the results of their 1982 report on student's expectations (Januario, 1995, 1997). The TPPA laid much of the blame for the failure of Luso-Canadian students on such policies and practices as the devaluation of Luso-Canadian students and their culture, the use of culturally-biased assessment procedures, the cultural irrelevance of the curriculum and the concentration of inferior, vocational schools and programmes in working-class areas, (Dos Santos, Perestrelo & Coelho, 1985; Ward, 1985). They particularly criticized the policy of streaming and ability grouping, as being discriminatory towards Luso-Canadian students. They also called for active militancy on the part of Portuguese-Canadian parents.

*Our children are being victimized by a system developed for and supported by the well-to-do sector...It is time for us to wake up and together plan a course of action to correct this injustice!!! (Dos Santos, Perestrelo & Coelho, 1985, p. 153)*

*'Portuguese parents do not understand what is happening to their children... We're not any dumber than anyone else [...]The only question is why is this happening.'*  
(Matas, 1984)

Some educators dismissed the position of the Portuguese Parents Association, calling it "left-wing" and "socialist" and blamed this group for politicizing what they felt was essentially a problem of parental and cultural origin (Matas, 1984). However, others were more ready to blame the schools:

*'We were overwhelmed,' admits a school board official. 'From being among the least vocal parents, the Portuguese were suddenly in the front lines. The atmosphere was confrontational, and at times, very rough. But they won, and in most cases they were right.'* (Ward, 1985)

Ultimately, the underachievement problem of both the Portuguese and the Black communities was addressed by the Provincial Government in a major government report on the state of education in Ontario (Royal Commission on Learning, 1994). In acknowledging previous research, this report mentioned how Portuguese students were more likely than others to drop out. Moreover, the report also stated that although Canadian-born Portuguese-speaking students had slightly higher levels of achievement than their foreign-born counterparts, they still remained below the average for the school system.

### ***Systemic influences on underachievement***

In recent years, a great deal of research evidence has been amassed, which supports the suspicions of the Toronto Portuguese Parents' Association regarding the effects of deleterious practices in the school system on minority children. This research highlights the discriminatory effects of such educational practices and policies as culturally biased educational assessments, culturally-biased I.Q. tests, low teachers' expectations, academic "streaming," ethnocentrism and racism in the curriculum (Cummins, 1980, 1988, 1989). Indeed, some of the very reports that were commissioned by the Ontario government have admitted that such policies as educational "streaming" are discriminatory to many minorities and counterproductive to the aims of the education system (Radawanski, 1987). In particular, Special Education in Toronto, has become a convenient placement – one could even label this a "dumping ground" - for Portuguese-Canadian children with language and reading

difficulties. Some of these children are second- and third-generation Luso-Canadians, who prior to entering the school system spoke only Portuguese at home (or a mixture of Portuguese and English, sometimes referred to as “Portinglês”, Cabral, 1986). Over the years, many of the language difficulties, which have traditionally been suffered by these Portuguese-Canadian children, have become associated and confused with learning disabilities and/or a lack of intelligence. Laura Araujo, a counsellor and interpreter stated in 1978 that,

*Children of Portuguese immigrants get short-changed in Ontario's school system because their weakness in the English language is confused with slowness. (Brazao, 1978)*

Unfortunately, there is little indication that either the comments of well-meaning educators or the mea-culpas contained in scattered government reports brought any changes to educational policies and practices which devalued student's cultures, marginalized Portuguese students with academic difficulties and which actively excluded the more vocal parents of the community from school matters. For example, tentative attempts to destream grade 9 in the late 80's and early 90's were eventually abandoned through lack of support from teachers, school boards and, by decree from a new, conservative provincial government.

### ***The Portuguese-Canadian Coalition for Better Education***

In February of 1995, the Portuguese-Canadian Coalition for Better Education - a group comprised of over 40 representative organizations and individuals in the Toronto Luso-Canadian community - was created, as a response to the release of the 1991 Every Secondary Student Survey (Brown, et. al., 1992; Cheng, et. al., 1993; Yau, et. al., 1993) and the inaction of the Board in changing educational practices towards Luso-Canadian students.

Since 1995, the Coalition has met with variouis Ministers of Education and worked collaboratively with the Toronto Public and Catholic School Boards on researching the situation of Luso-Canadian students, improving assessment, school accountability, equity in hiring, and implementing “best practices” (Januario, 1997). The Coalition has also been working on utilizing bilingual beginning reader books, developing the “First Steps” and “Steps to University” programmes for kindergarten and Grade 11

students and developing a mentoring and tutoring programme (Januario, 1997). Many of the individuals who have worked closely with the Portuguese-Canadian Coalition for Better Education have felt that the issue of underachievement needs to be challenged on two fronts: confronting the School Boards and government on their policies and practices, while simultaneously educating the Luso-Canadian community-at-large on the problem of underachievement (Januario, 1994, 1995).

Yet, despite the work of the Coalition, little was known until the late 1990's about the feelings of the community at large, regarding the education issue. The importance of this issue to Luso-Canadians, as well as their opinions as to the origin of the problem, were clearly illustrated in the first national study of the Portuguese in Canada, which was conducted from 1994 to 1996, by the Portuguese-Canadian National Congress.

#### *The first national study on Portuguese-Canadians*

The Portuguese-Canadian National Congress is an organization, which was initiated in 1993, and which acts through a nation-wide network of representative Delegates and Directors on issues relating to the health, well-being and integration of community members. In 1994 the Congress received a grant from the Canadian government to undertake the first national study (needs assessment) of the Portuguese in Canada (Nunes, 1998). The principal aim of this study was to ask Portuguese-Canadians across Canada what they felt to be the major issues that were affecting their communities, as well as their priorities for their resolution. Other aims were to profile the overall state of the Luso-Canadian population and to research the problems of the previously unstudied Luso-Canadian communities outside of Toronto and Montreal. The study was developed and undertaken through a participatory-research, community-development approach, which the conduct of 18 nation-wide focus groups, as well as a detailed 14-page survey, that was mailed to over 1,000 Congress members, Luso-Canadian community associations, churches and media. Finally, the study also gathered comparative data from the 1991 Canadian Census.

#### • **Major issues**

This study illustrated how Portuguese-Canadians throughout Canada regarded various issues related to the educational deficit as underlying many of the problems of the Portuguese-Canadian community (Nunes, 1998). These issues included, the lack of

fluency in English and French, the problem of academic underachievement (high drop out rates, low frequency in higher education, the lack of parental support for education) the need to promote the Portuguese language and culture, as well as the need for more community education, particularly in promoting post-secondary education. Some of the related problems which were identified included: the high rate of unemployment amongst the community (at the time of the study); the disproportionate concentration of Portuguese in low-paying, low-status jobs; the lack of integration of Portuguese-Canadians into Canadian society; the disunity of the community; lack of political representation and participation in the political process; and, (for youth), difficulties in communication with parents.

• **The community's social reproduction**

Many people in this study were particularly concerned with what they saw as the looming economic marginalization of the next generation of Luso-Canadian youth in low-waged, low-status jobs, as well as the consequent “social reproduction” of an entire generation of the community's youth, in the same working-class position as their parents. One person in Toronto remarked:

*If our children do not complete high-school... do not go to University, we are going to continue to have a Portuguese community that is the mirror image of ...the first generation. This is my biggest worry, it is seeing that the second generation is following in the footsteps of the first.... ...I think that, if we do not pay attention to this, [this will turn into] a great calamity for the Portuguese community. This is the key issue that we have to discuss. (Nunes, 1998, p. 7)*

This view was also echoed by the Luso-Canadian sociologist Edite Noivo (1997), in a separate study on the Portuguese-Canadian community in Montreal. She described how the present younger generations of Luso-Canadians in that city had fallen into similar marginalized social and economic roles:

*First, a great number of third-generation members are neither pursuing an education nor acquiring marketable skills. They remain oblivious to the current trends and demands in the labour market, namely to the fact that increasing automation will result in the elimination of the kinds of jobs working-class immigrants have generally held. Second, whereas these largely unskilled working-class youths expect to get personal fulfilment and gratification from their work, they are also used to a lot of leisure time and to relatively higher consumption than their class position allows for. Many appear fervently determined “to enjoy life instead of just working hard and saving” (their emphasis). Finally, I found it appalling that no one, not even their*

*parents, seems to realize the seriousness of the situation, or seems troubled by the uncertain occupation/material future of the third generation. (Noivo, 1997, p. 95)*

The author concluded that, due to the limited education and job-skills of the third-generation, a generalized downward social mobility is foreseeable within the Luso-Canadian community (Noivo, 1997)

#### • **Prioritizing education**

When people in the national study were asked to prioritize the issues which should merit future attention, from amongst the problems that they had identified, those in the larger urban centres tended to mention the disproportionate academic underachievement of Portuguese-Canadian youth, as well as the school system's lack of discipline and collaboration with parents. People in the larger centres also pointed to the promotion of the benefits of post-secondary education amongst young people and to more community education, as the keys to reversing the downward social mobility of the younger generations and, consequently, to resolving of many of the community's problems. As one person in Toronto said:

*If Portuguese want to prepare themselves for economic issues in the future - which is what we have to try to do, [since] a lot of those problems that exist, we're not going to solve - we have to stress the value of education and tell people what's coming. Because if people aren't prepared, its going to be a painful situation.*

Those in the smaller and more remote communities, outside of Toronto and Montreal, tended to regard as most important the lack of skills of the first generation in English or French, as well as the lack of promotion of, and support for, Portuguese language and culture. This was regarded as particularly critical in the more isolated communities, most of which are rapidly disappearing, as a result of language and culture loss amongst young people and their migration to the larger urban centres. In Edmonton, one man described the urgency of the need to stem this loss:

*Our language, if we don't... [promote it], in a few years it is liable to die off here in Edmonton. This is something which I lament greatly... the fact of allowing our language and culture to pass away. (Nunes, 1999, p 214)*

One woman in Vancouver stated:

*Our language is the most important thing that we need... After language come all the other issues. But, it is sad to see that there are few people from the second generation who speak Portuguese...(Nunes, 1999, p. 214)*

- **“Blaming” Portuguese parents**

In general, most people in this study tended to attribute the underachievement problem to what they saw as the negative attitudes and practices of Portuguese parents. People blamed Luso-Canadian parents for such things as: placing their immediate economic progress ahead of their children’s education; failing to encourage their children to continue their studies; not being more involved in their children’s education; actively urging their sons and daughters to go to work prematurely; and a tendency to focus obsessively on the purchase of a home (Nunes, 1999). For example, one person mentioned:

*...there are many people who are not interested in their children going to school. They would rather see their children come through the door with \$100 or \$200 a week... (Nunes, 1999, p. 232)*

Another man in Vancouver said:

*A lot of Portuguese fathers and mothers... sit back and say ‘ok, education, education, education.. Oh! How much are you making? Fourteen dollars an hour? Ok. Stop! You’re at your perfect job; I don’t care if you’re a secretary, I don’t care what you’re doing...’ (Nunes, 1999, p. 233)*

Yet, a minority of parents also felt that the community’s complacency regarding their disadvantaged position within Canadian society also had a lot to do with this problem.

For example, one person stated:

*They accept perfectly the fact that they are only construction workers and cleaners, and they live within this stigma perfectly content. (Nunes, 1998, p. 35)*

Another said,

*The community hasn’t matured yet.. hasn’t reached its age. [...] The community isn’t yet to par. It’s still not yet taken responsibility for its own problems. [...] The first thing we need to do is admit we have problems, instead of hiding, (like with this education thing.) (Nunes, 1998, p. 51)*

## **7.5 Conclusion and Discussion**

Does this mean, then - as the people in the national study implied - that underachievement occurs because Luso-Canadian parents don’t place a value on their

children's education? While this might seem a straightforward answer to the conundrum of underachievement, the available evidence doesn't support this view.

Firstly, no studies have yet been conducted which show that Portuguese-Canadians value education less than other parents. In fact, the little information that has indirectly addressed parental attitudes in previous work has tended to suggest that Luso-Canadian fathers and mothers place a great deal of value on their children's education, (ex. see Cummins, Lopes, & King, 1987; Larter, et. al., 1982; Nunes, 1998; Pinto, 1970). Furthermore, both the participants in the Congress national needs assessment (Nunes, 1998) as well as in Noivo's (1993, 1997) study reported that they had very high educational expectations for their children. Despite this fact, the children in Noivo's study did not achieve adequate levels of schooling. One young woman in the Montreal focus group of the Congress study stated:

*I think that there are many Portuguese which put a lot of pressure on their children, because there are many who did not have much schooling and... at a certain age, had to go to work.... and when they got here, they had children and they want the best for their kids. So, they put a lot of pressure on them [saying] 'you have to go to school; you have to study; you have to get good marks... because I didn't have that opportunity, and it's a good one...' and such. (Nunes, 1999, p. 235)*

The blaming of the parents is ultimately the simplification of a very complex problem; one which is rooted in both the discriminatory educational practices of Canadian schools, as well as in the inappropriate response on the part of many people in the Luso-Canadian community, to their continued social, economic, political and educational marginalization. In fact, it is this marginalization which ultimately leads to underachievement, by perpetuating the use of unfavourable strategies, on the part of Luso-Canadian parents and youth, in their negotiation of the barriers to integration.

### ***The immigrant generation***

As it was shown in our earlier profile of the Luso-Canadian community, the first generation of Portuguese-Canadian parents (those who immigrated as adults between the 1950's and the early 1980's) had few skills and little experience, to help them support their children in the negotiation of the education system.<sup>vi</sup> Because they originated from the most disempowered sectors of Portuguese society, many first-generation Portuguese-Canadians not only faced cultural and linguistic barriers to

participating in their children's schooling, but also class-based ones, as well. These parents suddenly found themselves having to negotiate a school system that was mainly geared towards serving, and inculcating, urban, middle-class patterns and goals. Many of these parents felt themselves unable to assist their sons and daughters with school problems. Consequently, many were unable to provide their sons and daughters with the experience, knowledge, contacts, habits and resources, which middle-class Canadian families take for granted; such staples as:

- White-collar contacts, for role modeling, career advice and employment;
- A working knowledge of how to negotiate the post-secondary system;
- Parental assistance with schoolwork and with general education issues;
- A practical knowledge of the range of alternative career paths;
- A greater financial security, to allow them to focus mainly on their studies.

Most Portuguese parents had also been conditioned by years of life under a dictatorship, to never question the school's authority. From the 1950's to the late 70's, their silence was further exacerbated, by the lack of certain services, such as cultural interpreters, E.S.L. classes and designated community liaison officers, which, today, help bridge the gap between the home and the school. Consequently, many of these parents received little guidance or support, when their children encountered problems in school, or when they came face to face with academic barriers, such as culturally biased assessments (leading to the placement of their children in Special Education). As a result, of these limitations, most first-generation Luso-Canadians placed much of the responsibility for their children's education on the shoulders of their sons and daughters.

For their part, a great number of second-generation Portuguese-Canadians faced significant academic pressures, throughout their elementary, secondary and post-secondary education. Their generalized language difficulties the elementary level, coupled with the lack of parental involvement in their schooling, meant that many Portuguese-Canadian youth experienced significant stress and academic difficulties, at the secondary and post-secondary levels. When faced with these barriers, many young Luso-Canadians often found it easier to access their families' readily available network of unskilled employment contacts (Anderson, 1974), than to negotiate their

way through alien white-collar environments and role definitions. Meanwhile some of those parents whose children were experiencing academic problems, and who lacked the resources to negotiate a solution through the schools, would inevitably facilitate the entrance of their sons and daughters into the blue-collar working world.

### ***The importance of home ownership***

Far from being regarded as a limiting decision, the option to drop out and enter the working world was often regarded by many Portuguese parents and youth as a most rational choice. In fact, amongst the Portuguese, there have evolved a few proven and traditional “folk-theories of success” (Ogbu, 1987), (referring to the African-American context) and “immigrant family projects” (Noivo, 1997), which have diminished their reliance on institutions outside of the family and which have stressed manual work and collective family financial responsibility. In particular, the purchase of a home has occupied a primordial importance for Luso-Canadians (Alpalhão & Da Rosa, 1980; Anderson & Higgs, 1976; Nunes, 1999). As Alpalhão and Da Rosa remarked:

*We cannot conceive of the Portuguese family without a house, because it holds so important a place in family life. For the Portuguese, the purchase of a house and its maintenance are traditional virtues. (Alpalhão & Da Rosa, 1980, p. 142)*

Another community member also described the importance of home ownership:

*To understand the working habits of the Portuguese, one has to remember that they brought with them a family-centred work culture. While these men took pride in their role as the family’s main breadwinner, they also feared that they might not be able to meet the challenge. And one of the signs that this challenge had been overcome was the possession of a house and property. (Marques, 1992)*

However, in focussing their efforts on this traditional “family project,” many first-generation immigrant Portuguese-Canadians became economically and culturally bound to life patterns, which have prevented them from participating more fully in mainstream Canada’s cultural, civic and political life. Unable to attain more than a passive fluency in their new language (by virtue of their low education levels) and lacking a familiarity with much of the historical, cultural and political heritage of their new land, many new immigrants retreated even further into their families and in caring for their house. As one Toronto participant of the national study stated:

*People are not interested in learning... they are not interested in anything. Only working and fixing up [their house]... (Nunes, 1999, p. 274).*

In doing so, they also distanced themselves and their children even further from the alien, middle-class world of Canadian schooling. According to Noivo (1997), many Portuguese-Canadian immigrant parents unwittingly brought their sons and daughters into the “family project” at a young age, through the “intergenerational transmission,” of their working-class ethnic role and identity patterns (Noivo, 1993, p. 67). The resulting school and parental discontinuities promoted the academic and economic marginalization of the “second” generation of Luso-Canadian youth. They also contributed to the intensification of feelings of cultural duality amongst these youth and to difficulties in their engagement in Canadian society. Over the years, a number of observers have commented about the lack of integration of this second-generation:

*They are not doing anything wrong, but they are not doing anything right, either. (Slinger, 1971)*

*...marginalized within the very environment in which they grew up and insecure as to a past that they hardly know and that, many times, they wish to forget, the youth of this second generation have difficulties in reaffirming themselves as citizens of their new country... ...There have begun to appear in Canada the first testimonies of this second generation, still reticent in revealing themselves and in making themselves heard. They are documents [of human feeling] which reveal great disturbance and suffering. (my translation: author) (Bulger, 1987, pp.19-20)*

However, while the limitations of first-generation Portuguese parents may serve as justification for the underachievement of the second-generation, these do not explain why subsequent generations continue to drop out of school. In fact, community members have voiced serious concerns that the members of the third generation are facing a disproportionate rate of future unemployment, failing to enter into job training programmes and displaying a lack of political involvement, in both mainstream and Portuguese-Canadian societies (Noivo, 1997; Nunes, 1998, 1999). As one person warned:

*...we as a Portuguese community... will find ourselves in the future... with a population of underdeveloped individuals, who do not have the preparation to meet the challenges of the extremely advanced society in which we live [...] we will find, for example [...] that a certain percentage of youth of Portuguese origin will not have a place in society. (Nunes, 1999, p. 284).*

In fact, there is evidence to suggest that newer generations of Luso-Canadian students continue to gravitate towards the unskilled, working world, since these students report

some of the longest part-time hours of any ethnoracial minority group in the Toronto Board of Education (16 versus 12 for other students) (Cheng & Yau, 1999).

### ***Marginalization and role definitions***

The continuing educational underachievement of the third generation of Luso-Canadian youth illustrates the complex nature of this community's problem. The perpetuation of this phenomenon amongst those with better-educated and fluent parents indicates that the essential elements in the underachievement issue go beyond the lack of parental resources or low expectations, to involve the *marginalized, wider-world situation* of Luso-Canadians and what this teaches young Portuguese-Canadians about themselves and their place in Canadian society.

Firstly, in living within a massively working-class community, Portuguese-Canadian children are inculcated with marginalizing role and identity definitions. These youth learn their place in society and their real-world possibilities through living and adopting their parents' disenfranchised social and economic patterns. In other words, while most Portuguese-Canadian parents may not necessarily counsel their sons and daughters to drop out of school - and while some may even lecture their children on the importance of a good education - their actions, attitudes and life choices nonetheless transmit to their children implicit messages regarding schooling, that are often contrary to that which they are voicing (Noivo, 1993, 1997; Ogbu, 1974). As Noivo (1993, 1997) explained, it is this reproduction of parental roles, patterns and habits, that enable the perpetuation of these "family projects" and "folk theories." As one person from Toronto lamented, in the Congress national study:

*"[Our] children today continue with this closed mentality. They don't know anything [...] they go and copy their parents." (Nunes, 1999, p. 284).*

Thus, for example, many Luso-Canadian youth become implicated in their family's traditional network of reciprocal rights and obligations, where studying may often be regarded as a sign of "hubris" and as an unwillingness to suffer the same manual work as one's parents and siblings (Da Cunha, 1977). Similarly, many others also inherit the class-based, oppositional elements of their parents' traditional, rural Portuguese society, where the definitions of a personal identity have often been formed in opposition to the cultural patterns of one's political and economic elites. In this

context, acquiring a higher education may be interpreted by some youth as an attempt to enter into the very same class roles, which have traditionally been denigrated by their parents and friends. In this fashion, the sense of personal identity which many Luso-Canadian youth develop, thus becomes forged *in opposition* to an image of their economic and political elites.

Their sense of an ethnic identity has similarly been similarly structured, in the Canadian context, by the association between class and ethnic factors. Because Portuguese-Canadian youth have largely grown up without white-collar Portuguese role models, entering into professional career paths has often signified, for many of these youth, an assimilation into a mainstream Canadian identity. As one close friend once humorously remarked to this author:

*You can't go to University! You're Portuguese! Don't you know that Portuguese are not supposed to go to University?! (Nunes, 1999, p.1)*

The unstated assumption following from these remarks was that achieving a University education was, somehow, incongruous with the maintenance of a Portuguese identity. Further evidence for this phenomenon can be found in the reports of many middle-class second and third generation Luso-Canadians, who comment on feeling distanced from their Portuguese identity, or in wanting to distance themselves from their Portuguese roots. In this fashion, they have associated a particular class membership with a Portuguese identity.

Consequently, for some Luso-Canadian youth, entering into post-secondary education has often been tantamount not only to leaving behind their family's class position, but also their sense of being "Portuguese." Because of this phenomenon, many Portuguese-Canadian students perceive the school's efforts, to inculcate them with middle-class mores and roles, as an attempt to annihilate their Portuguese-Canadian identity (MacLaren 1986). This sense of cultural annihilation is not unique to the Portuguese. It was also reported by the Mexican-American author, Richard Rodriguez, when he described how his success in schooling had distanced him from his Mexican-American identity (Rodriguez, 1982)

In summary, it would be misleading to believe that the supposed parental promotion of traditional paths to success, or the reproduction of family role patterns, is the root cause of the community's problems with schooling. While it can be argued that the adoption of traditional coping patterns has inevitably allowed underachievement to occur, (for example, by causing Portuguese families to focus on their homes and their jobs), these traditional patterns are *not the cause* of the community's underachievement. Rather, what is at the heart of the problem of academic underachievement is the economic, cultural and political marginalization that this community has suffered, within Canadian society. In fact, the continued validity of the "immigrant project" and traditional role patterns amongst newer generations itself provides evidence of the existence of this continuing marginalized state amongst these youth. This ongoing marginalization is what has reinforced both the economic as well as the existential value of traditional, working-class paths to success, for the newer generations. In other words, the continued marginalization of Luso-Canadian families is what has given these patterns and folk theories survival value and legitimacy. In this context, the adoption of traditional roles, identities and paths to success by the newer generations has, in itself, simply reproduced and reinforced the existing marginalization of these youth and their families, by further distancing them from those middle-class patterns and goals that would better integrate them into Canadian society. Thus, the patterns of traditional economic goals which are transmitted from parents to children are not – in themselves – the root cause of academic underachievement. They are, however, at once the way in which Luso-Canadian families have traditionally coped with their marginalized situations and, at the same time, the elements which are allowing the community's marginalization to remain unchallenged.

### ***The roots of marginalization***

However, the transmission across the generations of "folk theories of success" (Ogbu, 1987), "family projects" (Noivo, 1997), working-class identities and patterns of underachievement can only be possible in a situation where there is a long-standing and continuing economic and political inequality between mainstream Canadian society and its minorities (e.g. See Li, 1988; Porter, 1965; Ornstein, 2000). Within this fabric of Canadian society, subsequent generations of Portuguese-Canadian families continue to be marginalized not only economically, but also culturally and

politically. This structural and political inequality is what is at the root of the failure of the emergence of alternative definitions of Portuguese-Canadian identity amongst Luso-Canadian youth and what has contributed to the association of ethnic with class identities. It is only in an environment such as this, where traditional survival mechanisms - such as the entrance into working-class, unskilled occupations – can continue to make a great deal of sense for Portuguese-Canadian young people, not only economically, but also existentially. These mechanisms can only be perpetuated in a situation where, by furthering their education, Luso-Canadian youth face a type of cultural annihilation. This annihilation can only occur in a situation where Luso-Canadian students have grown up with the stigma of belonging to a culture which is little recognized, or often dismissed, by mainstream North American society and where they have been inculcated with negative definitions of their ethnic identities. The deleterious effects of the devaluation of a minority community's identity, language and culture on the academic achievement of its students have been well described by Cummins, (1989, 1994, 1996, 1998).

Thus, academic underachievement does not persist across the generations simply because the community actively promotes traditional “folk theories of success,” such as the option to enter early into manual labour or the focus on home-ownership (as the people in the national study concluded) (Nunes, 1998, 1999). Rather, such “folk theories” continue to have meaning and relevance to new generations of Luso-Canadians, exactly because these young people continue to find themselves in the same limited societal roles and identity patterns as their parents. Thus, underachievement is not caused simply by the transmission of these traditional roles and practices, but rather by the failure to challenge the community's marginalized position.

In essence, in living within the restricted economic and social roles of their families, in suffering the marginalizing stigmas of their community, in responding to their marginalized situation by adopting similar strategies to those of their parents, and in consequently failing to challenge the community's existing socio-economic status, subsequent generations of Luso-Canadians have allowed the perpetuation of this marginalized situation for themselves, their families and their community.

### ***The internalization of blame***

Ultimately, the national study is a clear example of a marginalized minority internalizing the blame for their own marginalization. In this study, the community essentially blamed itself for a problem whose causes are inevitably more complex, and more interconnected, than what is - at first - apparent. For example, one man said the following, regarding his failure to take advantage of educational opportunities:

*Azoreans do whatever they can so that they never go to school. They do whatever they can to go and work. They think that they get ahead this way but they only fall behind. Starting with myself. When I came to this country, I went to apply to study. the school said they would pay me \$75 a week. I didn't want to go to school. I went to work for \$65. (Nunes, 1998, p. 29)*

Noivo (1997) also described how the second-generation parents in her study blamed themselves for their own, as well as their children's, low educational and occupational levels:

*I found that, like most parents, the second generation wants their children to acquire "cultural capital" in the form of a higher education and marketable skills, perceived as enabling them to eventually get those "good" jobs that bring economic security and social respectability. But unlike most middle-class Canadian parents, the second generation suffers the type of class injuries discussed in chapter one, namely, lack of self-worth, social respect, and dignity. These parents tend to blame themselves both for their own and for their children's low educational and occupational levels. Because the majority see Canada as an open and mobile society based on merit and equal opportunity, many parents also feel personally responsible for and embarrassed of their children's poor academic achievement. Like other working-class members, they interpret "their" failure to move up the social ladder as individual inadequacy and not as a structural problem. Accordingly, these parents ordinarily voice strong regrets for "having made nothing" of themselves, for "not having gone to night school," and for "not having been given the opportunity to continue studying." (Noivo, 1997, pp. 88-89)*

This internalization of blame is an attitude that is prevalent amongst many marginalized or oppressed minorities, and is one that is well described by Paulo Freire (1970). In essence, the Portuguese in Canada tend to blame themselves, or their societal group, for their reactions to the structural problems in which they are submerged and which - because of this submersion - are outside their full comprehension. Yet, some of the people in the national study nonetheless gave evidence that they intuitively understood the reciprocal relationship between the community's marginalized position and the education problem. Not only did they attribute such problems as the lack of integration, leadership, political participation, and influence of the community in Canadian society to the various educational

deficits, but they went further to attribute the perpetuation of these educational problems themselves to the community's marginalized status. As one person said:

*There is a very great need to really assert our presence; or, in other words, to say 'we are living, we are here, there is much which has to be done' (Nunes, 1998, p. 1)*

Another said:

*There are a lot of problems...that we have, for many years, failed to face... we allowed our eyes to remain closed, we let the issue escape us and now, we are seeing the result of this negligence on our part... The responsibility is ours, as a community, that we closed our eyes to the reality of the situation. (Nunes, 1998, p. 2).*

Still one more said,

*The first thing we need to do is admit we have problems, instead of hiding, (like with this education thing).(Nunes, 1999, p.293).*

In this fashion, many of the people in this study described the relationship which they felt existed between the community's marginalized condition and its continuing low education levels. These people commented particularly on the necessity of raising the educational profile of the young, as the way to achieve full participation in Canadian society. Unfortunately, they did not give suggestions as to how this could be done. In the future, perhaps with a greater understanding of the way in which government policies, school practices and socio-cultural attitudes interrelate to structure role and identity patterns, those in the Portuguese-Canadian community will have a better understanding of the way these factors mediate the community's response to education.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> It is important to note that these numbers are disputed by the Portuguese Embassy, who estimates the Luso-Canadian population at over 500,000 people. They are also disputed by a number of researchers in this community, who point to a number of factors amongst the Portuguese in Canada which often affect their ability to accurately complete the official census survey (e.g. Teixeira & Lavigne, 1998). This discrepancy between the community's estimates of its population numbers and the Census figures is one factor which has frequently helped to frustrate the community's sense of their own agency in Canadian society. It is not uncommon to hear prominent community members voice dismay at the feeling that Canadian government officials (who generally accept the validity of Statistics Canada figures) do not grant the community the attention which they feel is due to a population of over half a million.

<sup>ii</sup> Much of the information on this topic was gathered from a series of secondary student surveys, which the former Toronto Board of Education (before amalgamation) had conducted every few years, since 1970.

<sup>iii</sup> The years listed are those when each cohort first entered the Board's Secondary Schools. Graduation would normally occur 4 or 5 years later, depending on the type of secondary school diploma which was sought. So, the majority of the 1993 cohort would have graduated in 1997, or 1998.

<sup>iv</sup> This would include all of those people in apprenticeship programmes, community college, technical training institutes and university study.

<sup>v</sup> This was the report which became the catalyst for a strong outcry to the media and government, by Portuguese community groups such as the Portuguese Parents Association; an outcry which was instrumental in pressuring the Ontario government of the mid-90's to take action on beginning a process to attempt to destream grade 9.

<sup>vi</sup> The term "first generation" and "second generation" are being used here in the colloquial sense, in which they are normally used in the community, to mean individuals who were schooled in Portugal and who immigrated as adults (first generation) and individuals who have been mainly schooled and socialized in Canada (second generation).