An Exploration of the Impacts of a Community-Based Tutoring and Mentoring Program

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Abstract

This article reports on a qualitative case study of Ready, Set, Learn (RSL), a community-based tutoring and mentoring program. It examines stakeholders' perceptions of the program's impact on Portuguese-Canadian students. RSL aims to mitigate educational challenges faced by Portuguese-Canadians, as they relate to high rates of high school non-completion and corresponding low levels of post-secondary enrolment. Previous studies conducted into the Portuguese-Canadian population have focused specifically on problems of educational disadvantage and have not explored programs or practices adopted by the community to address these issues. This study contributes to research on education-focused community-based organizations, such as RSL, which have been shown to support at-risk immigrant youth through the provision of supports and services that enable improved educational outcomes. The findings of this study show that RSL provided its students with cultural capital to construct high academic and vocational aspirations, and to cope with discouraging experiences they had in schools.

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Canada has consistently asserted that it is a country that provides opportunities for increased social mobility. Social mobility is largely said to be directly related to the extent and degree of educational achievement. Although education is guaranteed to all ethno-cultural groups living in Canada, certain groups, such as Portuguese-Canadians, have not had similar opportunities for increased social mobility given the disadvantages they have experienced with the education system (Ornstein, 2006). Previous studies on this minority group have shown how these disadvantages can stem from negative schooling experiences and can manifest in high non-completion rates, low rates of enrolment in post-secondary institutions, and social reproduction (Fonseca, 2010; Noivo, 1997; Nunes, 1999, 2003; Santos, 2006). Specifically, in his analysis of the 2001 census, Ornstein (2006) found that among Portuguese-Canadians aged 25 to 34, 33% had not completed high school and 22.5% were not in school full-time (p. 37). Portuguese-Canadians appeared to have one of the lowest proportions of university graduates, at only 11.6% of the population (p. 37). In contrast, the average level of high school and university level completion among all ethno-cultural groups in Toronto was 82% and 31.5%, respectively (Ornstein, 2006, p. 37).

These findings were echoed by the *Every Secondary Student Survey*, an initiative conducted by the Toronto District School Board (Project Diploma, 2006). This report highlighted a disproportionately low number of Portuguese-Canadian students placed in advanced study and enrichment programs, and subsequently, a low number of students aspiring to professional careers. Overall, only 57% of the Portuguese-Canadian students polled planned to pursue post-secondary education (Project Diploma, 2006). Since many Portuguese-Canadian youth are not completing formal schooling, and are therefore limiting their marketable skills, many within the Portuguese-Canadian community are ill-equipped to participate fully in the advanced Canadian economy (Nunes, 1999).

Given these challenges, the Portuguese-Canadian community of Toronto took concrete steps to attempt to address educational disadvantages experienced by their members, and to positively affect the low levels of high-school completion and low levels of post-secondary enrolment (Project Diploma, 2006). Through the creation of Ready, Set, Learn (RSL), a non-profit tutoring and mentoring program, members of the community sought to empower students and parents. By participating in the RSL program, these families became connected with mentors who provided them with information critical to their navigation of the school system and to advocate for their educational rights.

This paper reports on the outcomes of a case study that analyzed the effects of the RSL program and its impacts from the perceptions of the stakeholders directly involved in its operation (Kwiczala, 2012). The effects and impacts of the experiences of the stakeholders who took part in RSL will be discussed. These experiences will then be compared and contrasted with their experiences in the school system. This will show that RSL has affected the stakeholders' experiences in school and acted as a positive intervention. While much of the research on Portuguese-Canadians has focused on the various manifestations of the educational disadvantages they experience, this study takes a more positive approach in its examination of the work by members of this community to combat these issues. It therefore showcases the potential of community-based education to positively affect the educational achievement of minority groups (Villiani & Atkins, 2000). In the following sections, the literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, and findings of the study are outlined. The implications of the findings of the study will also be considered. This study demonstrates that the RSL program is a community-based effort that positively affects the landscape of Portuguese-Canadian educational achievement.

Theoretical Framework

Many newcomers to Canada strive to become economically successful and to have equitable access to all aspects of social and political life (Fernandez-Kelly & Portes, 2008; Nunes, 1999). Despite their attempts at social engagement and participation, Portuguese-Canadians have faced disadvantages in Canadian society, primarily through encounters with the education system (Nunes, 1999). Literature on cultural models, the effects of a lack of cultural capital, and experiences with persistent negative social reproduction, will be reviewed as a means of explicating and interpreting the plausible causes of the educational disadvantages experienced by Portuguese-Canadians. The focus will then shift to specific experiences with educational disadvantages and how these have manifested in the Portuguese-Canadian community. Finally, this article will consider the theories of community-based education and its potential in combating educational disadvantages. These sections constitute the basis of the literature review and underscore the importance of examining the Portuguese-Canadian community's attempts to address the educational disadvantages faced by its students, in the specific form of a tutoring and mentoring program.

Overview of Cultural Models, Cultural Capital, and Social Reproduction

Each cultural group in Canada has a unique model that provides its members with a framework for interpreting, among other things, educational experiences (Ogbu, 1991). These cultural models subsequently guide behaviour in the schooling context. The cultural model of a particular group is therefore connected to the degree of relative academic success or failure among its members. More academically successful groups, for instance, tend to have an understanding of the workings of the larger society, its institutions, and of their place within that working order (Ogbu, 1991). Bourdieu and Passerson (1977) refer to this as cultural capital and argue that groups who possess greater degrees of cultural capital have a greater likelihood of succeeding within educational and other realms of society. Cultural capital is largely transmitted from parents to their children through varying child-rearing activities and is highly dependent on socio-economic status (Lareau, 2003). The transmission of cultural capital in this way might result in social reproduction of inequality: the process by which each generation fulfills their inherited social, educational, and economic practices, leaving the group essentially unchanged (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977).

The Educational Disadvantages of Portuguese-Canadians

While Portuguese-Canadians have high educational and economic aspirations, Coelho (1977) argued that their cultural model conflicted in relation to the adjustment and relative success of their descendants within Canadian schools. Coelho (1977) discussed a lack of fluency in English among Portuguese-Canadians and a limited number of Portuguese-Canadians who speak English as a first language. She argued that these language difficulties, together with challenges in adjusting to the local social and cultural contexts impeded the integration of early Portuguese-Canadian immigrants into Canadian society (Coelho, 1977). This, in turn, placed increasing disadvantage onto the Canadian-born second generation as they lacked the social and cultural capital necessary to navigate educational institutions (Coelho, 1977). As a result, second-generation Portuguese-Canadians had increasingly negative schooling experiences lending to high rates of high-school non-completion and low enrolment in post-secondary

institutions (Coelho, 1977). Noivo (1997) has argued that this trend has continued with the third generation of Portuguese-Canadians and further contended that members of this generation are not acquiring higher education or marketable skills. As a result, she predicted a significant decline in their socio-economic standing (Noivo, 1997).

Portuguese-Canadians have been shown to have substantially lower education and average income levels compared to other immigrant groups (Ornstein, 2006). This has resulted in a social reproduction within the Portuguese-Canadian community.Nunes (2003) describes this as a disproportionate number of youth entering into the same marginalized socio-economic roles as their parents. It has also resulted in ongoing marginalization of Portuguese-Canadians and the exclusion from varying social, political, cultural, economic, and educational realms of Canadian society (Nunes, 1999).

Fonseca (2010) asserted that non-completion of school is a result of the challenges students face within the schooling system, particularly, a de-contextualized curriculum, disaffection, and disengagement in the classroom. In relation to Portuguese-Canadian students, McLaren (1986) further attributed their academic underachievement to the streaming of Portuguese-Canadian students into non-academic courses. Barlow and Robertson (1994) determined that many immigrant students, particularly Portuguese-Canadians, were deliberately enrolled in the least demanding and least competitive classes, which eventually excluded them from post-secondary schooling. McLaren (1986) argued that the practice of streaming victimized immigrant students reinforced the perception among educators that these students were dysfunctional and culturally deprived, therefore leading to negative teacher attitudes. The culture and life experiences of Portuguese-Canadian students were also shown to have been devalued and not reflected in the curriculum, further contributing to non-completion of school (McLaren, 1986). Negative teacher attitudes, coupled with culturally biased assessment procedures, and the concentration of inferior vocational schools and programmes in working class areas further contributed to the educational disadvantages faced by Portuguese-Canadians (Nunes, 2003). The educational system has therefore largely been unable to bridge the chasm of opportunity between Portuguese-Canadians and other cultural groups (McLaren, 1986; Nunes, 2003).

Santos (2006) recommended targeted programs such as community infrastructure frameworks and programs working with not-for-profit organizations to provide services to the Portuguese-Canadian community to address these disadvantages. Furthermore, there have been calls by researchers and members of the Portuguese-Canadian community to address the issue from the ground up, by partnering successful Portuguese-Canadians with at-risk students. These role models can transmit cultural capital to younger community members by illustrating to them how to aspire to educational and vocational goals, by using their own experiences (Fonseca, 2010). Community-based programs are therefore necessary to organize and facilitate this transmission.

The Role of Community-Based Education

Freire (1970) emphasized the importance of the community's role in the education of its members. He argues that the success of any program depends on a dialogical search for solutions with the people involved in the program and those affected by it (Freire, 1970). This is emphasized in various philosophies of community-based education, an approach that seeks to heighten the role that surrounding communities play in the education of its members (Heath & McLaughlin, 1991; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Tompkins, 2005). Through the use of communities as learning sites and by engaging more partners in the task of preparing children for adulthood, community-based education and the resources utilized in students' development significantly enhanced and strengthened both the students and the communities that will eventually depend on them (Smith & Sobel, 2010).

According to Heath and McLaughlin (1991), organizations that seek to improve the educational outcomes of at-risk students possess the following characteristics: they generate activities that respect the views and abilities that students bring with them; they are attuned to their developmental needs and cultural differences; and they provide academic support. The authors cite homework clubs and tutoring programs as examples of community partnerships between students, schools, and their communities (Heath & McLaughlin, 1991). These programs engage youth in authentic experiences within the public domain and result in meaningful learning experiences (Tompkins, 2005).

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) also supports school-community partnerships and has recognized that ethno-cultural communities represent substantial resources that schools could draw on to assist students and to

enrich the school's cultural environment. For example, educators are encouraged to foster community ownership of schools, and community groups were also identified as being able to contribute resources for use in schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Overall, this mandate of the Ontario Ministry of Education complements the philosophy of community-based education with its contention that connecting schools to their surrounding communities and encouraging partnerships create a richer learning environment for all students.

Communities can provide supports and resources that are necessary for students to navigate the complex and often constraining schooling institution. James (2005) provided an analysis of the role of community networks on educational outcomes of immigrant students from working class families. In an earlier study, James and Haig-Brown (2001) asserted that these immigrant students developed the necessary incentive, knowledge, determination, and commitment that made high educational and occupational goals possible (James & Haig-Brown, 2001). James (2005) further determined that when an ethnic group was constrained by structural disadvantages, effective community organizations mobilized resources to counter the negative effects its members faced in mainstream society. Moreover, community-based organizations furnished a protective social environment that prevented an ethnic enclave from ghettoization (Zhou, 2005).

It is vital to provide students, especially those from minority communities, with information regarding their educational and career opportunities as early as possible (Bernes, Bardick, Magnusson, & Witko, 2006). Community-based organizations therefore, also work to generate cultural capital by providing this information. Zhou (2005) argued that many immigrant parents lack the cultural capital necessary to give their children specific directions in relation to their overall educational and career aspirations. This, in turn, results in a gap between high expectations imposed by parents and realistically feasible means of meeting these expectations (Zhou, 2005). Community-based organizations attempt to address this gap by providing students with the tools necessary to become more aware of their academic and vocational choices and helping them find realistic means of becoming socio-economically successful (Zhou, 2005). After-school programs, tutor services, and test preparation centres were examples of how organizations facilitated this process (Zhou, 2005).

Community involvement can also play a significant role in how students reflected on their educational and occupational aspirations. For the most part, the support of community networks and resources allowed students to cultivate attitudes, values, and behaviours that helped them to break through barriers, resulting in upward social mobility (James, 2005). These experiences had the potential to influence the extent and manner in which students would participate in their communities as adults (Tompkins, 2005). In particular, involvement in community-based programs equipped students with the resources to give back to their communities, thereby enhancing the opportunities of its younger members and creating a positive cycle (James, 2005).

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach to research structured this study. The RSL tutoring and mentoring program was examined in order to showcase the experiences and impacts on the students it serves. This research took the form of a case study, which is an empirical inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1989). The study also used appreciative inquiry, a research method that mobilizes investigation by focusing on the conditions that foster successful outcomes in an organization (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). Through asking positive-focused questions, responses are elicited to gain new perspectives and heighten the potential for success (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008).

Outcomes of the RSL program were collected and analyzed from the stakeholders who were directly involved in the program. These stakeholders include students, parents, tutors, and program coordinators. Therefore, the study was comprised of both document analysis and a participant-oriented investigation (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010).

As appreciative inquiry studies typically make use of contextual information, data collection for the RSL program began with a review of documents (Reed, 2007). Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating both printed and electronic material (Bowen, 2009). This method is particularly suited to qualitative research, and requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). The documents collected were diverse and wide-ranging, and

included: agendas and minutes from administrative meetings; recruitment, registration, and information forms; samples of certificates of completion; pamphlets, articles, newsletters, advertisements, and other media promoting the program; student and tutor evaluation forms, surveys, registration packages, and orientation guides; program evaluations; fundraising, donation applications and letters; program budgets; yearly enrolment statistics and summaries; outreach information; and data on participating schools and collaboration with other institutions.

Context

According to the most recent enrolment statistics collected in 2010, the RSL program services over 250 students, and recruits over 160 tutors. There are two program coordinators who are responsible for the program's operation, as well as numerous parents and guardians who participate. RSL provides free tutoring and mentoring services to the Portuguese-Canadian community. It serves students from grades 1-12 who perform at lower levels of academic achievement in areas such as literacy and numeracy, as well as those students at the secondary level who are at risk of dropping out. Through its extensive partnerships with two school boards, RSL operates at various community schools six days a week, after school and on Saturday mornings. Students receive assistance with their homework and/or participate in educational activities focused on their areas of difficulty. RSL provides ample resources to assist tutors to work with their students as effectively as possible. In addition, tutors also act as mentors and role-models to their students, offering them support and advice, motivating them to have high academic and vocational goals, and inspiring them to positively contribute to their school and community.

RSL also offers additional services for its students and parents by hosting a variety of events. For example, each year Portuguese-Canadian high school students from within and outside of RSL have the opportunity to shadow a university student for the day, thereby receiving additional mentoring support. In addition, RSL also holds workshops for parents and students where information about all aspects of high school and post-secondary are provided in English and Portuguese. This format encourages parents and students to bring their questions and concerns forward, and provides a network of educators, professionals, and other parents, who can help guide them.

Data Collection

With regards to the selection of participants, qualitative research and appreciative inquiry were utilized. Following ethical clearance, strategic decisions were made by the researcher and the Program Coordinator in relation to whom to invite to take part in the study, depending upon the experience, knowledge, and understanding they appeared to have (Reed, 2007). These recruitment methods resulted in five RSL students being interviewed, who ranged in age from 12 to 15 years old and who had at least one full year of experience with the RSL program. Other program stakeholders were interviewed, including one Program Coordinator, three tutors, and two parents who all had at least one full year of experience with the program (Kwiczala, 2012). Each stakeholder was involved in a semi-structured, audio-recorded, one-on-one interview. These interviews were later transcribed and pseudonyms were given to the participants. The interview questions were predetermined and specific, and asked of each participant in a systematic and consistent order. However, divergence from these occurred when participants brought up emerging and consistent themes

Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected for this study was analyzed through a relatively systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpretation as recommended by McMillan and Schumacher (2010). With the purpose of studying each participant's schooling experiences and their perceptions of the impacts of RSL, the units of analysis also included participants' answers to the interview questions. The initial coding began by analyzing responses according to the themes that arose in the units of analysis and revealed perceptions of the tutoring and mentoring program in relation to its impact on its stakeholders. A coding theme was then developed and all codes across interviews were compared so as to determine patterns within the data sets.

Research Findings

The findings are organized to report on the schooling experiences of the participants as well as their involvement with RSL. Tutors, parents, students, and a Program Coordinator spoke to their experiences with the schooling system as well as their participation in the RSL program and the impacts of this participation.

Comparing Schooling Experiences with Those at RSL

Parental Involvement

Parent participants attempted to be actively involved in their children's education (inside and outside school), and in the RSL program; however, the experiences in these arenas differed substantially. For example, one parent discussed how although she went to parent-teacher interviews and made a point to introduce herself to her daughter's teachers, she sensed that the schooling community wasn't welcoming and didn't make the effort to get to know her:

> Teachers want the parents to do everything but it's hard … It's like, well give me advice like give me
> something! … Put me to the right path type thing you know what I mean? And then I'll do the rest but ah
> … sometimes … it's a struggle. Teachers are nice but … I don't think they do enough. Not like they used to.
> (Sylvia, p. 5)

Parents also discussed how they felt unsupported by their children's schools. "I went there and honestly, I didn't have … too much support from them" (Conceição, p. 9). Conceição further recalled how a complaint about her daughter's teacher was completely ignored by the administration, and Sylvia discussed how she perceived that her daughter's school was unnecessarily delaying the review process to get her on an Individual Education Plan.

RSL has attempted to encourage parents to become increasingly involved in their children's education. Many parents spoke about being empowered by the RSL program in that they were made aware of their rights and the rights of their children within the educational environment. This increased empowerment eventually gave them confidence to speak up to teachers, administration, and even the school board when they had any concerns. For example, Conceição discussed how her daughters' involvement in RSL had inspired her to speak up against the bullying that was going on in her daughters school:

> There was a movie [video] on the internet … from a guy that they were bullying … and … I just … send
> this movie to the … School Board … with the text 'Oh you think this is right? This is happening this such
> and such school, with the kids'. Two days after the movie was not on the internet anymore … I think I did
> my part. (Conceição, pp. 11-12)

The role of the tutor was also discussed in being vital in facilitating parental involvement. Having knowledge of English as well as an understanding of the workings of the schooling institution and larger society, tutors were resources to parents and helped them to advocate for their children. The Program Coordinator provided examples of how tutors often accompanied parents and children to parent-teacher interviews and school meetings to act as a translator and helped parents voice their concerns:

> There's an increase in parents dialoguing with the teachers as well … The parent is now much more
> familiar with what homework they bring home, what they should be working on, so that … all those
> components I think help the student. (Sandra, p. 19)

Provision of Information

Despite parental knowledge and involvement with the schooling system, parents also spoke about issues regarding a lack of information or understanding of the school system, course structure, and available programs and services. Although one parent was very involved in helping her daughter transition to high school, she discussed her unfamiliarity with the structure of high school, particularly how the credit system worked. She spoke of schools not having enough resources for their students, especially when it came to aspects of career planning: "We don't have [a

guidance counsellor] at St. Martina's … So I don't really know where to go to discuss anything, of that nature … with anybody" (Sylvia, p. 10).

This was also reflected in the student participants' discussions of their lack of knowledge of high school, university, and career options. Celia, a grade 7 student, was worried that she would have trouble adjusting to the different environment: "I'm not really *that* excited cause I don't know what it's going to be like. So, I'm a little bit worried. … It's going to be different" (Celia, p. 6). While most students had a general sense of their vocational aspirations, they discussed how their teachers had yet to examine the particular academic paths required to achieve those aspirations.

RSL provided career planning information to Portuguese-Canadian students as early as possible. This was accomplished primarily through workshops as well as through opportunities to shadow university mentors. One Program Coordinator stated: "I think our youth workshops are so important, our one-to-one tutor mentoring is so important because, being able to plant that seed and start to talk to the students … of what your options are" (Sandra, p. 21). One grade eight student discussed having a better understanding of the transition process from elementary to secondary school. In addition, she learned which courses she would need to take in high school to get into the college program of her choice. Similar sentiments were echoed by student participants in *Shadow-a-Student Day*. They learned of the programs provided by particular universities, information on financing post-secondary education, as well as the vocational opportunities that resulted from having a university degree: "The trip has helped me have a better understanding of the university system. I was able to learn about the educational and social life within the university and the help that is offered" (student participant, *Shadow-a-Student Day*). Students were also able to connect with mentors who were also of Portuguese-Canadian heritage and bond through discussions of similar upbringings and challenges they had faced. Essentially, this experience not only encouraged these students to pursue postsecondary studies, but gave them confidence in their abilities to do so.

Tutors also spoke of how they attempted to provide their students with information about the schooling system. One tutor used his past personal experiences with the education system to demonstrate the difficulties and challenges that contributed to leaving high school prior to completion. He encouraged his students to learn from his mistakes and stressed the importance of completing school the traditional way: "I always tell my students like if you don't want to go through that route which is longer and more painful … it's easier just to do it the right way" (Manuel, p. 8).

Engagement

This tutor's negative experiences in the traditional schooling program stemmed from disengagement and led him to seek an alternative. Student participants expressed similar sentiments of disengagement in regards to their schooling experiences. When asked of their perceptions of school, many student participants expressed how they felt that "sometimes it's just so boring" (Tatiana, p. 3) and often didn't see a point to what they were studying. Students who suffered from a lack of engagement spoke to having negative perceptions of their intelligence, which may have resulted in acting out their frustration in class, and considering leaving school prior to completion.

RSL attempted to counter this disengagement through the tutor-student relationship. The overall structure of the program led to more focused attention being placed on students. This individualized attention countered the *lost in the crowd* feeling that many of them experienced in traditional classrooms. The Program Coordinator discussed the importance of tutors having a positive outlook and making learning engaging and fun for their students. RSL supported this by understanding that each child learned in a different way and encouraging tutors and students to use the space and the resources as creatively as possible. As a result of the engaging tutoring sessions, there was an increase in students' self-motivation and self-esteem as students became confident in their participation in the classroom. Students, such as Marco, also discussed academic improvements as a result of the tutoring: "Been getting good grades in this year. Like As and A+s. I've been getting better in spelling." (Marco, p. 10). Furthermore, they reported more frequent completion of homework, as the tutors were able to help them better understand it. Says one student: "I needed help with math, I wasn't too good and my grades weren't the best. So she kind of helped me and she showed me like ways to do … multiplication and time tables and stuff" (Bella, p. 8).

Participants provided very positive feedback in regards to RSL and its impact on students. The students themselves enjoyed connecting with their tutors and liked attending RSL because of the ample resources it provided to support their learning. They also enjoyed seeing how they had progressed in their academic studies because of the one-on-

one help received from their tutors. As a result of their overall positive experiences, many student participants spoke of recommending this program to other students in their schools, and expressed interest in one day being tutors themselves.

Discussion

The major themes that emerged from the case study of the RSL program and the analysis of its stakeholders' experiences related to those explored in the theoretical framework. In terms of the educational disadvantages prevalent among Portuguese-Canadians, participants spoke to their experiences in detail. One tutor discussed leaving school before completion. His disengagement from the learning environment was a contributing factor to his decision to leave high school, thereby echoing the experiences of the participants in Fonseca's (2010) study. Parental discussions related to their experiences and perceptions of teachers, lack of support from the school, and lack of resources are in line with Nunes' (2003) discussion of educational disadvantages. Despite these negative experiences, parents involved in the RSL program were deeply concerned about their children's education and took the proactive step of placing them in the RSL program.

Both the structure and the impacts of RSL adhere to the literature on community-based education. The purposes and goals of RSL are in line with Heath and McLaughlin's (1991) effectiveness framework of community-based educational organizations in that the RSL program facilitated one-on-one tutoring sessions and provided academic support that was specifically tuned to students' developmental needs. This was achieved by ample communication between the child's tutor and teacher and the freedom and flexibility given to tutors in regards to structuring their sessions. All tutors discussed letting their students talk freely about any difficulties they were experiencing, and acted as positive role models by encouraging them to stay in school and work towards achieving their academic and vocational goals. Furthermore, the tutors' commitment to their students and the program in general inspired other stakeholders to effect positive change in their own schools and communities. One parent highlighted that she was inspired to join committees and campaigns in her daughter's school, and a number of former students had returned to RSL to become tutors themselves.

The RSL program also acted as a transmitter of cultural capital. One tutor recalled frequently referencing his own experiences with the schooling environment as a means of providing advice to his student. In this regard, he was therefore attempting to pass on his knowledge of the schooling system and the workings of larger society to his students (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977). One parent's story adhered to Zhou's (2005) discussion of the role of community-based organizations in facilitating parents' knowledge of and involvement in schools. This parent spoke to how the workshops hosted by RSL were beneficial in providing career information that further led to her child gaining an understanding of the requirements for her future career path. This knowledge also encouraged and empowered her to take a more active role in her child's education.

Participants also discussed how involvement in the RSL program led to an increase in grades, self-esteem, and attitudes toward school. This further increased student empowerment and engagement. According to Smith and Sobel (2010) these effects could have the potential to eventually strengthen the community as a whole. Overall, there is evidence to suggest that RSL has benefited Portuguese-Canadian students, as it has worked to equip students, their parents, and their tutors, with resources to give back to the community. This may have latent positive effects for future generations and could also contribute to reversing the trends of educational disadvantages among Portuguese-Canadians (James, 2005).

Educational Significance

RSL is a concrete example of how Portuguese-Canadians have attempted to combat the educational disadvantages and negative schooling experiences in their community. This study counters the idea that certain cultural models, a perceived lack of cultural capital, and emergent English language skills will perpetuate the cycle of educational disadvantage faced by many Portuguese-Canadians. Portuguese-Canadians, in general, are deeply concerned about education and this is evidenced in their participation in community-based organizations such as RSL. This study has wider implications for all immigrant students considered to be at-risk, and can provide a means for further research

to investigate how other educationally disadvantaged ethno-cultural groups can address these issues through effective community organizing.

Therefore, it is vital that programs such as RSL continue despite budgetary restraints and limited funding for non-profit organizations. Local schools might continue to work closely with community-based programs, and this might be encouraged at the Ministry and Board level through continued funding. Partnerships with organizations such as RSL are an effective way that schools contribute to improving the educational experiences and outcomes of Portuguese-Canadian students. Overall, RSL works toward combating the negative effects of schooling as well as the larger societal issues of high non-completion rates and low levels of participation in post-secondary education that Portuguese-Canadians have previously experienced. Due to the positive feedback of its stakeholders, the efforts of RSL should continue to be encouraged.

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