

Toronto Childcare Centres: A Language Profile

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“... begin where children are and build on
what they know and bring.”

(Goodwin, 2002: 167)

Introduction

This study reports on a Toronto-wide language investigation of children (aged 18 months to 5 years) enrolled in childcare. It represents an extension of an earlier study (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2008) of dual language behaviors of one group of immigrant children attending a childcare centre, housed on a Toronto University campus. Preparatory steps in this study revealed that immigrant children were a *very real presence* in the childcare centre – over one half of the total enrollment. Staff who worked in the centre reported the importance of *sensitivity* to the language needs of immigrant children. They adopted a number of strategies, such as serving as English-language models and using words in home languages to help these children adjust to their new environment.

This study led the author to speculate about the linguistic composition of other Toronto childcare centres and about extant pedagogical practice as it relates to immigrant children. This speculation generated the following two questions that directed the Toronto-wide study reported here:

- (i) *What is the linguistic composition of Toronto childcare centres?*
- (ii) *How can pedagogical practice, as it relates to immigrant children be characterized?*

Rationale

At the time of the study, the linguistic composition of Toronto's childcare centre population remained undocumented. Unlike the systematic documentation of children's linguistic background conducted by the two large Toronto school boards, language data on children attending childcare was sporadic and irregular across centres. Yet documentation of the linguistic composition of childcare centres in cities with large immigrant populations is important for staff and policy makers. Ongoing language documentation would help staff understand the *language pulse* of their centres, provide particulars of minority language representation, such as frequency and concentration, across and within childcare centres and reveal patterns, changes and trends of children's home languages. This information is vital for pedagogical practice adjustment, for planning, staffing and building community partnerships. Finally, language data, would serve as a reminder to staff of the heterogeneity of their working environment and the importance of establishing a multilingual and multi-literate environment where young children make use of their *entire* range of language resources for learning (Kenner, 2000:88). Municipal policy makers who are made aware of the extent and nature of linguistic diversity will make efforts to standardize language documentation across childcare centres and will ensure that necessary resources are in place to help staff meet immigrant children's language needs.

The purpose of the Toronto study, then, is two-fold. Firstly, it is intended to fill the gap described above and to provide a linguistic map of Toronto's childcare population. The second goal is to document pedagogical practice adopted by staff in their work with immigrant children.

Definitions

A number of terms used throughout the paper are defined and clarified here.

Immigrant children are born in Canada or outside of Canada to immigrant parents. These children are raised in homes where a minority language (or languages) is spoken. They are in the early stages of their home language acquisition: the younger ones (10 to 18 mos.) are in the single-word stage and the toddlers (18 mos. to 2 ½ yrs.) are communicating using two-word utterances, while older children (preschoolers, 2 ½ to 3 years and kindergarteners, 4 and 5 years) are using combinatorial speech. *Immigrant children* arrive in childcare centres with little or no understanding of English. In many cases, the parents of these children have limited English proficiency.

English Language Learners (or ELLs) is a term used in Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) documents and in numerous research studies to describe kindergarten and school-aged children (born in Canada or outside of Canada) who speak a minority language in the home. *ELLs* attend English language school where they are learning English as a second language.

L1 refers to the *first* (or home) language a child is acquiring and *L2* refers to a second language. In most cases immigrant children's *L2* is English, which is also referred to as the *host language*. In Canada, a language other than English or French is considered a *minority language*.

Early Childhood Educators (hereafter ECEs) are qualified and trained professionals (holding a 2-year diploma or a 4-year degree in Early Childhood Education) who are responsible for all aspects of program planning, preparation and delivery and who are registered with the CECE (College of Early Childhood Educators), a professional, self-regulatory provincial organization.

The term *childcare staff* (or *staff*) refers to ECEs, trained assistants and untrained employees who work directly with children in the childcare centre. Following the Canadian Oxford Dictionary (2004), *staff* is used as a singular collective noun to refer to the employees of a *single* childcare centre and in the plural when referring to employees of more than one centre.

Pedagogical practice refers to strategies, procedures and/or methodologies adopted by childcare staff in supporting and guiding immigrant children.

The Toronto Study

The Toronto study is presented in 5 sections. In the first section a brief description of Toronto's diverse visage is provided. A two-part language documentation that includes a mapping of children's home languages and a list of languages known and used by childcare staff is presented in Section 2. Section 3 reports on working with immigrant children in the childcare context. The fourth section includes a discussion of the findings. A conclusion is presented in the final section.

1. Toronto: City of immigrants

With a population of over 2 million inhabitants, Toronto is one of the world's most culturally and linguistically diverse cities. The motto *Diversity Our Strength* describes Toronto's attention to and celebration of the differences of newcomers who come to the Canadian city to live, work and raise families. Toronto can be described as a *language mosaic* where over 140 languages and dialects can be heard. In 2006, over 30% of Torontonians spoke a language other than English or French at home, while 47% had a mother tongue other than English or French (Canada Census, 2006). In 2004, the United Nations Development Program ranked Toronto second, behind Miami, in its *List of World Cities with the Largest Percentage of Foreign-born Population*. Even though Miami had the higher foreign-born population (mostly Hispanic and Haitian), Toronto's foreign-born population is significantly more diverse. More information about diversity in Toronto can be found at: http://www.toronto.ca/toronto_facts/diversity.htm

2. Two-part language documentation

Language documentation: Children's Home Languages

A *Questionnaire* was forwarded electronically to the Supervisors of 800 Toronto childcare centres (licensed by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services) that provide childcare services for some combination of the following four age groups: infants (birth to 18 mos.), toddlers (18 mos. to 2 ½ yrs.), preschoolers (2 ½ to 3 yrs.) and kindergarteners (4 and 5 yrs). Supervisors were asked to download and distribute the *Questionnaire* and send it home with all children. The *Questionnaire* included only one question: *What language or languages are used in your home?* and included a 14-option checklist. All reported home languages were analyzed statistically.

It is acknowledged here that the English-language *Questionnaire* was biased towards those parents who are speakers of English, who have a workable knowledge of English and parents who have a higher level of education and understand how to complete a *Questionnaire*. These parents were more likely than parents with limited proficiency in English, to take the time to complete the *Questionnaire* and to return it to their child's childcare centre.

Findings

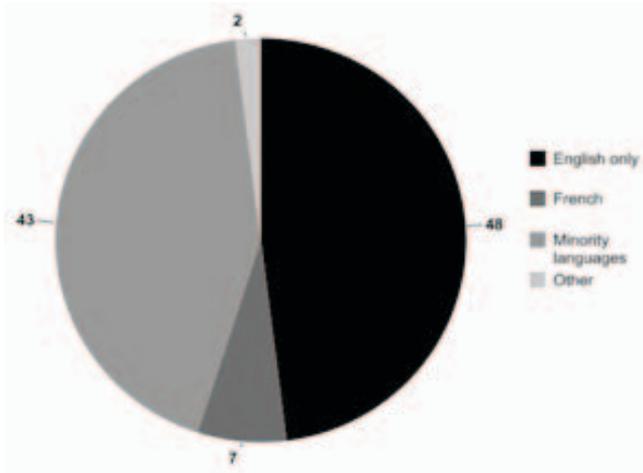
Of the 800 childcare centres contacted, 190 (24%) returned completed *Questionnaires*. *Questionnaire* returns across childcare centres ranged from 1 to 96 and represented 4,110 children. While home language use of non-participating children remains unknown, it can be said with some certainty that the present response rate provides a representative, cross-sectional sample of language use in the childcare population of Toronto.

Language categories

Four categories of home language use emerged from parental *Questionnaire* responses: (a) *English only*, (b) *French*, (c) *Minority languages* and (d) *Other*. Figure 1 shows that *English only* was reported most often as the home language: 48% of responses. The *French* category included both *French only* and *French and English* and totaled 7%. *Minority languages* totaled 43% and included the following four language options: (i) *Minority Language Only*: 10%; (ii) *Minority Language and English*: 32.6%; (iii) *Minority Language and French*: 0.2%; and (iv) *Minority Language and Other*: 0.5%. The final category, *Other*, with a total of 2% included *Aboriginal Only*, *Aboriginal and English*, *Aboriginal and Other*, *American Sign Language (ASL) Only* and *ASL and Other*.

Childcare centre Supervisors explained that the *Minority Language Only* option was most often reported by newcomers and/or recent immigrants, while immigrant parents who were more proficient in English and whose Canadian residency was

Figure 1. Children’s home languages (N = 4011)



longer than 3 years, reported the *Minority Language and English* option. *Minority Language and Other* often (but not always) included the use of two or more minority languages in the home.

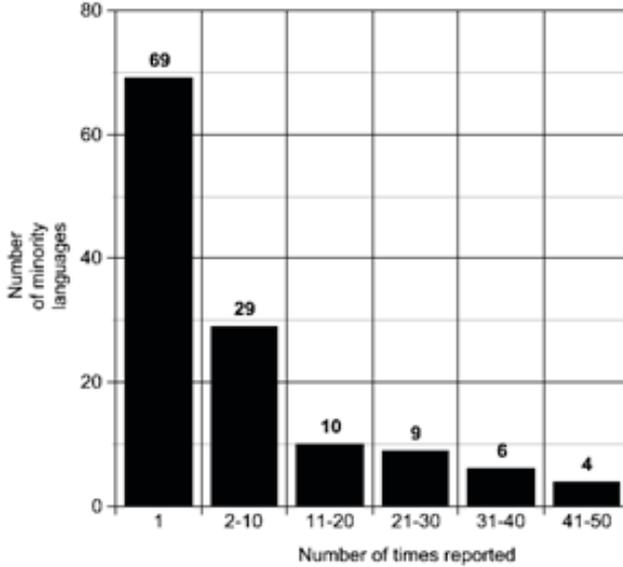
Reported minority languages

Questionnaire responses revealed a total of 129 different minority home languages. Of these, 21 were categorized as *unclear*, due (most likely) to a misunderstanding of the home language options provided in the *Questionnaire*. These responses, although included in the minority language total, did not *name* the home language, but rather reported the country of origin, as in *Tunisia*, or the name of a village, as in *Achanta* (located in the Godavari river basin, Andhra Pradesh, India). Also included in the *unclear* minority language category were responses such as *native*, *our own* or *heritage*, and names which could not be confirmed with *The Compendium of the World’s Languages* (Campbell, 2000).

Frequency of reported minority languages

Of the 129 different minority home languages, two were reported most often: Chinese (363 times), and Spanish (126 times). Five varieties of Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghainese, Hakka and Fujian) were reported and, in some cases, parents noted *Chinese* without variety specification. Figure 2 (which does not include the Chinese and Spanish totals) shows that in general, minority languages were widely distributed. One-time reporting was common, where over half (54%) of minority languages were reported by only one family. Taken together, the first

Figure 2. Frequency of minority languages



two bars of Figure 2 show that the majority (77%) of minority languages were reported between 1 and 10 times. The remaining minority languages (23%) had a reporting rate of 11 to 50.

Comparison of reported minority languages

A comparison of the minority home languages reported in the present study with *non-official* language data from Canada Census (2006) shows that the minority home language picture presented here is reflective of home language use (not to be confused with mother tongue) across major Canadian Census Metropolitan Areas¹ (hereafter CMAs). Table 2 shows the five most frequently reported minority home languages for the Toronto study and for 4 CMAs: Toronto, Edmonton, Vancouver and Montreal.

Noteworthy is the fact that the most frequently reported language (Chinese) appears in 4 of the above lists: in the Toronto study and in 3 CMAs: Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver. Not surprisingly, the closest match (of 3 languages: Chinese, Spanish and Portuguese) appears between home languages reported in the Toronto study and in the CMA: Toronto.

¹ A Census Metropolitan area is defined as a very large urban area (known as the urban core) together with adjacent urban and rural areas that have a high degree of social and economic integration with the urban core. A CMA has an urban core population of at least 100,000.

Table 1. Most frequently reported home minority languages (CMA = Census Metropolitan Area)

| Toronto study | Canada Census 2006: Language Data | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| | CMA: Toronto | CMA: Edmonton | CMA: Vancouver | CMA: Montreal |
| Chinese | Chinese | Chinese | Chinese | Italian |
| Spanish | Italian | German | Punjabi | Arabic |
| Tamil | Portuguese | Tagalog | Tagalog | Spanish |
| Portuguese | Tagalog | Ukrainian | German | Creoles |
| Arabic | Spanish | Arabic | Hindi | Greek |

Distribution of minority home languages across Toronto childcare centres

Minority home language use was reported in all but 4 of the 190 childcare centres that returned parental *Questionnaires*. Parents whose children were enrolled in these 4 centres reported that *English only* was used in the home. Figure 3 shows the significant presence of minority home languages in 186 Toronto childcare centres. The first two bars of Figure 3 show that between 1 and 10 minority languages were present in most (88%) centres while a higher number of minority languages (between 11 and 22) was reported in a small number (12%) of centres.

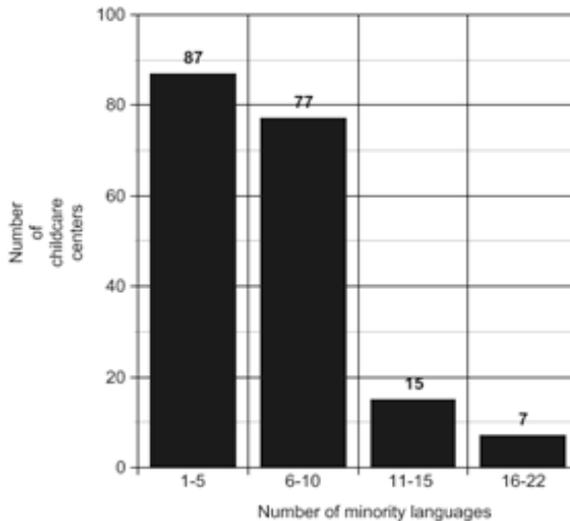
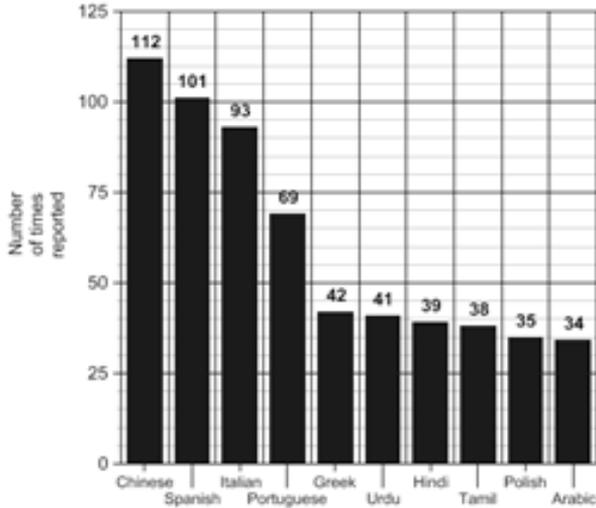


Figure 3. Distribution of minority languages across childcare centres

Figure 4. Ten most frequently reported minority languages known and used by staff



Summary: Children’s home languages

An important finding that emerged from *Questionnaire* responses was that children who spoke minority languages in the home comprised approximately half of the Toronto childcare population. The 129 different minority home languages were widely reported and distributed across childcare centres. In the majority of centres, up to 10 minority languages were reported while larger numbers of minority languages were present in fewer centres. Finally, the minority home language map of Toronto childcare centres presented here is reflective of the minority language presence in the CMA: Toronto, and also, to a lesser degree in other Canadian CMAs.

Language documentation: Staff languages

The Supervisors of 800 Toronto childcare centres that provide childcare services for children between the ages of 18 months and 5 years, were asked to submit (electronically) a *Staff Language List*, a record of languages (in addition to English) known and used by staff who work directly with children. *Language Lists* included a language count only and did not include the number of speakers for each of the languages reported.

Findings

Of the 800 centres contacted, 225 Supervisors submitted *Staff Language Lists*. The total number of staff who work directly with children in these centres was

Table 2. Children and Staff: Ten most frequently reported minority languages across childcare centres

| Children’s home languages | Staff languages |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Chinese | 1. Chinese |
| 2. Spanish | 2. Spanish |
| 3. Tamil | 3. Italian |
| 4. Portuguese | 4. Portuguese |
| 5. Arabic | 5. Greek |
| 6. Italian | 6. Urdu |
| 7. Russian | 7. Hindi |
| 8. Tagalog | 8. Tamil |
| 9. Hindi | 9. Polish |
| 10. Farsi | 10. Arabic |

2,822. Sixty-three different minority languages were reported in the *Staff Language Lists* and 4 language categories were noted: *Minority languages*, *French*, *English only*, and *American Sign Language*. Figure 4 shows that, overall, childcare staff were speakers of one or more minority languages. Not surprisingly, *French* was reported mostly (but not exclusively) in centres with a French-English bilingual program. Reports of *English-only* staff and knowledge and use of American Sign Language were negligible. Figure 5 shows the 10 most frequently reported minority languages known and used by childcare staff.

Linguistic match-linguistic mismatch

Home-Staff minority languages across childcare centres

Linguistic match is defined here as a situation where childcare staff and immigrant children share the same minority language or languages. An example of *linguistic match* would be a Mandarin-speaking staff member working in a centre with a child (or children) for whom Mandarin is his/her/their home language. *Linguistic mismatch* is the reverse - where staff and children are speakers of different minority languages. A Portuguese-speaking child, for example, with an Urdu-speaking staff member would be in a *linguistic mismatch* situation.

Table 2 shows that across centres, there was a significant match between the most frequently reported (children’s) home and staff minority languages. Seven of the 10 languages (shown in **bold**) in each list were the same. Chinese and Spanish were the two most frequently reported minority languages for both children and staff, while Portuguese was listed in fourth place in both lists. Tamil, Arabic, Italian, and Hindi were noted in both lists, though not in the same order.

Table 3. Home-Staff Linguistic match – Linguistic mismatch

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Number of childcare centres | 159 |
| Linguistic match | 73% |
| 1 minority language | 35% |
| 2 minority languages | 19% |
| 3-6-minority languages | 18% |
| Linguistic mismatch | 27% |

Home-staff language mismatch (shown in *italics*) was noted in 3 of the minority languages. Minority languages included in the home language but not in the staff list included Russian, Tagalog and Farsi, while those known and used by staff but not by children, included Greek, Urdu and Polish.

Linguistic match – linguistic mismatch

Home – Staff minority languages within childcare centres

A look at parental *Questionnaire* responses and *Staff Language Lists* from the *same* childcare centres allowed for a within-centre child-staff language comparison. Table 3 shows that in the majority (73%) of these centres, there was some degree of linguistic match between children and staff. A linguistic match of one was noted most often, and a 2 to 6 language match was also reported. Linguistic mismatch was noted in just over one quarter (27%) of childcare centres, where minority languages known and used by staff were different than children’s home languages.

The importance of home-staff linguistic match

The linguistic match found in the Toronto study stands in contrast to findings from two earlier studies (Chang, 1993; Bernhard, Lefebvre, Chud & Lange, 1996) that investigated language match between young children and childcare staff. Even though the California study (Chang, 1996) found a one-language (Spanish) match, where over half of the staff were speakers of Spanish, match with other minority languages (such as Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean) was limited. The Bernhard et al (1996) study, which explored linguistic match in 77 childcare centres in 3 large Canadian urban areas (Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal), found that although staff were speakers of a variety of languages, the majority of minority language children (72%) were in linguistically mismatched situations, where staff and children were speakers of different minority languages.

Both studies conclude that in many (but not all) cases, linguistic mismatch creates difficult situations for immigrant children, affects future school performance, diminishes support for home languages, leads to loss of home languages and makes

communication with parents difficult. To overcome the widespread linguistic mismatch, Bernhard et al (1996) stress the importance of increasing bilingual and bicultural staff in childcare centres.

The benefits of linguistic match can be found in a recent US policy framework (Matthews, 2008), which outlines the needs of babies and toddlers in childcare. One of the key principles in this document focuses on the importance of having childcare staff reflect children's home cultures and languages. Familiarity with children's culture and the ability to communicate in children's home languages, they argue, establishes a continuity between the home and the childcare centre, provides an emotionally secure environment for the children, allows for effective communication with immigrant parents, serves to reinforce the importance of home languages and allows for staff sharing of cultural and linguistic behaviors and practices, such as child rearing, home literacy and culturally distinct socialization patterns.

Two additional benefits of linguistic match are suggested here. When staff know and use children's home languages, they will establish a multilingual and multi-literate environment where home languages are validated, promoted and used in meaningful ways. In such environments, minority language-speaking staff move beyond token acknowledgment of home languages, become language role models for immigrant children and provide the opportunity for all children to witness and appreciate linguistic diversity.

Summary: Staff languages

To summarize, then, immigrant children attending Toronto childcare centres were cared for by minority-language-speaking staff. In the majority of centres there was a match between home and staff minority languages. The question that emerges from this finding is: *To what extent does staff make use of their linguistic resources?* This question will be addressed in the next section.

3. Working with immigrant children

In this section, pedagogical practice adopted by childcare staff, as reported by childcare centre Supervisors, is presented. Supervisors were invited to report (via an online *Survey*) on 3 aspects of pedagogical practice as it relates to immigrant children: level of preparedness, strategies and challenges. Responses were received from 225 centres with a total of 2,822 staff members. Findings are summarized and compared with two earlier studies of pedagogical practice. Comments provided by childcare centre Supervisors appear in *italics*.

Two limitations of electronic surveys are acknowledged here. The first limitation relates to the use of multiple-choice questions whose predetermined responses leave no room for comments and/or additional information. The second limitation concerns the accuracy and comprehensiveness of indirect reporting where childcare centre Supervisors reported on behalf of centre staff.

Preparedness to work with immigrant children

Supervisors reported that overall, staff were *ready* to work with immigrant children. The total number of responses for the categories, *well prepared*, *very well prepared* and *somewhat prepared*, were quite similar (between 28% and 34%), while reports of the *not at all prepared* category were negligible.

Strategies adopted in working with immigrant children

Supervisors reported that the goal of working with immigrant children was to help them *quickly adjust* socially and linguistically. Strategies adopted by staff in their work with immigrant children were grouped into three categories: transition, cultural and home language.

Transition strategies

Transition strategies were reported most often and were described as a time for newly arrived immigrant children to adjust to the new environment and to the host language. The focus of transition strategies was to help immigrant language children *learn English in a short time*. For example, picture symbols of routines (e.g. bathroom, hand-washing, number of children at stations) were displayed throughout the centre. Staff often accompanied these pictures with gestures and simple verbal instructions to help immigrant children become familiar with both the centre routines and the English words used to describe them. In addition to this, childcare staff directly taught English words and phrases to immigrant children. Another widely reported transition strategy was to pair immigrant children with *outgoing English-speaking children*. There were also reports about the importance of *teaching them English* and *discouraging the use of home languages in the centre*. For example children from similar language backgrounds were discouraged from joining the same playgroups.

Cultural strategies

Acknowledgement and recognition of immigrant children's home cultures were categorized as cultural strategies. For example, Supervisors reported that *culturally relevant materials* and *familiar supports*, such as dolls in ethnic costumes, photographs of children in their ethnic dress and music from different cultures were included in childcare centres. Another cultural strategy was to invite immigrant parents to the centre to celebrate ethnic holidays and attend special events.

Home language strategies

A two-part home language strategy was identified and included the following: acknowledgment of home languages, and using home languages in the childcare centre program.

Acknowledgement of home languages

All childcare centre staff reported that they acknowledge immigrant children's home languages. The following verbs were reported by Supervisors to describe home language recognition:

accept, accommodate, applaud, appreciate, assist, celebrate, embrace, encourage, enhance,

enrich, foster, help, honor, nourish, nurture, promote, respect, support, sustain, value.

Use of L1 key words and phrases

The most widely reported *home language* strategy was learning key words and phrases (such as *tired, come with me, thank you, sleep, bathroom*) in children's home languages. Supervisors reported that immigrant parents are asked to provide these words (together with pronunciation aids) when they register their children in childcare. Other home language strategies included making labels (with parental assistance) for centre objects in home languages, learning simple songs in children's home languages and *pairing* immigrant children with staff members who speak the same languages. Also, parents were invited into the centre to read dual language books to children. Finally, some centres included interpreters in meetings with immigrant parents.

Challenges in working with immigrant children

Childcare centre Supervisors reported 3 challenges staff face in their work with immigrant children: communication, needs of immigrant children and programming.

Communication

Difficulty in communicating with immigrant parents and grandparents, due to language barriers, was reported most frequently. Resources to help with this challenge, for example on-site interpreters and translations of newsletters were not used due to prohibitive cost.

Communicating with new arrivals who do not understand or speak English was described as an ongoing concern where staff were often unsure whether immigrant children understood what was being said to them. Childcare staff were concerned about comforting immigrant children during separation from parents and/or grandparents.

Needs of immigrant children

For childcare staff, the needs of immigrant children were two-fold: learning English and making friends. Meeting these interrelated needs was reported as challenging. The urgency of *social and language integration* and *assimilation*

of immigrant children into the social life of the centre was widely reported. Staff also reported that immigrant children need help in making friends since English-speaking children were not always willing to interact with their newly arrived peers.

Programming

Childcare staff reported that it was difficult to find the time to learn about the cultures, languages, customs and practices of the many immigrant children in their centres. Without this information, it was difficult to include a *cultural piece* into their busy programs.

In sum, Supervisors reported that childcare staff were *ready* to work with immigrant children. Their transition strategy had a clear L2 focus where the social and linguistic adjustment of immigrant children was viewed in terms of strategic movement towards English. Token acknowledgment of home languages was widespread. A hasty shift to L2 appeared to be the underlying purpose of using L1 words and phrases in interactions with immigrant children. Communication with newly arrived immigrant children and their parents was reported as problematic. Finally, the display of cultural artifacts in childcare centres was reported as a welcoming strategy and that time limitations did not allow childcare staff to include a cultural component in their programs.

In response to the question about staff linguistic resources, it is clear that staff do *not* use their minority languages to interact with immigrant children and parents. The *pairing* strategy (of children and staff who share the same home languages), reported only once, did not include any mention of actual language use. The strong linguistic match between immigrant children and staff found in the Toronto study and presented in Table 2, then, remained unutilized.

Prior studies

The Pacini-Ketchbaw (2007) study investigated pedagogical practice of one group of ECEs working with ELLs in Victoria and Vancouver, two Canadian cities with large immigrant populations. In this study, preparedness for working with young immigrant children was described as follows: *We are sort of learning as we go along* (p. 229). Like the Toronto study, strategies adopted by these ECEs were L2 focused and attention to home languages was absent: ... *immigrant children require more work and attention from the educators because of... English development* (p. 227-228). Working with new arrivals was described as a *time-consuming task* requiring *sensitivity*. The need for *flexibility, inclusion, tolerance* and *acceptance* was also reported. The study concludes with two recommendations to assist ECEs in their work with immigrant children: (a) a longer adjustment period that would allow immigrant children and their families ... *to express their own needs, provide children with a positive environment, allow children a gradual transition*

to childcare routines, and expose other children to the differences that immigrant families bring to the settings, and (b), the need to provide extra support staff in centres with high numbers of immigrant children.

A study conducted in North Carolina (Hardin, B., Lower, J., Robinson Smallwood, G., Chakravarthi, S., Li, L. & Jordan, C., 2010), a US state which experienced a 274% increase in the foreign-born population between 1990 and 2000, reports that even though a *longstanding recognition of... ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity* is in place among most American ECEs, they too often lack *the necessary tools and training* and are *not adequately prepared to ... meet the needs of ELL children and their families effectively* (p.20). To address this professional training issue, the authors developed *Teachers, Families and Communities* or TFC, a model of ... *high quality professional development focused on improving services for ELLs and their families*. The *Survey of Current Practices* was one part of the TFC model that focused on strategies adopted by ECEs in their work with ELLs.

Strategies adopted by North Carolina ECEs were characterized by an L2 focus and token attention to children's home languages. Staff were anxious for their ELLs to master English: ... *they really want them to learn English* (p. 31) and reported difficulty in working with children and parents who had limited English proficiency: ... *It's frustrating on my part because I can't get them to understand what I'm saying* (p.31). Token acknowledgment of home languages was reported, for example, ... *to support and preserve home language usage* (p. 10) and, as in the Toronto study, L1 words and phrases were used as a stepping stone to children's L2 learning. Upon completion of the TFC model, ECEs decided to adopt two new strategies: (a) give additional attention to the physical space or preparing *more culturally relevant environments* (p. 32) and (b) include ... *home languages in the classroom* (p. 32). Specifics of strategy (b) were not provided and these two strategies were described by the authors as evidence of successful training and preparation and that the participants were now *better prepared to meet the needs of ELL children and their families* (p. 32).

Summary: Working with immigrant children

Concerns, strategies and challenges reported by staff in the two studies reviewed above were strikingly similar to those found in the Toronto study. Staff in all three studies reported the same needs of immigrant children: to adjust to the new environment, to make friends, and to quickly learn English. To meet these social and linguistic needs of immigrant children, staff adopted L2 transition strategies, where attention was focused on the mastery of English in order to help immigrant children fully participate in the life of the centre. Acknowledgment of the importance of home languages was token and symbolic. L1 words were used as a springboard to the learning of English. The inclusion of cultural artifacts in the childcare centre was viewed as an important welcoming and

bridging strategy. Finally, communication with immigrant parents was reported as unsettling and problematic.

4. Discussion

This study has profiled the extent and nature of linguistic diversity in Toronto childcare centres. The high number of children from minority language homes, together with the rich linguistic resources of staff, make the label, *One Centre – Many Languages* an accurate descriptor of Toronto centres. In this linguistically diverse community, bilingual and multilingual staff adopted working strategies that focus on immigrant children's hasty learning of English.

It will be argued here that such an approach is both narrow and restrictive. Information about the *home language lives* of immigrant children, gathered by the author over many years, both formally (Chumak-Horbatsch 1999, 2006, 2008) and informally, reveals that pedagogical practice that focuses on the learning of English disqualifies and denies the language skills, behaviors, activities and events immigrant children experience in their homes. Immigrant children who arrive in childcare centres are active language learners. They are busy acquiring their home language (in some cases more than one language) and many have some contact with the host language. Most young immigrant children know songs and share books (with various systems of writing) in the home language with parents and siblings. Many watch DVDs and television programs in the home language. Many have some awareness of written language and are encouraged by parents to *add* their name to letters written to grandparents and relatives living in the home country. Most immigrant children live in homes where materials written in the home language, such as calendars, newspapers and books are plentiful. Many immigrant children participate in the reading of religious texts and learn to recite prayers in their home language.

Disregard of such experiences sends the following messages to immigrant children: *My home language practices are unimportant. The childcare centre is an English-only zone. and English is far more important than the language I speak at home.* Adoption of L2 focused strategies, driven by the mindset that young immigrant children growing up in English-speaking Canada need only English and that they can manage only one language, denies the bilingual potential of young immigrant children and stands in contrast to current research studies of childhood bilingualism (Baker 2006, Bialystok 2001, Kuhl 2004, Genesee, Paradis & Crago 2004), which have unequivocally established that young children *do* have the capacity for dual language learning and have documented personal, social, cognitive, linguistic and academic benefits of knowing and using two languages.

ECEs then, are encouraged to include immigrant children's *home language lives* in their programs and to heed the *home language mandate* (Nemeth, 2009), a research-based directive that describes support for home languages as a *necessity* (p. 37) and advocates for the inclusion of these languages in classrooms and child-

care centres. Underlying this mandate is the understanding that in their futures immigrant children will need, in addition to English, other languages in order to study and work. (Kennner 2000:xi)

Further, it is important that childcare staff recognize the unique bilingual situation of immigrant children (Genesee, 2010) and attend to their *dual* language needs – their continued development of the home language *and* their learning of the host language. When this happens, immigrant children will grow in two languages, remain connected to their home culture, enjoy the many benefits that come with bilingualism and grow into skilled, contributing members of Canadian society.

Not only immigrant children will benefit when childcare staff adopt L1 focused strategies. English-speaking children who witness daily references to other languages in a positive, additive atmosphere will come to understand and accept language variation. As they discover that objects can have many different names, as they hear and learn about the language habits and practices of their peers, they will be motivated to learn more about the languages represented in their group or centre.

Conclusions

The present study has set in motion the documentation of language in a context that has been overlooked by child language and immigration researchers. It is hoped that similar studies will be conducted in centres across Canada (and beyond) to provide stakeholders with vital information about children's home language patterns and linguistic resources of staff. The *Language Profile* has highlighted two important features of the Toronto childcare community (and most likely other large Canadian cities). Firstly, the childcare community is populated by minority-language speaking children and staff. Secondly, with the widespread adoption of L2 focused strategies, immigrant children's dual language needs are *not* being met.

These two features are viewed here as an urgent call for supporting childcare staff in their work with immigrant children. Providing scientifically based information about young children's dual language learning and about the importance of the home language in immigrant children's bilingual development will ensure that misconceptions and myths do not guide and direct decisions that are made about the language needs of immigrant children. Further, equipping childcare staff with concrete suggestions for meeting the *home language mandate* will ensure that monolingual childcare centres are transformed into multilingual and multi-literate environments where the language lives of immigrant children are included, and where all children grow to understand and accept linguistic diversity. Such inclusive environments, where staff build on and extend the language skills young children bring with them, will convey the following message to children and families:

*Home languages are interesting and important.
Dual language learning is encouraged and promoted.*

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