THE ROLE OF QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS IN SUPPORTING LONG-TERM INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

by

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Abstract

When immigrant families and their children leave their country of origin to live in Canada, they experience a variety of challenges. Many of these challenges can place immigrant children at risk of developmental delay and lower educational achievement. While research suggests that immigrant children and their families benefit from participation in high quality centre-based early childhood programs, there are a variety of barriers that affect immigrant children’s participation in early childhood programs. Immigrant children are less likely to be enrolled in centre-based early childhood programs compared to native children. Early identification of the barriers to participation can help early childhood educators acquire a better understanding of immigrant families’ life circumstances so that they are better able to support immigrant children and their families.
# Table of Contents

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................................. ii

List of Figures .............................................................................................................................................. v

Acknowledgments ......................................................................................................................................... vi

Dedication ...................................................................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................ 1

The Need for Quality Early Childhood Programs .................................................................................. 1

Immigrant Children ................................................................................................................................. 2

Immigrant Children and Quality Early Childhood Programs ............................................................. 3

Rationale ..................................................................................................................................................... 4

Significance ................................................................................................................................................ 5

Theoretical Framework ........................................................................................................................... 5

Project Outline .......................................................................................................................................... 8

CHAPTER TWO: THE REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE ................................................................. 9

The Challenges Faced by Children of Immigrants ............................................................................... 9

Language difficulties ............................................................................................................................... 10

Poverty ....................................................................................................................................................... 11

Adjustment to mainstream society ......................................................................................................... 12

Parental educational attainment ........................................................................................................... 14

Low-wage work with no benefits ........................................................................................................... 14
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory ........................................ 7

Figure 2.1 The Epstein Model .................................................................................. 19
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Canada is a nation that is shaped by immigrant children and families. As a result, the future of the country is dependent on a generation that is more diverse than previous generations. James (1997) posited that “when immigrant children leave their country of origin to live in another country, they leave behind a familiar language, culture, community, and social system.” (p.98). This transitional process can be stressful for both immigrant children and their families. Although different children have varied patterns of acculturation, for many children, this transitional journey can be so stressful that it may result in anxiety, depression, school failure, drug addiction, identity issues, and many other conflicts (James, 1997).

The transition to daycare, pre-school, or kindergarten is an important stage in children’s lives as they move from home to a more formal educational setting. This transition can be an exciting and stressful time for both parents and students. For immigrant children and their parents, this transition can be even more stressful as they have already experienced the additional burden of transition as a result of immigration. Thus, the transition to a school or daycare setting can cause immigrant children and their parents more fear, anxiety, and nervousness in comparison to native-born children and adults.

The Need for Quality Early Childhood Programs

The development, care, and education of children from birth to age five has become increasingly significant in the world, and has received increasing public interest (UN Commission on Human Rights: 46th Session 1990). The increased interest in young children seems to stem from several factors such as, the increase of mothers in the workplace, the realization of the importance of early brain development, the concept of school readiness, and the significance of preschool programs to successful transitions to kindergarten (Karoly & Gonzalez,
In regard to children’s entry to kindergarten, research has revealed that children’s cognitive and language development skills are important factors for their future life success (Takanishi, 2004). Adams and Sandfort (1994) indicated that school readiness would not be achieved unless children have access to high quality prekindergarten and child care programs. Research shows that high quality programs are critical in preparing children to enter the future workforce (Smith, Fairchild, & Groginsky, 1995). Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) stated that high quality preschool programs are even more beneficial for immigrant children who might be disadvantaged compared to their native counterparts. For example, vulnerable children, who experience pre kindergarten programs, have higher levels of success in school, higher motivation, higher aspiration, and higher employment rates (Smith et al., 1995). Dodge (1995) indicated that children’s social competence, such as positive sense of identity and learning to trust others can also be promoted by quality pre-kindergarten programs.

**Immigrant Children**

When children immigrate to a new country, this can often result in enormous stress for young children. This stress may come from leaving a familiar culture, context, and social system, and from entering a new place or leaning a new language (McCarthy, 1998). Aronowitz (1984) suggested that immigrant children have different patterns of adaptation to immigration, and revealed that many immigrant children do well at school (Aronowitz, 1984). Even though they do not share the language and culture of their dominant group of peers, some immigrant children make a fast and positive adjustment, and in some aspects, such as grades and graduation rates, they do better than the majority group at school (Beiser, Hou, Hyman, & Tousignant, 1998). However, some immigrant children find it hard to establish their roles in a new society and culture (Halkias, Fakinos, Harkiolakis, & Katsioloudes, 2008; James, 1997; Ma, 2002). Rambaut
(1995) reported that although nearly all immigrant children seem to encounter considerable social adjustments and academic learning difficulties at the beginning, these problems seem to decrease over time for some children; however, as previously addressed, for some immigrant children, issues continue to persist.

Although some studies show that these challenges appear to be slight and transitory (Aronowitz, 1984), other studies (e.g., James, 1997; William & Berry, 1991) report that immigrant children are at higher risk for anxiety, aggression, low self-esteem, dependency, poor relations with peers, alcohol use, drug addiction, delinquency, depression, and learning difficulties. It was once assumed that immigrant children adapted to the new society easily, but literature shows that immigrant children face huge educational and psychological challenges (Halkias et al., 2008; James, 1997; Ma, 2002; Sam, 1994). This stress is also apparent in immigrant parents as they are responsible for their family, and they must learn a new language to satisfy the immediate needs such as making a living.

**Immigrant Children and Quality Early Childhood Programs**

There is sufficient research demonstrating that immigrant children are more likely than children with native-born parents to experience poverty, low-parental education, and other life stressors in early childhood which can put immigrant children at risk of developmental delay and lower academic achievement once they enter school (Hernandez, 2004; James, 1997; Shields & Behrman, 2004). Research shows that participation in high quality pre-school programs can produce developmental benefits and long-term gains for school performance for young children (Takanishi, 2004). Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) indicated that immigrant children are expected to experience even more benefits from participation in high quality pre-school programs. The availability and success of quality education programs are important factors for supporting long-
term integration of immigrant children in host societies (Halkias et al., 2008). Researchers have found that quality early childhood programs are one of the ways to reduce the gap between immigrant and native children upon their school entry (Dodge, 1995; Leseman, 2007). While the importance of quality early childhood programs has been indicated through a number of research studies (Halkias et al., 2008; Takanishi, 2004), the availability and access of these programs is even more crucial for immigrant children’s school readiness. As educators and researchers, it is imperative to further investigate ways to reduce the existing gap between immigrant and native children upon their school entry.

**Rationale**

I decided to address the topic of immigrant children’s transition to kindergarten due to the challenges that I encountered as an immigrant student in Canada when I moved to Vancouver from Iran approximately two years ago. Although I made this transition as an adult, I contend that children who experience the acculturation process must also encounter many challenges. Considering the increasing population of immigrant children in Canada, it is important to identify the challenges that these children face during the process of acculturation. Although there is a large body of research on the process of acculturation in adult immigrants’ worlds (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Veddar, 2006; Cabigting, 2002; Nesdale & Mak, 2000; Stevens, Pels, Vollebergh, & Crijnen, 2004), little research has been done on the acculturation experiences of immigrant children (Turney & Koa, 2009).
Significance

Since Canada is a nation that is significantly shaped by immigrants, it is important for educators, researchers, and policy-makers to identify the challenges that immigrant children encounter during the process of acculturation, and to effectively and respectfully respond to their particular needs. Early identification of their challenges is of great significance since investing in the mental health, well being, and educational achievement of these children correlates with investing in the future of the country. Thus, schools must take steps to develop immigrant children’s well being and academic achievement. In this graduating project, I examine the research literature that addresses the issues immigrant children face during the process of acculturation when they transition to kindergarten. Entering kindergarten can be challenging for all children and, in particular, for recent immigrant children who have already experienced major transitional journeys. It is important for educators, researchers, and policymakers to identify the challenges immigrant children and their family encounter at children’s entry to kindergarten to fully respond their needs and facilitate this transitional journey.

Theoretical Framework

In this paper, I draw from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model. Bronfenbrenner’s (1999) perspective of human development indicates that:

Human development takes place through processes of progressively complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biospsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended period of time. (p.5)

Based on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, Ma (2002) indicated that “the range of individual, family, and environmental factors implies that children’s adaptation to immigration is
a complex process that requires considerable attention to the interactions among immigrant children, their families, and communities in which they reside” (p. 397). Ma concluded that the social and emotional well-being of immigrant children is influenced by many different factors, such as a child’s individual characteristics.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) divided these characteristics into three types of characteristics: Demand, Resource, and Force characteristics. As example of a demand characteristic is age. As such, the age of an immigrant child upon his/her arrival to Canada will influence the developmental outcomes of the child. Resource characteristics refer to the resources that an immigrant child possesses. A child’s familial context, his or her parents’ adjustment to the new environment, and the social and economic status of the parents are all examples of the resources which can influence immigrant children’s developmental outcomes. Force characteristics refer to immigrant children’s inner motivation, self-confidence, and perseverance. Although some children may receive equal resources, there may also be disparities in developmental outcome due to the differences in their force characteristics.

As previously stated “human development takes place through processes of progressively complex reciprocal interaction” (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p.5). These interactions take place through different systems. For example, the microsystem refers to the interactions among the child and the most immediate environment of a child, such as his or her family and school. The mesosystem refers to the interaction among different Microsystems, such the interactions between as family and school. The exosystem refers to the interaction between the contexts in which child is not situated, but these contexts can affect a child’s developmental outcome. For example where parents work is a context, in which the child is not situated in, but it influences child’s parents and therefore, it influences child’s developmental outcome indirectly. The
macrosystem is a context that includes members who share value or belief systems. Interactions among and between each of these systems are influential in the healthy development of immigrant children. Figure 1.1 illustrates the interaction among and between systems that, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), shapes a child’s development.

**Figure 1.1 Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory**

Sabatier and Berry (2008) suggested that interactions between child and family members, particularly parents, play an important role in healthy adjustment of children to a new society. It is important for educators to understand the experiences that these children undergo in the process of acculturation. Thus, educators should develop positive and effective interactions with these children and their families. Although the process of immigration is often a difficult
experience for immigrant children, their parents, teachers, community members can collaborate to improve the potential negative effects children experience due to the immigration experience by providing the resources that immigrant children need to develop in healthy ways.

**Project Outline**

In this chapter, I presented the theoretical model, framework, rationale, and purpose that form the foundation of this paper. In the following chapter, I present a review of the current research on the issues that immigrant children encounter, and the impact of quality early childhood programs on successful transitions of these children to formal educational settings. In chapter three, I connect research findings to classroom practice and provide a plan for a workshop for early childhood educators on the challenges faced by new immigrant families and children and how educators might help families access the child-care subsidy. In chapter four, I share my conclusions, and address implications for teachers. In that final chapter, I also suggest possibilities for further research.
CHAPTER TWO: THE REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE

In this chapter, I present a review of the empirical research findings that address: the challenges that immigrant children and their families face upon their arrival in Canada; the impact of these challenges on children’s development; challenges and barriers that these children face in the process of acculturation to the mainstream culture; and how we, as educators, early childhood care providers, researchers and policy-makers can facilitate this process. With a growing number of immigrants in Canada, children from families with linguistic minority backgrounds form a substantial and rapidly growing proportion of the school population (Ma, 2002). While it can be argued that investment in healthy development and successful academic achievement of these children is investing in the brighter future of the country, a thorough review of the literature, reveals a paucity of research that addresses the challenges that immigrant children and their parents face upon their arrival in Canada, and in particular, immigrant children’s experiences of early learning settings; and the ways in which early childhood educators can support young immigrant children’s successful transition to school.

However, while there is little research on the needs of young immigrant children and their families, what little research there is reveals themes critical to young children’s school success. These include: i) challenges faced by children of immigrants; ii) continuity of services between families, school, and communities; iii) intervention programs; and vi) teachers’ perspectives to effectively respond the unique needs of immigrant children.

The Challenges Faced by Children of Immigrants

Existing research demonstrates that the life circumstances of immigrant children influence the development and educational achievement of young children (Hernandez, 2004; James, 1997; Sam, 1994; Shields & Behrman, 2004). Immigrant children and their families
confront a variety of challenges and life stressors, during the process of migration and adapting to a new life in a new country. Such stressors can put young immigrant children at risk of developmental delay and poor academic achievement once they enter school. (Hernandez, 2004; Magnuson, Lahaie & Waldfogel, 2006). There is growing support for early care and education of young children in their early years of life (UN Commission on Human Rights: 46th Session 1990). Research shows that participation in high quality early childhood programs can reinforce development and academic achievement of children in the future (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Magnuson et al., 2006). As they experience more life stressors (Hernandez, 2004), immigrant children “seem to benefit as much as, if not more than, children from other groups” (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011, p.82). It is important for researchers, early childhood educators, and policymakers, to identify the challenges that immigrant children face and the stressors that place them at risk of developmental delay and decreased academic success. Identification of these problems can endow early childhood providers with the awareness they need to plan culturally appropriate and effective interventions.

There is a wide range of socioeconomic and cultural factors in immigrant children’s families that can negatively impact immigrant children’s well being and development (Hernandez, 2004; Shields & Behrman, 2004). Although some children experience none of these risk factors or they cope well with the stressors (Aronowitz, 1984; Hyman, Beiser & Vu, 1996), others struggle. Some of these critical risk factors include:

*Language difficulties*

Linguistic isolation in immigrant families can be a huge barrier for many children and families as they struggle to make their way in a new country (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Shields & Behrman, 2004). Because: “…Learning a language, especially, during adulthood can be a
long-term process…” (Hernandez, 2004, p.31), many immigrant parents speak their native language at home with the result that many immigrant children speak a language other than English at home and may not develop the English language skills necessary for academic success. Shields and Behrman (2004) asserted that, despite the potential advantages of bilingualism, low English fluency could limit immigrant families’ ability to access social services, including educators and health care providers.

Because of their English language skills, immigrant children may have a hard time learning and communicating with teachers and other children. Teachers, in turn, may not be able to speak the child’s heritage languages. James (1997) indicated that some immigrant children might go through a “Silence Stage” due to their inability to communicate in the English language. Immigrant parents may also experience barriers in communicating with organizations such as school. Minority immigrant parents are reported to have less parental involvement at school (Lahaie, 2008).

Poverty

Hernandez (2004) reports that poverty can negatively impact childhood development due to inadequate nutrition and health care and a lack of educational resources. Hernandez (2004) adds that poverty rates for children in immigrant families are substantially higher than for children in native families. Immigrant families are more likely to be low income, and parents typically have less education and are more likely to be unemployed or hold part-time jobs at minimum wage. Many studies show that poverty often means lack of access to quality care and education resources, which can lead to children’s poor development and school failure (Hernandez, 2004; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Shields & Behrman, 2004).
Adjustment to mainstream society

Leaving one’s home, family, and a familiar place can be traumatic. As a first generation immigrant, I understand the deep sense of loss, loneliness, confusion and fear together with excitement that a new immigrant feels. When immigrants enter the host country, they experience a “lack of access to the language, daily knowledge, and common practices, and necessary skills for the mainstream society” (Rong & Preissle, 1998, p.83). “Even the simplest tasks become onerous and forbidding when background knowledge and familiarity are absent” (Goodwin, 2002, p.164). Shields and Behrman (2004) indicated that immigrant children are not immune to these life-altering situations. When immigrant children leave their country of origin to live in another country, they leave behind a familiar place, social system, and culture. Igoa (1995) noted that adjustment is particularly difficult for children emigrating from politically, religiously, or economically unstable environments. Children from refugee families may experience anxiety, fear, shock, or trauma.

Research asserts that there are different styles of acculturation to the new country. It is important for educators to differentiate between different styles of acculturation to better facilitate immigration experiences. Pawliuk, Grizenko, Chan-Yip, Gantous, Mathew, and Nguyen (1996) defined acculturation as “… the changes individuals undergo when they come into contact with another culture, may entail changing behaviors, values, attitudes, and identity” (p.111). James (1997) stated that:

The impact of this change as part of the acculturation process is most likely to experience by children in the school settings. Lack of acceptance by peers and teachers may foster a sense of being different, thus replacing the sense of belonging that the child may have felt
previously. The more distinctly the culture, the more intensely this difference will be felt. (p.100)

Research indicates that the process of acculturation can be stressful for immigrant children and may result in poor developmental outcomes and possibly school failure (Hernandez, 2004; Shields & Behrman, 2004). Pawliuk et al. (1996) stated that “immigrant children face two general issues whether to maintain the cultural identity and characteristics of the culture of origin, and whether to participate in the larger society” (p.111). Pawliuk et al. (1996) divided the responses that immigrant children and their families have to the process of acculturation into four types: assimilation, or the rejection of original cultural identity in favor of joining the larger society; integration, or participating in the larger society while retaining the original cultural identity; separation, or retaining the original cultural identity and rejecting larger society; and marginalization, or rejecting both the original cultural identity and participation in the larger society.

Berry, Kim, Minde, and Mok (1987) found that immigrant children who adapted to the new culture in an integration style of acculturation experiences less stress. They also found that those who acculturated through assimilation, separation and marginalization experienced higher levels of stress. Pawliuk et al. (1996) reported that there is strong relationship between the well being of immigrant children and their parents’ style of acculturation. They also added that the difference between the style of acculturation between children and their parents could cause a clash of values between parents and children. James (1997) indicated that those immigrant children and their parents who are exposed to stressors as a result of the acculturation process, will likely be more vulnerable to social, emotional and academic problems.
Parental educational attainment

Hernandez (2004) indicated, “parental educational attainment is perhaps the most central feature of family circumstances relevant to overall child well-being and development, regardless of race/ethnicity or immigrant origins” (p.17). Immigrant parents are reported to have lower levels of parental involvement in their children’s schooling (Lahaie, 2008) and parents with lower educational attainment are less able to assist with their children’s school work (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). They are also less able to communicate with school personnel and other organizations. Parents with limited educational attainment tend to have jobs with lower wages and are less able to provide their children with the resources they need (Hernandez, 2004). Thus, children of immigrant families whose parents have little education are more likely to experience negative developmental outcomes (Hernandez, 2004).

Low-wage work with no benefits

Nightingale and Fix (2004) reported that with the growth of industry, technology and communication in North America, many jobs need skills and higher education. As a result, there is a wage gap between those with high levels of education and skills and those without. Many immigrant parents, who do not possess the skills and education they need to find a well-paying job in the new country, may find themselves at the bottom of the wage gap. Not knowing the language of the host country is another factor, which makes this gap wider (Shields & Behrman, 2004). Hernandez (2004) stated that:

Just having a parent who can find full-time year-round work is strongly associated with parental education levels, so too are child poverty rates. Children with lower education parents have parents who are less able to find full-time year-round work, and the work they find pays less well. (p. 30)
Crowded Households

Immigrant children are more likely to be raised in crowded households with parents, siblings and other relatives. Hernandez (2004) indicated that:

Immigrant families are more likely to have another person in the home such as siblings, grandparents, other relatives, or non-relatives. Overcrowding is strongly correlated with parental education and poverty across racial/ethnic and immigrant generation groups, suggesting the need to double up with relatives or non-relatives to share resources. This is especially true for immigrant-origin groups. (p. 33)

Hernandez (2004) presented a wide range of statistics demonstrating that many immigrant children are exposed to one or more of the risk factors discussed above. Hernandez (2004) also proposed that immigrant children who experience these risk factors are more likely to experience negative developmental and educational outcomes than children with native-born parents. Takanishi (2004) declared that such conditions could place young children at risk, as living with hardship is linked to lowered cognitive development among this demographic.

A strong high quality early education program is one way to bridge the achievement gap for immigrant children and prepare them for school entry. Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) indicated that high quality early childhood settings narrow the gap between less advantaged and more advantaged groups of children in terms of academic achievement, developmental outcome and school readiness. They also reported that high quality preschool programs could produce cognitive and socio-emotional benefits at the time of school entry. They suggest that high quality preschool programs generates educational benefits such as high elementary grades, decreased use of special education, reduced rates of grade repetition, higher rates of high school graduation, improved economic and social outcomes in adulthood, lower rates of crime and reduced welfare
use. According to Karoly and Gonzalez (2011), immigrant children who participate in quality early childhood programs stand to benefit even more than native children. For example, centre-based early childhood programs can help immigrant children with the process of adaptation to a new socio-cultural environment that might be different from the one at home. They help immigrant children learn the rules of the school setting, teach them how to play cooperatively with other children, and assists them in understanding how to communicate with teachers or other authority figures outside the family.

Quality early childhood programs can also improve the language proficiency of immigrant children who speak a language other than English at home (Magnuson, Lahaie & Waldfogel, 2006). In their study, Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) also reported the benefits of participation in early childhood settings for immigrant parents. For example, immigrant parents who enroll their children in early childhood programs can learn about the institute’s rules, norms, practices and procedures, schedules, classroom holiday celebrations, etc. Parents are more likely to meet with teachers and engage with other parents and other staff and in this way they have opportunities to widen their circle of acquaintances. Ultimately this process can help immigrant parents and families integrate into the culture of the host country.

While there is sufficient literature demonstrating the benefits of quality centre-based early childhood programs for immigrant children (Magnuson, Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006; Takanishi, 2004), Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) found evidence indicating that immigrant children are more likely to be in parental care only, and they are less likely to be enrolled in preschool programs that are school-based or centre-based compared to children with native-born parents. Karoly and Gonzales (2011) pointed out that this participation gap can be explained by several different factors such as low income, parents’ low education, non-working parents,
language barriers and knowledge gaps related to time in country and immigrant perceptions. Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) divided the participation barriers into four categories: *structural barriers, informational barriers, bureaucratic barriers, and cultural barriers*. Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) stated that: “A number of *structural* factors can affect affordability, availability, and access to ECE programs for disadvantaged families more generally” (p.86).

Takanishi (2004) indicated that immigrant parents with lower income are less likely to be able to pay for centre-based or school-based early childhood programs, and subsidy does not cover all the eligible children (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Lack of suitable subsidized spaces, lack of programs in immigrant communities which meet their need for bilingual and culturally competent staff, not having a car or driving license of the new city for new immigrant parents, and language barriers are all barriers that immigrant parents confront and which may impede their participation in early childhood programs (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) also reported on informational and bureaucratic barriers to participation of immigrant families in early childhood settings. Many immigrant parents are simply unaware of the existence of early childhood programs that their children could attend (Adams & McDaniel, 2009).

According to Karoly and Gonzales (2011) “the predominant method of sharing information within immigrant communities is word of mouth, not formal information provision” (p.87). Immigrant parents talk about the challenges they encounter with the enrolment process such as completing paperwork, long waiting lists, filling out the forms for subsidized programs and documenting income level (Adams & McDaniel, 2009). These procedures can be difficult for immigrant parents who do not have sufficient working knowledge of the English language, may have a lower level of education and are new to the country and unfamiliar with the system.
Thus, “many immigrant parents prefer to pay for unsubsidized centre-based or informal care by a trusted kin member or acquaintance because there would be fewer hassles and immediate enrolment” (Kirmani & Leung as cited in Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011, p.87).

Another reason for lower enrolment rates of immigrant families is the *Cultural* barrier. Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) indicated that some immigrant parents from some cultures prefer that their children be cared for at home. The varying comfort levels parents have interacting with child-care providers can also create barriers to participation (Goodwin, 2002). Research shows that many immigrant parents’ involvement at their children’s schools depends on the opportunities made available to them by the school or school staff (Adams & McDaniel, 2009). If child-care providers are not culturally sensitive and responsive, do not know the language of an immigrant family that has difficulty speaking English, or are unresponsive to immigrant families, the parents may not feel welcome (Goodwin, 2002).

The issues discussed above do not represent the sum total of all the issues relevant to the education of immigrant children. They are, however, key issues that have significant implications for early childhood educators and policy-makers.

**Continuity of Services between Families, School, and Community**

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) proposes a child’s development arises from dynamic transactions between a child and the different contexts in which he or she is living. Bronfenbrenner viewed the individual, organization, community, and culture to be influential in human development and human development is taking place through the interactions of individual with the larger societal framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Analyzing the relationship between family, school, and the community, Epstein (2001) has developed a model based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979)
framework. The Epstein model (Figure 1) consists of overlapping spheres representing the family, school, and community. Each sphere in the Epstein model is directly involved in the child’s development and educational outcome. Figure 2.1 illustrated the overlapping spheres representing the family, school, and community. Epstein and Sanders (2002) suggested an approach to continuity of services that focuses on the development of the child and places the value on the importance of school, family and community. This approach aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological System Theory that the dynamic relationships between children, their families and communities are what shape young children. According to this model, in order to improve the educational achievement of immigrant children, it is important for family, school, and community to work together. The interactions between these three spheres influence the developmental outcome and educational achievement of immigrant children.

**Figure 2.1 The Epstein Model needs**

![Diagram of overlapping spheres representing Family, School, and Community]

In his report on Early Education for immigrant children, Leseman (2007) also mentioned that centre-based education programs with strong parental involvement are the most effective methods of early intervention compared to other models of early education programs. Epstein and Sanders (2000) asserted that most studies on the influence of families, of schools, or of communities were conducted as if they were separate or competing contexts. In this study, Epstein and Sanders (2000) indicated that:
The simultaneous influence on children of schools, of families, and communities is undeniable, but too often the connections across contexts are ignored in theory, in research, in policy and in practice. Indeed, most social scientists who study one environment, rarely, give attention to another. For example, sociologists who study schools rarely examine how school practices affect family attitudes influence children or how families and communities affect the schools, similarly, sociologists who study family rarely examine feature of children’s preschool, elementary, middle, and high schools or conditions in communities that affect family life. (p.285)

Bouilion and Gomez (2001) also indicated that the disconnection between family, school, and community is a challenge in responding to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse population. Bouilion and Gomez (2001) suggested exploring the overlapping spheres of influence on children’s learning and development, and bring together school and outside school communities, encouraging the use of distributed expertise to develop a mutual beneficial solution.

**Intervention Programs**

As mentioned in chapter one, researchers have tried to find ways of reducing the gap between immigrant and native children, regarding educational success. Attention focuses on early childhood interventions, as a critical way of helping to reduce inequalities in skills upon school entry and helping immigrant children entering school better prepared (Magnuson et al., 2006). Studies have shown that children’s skills upon entering kindergarten and their achievement at the end of third grade are important factors of their future life (Takanishi, 2004). However, young children of immigrant, due to the barriers they confront upon their arrival in Canada, are less likely to participate in formal preschool education settings than native children.
(Magnuson et al., 2006; Shields & Behrman, 2004). Due to the crucial nature of preschool education for cognitive and linguistic development and preparation for school entry, particularly for young immigrant children, initiatives have been made across immigrant-host countries. For example, the ministry of education in Netherlands funded a campaign to encourage immigrant parents to enroll their young children in preschool care (Eurydice, 2003/04).

Based on the European Commission survey on Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe (Eurydice, 2003/04), some European countries, such as Spain and the United Kingdom, have clear policies regarding preschool education, with legislation ensuring sufficient places for immigrant children in early education programs. In Denmark, and Sweden, young immigrant children are given extra support in preschool education programs to facilitate acquiring language skills prior to school entry (Eurydice, 2003/04). In the United States, federally funded programs, such as “head start,” promotes preschool education in poor families (Takanishi, 2004). These programs legislated the involvement of low-income parents to prepare their very young children for successful school entry.

In British Columbia, the government invests in research to best support children’s optimal development in early years. For example, the Strong Start B.C. early learning programs provide school-based learning services for adults and their young children, aged birth to five, at no cost to families (Strong Start Website). The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) is another research program at The University of British Columbia, which is “contributing to new knowledge in early childhood development.” (HELP website). The University of Victoria’s Unit for Early Years Research and Development is another research network in British Columbia, which “focuses on the importance of leadership and local engagement in support of diversity, and social equity in the early years” (University Of Victoria’s Unit for Early Years Research and...
Development). The program aims to provide support for early childhood educators by focusing on provincial goals and sustaining leaders within the community in addition to providing educational and developmental support for children.

**Educators’ Perspectives**

Any discussion about educating immigrant children must include an examination of the teachers charged with their care and schooling. Are teachers prepared to respond appropriately to the needs of the new immigrants entering their classrooms? (Goodwin, 2002, p.157)

Rong and Preissle (1997) indicated that while the school settings are more diverse than the previous century, teachers continue to be mainly white, female, and monolingual. Research suggests that teachers have parochial attitudes towards children from linguistically and culturally different background and they prefer to teach them like themselves in environments in which they are familiar (Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992). Nieto (2002) suggested that teachers may not be aware of special needs of immigrant children and may choose to adopt a “color-blind” approach in the misguided thought that such behavior is appropriate and fair. Many studies, also, demonstrates that educators still believe that the only language appropriate in the school settings is English. For example, Lanehart (1998) found that many teachers imply that only English is appropriate for school, and thus, students from immigrant families may infer that their home language and culture are less important. When educators do not value children’s home language and culture, children are likely to reject and abandon their heritage language (Wong-Fillmore, 2000). Lee and Oxelson (2006) cited the observation by Franquiz and de la Luz Reyes (1998) that “a common misunderstanding among teachers is that only teachers who are proficient in the children’s heritage language can support children’s heritage language maintenance.
To the contrary, studies have shown that positive effects are also found when teachers express interest in the heritage language and culture and treat it as a resource” (p.456). In the same study by Lee and Oxelson (2006), teachers reported that in the United States of America the pressures of educational policies and the punitive nature of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 make it difficult for them to address the needs of their children. Many teachers explained that they cannot support children from culturally diverse background because they “. . . just don’t have time to do anything about it” (p.567).

As parents in immigrant families are less likely to participate in their children’s schooling due to the barriers discussed earlier, unfortunately, rather than relating the lower levels of school participation to barriers parents encounter, ECE staff may assume that immigrant parents are not engaged in their child’s development or social progress. This perception may have detrimental effects on the child’s learning and development (Lahaie, 2008).
CHAPTER THREE: MAKING CONNECTIONS TO PRACTICE

A Workshop for Early Childhood Educators

In the previous chapter, I presented a review of the empirical research findings that addressed the challenges that immigrant children and their families face upon their arrival to Canada and the role of preschool in facilitating the acculturation process. Research shows that due to these challenges, immigrant children are at risk for developmental delay and poor academic achievement once they enter school (Hernandez, 2004; Magnuson, Lahaie & Waldfodel, 2006). Research also indicates that immigrant children, as they experience more life stressors (Hernandez, 2004), seem to benefit from participation in early childhood programs even more than native children. In order for immigrant children to benefit from such programs, it is important for early childhood educators to identify the challenges immigrant families face upon their arrival to a new country. Identification of these problems can provide early childhood educators with the awareness they need to plan culturally appropriate and effective interventions.

One way to provide educators with the awareness they need to work successfully with immigrant children is through informative workshops. In this section, I provide a plan for a workshop for early childhood educators on the challenges faced by new immigrant families and children in British Columbia and how they might help families access the Child Care Subsidy. As I am an Iranian immigrant student living in British Columbia, I will be focusing on the needs of Iranian immigrant families, one of the dominant immigrant cultures in North Vancouver.

Planning for success

In order to have the greatest success in planning a workshop for families, it is important that particular factors are taken into account in the planning process. To allow for positive turnout, timing and location are both important factors to consider. The workshop will be held in
the evening, as that time is usually most convenient for the majority of educators’ work schedules. The workshop will take place at the North Vancouver Community Centre which provides adequate space and appropriate comfortable seating for 15-20 participants.

*Workshop goals and objectives*

The goal of the workshop is to provide information to early childhood educators about the life circumstances of immigrant families. Specifically, it will emphasize the challenges that immigrant families and children encounter when they arrive in British Columbia, in the hope that early childhood educators may rethink any assumptions they may have about immigrant children and families and consider ways in which they can support immigrant families and children in their early childhood education centres. To that end, workshop participants will also gain information about the *Child Care Subsidy* application process in order to be able to provide immigrant parents with the information that they need to apply for the subsidy. At the end of the workshop, it is my hope that early childhood educators will have a better understanding of the challenges and life stressors that immigrant families and their children experiences when they arrive in British Columbia to better assist immigrant families and their children. They will also acquire some information on the subsidy application process to assist immigrant families who are not aware of the existence of the subsidy or who struggle with the application process due to a lack of background knowledge or language proficiency.

*Workshop agenda*

The agenda of the workshop will be displayed to educators on a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix A) that I am going to use in combination with a brochure (Appendix B) providing information for early childhood educators and parents about the subsidy application process. Since the dominant immigrant culture in North Vancouver is Iranian, the brochure is written in
both English and Farsi. The printed brochures and Child Care Subsidy application forms will be displayed on the tables for early childhood educators to explore. The brochure, in two languages, will also be available at the North Vancouver Community Centre, the North Vancouver Library, and Iranian grocery stores for immigrant families to become aware of the existence of the subsidy and subsidy application process.

Upon entering the workshop, educators will have an opportunity to explore and view the Child Care Subsidy brochures and subsidy application forms displayed on the tables. Allowing the early childhood educators to explore the brochure and subsidy application forms will allow them to gain some familiarity with the content I will be discussing in my presentation. As they explore, I will mingle with the early childhood educators, discussing the topic of the presentation, brochures, application forms that are displayed and answering any questions that they may have. Once all the educators have arrived and had a chance to socialize and explore the brochures and the application forms, I will ask them to be seated for the presentation:

- First, I will introduce myself and the topic of the presentation;
- Explain the purpose of the presentation;
- Ask educators their thoughts and their perspectives towards immigration, acculturation process, immigrant families and their children’ challenges upon their arrival to a new country;
- Lead a brief discussion of their thoughts;
- Further explain the purpose of the presentation before beginning the PowerPoint presentation
At the end of the presentation, I will allow adequate time for questions and discussion. The brochures on the subsidy application process, displayed on the tables, and a hand-out highlighting the important points of the PowerPoint presentation will also be provided to take home.

Organization and costs

The list of potential costs involved in planning and implementing the workshop is included in Appendix C. The workshop is designed to be approximately two hours long, with time for questions and socializing. The information is provided in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, which requires a computer, projector, and a screen or blank, light-colored wall. As Internet access will be required for the PowerPoint presentation, the facility will need to be checked for this, or wireless Internet access may need to be purchased. Many community centers have this equipment and service, however if they need to be rented, the cost would need to be considered when planning the workshop. An alternative to a PowerPoint presentation could be the use of an overhead projector or a lecture-style workshop with handouts.

Advertising the workshop

Several methods can be used to make early childhood educators aware of the workshop. Workshop event information can be posted on the community center website or a public Facebook event can also be created. The benefit of Facebook is that if one educator attends the event, his/her colleagues will see the event and become aware of the workshop. Printed materials may include bulletins provided at the child-care centers of North Vancouver and hanging posters on the Community Center bulletin board and in child-care centers.
Evaluation and follow-up

The effectiveness of a workshop lies not only in its presentation but also how the provided information affects those in attendance. To assist in planning future workshops, it is beneficial to gain perspectives from attendees. Through their input, alternations can be made to future workshops to better meet the needs of the target audience. One way to gain feedback is through the use of conversations with educators following the workshop. As a more formal method, the use of a feedback form (Appendix D) provided to the early childhood educators at the end of workshop could be used. An alternative method that could be implemented in the use of an electronic version of the feedback form that could be emailed to early childhood educators, completed at home, and then submitted anonymously. In addition, ongoing conversations with early childhood educators throughout the school year would help provide information about the effectiveness of the workshop. Support from the community members could also be useful in delivering the message of the workshop. The audience for my workshop will be early childhood educators of North Vancouver child-care centers, as well as any other individual interested in learning about the challenges immigrant families and their children face.

The appendices accompanying this paper include a PowerPoint presentation consisting of thirteen slides (Appendix A); an informative brochure in both English and Farsi on the Child Care Subsidy (Appendix B); a list of potential workshop costs (Appendix C); and a sample feedback form (Appendix D).
CHAPTER FOUR: REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The literature on the development and school readiness of immigrant children and the challenges that immigrant children and their families encounter when they arrive in Canada has provided the field with valuable research that has added to our understanding of how schools, families, communities can work together to provide an effective and successful start to school for young children. While this project focused on our developing understanding of the important elements affecting immigrant families’ transition into the new culture, the project has also identified the need for further research that addresses the unique needs of immigrant children if we, as a society and as early childhood educators, are to help these children transition successfully into society and school.

As a result of my work experiences in two child-care centers, I have developed an understanding of the urgency of educators’ and policy-makers’ support in helping immigrant children successfully integrate into a new society. I believe that quality early childhood programs are crucial to the well being of young immigrant children and their families. It is in my belief that as subsidized quality early childhood programs become more common in Canada, immigrant parents and children will feel the benefits.

Areas for Further Research

Although there is an extensive body of research on the challenges that immigrant children and their families encounter in a new country, most of this research has been conducted in the United States and few studies have occurred in Canada and British Columbia. I also noticed that there is lack of research on teachers’ perspectives, and there is little research on the “voices” of immigrant children. Furthermore, there is a large gap in the literature that provides pre-school
teachers and early childhood providers with information and strategies for working with immigrant children.

**Dissemination of Knowledge**

This project investigated the challenges that immigrant children and their families encounter when they transition into school. In my own work as an early childhood educator and due to my experiences as an immigrant, I have developed a passion for working with immigrant children and their families to assist them in adjusting to a new country. Through my experiences and my research for this graduating paper, I have become an advocate of subsidized quality early childhood programs and intervention programs for immigrant children and their families. I am hoping to share the findings of this literature review with other early childhood educators, educational assistants, parents, and whoever is interested to learn about the challenges immigrant families face upon their arrival to Canada. I plan to conduct the workshop, discussed in chapter three, for early childhood educators on a regular basis.

I am passionate about assisting in-need immigrant families with the Child Care Subsidy application and to that end I plan to submit the Child Care Subsidy information brochure in Iranian magazines published in North Vancouver, and print and distribute the brochures in a variety of locations (e.g., North Vancouver community center, the North Vancouver library, Iranian grocery stores).

**Conclusion**

Immigrant children and their families confront a variety of challenges and life stressors, during the process of migration and adapting to a new life in a new country. Some of these risk factors include language difficulty, poverty, adjustment to the mainstream society, parental educational attainment, low-wage work with few or no benefits and crowded households. Such
stressors can put young immigrant children at risk of developmental delay and poor academic achievement once they enter school. (Hernandez, 2004; Magnuson, Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006). Research indicates that participation in high quality early childhood programs can reinforce immigrant children’s development and academic achievement in the future (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Magnuson et al., 2006). It is important for researchers, early childhood educators, and policy-makers, to identify the challenges that immigrant children face and the stressors that place them at risk of developmental delay and decreased academic success. Identification of these problems can endow early childhood providers with the awareness they need to plan culturally appropriate and effective interventions.

While there is sufficient literature demonstrating the benefits of quality centre-based early childhood programs for immigrant children (Magnuson, Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006; Takanishi, 2004), immigrant children are less likely to be enrolled in preschool programs that are school-based or centre-based compared to children with native-born parents (Karoly and Gonzalez, 2011). Informational and bureaucratic barriers to participation of immigrant families in early childhood settings are factors that prevent immigrant families from participation in early childhood programs. Many immigrant parents are simply unaware of the existence of early childhood programs that their children could attend (Adams & McDaniel, 2009). Immigrant parents face challenges with the enrolment process such as completing paperwork, long waiting lists, filling out the forms for subsidized programs and documenting income level (Adams & McDaniel, 2009). These procedures can be difficult for immigrant parents who do not have sufficient working knowledge of the English language, may have a lower level of education and are new to the country and unfamiliar with the system. In this graduate project, I offered holding informative workshops for early childhood educators in order to provide them with information
on the challenges that immigrant children face with the hope that these workshops give early childhood educators a better understanding of the challenges that face immigrant children and their families. Additionally, since immigrant families are reported to have lack of knowledge and difficulties with the *Child Care Subsidy* application, creating an informative brochure is offered as a way to help parents and early childhood educators become aware of the *Child Care Subsidy* and the subsidy application process.
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Appendices

Appendix A

PowerPoint presentation

The Challenges Immigrant Families and Children encounter upon arrival in British Columbia

Anahita Keshavarzi
Early Childhood Educator
Outline of Presentation

• What challenges do new immigrant families encounter when arriving in British Columbia?
  • Language difficulties
  • Poverty
  • Adjustment to mainstream culture
  • Crowded households

• How can Early Childhood Educators help?
  • Child Care Subsidy

In order for early childhood educators to assist and support immigrant families and their children it is important that they have a better understanding of the challenges and life stressors that immigrant families encounter when arriving in British Columbia.

- Language difficulties
- Poverty
- Adjustment to mainstream culture
- Parental education attainment
- Crowded households

Language Difficulties

- Linguistic isolation in immigrant families can be a huge barrier for many children and families (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Shields & Behrman, 2004)
- Due to their limited English language skills, immigrant children may have a difficult time learning and communicating with teachers and other children
- Immigrant parents may also experience barriers in communicating with institutions such as schools
- Shields & Behrman (2004) asserted that low English fluency can limit immigrant families’ ability to access social services including the Child Care Subsidy
Poverty

• High poverty rates in immigrant families can cause poor developmental outcomes for children in school (Hernández, 2004)

• Immigrant families are more likely to have:
  ➢ Low-income occupations
  ➢ Less education

Adjustment to mainstream culture

• Immigration can be a traumatic experience due to anxiety, stress, and trauma (Igoa, 1995)

• Even the simplest tasks can be challenging (Goodwin, 2002)

• My experiences as a first generation immigrant
  ➢ The feelings of loss, fear, confusion, and excitement
Parental Educational Attainment

• Immigrant parents are reported to have less education (Lahaie, 2008).

• They are often less able to assist with their children’s schooling (Lahaie, 2008).

How can Early Childhood Educators help?

It is important for early childhood educators to have a better understanding of the challenges and life stressors that immigrant families and their children experience when they arrive in British Columbia.

One way that early childhood educators can give practical help is by providing clear, information on how to obtain the Child Care Subsidy.
What is the Child Care Subsidy?

- Monthly subsidy payments to help families obtain affordable, accessible, safe, quality child care. The payment is offered to assist eligible B.C. families with the cost of child care.

http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/subsidy_promo.htm

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Child Care Subsidy
Assisting immigrant families with subsidy application

*Please see the brochures on the tables*

- Existence of subsidy?
  - Many immigrant parents are unaware of the existence of subsidy

- Complex paperwork
  - Lack of background knowledge
  - Language proficiency
  - Lower level of education
  - Unfamiliar system
Now that we know the challenges of recently immigrated families, it is important to assist these families by providing them with support and resources.

Thanks for listening!

References


Appendix B

What is childcare subsidy?
The Province of British Columbia is committed to helping families obtain affordable, accessible, safe, quality child care. Child Care Subsidy is a monthly payment to assist eligible British Columbia families with the cost of child care. Monthly subsidy payments vary depending on your family’s circumstances.

Childcare Subsidy Contact

Mailing Address
Child Care Subsidy Service Centre
PO Box 9953 Stn Prov Govt.
Victoria BC V8W 9R3

Phone
Greater Victoria: 250 356-6501
BC Toll-free: 1 888 638-6622

Fax
Toll Free Fax 1 877 544-0699

Telephone Device for the Deaf
In Vancouver: 604 775-0303
BC Toll-free: 1 800 661-8773

Business hours
8:30 am - 4:30 pm
Monday to Friday
(excluding statutory holidays)

Financial help with your Childcare Costs
How do I get Childcare Subsidy?
You can apply for childcare subsidy by visiting:
www.mcl.gov.bc.ca/childcare/subsidy_promo.htm

1. Complete an application form which can be found on:
   www.mcl.gov.bc.ca/childcare/pdf/cs_2990.pdf
2. Your Childcare Provider must complete and sign a form which can be found on:
   www.mcl.gov.bc.ca/childcare/pdf/cs_2736.pdf
3. Mail or fax all the required documents to:
   Child Care Subsidy Service Centre
   PO Box 9953 Stn Prov Govt
   Victoria, BC V8W 9R3
   Fax: 1.877.544-0699

4. After application submitted:
+ The Childcare Subsidy Service Centre will review your application to determine if it is complete and whether you are eligible to receive Child Care Subsidy.
+ If eligible, you and your child care provider will receive an authorization in the mail describing the length of time and amount of Child Care subsidy you are eligible to receive.
+ If you are not eligible, you will receive a letter explaining the decision with further information on how you may request a review of this decision.

Eligibility
To receive child care subsidy you must meet the following criteria:
1. You must be a resident of BC.
2. You must be one of the following: a Canadian citizen, a Permanent Resident of Canada, a Convention Refugee, or a Person in need of protection.
3. You must have an eligible child care arrangement provided in BC. Eligible child care arrangements include:
   Licensed (a family home, group child care centre or preschool);
   + Registered Licence not required;
   + In the Child's Own Home.
4. You & your spouse (if applicable) must have one of the following reasons for needing childcare:
   + employed or self-employed;
   + attending an educational institution or enrolled in distance education;
   + seeking employment or participating in an employment-related program (only one parent can be seeking employment);
   + have a medical condition that interferes with your ability to care for your children;
   + have a child attending a licensed preschool;
   + have been referred by a Ministry of Children and Family Development or Dedicated Aboriginal Agency social worker.
5. You and your spouse must establish a financial need (if applicable). Proof of income will be required.

What if I don’t speak English or I have accessibility needs?
Immigrant settlement services will help immigrant families with their needs regarding childcare centres and childcare subsidy. The child-care subsidy will pay for Translation Services are available upon request.

North Shore Multicultural Society
#207 – 123 East 15th Street
North Vancouver, B.C. V7L 9P7
604.988.2931
E-mail: office@nsms.ca
www.nsms.ca

Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia
530 Drake Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 2H3
604.684.7498
E-mail: issbc@issbc.org
www.issbc.org
چگونه می‌توان پارانتالیز گذاری از تک‌کود دریافت کرد؟

برای درخواست پارانتالیز از تک‌کود می‌توانید از طریق نردهای ریز اخوان کنید:

1. www.mcf.gov.ca/chilcrearsubsidy_promo.htm
2. برای درخواست پارانتالیز از تک‌کود اینترنتی لینک
3. قائم قرار دهید، راهنمای ویژه برای پارانتالیز از تک‌کود
4. مطالعه محتوای وب‌سایت www.mcd.gov.ca/chilcrearsubsidy_promo.htm
5. مطالعه محتوای وب‌سایت www.mcd.gov.ca/chilcrearsubsidy_promo.htm
6. مطالعه محتوای وب‌سایت www.mcd.gov.ca/chilcrearsubsidy_promo.htm
7. مطالعه محتوای وب‌سایت www.mcd.gov.ca/chilcrearsubsidy_promo.htm
8. مطالعه محتوای وب‌سایت www.mcd.gov.ca/chilcrearsubsidy_promo.htm
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11. مطالعه محتوای وب‌سایت www.mcd.gov.ca/chilcrearsubsidy_promo.htm
12. مطالعه محتوای وب‌سایت www.mcd.gov.ca/chilcrearsubsidy_promo.htm

Child Care Subsidy Service Centre
PO Box 9953 Stn Prov Govt Victoria BC V8W 9R3
1877 544 0889

North Shore Multicultural Society
#207 – 123 East 15th Street
North Vancouver, B.C. V7L 2P7
604 988-2921
E-mail: office@nsms.ca
www.nsms.ca

Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia
530 Drake Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 2H3
604 684-7490
E-mail: iss@issbc.org
www.issbc.org
Appendix C

Appendix C: List of potential Expenses

- Facility rental
- Equipment rental
  - Tables and Chairs
  - Audio/visual equipment
- Wireless internet service
- Food and beverages
- Cups, plates & utensils
- Photocopying costs
Appendix D

Example of a feedback form

Thank you for attending this workshop on the challenges and barriers faced by immigrant children and their families. If you would be willing to take the time to fill this feedback form, I would greatly appreciate it. I feel that feedback from workshop participants is valuable because it allows me to make ongoing adjustments to my presentations to better meet the needs of our families. Thank you again for taking the time to respond to these questions.

1. Did you find this workshop beneficial?

2. What did you learn that you found most useful for you?

3. Where they any confusing areas, or areas you feel could have been better clarified?

4. Do you feel that like knowing the challenges that immigrant families’ face would be valuable to you?

5. Are you willing to participate in providing feedback immigrant families’ needs as an early childhood educator?

6. Do you have any questions that were not answered in today’s session?

Additional comments (Feel free to continue on reverse):