THE ROLE OF AN INTERCULTURAL EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM FOR REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT CHILDREN ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR L1 AND L2 SKILLS AND ABILITIES

FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

Background: The importance of accommodating the learning needs of these students in general and younger learners in particular was recognized by Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) in its recommendation to extend funding for English as a second language, English language deficiency, and French language upgrading to children in junior and regular Kindergarten. While funding became available for young English language learners in Alberta in 2007, there was scarcity of research in the area of curriculum and pedagogy appropriate for preschool-age children that result in balanced bilingualism achieved outside of the well-known Heritage Language programs.

Purpose and Research Questions: The purpose of the study was to examine the benefits of an intercultural early learning program that is supportive of children's first language while also facilitating English language learning that is culturally sensitive and inclusive of the newcomer families' perspectives on children's L1 and L2 development. The main research questions explored were: **1)**What approaches to working with ethnocultural communities and parents contribute to the development of an intercultural early learning program that strengthens the L1 for ELL children?**; 2)** What approaches to curriculum and pedagogy lead to a genuine inclusion of both ELL children's home languages and cultural traditions, and the English language and Canadian cultural traditions in early learning programs as a basis for ELL children's simultaneous development of L1 and L2?; **3)** Does the intercultural early learning program have the effect of strengthening the L1 for ELL children compared to children in English-only preschools?; **4)** Does the L1 component weaken or strengthen children's gains in English? Are there advantages or disadvantages for L2 development?

Study Design: The study's design was a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. To address research questions 1 and 2 aimed at developing an effective model of the involvement of ethnocultural communities and parents in the development of the early learning program that can be sustainable and could, therefore be used as a model in the development of other such programs within the Province of Alberta, a participatory action research design was utilized. To address research questions 3 and 4 regarding the use of their home language and measuring the effectiveness of the program, a repeated measures design (i.e., Time 1- Time 2 design) was utilized.

Participants and Setting: Twenty-one children and their families participated in the research. Children were from the following L1 backgrounds: Somali, Arabic, Nuer (Sudan), Tigre (Ethopia), Dinka (Sudan), and Serbo-Croatian. The largest L1 group was the Somali children (N=10), and the analyses of L1 development were conducted only with these children. All children were attending the intercultural early education program at a public elementary/junior high school in Edmonton. The program took place four mornings a week with an English-speaking classroom teacher. In addition, three first language facilitators (FLFs) (Arabic, Somali and Kurdish) were part of the classroom staff and thus children who spoke these languages received support for their language and culture as part of the program, and all children were able to engage in intercultural and multi-linguistic experiences.

Qualitative data collection methods employed in the study were: 1) ***Focus groups*** conducted with three groups of participants: a) the community members and parents of the children enrolled in the intercultural early learning program at the research site; b) the classroom teacher, the FLFs, and the school administrators at the research site, and c) all stakeholders including community serving agencies and policy makers; 2) ***Field notes*** taken during and after the focus groups and were used as an ongoing source of data; 3) ***Focused Observations*** of classroom behaviors and practices as they occurred that served as a basis of on-going discussions regarding curriculum and pedagogy; 4) ***Research Conversations*** allowed for participants from diverse cultures to work together and assess their actions on an ongoing basis.

Quantitative data collection methods employed in the study were: 1) ***20-minute spontaneous speech sample*** in L1 and L2, recorded on video or audiotape, and transcribed according to the CHAT format; 2) ***Edmonton Narrative Norms Instrument*** - ENNI; 3) ***Parental questionnaire*** on language use in the home, parental attitudes about maintenance of the home language and culture, and about integration in Canadian society.

Research Findings

Findings Regarding Approaches to Working with Ethnocultural Communities and Parents

- Family and community participation was essential in the development of the program from setting up the goals for the program to providing feedback on children's learning. However, only when parents saw that their ideas were not only welcomed but actively sought and implemented in the classroom practice, did they became willing to share their cultural knowledge and childrearing traditions.
- The involvement of cultural brokers and FLFs diminished the barriers of communication between parents and English-speaking school staff and made the sharing of cultural practices possible on an ongoing basis. Their involvement was also crucial in making newcomer families feel comfortable in the classroom and understanding their role in their children's educational experiences in the host country.
- The program was instrumental in communicating to parents the relationship between the first and second language development and the importance of home language for both children's cognitive and social development. Thus it empowered and mobilized the communities in sharing the responsibilities of maintaining the home language and educating their young within the school system.
- Parents reported children's increased use of their L1 at home with both the parents and their siblings including the use of new vocabulary; positive changes in the children's self-confidence, ethnic and linguistic identities; and their ability to be with other children. They also reported changes in their own use of the mother tongue with their children at home and in their interactions with their children which have become more playful and involved a greater participation of fathers in children's lives in and outside school.

Findings Regarding Approaches to Curriculum and Pedagogy

- The use of children's home languages in the classroom by members of their own communities not only allowed for cultural and linguistic continuity but also affirmed children's first languages as languages that, along with English, belong in school as opposed to being used only in the privacy of their home.
- The classroom physical environment as well as the cultural and linguistic diversity of the teaching staff was central to meeting the set goals of the program. The presence of the FLFs as regular teaching staff was essential to children's meaningful exploration of culturally relevant ways of using cultural artifacts and learning the traditions and vocabulary related to their use while they are also learning English and expectations related to being a student in Canada.
- Building on children's strengths as they were identified by the classroom team provided opportunities for challenging the dominant discourse of deficit that have constructed children of immigrants as needy, having fewer skills than their native peers, as well as having language deficiency or lacking alignment in social capital.
- Providing sufficient planning time for the classroom team was essential for intercultural understanding to develop among its members as a basis for genuine collaboration and negotiation of cultural meaning that over time became shared. This allowed for new approaches to working with young children to emerge, including: identifying events common or essential to life and rooted in the three cultural communities' traditions to become topics for classroom exploration; using common culturally relevant pedagogical vehicles such as storytelling and singing; finding a balance between children's needs and strengths based on cultural expectations; and using a function-based approach to learning all languages in the classroom.
- The practices that emerged and were shaped by the fusion of cultures provided numerous examples of "practice-based evidence" that the education field as a whole should be engaged in so that new understandings of the complex worlds in which both young children and early childhood educators navigate on a daily basis can be developed.

Findings Regarding Language Development of Low SES Refugee Children

- The most salient information from the questionnaire was that children fell into two groups: (1) bilinguals – children who grew up speaking both English and the L1, and in some cases, their L1 abilities were mainly passive by the time they were in the early education program, and (2) beginner L2 – children whose first consistent and systemic exposure to English was in the early education program.
- The English data show there is contrast between how advanced the bilingual group were in spontaneous conversational English versus in more academic English (narratives). These children had been learning English since birth or a very young age, and yet they were not, as a group, significantly more advanced in their performance on the ENNI than the beginners. This suggests that the skills needed to perform on a task relevant to children's literacy and general academic development were learned in the early learning classroom mainly. Furthermore, many children in both groups performed much lower than age-expectations on the ENNI, and thus, they still have to be given some time in kindergarten to develop these narrative skills to eventually be on a par with their native-speaker peers.
- The differences between the beginner and bilingual groups suggest that the intercultural early education program had a different impact on beginners than on the bilinguals. For the beginners, they seemed to be focusing their energies on learning the new language, English, and during this preschool year, their Somali abilities diminished somewhat or remained stagnant. (However, their Somali abilities did not diminish to the level of the bilinguals). For the bilinguals, it appeared that the early education program gave a boost to their Somali, possibly because they came into the program already speaking English, but coming from homes where a shift to English was firmly rooted, and L1 loss was beginning to take place. The increase in their use of Somali word types and decrease in code-switching density from time 1 to time 2 both point to the possibility that attending this program helped them restore some of their L1 abilities.

Recommendations and Future Research

- By removing some of the major barriers to newcomer families with young children such as limited space; complex enrolment processes; language services; transportation; a shortage of bilingual, bicultural providers and culturally competent staff, and inappropriate parental and community involvement strategies, the program provides an example of how such programs can advance social inclusion for newcomer children and their families.
- The program demonstrated that the intercultural approach to early childhood education requires parallel changes in the wider social world—that is the provincial initiatives to better meet the needs of young refugee and immigrant children. It provided an example of how community and families' cultural needs as well as their high aspirations for the education of their children in Canada could be addressed in a sensitive and comprehensive manner through collaborative grass-roots efforts. However, longitudinal studies are needed to establish long-term effects of such programs on children's school performance.
- The L1 and L2 development results showed that even after attending the program for a year, neither the beginners nor the bilinguals consistently performed according to English native-speaker age-based expectations. This finding has implications for evaluating the language abilities of minority children who have had early education experiences. An interesting area for future research would be to investigate the extent to which minority children's limited skills with narratives are a function of their incompletely learned English, their cultural experiences, or both.

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Final Report

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Societal Context

Between 2001 and 2006, Canada's foreign-born population grew by 13.6%. This was four times faster than the Canadian-born population, which increased by 3.3%. About 9.3%, or 103,700, of the 1.1 million new immigrants who came to Canada between 2001 and 2006 settled in Alberta (Census Canada, 2006). This was an increase from the last census in 2001, when 6.9% of newcomers settled there. At this time, 16.1% of the population in Alberta is composed of immigrants and refugees. According to Statistics Canada, the city of Edmonton's population, of which 22.9% are newcomers to Canada, is even more diverse than that of Alberta and Canada (19.8%) as a whole.

Three significant trends point toward an increasingly diverse population due to the growing numbers of immigrant and refugee families who are coming to and living in the Edmonton region. First, the number of refugees that annually come to Canada has increased from 28,097 in 1996 to 35,768 in 2005. Second, the majority (86.4%) of the refugees who arrived in Canada in 2005 were from three main source areas—Africa and the Middle East (32%), Asia and the Pacific (33.1%), and South and Central America (21.3%) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006, p. 29). Third, the present strong economy in Edmonton leads to migration of immigrant and refugee populations from other provinces in Canada. The impact of these trends on the education system is substantial. Alberta Education statistics show that 45,134 K-12 students in 2006–2007 were coded ESL learners. The importance of accommodating the learning needs of these students in general and younger learners in particular was recognized by the Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) in its recommendation to extend funding for English as a second language, English language deficiency, and French language upgrading to children in junior and regular Kindergarten. While funding became available for young English language learners in Alberta in 2007, there was scarcity of research in the area of curriculum and pedagogy appropriate for this age that result in balanced bilingualism achieved outside of the well-known Heritage Language programs.

Social Inclusion, Multicultural Education in Canada and the UN Convention of the Rights of a Child

Sen (2000) states that an inclusive society provides equality of life chances and offers all citizens the opportunity to participate meaningfully and actively in shared experiences and attain fundamental well-being. "The move to social inclusion is eroded when the rights of minorities are not respected and accommodated and minorities feel 'othered'" (Saloojee, 2005, p. 191). Viet-Wislon (1998) distinguished between a weak version of the social exclusion discourse (i.e., focusing on changing the excluded and integrating them into the mainstream society), and a strong version of the social inclusion discourse (i.e., focusing on the power relationships between those who are excluded and those doing the exclusion). He associates a state commitment to multiculturalism with the weak version of social inclusion and the discourse concerned with rights, citizenship, and restructuring the relations between racialized communities and the institutions of the dominant society with the strong version of social inclusion (Saloojee, 2005).

Linked to the 1971 federal multiculturalism policy, multicultural education's emphasis on majority students' learning about other cultures has been criticised for solidifying boundaries between majority and minority cultures (Kirova, 2008), fostering isolation, and replicating racialized forms of injustice (Wideen & Bernard, 1999). As a response to such critique, intercultural education seeks to include all students. It aims to create a common space, a *vivre ensemble* (McAndrew, 1996), based on mutual understanding and recognition of similarities through dialogue. However, the recent movement towards human rights has modified the contours of intercultural education to include differences (ability, regional, economic, sexual, etc.) within as well as between cultural groups. This movement has also brought about questions of education in historically marginalised languages. Thus, also unlike multicultural education, intercultural education discourse in Canada is faced with the examining its relation to the human rights discourse.

Particularly important for the program developed as part of the study was the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child. According to Article 29 (c) of the Convention, education

should be directed at development of respect for the child's parents, cultural identity, language, and values; for the national values of the country in which the child is living and for the country of origin; and for civilizations different from his or her own. In regard to children who belong to ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities, Article 30 asserts,

> In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

In spite of ongoing debates about the interpretation of the articles of the Convention (May, 2008), it is evident that if applied to the Canadian context, the inclusion of minority children should go beyond the preeminent position of the English and the French in society. Thus, the Convention challenges the preservation of the national and linguistic duality that is assumed to create a foundation for a shared Canadian identity. Churchill's (2002) analysis of the origins of the federal programs for official languages education and its impact on identity, diversity, and citizenship revealed that the impact of the official languages model upon major population subgroups—such as recent immigrants, whose home languages are neither English nor French, and the aboriginal peoples who were marginalized before the official languages law—has been that "identity needs have not been addressed by the official languages in education model" (p. 43). As a result, even when heritage language instruction is available for recent immigrants on a short-term, voluntary basis in the schools, it is not sufficient to maintain immigrant languages and cultures beyond the second and third generation. Day's (2000) even more critical view was that "integration within multiculturalism in a bilingual framework is best seen as a creative reproduction of the colonial method of strategic simulation of assimilation to the Other, and not as an overcoming or break with this past" (p. 197).

The use of an official language as a tool of assimilation is defined by some authors as linguistic and cultural genocide. "Education through the medium of majority languages or colonial languages has been the most powerful assimilating force for both indigenous children and immigrant/refugee minority children, thus likewise having a homogenizing function" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, pp. 201–202). In addition, the pursuit of educational goals pertaining to global competitiveness rather than human rights perpetuates linguistic colonialism or "lingoracism" (Gounari, 2006, p. 77) in many immigrant-receiving countries. Homogenization through the English language in particular as an outcome of globalization has acted as a "killing agent" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. xi) of diversity. Thus, by not aligning with the UN Convention, public education has not accommodated the needs of the children from minority communities nor supported the development of their talents and capacities so they can become valued, respected, and contributing members of society. In the context of international economic restructuring that demands a common international language and a common set of knowledge and skills, the linguistic and cultural capital of minority children and their parents and communities has been systematically invalidated.

Theoretical Groundings

Bourdieu's (1990) notion of *habitus* was central to the understanding of inequalities in power between dominant and subordinate groups, and particularly in examining how the habitus of the dominant group is recognized as *cultural capital* that is valuable to society, while the personal and collective habitus of the subordinate group is not. May (2008) draws clear parallels between Bourdieu's explanation of habitus and its relation to cultural capital, and the "views of ethnic minority cultures and practices (including the speaking of a minority language) as regressive and 'premodern' " (p. 48). The discourse of deficiencies or deficits of immigrant children, parents, and communities is thus a manifestation of the unequal power relationship between the dominant and subordinate groups in society. This discourse has constructed the children of immigrant parents as entering school with fewer skills than their native peers (e.g., Magnuson, Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006) as well as having language deficiency or lacking alignment in social capital (e.g., Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Roopnarine at al., 2006). Similarly, immigrant parents

have been conceptualized as uninvolved in school, in need of social and cultural capital, and unable to provide children with an appropriate education (Arzubiaga et al., 2009).

The understanding of power relationships between typically marginalized (minority) cultures and the dominant (Western/White) culture is important in exploring the complex relationships that exist between race, culture/ethnicity, and learning, especially in regards to defining the educational needs and goals of young refugee children. This understanding, along with the sociocultural-historical theory of learning (Leontiev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991; 1998), provided the theoretical foundation for the development of the program as part of the study. The program's intent was to provide an alternative to the developmentalism inherent in early childhood practices guided by Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Unlike the efforts made by mainstream child development research to identify certain scientific values based on which the universal, decotextualized features of children can be described (Göncü et al., 1999), this theoretical perspective emphasises the importance of culture and context in children's development.

The implications of the sociocultural-historical theory of learning and development for the development of the study can be summarized as follows:

- The sociocultural-historical theory allowed for examining the multidimensional relationship between culture, development, and power. In the societal context in which the study took place, the dominating universalist and/or decontextualized view of child development had created a discourse of deficits associated with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children and families participating in the project that had to be contested on an ongoing basis. The practice of constant interrogation of history of the socio-political arrangements of power and access in which the individuals participating in the project were situated allowed all participants to better understand how these arrangements have led to privileging particular forms of social and cultural capital.
- The sociocultural-historical theory allowed the study to focus on cultural practices as a unit of analysis of culture of both the (minority) ethnic groups' culture and the (majority) school culture. The analysis of the activities, interactions, and the social others such as teachers and peers within the respective cultures in the daily life of a classroom allowed for understanding of how cultural practices are embodied by the individuals participating in the project who exhibited distinctive interactive patterns.
- Because the concept of change is central to the sociocultural-historical theory, it allowed all participants in the project to adopt a non-essentialist approach to cultural differences. This, in turn, allowed the creation of a hybrid or third space as one of negotiation of cultural space that offers opportunities for practices in and between varied modes of meaning, or a fusion of cultures. Such space is seen as a space where multiple, even contradictory cultural identities can exist. From this perspective language too was seen as an intentional and intersubjective space between users.

Background: Pilot Project

The pilot project evolved as a result of a unique partnership between the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB), the Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative (MHBC), the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN), the University of Alberta, and ABC Head Start, along with key community partners: Somali, Sudanese, and Kurdish.

The purpose of the pilot was to explore the feasibility of an innovative intercultural preschool program that would be characterized by a genuine responsiveness to the unique circumstances and early learning needs of newcomer children and parents in Edmonton. The community involvement aspect of the project was funded by the Community Partnership Enhancement Fund (CPEF).

The program had the following goals as defined by all stakeholders represented in the steering committee:

- To be genuinely responsive to the unique early learning needs of newcomer children growing up in a particularly complex social/economic and multicultural context;
- To provide cultural and linguistic continuity for young newcomer children through both first language and English instruction;
- To be culturally sensitive and inclusive of the newcomer families' perspectives;
- To be holistic, strength-based, and equity-based, building on the combined expertise of government organizations, community partners, communities, and researchers;
- To be collaborative, inter-relational, and interdependent so that mutual learning becomes fundamental to success of the project.

Key Findings from the Pilot Project

- As a community-driven project whose overriding focus was to be responsive to the parents and children of the ethnocultural communities involved in the program, it served as a means for building community capacity.
- The interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral make-up of the steering committee allowed for differing perspectives and systems to work together in the creation of a unique program, and helped to broaden the understanding of all members regarding the scope of this undertaking.
- Diversity, both between and within ethnocultural communities with respect to the focus on home language development, was observed. Some factors that contribute to these differences were related to the length of time the community had been in Canada, their pre-migration experiences, and their internal migration within Canada.
- The settlement experience of communities facilitated or hindered the ability to recruit leaders to the school setting. Human resources need to be nurtured long term.
- Parents showed great commitment to gathering together to both share and gain knowledge. However, more parental and community involvement in the day-to-day classroom activities was desired.
- Tensions existed between the goals of some of the systems the stakeholders represented. Support in the form of meeting and planning time, in-service opportunities, facilitated discussion, and time for people from different communities of practice to gather was required in order to negotiate tensions that arose.
- Tensions at a classroom level included:
    - Creating a classroom environment that was less based on Western developmentally appropriate practices and more open to other culturally specific and relevant practices and traditions, including the choice of classroom materials and room set up, and establishing a classroom routine that honours culturally appropriate ways of structuring young children's time (i.e., snacks, play, toilet) rather than imposing a rigid structure based on "school time"
    - Developing curriculum and classroom pedagogy that involved ethnocultural community members and parents' on-going input.
- Sustainability, that is, continuation of the program beyond the first year pilot phase, was a central concern to both the ethnocultural communities and policy makers.

The following questions for further research were identified:

- How do parents and families who come from small and vulnerable communities continue to build a sense of confidence and ability to contribute to their children's education?

- How do ethnocultural communities articulate and communicate their practices, believes, expectations, and aspirations for their children's education so that these have an impact on early learning curriculum and pedagogy?
- What mechanisms are in place within the public school system that allow for a full inclusion of alternative learning practices that have a potential to contribute to the development of a genuine intercultural school environment?
- What role can the school system play in the development and maintenance of children's L1? What does a shared responsibility between school, home, and community look like when children's simultaneous L1 and L2 language development is concerned?

It was these questions (above) that provided the impetus for the research funded by the ACCFCR, which focused on the linguistic outcomes of children enrolled in the program as they relate to the unique intercultural, multilingual curriculum and pedagogy developed in the program.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of the study funded by the ACCFCR was to examine the benefits of an intercultural early learning program that is supportive of children's first language while also facilitating English language learning, and that is culturally sensitive and inclusive of the newcomer families' perspectives on children's L1 and L2 development.

Research Questions

The study aimed at addressing the following research questions: **1)**What approaches to working with ethnocultural communities and parents contribute to the development of an intercultural early learning program that strengthens the L1 for ELL children?; **2)**What approaches to curriculum and pedagogy lead to a genuine inclusion of both ELL children's home languages and cultural traditions, and the English language and Canadian cultural traditions in early learning programs as a basis for ELL children's simultaneous development of L1 and L2?; **3)**Does the intercultural early learning program have the effect of strengthening the L1 for ELL children compared to children in English-only preschools? ; **4)** Does the L1 component weaken or strengthen children's gains in English? Are there advantages or disadvantages for L2 development?

Method

Sample and Setting

Due to the nature of the early learning programs offered by the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB), the study used convenience sampling. The children participating in these programs qualify if they are 3.5 years old by September 1st. In order for the schools that offer early learning programs to qualify for additional funding for ELL students, these children have to be either born to parents who are recent immigrants and refugees to Canada, or to be born outside of the country. Thus children's age and the family circumstances were the two characteristics that were common to all participants in the study.

The program at the school where the study took place built on and expanded the practice established during the pilot project described above, and therefore continued to offer instruction in children's home languages by L1 instructors on a daily basis. Both children's L1 and English were the media of instruction roughly 50/50. Unlike the pilot program, however, the group also included children who were native speakers of English. It is important to note that while the existing *Heritage Language* programs in Canada, Europe, and the USA (Cummins, 1992; Tavares, 2000), and *Dual Language* programs/*two-way bilingual immersion* programs (Olson, 2007) typically have similar configuration of L1 and L2 language instruction time, the program was unique in that it involved instruction in four languages: Somali, Arabic (Sudanese dialect), Kurdish, and English.

Study Design

To address the complexity of the research questions, the study's design was a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. To address research questions 1 and 2 aimed at developing an effective model of the involvement of ethnocultural communities and parents in the development of the early learning program that could be sustainable and could, therefore, be used as a model in the development of other such programs within the Province of Alberta, a participatory action research design was utilized. To address research questions 3 and 4 regarding the use of their home language and aimed at establishing the effectiveness of the program a repeated measures design (i.e. Time1- Time 2 design) was utilized.

Research Activities

*The research activities related to research **question 1*** were as follows:

- Identifying key partners (e.g., cultural brokers, community leaders, and/or elders, etc.) within the three participating communities: Kurdish, Sudanese, and Somali.
- Facilitating and documenting communities' needs self-assessments as they relate to children's learning and development.
- Facilitating goal-setting within each community as well as negotiating common goals among the three communities for the early learning program at the research site.
- Fostering parents' sense of self-efficacy through validating culturally specific practices and helping them understand how such traditional practices support their children's learning in the context of the Canadian education system.
- Fostering parents' sense of self-efficacy through involving them in parent-education activities intended to stress the importance of the development of L1 for their children's cognitive, social, and emotional development as well as for children's higher level of development of English (L2).

*The research activities related to research **question 2*** were as follows:

- Facilitating and documenting the reflective processes involved in the English-speaking teacher, the first language facilitators (FLFs), the school administrators, and service providers' ongoing involvement with children, families, and communities as part of the early learning program at the research site.
- Facilitating and documenting the development of intercultural competence in teaching, support, and service-delivery staff.
- Facilitating and documenting culturally specific ways of assessing/demonstrating strengths in young children.

*The research activities related to research **questions 3 and 4*** were as follows:

- Testing all ELL children in December for [i] spontaneous speech in the L1 and in English, [ii] narratives in English, and [iii] the parental questionnaire.
    - Testing all ELL children in June for [i] spontaneous speech in L1 and in English, [ii] narratives, and [iii] the parental questionnaire. June is a 6-month interval from December, and so the children would be expected to make gains, and there could be changes in home language use and possibly, parental attitudes.

Data Collection, Procedures, and Data Analysis

Research procedures for data collection depend on the type of research questions and the pertinent research activities. Therefore, the study included both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection.

Qualitative data collection methods employed in the study were:

Focus groups (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001) were conducted with three groups of participants: 1) the community members and parents of the children enrolled in the intercultural early learning program at the research site; 2) the classroom teacher, the FLFs, and the school administrators at the research site, and 3) all stakeholders, including community serving agencies and policy makers. Other sources of data during focus groups included ***field notes*** taken during and after the focus group.

Focused Observations aimed at describing and recording classroom behaviors and practices as they occur as well as giving and receiving feedback, reflecting and setting goals for improvement, and suggesting modifications to behaviors/practices.

Research Conversations (Herda, 1999) allowed for participants from diverse cultures to work together and assess their actions. These were on-going and initiated by both the participants and the researchers.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Focus groups and research conversations data analysis consisted of examining, categorizing, and thematically organising the data collected during the focus group to address the first two research questions of the proposed study. Analysis of focus group data involved three steps: indexing, management, and interpretation (Creswell, 2005).

Quantitative data collection methods employed in the study:

I. ***20-minute spontaneous speech sample*** in L1 and L2, recorded on video or audiotape, and transcribed according to the CHAT format were analysed using CLAN (CHILDES: http://childes.psy.cmu.edu).

II. ***Edmonton Narrative Norms Instrument*** - ENNI (Schneider, Dubé, & Hayward, 2004; http://www.rehabmed.ualberta.ca/spa/enni/).

III. ***Parental questionnaire*** on language use in the home, parental attitudes about maintenance of the home language and culture and about integration in Canadian society, and other background information pertinent to the child's development. The questionnaire was developed by Paradis (year) in consultation with the MHBC and has been used in another research project successfully.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Comparisons between Time 1 and Time 2 illustrated the effects on L1 and L2 development of the early learning program at the research site. Children were compared on (1) lexical and grammatical measures in their L1 and English from spontaneous speech, on (2) lexical, grammatical, and narrative measures in English from the ENNI. Within-group comparisons were conducted on children's English abilities for the easy task (spontaneous speech) versus the more difficult task (ENNI).

Research Findings

For greater clarity and better organization of the report, the research findings are presented in two separate sections: Part 1: Findings related to research questions 1 and 2, and Part 2: Findings related to research questions 3 and 4.

Research Findings Part 1

Findings Regarding Approaches to Working with Ethnocultural Communities and Parents in the Development of the Intercultural Early Learning Program's Curriculum and Pedagogy

Introduction

Research on immigrant and refugee (hereafter: newcomer) families suggests that these families and their children encounter a number of sources of stress in their lives that may include parental

underemployment or unemployment, language problems, separation from former social networks, loneliness, perceived or real discrimination, family conflict, and perceived cultural incompatibilities (Dachyshyn, 2008; Harvey & Houle, 2006). Newcomers and the children of newcomer parents may experience conflict trying to adapt to one culture at home and another at school or in the community at large (Adams & Kirova, 2007; Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998).

In addition to the stressors that have been identified as factors in the difficulties that all newcomer families face, families with young children experience an additional challenge related to childcare and early education opportunities. Three areas that could be serving as barriers to young children's participation in early childhood education programs have been identified in a comprehensive research study conducted in the USA (Matthews & Jang, 2007): a) lack of **awareness** of newcomer families of availability and benefits of early education and services; b) lack of **accessibility** of high-quality programs due to limited space, complex enrolment processes, language services, and transportation, and c) lack of **responsiveness** of child care education due to shortage of bilingual, bicultural providers, and/or culturally competent staff, and inappropriate parental and community involvement strategies.

Furthermore, both research and practice suggest that majority culture early learning programs typically consider differences in culture as a deficit instead of an asset in schools (BRYCS, 2007). According to Lightfoot (2004), "Low-income, urban parents who speak English as a second language […] are portrayed as empty containers, which need to be filled before they can give anything of value to the schools or to their own offspring" (p. 93). Thus, not only the newcomer children but also their parents are seen as in need of learning the *right* way of being and behaving in their new environment. Like with the case of a "needy child" when the "child's knowledge is not only disqualified, but its existence denied" (Cannella, 1997, p. 19), the creation of an image of a *needy parent* leads to undermining newcomer parents' sense of competence in raising their children. However, parental self-efficacy, the feeling that parents are able to act and guide their children in ways that promote positive outcomes, is shown to be a factor in both parental competence and child adjustment (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Coleman & Karraker, 1998, 2000; Jones & Prinz, 2005). The proposed study is built on the premise that there is a high correlation between the educational outcome of a child and his or her environment (i.e., family circumstances, parents' educational level, parent participation, etc.) (Worswick, 2006), and thus, the role of the parents and their communities must be implicated in the whole process of educating children (Harvey & Houle, 2006).

Involving newcomer parents in a meaningful way has been a challenge to the school system and has been linked to lack of school success for children who speak English as a second language (English Language Learners/ ELL) (Cummins, 1989; 1996). Cummins stresses that underachievement is not caused by lack of fluency in English but rather it is the result of particular kinds of interactions in school that lead minority students to mentally withdraw from academic efforts (Cummins, 1989). In addition, the lack of native language instruction for immigrant students has often been equated with cognitive disadvantage, psychological problems, and academic underachievement (Cummins, 2000; Gunderson, 2007).The importance of stressing language minority students' first language (L1) competence in making educational progress is emphasized as one way of promoting students' linguistic talents and actively encouraging community participation in the development of students' academic and cultural resources. Interactions between educators and parents that affirm student and community identity can result in empowerment of educators, students, and parents (Cummins, 1996, 2000).

To address the gaps identified in the literature, the following (qualitative) research questions were explored in the study: 1) What approaches to working with ethnocultural communities and parents contribute to the development of an intercultural early learning program that strengthens the L1 for ELL children?; 2) What approaches to curriculum and pedagogy lead to a genuine inclusion of both ELL children's home languages and cultural traditions, and the English language and Canadian cultural traditions in early learning programs as a basis for ELL children's simultaneous development of L1 and L2?

I. Learnings Regarding Approaches to Working with Ethnocultural Communities and Parents

> The program is built on the premise that there is richness in diversity, both among and within communities that allows for similarities to emerge. The program is a place where an intercultural community is built rather than a place where problems are fixed. The children attending the program are not "at risk"; they are in the program because they deserve and have the right to learn in their mother tongue. (Professional Development Day discussion, Feb. 5, 2010)

As the excerpt form the *stakeholders group* conversation shows, the program was based on the assumption that newcomer parents and communities' knowledge and practices not only have a significant impact on the child's learning and development, but also that early childhood classroom practices are greatly enhanced when these become part of the children's early school experiences.

The key learnings regarding the approaches to working with ethnocultural communities and newcomer parents over a period of 3 years can be summarized as follows:

1. Acknowledging communities' and parents' cultural capital through consultations

In order to tap on to the collective wisdom of the three ethnocultural communities, a series of focus groups of parents and community leaders and elders was conducted. The following key questions were discussed: (a) In what aspects of life (both in the home and outside of the home) do you expect your children to participate and how? (b) What do you want your young child to know about the world? (c) What do you consider an appropriate way of teaching children what they need to know? and d) Are there any specific songs, games, stories, play materials that you consider absolutely crucial for your children's learning? If so, how do you think they can be incorporated into classroom practice?

The analysis of the discussions with the parents and the elders from the three communities led to the identification of the following commonalities:

- *Learning happens through observation and participation in life*. This applies to all children of this age, although boys and girls are expected to learn different roles; e.g., boys learn to play soccer and girls pretend to cook and take care of babies.
- *Elders play an essential role in young children's education*. Children often sit around the elders to sing songs and listen to stories that have a moral lesson or that teach the child how to handle a difficult or unsafe situation.
- *Children are expected to know their roots*. Every child has a family name song, and family history is told in a song that includes the names of predecessors. Children learn differences and similarities between their own and other cultures (as for dress, religion, and language).
- *Teaching respect for family members and elders in the community is a priority*. Showing respect means never saying "no" to a teacher, parent, or elder; not looking older members of the family/community in the eye when being scolded (the child must not appear as an equal); and being obedient.
- *Skills and creativity are developed through children's engagement in making toys for themselves*. Boys and girls make different types of toys with natural materials (e.g., trucks and dolls), make instruments with fruits and seeds, and draw in the sand.
- *As members of the family and community, children have responsibilities*. Children should know and follow the rules of the house (e.g., at bedtime and meal time). They are expected to dress and feed themselves independently, as well as clean up after themselves. Children are never idle; they help adults with cooking, building, or making ropes, and they make their own toys.

The act of sharing cultural expectations, norms, and approaches to learning and the expectation of parents and community leaders that there was a "real place" for these to be implemented created the feeling, expressed in the focus group, that "for the first time there is chance for our voices to be heard for real" (focus group, April 24, 2009). They began to realize that their cultural practices and languages were recognized as valuable in the dominant education system. This created a shared sense of momentum among the members of the communities and a desire to be involved in their children's education, especially when they saw that these expectations and traditional ways of raising and teaching children of this age were used as guiding principles in the development of the culturally relevant curriculum.

2. Ongoing input from communities and families through first language facilitators (FLFs) and cultural brokers

The program needed to engage communities and involve families in ways not defined by "middle class terms" (settlement worker, meeting Oct. 2, 2008). Considering the unique circumstances of the refugee families meant that parental and community involvement in the program's design was mainly though the ongoing participation of the FLFs and cultural brokers. The intent in hiring the FLFs was that they would provide cultural and linguistic knowledge that would be infused into the classroom environment, routines, and the learning experiences to be carried out with the children. Therefore, both the FLFs and the cultural brokers were involved in the weekly (Mondays) planning of the classroom activities, setting goals and assessment of the children, and involving the children in small-group language/culture-based classroom activities. They were also in ongoing contact with the children's parents and communicated progress, concerns, and/or questions between home and school. In addition, they served as interpreters when the parents and/or the English-speaking teacher needed to communicate with a particular family, and during the regular parent-teachers conferences. Their role in the monthly parent meetings was very much appreciated by the classroom teacher and the acknowledged by the parents:

> "We wouldn't come if we did not have someone here to hear and understand . . . we would not come otherwise" (a Somali mother).

> "When we first arrived (in Ontario) we went to the school . . . . A woman was supposed to be interpreting but she did not come. We were there the whole day and could not understand one word" (a Somali grandmother).

3. ***Goal setting and on-going revisiting the goals by all stakeholders***

In order for a program of this nature to be successful, the communities and parents had to be involved in the process of goal setting as well as ongoing revisions of the initial goals of the program. For example, at the end of the second year (June, 2009) of the program, two additional goals were added to the original goals of the program: a) To help children develop a sense of belonging to both their home culture and language, and the Canadian culture, and b) To build a support system and partnership within the broader school community (e.g., multi-age language and culture-based extracurricular activities).

In addition, in the middle of the third year (March, 2010) of the program, the classroom staff felt the need to *contextualize* the goals of the program. For example, while all stakeholders and classroom staff recognized that newcomer children have unique needs, there was a need to make sure that the way in which these needs are articulated did not perpetuate the discourse of deficit related to the "*needy child*" discourse. The results of this process are described in greater detail in relation to learnings regarding curriculum and pedagogy.

4. Seeking Parents' Views of Their Children's Learning

Assessing children's learning in the program was not an easy task since stakeholders used different cultural lenses to define success. Research focused on creating an appropriate means to evaluate young children of immigrant and refugee families (Ogilvie et al., 2005), suggested that such assessment

should not be done in a standardized fashion, isolated from the larger family context in which these children live. Consistent with the goals of the program, addressing the needs of the families was a priority in the assessment process. The assessment activities were part of an iterative process, conducted at the pace and discretion deemed appropriate by the classroom team, parents, and cultural brokers. While this was a very complex process including more formal assessment of children's L1 and L2 development (results presented in part 2) the views of the parents regarding their children's learning demonstrated their deep satisfaction and appreciation:

> "It is a big, big help . . . and a hard job to look after all these kids from different backgrounds. Thank you on behalf of the parents for a great job. It takes not an ordinary person to do that, to work with parents from all culture" (Sudanese father).

Parents' views were solicited informally each year. At the end of year 3 of the program (May, 2010), the parents were formally invited to discuss observable changes regarding their children's feelings about themselves, ability to get along with others at home and at school, and use of the home language. The summary of these discussions showed that, like the parents of the first 2 years, they felt their children had become more responsible, had learned to share, had become more open to playing with other children even outside the school, and were now following rules at home for the first time. Some children had become a lot more confident, as expressed by these parents:

> "My daughter knows that she can do things by herself" (Sudanese father).

> "My son is very proud of what he can do. He is so excited about everything he does so he wants to show it to us" (Serbian mother).

> "My daughter too wants to show me everything she draws or makes" (Sudanese father).

> "I see a lot of change in him from the beginning of the school year. He can now sit still and do something while before he could not. He feels good about himself" (Sudanese mother).

Most parents noticed positive changes in terms of their children's use of their first language, including paying more attention to parents' talk in their home language and showing interest in the topics being discussed. For example, a Somali mother said, laughingly, "When we say something in our language we don't want him to hear, he now says, 'I heard you!'" Younger children were reported engaging older children in conversations in their mother tongue and teaching them words, or bringing new words from school and discussing them with their parents. Even Serbian children, whose home language was not supported in the classroom, became more attentive to their grandparents' requests and began to reply in Serbian.

The parents acknowledged that they too have become a lot more conscious about using their home language with all their children, as well as encouraging other members of the community whose children were not part of the program to do the same.

> Wherever I go I tell my people, "Talk to your children in our language because this will help them learn in school." They don't believe me first but then I tell them what my child is doing and they listen to me. (Sudanese mother)

The parents also identified changes that occurred in their relationships with their children. These were particularly noticeable in the area of engaging in playful interactions. As one Sudanese father put it,

> Back home the relationship between the parent and the child is more limited. Kids would laugh at you if you wanted to play with them. Here, they demand it, they expect it; they see other parents

play with their children and if I don't do the same, I feel bad. My children always ask me to go to the park and play. And I do even though I don't have time. . . . Back home we had the whole extended family so there were more people to play with the children. It is just us here.

Another noticeable change was in the way in which parents understood and were able to accommodate changes for their children's behaviour required by the school, such as approaching adults directly with questions and looking them in the eyes when scolded. One Sudanese father said, "I don't have a problem with this. We are here in Canada and it is important for our children to learn to stand for themselves and be like the other children." A Somali father added, "I see her [my daughter] need to blend my culture and this culture in order to fit. So the program has helped a lot. If you live here, you have to be flexible."

5. Building Community Capacities

The regular parent meetings as well as the focus groups with communities and parent were instrumental in communicating to the communities the relationship between L1 and L2 for their children's cognitive and emotional development. When asked, "How do you see parent and community contribution to the process of teaching your young children their home language?," the following strategies were suggested:

- We need to encourage parents to be consistent in speaking the home language, and encourage children to speak back.
- We need to educate and encourage parents to speak the L1 because they are getting contradicting information from other parts of the world.
- We need to organize cultural events where teaching new words to the children will be natural
- We need to encourage grandparents to teach children their mother tongue through story-telling.
- We need to change attitudes among community members who don't take it [first language use] seriously.
- The need to maintain children's self-esteem and confidence in using their mother tongue.
- We need to further develop a sense of community and children's sense of belonging to their ethno-cultural community.
- We need to better support communities that are not very established through more frequent community gatherings.
- We need to establishing parent groups and homework clubs in the community to help our children.
- We need to help our children feel pride and have a sense of identity when seeing someone from their background. Children need a sense of belonging and they want to fit in (the new country)—we need to give them a sense of belonging to their community.

The program has become an example/demonstration site for other schools that too had large populations of immigrant children. The program was seen as an *incubator* for pedagogical innovations, both in curriculum development and teaching approaches. These were shared regularly at the monthly PD day meetings involving the staff members of the other eight Early Learning programs within the EPSB, many of which had a high number of ELL children as well but provided instruction in English only. As a result of the example provided by the program, other communities have become energized and mobilized in articulating and gathering the knowledge about raising and educating young children they collectively hold. For example, two other ethnocultural communities, Vietnamese and Eritrean, started a daycare centre where the two languages were used for regular instruction as well as English. The teaching team attended a few of the Monday morning planning sessions at the research site to learn about the planning process used in the program. Service providers (i.e., Multicultural Health Brokers' Co-op) report that

conversations among different communities are filled with hope—there is a strong shared belief that something could actually happen in the system so that it can genuinely include their points of view.

II. Learnings Regarding Approaches to Curriculum and Pedagogy

It was through the classroom team's conversations during the regular Monday planning meetings that life-stories became interconnected in a shared understanding about the children in the program and the diverse worlds they needed to know and navigate on a daily basis. In the absence of a set curriculum, Grumet (1995) described "conversation [as] the process of making sense with a group of people of the systems that shape and organize the world that we can think about together" (p. 19). Taking a constructivist viewpoint, Bruner (1987) defined "world-making" or "life-making" as a process in which the life-stories of those involved "must mesh, so to speak, within a community of life stories; tellers and listeners must share some 'deep structure' about the nature of 'life'" (p. 21).

The key learnings regarding to the intercultural development of curriculum and pedagogy can be summarized as follows:

1. Going Beyond a Simplistic View of Culture through Negotiating Cultural Meanings in Selecting Curriculum Topics

The program's first goal was to provide cultural and linguistic continuity for young newcomer children through both first language and English instruction. Therefore, the first major task in developing the curriculum was to go beyond a simplistic view of culture commonly represented in multicultural classrooms: a static, homogeneous, frozen in time and normative "entity" that "does things to people" (Hoffman, 1996). Instead of the traditional multicultural approach to early childhood practice based on special celebrations of holidays, foods, costumes, or arts/crafts, the classroom team engaged an ongoing discussion about children's everyday experiences that cut across all four cultures.

The following guiding principles emerged though the collaborative process of curriculum development undertaken by the classroom team:

- No one's personal or cultural view has more value than any other: tensions that may exist among different views are resolved by negotiations.
- Finding commonalities is as important as pointing to differences among views and ways of being and doing.
- All children need to experience all available opportunities, regardless of their cultural or linguistic heritage.
- All members of the classroom community had the right to express themselves in whatever language or any other (symbolic) form they felt most comfortable with.

Over time, the application of these guiding principles in everyday practice of the classroom meant that the topics explored by the children had to represent common human experience within which children's and classroom staff's explorations of cultural variations were welcomed. Through ongoing conversations, common topics emerged: families, babies, friendship, harvest, market, serving tea, houses, and animals. For example, almost half of the families had an infant at home, and in the classroom the ways in which all families care for a newborn were discussed. The FLFs also initiated discussions of family differences in both English and the children's respective home languages, having the children share a lullaby or a game used in their own homes. In this way the children learned what it means to care for a baby in general and how this care might differ from culture to culture (see Appendix A for examples of topic webs).

In the development of the topics the following pattern emerged:

- Indentifying themes or events that were common or elemental to life and rooted in all three cultural groups' traditions. Thus, the topics were related to children's prior experiences and cultural knowledge.
- The topics were selected in consultation with family and community members. They evolved as a result of the connections the cultural brokers and the FLFs had with the parents outside of the classroom activities (i.e., community events, heritage language classes, etc.)
- The individual topics, although brought to the group for a discussion by an individual (i.e., a cultural broker or a FLF), resonated with all members of the classroom team who were always able to come up with a similar or equivalent cultural tradition. Elaborating on the details of the classroom activities related to the topic *snowball*ed—everyone in the classroom team had something to contribute to it.
- The materials and the strategies to engage children reflected the cultural backgrounds of all children in the program. These included culturally specific artifacts as well as open-ended materials so that children could represent what they know from their home environment. New materials that stimulated new thoughts and vocabularies in both English and the children's first languages were added on an ongoing basis.
- The topics lent themselves to the development of activities that progressed on a continuum from adult-led to peer-led to child-initiated. The activities were expected to develop over a period of 2 to 4 weeks.
- Although not always possible, connections between topics and transition from one to the next were sought.

All topics introduced and developed collaboratively among classroom staff, cultural brokers, families, communities, and children included the following common elements as culturally relevant pedagogical vehicles (see Appendix B for more detailed descriptions):

- Storytelling and story enactment
- Singing songs
- Cooking
- Play
- Creative activities

2. Creating an intercultural classroom environment though meaningful use of cultural artifacts

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) situates objects as props and learning tools designed to elicit children's optimal development and as a means of representing the community of learners (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). This approach however, typically leads to turning cultural artifacts to *decoration items* which severely limits their ability to contribute to the children's meaningful exploration of culturally relevant ways of using these artifacts and learning the vocabulary related to their use.

In contrast, socio-cultural approaches situate the material object within the social context and recognize that, like play, the use and function is adaptive (Göncü, Jain, & Tuermer, 2007; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2001). In the socio-cultural perspective, all activities' development occurred largely through everyday activities and interactions of individuals and their social partners (Tudge & Odero-Wanga, 2009). By engaging in these habitual activities and interactions, children become a part of their cultural world. Vygotsky (1978) and his successors (i.e., Leont'ev, 1978) acknowledged the role of materials as *tools* for learning.

Based on the socio-cultural theory of learning that guided the practices in the program, cultural artifacts were brought to the classroom in consideration of the ways in which these items were connected to the children's lives outside of the classroom, and what was the cultural significance of these objects to the members of the classroom community (Holzman, 2009). Thus, having cultural artifacts in children's

dramatic area was not simply an act of recognition and appreciation of diversity. Rather, it is an essential element of the classroom environment that allows children from diverse backgrounds to enact their cultural knowledge.

There were other play objects (i.e. commercial toys such as puzzles, self-controlling materials, games, etc.) available to the children in the classroom. They were seen as cultural artifacts representative of the early childhood institutions, typically designed to foster acquisition of empirical knowledge based on observation, classification, and "reflection before acting" (Hedegaard, 2007, p. 265). The use of these play objects allowed children, through the guidance of preschool teachers to discover and eventually internalize their symbolic content. Therefore, both cultural artifacts and *typical Western* play objects played distinct and complimentary roles in the program.

3. Balancing the four languages in the classroom

The view that language is best learned in a meaningful context was strongly supported by all stakeholders. Therefore, the topics developed in the program were illustrative of the view that content and materials are vehicles of language instruction. As a result, instead of acting as interpreters or translators from English to the children's home languages, FLFs engaged the children in culturally-relevant activities that led to learning cultural traditions and the vocabularies pertinent to these traditions.

However, the use of multiple languages and the imbalance between the numbers of children in each of the three linguistic groups was an issue in the day-to-day workings of the program. One of the greatest challenges to the integrity of the program was the fact that many of the Somali children, who formed the largest linguistic and cultural group represented in the program, were fluent in English, with only minimal knowledge of their mother tongue. In addition, because English was the common language of the children and the classroom staff, children formed bonds with other children and adults from other cultural groups and used their common language, English, to maintain their relationships. This presented the challenge of balancing the use of English with the use of the other languages so that it did not become the dominant language. As a result, children who were hearing four languages picked up words and phrases from other languages. Although this situation may not have been optimal for the development of home language, it seemed to heighten children's awareness of and interest in all the languages spoken in the classroom.

In terms of the languages of instruction, in order to assure a balance between the use of the classroom languages, a function-based language approach was utilized. This approach guarded against the inclination to go over lists of noun vocabulary (names for things), since with a function-based approach, vocabulary is embedded in sentences with verbs, adjectives, etc. A focus on function-based language also guards against the inclination to explicitly teach children grammar.

The following language functions were emphasized in all languages:

- Requesting (asking to join in the activity, asking for an object, asking permission, asking for information, asking politely, etc.)
- Responding (to questions, to continue the topic, etc.)
- Expressing likes and dislikes
- Describing what just happened, what they did yesterday, etc.
- Describing a present scene, an object, a person, etc.
- Apologizing and expressing thanks
- Narrative/story-telling
- Giving information and explanations
- Giving "how to" instructions
- Problem-solving
- Negotiating

In terms of classroom organization, the function-based approach meant the following:

- Whole-group time or circle time was held by the English-speaking teacher
- If a story was shared during the group time, the English speaking teacher first told the story to all the children with the aid of a picture book and then the FLFs told the same story in the children's home languages.
- Depending on the nature of a particular cultural topic or a cultural artefact being introduced, one of the classroom team members (the English speaking teacher or one of the FLFs) would present it to the children in the corresponding language. It was then introduced in the other children's home languages and English.
- Whole-group activities were followed by small-group language and culture-based activities set up as centres in the classroom. These were open centres so all children could visit and explore the activities set up in them. When children speaking languages other than the one native to the classroom team member were interested in the activities or there were children from different linguistic groups at the centre, the language of communication was English.
- Any information concerning all children (i.e., snack, outdoor recess, bathroom visit, etc.) was communicated first in English and then in the children's home languages.

4. Finding a Balance Between Children's Needs and Strengths Based on Cultural Expectations

Another major task in planning curriculum and pedagogy was making sure the discourse of deficit that constructed children of immigrants as needy, having fewer skills than their native peers (e.g., Magnuson, Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006), as well as having language deficiency or lacking alignment in social capital (e.g., Kao & Rutherford, 2007), was problematized on a day-to-day basis in the classroom. As a result of a struggle to find a shared understanding of the differences between classroom practices based on needs and those based on strengths, the classroom staff felt the need to contextualize the goals of the program. For example, while all stakeholders and classroom staff recognized that newcomer children have unique needs, there was a danger that the way in which these needs were articulated could perpetuate the discourse of deficit. Rich, small and large group discussions with all stakeholders identified the following needs for children in the program:

- Be loved for who they are without being prejudged.
- View their parents as capable caregivers despite a lack of English language proficiency.
- Feel that they belong to both home and Canadian cultures.
- Negotiate between home and school cultures.
- Learn English as well as their home language.
- Learn to navigate school rules.
- Learn to be with children who don't speak their language.
- Be confident in themselves in the face of being marginalized.
- Maintain their cultural background.
- See their family and community lives reflected in their classroom.
- Have their unique strengths recognized.

The classroom staff realized that needs such as belonging, affirmation, self-expression, and exploration were similar to mainstream children's needs, but there also were differences "in how we do this given the context of their lives. Concretely, this means much closer ties with families" (Kurdish language facilitator). Consistent with the cultural expectations of young children articulated at the communities' focus groups, another difference observed by the classroom staff was that newcomer children have a different interaction/learning styles compared to their English-speaking, Canadian-born counterparts, in that they relied more on nonverbal exchanges.

Being responsive to the children's unique needs meant that on a daily basis, the classroom staff needed to:

- Recognize that some unique needs are rooted in socioeconomic vulnerability.

- Respect children's differences.
- Know the families' needs, situations, support for their children's learning, goals/hopes for their children.
- Develop an understanding of the families' experiences prior to emigrating.
- Involve children in the learning process: Find ways for them to express their curiosity and confusion; help them negotiate two different worlds.
- Observe what the children are doing and what is catching their interest; use nonverbal expressions, such as a gentle touch and eye contact.
- Recognize the cultural knowledge children bring to the classroom and how things are done in their home/culture; work with the child to extend their knowledge and skills. In this process, cultural brokers are invaluable resources.

The strengths of the children were seen in direct relationship to their already identified needs. For example, their ability to navigate across cultures and languages was seen as one of the children's main strengths, as were resourcefulness (e.g., doing more with fewer materials and toys); ability to learn by observing their environment; astute awareness of gestures, tone, eye contact; and knowledge of at least two cultures and languages.

To be responsive to the children's unique strengths meant that staff needed to have, on a day-to-day basis, the following mindset and approach:

- Begin every interaction with the belief that all children come with strengths; engage children as co-contributors to their learning through child-driven activities.
- Foster a sense of competence and self-worth in children.
- Identify and affirm what children bring to the classroom and who they are as unique individuals and as members of their cultural community.
- Show the children the value of their cultural knowledge and experience.

Summary of Findings Regarding Approaches to Working with Ethnocultural Communities and Parents in the Development of the Intercultural Early Learning Program's Curriculum and Pedagogy

- Family and community participation was essential in the development of the program from setting up the goals for the program to providing feedback on children's learning. However, only when parents saw that their ideas were not only welcomed but actively sought and implemented in the classroom practice, did they became willing to share their cultural knowledge and childrearing traditions.
- The involvement of cultural brokers and FLFs diminished the barriers of communication between parents and English-speaking school staff and made the sharing of cultural practices possible on an ongoing basis. Their involvement was also crucial in making newcomer families feel comfortable in the classroom and understanding their role in their children's educational experiences in the host country.
- The program was instrumental in communicating to parents the relationship between the first and second language development and the importance of home language for both children`' cognitive and social development. Thus it empowered and mobilized the communities in sharing the responsibilities of maintaining the home language and educating their young with the school system.
- Parents reported children's increased use of their L1 at home with both the parents and their siblings including the use of new vocabulary; positive changes in the children's self-confidence, ethnic, and linguistic identities; and ability to be with other children. They also reported changes in their own use of the mother tongue with their children at home and in their interactions with their children which have become more playful and involved a greater participation of fathers in children's lives in and outside school.
- The use of children's home languages in the classroom by members of their own communities not only allowed for cultural and linguistic continuity but also affirmed children's first languages as

languages that, along with English, belong in school as opposed to being used only in the privacy of their home.

- The classroom physical environment as well as the cultural and linguistic diversity of the teaching staff was central to meeting the set goals of the program. The presence of the FLFs as regular teaching staff was essential children's meaningful exploration of culturally relevant ways of using cultural artifacts and learning the traditions and vocabulary related to their use while they were also learning English and expectations related to being a student in Canada.
- Building on children's strengths as they were identified by the classroom team provided opportunities for challenging the dominant discourse of deficit that had constructed children of immigrants as needy, having fewer skills than their native peers, as well as having language deficiency or lacking alignment in social capital.
- Providing sufficient planning time for the classroom team was essential for intercultural understanding to develop among its members as a basis for genuine collaboration and negotiation of cultural meaning that over time became shared. This allowed for new approaches to working with young children to emerge, including: identifying events common or essential to life and rooted in the three cultural communities' traditions to become topics for classroom exploration; using common culturally-relevant pedagogical vehicles such as storytelling and singing; finding a balance between children's needs and strengths based on cultural expectations; and using a function-based approach to learning all languages in the classroom.
- The practices that emerged and were shaped by the fusion of cultures provided numerous examples of *practice-based evidence* that the education field as a whole should be engaged in so the new understandings of the complex worlds in which both young children and early childhood educators navigate on a daily basis can emerge.

Recommendations and Future Research

- By removing some of the major barriers to newcomer families with young children such as limited space; complex enrolment processes; language services; transportation; a shortage of bilingual, bicultural providers and culturally competent staff; and inappropriate parental and community involvement strategies, the program provides an example of how such programs can advance social inclusion for newcomer children and their families.
- The program demonstrated that the intercultural approach to early childhood education requires parallel changes in the wider social world—that is the provincial initiatives to better meet the needs of young refugee and immigrant children. It provided an example of how community and families' cultural needs, as well as their high aspirations for the education of their children in Canada, could be addressed in a sensitive and comprehensive manner though collaborative grass-roots efforts. However, longitudinal studies are needed to establish long-term effects of such programs on children's school performance.

Research Findings Part 2

Findings Regarding Language development of low SES refugee children attending an intercultural preschool program

Introduction

Although available research (e.g., Matthews & Jang, 2007) points to the importance of valuing a child's home culture and home language, as well as infusing multiculturalism and diversity throughout early learning program content, it also points to the urgent need for additional research on effective models that improve outcomes for young children in newcomer families. There is a consensus among researchers that maintenance of the first language (L1) in immigrant and refugee children is beneficial to their cognitive, educational, and social-emotional development. Cummins (1991, 2000) reviews a body of work showing that bilingual children whose proficiency is strong in their L1 are more likely to have high proficiency in their second language (L2). Thus, on Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis, the two languages of a bilingual child strengthen each other, in contrast to the popular wisdom "trade off" model, where proficiency in one language is thought to drain proficiency from the other. Bialystok (2006, 2007) also discusses numerous studies that found bilingual children to have cognitive advantages in the domain of executive control and in the underpinnings of literacy skills, such as phonological awareness but, crucially, proficiency in both languages is necessary for these advantages to emerge. Regarding newcomer children in particular, Wong Fillmore (1991) outlines why maintenance of the L1 at home is the cornerstone of a healthy family life, and especially if parents do not speak the majority language, English, very well. Maintenance of the L1 is important for children's self-esteem and for their relationships with their parents in the long term. Wong Fillmore documents cases of rifts in family structure due to the inability of parents to communicate effectively with their adolescent children because they no longer share a common language.

While there is agreement that maintenance of the L1 is important and that bilingualism is beneficial in many ways to children, there is controversy surrounding the issue of when to introduce the L2 to newcomer children. In a survey of 1,000 families in the United States, Wong Fillmore (1991) found that according to parental report, children who attended English language Head Start Preschool programs were more likely to experience attrition or loss of their L1 than children who did not attend these programs. However, Spanish-speaking children who attended Head Start programs in Spanish, were likely to maintain their L1. In a large-scale study of Spanish-English bilingual children in Miami, researchers found that the children who spoke English at home and attended English-only schools experienced decline in their Spanish vocabulary and grammatical skills in elementary school, while their counterparts in two-way bilingual programs showed strengths in both English and Spanish (Oller & Eilers, 2002). In contrast, Winsler, Díaz, Espinosa, and Rodríguez (1999) studied the language skills of Spanish-speaking children in California, some of whom attended English Head Start preschools while others were at home with their mothers before kindergarten. Results revealed no adverse effects on the Spanish language abilities for the children in the Head Start program. In addition, research on simultaneous bilingual children, those who have been learning both languages from birth, indicate successful bilingual outcomes in the preschool years (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004; Paradis, 2007; Paradis, Nicoladis, & Crago, 2007), suggesting that early introduction of dual language learning need not have ill effects on children's development. Indeed, timing of the onset of the L2 is possibly less important than maintaining rich experiences in the L1. Golberg, Paradis, and Crago (2008) found that newcomer children in Edmonton who began to learn English after 5 years of age showed faster growth of English vocabulary than children who began to learn English in preschool, indicating that the later onset group would easily *catch up*. In addition, regardless of age of L2 onset, the children whose mothers spoke the L1 more at home had larger vocabularies in English, supporting Cummins's Interdependence Hypothesis, albeit indirectly. On the one hand, the results of Golberg et al. (2008) challenge the common-sense notion of *the earlier the better* in L2 learning. On the other hand, the conflicting findings from the United States

on the effects of English Head Start programs show that there is a need for further research to understand the outcome of learning the majority L2 in the preschool school years, for both majority language development and maintenance of the minority L1.

One factor emerging from the prior research is that the sociolinguistic status of the L1 makes a difference (Genesee et al., 2004). Maintenance of the L1 is more likely when the L1 is supported in the community outside the home, meaning that educational resources, media, and a social community exists to increase a child's richness of linguistic experiences in that language and to transmit cultural values and pride to the child (Jia & Aaronson, 2003). In the case of certain newcomer groups in Edmonton, refugee groups in particular, children's L1 could be considered fragile and low status because the community and other resources have not yet been constructed to support its development. Another factor that has been found to influence children's early language development is the socio-economic status (SES) of the family, usually measured through mother's level of education. Golberg et al. (2008) found children of higher educated mothers to have larger English vocabularies consistently over the 2-year period of the study. Since refugee families tend to have lower SES and parental education levels than immigrant families in Canada, it is possible that this factor could influence both the L1 and L2 development of these children.

The present study

The purpose of this study was to examine the L1 and L2 development of children from low SES, refugee backgrounds who are early learners of the majority language. Children were attending an intercultural 4-mornings-a-week preschool program where instruction was provided in English as well as in some of the home languages of the children, the largest group being Somali. Children's language development was documented in January (time 1) and June (time 2) of the school year. The particular research questions informing the analyses were: (1) Do children's lexical and grammatical abilities increase in English and in their L1 from time 1 to time 2? (2) How do children's verbal academic skills in English at the end of the year compare to their monolingual peers? (3) What is the impact of learning English together with the L1 from birth or the toddler years versus being introduced to English in a preschool program at the age of 4 years?

Method

Participants

Twenty-one children and their families participated in the research. Children were from the following L1 backgrounds: Somali, Arabic, Nuer (Sudan), Tigre (Eithopia), Dinka (Sudan), and Serbo-Croatian. The largest L1 group was the Somali children (N=10) and the analyses of L1 development were conducted only with these children. All children were attending the intercultural early education program at an elementary/junior high school in Edmonton. The program took place four mornings a week, with an English-speaking primary classroom teacher. In addition, three L1 instructors were also present in the classroom—Arabic, Somali, and Kurdish—and thus children who spoke these languages received support for their language and culture as part of the program, and all children were able to engage in intercultural and multi-linguistic experiences.

Procedures

Children were tested once in January (time 1) and again in June (time 2). Spontaneous language samples were collected from the children in English and in Somali at time 1 and time 2. These samples were transcribed and analysed for lexical diversity (number of unique words used in 100 utterances of discourse) and mean length of utterance (MLU: average number of words in a sentence across the language sample). A student assistant worked together with the Somali-speaking teacher to transcribe the Somali language samples.

In addition, children were administered the Edmonton Narrative Norm Instrument (ENNI: Schneider, Dubé, & Hayward, 2004). This is a standardized test consisting of picture sequences depicting age-appropriate stories that increase in complexity. Children's performance on this test could be

compared to monolingual native speakers (i.e., published norms). The ENNI can be scored for narrative macrostructure and microstructure. Macrostructure scores include story grammar (what events a child included in the story) and first mentions (how a child introduced new characters and objects). Microstructure scores include mean length of communicative unit (MLCU: very similar to MLU above) and number of different words (similar to the lexical diversity measure above). One purpose of including the ENNI was to enable comparisons of these children to monolingual native-speakers. Another reason was that narrative abilities in children this age can be considered verbal academic skills, as opposed to the more informal language documented in the spontaneous language samples. Interviews with parents and cultural information gathered from the L1 instructors indicated that book-looking and reading/telling stories from books were not common activities in most of these children's homes. In contrast, story telling/reading based on books was a frequent, even daily, activity in the early education program. Thus, all children's narrative abilities would have been developed mainly in the classroom.

Parents of the children were given a questionnaire about the language use in the home and richness of the child's L1 and English environment, as measured by activities, media, and friends in each language. Parents were also asked about their education levels, fluency in English, and whether they thought their children were in the process of losing the L1. The questionnaire was given orally by a cultural broker-interpreter.

Results and Discussion

Background of participants

Children were, on average, 53 months old (4 years, 5 months) at the January testing period, with a range of 46–58 months. The information from the questionnaires confirms that these are low SES children, as the levels of maternal education were, on average, low: 8 years of schooling (middle school). There were some mothers who reported never having attended school. The most salient information from the questionnaire was that children fell into two groups: (1) bilinguals – children who grew up speaking both English and the L1, and in some cases, their L1 abilities were mainly passive by the time they were in the early education program, and (2) beginner L2 – children whose first consistent and systemic exposure to English was in the early education program. Therefore, background information in Table 1 is divided according to the bilingual/L2 distinction. Also, subsequent analyses are conducted on these groups separately.

As expected, the home language scores in Table 1 are more tilted toward English for the bilingual children (scores = proportion of English spoken in the home, from 0–1.0), and also English-richness is higher for them, whereas, L1 richness is higher for the L2 children. Note that L1 richness scores are generally lower than English richness scores. It is noteworthy that the English richness scores are based mainly on TV and DVD watching, rather than book looking/reading or other activities. In contrast, responses to the question of whether parents believed their child to be losing their L1 were similar for the bilingual and L2 groups. Answers to the question "Do you feel your child is losing their L1 for English?" were on a rating scale (0 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree). The 2–3 range mean score indicates that parents, on average, somewhat agreed that their child was losing their L1.

Table 1. Background of Participants

Children	Home language	English Richness	L1 Richness	Losing L1?
Beginner L2 (9)	.38	.53	.28	2.5
Bilinguals (12)	.62	.69	.19	2.4
All	.50	.61	.24	2.4

English Only Analyses

Data from the English measures for the beginner L2 and the bilingual groups are in Tables 2 and 3 respectively. The mean scores for MLU and lexical diversity from the language samples are in the

Tables. Also in the Tables are the macrostructure and microstructure scores from the ENNI. The scores from the ENNI are standard scores, where the norming sample mean is 10 and the 1 SD range is 7–13 (thus, scores lower than 7 are lower than the normal range for monolinguals the same age). ENNI data was collected at the end of the school year in order to be sure all children had had copious exposure to tasks like book-looking/story telling from books.

From time 1 to time 2 the bilingual group showed a significant increase in their lexical diversity ($t[10] = 3.610$, $p = .005$) and sentence length ($t[10] = 3.504$, $p = .006$) in English in their spontaneous language samples. While there is some small increase in the mean scores for the beginner L2 group, no statistically different increase occurred. The bilingual children may have shown more dramatic increase because they were not beginners upon entering the preschool program and thus their English learning could *take off* more than the English learning of the beginners. The bilinguals had significantly longer sentences and larger lexical diversity than the beginner L2ers at time 2 (MLU: $t[18] = -2.304$, $p = .033$; Lexical: ($t[18] = -2.887$, $p = .010$), but only for MLU at time 1 (MLU: $t[23] = -2.194$, $p = .039$).

For the ENNI data, we first interpret the children's performance in terms of monolinguals. For all the scores, the ranges indicate that there are children who are above the monolingual average and those who far fall below it. For the beginners, only the Story Grammar and Number of Different Words mean scores fell in the normal range. For the bilinguals, all the mean scores fell within the normal range. However, there was a lot of variation within the bilingual group and statistical comparisons between the bilingual and beginner groups revealed no significant differences between them for any of the ENNI scores.

In sum, the English data show there is a contrast between how advanced the bilingual group were in spontaneous conversational English versus in more academic English (narratives). These children had been learning English since birth or a very young age and yet they were not, as a group, significantly more advanced in their performance on the ENNI than the beginners. This suggests that the skills needed to perform on a task relevant to children's literacy and general academic development were learned in the early learning classroom mainly. Furthermore, many children in both groups performed much lower than age-expectations and thus they still have to be given some time in kindergarten to develop these narrative skills to eventually be on a par with their native-speaking peers. Setting appropriate expectations for children like the ones in this study is particularly important when one considers the performance of the bilingual children. Many of these children *sound* native-like in their casual English conversations, and educators might expect too much of their academic English skills because of it (Cummins, 2000).

Table 2. Mean Scores for English Measures for Beginner L2 Children

	Spontaneous Language Sample		Edmonton Narrative Norms Instrument			
	MLU	Lexical Diversity	Story Grammar	First Mentions	MLCU	Number of Different Words
Jan-time 1	2.56	90	-	-	-	-
Jun-time 2	2.81	107	9.3 (1-16)	6.1 (1-12)	6 (1-10)	7.1 (3-15)

Table 3. Mean Scores for English Measures for Bilingual Children

	Spontaneous Language Sample		Edmonton Narrative Norms Instrument			
	MLU	Lexical Diversity	Story Grammar	First Mentions	MLCU	Number of Different Words
Jan-time 1	3.15	106	-	-	-	-
Jun-time 2	3.78	141	10 (5-13)	8.9(3-12)	7.4(5-12)	8.7(5-13)

English and Somali Analyses

There were 10 Somali children in the study, 5 of them were L2 beginners and 5 were bilinguals. As with the English analyses, the data for the Somali children were divided according to whether they were L2 or bilingual since different trends emerged for the different groups. Beginner group data are in Table 4 and bilingual data are in Table 5. Data are the mean score of each measure, but because there are only 5 children in each sub-group, no statistical analysis was undertaken.

The MLU and lexical diversity measure for English are the same as the ones described above. In the Somali spontaneous language samples, even though the conversation partner, the L1 instructor, spoke Somali nearly exclusively, the children mixed some English into their conversation. Mixing, or code-switching, took the form of entire utterances in English or the insertion of English words into Somali utterances. All children had some code-switching but the amounts varied greatly. The code-switching density was measured by the proportion of utterances with some or all English out of the total number of utterances in the Somali transcript, and these scores ranged from .01 to .81. The Somali MLU and lexical diversity score in Tables 4 and 5 were calculated using only those utterances that were entirely in Somali. The total-MLU was calculated using all the utterances in the transcript, regardless of whether they were in English or Somali. No child used Somali words or utterances when doing the English spontaneous language sample. This shows that even children this young have a keen awareness of the sociolinguistic context *vis à vis* majority and minority language, and the fact that Somali-English bilingualism is expected among Somali speakers, but not among English speakers. Paradis and Nicoladis (2007) found similar results for French-English bilingual 4 year olds in Edmonton.

For both the beginners and bilinguals, their English MLU and lexical diversity scores increased from time 1 to time 2, which is expected since these children were also part of the larger group discussed above. In contrast, their Somali MLU scores stayed virtually the same. The contrast between English and Somali is most likely a reflection of the majority-minority language status difference.

There are also differences between the beginner and bilingual groups. For the beginners, their Somali lexical diversity decreased from time 1 to time 2, but for the bilinguals it increased. Also notice that the bilinguals used shorter sentences (MLU) in Somali and fewer word types than the beginners, at both time periods, suggesting greater erosion of their L1. Examination of the total-MLU and code-switching density also reveals differences between the groups. Code-switching increases for the beginners but it decreases for the bilinguals. The bilinguals have much longer sentences when they mix English and Somali (total-MLU) than when they stay with Somali alone, but this trend is not evident in the beginner group. The reliance on code-switching by the bilingual group could be seen as a strategy for expanding their expressive abilities in Somali conversations. For example, they had longer sentences in the Somali conversation when they mixed in English words and phrases. Given the high levels of bilingualism in the Somali community and given that they knew the L1 instructor was bilingual, it is natural that they would feel free to rely on code-switching to fill gaps since they know the conversation would continue unimpeded.

The differences between the groups suggest that the intercultural early education program had a different impact on beginners than on the bilinguals. For the beginners, they seemed to be focusing their energies on learning the new language, English, and during this preschool year, their Somali abilities

diminished somewhat or remained stagnant. (However, their Somali abilities did not diminish to the level of the bilinguals). For the bilinguals, it appeared that the early education program gave a boost to their Somali, possibly because they came into the program already speaking English, but coming from homes where a shift to English was firmly rooted and L1 loss was beginning to take place. The increase in their use of Somali word types and decrease in code-switching density from time 1 to time 2 both point to the possibility that attending this program helped them restore some of their L1 abilities.

Table 4. Mean Scores for English and Somali Measures for Beginner L2 Children

	English MLU	English Lexical Diversity	Somali MLU	Somali Lexical Diversity	Somali Total MLU	Code-switch Density
Jan-time 1	2.77	98	2.38	124	2.198	.19
Jun-time 2	2.91	114	2.35	97	2.43	.27

Table 5. Mean Scores for English and Somali Measures for Beginner L2 Children

	English MLU	English Lexical Diversity	Somali MLU	Somali Lexical Diversity	Somali Total MLU	Code-switch Density
Jan-time 1	2.96	93	1.98	65	2.51	.64
Jun-time 2	3.49	138	1.81	75	2.66	.48

Conclusions and Recommendations

One purpose of this study was to investigate whether early onset of L2 learning had positive or negative consequences for minority children's L1 and L2 development. It seems that the slight decline in the Somali of the beginner children and the low levels of Somali at time 1 among the bilingual children indicate that early L2 learning puts minority children's L1 development at risk. However, there were indicators that the bilingual children were re-gaining some of their Somali by time 2 in the early education program, thus supporting the efficacy of the program. Regarding L2 development, the children who came into the program already speaking some English made the greatest gains.

Another purpose of this study was to understand how children's levels of English at the end of the school year compared to their English-speaking monolingual peers, especially for academic language uses. The results showed that neither group of children, not even the bilinguals, consistently performed according to native-speaker age-based expectations. This finding would be important for kindergarten teachers to keep in mind when evaluating minority children who have had early education experiences. It is important for teachers not to set expectations too high for these children. An interesting area for future research would be to investigate the extent to which minority children's limited skills with narratives are a function of their incompletely learned English, their cultural experiences, or both.

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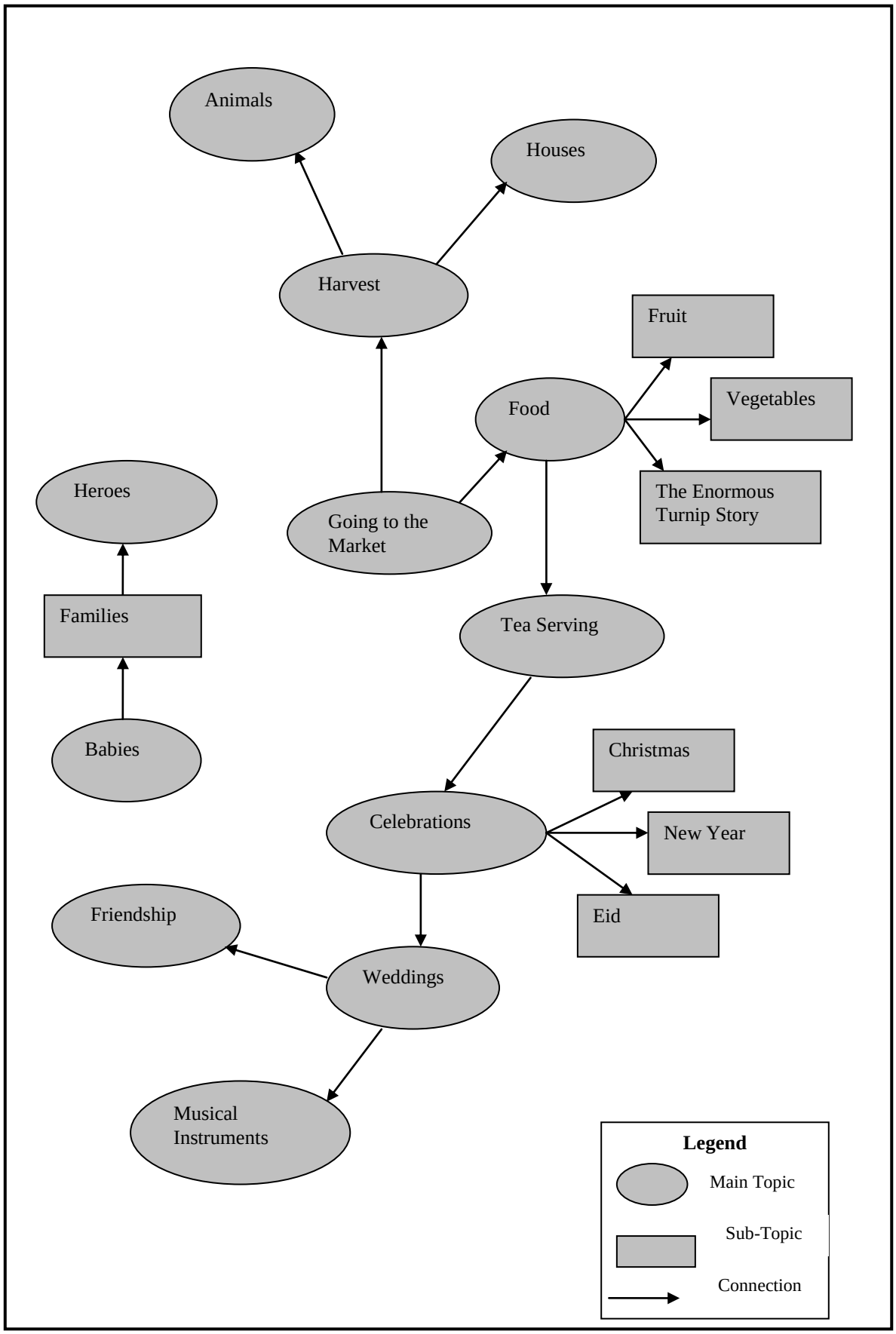
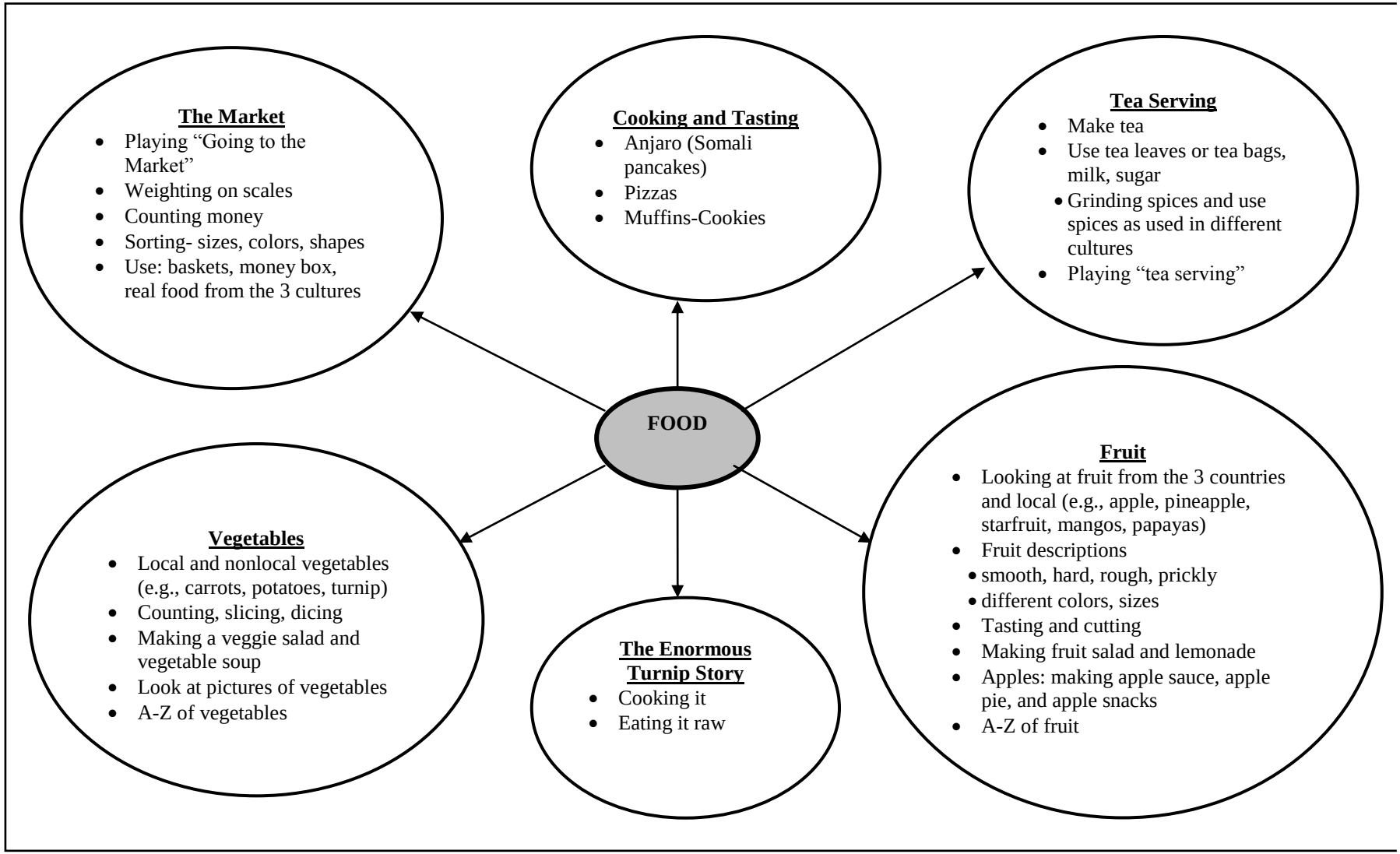
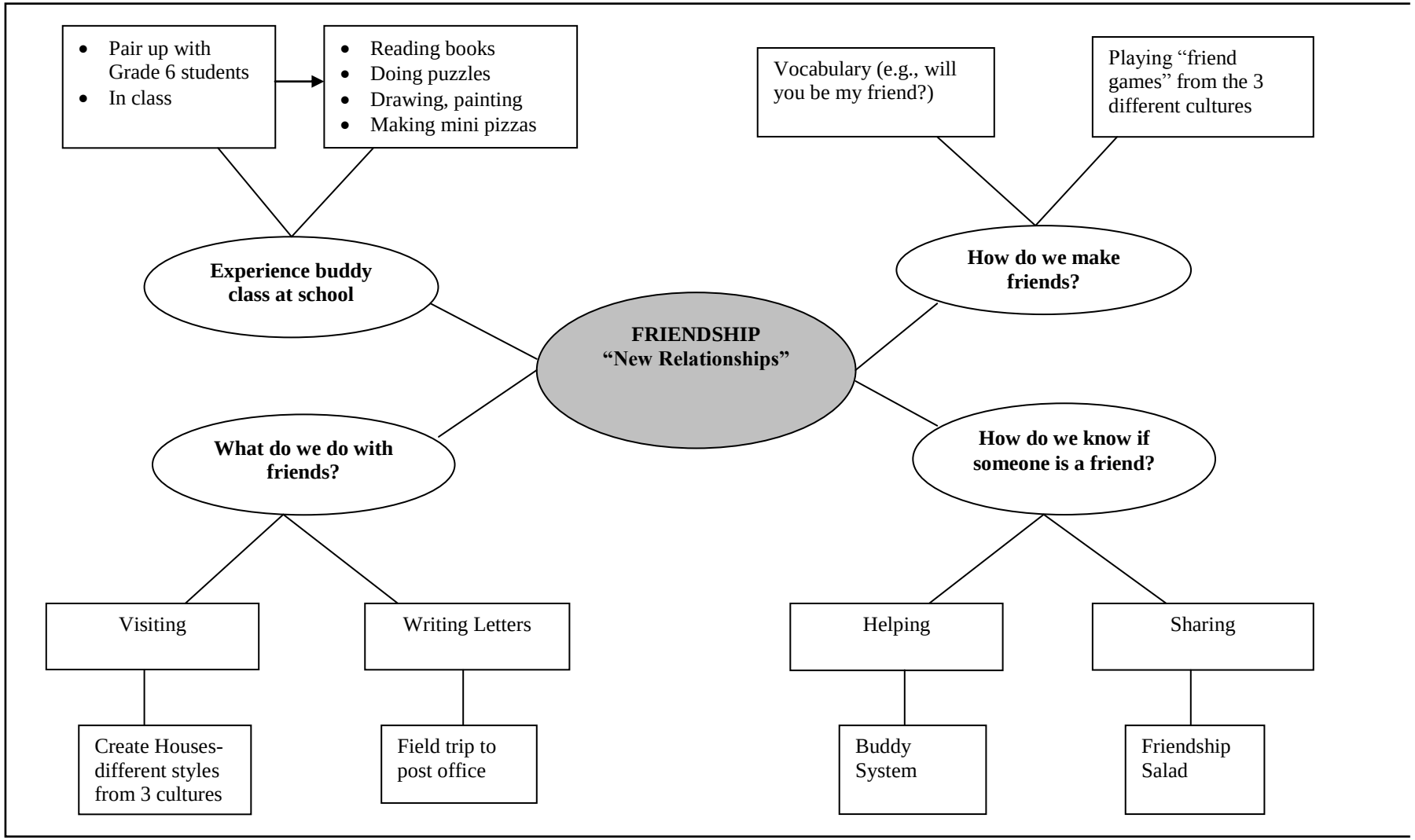
Appendix A: Topics Map



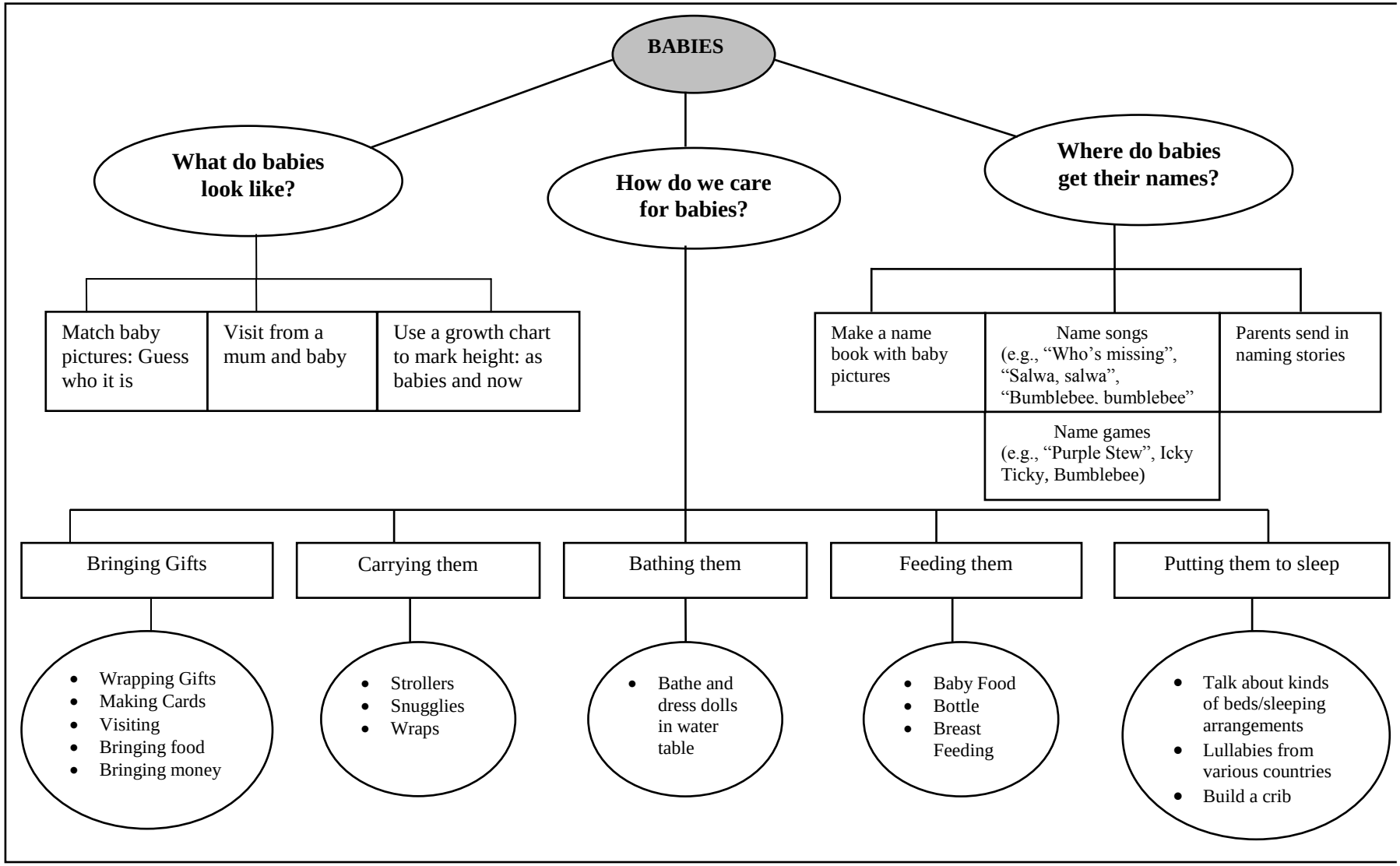
Appendix A: Food Map



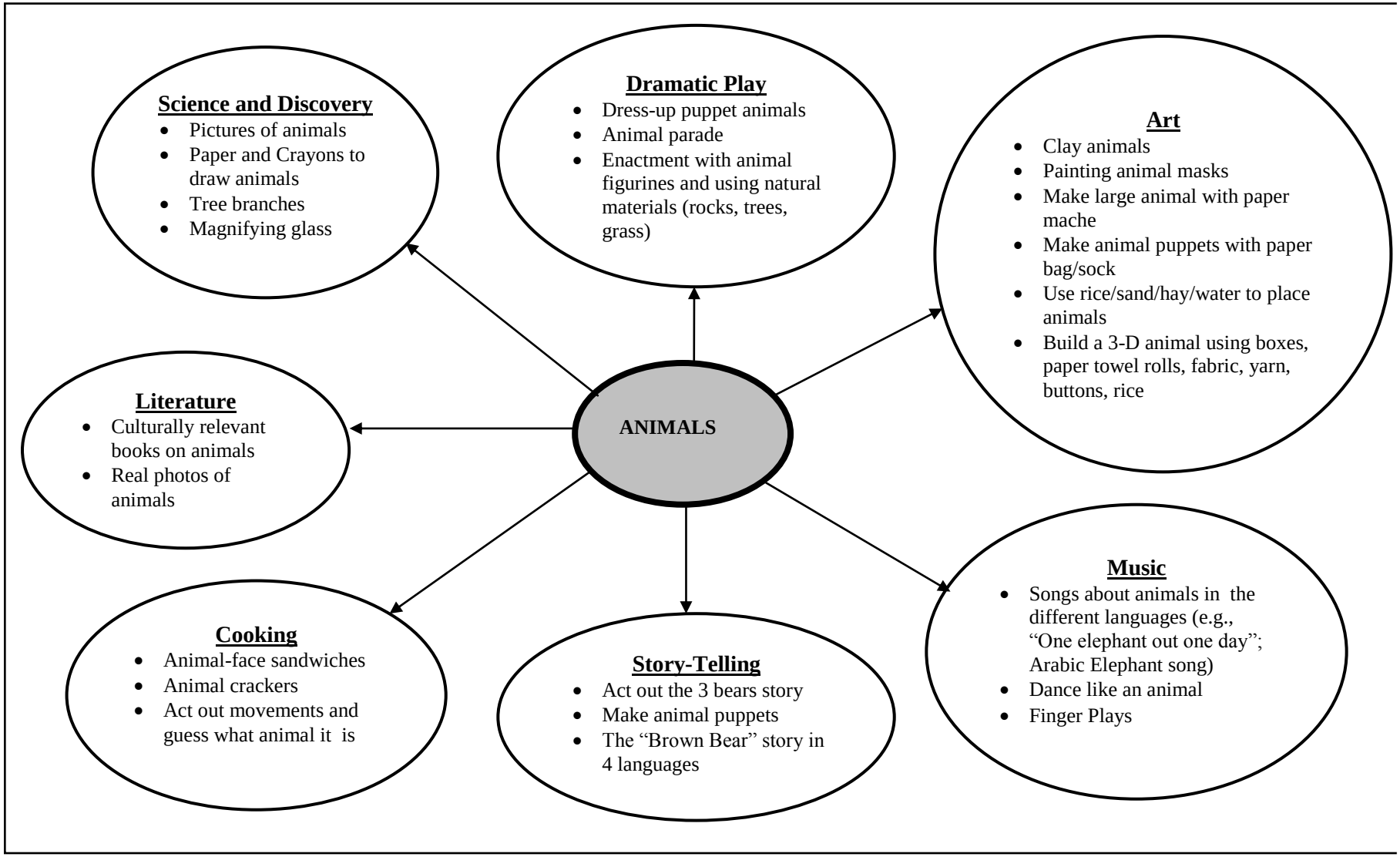
Appendix A: Friendship Map



Appendix A: Babies Map



Appendix A: Animal Map



Appendix B

Common elements of culturally relevant pedagogical vehicles in developing topics

- **Storytelling and Story Enactment**

Story Telling

Although all cultures have relied on stories to teach and preserve cultural values, storytelling has not received sufficient attention as a means of valuing, teaching and preserving heritage languages (Friesen & Friesen, 2010). Many popular folk tales are found in various forms across cultural and linguistic groups. In the intercultural early learning program, folklore stories such as myths, epic and fables from all four cultures were used in relation to or independent from the topics explored in greater depth by the children in the class.

- **Description:** The teacher told a story, usually with the aid of a picture book. Using simple language and gesture while also pointing to the characters in the pictures, the teacher facilitated all children's ability to follow the story, especially those whose English language skills are very limited.

- **FLFs, family and community participation:** If the telling or reading of the story was first in English, it was followed by the FLFs reading or telling of the story in the children's home languages.

- **Materials:** Picture books in several languages were available in the public or school library.

- **Activity progression**: The adults' roles change from telling the story with the use of many gestures, to reading the story, using some or no gestures, to having different children tell the story while using the picture book as a prompt.

Story Enactment

- **Description:** The adult, either the English speaking teacher of a FLF began by narrating the story while enacting the role of the main character calling upon children to become involved as the story evolved.

- **FLFs, family and community involvement:** Parents bring culturally specific artifacts to be used in the enactment. FLFs, family or community members told the story in their home language (using a lot of gesture to indicate the character that is called for to help) while all children, who were already familiar with the story participated in enacting it.

- **Materials:** Props such as articles of clothing, and/or masks and head dresses were used to support children in their role-playing. These can be made by the children during prop-making activity, as well as by the teacher, the FLFs or the parents, especially clothing articles that were culturally specific.

- **Activity progression**: Children were encouraged to choose a different role each time the story is enacted.

- **Singing Songs**

Singing as a cultural activity

Singing was the most salient cultural way of being with young children utilized on a minute-to-minute basis by the FLFs and cultural brokers. Singing was described by both the parents and the classroom staff as a way of "naturally reinforcing steps followed in complex or monotonous tasks" (Sudanese FLF). They saw the use of songs as a way of gently and indirectly guiding children's behaviours in the classroom. Songs derived from the activities in which either the adults and/or the children were involved on a daily basis—sweeping the floor, getting the tables ready for a snack, greeting each other in the morning, "making pita bread" on the play dough table, etc. Rather than being a separate activity, singing was related to what the children were doing at the moment and thus it was a spontaneous activity that accompanied whatever the children were doing. However, songs involved instructions (i.e. how to complete a task at hand), or expressed particular emotions, most commonly affection. As songs have traditional morals embedded in them, they were used to both praise children and scold them.

Songs and rhymes as instructional methods for teaching language both English and home languages

Because songs and rhymes allow for limitless repetition, choosing them as part of the daily routines through which children have an opportunity to practice pronunciation and new English vocabulary was important. All children were expected to sing along when the teacher began to sing, or when a recorded song was played. Songs with simple, repeated words such as *Old McDonalds Had a Farm* were used by the English speaking teacher for this purpose.

In addition to learning English songs and rhymes, learning songs and rhymes used in the children's home cultures also allowed for a smoother transition between home and school for the ELL children. Through consultation with family and community members traditional songs and rhymes, as well as songs for each child's name were collected and sung in the classroom on a daily basis.

- **Cooking**

Preparing food is a central communal activity in the cultures represented in the program. Cooking and sharing food is associated with creating a sense of togetherness and acts of kindness.

- **Description:** Along with the FLFs and cultural brokers, family and community members were consulted and invited to share traditional ways of preparing food. Real life cooking gear was needed as were vegetables and other ingredients. Whenever possible, children were involved in the hands-on preparation of several dishes over the length of the project or theme. Adult used language specific to volume, size, weight, quantity, time, and temperature while cooking which built children's cognitive capacity as well as their vocabularies in English as well as their home languages.

- **Activity progression:** Adults first used a lot of language describing the shape, colour and taste of the different vegetables. Children were asked to pick their favourite vegetable and describe it before putting it in the pot or cutting it into pieces.

- **Family and community participation:** It was essential for bilingual children develop mathematical concepts inherent in cooking simultaneously in English and in their home language; therefore, children's use of their home language with parents and community members was be encouraged during this activity.

- **Play as a cultural activity**

Within the theoretical framework based on which the program was developed, play was viewed as a cultural activity in refugee children's transition from home to pre-school culture. Vygotsky (1977) believed that in pretend play children re-create real life events regardless of the fact that they take place in an imaginary situation of the play. The imaginary situation allowed children freedom from the constrains of the real world

that surrounds them, and stimulates them to try on social roles and skills that they do not yet have a mastery of. Vygotsky (1978) stated that pretend "play creates a zone of proximal development of the child. In play a child always behaves beyond [his] average age, above [his] daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than [himself]." (p. 102). According to his theory then, during play children are reaching out, extending beyond what they are now, that is they are projecting themselves to a more advanced level of development. Play is a leading activity for preschool-aged children because it produces imagination, symbolic function, and the integration of thinking and emotions as the major developmental accomplishments for this age (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). These accomplishments are possible though children's participation in and appropriation from activities by using the tools of their culture. Culture, therefore is not an "add-on" to a universal play activity but rather it is the origin of what children do in play, the cultural tools they use in mastering social roles and skills, and the ways in which they appropriate a particular cultural activity with its developmental functions that may vary within as well as across cultures. (see Kirova, 2010, Appendix C)

Dramatic Play

- **Description:** The housekeeping area allowed space for children to recreate any aspect of their life in- and outside- of the classroom. Practice through peer interaction was seen as essential in children's learning of both English and their home language. Thus, a substantial amount of time in the day was allocated for dramatic play. The negotiation of the use of materials, space, roles, actions, sequence of events, etc., in a pretend situation allowed the children to use descriptive and interactive language that other activities did not allow for. Furthermore, play allowed a safe space for children to use new vocabulary in a trial and error way.

- **Family and community participation:** FLFs, family and community participation in setting up and contributing artifacts for the arrangement of this area was crucial. Clothes and small gardening tools brought a realistic element to the play area. The presence of home artifacts encourages the use of home language alongside English.

Play with Blocks and Manipulatives

- **Description:** Building of different types of houses, roads, fields, fences, barns, animals, etc. was the focus of small and large block play. Discussions regarding the types of blocks and other materials such as small animal and human figures, household items, vehicles, etc., used in the creation of the playscape encouraged the use of vocabularies in both English and the children's home languages. Block play encouraged children to solve "technical" problems as they attempt to build different types of structures in order to accommodate the animals, human figures, and plants, and to allow for the manoeuvring of vehicles.

- **Materials:** Having large blocks allowed for more elaborate block play. Large, hollow blocks, cylinders, long boards, half circles, triangles, and ramps were used to build large structures. Cardboard blocks may also be available; they are lighter and easier for some children to use. Wooden blocks can be mixed with cardboard blocks for interesting effects. Small unit blocks were also used both on the floor, in conjunction with the large blocks, and on a table. Having block accessories (e.g. toy figures of people, animals, small cars, trucks, etc.) was important to stimulate meaningful block play.

- **Creative activities: Arts and crafts**

A variety of materials for creative activities including natural materials and writing utensils were present and readily accusable by the children. The availability of these materials allowed for the children's engagement in drawing, painting, modeling, creating collages, etc., as well as working on traditional crafts under the guidance of the FLFs and cultural brokers. These culturally specific crafts included but were not limited to making dolls from corn cobs (Sudanese tradition) , musical instruments (Somali tradition), orange-

peels necklaces (Kurdish tradition). Making these crafts was used as an opportunity to tell traditional stories, sing traditional songs, and engage in conversations about the FLFs and the brokers' childhood in their countries of origin. They are a way of passing on cultural knowledge to the children as well as enhancing their creative capacities.

Appendix C

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ARTICLES
Children's Representations of Cultural Scripts in Play: Facilitating Transition From Home to Preschool in an Intercultural Early Learning Program for Refugee Children

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This article focuses on the role of play as a cultural activity in refugee children's transition from home to preschool. The "culture-free" view of play as a means for development of a "universal" child was challenged and an alternative view presented of play as a culturally leading activity in the development of a culturally situated child based on the work of Vygotsky and Leont'ev. That view framed a community-initiated project that aimed at providing learning opportunities in both children's home languages (first language [L1]) and English (second language), so a smooth transition from home to school cultures is provided for the children. The program was unique in that 4 languages were spoken in the classroom (i.e., Kurdish, Somali, Sudanese Arabic, and English) by both the children and the L1 facilitators chosen by their respective ethnocultural communities. The pilot study that used the Participatory Action and Learning methodology demonstrated that the intercultural approach to education could open possibilities for new directions in early childhood practice in which a hybrid space is open for children and adults who share it to bring their knowledge and ways of being in the world. In this space, play is a vehicle for preserving cultural group identities while creating a common culture.

Immigrant and refugee populations in Canada grew by 13.6% between 2001 and 2006, four times faster than the Canadian-born population ("2006 Census of Canada," 2006). Research on these families suggests they encounter a number of sources of stress in their lives including parental underemployment or unemployment (Harvey & Houle, 2006), language difficulties, separation from extended family and familiar social networks, loneliness, discrimination, family conflict, and perceived cultural incompatibilities. Newcomers and the children of newcomer parents may experience conflict due to changed family dynamics as they are adapting to the host culture at differing rates and making the transition from home to the community at large with varying degrees of perceived success (Adams & Kirova, 2007; Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998). In 2008, 12.5% of all newcomers to Canada were refugees ("Citizenship and Immigration Canada," 2008). According to "the United Nations Convention Related to the Status of Refugees" (1951), refugees are persons in need of protection due to fear of persecution or are at risk of torture or cruel and unusual treatment or punishment (Article 1A(2)). Thus, unlike most immigrants who had given the decision due consideration and who had time to physically and emotionally prepare themselves for the resettlement process, refugees had not intended to leave their country of origin. For refugees or asylum seekers, "the sudden and involuntary nature of the process generates tremendous tensions within the family" (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, p. 27). The resettlement process is influenced by "the physical and psychological availability of parents, the family's socioeconomic background, and the context in which the family resettles" (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, p. 28).

Newcomer families with young children experience additional challenges related to child care and early education opportunities. In the urban context in which the study took place, the ethnocultural communities and the not-for-profit, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working with the families prior to the beginning of the study identified a number of difficulties and barriers the refugee families encountered regarding culturally relevant early educational opportunities for their children. These barriers can be grouped in two major categories: 1. Accessibility: (a) lack of space in early learning programs in the city for refugee children from families dealing with multiple social vulnerability factors, (b) transportation difficulties, (c) entrance criteria (e.g., "mild to moderate" developmental delay) that contributes to stigmatization and can have detrimental effects on the school life of the child, (d) rigid age cutoffs, and (f) income criteria for working refugee families who, like other working poor, do not meet income criteria at first glance. 2. Responsiveness: (a) lack of understanding of the special life circumstances of refugee families, (b) lack of flexibility with the current expectations or requirements for parental volunteering within the program, and (c) language and cultural limitations of parents that prevent them from fully engaging and being involved in their children's participation in available early learning programs.

In addition to the barriers described earlier, both research and practice have suggested other more implicit or hidden factors, such as in the majority culture (e.g., early learning programs typically consider differences in culture as a deficit rather than an asset in schools; Bridging Refugee Youth, 2007). As Cannella (1997) pointed out, the "child's knowledge is not only disqualified, but its existence denied" (p. 19). She maintained that the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) position on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP; Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) has privileged child-centered, playbased instruction as the "universal human pedagogy that is appropriate for all human beings, the truth for everyone" (Cannella, 1997, p. 117).

Even among the proponents of DAP (e.g., Morgan, 2002, as cited in Hatch et al., 2002), there was a view that, although the 1997 revised version addressed the issue of cultural diversity by "including a more complex discussion of cultural relevance as a critical factor in teaching practices" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 446), the document fell short in that Western values were still presented as the standardized starting point from which to evaluate and modify practice. More recently, Fleer, Tonyan, Mantilla, and Rivalland (2009) indicated that much of the research informing current early childhood practice in Western nations is based on limited cultural and historical contexts.

It is important, therefore, that developmental theory in early childhood education is to be challenged and other ways of understanding children and childhood brought to bear on the dialogue. Such a dialogue can only begin when children's and families' voices are equally strong, and have equal power to influence change. Although the importance of valuing a child's home culture and home language, as well as infusing multiculturalism and diversity throughout early learning program content is seen increasingly as important (e.g., Matthews & Jang, 2007), there is an urgent need for additional research on effective models that improve outcomes for young children in immigrant and refugee families. This study aims at addressing this need by documenting how the development of an intercultural early learning program involving families from three refugee communities in a large city in Western Canada can provide insights into the place of culture in early childhood practice. This article focuses only on one aspect of the pilot program—classroom practice; specifically, the role of play as a cultural activity in refugee children's transition from home to preschool culture.

INTERCULTURAL EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN: A PARTICIPATORY LEARNING AND ACTION (PLA) PROJECT

To address the aforementioned challenges identified by the ethnocultural communities and the NGOs in 2007, the Board of Trustees of the Public Schools in the city realigned some district funding to enable the implementation of an innovative support model to better serve English language learners (ELLs), including refugee and immigrant children and youth. The model involved three clusters of schools serving ELL students and families within geographic proximity.

The intent of the initiative was to provide access to culturally and linguistically diverse resource staff, ELL services at school sites, and to increase collaboration with families and communities through community agencies and organizations. The ultimate goal was to have an early learning program serving preschool children from schools within each cluster. As the principal researcher in the study, my role in this community-initiated and government supported program was to provide guidance and research support to communities and community organizations, families, educators, policymakers, service providers, and administrators in developing and piloting an intercultural early learning program. The main research question of the pilot study was, "What approaches to curriculum and pedagogy lead to a genuine inclusion of both refugee children's home languages and cultural traditions, and the English language and Canadian cultural traditions in early learning programs?" The pilot program involved one early learning program in one of the school clusters. The goals of the program included the following:

1. To be genuinely responsive to the unique early learning needs of refugee children growing up in a particularly complex social, economic, and multicultural context.
2. To be focused on providing cultural and linguistic continuity for young refugee children.
3. To be supportive of children's first (i.e., home) language while also facilitating ELL.
4. To be attentive to the total life circumstances of refugee families as they affect parenting and early learning.
5. To be culturally sensitive and inclusive of the refugee families' perspectives.
6. To be based on the combined expertise and strengths of the public school board, community partners, as well as academic knowledge of early learning; and thus, is holistic, strength based, and equity based.
7. To be collaborative, interrelational, and interdependent so that mutual learning is fundamental to its success.

INTERCULTURAL EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTICES: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociocultural–Historical Learning

For the program to meet these expectations, a sociocultural–historical view of learning as an alternative to the developmentalism inherent in the current early childhood practices guided by the DAP document was adopted. Influenced by Vygotsky's work, Wertsch (1991) described the basic goal of a sociocultural approach to human mind as creating "an account of human mental processes that recognizes the essential relation between these processes and their cultural, historical, and institutional settings" (p. 6). More specifically, based on the work of Rogoff (2003), individual development was conceptualized as occurring through individuals' "changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change" (p. 368).

The idea of change was particularly important in the pilot program, especially in relation to the transition between cultures experienced by the refugee families and their children. For the purposes of this article, however, it is most important to distinguish the view of play used in the program from the view based on DAP philosophy that is promoted in most preschool programs.

The Value of Play Promoted by DAP: Development of the Universal Child

The history of play in the Western context has been well-studied (Bruner, Jolly, & Sylva, 1976; Herron & Sutton-Smith, 1971; Lowenfeld, 1969), as has the role of play in the evolution of early childhood care and education (Bloch & Choi, 1990; Spodek & Saracho, 1991). In their cultural–historical analysis of play, Fleer et al. (2009) contended that play is a powerful discourse in the early childhood education community. The value of play in the development and education of young children in institutionalized settings has been emphasised since the establishment of Froebel's first kindergarten more than 150 years ago (Saracho & Spodek, 1998). Manipulation of Froebelian gifts and participation in making crafts under the strict supervision and direction of the teacher was seen as play that had a particular educational purpose. Although with a different purpose, Montessori too developed a set of play materials to be manipulated by young children with the specific goal of acquiring knowledge of the properties of the objects and skills related to these properties. It was not until the first fourth of the 20th century when the nursery school movement, along with the reform of the kindergarten movement, brought the notion of the value of natural, organic play as a vehicle for young children's learning in its own right.

The publication of the NAEYC's *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* in the 1980s (Bredekamp, 1987) set the stage for the development and wide distribution of new print resources that were designed to support the implementation of the learning through play philosophy (e.g., Jones & Reynolds, 1992; McKee & the Association for Childhood Education, 1986; Reynolds & Jones, 1997), and the publication of companion volumes (e.g., Gestwicki, 2007; Sluss, 2005). In general, play within the DAP construction is considered an antidote to academics in the early years that prepared the child to enter formal schooling.

The most recent edition of the NAEYC's (2009) position statement on DAP states, "Research shows the links between play and foundational capacities such as memory, self-regulation, and oral language abilities, social skills, and success in school" (p. 14). Thus, the view that play has benefits in different areas of development—intellectual, cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and academic—and should be part of the early childhood curriculum is still prevalent in both theory and practice of early childhood education.

It is important to note, however, that in the field of early childhood education there has been a "'culture-free' approach to children's play" (Kushner, 2007, p. 62). This approach reflects the view of the universal child, implying that universal principles of child development apply to all children, regardless of their backgrounds and experiences. In his critical review of the 101 articles on the topic of play published in 184 issues of *Young Children* from 1973 to 2002 (the total number of articles published was 1,408), Kushner found that only 1 article directly addressed the issue of cultural differences and play. He noted that this article, authored by Boutte, Van Scoy, and Hendley in 1996, promoted the use of multicultural prop boxes for children's sociodramatic play area in which props and artifacts from different cultures to increase multicultural awareness and appreciation of diversity. Kushner also identified 2 articles (Griffing, 1983; Nourot & Van Hoorn, 1991) that emphasised the need for teachers to understand the differences children may exhibit in play that might, in fact, be cultural.

This alarming omission in *Young Children*, the most widely disseminated professional publication in the field of early childhood education, speaks clearly to the lack of recognition in the field of early childhood in general of the role of culture as one of the most important aspects of children's play context (King, 1992). Although writings on play in other publications, including child development texts (Fromberg & Bergen, 2006; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2005; Hughes, 1999), might bring the reader's attention to how play is influenced by gender, culture, and special needs and to how play

is appropriate in some cases, attempts to understand play from contexts outside of developmental psychology are relatively recent.

The reasons for such delayed attempts are numerous, but perhaps the most important one is that the greatest developmental theorists (i.e., Parten, 1932; Piaget, 1945; Vygotsky, 1978) agreed on the following points regarding play: (a) The development of children's play follows similar patterns of development in terms of its origins, frequencies, and types observable at different ages and stages of development; and (b) play is an activity necessary for young children's optimal development with somewhat different emphases on the areas of development most significantly influenced by play (e.g., language development, perspective thinking, problem solving, etc.; Göncü, Tuermer, Jain, & Johnson, 1999). Children whose play did not fit the developmental norms established by the dominant developmental theories were seen as in need of intervention. As a response to the interventionist view of play, play researchers such as Roopnarine and Johnson (2001), who were of the opinion that "existing play theories may be inadequate in guiding research on diverse groups of children because they appear insensitive to considerations of factors within the ecocultural system that may influence growth and development" (p. 301), were motivated to explore the role of culture and class in the development of children's play. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of development provides a foundation for such explorations.

PLAY AS A CULTURAL ACTIVITY: DEVELOPMENT OF THE CULTURALLY SITUATED CHILD

Roopnarine and Johnson (1994) stated that cultural–ecological models of behaviour and development reveal three interacting layers of environmental influence on play: (a) the physical and social aspects of children's immediate settings, (b) the historical influences that affect the way that individuals conceptualize play, and (c) the cultural and ideological beliefs relative to the meaning of play. Vygotsky's (1978) conceptualization of the role of play in the process of internalization or appropriation of skills that first exist on the interpsychological plane before they exist on the intrapsychological plane is central to the understanding of play as a cultural activity. Vygotsky (1977) believed that in pretend play, children recreate real-life events regardless of the fact that they take place in an imaginary situation. The imaginary situation in play allows children freedom from the constraints of the real world that surrounds them and stimulates them to try on social roles and skills they have not yet mastered:

> In play a child creates an imaginary situation. . . . Imagination is a new [newly formed] formation which is not present in the consciousness of the very young child . . . and represents a specifically human form of conscious activity. . . . Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary [not imposed] intentions and the formation of real-life plans . . . all appear in play and make it the highest level of pre-school development. (Vygotsky, 1977, p. 552)

Therefore, the freedom created by the imaginary situation in play allows children not only to play with play objects (e.g., toys) but, more important, to play with meanings they assign to these objects and, thus, to use higher-order mental processes based on signs and language as mental tools. Vygotsky (1978) stated that pretend "play creates a zone of proximal development of the child. In play a child always behaves beyond [his] average age, above [his] daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than [himself]" (p. 102).

Building on Vygotsky's (1977, 1978) theory of development and the role of play in it, Leont'ev (1981) explained children's engagement in play as a desire to act like adults, which they cannot do in real life. Taking Vygotsky's theory further by suggesting that play is a leading activity in preschool, Leont'ev (1978) used the concept of leading activity to distinguish a particular type of interaction between the child and the environment that produces major development accomplishments, provides the basis for other activities, and induces the creation of new mental processes and restructuring of old ones. For Leont'ev (1981), activities are "processes that are psychologically characterised by what the process as a whole is directed to (its object) always coinciding with the objective that stimulates the subject to this activity, i.e., the motive" (pp. 39–40). It is through the child's engagement in activities that he or she appropriates "historically formed human properties, capacities, and modes of behaviour" (Leont'ev, 1981, p. 42). Play, he found, is a leading activity for preschool-aged children because it produces imagination, symbolic function, and the integration of thinking and emotions as the major developmental accomplishments for this age (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). These accomplishments are possible through children's participation in and appropriation from activities by using the tools of their culture.

Culture, therefore, is not an "add-on" to a universal play activity but, rather, the origin of what children do in play, the cultural tools they use in mastering social roles and skills, and the ways in which they appropriate a particular cultural activity with its developmental functions that may vary within, as well as across, cultures. As Göncü et al. (1999) stressed, "an adequate examination of children's play in a given community can be accomplished only by taking into account the unique cultural milieu in which play is embedded" (p. 152).

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

Studying play in its cultural context is absolutely essential to understanding it as a cultural activity in a particular community. However, the question explored in this article—"Which cultural context do refugee children represent in their play?"—brings the study of children's play in multicultural contexts to a level of greater complexity. This article investigates through examples how the refugee children in an intercultural early learning classroom incorporate in their play actions and operations appropriated through their participation in activities specific to their home culture.

The methodology used in the study, PLA, allows for challenging prevailing biases and preconceptions about people's knowledge, and thus offers opportunities for mobilizing local people for joint action toward life-enhancing changes. Because of these characteristics, participatory research methods are appropriate for working with populations, including children, young people, and adults, who might come from oral traditions in which sharing in groups is more comfortable than one-on-one interviews or written questionnaires and surveys. Like the other participatory approaches, PLA emphasizes equal collaboration and result in an "emancipated researcher" (Creswell, 2005, p. 552).

SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

A core component of the pilot program included children's home languages as a language of instruction, in addition to English, to ensure linguistic and cultural continuity, as well as a smooth transition from home to school cultures. The program was unique in that it involved four languages: Somali, Arabic (Sudanese dialect), Kurdish, and English. The pilot program, situated at an inner city elementary–junior high school (pre-kindergarten–Grade 9) with a dense immigrant student population, began in the fall of 2007. One-third of all children were coded as ELLs, and more than 20 languages and dialects were spoken among these children. The school also offered a bilingual Ukrainian–English program.
The intercultural early learning program was designed to include 16 children, who were 3½ years old by September 1, and their families. The communities these families were selected from were the Kurdish, Sudanese, and Somali living within the boundaries of that area of the city and who, through a series of shared activities undertaken as part of a parenting group program provided by one of the partnering NGOs, had already begun to form intergroup relationships. Given the number of different languages and dialects spoken within the Sudanese community (close to 100), the program was designed to offer support of children's Sudanese Arabic, considered to be a common language of that community. However, due to transportation difficulties in the second year of the pilot, fewer children actually attended the program on a consistent basis. The mix of numbers of the participating children and their backgrounds are as follows: 3 children were from Sudanese background; 3 children were from Somali background; 3 were non-immigrant, Canadian-born, English-speaking children; and 1 child was Kurdish speaking. Only 1 child, a Sudanese boy, was born in a refugee camp. The other children from the three refugee communities were the first child born in Canada after a family's arrival.

The early childhood educators in the classroom included a home-language facilitator for each of the children's three home languages. The educators were chosen by their communities because of their passion for their culture, ability to work with young children, and ability to tell stories and sing songs from their native culture. Also included was an English-speaking classroom teacher with over 20 years' experience working with diverse populations served by Head Start. The program was offered 4 half-days per week, with time for instruction and activities divided equally between English and the children's home languages. Research suggests that in partnership, parents and educational practitioners can and should work simultaneously toward developing language-learning milestones in both languages through exploration of language and literacy patterns in the home and integration of culture and language into classroom learning (e.g., Coltrane, 2003; Wong Fillmore, 1991). To help parents understand the importance of using their mother tongue at home, bimonthly parent meetings were held. It was anticipated that the children would develop their home language so they could maintain communications and relationships with their parents, extended families, and communities (Hepburn, 2004). It was also expected that developing English language proficiency would put the children in a more equitable position in school with peers who were native English speakers.

DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURES

As a qualitative design, PLA employs the following data collection methods: research conversations, focus groups, field notes, and focus observations. Research conversations as a method in participatory inquiry (Herda, 1999) allowed for participants from diverse cultures in this program to work together and assess their actions. These were ongoing and initiated by both participants and researcher. The classroom team consisted of the classroom teacher, three first-language (L1) facilitators, the researcher, and the research assistant (RA). The team met every Monday morning, when the children did not attend the program, to reflect on the previous week and to plan the week ahead. These conversations changed focus from one week to the next as the classroom routines became smoother and the planning of the activities for the

whole group (English only) and the small groups (L1 only) became more easily organized and carried out. It was during these conversations that the emerging curriculum was discussed. The team negotiated topics such as babies, siblings, friends, animals, animal and people houses "back home" and in Canada, fruits and vegetables, and the market, to list a few, and they made decisions regarding materials and culturally specific activities.

Three focus groups (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001) were conducted with the parents and ethnocultural community leaders to discuss their goals and aspirations for their children, as well as their expectations regarding the success of the program. Once they had gathered parents' and community members' knowledge of culturally specific activities (e.g., making the orange-peel necklaces and carved apple faces typical of the rural impoverished areas in Kurdistan; playing shooting marbles on the floor and name games typical of the Somali and Sudanese communities), as well as stories, songs, and rituals, the team brought these ideas to the Monday morning meetings to consider for inclusion in classroom activities.

Field notes from the team, in the form of jotted notes and direct observations (Neuman, 2009), documented the conversations, events, and behaviours that occurred in the classroom. The intent of these focused observations was to describe and record behaviours of a child or a group of children or particular aspect of a classroom practice. For example, during the first couple of months of the program, the major concern was how to include four languages in the classroom. Because the L1 facilitators were also fluent in English and, because English was the common language in the classroom, as well as among the classroom team and the research team, special attention was given to the time and activities in which the children's L1s would be used in the most meaningful way. Classroom routines (e.g., snack, toilet, and circle time) and ways in which everyone became a member of a community were also aspects of the classroom life that the team observed and documented. Reflecting on the observations and setting new goals regarding the observed behaviours and practices was part of the ongoing conversations among the members of the team. For the purposes of this article, however, only the observations that focused on the cultural aspects of play are discussed.

The classroom observations were conducted two times per week for 4 months by a RA of East Indian heritage, who was highly sensitive to cultural differences in children's day-to-day behaviour and learning. The role of researcher and RA was that of participant observer (Merriam, 1998) in which one "relies totally upon one's sensitivity, one's ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviours, customs, and the like," (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 103) and upon tacit, as well as propositional, knowledge.

PLAYING "REALITY": CULTURAL SCRIPTS IN CHILDREN'S PLAY

Play scholars—such as Gaskins, Haight, and Lancy (2007); and Göncü, Jain, and Tuermer (2007)—highlighted play as a cultural construction that must be contextualized. "Understanding children's play requires an examination of how children represent their worlds in play" (Göncü et al., 1999, p. 158). According to Göncü et al. (1999), such an examination should also include

> the kinds of roles adopted by children, the types of events represented in children's play, and the ways in which the physical environment is used in the service of children's play desire, as well as the communicative context in which play desire are developed. (p. 158)

In the following section, examples of such an examination of two play episodes observed in the intercultural early learning classroom are presented. The names used in the descriptions are pseudonyms.

Playing Tea Serving

The following description of a play episode, which the team called "tea serving," is based on the Research Assistant's (RA) focused observations of play. She noted that two of the children, Abuko (a Sudanese girl) and Laho (a Sudanese boy), followed Achi (the Sudanese Arabic home language facilitator) to the kitchen–hut centre. The children began to bring out cooking utensils and a baby. Laho dressed the baby while Achi told him to get the baby ready for the day. The children decided that Abuko would cook something first. Abuko took a small stool and converted it into a small stove:
RA: "What are you making?"
Abuko: "I am cooking potatoes for you to eat. My mom makes potatoes for supper."
RA: "This is very kind of you, Abuko, thank you."
Abuko: "I will make you tea."
RA: "Oh, this is wonderful, Abuko. I love tea. Thank you."
RA (to Achi): "Is it a Sudanese tradition to offer tea after dinner?"
Achi: "Back home everyone drank tea after supper."
RA: "In the East Indian culture we call tea 'chai'."

Achi: “We call it ‘shaah’ in Sudanese Arabic.”

While the RA was “drinking” tea, one of the Somali children, Hasan, came and inquired:
Hasan: “Are you drinking tea? I want some too.”

It seemed that drinking tea was a familiar event in his home life as well, so they conversed about when one drinks tea at home and how it is made. The other L1 facilitators and most of the other children came to the kitchen area and shared how tea is made in their homes. Questions such as, “When do you drink tea at home?,” “Do you drink it with snack, and if so, what are these snacks?,” “Is it common to drink it with sweets?,” “Are certain spices used to make tea?,” “How is tea served in your home?,” or “How many times a day do they drink tea?,” were asked in all four languages spoken by the children in the classroom, and resulted in an animated discussion.

The following day, the L1 facilitators brought special tea pots, tea cups and saucers, spoons for stirring, and a steel and ceramic mortar and pestle for grinding spices, which they had carried from their countries of origin. They also brought specialty tea (some of it in bags and some it loose), sugar (cubed and loose), and a variety of spices (cardamom, cloves, and cinnamon) to make the “shaah.”

As these artifacts and ingredients were taken out of the bags and put on a table for everyone to explore, Hasan, a Somali boy, picked up a mortar and pestle and simulated grinding up spices that were at the tea table.
As Hasan was pretending to grind special spices for the tea, he was explaining to Maryam (the Somali language facilitator) how tea is served in his home and how his father drinks tea after his dinner. Laho, a Sudanese boy, said that his mother grinds things in a spice grinder like the one in our classroom. He also picked up the grinder during his play and knew exactly how to use it.

The Kurdish girl, Hana, who loved to play at the kitchen centre, pretending to be a mother, also showed interest in the tea sets and immediately began setting up the cups and saucers in a straight row on the floor and counted them. Tara, the Kurdish language facilitator, informed the RA that Hana was perfectly imitating her own mother’s way of serving tea, as it is the Kurdish tradition to serve food and drinks on the floor. When Tara was demonstrating to all children how the Kurdish people serve tea, Hana came up to help. Because the tea was too hot, Tara poured the tea in a saucer; Hana quickly came and blew on it to make it cool down as it is customary in the Kurdish tradition.

The play continued for 1 week. Every child had a chance to “make” tea in the play area following the four cultural traditions in the classroom: Kurdish, Somali, Sudanese, and Canadian. Learning each others’ cultural traditions, some of the Sudanese children and the Canadian-born, English speaking children started dipping their cookies in the tea cup, just like Maryam (the Somali language facilitator) did. Putting a sugar cube in the mouth and then drinking tea from the cup, a Kurdish tradition, was joyfully adopted by almost all children in the class. At the end of the week, a real tea party took place when the children from each culture, guided by their L1 facilitator, set up a table according to their cultural traditions and invited the other children for tea. Visiting each others’ “homes” brought a lot of excitement and turned into a shared tea party celebration. The shared party stimulated children to observe, try, and discuss different ways of drinking tea. At the end, one of the Sudanese boys said, “My favorite part of school is having a tea party.”

Playing Going to the Market

As a play theme, the marketplace developed as a natural extension of children’s exploration of tea-drinking rituals in their homes. Questions such as, “Where does tea come from?,” “Where does it grow?,” and “What else can we grow?,” led to rich conversations about growing fruits and vegetables and the kinds of produce children knew from their countries of origin. The L1 facilitators brought a variety of fruits and vegetables typical in their respective countries. Cultural artifacts such as hand-woven shopping baskets, banana leaf baskets, wooden fruit bowls, paper currency (Kurdish, Sudanese, and Somalian), and a seller’s vest and hat were also brought into the classroom and made available for the children to explore. A colorful fabric to cover the market table finished the preparation for the opening of the market.

Roles were discussed among the children, teachers, and L1 facilitators. Children decided that they would be the buyers and the teachers would be the vendors. Currency, both from their countries of origin and from Canada, was divided equally among the children. After some discussion, the children decided that the teachers, too, had to have some money so they could make change if they needed to. The shopping baskets, too, were divided among the children according to their preferences.

The play began with one of the language facilitators shouting out the different fruits she had for sale. As she held up the different fruits, she shouted, "Fresh oranges and lemons for sale! Fresh mangos for sale!" The children held on to their money and began lining up, choosing different baskets to carry their purchases in.

In their play, the children carried the baskets in a variety of different ways, specific to their culture. Some children swung the baskets over their shoulders; the Sudanese boy, who was the only child in this group born in a refugee camp, placed a basket on his head. One girl carried a heavy basket with both hands behind her back.
Since it was play and not a real market, the children did not pay for their purchases in an orderly way. Some of them pushed their way through to get their favorite fruits. They held out all of their money at once and pushed it into the seller's face. One of the L1 facilitators demonstrated how to bargain with the money when making purchases. She encouraged them to count it first to make sure they were paying the right amount, speaking to the children from her ethnocultural community in their mother tongue. In applying the cultural way of shopping by bargaining the prices, one of the children said, "How about three not four dollars?"

The children proceeded with their purchases to a fruit and lemonade stand, where they counted their fruits and practiced using a scale to weigh the different fruits. The L1 facilitator, who was the seller, counted the money she earned from the marketplace and told the children how rich she was. Some of the other children wanted to play the role of the seller as well. They took turns putting on the seller's vest in the market while some of their peers bought fruits. While acting as seller, the children shouted out the various fruits that were for sale, imitating what they had previously seen their teachers doing. Some of the children shouted out what was for sale in their mother tongues.

The children who were the buyers kept running back to get more money from the language facilitators so that they could continue buying more fruits. When the children were done shopping, they wanted to "cook," so a language facilitator and a teacher helped them cut up their different fruits to make a fruit salad for a snack. Many of the children did not put all of the fruit they purchased in the class fruit salad. A few of the children took their baskets to the hut–kitchen centre and put the food into a pot to make soup. They played in the kitchen area and stirred around the food. The lemons were enjoyed by many of the children, especially the Sudanese and Somali children, who were accustomed to eating sliced lemons with a bit of salt.

The market stand was so popular that one of the children proposed that an open–closed sign should be placed on the table so that the students would know when they could play in it. The language facilitators thought it was a good idea, and made signs in English and in their native languages for the children to post. The children thoroughly enjoyed playing market with the language facilitators all week.

EXAMINING CHILDREN'S WORLDS AS REPRESENTED IN CLASSROOM PLAY

In understanding the significance of these play episodes in refugee children's transitions from home to school cultures, one needs to take into account how play is viewed in these children's communities. Perhaps Rogoff's (1993) description of the cultural differences between play in non-industrialized and industrialized–Western communities can be useful:

> Children [in non-industrialized communities] most often emulate adult activities in play, whereas in middle-class communities children's play is less frequently modeled on adult activities (which such children have less opportunities to observe) and more frequently involves imaginary characters such as those on television. (pp. 25–26)

In considering this distinction, one can see how play in the pilot program was characteristic of play representative of the children's home cultures. Children playfully imitated and reconstructed at the different stages of the development of these particular play episodes important themes of adult life—serving tea and going to the market. From the point of view of the activity theory, an activity as "a unit of life that is historically determined and social in origin" (Göncü et al., 1999, p. 154), has a purpose driven by a need (e.g., grocery shopping to satisfy the need for food), and thus motivates an individual to engage in the activity. The particular actions involved in the "going to the market" play episode, such as selecting fruits and vegetables and paying for the purchased goods, require the use of cultural tools, including language and gesture, that are appropriated within the context of a particular historical and social meaning. Although the overall motives of the activity and its actions and goals occur at a conscious level, some automated actions, which depend on specific environmental circumstances, do not involve conscious attention. In the classroom, play provided context in which the children were able to demonstrate culturally specific operations (such as carrying a shopping basket or blowing on a saucer to cool down the tea poured into it) not typical for the culture of their host country but for their home culture.

Children's motivation to engage in a play activity is different from adults' engagement in real-life activity, however. Unlike adults, children do not aim at tangible end results of their play activity. Rather, their motive is to be like adults and, thus, to play their roles by performing the actions associated with adult roles. These actions, according to Leont'ev (1981), are real, although they are performed without the goal of achieving an end result and usually involve play materials or other objects, not the actual tools used in life. Therefore, imagination or an imaginary situation is the requirement for the child to be able to perform real, culturally formed actions and operations.
In the play episode "serving tea," for example, children adopted adult roles in preparing, serving, and consuming tea and enjoyed visiting one another's tea party, just as adults do. Both the actions involved in the tea-serving activity and the roles that required these actions necessitated the use of cultural tools, which were predominantly demonstrated in children's gestures (e.g., grinding the tea spices and dipping cookies in the tea cup).

However, one can also see that because of children's somewhat limited experiences and knowledge of the larger cultural context in which tea rituals and shopping at the local market take place in their countries of origin, they could enact only a small portion of these everyday activities on their own. Although the tea rituals were practiced in their homes on a daily basis and most children were able to talk about and demonstrate how tea was served and consumed in their homes, going to the market was an experience that had been initiated in the host country for all but 1 of the children, the one born in a refugee camp. The cultural scripts demonstrated in play were limited to carrying the shopping baskets and picking fruit from the stand—activities the children observed their parents doing in Canada. Thus, depending on their first-hand experiences, the children relied to different degree on the L1 facilitators' involvement in developing "serving tea" and "going to the market" as sustained, dramatic play themes. Adopting roles and participating as playmates in children's play was a new experience for both the L1 facilitators and the children because it is not typical for adults in their cultures to play with children. Furthermore, children needed the cultural artifacts as scaffolds in enacting their cultural knowledge, which in their countries of origin would have been replaced by child-made or improvised play objects.

The use of play objects and cultural artifacts in the children's play episodes deserves special attention. From birth, children are surrounded by objects and artifacts of their culture, which they experience first by observing adults, next by imitating, and then by using creatively to satisfy their own needs and desires; ultimately, they develop their own useful tools and objects. It is an expectation and an overall goal of each society for the young to learn to be proficient of the older generation's tools and "modernize" them to meet the needs of their own generation. Tudge and Odero-Wanga (2009) maintained that children do not merely reproduce cultural practices, but also recreate them. Children's manipulation of the objects available to them in different contexts and participating in activities requiring the use of these objects allows them to develop different competencies that are related to different practices and different knowledge systems—home and school. As these episodes illustrate, play allows space where the practice of these knowledge systems safely overlap and where new, hybrid knowledge and practice associated with it can emerge.

The children in this particular program have already made, to some extent, a transition from their cultural way of playing at home with less involvement of adults and use of fewer play objects, to playing at school with more adult involvement and more provisions made for arranging conducive culturally appropriate play contexts. It seems that play was significant in these children's transitions from home to school culture because it served as affirmation of their cultural knowledge in a context outside of their home and allowed for sharing cultural knowledge in an attempt to create a new one that combined elements of all. Play then allowed children to create a new culture of childhood in their adopted homes.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Referring to the work of Eiser (1988) on children's play in the Holocaust, King (1992) discussed the joy and satisfaction adults, in general, and early childhood educators, in particular, received from providing play settings for children and taking part in this play. She brought several arguments in support of her main thesis that, contrary to the common perception, children's play in any institutional or organizational setting is far from being "free." King stated, "In summary, classroom play is never, simply, the free expression of children" (p. 47). Along with the importance of adult-made choices of physical environment (i.e., the space designated in the classroom as a play area), the play materials made available to children, and the time allowed for play activities or "free play," the type of interactions between adults and children in play also shapes how children use materials and perform roles in play.

The play episodes previously described can serve as examples of how the adults' thoughtful consideration of the cultural context of play created space for children's enactment of cultural scripts pertaining to important day-to-day practices in their home lives. These practices, in which knowledge of cultural traditions surface, are not individual and unique but, rather, sociocultural and historic. It is important here to emphasize the availability of cultural artifacts in the classroom

defined as objects "created as an embodiment of purpose and incorporated into life activity in a certain way" (Backhurst, 1990, p. 182). This definition is particularly useful in understanding the role of adults and, most important, the role of the L1 facilitators who also served as cultural brokers in the classroom in guiding children's use of these artifacts in culturally appropriate ways in their play. The definition is also useful in understanding culture as "not a random array of artifacts, but rather a heterogeneously, dynamically changing set of practices and resources that require constant active engagement for their continued existence" (Cole, 1996, as cited in Cole & Gajdamaschko, 2007, p. 208). In the Vygotskian tradition, this definition of artifacts helps us to see how a child enacts, as well as acquires, knowledge of culturally specific ways of being in the world by participating in activities that were initiated and scaffolded by the more competent members of their own cultural group—the L1 facilitators and cultural brokers. Thus, the examples provided earlier challenge the idea of using of a "multicultural prop box" without the cultural mediation needed in scaffolding children's use of these props.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This article explored the role of play as a cultural activity in refugee children's transitions from home to preschool culture, challenging the "culture-free" view of play as a means for development of a "universal" child and presenting an alternative view of play as a cultural leading activity. The works of Vygotsky (1977, 1978) and Leont'ev (1978, 1981) theoretically framed a community-initiated project that provided learning opportunities in the child's home language and English. The purpose of the initiative was to provide linguistic and cultural continuity to smooth children's transition from home to school. While linguistic continuity was achieved through the consistent use of L1s in the classroom while the children were learning English, cultural continuity was provided through the cultural content and cultural activities relevant to each of the cultures present in the classroom. The availability of artifacts children recognized as belonging to their culture allowed them to enact their narrative knowledge of everyday events in their home life. Thus, having cultural artifacts in children's dramatic play was not simply an act of recognition and appreciation of diversity. Rather, it was an essential element of the play environment that allowed children from diverse background to enact their cultural knowledge. Children's enactment of cultural scripts in play in a preschool context in their host country demonstrated that "children take on important roles in mediating between their world of origin and the host society" (Knörr, 2005, p. 15) by bringing their cultural narrative knowledge to their new cultural context. Each child is a participant in a number of sociocultural contexts and, in the case of immigrant and refugee children, a member of different ethnocultural groups. Thus, he or she is both a product of these contexts and agent of their change. Children's understanding and knowledge about the different sociocultural contexts they live in are most freely represented in preschool-age children's dramatic or pretend play.

Play provided a hybrid space in which young children and their mothers engaged in practices that merged different cultural forms into a "bricolage" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 102) in Dachyshyn and Kirova's (2008) work based on observations of Sudanese mother–son dyads. Play in this study was also conceptualized as providing a liminal space for new identities to emerge through contestation. Dachyshyn and Kirova concluded

> If we allow room for alternate expressions of being to arise then early childhood institutions can become a hybrid space, a third space, for children and parents new to Canada in which to negotiate the hybrid identities that are essential to healthy integration into life in the host country. (p. 294)

The play episodes in which the children recreated their cultural knowledge were possible because the intercultural early learning program was designed to open a hybrid space for the children and adults who shared it to bring their knowledge and way of being in the world. Such examples challenge the goal of the implementation of the federal multicultural policy within the educational system in Canada, which has resulted in "folklorisation" and construction of minority groups in static, essentialist, and exoticized terms while situating such groups outside the Canadian nation (e.g., Bannerji, 2000; Walcott, 1997). The elements of the piloted intercultural early learning program presented here suggest the possibility of a new direction of multicultural education practice that moves beyond the celebration of difference on special occasions or dates that are typically add-ons to the regular curriculum and integrates multiple perspectives into the explicit curriculum. By critically analysing the Eurocentric basis of early childhood practices and adopting a sociocultural–historical theory of learning and its foundational principles, this intercultural early learning program demonstrates that it is possible to preserve cultural group identity and practices while creating a common culture. Following children's lead in negotiating cultural scripts and realities, early childhood educators can learn to see the tension between preservation and interpenetration of cultures as creative possibilities.

The program also demonstrates that the intercultural approach to education cannot become a reality in schools without parallel changes in the wider social world—that is, provincial government initiatives to better meet the needs of young refugee and immigrant children. The program exemplifies how communities' and families' cultural needs, as well as their

high aspirations for the education of their children in Canada, can be addressed in a sensitive and comprehensive manner through collaborative grassroots efforts.

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