

Culture and Practice in Early Childhood Teacher Education: A Comparative and Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT This study currently in progress focuses on two early childhood teacher education programs in contexts where the participants are undergoing rapid social and personal change: a program in Namibia, and a program for immigrant childcare educators in Canada. The objective is to provide in-depth understanding of the ways in which differing ideas about teacher education are reflected in practice. It is important to ensure that teacher education programs prepare teachers to dovetail children's preparation for school with meaningful connections to the culture and language of the home community. Without such connections, many children in settings undergoing rapid change will continue to drop out of school before literacy and other skills are firmly established. The study uses ethnographic methods to undertake fieldwork in teacher education classrooms at the two research sites over a period of two terms. The central research question focuses on the way conceptions of young children's preschool needs are played out in each setting. The data stems from analysis of early childhood care and education and teacher education curricula; policy and other documents; focused observations in teacher education classrooms and teaching practice; and interviews with teacher educators, education officers, teachers, parents, and community leaders. Preliminary data from the Canadian site begins to elucidate issues and strategies that are most likely to be effective for teacher education programs, with implications for teacher education in a range of settings in both the majority and minority worlds.

Keywords: comparative education, teacher education, early childhood, ethnography

Introduction

This comparative and qualitative study currently in progress focuses on two early childhood teacher education programs in contexts where the participants are undergoing rapid social and personal change: a program in Namibia, which commences in February 2014, and a program for immigrant childcare educators in Canada which started in September 2012. A third site in Latin America is being negotiated at this writing. The origin of the study was our observation of the trend in teacher education and in early childhood care and education (ECCE) to be moving in two directions at once¹. In an apparent move away from psychological theoretical assumptions about the universality of child development, there is increasing recognition of the validity of local ways of knowing and a greater value placed on linguistic and cultural diversity (Cannella 1997; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence 2007; Vandebroek 2004). At the same time, the legacy of colonialism in countries such as Namibia continues to discourage the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and activities in teacher education programs (Abdi & Cleghorn, 2005; Evans & Cleghorn, 2012; Goduka 1997; Gonzales 1999; Serpell 1993; Shizha 2006; Swadener, Kabiru & Njenga 1997). A comparable situation is found in Canada, where language barriers and a lack of recognition of foreign experience and qualifications (Statistics Canada 2006) channels many newcomers into work with children, that is not seen as professional. The percentage of immigrants (15%) employed as EC educators in Canada is higher than for any other occupation sector (Service Canada 2012). In order for immigrant early childhood educators to be construed as professionals, they must detach themselves from their experiential, tacit, and intuitive ways of knowing (Jipson 1991). Thus the privileged position of western child development knowledge leaves no space for teachers to bring in their own understandings of the socio-cultural contexts in which they, and the children with whom they work, live (Silin 1995; Stott & Bowman 1996). These apparently opposing patterns are thought to impede the establishment of teacher education programs that are broadly effective and locally adapted. In fact, it seems that, despite efforts to recognize local cultures as valuable resources for planning appropriate education programs, it is still the case that teacher education planners “are taking their cues from imported models that reinforce value shifts towards the individualistic, production oriented cultures of the west” (Myers 1992, p. 29)². We ask whether this is the most desirable direction for all.

Conceptual Framework

This research builds on preliminary studies in Zimbabwe, India, South Africa, and Canada, where a range of interpretations was observed among EC teachers and teacher educators about the meaning and application of key concepts such as *best practice*, *child-centered approach*, *developmentally appropriate practice*, and *play-based curriculum* (Cleghorn & Prochner 1997, 2003, 2010, 2012; Dachyshyn 2008; Kirova 2010; Cleghorn, Shumba, & Peacock 2002). Cleghorn and Prochner (2003) used a conceptual frame-

1. Throughout the paper, teacher education refers to early childhood teacher education.

2. Culture is here defined as the ways of thinking, speaking, seeing, believing, and behaving that characterize the members of a social group (Geertz 1975).

work drawn from LeVine et al. (1994) to provide insight into Western and non-Western visions of childhood via two distinct models of childcare, the *pediatric* and the *pedagogical*³. Although the LeVine et al. models refer to the features of infant child care in only two contexts—one African and one middle-class North American—they point to very different conceptualizations of early socialization that tend to persist into later teaching-learning situations, whether formalized or not. We have found their respective features to be manifested in various ways in teachers' attitudes and approaches in early childhood programs in India and in eastern and southern Africa; they also bring attention to shifts in practice that coincide with rural-to-urban migration, decrease in child mortality, increase in access to preschool and regular schooling, and increase in the formal preparation of EC teachers (LeVine 2003).

To elaborate, the foregoing can also be considered with regard to social change and development (Hsueh & Tobin 2003). On the one hand, teacher education program planners may equate beliefs about universality in child development with trends in global development (Ball & Pence 2001; Bekman 1998; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence 2007; Kagitçibasi, Sunar, & Bekman 2001). On the other hand, teacher education and early childhood programs may be expected to reflect local community values and approved behaviours while responding to social change by, for example, educating teachers in the still dominant theories of child development, "best practice," and the like (Lubeck 1996). However, while social, economic, and technological change can be rapid, culture tends to change slowly. It is in this regard that the pediatric-pedagogical models may also be discussed in terms of the cultural values that are more likely to change slowly over time; e.g., interpersonal relatedness to independence, emotional interdependence to autonomy, material interdependence to material emancipation, and, collective to individualistic identity (Kagitçibasi 2007).

Keeping in mind the seemingly dichotomized nature of the concepts under consideration, it is important for teacher educators to understand how each model may relate differently to a group's needs for economic survival, the pediatric model to a rural, subsistence economy and the pedagogical model to the highly differentiated economy of urban North America, for example. That is, when the home environment is relatively impoverished, non-literate, and non-Western, as in many rural and semi-rural parts of Africa, the patterns of child care will likely conform to the pediatric model; the teaching of moral and other values may occur through oral storytelling and singing, with little use of language between adults and children for encouraging or answering questions, reading stories, or vocabulary building—the kinds of discourse patterns found in schools. Beyond infancy, one may observe a shift in focus to children's mastery of specific skills through observation and imitation, via the respect-obedience model (LeVine et al. 1994), a model that suggests a culturally shared vision of the adult-to-be as one who can function within a hierarchical society where the authority of a parent or other adult (such as a teacher) is not to be questioned (Shumba 1999).

In contrast, the pedagogical model of early socialization is reflective of the social and economic structure of societies such as Canada, where most learners complete secondary school and many receive postsecondary education. In such societies, the dominant

3. These models are *ideal types* in the sociological sense, that is, seemingly dichotomized concepts made up of essential characteristics, used in the social sciences for the purposes of analyzing and understanding social phenomena (Max Weber, 1946, cited by Babbie 2002).

group's vision of the adult-to-be is of a person who values individual competition and achievement and is ideologically oriented towards democratic ways of doing things—within families as well as in school and society at large. Typically, the child-rearing methods of middle-class educated parents dovetail with the kinds of interaction patterns that the child will encounter in school (LeVine 2003), for example, extensive listening, speaking, reasoning, explaining, asking, answering, comparing, labeling, and counting. We ask to what extent this model fits with the experience of immigrant families and immigrant childcare educators. While schools everywhere are increasingly middle-class institutions (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990), does the immigrant child find school a familiar place, as would a middle-class western child? What do EC teacher educators need to know about the borders such children cross between home and school?

The authors' earlier studies suggest that, especially in social contexts undergoing rapid social change, a teacher education program may reflect a number of transitions and possible discontinuities: societal change in terms of economic and other aspects of development; conceptual change among teacher education students in terms of shifts in thought towards more western or globalized notions of how children are to be socialized in the preschool years; home/school language and cultural differences, and so on. Similar transitions and discontinuities are also reflected in the history of immigrants' experiences in Canada where accounts describe the effects of a sharp discontinuity between early socialization in the home community and the culture that is encountered at school (Kirk 2004; Simpson 2000). Thus, if it is the case that one of the main functions of preschools is to prepare children for formal schooling, then EC teacher educators may need explicit knowledge about the kinds of boundaries that they and young learners are expected to cross (Giroux 1992). If some EC educators wonder about the meaning and application of such western-generated concepts as child-centred approaches, developmentally appropriate practices, and play-based curriculum, it is not surprising then if the early school experience is also unfamiliar and seemingly irrelevant for the young children in their charge (Breton-Carbonneau, et al., (2012; Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010; Evans & Cleghorn, 2012; Heath, 1983; Jegede & Aikenhead 1999; Morris, McLeod, & Danesi 1993). We suggest therefore that the experiences that teacher education programs offer are critically important for preparing teachers and children (and families) for the possibly disorienting border crossings, so that, ideally, indigenous and local ways of knowing, doing, and being can be incorporated into the schooling process and the chances for success in school maximized.

Research Question

Although Namibia and Canada share connections through their colonial histories, they differ in significant ways, not the least of which is Canada's place as a "developed" (minority world) nation. The central question of this research therefore asks the extent to which, and in what ways, the above-described dimensions and varied conceptions of young children's preschool needs are played out in each teacher education setting in light of the economic, political, social, cultural, and linguistic differences between them. In this we also ask, does the increased globalization of thought in the field of early childhood education undermine sound, locally appropriate teacher educa-

tion practice? If so, in what ways can local cultural knowledges and practices be meaningfully integrated with the existing teacher education programs?⁴

In sum, diverse influences may be reflected in teacher education programs in the light of rapid social and personal change. Such changes, or transitions, also point to ways in which traditional child-rearing patterns and views of childhood (e.g., how children “ought” to behave, what they need to learn) may represent a cost or a benefit, to be clung to and perhaps later retrieved, for children, families, and communities. While we agree that the school should adapt to the cultural conditions of the child, it is more likely that its hegemonic patterns—western curriculum, learning materials, and teaching methods—will persist and become even more entrenched. Our goal is to determine ways that EC teacher educators, teachers, parents, and communities can better prepare children for the realities of schooling, while preserving the integrity of local norms and values in teacher education. We suggest that this goal must be accomplished in order for young learners everywhere to realize their potential.

Research Settings

This comparative and qualitative study is being carried out in an early childhood teacher education program in Namibia and in a worksite-embedded program for immigrant childcare educators in Canada⁵. The primary objective is to provide in-depth understanding of the ways in which differing conceptions of what children need in the preschool years are played out in teacher education programs in social contexts where the participants are experiencing rapid social, technological and personal change. For example, in Canada, the 2006 census indicates that 1 in 5 children are born outside Canada; many newcomer families struggle to adapt and to find suitable employment. In Namibia, the gap between rich and poor is marked with 35% of the population living on less than \$1 a day. In addition about 57,000 children have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS (UNICEF, 2012). The inclusion of the African site will allow for some insights into historical, linguistic, and cultural differences that too often are ignored in loose generalizations about Africa. Our previous studies suggest that, within the preschool years and in such settings, western and local cultural norms may conflict in ways that compromise the oft-stated aim of preparing children for school, thus putting children at increased risk for later school failure and drop-out (Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010). It is of note that academic discourse confirms the need for the kind of up-to-date research on teacher education that we are undertaking (Ball & Pence 1999; Hatch, Bowman, Jor’dan, et al. 2002; LeVine 2003; Pence & Nsamenang 2008).

The research site in Namibia is a university setting offering a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Development and a Master of Education in Early Childhood Development (ECD). The four-year undergraduate program prepares teachers for pre-primary and grades 1-4. It is offered on the main campus and at four different satellite campuses. This is a professional degree designed to meet the learners’ needs, potential and abilities. Graduates will be able to teach in one local language as well as in English, learning also how to ease the transition from an indigenous language to learning via

4. The term knowledges is used “to denote the multiplicity of indigenous . . . knowledges” (Breidlid 2013, p. 2).

5. The programs have an integrated approach to childcare, development, and education led by adults who are variously called educators, instructors or teachers.

English, the official language. A learner-centered approach is to be used which presupposes that teachers have a holistic view of learning, valuing the learner's life experiences as a starting point for their studies (Sibuku 1997). The university also offers several Master of Education programs, including ECD. The Master of Education in ECD is intended to produce graduates with expertise in designing, implementing, and evaluating ECD programs of learning that meet the cognitive, social, physical, personal, emotional and cultural developmental needs of young children.

The Canadian research site is a worksite-embedded program for immigrant early childhood educators in a large city in western Canada. While substantial numbers of immigrant women gravitate to the field of ECE (Service Canada 2012), those who aspire to advance their education face significant language and financial barriers (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2010; Child Care Human Resources Sector Council 2009). Furthermore, women entering teacher education programs are typically confronted by the dominant discourse in ECE which foregrounds the research of Western developmental psychologists at the expense of the women's culturally constructed beliefs and practices about how to be and work with young children (Massing, 2014).

Concerned about the lack of options for immigrant early childhood educators, an immigrant-serving agency attached to a childcare centre sought and was granted government funding to pilot a two-year program to bridge these women into the post-secondary system. The overall aims of the program, as defined by the funding agreement, are to improve upon students' skills in English language and teach the dominant theory and practice in the field of ECE. Since this is a pilot program, which may not continue, we commenced data collection in September 2012, the first year of this program, with the support of a different research grant to which two of the authors of this paper are attached. This initial research project is framed by participatory action research, a component embedded within the program and which has a divergent set of goals from those outlined in the funding agreement. These are: 1) To identify the tensions that exist between the cultural knowledge that immigrant child care educators bring to their work and professional knowledge in the early childhood care and education community of practice, and 2) To explore the role that a worksite-embedded program for immigrant childcare educators can play in resolving these tensions in a productive and meaningful way in everyday ECE practice.

Research plan

A team approach involving close collaboration with local education experts and the training and employment of two graduate student assistants from each community is used. In both sites local advisory committees are formed and community-based participatory research strategies is in progress. The research is guided by each site's principles for ethical conduct, including reciprocity and equity. Consistent with participatory research methodology, data are co-constructed and generated collectively during all phases of the process. Focus groups (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson 2001) and individual interviews with course instructors and students, field notes, and analysis of documentation pertaining to teacher education philosophy, curriculum, and policy, and

reconstruction of the cultural meaning of educational processes and related events via the perspectives of the study's participants are used as data-generating research methods. Fieldwork in each site is planned to take place over the course of two or more academic terms, following student teachers from the first day in their program⁶. Data collection began much earlier in the Canadian site to capitalize on the unique opportunity this pilot program afforded us. The use of ethnographic data collection methods requires attention to be paid to repeated, regular events as well as to exceptional episodes, since these can bring to light matters that are out of the participants' "line of vision" (Carrasco 1981; Carspecken & Wolford 2001).

The cyclic nature of participatory research methodologies requires data to be analyzed on an on-going basis. Thus, after an analysis of each of the data sources, significant items of information are to be identified and shared among the co-researchers. Clustering of similar items in categories and themes will allow for the identification of group-similar items which will serve to guide a group decision-making process leading to concrete solutions to the identified practical problems (Creswell 2005). Particular attention is to be given to tensions arising from "cultural clashes" between euro-centric course contents and students' personal cultural knowledges and beliefs about what is "good for children" and what constitutes professional early childhood practice.

Preliminary Findings: Canadian Site

Data have been collected for over a year in the Canadian site and preliminary analyses have yielded some insights into the ways in which, and the extent to which, each of the teacher education instructors elicit and include indigenous knowledges in the courses. Since the goals in each year of the program were different, the instructors took varied approaches to educating this information. In the first year, the instructor, Audrey, aimed to uncover the skills and knowledges each of the students brought to their work with children. The second year was identified as a bridge to conventional post-secondary learning. Therefore, the instructor, Sandra, aspires to convey the standard curriculum she uses when teaching a Communications course in a two-year diploma college program, but with attentiveness to culturally-constructed ways of being with children. Given these diverse learning goals, we elaborate on each instructor's approaches to teaching in turn to illustrate the ways in which the students' culturally-constructed conceptualizations of how preschool-aged children are to be socialized in preparation for schooling filter into the early childhood teacher education classroom.

The primary instructor in the first year, Audrey, created a classroom environment where students and the instructor would feel comfortable sharing their experiences and co-learning. In terms of the physical environment, the desks were arranged to facilitate student interaction and discussions, and Audrey demonstrated caring for her students by providing drinks, snacks, and resources such as a library, computers, and a printer. Since she eschewed using the board or showing PowerPoint slides and sat with the students instead of standing at the front, she alternately presented herself as a co-learner or a facilitator rather than taking an expert stance. In fact, she often deliberately dis-

6. In Namibia, the student teachers are at once instructors in the undergraduate early childhood development program who are embarking on Masters' degree studies.

tanced herself from the dominant body of ECE knowledge by saying things like “*they* say that you shouldn’t . . . ” instead of telling them what to do based on her own expertise (Field notes February 26, 2013)⁷. Consistent with the focus on developing a relational environment, Audrey shared her personal experiences but mainly kept the focus on the students. This positioning was deliberate; allowing her to situate the students themselves as experts. Honouring their home languages in the class by encouraging students to discuss the content with same language speakers to facilitate comprehension (Kennedy 2008) was an intentional strategy again aimed at privileging their knowledges. The assignments were also designed to promote reflection on the dissonance between their own cultural practices and those mandated in the regulatory frameworks:

This (assignment) is about the difference between cultural ways of being and what Western practice demands, so it just asks you to try to do some things a little bit differently. Maybe you do these already and that's okay But it (the assignment) says “this week try interacting with children in a way that's a bit new for you. Some examples might be playing on the floor with the child, kneeling to be at the child's level, talking about a child's feelings.” . . . Think about something that you might not normally do or maybe you do but it's a bit hard for you. Try it, and say what you did differently, how it felt to you, and how the child responded (FN October 16, 2012).

By being tentative and acknowledging how inherently difficult it is to change one's practice, she also engendered feelings of security in the class.

Consistent with Gupta's (2006) work with her immigrant child development students, Audrey sought to have students form connections between theory and practice in order to draw out their funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti 2005) with respect to child development, child care/rearing, and socialization goals. However, instead of presenting the authoritative knowledge first and asking them to respond, as Gupta did with her students, she usually foregrounded their knowledges; inviting them to comment on a topic based on their own experiences, then having a learning facilitator present the Western theory, and finally juxtaposing the two bodies of knowledge by asking for their comments a second time. For instance, when teaching developmental milestones she opened the lesson with “I want to know if these are different in different cultures.” Students discussed various tensions between Western notions of child development and those enacted in their cultural communities, connecting experience to development. For example, one student mentioned how Islamic religious beliefs curtailed children's involvement in certain activities which are valued here, thus impacting on their physical development: “They (their bodies) cannot be exposed so when they go swimming they cannot go, things that are Western. . . . At some time they need to come to school and children are shocked and don't know what to do” (FN March 5, 2013). Moreover, a number of students observed that the socialization goals for young children in Canada are framed around the development of ‘school skills,’ resonating with LeVine et al's (2006) conceptualization of the pedagogical model. For example, several students referred to how preschool-age children are expected to be able to cut

7. Field notes, hereafter FN.

with scissors, but immigrant families do not share this expectation, leading to tension. As one student described: “Teachers get mad, but they haven’t reached this milestone” (FN March 5, 2013). Others were surprised that many preschool aged children in Canada know their ABCs and number and can write their names. As one student explained: “In our playschool, we have a lot of kids—four and four and a half—who can write their names by themselves, they can do a lot of things by themselves. They can do it, I think, because they are Canadian people” (FN March 5, 2013). Further to this discussion, Audrey drew from their examples to talk about the influence of contextual factors on development. In general, Audrey invited them to share their culture perspectives both formally and informally, inserting pauses as she spoke to allow them time to reflect and respond.

In addition to this discussion format, Audrey assembled other resources to elicit student perspectives. On one occasion, students and their mentors—each student is assigned a volunteer mentor who assists them inside and/or outside of class—were instructed to interview one another about their child rearing practices, thus creating a space for more egalitarian cross-cultural dialogue. Photo or video elicitation was also used to facilitate discussion and critique. For instance, students viewed a documentary film entitled *Babies* (Balmès 2010) depicting childrearing in four different cultures and Audrey asked, “was there anything that was surprising to you?” (FN March 12, 2013). These surprises included: how one mother used breast milk to clean her son’s face, how one mother who was never seen cooking or finding food was not “taking care” of her child, how several of the children were never “talked to,” and the safety of one child roaming freely among the cattle.

Although Audrey continues to attend the class in year two (currently in progress), Sandra is the primary instructor, and has been tasked with preparing them for formal post-secondary learning. Sandra has inherited the physical and social-emotional environment constructed in the previous year, but she also builds relationships with each student by greeting them warmly, taking the time to converse with each student individually, and assisting them in class. However, Sandra teaches at the front of the class in more of an expert positioning and relies heavily on instructor lectures with Power-Point, breaking into individual or small group work at various points in the class. The content and the readings reflect dominant Western notions about communication, enforcing “one right way” of interacting with young children. In deference to her as an expert, students frequently ask her “is this okay?” or “am I doing the right thing?” which they did not do with Audrey. In spite of this expert role, Sandra employs three different strategies to extract the perspectives the students bring to the program and relate these to the dominant discourse.

First, in contrast to Audrey’s approach and much as Gupta (2006) did, Sandra always introduces her perspectives on the course content first, and then asks the students to comment. During class, she shares many stories of her professional experiences with them as an invitation, but not a requirement, to reciprocate if they feel comfortable doing so. Their first assignment entailed bringing an object representing something that happened in their lives or a relationship which has changed how they views things. Sandra modeled the process beforehand by telling a very emotional, personal story, which then assisted them in opening up and telling the class deeply personal information (FN

October 9, 2013). In these moments when Sandra asks for their opinions, she moves closer to the students, shifting to become a learner who listens attentively to students, takes away the information and reflects on it, and then refers back to that information in her teaching and examples in subsequent classes. For instance, when she explained how people demonstrate they are listening to others, she slouched in her chair and crossed her arms to model “poor listening” behaviours (FN September 25, 2013). When a student mentioned that people cross arms as a sign of respect in her country, Sandra incorporated that information into a later class on non-verbal communication (FN October 30, 2013).

A second pedagogical strategy Sandra uses is to adopt the role of a translator or facilitator who aids students in understanding dominant practice. She navigates the divide between professional and personal practices, stating: “So, there are layers, all sorts of things you have to be aware of in terms of our culture or origin and what we do in our family, what we do in Canada, and what we do in child care” (FN September 18, 2013). In particular, she makes students aware of how regulatory frameworks such as licensing and accreditation standards dictate practice. For instance, a student shared: “When I started in the day care I feel uncomfortable because in my back home maybe young children never look adults in the eyes. When I come here I know I need to, I have to” (FN September 18, 2013). Sandra acknowledged that the standards are based on European North American interactional patterns which may not reflect the diversity of the families in the child care centre: “So it's hard but you have this extra layer of having licensing and accreditation (validators) who will be looking for eye contact” (FN September 18, 2013). In keeping with her style of teaching then listening, she later asked them “so, tell me about eye contact,” leading into a discussion of their cultural understandings of eye contact or lack thereof (FN October 30, 2013). The tension between cultural, parental knowledges and these standards was brought forward by a student commenting on a parenting course for immigrant women that she attended: “We know more about our kids. We know better than they (the ‘experts’) do.” Sandra explained: “In early childhood there is a body of knowledge that is considered best practice. . . . There is difference between what goals, perhaps, parents would have for children and the goals I might have for children” (FN, November 6, 2013). She then shared some goals for preschool children which are embodied in the dominant body of knowledge to facilitate their understanding such as being problem solvers, fostering competence, and providing security.

Finally, Sandra attempts to reconcile or bridge dominant practices with the students’ own ways of communicating. If students’ answers are ‘wrong’ in terms of the expected professional practices, Sandra is affirming and rather than overtly correcting them, she presents an alternate possibility. For instance, Sandra was teaching about giving descriptive feedback instead of offering praise, a concept that was extremely difficult for the students to grasp as it is not practiced in their cultures. A student stated that she would tell a child who is helping another child put his shoes on: “Great job! You are teaching him how to put his shoes on!” Sandra, who had asked them to avoid using phrases such as ‘great job,’ sensitively responded:

Okay, so you've got the ‘great job’ there, but you've added onto it...And that's a good in between step, right? I say great job and it gives me time to think and

then I add on. Eventually maybe that great job won't be there and you'll just say "you're helping him put his shoes on." But that's fine when you add those two together (FN November 13, 2013).

With respect to crossing one's arms, she commented: "so if the accreditation validator came to your room and you were sitting like that they might interpret it in a very North American way and say the caregiver isn't interested in the child when your intent is I'm here, I'm listening, I'm present." After some discussion about their other ways of communicating nonverbally, the class came to the conclusion that one might combine crossed arms with a slight head tilt, indicating interest or concern (FN November 6, 2013). In one class, she told a story about a child care centre where the immigrant staff called all the children "baby." When she asked them why, one woman told her that it was a term of endearment in their country meaning 'I care for you as I do for my own baby.' Sandra explained:

Her intentions were very loving and giving. And so we had a discussion, one of the things your licensing officer and accreditation validator will be looking for is using a child's name. . . . They won't understand that. Could you combine it? Maybe, maybe. . . . So I learned a little about what her intentions were and she learned a little about what some people would be looking for. . . . So, what is your intention when you say sweetie, honey, darling? . . . We care about them, we like them, we love them. . . . So, in my professional self what are some ways I can do that and use their name, and I think you've got the answer here (FN September 18, 2013).

By deferring personal judgments, she maintains a relationship of trust with them; modelling how they might bridge between cultural and professional practices.

Therefore, at the macro-level, as operationalised in the regulatory frameworks, western concepts such as developmentally appropriate practices pervade early childhood settings and undermine immigrants' own culturally-constructed understandings of how to care for and socialize young children. At the micro-level in this particular classroom, though, the instructors are able to utilize diverse pedagogical approaches to draw the varied conceptions of young children's preschool needs into the coursework to a fairly significant extent. As Sandra explained, a course in a conventional early childhood program might devote one isolated class to cultural diversity, but in this program, cultural perspectives on child development, socialization, and child care are infused within every single class. Audrey co-constructed understandings with the students and privileged their cultural practices in the course content, while Sandra fluidly shifted between an expert and a learner stance, translating dominant practices and reconciling them or combining them with cultural practices. However, the current discourse mandates specific ways of being and communicating with young children which are in conflict with the local understandings being produced in this program. As one student commented, "It's very hard for us. We want to work in the day care. We have our own culture, our own things . . . together sometimes it doesn't work" (FN October 23, 2012).

The Significance of the Study

Although this is a research study in progress and much more data will be forthcoming, we take the position that it is increasingly important to ensure that teacher education programs prepare teachers to dovetail children's preparation for school with meaningful connections to the culture and language of the home community (Adair 2011), especially since more and more children spend their preschool years in EC centres that are becoming increasingly westernized in character. Without such connections, the risk is that many children who experience rapid social and personal change will continue to drop out of school.

Current academic discourse points to the need for more qualitative/ethnographic research that describes the specifics of educational processes that foster learners' engagement with schooling. Such in-depth knowledge can be incorporated into teacher education programs so that identifiable problems in the early years are less amenable to cultural bias and superficial remedial responses. The knowledge produced from this research stands to (a) increase understanding of how change in teacher education thought affects practice and how practice affects school readiness, variously defined as that may be; (b) inform teacher education policy; and (c) contribute to revisions that will enhance teacher education programs. The results will illuminate issues and strategies that are most likely to be effective for teacher education programs, with implications for the policy and practice of teacher education in a wide range of settings in both the majority and minority worlds. The research also has significant social value, as improvements in teacher education can serve as a "lever" to increase the benefits of early childhood programs for children, families, and communities (OECD 2012).

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