

子育てにおける家庭言語の保持 —カナダ・オンタリオ州トロントの移民家庭に対する 支援の実践—

Raising your Child while Holding onto your Home Language: Supporting Immigrant Families in Toronto, Ontario, Canada

レイムンド, ヴィルマ M. RAYMUNDO, Vilma Magsajo

● ドンバレーイースト・オンタリオ・アーリーイヤーズセンター
Don Valley East Ontario Early Years Centre in Toronto, Canada



Keywords

オンタリオ・アーリーイヤーズセンター, 脳の発達, 家庭言語, 移民家庭

Ontario Early Years Centre, brain development, home language, immigrant families

ABSTRACT

本稿は、トロントの移民家庭が、コミュニティやオンタリオ・アーリーイヤーズセンターのような社会サービスを通してどのような支援を受けているかについて報告するものである。移民家庭の子どもが健全に人生のスタートを切り、安心・安全に育ち、十全に能力を発揮できるように、同センターでは家庭言語の使用を重視して保護者の支援を行っているが、本稿はその具体的な実践の方法についても解説する。

This article reports on the current practice in Toronto of how immigrant families are being supported by the local community and social services such as the ‘Ontario Early Years Centres’ initiative. The paper also discusses practical strategies on how parents are being supported at the Ontario Early Years Centres while using their home language to provide their children with a healthy start in life, to be safe and secure and to ensure they reach their full potential.

Introduction

Bilingualism and Multiculturalism

In 2006 Statistics Canada (2006 Community Profiles) reported that 11.9% of its population speaks a language other than English or French at home.

In the City of Toronto, Census Data reported that 32% of its population speaks a language other than English or French at home. This is evident of the high immigration population in the city. The 2.5 million residents comprises of 449, 535 families with children while 8% of this population are children 0-6 years of age. While 5% of this population have no knowledge of English or French, 32% speak their Home language other than English.

Half of the total population of Toronto are immigrants where 22% of these are recent immigrants between the year 2001 and 2006. The first three dominant home languages are Chinese, Tamil and Persian followed by Korean, Urdu & Gujarati (India), Romanian, Arabic, Russian, Filipino, Italian and Spanish.

Early Years and Family Support

In May 2001, the Ontario Government established the Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) across the province. The OEYCs were designed at the community level to ensure flexibility to meet the local community needs, enhance services to children and families to promote healthy child development.

The OEYCs are a family friendly environment providing a wide range of early learning activities to strengthen children's readiness to learn. The centre ensures to implement a core set of nine universal programs available to children and families; (Ontario Early Years Centres – Guide

of Effective Practices) 1) early learning services for children, parents and caregivers; 2) training and resources to promote healthy child development; 3) pre and post-natal resources; 4) information and links to other community and social services, 5) an Early Literacy Specialist who work with educators and facilitators; 6) outreach services that focused on families who are isolated and marginalized from the community; 7) a Speaker's Bureau that identifies community members and shares best practices and positive parenting experiences; 8) volunteer coordination services to identify community volunteers who are able to work and assist in the early years programs; 9) and data gathering, management and monitoring to assess the effectiveness of the early years services and initiatives and their impact on child development outcomes. These services are offered through all centre's main and satellite locations to ensure program accessibility.

At the Local Community Level

The Don Valley East Ontario Early Years Centre, one of the 103 Early Years Centres in the provincial ridings experience first hand the increasing demand of supporting families who speak in their mother tongue and with very little knowledge of the English language. The centre hires staff who are bilingual or can speak a second language predominant in the community to assist families with language barriers. Adult volunteers are recruited for language translation and program support. The centre encourages parents and caregivers to speak to their children in their home language and provide them with parent education and training to further understand the need of nurturing their children in the early years.

The increasing number of new immigrants with young children in Toronto calls for all community

social services with similar vision in helping young children to collaborate and work together to support these families and slowly integrate them in their new adopted country. These families may have lost their network of friends, felt isolated and experience culture shock. By accessing family support programs like the early years centre, they meet new families and share similar experiences and later establish new connections. The Don Valley East Early Years Centre works in partnership with Toronto Public Health, Preschool Speech and Language, Toronto District School Board, Public Libraries, Parks and Recreation Centres, Working Women Community Centre and other existing social and community agencies serving families with young children.

Supporting Bilingualism

New immigrant parents with young children felt the need to withhold their home language as soon as they arrive in Canada. This has been a common misconception for years as they believed their children will learn the English language faster if they drop their home language. The early years centre staff with the support of the Early Literacy Specialist consistently promote to parents the need to teach their children their home language for a variety of research based reasons as outlined by Professor Jim Cummins from the University of Toronto: that teaching the home language has positive effects on children's language and cognitive development; promoting home language helps develop the children's ability to learn other languages; rich and varied language experiences help children's brain grow and children learn best from people who speak the language well.

The Macaulay Child Development Centre on Using Your First Language stated that contrary to adults' beliefs using two languages will not confuse children and it is normal for bilinguals to mix

languages as a sign of mastering both languages. What is learned in one language can easily be transferred into the other language. There is a wide range of completely normal variation among children in how fast they learn language and no credible research out there that suggests speaking to a baby in more than one language is in any way detrimental. King & Mackey (2007) noted that it is never too early for a baby to start learning another language and that bilingual children hit the same linguistic milestones at about the same time as monolingual children.

At the OEYCs, parents, caregivers and other adults were provided practical guidelines and strategies to promote the use of their home language by encouraging them to use every opportunity to talk to their children in their first language at the dining table, play time, bath time, dressing and other family activities. Parents are also encouraged to read to their children everyday for at least twenty minutes. By using gestures to show children what adults are talking about and speaking slowly, the children will have a chance to grasp and comprehend the words spoken. Through singing songs, chanting rhymes and reading stories, children will learn new words and build their vocabularies.

Parents themselves provide other parents their common practice on how to further use and incorporate their first language in their family routine. They provide opportunities for children to learn simple songs in their language by listening to music, watching shows or movies and attending family gatherings and special events celebrating their festivals and cultural heritage. Parents enrol their children in heritage language classes offered in schools and local communities. Some families may bring their children back to their homeland to visit and acquire the most authentic experience of being immersed in their native culture.

While all these are taking place families are encouraged NOT to neglect learning and practicing the English language. They can use the same strategies to learn and speak the second language. Sean Brotherson (2005) a Family Science Specialist indicated that the prime time for language development and learning to talk is from birth to 10 years of age. He also emphasized that the prime time for language learning is the first three years of life and his constant advice to parents is to talk, read, sing and play with their children which was also strongly recommended by the Early Literacy Specialist.

Early Learning and Readiness for School

The parent-child programs at the OEYCs are designed around the belief that good early childhood educational experiences can help the child better prepare for school and life-long learning. The early childhood educators are trained professionals in planning, implementing and evaluating play-based curriculum. (Best Start-ELECT 2007).

Children learn and grow through play. When children are involved in play they learn to solve problems, follow and listen to directions, make decisions, concentrate, socialize, communicate and discover new things at their own pace (Elkind 2007). The play environment is divided into several interest areas that offer more learning opportunities and support children in their five developmental domains: communication skills and general knowledge; emotional health and maturity; language and cognitive development; physical health and well-being; and social knowledge and competence (The Early Development Instrument EDI). The EDI is a teacher-rated measure of kindergarten children's readiness to learn at school. It measures children's readiness to learn in five domains of early child development. The OEYCs' Data Analysis

Coordinator shares the EDI results at the community level. Its value as a planning tool is achieved in its interpretation within the context of the communities in which the information is generated. It is discussed at the community planning table to create an action plan and provide strategies to further support children and families.

Conclusion

It is clearly evident through a wide range of research studies on brain development that early years from conception to age six are the most critical period in a child's life. The effects of the early years experience particularly during the first three years have the most important influence on the child's brain development and subsequent learning, behaviour and health. Communicating to a child at an early age in the language that a parent knows best has long term benefits to the child. The role of parents, caregivers, educators and other adults who are involved in the child's growth and development is the key to establish a solid foundation for reaching their full potential in the years ahead.

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Acknowledgement

My sincerest gratitude to Prof. John C. Maher and Ms. Yoko Suzuki for this great opportunity.