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Future Research Directions and Suggested Strategies

Future Research Topics

There is little in the literature on the child care decision making of refugee and immigrant parents and thus, this study was necessarily exploratory in nature. Our findings support the need for more in-depth research in the following areas:

- **How best to give child care providers guidance for classrooms where multiple languages are spoken and used, from the content taught to the strategies used in the classroom**

More than a quarter (26%) of child care providers surveyed in Maine and 16% in Colorado reported having 3-8 languages spoken in their classroom, and by extension, among the families they serve. Having bilingual staff was cited as a benefit but obviously not the sole solution in classrooms where multiple languages are spoken.

The content of training and the supports available to providers, as well as notions of what it means to be culturally competent, need to be updated to reflect the realities of providers who serve multiple cultures and languages instead of just two or three. This affects staff hiring, children's English language acquisition, the ability to honor multiple cultures and religions in the classroom, instruction strategies, parent involvement—virtually every aspect of quality in a child care program. As one provider put it, “We have itty bitty pockets of many different cultures. We don't have the know-how on each culture but we try to take it in.”

- **Methods to involve immigrant and refugee parents meaningfully in early care and education programs**

Providers reported that parent involvement and the comfort level of parents increases when the number of parents served who are from the same cultural group increases. Meaningful involvement of parents can be a challenge in classrooms with small groups of children from multiple cultures. While involvement is increased if there are bilingual staff in all aspects of a program—from the front desk to the teaching staff—this is clearly not practical when dealing with multiple languages. More research is needed to identify best practices for communities with a wide variety of cultures and languages spoken, none of which predominate in terms of size.

More research is needed on how best to help immigrant and refugee providers become licensed to serve the child care needs of their communities.

- **The implications of immigration policies for child development and school readiness**

Our qualitative findings from this study indicated that recent Colorado laws concerning documentation requirements for child care assistance and fingerprinting of family child care providers and their families may be operating as constraints on child care choice for Mexican immigrant families. Interviewees speculated that these policies are impeding ECE enrollment in their state which may in turn have implications for the school readiness of these children.

- **Successful methods of having members of the refugee and immigrant communities fill their own child care needs from within their communities.**

Some Colorado interviewees estimated that the new fingerprinting requirement which applies to all members of the household and the requirement that child care providers be U.S. citizens before they can be licensed has resulted in a 70% decrease in the number of Mexican immigrants certified as family child care providers. In Maine, initiatives to train members of the refugee community to become licensed providers have been thwarted by licensing requirements that could not be met in public housing where the majority of refugee families live. More research is needed on how best to help immigrant and refugee providers become licensed to serve the child care needs of their communities.

- **Methods to integrate culturally appropriate disciplinary practice into current early care and education practice**

Accepted disciplinary practices in their native countries, such as spanking, are often not considered appropriate in this country. Some parents worried that continuing those practices would result in trouble with the police or child protective services and this concern also influenced some parents' child care choices. Parents expressed a strong desire to receive training on disciplinary practices that are acceptable in this country. Providers were less aware of this concern, making a greater understanding of, and communication about, this issue beneficial.

Conclusion

Existing research demonstrates that attending a quality early care and education program significantly raises the English-language proficiency and increases reading and math scores for ELL children. These programs can link immigrant and refugee parents to employment, health and other social services, and help with parenting, ESL, and literacy skills. They can also provide a way to track children's development and emotional well-being and connect them, if needed, with early intervention services. However, what existing research does not tell us is why, even with these positive results, there are lower enrollment rates of ELL children in early care and education programs. Unfortunately, the results of our study show that there are no easy answers to this question. Families make decisions about child care from culturally constructed views and beliefs that cannot be neatly organized and presented as a comprehensive response to the issue of low enrollment. And, as our findings demonstrate, these parents also identify factors shared by parents across cultures. Also, as noted earlier, there seemed to be as much variation in beliefs about child care within cultural groups as there were between cultural groups. A better understanding of the child care experiences and concerns of refugee and immigrant parents, an enhanced capacity to serve these families in a culturally sensitive and welcoming way, and greater access to high quality programs are important components of efforts to boost the school readiness of children from refugee and immigrant families. An essential component of these efforts is the development of policies to enable more members of the refugee and immigrant community to become child care providers and teachers. The findings from our study will help inform policy making as well as the practices of child care providers, and local, state and private nonprofit agencies in meeting the child care needs of the refugee and immigrant communities and enhancing the later school success of young ELL children. It is critical to include the voices of these parents when considering policies that will affect their children and families. We also hope the findings from this exploratory study will help lay the groundwork for future examination of these issues, particularly as they apply to communities with multiple cultural groups, an increasingly common reality across the United States.

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