perspectives

IN FAMILY SUPPORT • DE SOUTIEN À LA FAMILLE

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FRP
CANADA

Contents

Support for New Immigrant Families

Challenges and Opportunities

Between January 2001 and May 2006, 1,110,000 people came to settle in Canada, as estimated by Statistics Canada in its report on the 2006 census. We can look at this number as a whole and say it represents 3.6% of the country's total population. Looked at from another point of view, it represents 1,110, 000 individuals, adults and children, who are adapting to life in a new country. Family resource programs, with their unique approach to responding to their community, are well placed to assist newcomer families in the process of adaptation. The articles in this volume of *Perspectives* are aimed at practitioners, administrators, researchers and policymakers and focus on how we can make immigrants feel welcome. Readers are invited to reflect on ways to develop good practices when offering support to families who have arrived from many parts of the world to start a new life in Canada.

Recognizing that family resource programs face challenges in answering the needs of newcomer families, the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada) undertook a project in February 2007 in partnership with the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance. Called *Welcome Here*, the project was designed to strengthen links between settlement agencies and family resource centres in order to create more welcoming communities through increased participation of immigrant parents at community-based programs. We wish to thank Citizenship and Immigration Canada for its financial support of this project as part of its Welcoming Communities Initiative. This financial support has continued for a second phase of the *Welcome Here* project.

In Phase 2, the purpose has been to identify information and resources that would make family resource programs more effective in welcoming immigrant families. The current volume of *Perspectives* is just one part of this second phase.

We are very pleased to be able to present a wide variety of articles, beginning with a report by Marie Rhéaume on research done in community-based family support organizations in Quebec. A survey of members of the *Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille* (FQOCF – a provincial federation of family-oriented community organizations) showed that immigrants use these programs throughout the province, and not only in large centres. Five organizations were chosen to carry out interviews with practitioners and participants, including both immigrant mothers and mothers long established in Quebec. The practitioners who were interviewed emphasized the importance of maintaining an open, non-targeted and respectful approach—a key element of the guiding principles of family support. For their part, both groups of mothers confirmed that this atmosphere made them feel comfortable participating in activities there. The study found that these organizations play a significant role in opening communication between immigrants and long established families. Moreover, immigrant mothers said that this is where they learned about how Quebec society works and where to find resources in their neighbourhood. In the informal setting of the family resource program, mothers shared a common interest in their children's well-being and a common desire to break out of the isolation of being at home with children, allowing bridges to be built between the two communities.

Challenges remain, however, including the lack of adequate funding for community organizations to do the complex work of welcoming diverse populations.

Lianne Fisher's article, "Taking an *Advocacy With* Approach to Better Support Families," examines the *way* that help is given to immigrant families. She draws a distinction between *advocacy with* and *advocacy for*, pointing out that the assumptions practitioners make can sometimes lead to stigmatizing and marginalizing the very people they hope to support. Taking an *advocacy with* approach requires practitioners to recognize how some of their assumptions about newcomer families have been socially constructed. Fisher takes as an example notions practitioners may have about children in the role of "cultural broker," mediating exchanges between their parents and Canadian society. She concludes that practitioners need to critically reflect on their underlying beliefs about immigrating families in order to improve their practice and truly assist families to reach their goals.

As part of Phase 2 of FRP Canada's *Welcome Here* project, project coordinators organized focus groups to find out what immigrant families themselves would like to see in a "welcoming community." At the same time, they asked practitioners about current practices in the area of service to immigrant families, as well as about the resources and training they would need to improve their work. Extracts from the report of these Phase 2 activities, "More Lessons Learned," are included in this volume of *Perspectives*. It is interesting to note that practitioners and families agree on the elements that make a community welcoming: access to information, training and support services, translation services, mentorship programs, and a physical environment that celebrates cultural diversity. In the face of many challenges, family resource programs continue to build upon the strengths of their participants and create welcoming spaces where families have the opportunity to provide mutual support to one another and to actively participate in community life.

In the *Welcome Here* project focus groups mentioned above, both newcomer families and family support practitioners put high on their wish list "greater access to documents and other resources in many languages." Unfortunately, taking ideas in one language and converting them to another is not a straightforward process, as Betsy Mann explains in her article, "Reflecting on Issues of Translation and Interpretation." She enumerates some of the barriers to accurate and effective translation of written text, including availability of professional translators, understanding of cultural and con-textual nuances, and fidelity to the original in both tone and meaning. Interpretation, which refers to oral communication, introduces other complexities which may get in the way of clear understanding between speakers of different languages. Mann suggests a number of ways to minimize the possibility of misunderstanding, but her main purpose is to raise awareness in practitioners and administrators of the pitfalls lurking behind what might seem a simple procedure. As always, improving practice requires us to take a step back to consciously reflect on our current ways of doing things.

In her article "What are the Essential Elements of Valid Research? The Problem of 'Data' and their Collection in Cross-Cultural Contexts," Judith Bernhard recounts how she was forced to step back and take another look at how she conducts research with immigrant populations. She describes two cases from her own research activities as professor in the School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University. In the first case, she was confronted with the tension between her academic training and her perspective as a representative of Latina culture. She suggests that researchers need to be more mindful of their own professional training and acculturation when they do research. In the second case, she explains how her data collection about the experience of Somali refugee mothers was severely compromised. There were irreconcilable differences between, on the one hand, the cultural norms and perceptions of the population under study and, on the other, the ethical and professional requirements of credible academic research. Bernhard has no easy answers for this conundrum, but raises the issue of "data" and their collection in diverse cultural settings for the research community to consider. Her purpose is not purely theoretical. As she points out, if researchers cannot present the results of their investigation in a way that makes it acceptable "evidence," the point of view of the immigrant community will not be reflected in policies and practice.

It is clear that the issues involved in serving newcomers require everyone working in the field of family support to be aware of both the opportunities and the challenges that may arise. We hope that the articles in this volume will spark discussion and move us toward ways of working that will respond to the complex and varied needs of families who have come to settle in Canada.

Janice MacAulay, Executive Director, FRP Canada
Betsy Mann, Editor
Kim Hetherington, Project Coordinator

The Participation of Immigrant Families in the Activities of Family Resource Programs

Marie Rhéaume

▼ **Abstract**

Marie Rhéaume, Executive Director of the *Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance*, reports here on a research project which examined the participation of immigrant families in family resource programs (FRPs) in Quebec and the framework created to welcome them there. Information was collected first through a survey of family support organizations, followed by interviews with practitioners and participants in five selected FRPs. Mothers from both long-established francophone Québécois families and from newly arrived families were interviewed about their experience in FRPs. Immigrant families are found in FRPs in almost all the regions of the province, not only in Montreal. They are attracted by the openness of these community-based programs. In addition, they are often identified as belonging to vulnerable populations and are referred to a local FRP by social services, even though practitioners note that targeting families in this way contradicts the principles of family support. Drop-ins and other activities in an FRP provide immigrant mothers the opportunity to learn about how Quebec society works in general and how to find resources in their neighbourhood in particular. Their children also have an opportunity to improve their French in preparation for school. Cultural differences in parenting practices mean that immigrant families are less inclined to attend parent education activities. The question of the language spoken during activities can be a sensitive one, as can the Islamic veil or headscarf. FRPs tend to respond to issues of diversity on a case-by-case basis. Collaboration with settlement organizations tends to be limited. The research project identified several issues that create distance between immigrant mothers and long-established Québécois mothers, but in general the study paints a largely positive picture of the experience in FRPs. The values that underlie the work of these community-based organizations, particularly the climate of respect, help build bridges between the two groups. For many participants, the first contact with an individual from the other group happens in an FRP. Connections are based on the shared experience of having children and the need to overcome the loneliness that a parent at home often feels. Participation in activities at an FRP gives all participants a chance to share their experiences and learn from others. Moreover, FRPs reduce obstacles to the full participation of immigrant families in their adopted country, especially as regards their children. Funding, however, is not always adequate for FRPs to properly respond to the needs of immigrant families.

This article presents a general report on a research project which examined the participation of immigrant families in family resource programs (FRPs) and the framework created to welcome them there. After a short description of the methodology that was used, we will look at some of the results. We will finish with an overview of the factors that build bridges between immigrant families and Quebecers of French-Canadian origin,[1] and the factors that set them apart. In conclusion, we will raise some issues and further research questions suggested by the results of this study.

Methodology

Before beginning, it might be useful to define what family resource programs are. FRPs identify themselves as welcoming places where all family members may gather and participate. Parenting support and enhancement of the parent-child relationship are at the heart of their mission. They are open to all families at all stages of the life cycle. In addition, they participate in certain programs that target vulnerable families.

This research project was a collaboration between the *Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille* (FQOCF – a provincial federation of family-oriented community organizations) and the *Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance* (a council for family and childhood).[2] It was carried out between May 2005 and December 2006. The members of the *Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance* wanted the study to focus on the participation of immigrant families rather than their integration. This perspective echoes the point of view of participants in activities in FRPs.

In the project's first stage, a survey was sent to FQOCF's 200 member organizations. They were asked to answer a self-administered questionnaire; the response rate of 46.5% was high enough to be considered representative given the sample size. The aim of the survey was to measure the participation rate of immigrant families in activities at FRPs, an area which had never before been studied.

This process gave us an initial set of data on the nature of this participation and the climate in which it takes place. The second stage involved five case studies, carried out in FRPs that had answered the survey and had indicated their interest in continuing to participate in the study. They were also chosen to reflect the varied rates of participation by immigrant families found in the survey.

In each FRP, interviews were used to determine the dynamics of this participation. They were about an hour in length and were done with one or several of the staff of the organization, one or several parents who were Quebecers of French-Canadian origin, and one or several immigrant parents. The choice of people to be interviewed was left to the staff of the organization.

The great majority of participants in FRPs are women. Since all the people interviewed were women, the study reflects an essentially female perspective. In addition, we noted that the sample of immigrant mothers included a heavy representation of women from North Africa. This bias is partly explained by the fact that they speak French better than some other groups.

Findings

One of the first things we noted is that immigrant families are present in FRPs in almost all regions of Quebec. This presence reflects fairly accurately the fact that immigrants are dispersed throughout the province and not only in Montreal.

All the immigrant mothers who were interviewed emphasized how important the FRPs' stated attitude of openness was when they decided to participate in activities. This suggests a significant convergence between the family support approach that is characteristic of FRPs and the values of these mothers who have arrived from elsewhere. These families seem to come to FRPs through the same channels as do other participants.

Their participation is also due to the fact that immigrant families are considered vulnerable under various

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1. In French, the expression "Québécois de souche" is used to refer to families who trace their origins back many generations in Quebec. In this paper, the translator has chosen to use the term in English "Quebecers of French-Canadian origin." This follows the suggestion of the recent report of the Bouchard-Taylor commission on "reasonable accommodations" between cultural groups in Quebec. According to Statistics Canada, 80% of the Quebec population aged 15 years and older in 2002 could trace their roots in Canada back at least three generations; most of this number were of French descent. - Statistics Canada (2003) *Ethnic Diversity Survey: portrait of a multicultural society*, www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-593-x/89-593-x2003001-eng.pdf, consulted December 10, 2009.

2. Family resource programs are called "organismes communautaires Famille" (OCF) in Quebec and the provincial association is called *La Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille* (FQOCF). The research project discussed in this article was a collaboration between the FQOCF and *Le Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance* (a council for family and childhood). This council is a government body whose mandate is to advise the government of Quebec on the direction of family policy and other matters related to family life. It works with a variety of partners, including community organizations.

programs of the *Centres de santé et services sociaux* (CSSS; health and social services centres), including pre- and post-natal programs. Through these programs, they are invited to participate in FRP activities that are financed by social and health services. It is difficult, however, to estimate the percentage of participants involved. In this regard, all the staff members interviewed insisted on pointing out that targeting certain groups contradicts the approach promoted by FRPs, which consider themselves to be open to all families.

Mothers who were the most recent immigrants (a few months to a few years) unanimously said that themed activities and informal drop-ins allow them to get to know Quebec society better (how things work—the financial system, health system, schools, social norms, etc.), as well as their own neighbourhood (where to find bargains, resources, etc.). We were surprised to find that immigrant mothers use the short-term, occasional child care services offered in FRPs as a way for their children to learn French, even when they spoke French well themselves.[3]

It is still a minority of immigrant parents who choose to participate in parenting support activities. Parenting is an area which may evoke a confrontation between values. Immigrant mothers often disapprove of the way authority is exercised here, at home and in school. Some reject particular behaviours that are socially encouraged or permitted in this country. In at least two FRPs, immigrant women talked about their fears concerning the Charter of Rights and child protection.

Managing diversity poses challenges to FRPs, just as it does in other settings. Attitudes could be summed up as follows: "Yes to diversity, but not diversity at any price." FRPs in this study managed situations on a case-by-case basis, except in one organization which has a clear statement of policy (set of values). The study obtained some information about the framework developed by FRP staff to respond to diversity. Because of the limited sample, we must be careful in drawing conclusions.

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Two of the five FRPs employed immigrants or second-generation immigrants, including one director and some staff in the occasional child care programs. Opinions were divided about how their presence affects the participation of immigrant families. Most of the organizations we met try to ensure that diversity is also reflected in the make up of their Board of Directors. They encourage immigrant mothers to come forward, just like other parents.

The question of the language used during activities can be an issue. Different locations manage the question differently. One of the FRPs has adopted a clear policy and insists that all the discussions take place in French. In another, where staff noted that isolated immigrant mothers need to socialize in their mother tongue, the rule about using French is more flexible during meals; however, this choice creates tensions with other participants.

A minority of respondents, mostly FRPs in Montreal, indicated that they work regularly with organizations that respond to the needs of refugees and immigrants. This usually means making referrals and getting involved in time-limited projects. Staff mentioned a number of factors to explain the small number of connections, including the lack of organizations in neighbourhoods where immigration is recent, a lack of interest in immigration issues, and the lack of a "family" approach at sectoral round tables. One can conclude that collaboration is possible, but that it depends on the willingness of the people involved.

What creates distance, what builds bridges

The case studies were designed to better understand what creates distance and what builds bridges between immigrant families and Quebec families of French-Canadian origin in FRPs. The picture that emerges of how immigrant families participate is largely positive, but it is also realistic about the difficulties encountered.

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3. Many FRPs in Quebec offer a "halte-garderie" as part of their programs. This is short-term, occasional child care, usually offered in the same place as the drop-in programs.

Apart from one organization, all the locations where interviews took place are in poor or modest neighbourhoods. In two of them, participants of all origins had basically the same profile. In two others, however, the immigrant mothers who were interviewed had post-secondary degrees or had held professional positions in their country of origin, whereas the mothers who were Quebecers of French-Canadian origin had a much lower level of schooling. When they worked, they held non-specialized jobs. Interviews with this latter group brought out a feeling of injustice when faced with those better educated parents who, in spite of the difficulties that accompany recent immigration, were perhaps more mobile and better equipped.

In fact, it is often in an FRP that an immigrant mother has her first conversation with a Quebecer of French-Canadian origin, or at least an exchange that is more than a simple "hello." The reverse is also true. Thanks to these conversations, some non-immigrant mothers were able to get beyond prejudices and stereotypes, but this was not always the case. While cooking activities can often bring people together, sometimes serving traditional foods, such as ham at Easter and at the maple sugar shack, keeps people apart. Some immigrant mothers said they avoided signing up for activities that would include a meal.

Although there are limits to the sample, this study brought up a wide range of situations dealing with male-female relationships, including some that were very difficult (domestic violence affecting both immigrant and non-immigrant mothers). Practitioners needed to be highly skilled and sensitive to deal with these situations. The picture that emerges from conversations about women's rights and equality with men suggests that they are an opportunity for mutual discoveries and learning.

Of all the potentially difficult issues, the veil is without question the most sensitive. In one FRP, it is definitely a taboo subject; in at least two others, immigrant mothers wearing the veil or headscarf have evoked curiosity, reservations and a certain discomfort. (It must be noted that the heavy representation among interviewees of North African

women certainly contributed to the importance given during the discussions to the issue of wearing the veil.)

The values which underlie autonomous community organizations can be considered to encourage a climate which leads to building bridges. For instance, all the participants were unanimous in saying that the environment of openness that is characteristic of FRPs makes it possible for different points of view to find expression, with no need to change the other's position. No one denies the existence of tensions from time to time. Several of those who were interviewed talked about confrontational or difficult intercultural relations they had experienced in the outside world and emphasized the difference between these situations and the climate of respect that is the norm in FRPs.

The parenting experience itself contributes greatly to making differences less important, whether those differences are related to socio-economic status or to the origins of participants. This is the strongest finding that emerges from the study. The mothers, wherever they were born, strongly expressed their need to break out of their isolation, a loneliness which is felt especially strongly by immigrant mothers who are far from their immediate family.

All the mothers, irrespective of their origin, want to share what is going on in their life, what they have found out and what tricks have worked for them. They realize that their situations are similar, at the same time as they learn to understand their differences. The FRP is also a place where mothers from elsewhere can become familiar with certain aspects of the culture here.

In this sample, it was unusual for immigrant mothers and Quebecers of French-Canadian origin who had met at the FRP to continue their relationship in other settings. The non-immigrant mothers say that they remain reserved, while the immigrant mothers would like to build closer relationships. They are confused by the social codes that they don't completely understand; they see the signs of distance at the same time as apparent friendliness. Not surprisingly, however, participants are clear that these situations are not a problem for the children, who socialize spontaneously at the FRP, as they do in nursery school or at school.

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Conclusion

As far as the *Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance* is aware, this was the first study looking at the participation of immigrant families in the activities of FRPs. The lack of other studies, as well of the small size of the second stage of this project, means that one must be careful in drawing conclusions.

An important way that immigrants participate in the life of their adopted country is through their work. More and more immigrant women are finding a place in the labour market, sometimes even before their husband, but still fewer than half of them have a job. In addition to encouraging sharing around the theme of parenting, FRPs are unique and important settings where many immigrant mothers can socialize and learn about how Quebec society works. FRPs help reduce the obstacles to their full participation in their adopted country, especially in everything that concerns their children.

It would be interesting to better understand the role that occasional child care services in FRPs play in teaching French to the children of immigrants. The capacity of practitioners to respond to these expectations without compromising all their other activities needs to be examined.

The study also raises the question of possibly improving coordination with practitioners in the fields of education and early childhood. This is an issue because FRPs, whose precarious financial position has been well documented, do not always have the resources needed to respond to the situation and special needs created by the presence of immigrant families in their programs.

The *Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance* considers that there are benefits to gain from better understanding the ongoing process of how immigrant families participate in family resource programs.

Marie Rhéaume was appointed in 2008 to the position of Executive Director of the *Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance*, a governmental body which advises the Quebec government on family policy. At the time the study described in this article was undertaken, she was the executive director of the *Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille*. An original version of this article was presented at the seminar "Familles immigrantes et intervention : les valeurs en jeu" (immigrant families and practice: values at issue), held in Montreal May 30, 2008. The seminar was organized by the social research partnership *Familles en mouvance et dynamiques intergénérationnelles* (http://partenariat-familles.ucs.inrs.ca).

Taking an *Advocacy With* Approach to Better Support Families

Lianne Fisher

▼ **Abstract**

Lianne Fisher uses Paolo Freire's concept of *advocacy with* to lead family support practitioners to reflect on their position when offering help to program participants who are new to Canada. She explains the distinction between *advocacy with* and *advocacy for* and points out the assumptions that help givers sometimes make about help receivers. These assumptions may lead to stigmatizing and marginalizing the very people practitioners hope to support. *Advocacy with* requires that we recognize the beliefs, wants and desires of those individuals and families our services support. Fisher points out that beliefs about group characteristics are often socially constructed, that is, they are built up from media representations and social conversations, rather than based on inherent qualities of the individuals in question. For instance, people who have recently immigrated to Canada may be perceived and treated as innocent, naïve and passive, rather like children. In fact, they have had to show considerable commitment and initiative to complete the immigration process. Another way to approach the situation is to consider that different cultures have different knowledges. Fisher also discusses how social constructions about childhood affect the way we feel about putting children in the role of cultural broker. Children are often required to not only interpret language but also explain cultural practices in exchanges between their parents and Canadian society. This role has positive and negative effects on children; it can raise their sense of efficacy, but it can also place a heavy burden on them. Children's active contribution to the family carries a similar double-edged possibility. Fisher argues that it is important to go beyond social constructions to look at the meaning of these activities for the individual child and family. Also, she suggests that supporting the child in the role and recognizing its importance for the family can help to reduce any negative impact. Furthermore, she acknowledges that her own child is a cultural broker for her in some situations and notes that the adult in this exchange also experiences discomfort. In conclusion, Fisher urges practitioners to critically reflect on their underlying beliefs about immigrating families in order to improve their practice and truly assist families to reach their goals.

I remember the teenage house party in England when I discovered that my host was poor. I went to the bathroom and there were cut-up squares of newspaper for toilet roll. How could I not have known my schoolmate was *poor* before that day? From then on I made a special effort around him. I spoke brightly and probably a little too loudly, included him in activities, made suggestions for his decorum, and once or twice touched his arm, as if to say "It's okay, I understand." I mean, it wasn't his fault he was poor, was it? But then it seemed to me that after awhile his poorness got the better of him. He was rude and didn't want to hang out with the group anymore. I didn't understand where this had come from. After all, I was being nice to him. I didn't make jokes behind his back about the newspaper; in fact I defended him. This schoolmate avoided me, rebuffed my *generous* overtures, and at times he would stare at me with such hostility that I remember being unnerved. I was only trying to help, and I didn't think he was being very grateful. Despite my best intentions, it seemed there was nothing I could do.

Advocacy for or *advocacy with*

This memory came back to me years later at university when I was studying *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paolo Freire. A classroom discussion on Freire's concept of *advocacy with* versus *advocacy for* allowed me to gain some insight into my own and my friend's behaviour. I saw that I had perhaps made erroneous assumptions about my friend's degree of wealth. Using newspaper squares for toilet paper is not a universal symbol of poverty; it was, however, outside my experience.

I had also assumed a position of authority over him. Believing him and his family to be poorer than me and mine, I believed that I then had the right—in fact, the duty—to help him better himself. I took the position of *advocacy for*, a patronizing position in which I felt I knew what was best for him, without knowing his circumstances.

In contrast, the idea of *advocacy with* looks at individuals, families and whole communities of people as having knowledge and insight about their own state of affairs and as having the capacity to generate solutions. In many instances where there are stressful, harmful and inequitable practices within a community, members of that community are working toward changing conditions (Freire, 2006; Waring, 2009). For example, women in Afghanistan continued to educate young women when their schooling was outlawed, and they continue to work toward making education for women widespread and accepted (Turiel, 2005).

Attributing attitudes and characteristics

My teenage experience highlights two other issues. First, we may think that groups of individuals who are traditionally marginalized or recipients of support are supposed to be grateful for the services and resources they receive. Second, we often attribute attitudes displayed by individuals who do not accept our "help" to enduring internal character traits rather than interpreting them as a reaction to how we treat them socially. I interpreted my friend's hostility as a sign he was ungrateful, but maybe he was reacting to my patronizing behaviour. I would have treated him very differently had I examined some of the assumptions I had made about him and his family's use of newspaper. Instead of seeing his rude behaviour as typical of *poor* people, I might have understood it as a reaction to my putting myself in a superior position.

Our good intentions may marginalize and stigmatize the very individuals we hope to support. Communities and families are often seen as passive and unaware of their own circumstances. When we are trying to provide resources and services, it can be frustrating to have our best efforts rejected. Moreover, sometimes what is needed is in opposition to agency mandates, policies and procedures. For instance, a school board working group, which had been set up to address issues of discrimination, posed the question: "How do we respond to the black male student who shuns our attempts to involve him in Black History Month or a basketball game, when what he really needs is access to a quiet room and a prayer mat?" (Samuel et al, 2002, p. 4). Often services are provided without collaborating with the people we are trying to reach. Their participation is important; otherwise, communities and families are left with "outcomes for which they have no need" (Waring, 2009, p. 163).

In a discussion of children and immigrant families, Burman (2008) points to an important question about *advocacy with*: "How can we help in ways that do not require those whom we help to occupy a position of gratitude, or even to be or become like 'us'" (p. 142). "Becoming more like us" can often be problematic for newly arrived families. Feelings

> *Advocacy with* requires that we recognize the beliefs, wants and desires of those individuals and families our services support.

of belonging and significance can be confused with being "the same as." *Advocacy with* requires that we recognize the beliefs, wants and desires of those individuals and families our services support.

Social construction of beliefs

Our ability to be *advocates with* is often hampered by our own beliefs about the inherent characteristics of categories of people. For instance, some people might say that women are more emotional than men because of biologically determined hormonal differences. Similarly, in my relations with my teenage friend, I had a belief about how poor people "naturally" act. Social theorists have pointed out that such beliefs are often social constructions; that is, they are not rooted in any biological necessity but are in fact built up through what we see and hear in our society. A social constructivist approach asks that we look at how groups of people—women, men, children, white, black—are differentially represented in the newspapers and books we read, the TV programs and movies we watch, and the conversations that we hear around us in our daily life.

If our social construction about families who have immigrated defines them as naïve, uneducated and "in need of help," we will provide services and support from an *advocacy for* position (Moss, & Petrie, 2002). Social constructions may give rise to a view of a particular category of people as "less civilized" or "naïve" if another category, for example, people having light skin and being from the Western hemisphere, is considered superior or more knowledgeable than others. Another way to see the situation would be to consider that different cultures may have different knowledges. It makes sense to provide support and resources to individuals as they interact in new cultural spheres. In order to improve delivery of social services and promote successful outcomes, it is important to reflect on the assumptions we hold and challenge them.

Challenging the assumptions we hold about groups of people is complicated by the fact that it is possible for social constructions to be in opposition to each other. On the one hand, children may be seen as wilful, uncontrollable, in danger of running wild without the guidance and help of society (think *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding). On the other hand, children may be defined as incomplete adults who are innocent, passive, blank slates who need to be cherished and filled with knowledge (e.g., Moss & Petrie, 2002; Stasiulis, 2002). The services we provide for children and the attitudes we hold about them will differ depending on how we construct the notion of "childhood." I am not

suggesting that either construction is completely right or completely wrong. Extremes are useful for illustration, but rarely are they accurate.

The ideas of innocence, naivety and passivity are often applied not only to children but also to newly immigrated adults. These assumptions are troublesome, since in fact individuals seeking to immigrate typically need to be well-educated to gain entry to Canada. Moreover, they have shown considerable initiative and commitment to complete the application process. Parents often see immigration as a way to improve the lives of their children. In the case of refugee populations, it is estimated that four to five per cent have been victims of torture (Michultka, 2009). People who have witnessed war and displacement, people who have lived with policies that restrict practices or limit the number of children per family, are probably less naïve than I am. However, the fact remains that we have different kinds of knowledge. When notions of inexperience and naivety arise, it can be useful to ask the question: "In regards to what?" This may help prevent the application of universalistic social constructions to particular groups of people or to all facets of an individual's life.

I am not suggesting an extreme cultural relativism where anything goes. But as Moss and Petrie (2006) note in reference to services for children:

> Public provision…is not, and can never be, simply a technical subject whose main concern is efficient delivery of a commodity. Evaluation—judgements of value—is important: but before providing a referential framework for these judgements come critical questions concerning meaning and purpose…justice, democracy, power and relationships, all of which are inescapably ethical and political (p. 165).

Children as cultural brokers

Cultural brokering is one area where our social constructions can play a role in the services we provide for families and children who have immigrated. Cultural brokering can be defined as interpreting not just language but also cultural practices between different groups. In immigrant families, this job is often assumed by a child or adolescent who is called on to mediate between the parents and the new culture. Brokering takes place along a continuum from answering the household phone to reading labels at the grocery store to translating medical information in the doctor's office. Children and adolescents have reported both positive and negative consequences from cultural brokering. For example, a young girl reports her excitement about helping her grandparent vote. In comparison, hav-

ing to translate sensitive materials in legal or medical situations is a source of stress for young people (Jones & Trickett, 2005). The fact that evidence is mixed regarding the outcomes of the cultural broker role for children does not necessarily mean that we have not found "the truth" *yet*. Rather, reports from children suggest that brokering has both positive components (e.g., feelings of efficacy) and negative components (e.g., a sense of burden) (Wu & Kim, 2009).

Some acts of cultural brokering can conflict with a construction of childhood as a period free of *mature* responsibilities and, reciprocally, of parents as protectors of childhood innocence. If we hold this view, cultural brokering may in some instances be seen as the adultification of children or a role reversal between a parent and child. What is our belief about whether it is appropriate for children to be taking on this role? Our answer may depend on what we believe is appropriate work for children. In fact, the definition of appropriate labour for children differs by culture, social class and gender. UNICEF (2009) estimates that 150 million 5 to14 year old children worldwide are engaged in excessive child labour, defined as economic activity or household chores in excess of 28 hours per week. These data suggest that many other children must be working fewer hours, actively contributing to their families. For instance, children do chores in the home, play with and supervise younger siblings, feed the pets, put clothes in the laundry, and go grocery shopping with a parent. Contributing actively to the household and accepting increased responsibility with age are often seen as positive behaviours (Love & Buriel, 2007). Under such circumstances, children report feelings of pride, helpfulness and usefulness. Negative reports raise issues of the child feeling embarrassed, burdened and uncomfortable (Wu & Kim, 2009). Like cultural brokering, being called on to make an active contribution to the household can be both a positive and a negative experience about which children can have negative and positive feelings simultaneously.

Impact of cultural brokering

The worlds of children, like adults' worlds, are not free from racism and discrimination. In one study, interviews with adolescents suggested that discrimination is a factor in negative outcomes of cultural brokering (Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009) when they encounter social constructions that expect

> Critical reflection, thinking about what underlying beliefs we bring to our interactions and our jobs, is an important component of working with adults.

newly immigrating families to assimilate. They may have to deal with people who feel that it is not appropriate for a child to act as cultural broker or to speak a "foreign" language in public. The negative stress these children experience is not due to the act of language brokering *per se*, but rather to the discrimination. In this instance, if our social construction of the situation makes us think that the family is placing an unfair burden on its children, we will conclude that the parents need to change their behaviour. We will not confront or challenge systemic discrimination in the wider community, and we will put the onus on the family to be become more like *us*.

Negative outcomes associated with cultural brokering are not always the result of discrimination. Research suggests that another reason children mention negative aspects is that it takes time from other activities, such as homework or socializing with peers (Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009). Again, it is not the brokering in and of itself that is at issue.

Negative stress from cultural brokering seems to be buffered by family support (e.g., Wu & Kim, 2009). It is important that we provide support to families for the brokering task *per se*, especially if the family feels this is useful. However, it may turn out that we can best act by providing psychosocial support to the adolescent, or, for example, by working to "encourage parental support and recognition of [the] child's role in family" (Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009, p. 413).

In addition, the literature suggests that cultural brokering activity decreases over time, the longer families are in their new country. Such changes would be an important indicator for assessing impact.

During my career I have worked to reduce discrimination and oppression, but social constructions can be powerful and it is not easy to step out of our socialization. When I thought of cultural brokering I thought of it as happening out there, to other people, newly immigrating families, for example. It does seem to be the case that the research literature typically looks at cultural brokering within families who have immigrated (e.g., Love & Buriel, 2007; Jones & Trickett, 2005; Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009; Wu & Kim, 2009). Then I realized I was buying into a stereotype. I did not want to see myself as placing a burden on my child, when in fact my son acts as a cultural broker for me, notably in matters relating to electronic games. Yes, there are differences and increased pressures in cultural brokering when a family has moved into

a different cultural setting. There is also evidence for positive outcomes of brokering or role reversal in families in general, not just families who have immigrated (Herrer & Mayseless[1] as cited in Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009).

As well as thinking that cultural brokering was something that took place only in families who had immigrated, I realized that I had assumed that the associated stress was only for the cultural broker. Both my son and his father (who speak French and English) tell me that it is indeed at times stressful to play the broker role for me (a monolingual English speaker). On that note, I was struck by what a young participant said in research reported by Oznobishin and Kurman (2009). This daughter expressed feelings of discomfort that her mother was not able to function "as an adult" in some situations. For my part, I can empathize with the mother. There are times when I feel quite shameful and annoyed with my inability to function in French-speaking contexts. It can be incapacitating, leaving me with feelings of inadequacy as an adult. I think it is a disservice to parents to believe that they do not also feel some tension in regard to cultural brokering. They too may be working to generate solutions for tensions in their lives. We can be more useful if we work from a space of *advocacy with* to assist families in reducing any negative impacts of cultural brokering.

Critical reflection supports *advocacy with*

Our ability to *advocate with*, providing support through services and resources, can be enhanced by reflecting on our social constructions of groups of people, in other words the assumptions we take for granted. Critical reflection, thinking about what underlying beliefs we bring to our interactions and our jobs, is an important component of working with adults (Brookfield, 1995; Freire, 2006). Such reflection improves our chances of successfully facilitating the needs, wants and desires of families as they come to know and live within particular communities in Canada. In this way, our best intentions and better practices will avoid discriminating against and marginalizing the very individuals we hope to support.

Lianne Fisher is currently completing her M.A. in Child and Youth Studies at Brock University and graduated with an honours degree in Psychology from Simon Fraser University. She has co-authored publications and facilitated conference presentations in the areas of critical acculturation and child development. Her theoretical and research interests are dialogic and sociocultural approaches to parent-child socialization, anti-oppression, diversity issues in education and mothering.

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1. The report of this research is written in Hebrew and I rely on and appreciate Oznobishin & Kurman's translation.

Our Learned Cultural Bias and Prejudice

What is my cultural bias?

Learning Culture is Learning Prejudice (and that's okay!)

If we look deeper into our learned patterns or responses, we see that behind our learned patterns lie cultural values. We learn how to be human in a particular way within a particular range of cultural values.

One way to think of our range of cultural values is to imagine our range as a filing drawer with a particular number of files each within an established category. This filing drawer (our value system) allows us to organize and categorize experiences and information. If something does not fit into one of these categories, it is often thrown out without further examination.

It is important to understand that the range of values supporting our learned responses or patterns is relatively narrow, given the broad range of responses available in cultures worldwide.

Our values are indoctrinated into us from birth. In a sense, our values are our prejudice. Prejudice is the human condition. All 'mentally healthy' human beings are prejudiced toward the automatic preference for certain clothing styles, political values, foods, and so on.

Am I prejudiced?

We might describe prejudice as a 'prejudgment'. We automatically learn and apply prejudice and the use of stereotypes to everything and everyone in our environment as a way to neatly process information. Prejudice is an unavoidable part of the human condition.

To be human means to learn right from wrong, true from false, good from bad, tasteful from distasteful, safe from dangerous, all in accordance with the values from our own culture. We need our value system, our ability to prejudge, in order to live in our culture in a rational way. An individual who did not exercise his or her prejudice by being unable to discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad, etc. might be regarded as abnormal.

Our prejudice or prejudgement is neither positive nor negative; it is simply an unavoidable fact of our existence.

What becomes positive or negative is what we do with our prejudgments or stereotypes as we interact with others.

Phase 2 of FRP Canada's *Welcome Here* Project

A Summary Report of Lessons Learned

Introduction

The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs *Welcome Here* Project has consisted of two phases, carried out between 2007 and 2010. Building on the *Welcome Here Resource Kit* developed in Phase 1 of the project, Phase 2 focused on ways to create more welcoming family resource programs for immigrant families. Extracts from the Phase 2 report, entitled *More Lessons Learned*, are presented here. The report combines the responses from an online member survey and six focus groups that were facilitated in three regions in Canada with both immigrant families and practitioners. The complete report is available at www.welcomehere.ca.

FRP Canada online member survey

As part of Phase 2 of the *Welcome Here* project, FRP Canada conducted an online member survey to gather input on current practices concerning services to immigrant and refugee families, as well as to obtain information about practitioners' resource and training needs. The survey was set up using online software, and the link was sent to all FRP Canada member organizations in November 2008. The survey consisted of multiple-choice questions, with the option of adding comments, feedback and suggestions. Care was taken to maintain anonymity of the respondents in order to solicit open feedback. The survey was completed by 104 member organizations.

Approximately 58% of the respondents to FRP Canada's member survey said that many immigrant and refugee families have settled in their community in the last ten years. One in five said that over three-quarters of the families visiting their program were either immigrants or refugees who have arrived in the last decade. By contrast, almost a third of the respondents answered that fewer than 10% of their participants were in this category. This reflects the fact that immigration is concentrated in certain communities, and not distributed evenly across the country.

Survey respondents reported serving immigrant and refugee families who speak a wide variety of languages. One centre noted that clients of its umbrella organization speak over 100 different languages. The five languages (besides English and French) that were most frequently reported by survey respondents are Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Farsi (Persian) and Punjabi.

The member survey asked respondents to identify the programs and services that are most frequently accessed by new immigrant and refugee families. The most commonly used programs and services are community information and referral, parenting programs, childcare services and referrals, and volunteer opportunities.

Based on the responses from the member survey, it is evident that immigrants to Canada are settling in both large and small communities across Canada. Community-based organizations, including family resource programs, are faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of new immigrant families and providing programs and services that assist with the successful integration of newcomers into Canadian communities.

FRP Canada focus groups

Between September and December 2008, six focus groups were conducted. The *Welcome Here* team worked in collaboration with the CHANCES Family Centre in Charlottetown to conduct two focus groups, one with immigrant families (14 participants) and one with practitioners who work with immigrant families (15 participants). In North Vancouver, the project team collaborated with the North Shore Neighbourhood House, again conducting two focus groups: one with immigrant parents (25 participants) and the other with practitioners working with immigrant families (23 participants). Similarly, in Ottawa two focus groups were organized in close collaboration with Immigrant Women Service; there were 12 participants in the group for families and 19 in the group for practitioners.

Using a combination of techniques, such as questionnaires, group activities and open discussions, facilitators created an open and safe space for an exchange around three main themes: feelings, building community relationships, and program and training needs.

When asked what makes them feel welcome in a community, newcomer families specifically mention a positive orientation to cultural diversity, including the attitude of staff members and a display of pictures of people from different origins. They also appreciate ready access to child care and programs related to gaining employment. Access to interpreters and to information published in their home language also makes them feel welcome.

Participants in the focus groups for new immigrant families identify the following challenges and needs related to being a new immigrant family in the community:

- Availability and cost of childcare
- Difficulty understanding the needs of young children
- Feelings of being overwhelmed
- Lack of access to information
- Lack of clear information for newcomer families
- Lack of extended family support
- Language and communication barriers
- Securing employment and uncertainty about the future

The practitioners who participated in the focus groups identified the following challenges in working with immigrant families:

- Accessing interpretation and translation services
- Inability to provide services on weekends
- Inability to reach new immigrant families
- Lack of community partnerships
- Lack of information
- Lack of simple resources
- Lack of space and funding

It is interesting to note the similar responses given by immigrant families and by practitioners concerning the challenges they encounter. Both groups identified lack of access to information, lack of clear and simple resources, lack of space, and barriers to language and communication. The focus groups were also asked to develop a "welcome plan." In the process, it became clear that the desires of immigrant families correspond to what practitioners also feel will create welcoming communities. Access to information, training and support services, translation services, mentorship programs, and a physical environment that celebrates cultural diversity emerge as key components in creating a welcoming community.

Conclusion

The results from both the focus groups and member survey provide valuable information for family support practitioners working with new immigrant families. This information can be used for programming purposes or for guidance in creating solutions to overcome the identified barriers and challenges.

Although there is much work to be done to build welcoming communities, it is evident that family resource programs are doing their best to respond to the needs of immigrant families through the provision of diverse programs and services that both reflect the communities they serve and respond to their needs. Family resource programs continue to build upon the strengths of their participants and create welcoming spaces where families have the opportunity to provide mutual support to one another and to actively participate in community life.

Reflecting on Issues of Translation and Interpretation

Betsy Mann

▼ **Abstract**

Community organizations are increasingly called on to provide services to newcomer families who speak a wide variety of languages. Practitioners and administrators may be dealing with issues of translation (written language) and interpretation (oral language) for which they are unprepared. Based on her experience as a family educator and editor at FRP Canada, Betsy Mann outlines some of these issues and also suggests ways of handling them to minimize the potential for miscommunication. Converting one language to another is more complicated than the simple translation exercises in a high school language course would lead one to believe. Anything more complex than a few sentences requires the services of a qualified translator. Some aspects to discuss with a translator are the level and tone of language used, which should mirror the original; the possibility that the language has a number of regional variants or dialects; the contextual nuances, which should convey concepts in line with family support values; and the appropriateness of cultural references. For quality assurance, review by a second translator and by community reviewers who are familiar with family support practice is recommended. The complexity of this review will depend on the importance and the projected lifespan of the document in question. It is important to plan for the time that good translation will take. In addition to all these issues related to written translation, oral interpretation raises problems because of the immediacy of the process and the likelihood that the interpreter is a volunteer or family member. Questions may arise concerning the accuracy of interpretation, since there is no time to check or review the choice of words; the fidelity of the interpretation to the speakers' intentions, without filtering or additions from the interpreter; the influence of any relationship with the interpreter, whether personal or through cultural factors such as gender, class, ethnic group, etc.; questions of confidentiality with a third party present (the interpreter); and accountability when the interpreter is not a member of a professional association. There are no simple solutions to these potential obstacles to good communication between practitioners and newcomers who do not speak the same language. However, becoming aware of the pitfalls is the first step to setting standards for good practice and achieving clearer mutual understanding.

Given the realities of immigration to Canada in the last thirty years, many community organizations are now called on to respond to participants who speak a wide variety of languages. To do this, they are attempting to offer services, or at least documents, in the languages of the families that come to them. When they don't have staff members who speak the required language, administrators and program directors have often been thrown into the business of supervising translation and interpretation[1]. Too often, they are unprepared for the complications that this work involves. In this article, we will present some of the language issues encountered by community organizations that work with newcomer families who speak languages other than English or French. We will also suggest some ways of handling these issues to minimize the potential of miscommunication that can lead to problems[2]. In the end, it is awareness of the pitfalls and careful attention to the details of the process that will produce better results for both practitioners and the families they serve.

More complicated than you might think

Maybe the only time you have had to think about how to say something in another language was when you were doing homework for a course in high school. If so, you may well think that translation and interpretation are pretty simple. Back then, all you had to do to complete the exercise at the end of the lesson was to look up each word in the dictionary at the back of the textbook. Then you might have to change the tense and the case to make it correspond to the original. No one ever asked the question, "Is this how a native speaker would express the same idea?" Or "If I actually said this to a native speaker, what would they understand and what would they think of me?" In the real world, these are key questions that make the processes of translation and interpretation considerably more complicated than they were in that high school language class.

If you have more immediate and more practical experience with moving from one language to another, you know that all kinds of roadblocks to clear communication can insert themselves in between speakers of different languages. Some of the roadblocks (and their solutions) apply to both written translation and oral interpretation. We will deal first with the challenges of producing documents in different languages, and then go on to the special issues of oral interpretation when dealing with families.

Who is qualified to do translation?

The fact that someone can speak more than one language does not make them a good translator, any more than the fact that someone has a valid driver's licence makes them a competent driving instructor. People study for years to learn how to take a document and express the same ideas in another language. They strive to do this in a way that is faithful to the author's original intention without sounding stilted to a native speaker. They learn to avoid the common pitfalls of translation. We have all had a laugh at instructions that come with imported appliances; we understand what they mean (sometimes) but that is not how we would say it. Online translation tools often produce the same effect. These are extreme illustrations of what can happen when translation is done without a real understanding of what the task requires. Maybe some of the translations that emerged

> **Translation** is an activity based on written communication. The translator acts as an intermediary between speakers of different languages and cultures. A translator's work consists of transposing the content of a written document from one language to another while remaining faithful to the message and meaning of the original document. Translators also take into account the kind of text, the target audience and the degree of specialization of the text. Translators possess not only a very good knowledge of the language of the "source" text but also an excellent knowledge of the target language, which ideally is their mother tongue. Translators also have writing and research skills, as well as knowledge in specialized areas.
>
> Some translators work with texts of a general nature while others specialize. Some translators are employed by organizations or companies, while others freelance. Certified translators abide by the code of ethics of their professional association.
>
> **Interpretation** is an activity based on spoken communication. Interpreters facilitate oral communication among people of different languages and cultures.
>
> — definitions from the Website of the Association of Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters of Manitoba, www.atim.mb.ca/en/languageprofessions.htm.

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1. The term "interpretation" generally refers to spoken language and "translation" to written language.
2. Some of the suggestions in this article are based on the experience of FRP Canada's project coordinators for the *Welcome Here* project. As part of this project, many documents aimed at families with children were translated into 14 different languages. This involved working with numerous translators and community reviewers to ensure acceptable and useful products. The ten parent resource sheets are available in multiple languages at www.welcomehere.ca.

from your high school homework exercises would have given a native speaker a few laughs!

For anything more complicated than signs that point to the washrooms or say "no smoking," you need to pay for the services of a professional translator. Perhaps most importantly, ask for references and samples of previous work that would be similar in subject and tone to your assignment. Translation is expensive; if you are very lucky, you may find a professional who is willing to do some work for you on a volunteer basis. You still need to be sure that they are qualified to do the kind of translation that you require.

Level of language

When you write material for program participants in English, you probably use a friendly tone and conversational language. Translators who usually work with academic and official documents may find it challenging to adapt their level of language to a style that suits children and families. They may feel that an informal style sounds "unprofessional" and would diminish the quality of their work. In addition, English tends to allow a quite informal style in writing; however, many other languages make a big distinction between what is acceptable in the spoken language and what is correct in the written language.

You will need to discuss these issues with your translator. Make it clear that you are aiming at a tone and a level of language that will be easy to read for a wide audience and that will make people feel welcome. Your translator may have a wide vocabulary and an elegant style, but ask them to adopt your tone. Emphasize that you do not want to drive away participants who may be intimidated by erudite language. Most of all, you want to make your documents easy to understand for all participants. If you are making the effort to write in clear, plain language, your translator should be mirroring your level of language, and not just translating the words.

Variants of the same language

A further challenge for translators is the dialect or variant of the language that your participants use. Both vocabulary and style may be different. Brazilian Portuguese is not the same as that spoken in Portugal. Some languages vary significantly

The website of the Corporation of Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters of New Brunswick lists links to the websites of provincial, national and international associations of professional translators and interpreters. www.ctinb.nb.ca/english/other_associations.php

from region to region inside the same country. English has regional variants too, though we might not be aware of them until our British friend says he is going to put the picnic basket in the boot. We may have to think a bit before we realize that he is going to put the basket into the trunk of the car, not try to squeeze it into his footwear.

You will help your translator by finding out which variant of a language your participants speak. In some cases, this question may be complicated. For instance, your participants could include speakers of several variants of Arabic. In this case, your translator should aim at a standard that can be understood by people from a variety of Arabic-speaking countries. You might have to sacrifice some of your informal tone in order to reach this common level of comprehension.

Some languages have variants that indicate not only the region that people come from but also their social class and level of education. We may think that two families come from the same country and, to our ears, speak the same language, when in fact they themselves are acutely aware of the class differences that separate them. These differences in class and education often manifest themselves in the level of language spoken. A professional translator will likely use the level of language of the higher social class. It is important to be aware that these differences exist and may influence the way documents are interpreted by your participants.

An understanding of context

Unlike those translation exercises in your high school language course, any documents your organization wants to get translated take their meaning from a particular context. The context may include many assumptions that are probably not spelled out in the document in question, but that are crucial for a real understanding of its meaning. The translator may

> We may think that two families come from the same country and, to our ears, speak the same language, when in fact they themselves are acutely aware of the class differences that separate them.

be faced with many words in the other language that could translate an English word in your document. To be able to choose the appropriate one that conveys all the nuances of the original, he or she must understand something about the context. For instance, the idea of "discipline" might be expressed by different words depending on whether the context is within the military or within a family. If the translator makes the wrong choice, your suggestions about guiding children's behaviour in the family might come out sounding as if you expect parents to impose military regimentation.

Ideally, you will find a translator who understands the nature and nuances of your work with families. If you are concerned about misinterpretations, take some time to discuss the assumptions that underlie your document with the translator. It will make their work easier and the product more useful. If you have had similar material translated before, supply the translator with a list of equivalent terms that you have already approved. It is also preferable to have the translator's work read by a community reviewer, as discussed below.

An understanding of the culture

It is important for translators to have a good understanding of the culture of the participants whose language they are translating your material into. For instance, to take again the example of "discipline," the most commonly used word in a particular culture may necessarily carry overtones of corporal punishment. The translator may have to adapt the text to make it clear that this is not what is being referred to.

In addition, some practices and objects that are common in Canada may be unfamiliar to newcomers and may require more explanation or adaptation. For example, recipes in Canada often measure ingredients in teaspoons and cups that would be confusing to people used to metric measures. Your translator will need to convert them. If you are describing a craft that uses popsicle sticks to someone whose language doesn't have a word for popsicle, your translator may need to add a definition, or you may need to include a drawing. Another solution is to also include the English word in square brackets, since many people simply borrow words for things they don't have names for in their own language. A drawing would also help if you are talking about teddy bears, which are not a common toy in all countries. Probably though it would not take long in Canada for a parent to learn where these toys fit into child culture in this country.

High school students and online translators tend to translate word by word, substituting a word in the second language for the original word. Qualified translators use their knowledge of the intended audience's cultural references to help them convey the author's underlying idea. When you are choosing a translator, ask about his or her knowledge of the culture of the newcomer families who use your services. One area is worthy of particular mention here. Many documents produced by family support organizations refer to elements of children's culture. Resource sheets on language development and early literacy may refer to songs and finger plays that parents are encouraged to use with children. Be sure to tell translators that you do not want anything of this nature translated word for word; these sections should not be included in the word count for calculating the bill. If the translator happens to know an equivalent song or game, he or she might suggest it, but it is probably better to call on a native speaker, either a participant or a practitioner, to supply this material.

A second (and third) opinion

Even if you have hired a well qualified translator and have coached this person in your requirements, it is always wise to have the translation read by a native speaker before posting it on a bulletin board or printing hundreds of copies. If it is a one-page invitation to a community breakfast next week, the review can be informal and brief. However, if this is a more complex document that you will be publishing in large quantities and using for awhile, you should give the review process more attention.

Depending on your budget and the importance of the document, the review process can include a number of different steps. One approach is to ask a second professional translator to review the work of the first. Be aware that because translation is not an exact science, professionals can have honest disagreements about how best to express your ideas. You may end up with two translations and no way to decide which is better. Ask each to explain the reasoning behind any divergent choices. You might also get another translator to take the text in the second language and translate it back into English. This process (sometimes called round-trip or reverse translation) may alert you to places where your intention was not understood and needs to be clarified.

Another approach to the review process is to have your translator's work read by a native speaker who is familiar not only with the language, but also with the cultural context and the subject matter. Someone who has experience in the field will be sensitive to how your material will sound to the people they work with. In addition, practitioners who can imagine themselves using your translated material with families will be motivated to produce a truly practical and useful product.

The job of a practitioner/reviewer or community reader is not to translate, but he or she may be able to suggest some

changes that will make your material more accessible and user friendly. In particular, if your translator is short on child culture, a practitioner may be able to suggest equivalent nursery rhymes, songs and games that would be appropriate. Honing the final document through this process of back and forth between the community reader and the translator may take some time and effort. The more complex the language and cultural variants among your participants, the longer it will take. You should be prepared to pay a reasonable fee for the community reader's service, as for any proof reader, but their personal commitment will probably be what motivates them to persevere.

If you intend to use a community reader, let your translators know this right from the beginning. Professional translators might find it hard to accept the involvement of a "non-professional" in the process. Make it clear that you are not questioning their competence at their job; you are just asking someone in the field for an opinion on how the material will be received. You may yourself ask colleagues to reread your work for the same reasons when you write the English version of your material.

More time and money than you might think

It is obvious from this description that if you are planning to have a fairly lengthy and complex document translated, one that will be widely distributed and that you want to use for a long time, you should be prepared to go through many steps before your text is ready to publish. Plan for the time this will take and beware of short cuts. Even if your readers can more or less understand your message, you don't want the translation to be of such poor quality that it throws into doubt your professionalism and the credibility of your information.

The investment of time is reflected in the cost. Typically, translators are paid by the number of words. Prices range from 25 cents to 40 cents per word, depending on the complexity of the text and the language being translated. Knowing that translation costs will mount quickly may motivate you to be concise and eliminate all unnecessary words from the original. The more clearly an idea is expressed in the original, the easier it will be for a translator to express it in another language.

You don't want the translation to be of such poor quality that it throws into doubt your professionalism and the credibility of your information.

Interpretation

Interpretation—converting a spoken message from one language to another to facilitate an exchange between two or more people—raises many of the same issues as translation of written documents: level of language, variants of the same language, and an understanding of culture and context. It opens even more possibilities for miscommunication, however, since by its nature, it is immediate. The interpreter cannot research a term or reflect long on which of the possible words will best convey the speaker's meaning. There is, of course, no way to ask for a quality review to check the interpreter's work. Using a professional interpreter provides some assurance of quality; however, the kind of spoken communication that needs to be interpreted in a community setting does not generally warrant the expense of hiring a professional.

Most often, when practitioners speak with newcomer families, they call on whoever is available—family members, friends, other staff members, whoever can speak both languages at least a little. This may be sufficient when the information being conveyed is the hours of opening and the list of services provided. However, if practitioners need to have a more in-depth conversation with families, the use of informal interpreters can give rise to serious challenges, including questions of accuracy, fidelity, the interpreter-participant relationship, confidentiality and accountability.

In the remainder of this article, we will enumerate some of the possible pitfalls of informal interpretation, above and beyond the already-mentioned difficulties relating to translation. We will also draw from the medical literature to suggest how to make two-way communication as clear as possible when there is a third person in the middle[3]. Medical personnel have long had to deal with the complex issues surrounding informal interpretation relating to sensitive matters, issues that typically arise in family support practice as well.

Accuracy

As we have seen in the discussion of translation, accuracy is not a simple question of substituting one word for another.

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3. For example, see "The Providers' Guide to Quality and Culture," an electronic resource published by Management Sciences for Health, a non-profit international health organization based in the U.S. http://erc.msh.org/mainpage.cfm?file=4.5.0.htm&module=provider&language=English

Before you start your conversation with a participant, try to get a sense of how fluent your interpreter is in both your language and the language of the person you wish to talk with. Let the interpreter know that he or she can interrupt you at any time to ask for clarification or explanation of any nuances. You can help by explaining beforehand any terms and background information that might be unfamiliar. Choose the simplest words you can to get the point across and avoid jargon, idioms and technical terms. The interpreter might understand them but find them difficult to render in the other language. Remember, you are probably not dealing with a professional who is trained to move quickly between languages.

You don't need to speak more slowly (and certainly not any more loudly!) than you usually do. People will generally find it easier to grasp the meaning of your sentences if you speak at a normal speed, but do encourage your interpreter to ask you to slow down if he or she is having trouble following you. When you are asking questions, ask one at a time and wait for an answer before continuing. If the response you get makes you feel that there has been a misunderstanding, try using different words to express the same idea.

Even if you want to supplement your words with gestures to increase understanding, this may not be the best approach. When the person you are talking to sees your gestures, they will not be connected to words in his or her own language and they may be confusing. Be aware that you may misinterpret the other person's gestures and facial expressions for the same reason. Don't jump to conclusions about what is meant by non-verbal language; ask the interpreter to explain if you are in doubt.

Leave enough time for the interview process so no one will feel rushed. Remember that everything that is said in an interpreted exchange will be said at least twice, and maybe even more times if clarifications are required. In addition, what can be said briefly in one language may take quite a few words to express in another.

Fidelity

Professional interpreters are trained to facilitate communication between speakers of different languages without distorting the speakers' intentions. They do not judge the content of the message, insert their own opinions, add personal comments, give advice, suggest answers, soften the tone, or filter out controversial or embarrassing information. Informal interpreters may be inclined to do all of these things. Sometimes they have the best of motives: a desire to please or a genuine wish to be helpful. Sometimes, they may themselves be embarrassed to have to repeat what has been said. They

may disagree with something you or the other person has expressed or feel that it is inappropriate or offensive. When this happens, the message goes through their filter and comes out somewhat changed. Instead of being a clear window between you and the person you are speaking with, interpreters like this put up a curtain of their own making.

To maximize the fidelity of the messages, make sure that the person who is interpreting understands your expectations. You want to hear *all* of what the other person is saying to you, and you want that person to hear *all* that you have said. You will not be offended by anything and will not judge the interpreter personally for reporting a message accurately. If the interpreter feels that more explanation is required for proper understanding, he or she should ask the person concerned to do the explaining, whether it is you or the participant. The job is then to translate those words, not supply his or her own explanation.

Context of the relationship

When you call on someone to act as an informal interpreter for a participant, you should be aware that the exchange could well be coloured by the relationship that already exists between those people. A particularly common case is children who have learned English at school and who translate for their newcomer parents. They are a convenient choice, but not always the best one. Apart from all the other problems arising from putting children in this role (limited vocabulary in both languages, limited knowledge of adult subjects, insufficient knowledge of the socio-cultural background in either the new or the old culture), it is clear that parents may hesitate to be frank because they wish to keep certain matters from their own children. This desire for privacy may also be true in the case of other family members and even of friends. Sometimes it is better to look for an informal interpreter who has no personal relationship with the participant family.

Even if there is no personal relationship, cultural factors may create a context that will influence the accuracy and fidelity of the interpretation. It may appear to us that two people speak the same language and come from the same country and should therefore have a lot in common. To the people involved, however, their relationship might be defined by the differences— in class, in education and in age—that divide them. Relationships of power, invisible to us, may lead to a failure in communication across the language barrier. For instance, an interpreter with higher status may seem intimidating to a family of lower status so that the family hesitates to express its real needs. If an interpreter with a lower class

accent is acting as intermediary for a highly educated family, that family may be offended at being dependent on someone whom they feel is unqualified. The story in the sidebar on this page illustrates how cultural values about relating to elders can lead to misunderstanding.

Gender is another variable that may affect the success of interpretation. Even where gender equality is the cultural norm, many women would be reluctant to have a man sitting in on intimate conversations, and the reverse is true too. Finally, historical factors may influence the relationship between participants and potential interpreters who speak the same language. Ethnic, regional and religious divisions carrying over from the country of origin may make the relationship so uncomfortable as to interfere with the success of communication.

It is clearly impossible for practitioners in community organizations to be aware of all the cultural and historical factors that might create a negative context for interpretation among the newcomer participants in their programs. Nonetheless, it is important to realize that these factors do exist and that their impact is significant. If you get the feeling that biases and stereotypes may be interfering with clear communication, try to bring them into the light. You might be able to remove obstacles by discussing them with the people involved. On the other hand, you might have to change interpreters.

Confidentiality

Professional interpreters are trained to respect confidentiality. They are under an obligation not to discuss anything that they may have heard during a private interview. Participants may rightfully be concerned that informal interpreters will not be held to the same standards. Many cultural communities are quite small and closely knit. It is entirely possible that the interpreter and the participant have acquaintances in common, even if they have never met before. Participants may be reluctant to speak if they think that their private family matters will become the subject of gossip in their cultural community.

> Participants may be reluctant to speak if they think that their private family matters will become the subject of gossip in their cultural community.

Deference to Age: A Hidden Cultural Factor

One morning a week, a family resource centre offered a drop-in program for grandparents who had come to Canada to help look after their grandchildren. The centre had hired a coordinator (call her Sue) who spoke the grandparents' language. Sue had succeeded in attracting quite a few participants to this program. The centre's director (call her Mary) was pleased, but when the cold weather came, she noticed that the grandparents were not using the cloakroom. Instead, they were draping their coats on the chairs and sofas. Mary thought this made the drop-in room look untidy, and it took up places that were supposed to be used to sit with the children. Mary asked Sue to pass the message to participants in their language, asking them to hang up coats in the cloakroom. Sue put up a sign in their language, but after a couple of weeks, Mary couldn't see any change. She asked Sue to repeat the message, and Sue agreed to do so. The following week, still no action, so Mary asked Sue what was happening. Was this a case of participants refusing to follow the rules of the centre? Was Sue not doing her job? Where was the communication breakdown?

Sue supplied the cultural piece that Mary was missing. She explained that since all these people were her elders, the rules of her culture dictated that it would be very impolite for her to give them an order. Because any request beyond the sign in the cloakroom would be viewed as impertinent, she had not in fact passed on the message. She had decided that to do a good job with these participants, it was more important that she keep their respect. If she interpreted Mary's request exactly, she might lose credibility and they might stop coming to the program.

Mary understood Sue's position, but she still felt that it was important that the coats be hung up in the cloakroom. If this group could leave their coats lying around, other participants might follow suit and this would be undesirable. Mary decided that, because she was an outsider, the participants would not expect her to be governed by the same cultural rules. Moreover, their attendance did not depend on their relationship with her. The next week, she went over to the sofa with the coats, smiled at the grandparents, pointed to the cloakroom, and quietly took all the coats there to hang them up. They got the message, no interpretation necessary.

Maintaining the family's reputation can seem more important than solving a problem. For instance, in some cultures, mental health issues are seen as the fault of the family and a cause for shame. It may be hard for people to seek help if they cannot count on secrecy. Although as a practitioner, your goal would be to eventually destigmatize mental illness, you have to acknowledge cultural norms and concentrate on providing immediate support based on families' current beliefs.

Before any private interview with a participant where an interpreter will be present, explain the obligation of confidentiality to the interpreter. Then, when the interview begins, repeat this obligation and ask the interpreter to explain it to the participant in the other language.

Accountability

Professional interpreters have extensive training in their field. They follow standards, back up their work and may belong to a professional association. When you use informal interpreters, you have no mechanism to ensure professional accountability. Your only assurance of quality is the informal interpreter's good will and desire to do a good job facilitating communication for families.

You can increase the good will by acknowledging the effort and time that your informal interpreters put into their work. You probably don't pay them, but they should receive abun-

dant thanks and recognition. Tell them you understand what a complicated process interpretation is. Acknowledge the difficulties and stress of the job. Look for training opportunities to assist them to improve their interpretation skills. Honour them along with your other volunteers for their contribution to the success of your organization and the well-being of families who need their help.

Conclusion

This article has outlined some of the challenges related to translation and interpretation in community organizations, particularly those that support newcomer families. Communicating with people in their own language is a powerful way to say "Welcome Here!". As this article makes clear, it is not always a simple matter. Becoming aware of the pitfalls is the first step to setting standards for good practice and achieving clearer mutual understanding.

Betsy Mann, M.A. is the editor of *Play and Parenting*, the quarterly newsletter of the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada). She has also authored several publications in the fields of parenting education and child development. In addition, she is a Certified Canadian Family Educator, has facilitated workshops and courses for parents for over 16 years, and has given numerous training workshops for family support practitioners. She has 35 years of personal experience living in two languages and cultures. She was brought up in Toronto in a unilingual Anglophone family and she and her Franco-Ontarian partner chose French as the home language for their children.

What are the Essential Elements of Valid Research?

The Problem of "Data" and their Collection in Cross-Cultural Contexts

Judith K. Bernhard, Ph.D.

▼ **Abstract**

Professor Judith Bernhard teaches in the School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University. She draws on her own experience of research in the field of transnational families to illustrate the challenges of collecting data that can inform practice in the field. She begins by outlining her own personal history as an immigrant and an academic. The difficulties of attempting to be both an advocate for families and a scholarly investigator touch her personally. She uses two cases to illustrate some of these difficulties. The first is the case of divergent perspectives on the role of a parent in the case of a young adolescent whose family had come to Canada from El Salvador. The girl's teacher and her family differed in their views on her rights and responsibilities, based on their cultural values. Dr. Bernhard describes how these different views were also represented among the members of the research team. Her own roots in South America gave her an understanding of the family's position, while her academic training allowed her to sympathize with the teacher's purposes. The team wrote a report that did not fully reflect the tension between the cultures; however, Dr. Bernhard concludes that researchers need to be more mindful of their own professional training and acculturation as important markers to consider in the research process. The second case she presents raises the difficulties she encountered using interviews to investigate the lived experience of refugee Somali mothers. The first interviewer, although an experienced researcher with immigrant roots, proved unacceptable to the Somali families, mostly because he was male. The next person chosen came from the Somali community and was trained by the researchers to obtain informed consent and conduct standard interviews. Dr. Bernhard describes how cultural perceptions and norms made it impossible to use these standardized approaches with the population under investigation, meaning that no credible research paper on the findings could be published. This in turn meant that information about the families' situation and views would not reach professionals and policy makers whose decisions influence the families' lives. Dr. Bernhard encourages the research community to reflect on how to take cultural issues into consideration when deciding what is meant by significant "data" and the best methods for collecting them.

My Subjective "I"

Working across difference has been a necessary but also richly rewarding part of my life. I carry with me the experiences of border crossing as a family member, a student, a teacher, and a mother. At the moment, I am a Professor and Director of a Masters Program in Early Childhood Studies. I am also a migrant. Born in Chile, I have subsequently made my "home" in Puerto Rico, in the Dominican Republic, and in Canada.

Moving from continent to continent, learning new languages, new worldviews, and new sets of "core values" has helped me to see the arbitrary nature of the rules and regulations used to classify, sort, and manage people.

I have been the Principal Investigator of a number of projects designed to document the struggles migrant families go through as their children try to find the right balance between succeeding in North American schools while retaining their original cultural identity and language in the family. I and my co-workers on these projects have always aimed to capture the lived experience of our research "subjects" in such a way that we could change educational and political practices because of this knowledge. Thus, we have also intended our findings to support educators with the great challenges we know they face when working with students they perceive as different and often problematic.

In our work, we have made every effort to avoid a split between objective and subjective facts. We have sought systemic diagnosis of problems that reflect the lived experience of the persons we study. And we have done so because we believe that social knowledge is always situated and contextualized.

Thus, we have always appreciated the need for a diverse research team that can help shed light on the lived experiences of our participants. Team members from diverse backgrounds help the rest of the team understand the meanings that lie behind participants' words and actions. Our field is still at a stage where a multi-ethnic team needs to be intentionally selected and sometimes forcibly so because our institutions are not representative of all the groups we work with. My contribution to the present volume will focus on some of the challenges my colleagues and I have faced in working in multi-ethnic and multi-disciplinary teams.

What does "difference" mean to me? I have experienced ever-changing memberships and allegiances during the course of my life. In the words of Mary Catherine Bateson,

> …membership is an artifact, something that has to be made… membership both acknowledges and bridges separateness, it is constructed across a gap of incomprehension, depending always on the willingness to join in and be changed by the common dance. (1994, p. 62)

Since coming to North America, I have been classified in many ways: as an immigrant, a tourist, an involuntary migrant, and, depending on which side of which border of the Americas I stand, as white or Latina or Hispanic. When I am in one place, I miss the values and ways of the other; yet when I actually go to that other place, I find it no longer exists as I remember it.

When I first immigrated to Canada, I wanted to adopt all that I saw as modern and progressive. Yet the result of this mindset was that often I felt that I had become a stranger to myself. Eva Hoffman describes a similar feeling in *Lost in Translation*. She describes how she left Cracow for Canada at age 13 and discovered that, after a short time, she had lost contact with her inner self:

> The worst losses come at night. As I lie down in a strange bed in a strange house… I wait for the spontaneous flow of inner language which used to be my nighttime talk with myself and nothing comes. Polish, in a short time has atrophied, shriveled from sheer uselessness. Its words don't apply to my new experiences; they aren't coeval with any of the objects, or faces, or the very air I breathe in the daytime. In English, words have not penetrated to those layers of my psyche from which a private conversation could proceed… Now, this picture and word show is gone, the thread has snapped. I have no interior language. (Hoffman, 1990, pp. 107-108)

The challenges of holding onto a familiar subjectivity and at the same time feeling the pull and desire to assimilate to the new dominant order are strong and affect each aspect of my life to this day. As a researcher, I feel the difficulties of these pushes and pulls. I am honoured to have my voice heard by those in academia, yet it is difficult sometimes to switch from one voice to another as I attempt to be both family advocate and scholarly investigator.

Quantitative and data-driven approaches to social science have often been critiqued. Various alternatives have been proposed, including ethnographic approaches which are said to capture a reality that is not revealed in "hard data." However, as the examples below illustrate, there are problems of valid research methods and collection of data that can be considered "objective" (i.e., not merely the researcher's imaginings). The problems of obtaining informative and truthful answers from participants as well as those arising from the question of which answers ethically may be reported in research papers are not solved simply by resorting to ethnographic interviews.

While the problems of interview data are not foreign to anthropologists, in the field of early childhood studies, the kinds of research issues we describe have not received very much attention. The extent to which early childhood researchers have their hands tied and their keyboards immobilized when it comes to investigating and giving reports on diverse families as well as making sure those investigations and reports meet the professional standards in social sciences has not been recognized.

I'd like to tell you about some of these issues by way of two stories. One involves a research project with Latina mothers. The other is a story about research with Somali mothers.

Illustration One: Who can we represent? The story of Isabel

The setting is an interview I am having with a teacher in a Toronto inner city school. We are talking about her student, 13-year-old Isabel Torres who was born in El Salvador and arrived in Canada at 10 years of age. I have been part of a team of participant observers in the school for two months, taking field notes and reviewing school records.

I also had the opportunity to visit the home of the Torres family on three occasions. The four Torres children live with their mother, father, and paternal grandmother in government housing. The father speaks English at a very basic level, the mother only Spanish. Mr. Torres works night shifts while the mother and paternal grandmother stay home with the children. The family speaks only Spanish at home, and Isabel's proficiency in Spanish is solid.

When discussing their values and family practices with me, Isabel's parents referred to family closeness as critical. They believe that it is key for parents to stay on top of their children's activities, to know where they are at all times, and to be aware of the issues the children are dealing with in their lives.

> … in my view, one of the parents has to stay at home to be in touch with the children, to make sure they are eating well, and supervise what they are doing. My children come home every day for lunch… every day they have their soup… Now my older son is in high school so he can't come home but I have a friend who has a restaurant and he goes there to eat lunch every day.

During a separate interview, Isabel's teacher talks to me. She describes Isabel as a strong student, who is self-centred and excelling in all subjects. Nevertheless, it is clear from the teacher's words that Isabel's parents' values conflict with those of the teacher. The teacher says:

> … I think that Isabel is very afraid of the consequences at home… which may make her behave well… so I am very cautious about what I tell them. The father is always at the school, he picks them up for lunch. I think there is so much control. He has this attitude, you know, like he is the one that rules everything. Even the mother seems terrorized. He has her, as they say, barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen, so how can she help her children? Just the other day I heard [from her father] that Isabel had written something in a journal about a boy who asked to kiss her. Her diary is confidential…. He shouldn't be reading this… Now he wants to know the name of the boy.

Unpacking Illustration One: Within-community differences

These above data resulted in a lengthy discussion among the research team on this project. The team consisted of three women and two men. The women included me, a woman from Ghana, and a European-Canadian woman. One of the men was European American and one was from Ghana. Our team agreement was that the process of data analysis would be conducted through our discussion sessions. This approach was new to me since, even when working in collaboration with others, I had always had the experience of dividing tasks and working alone on my little piece. The so-called reality of the situation of the Torres family is explored in terms of the subject positions of those in the research team. What is to be reported?

Some of the team members saw Isabel as a child at risk. According to them, she was someone afraid of the scare tactics of an authoritarian father. The family's close involvement in each other's affairs was perceived as intrusive and mean spirited in this view. The researchers felt that the young adolescent had a number of individual rights and that her development as an individual was crucial. They saw her as already close to a full-fledged person capable of making her own decisions. It follows from this that these team members would see adults' attempts to interfere, even if those adults were her own parents, as improper and oppressive.

Other team members saw the father's role as normal in his cultural context. They saw Isabel, on the other hand, as exemplifying the virtues of a bicultural approach. These researchers said that the father seemed un-cooperative. It is important to see the judgment behind such a term as

"un-cooperative," however. It suggests that the father's wishes were at odds with those of the teacher and that the teacher was applying a universal template to Isabel. For example, the teacher appeared to be saying, "Here is a teen, these are her developmental tasks (a budding adult who needs freedom). She needs a desired family model that is democratic and child centred."

Looked at another way, however, we can see that the father's posture was not simply in opposition to the teacher. Rather, it was also a source of the family strength. Given the authority structure of the family, the "rights" of the minor dependant become of minimal concern in this model. Instead, the concern focuses on the welfare of the family, including the welfare of its minor members. A child of 13 is not of an age to make decisions about matters such as dating. A parent's role is to teach, guide, and protect the child.

I was concerned also about the teacher's role. In conveying her views to Isabel, she was affirming her own authority and in the process undermining the authority of Isabel's father. There was a potential for the emotional disruption of the family. If the teacher succeeded in arming Isabel with assertive views about her rights, she would be placed on a collision course with her father and the rest of her family. In other words, a seemingly small item such as stopping the father from reading the diary could have a devastating effect on the structure of the family.

In our team discussions about this case, I and my colleagues quickly realized that our two different views could not be entirely integrated or made consistent. All eyes turned to me as the Latina member of the team. Yet I found I was (and still am) of two minds: One reaction comes from my worldview as a fellow Latina, sharing the mother's goal of trying to adjust to life in Canada and maintaining her culture and values, and keeping her family together. I recognize the teacher was drawing on stereotypes of the Latino family, particularly, Catholic values about family, birth control, and abortion. I ask myself, if the father is a daily visitor to the school, why can't this teacher find strengths in the family and improve relations with them. Why all this mistrust on both sides?

I also hear the teacher through the lens of a middle-class woman with many years of education, a feminist who has chosen a career path, and someone who values privacy and children's rights. The experience of being trained for so many years in Euro-American post-secondary institutions has made

> …we need to be more mindful of our own professional training and acculturation as important markers to consider in the research process.

me let go of my relational view of the world. I am now a professional, abiding by laws of mandated reporting. Although the family appreciates that I speak their language, there is a distance here that cannot be ignored.

In our team debriefing sessions, we reminded each other that there can be no context-free judgment of Isabel's father. We realized that even though we often thought of differences of gender and class, we need to be more mindful of our own professional training and acculturation as important markers to consider in the research process. It seemed to me that the family's structure should be understood and respected. I leaned toward the side of the family in the conflict. At the same time, I am aware of the teacher's concerns. Having been a teacher myself, I am familiar with "wanting what is best for the child" and advocating for a child by giving her a voice. Yet, I don't feel that a teacher's proper role is to take over or upgrade a child's position in the family in such a way that it could only have an unfavourable impact on the child. The ability to see conflicting worldviews and perspectives put me at a distance from Isabel and her family, and I had to wrestle with the responsibility of being the Latina on the team.

The role reversal that children in Isabel's case could potentially experience would make their learning difficult. In addition, it would mean that everyone who works in schools must be conscious of what is happening with the entire family as they educate the individual child. We perhaps have to live with the knowledge that the effect of some of our practices is that family boundaries are permeated, sometimes brutally shattered.

The reports that I and my team authored at the end of this project turned out to be sympathetic to Isabel's family's concerns. What the reports did not reflect, however, was the tension between the two cultures (as represented by the Torres family and Isabel's teacher) and between the varying views of the research team. Some issues are apparent to me now that were not my focus at the time. The issue of what is right for any given child is not such an objectively answerable question as one might think.

Illustration Two: What counts as "Data"? The Somali Mothers Project

The setting is a research team meeting in a school that has recently experienced a large influx of Somali families. The

families were admitted to the country as political refugees because of civil unrest. They live in a block of apartment buildings in a suburb close to the Toronto International Airport.

The population of the school has changed dramatically and many of the teachers feel at a loss for knowing how to relate to the families. Our research project is aimed at shedding light on the lived experiences of the mothers whose children attend the school. As with all projects, we are on a timeline, and must abide by institutional policies such as Ethics Review committees, as well as interim and final reports.

Our first choice for the person to conduct the interviews is a Black Caribbean man. He has substantial training in qualitative methods and has written a great deal in this area. Very early on, we realize that the men are uncomfortable with him interviewing their wives; he asked his sister to go with him to interviews, but still the mothers were not comfortable talking to a man. We quickly realized gender issues were involved and so needed to regroup.

Through contacts with community groups we were able to hire Hafeezah, a Muslim woman who was working as a translator at a community center. In addition to a tape recorder, informed consent forms, and an interview protocol, we provided Hafeezah with previous articles we had written, elaborated on the research questions and the theoretical frameworks used. Further, we engaged in a number of scenarios and role plays.

At our third weekly research meeting, Hafeezah told us all was not well out in the field. She actually felt fearful for her life. She reported that many women would not talk to her because she did not wear a head covering. After long deliberations, we decided that our study would focus on the people who did agree to talk to her. Those who did invite Hafeezah into their home wanted to spend time talking about people they knew in common. She was expected to attend family events, accompany them to the doctor and drink lots of tea.

She related that given these families' experiences at home where the government threatened and harmed people, they were alarmed at the suggestion that someone associated with the school wanted them to sign papers, take notes, and audio-tape their responses. It would be counterproductive to raise any interview questions until the families could situate her and make sure that she was not on the wrong side of the political spectrum.

We are now six weeks into the data collection and need to write an interim report to the funder. I am meeting with Hafeezah to debrief on her interviews with the families:

Me: Hafeezah, now that you have had time to establish rapport with some of the families,

I want to know what they said so let's begin to debrief around the audio-tapes.

Hafeezah: There are no audio-tapes. The mothers come from situations where they have been betrayed so many times; they would feel insulted and suspect me as an intruder and informant, it is not appropriate. But I can tell you what they said. Just ask me.

Me: Let's go over the signed consent forms then. Maybe we can take your accounts and do a member check with the families. What quotes do you have from your notes? We still need actual quotes to be able to separate what actually happened from your interpretation.

Hafeezah: Taking notes or having them sign strange forms would be also disrespectful. I brought no pen or paper. We don't sign things like that. But I did jot down some notes after I got home and I remember what they said.

It was at this point that I realized how much I had assumed of Hafeezah and her world view. I realized the need for clear research guidelines. The concept of requiring some accountability for the world of researchers was not in Hafeezah's world view.

I then asked her to tell me her stories. She told me that many of the conversations focussed on situations of conflict with their children. When parents tried to set limits and enforce order and respect, the children threatened to call 911. There were many stories of children being taken away by Children's Aid societies, but due to the promises of confidentiality she had made to the families, she could not give us any more details. Hafeezah felt her life would be at risk if she were to betray this promise.

Unpacking Illustration Two

I was very frustrated at not being able to access these important data. This situation raised questions about quality and ethics of what we call research.

My first lesson with the Caribbean-Canadian researcher was that using only race as an identifier would not lead to meaningful findings. Rather, the in-group characteristics to be considered were gender, religion, culture and level of acculturation.

My second lesson had to do with revisiting my assumptions about what I call data or research. In our work we were committed to working with the University's rules for ethical con-

duct of research with human subjects. We needed to have signed or verbal consents and data objective enough to allow for corroboration.[1] Yet our demand for data and for their being collected in a certain way led to a stalemate.

We needed to get involved with participants' lives, yet we were imposing Western ways of thinking about time and about having discussions that became barriers to genuine understanding. Turning on the tape recorder could be conceptualized in Bourdieuian terms as symbolic violence. It was becoming clear to me that the interviews Hafeezah had conducted would not provide any usable material for a publishable paper in social sciences. This is not merely unfortunate as a research problem but it is truly unfortunate in that the situation of the families and the families' views would not be communicated to the outside world, to professionals in the field, and to policy-makers. While the research protocols of the university were designed to protect families, the upshot in this case was to remove them from being considered as participants in educational research. This is not a suggestion to undermine the protective goal of university research-ethics guidelines; one cannot simply remove protections.

In being faced with the challenge of balancing the vulnerability of the families and the need for educators to gain an understanding of the lived reality of the children and families, I have broadened my conceptions of what research is and the kind of team relationships we need to conduct the work. I find that traditional methodology is limited and that in order to obtain authentic responses, much rethinking is needed.

Conclusion

As researchers we experience dilemmas and there are no easy resolutions. We have shown how the problems of researching diverse families are not simply a matter of choosing between qualitative or quantitative methods, between detached or participatory approaches, or even between in-

> …our demand for data and for their being collected in a certain way led to a stalemate.

group, out-group researchers. We have looked at two examples and see that the research issues are not resolved by a decision to choose the "correct" alternative of the dichotomy.

As pointed out by Reid and Tom (2006), in asking people to tell their stories to researchers, we are making an implicit promise to do something with their stories. Yet if the research team cannot agree on the essential elements that have to be present for the report of a story to be acceptable as "data," we are doing an injustice to the family.

This is not a paper with simple answers for complex problems. What I recommend is that researchers undertake to reflect on these problems. The issues deserve more airing in professional forums. We should not hold back on grounds that we appear not to be totally in command; we need some humility and realism about the limitations of present approaches.

I leave readers with the question of what aspects or modes of investigation are essential in order for us to call a report of someone's experiences or of a series of events, "data." We need to consider how to capture the lived experiences in ways that are considered useful, and of sufficient genuineness or "objectivity" as to be a basis for our changing our practice because of what we have learned.
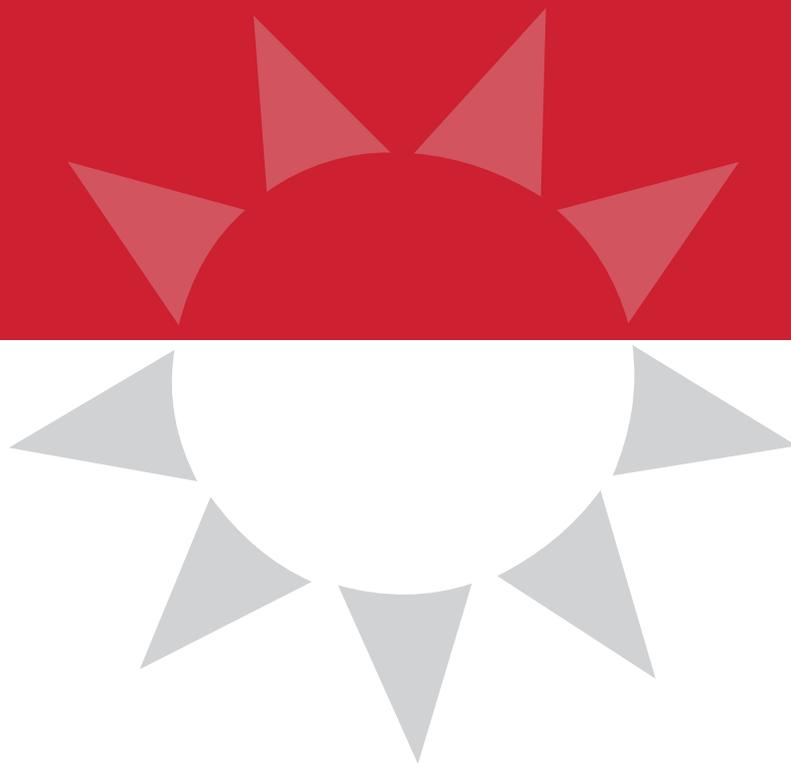
Dr. Judith K. Bernhard is a professor in the School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University in Toronto and Program Director for the Masters in Early Childhood Studies. Her research has focussed on early childhood education and care settings with an emphasis on how the early childhood education field responds to inclusion and diversity. Dr. Bernhard is engaged in studies of transformative family literacy, transnational families and collaborative work between early childhood personnel and families.

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1. Ethics Review Boards allow researchers to offer participants their choice of a verbal or written consent process, following established procedures. On this subject, see Bernhard, J. K., Young, J. E. E. (2009). Gaining institutional permission: Researching precarious legal status in Canada, *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 7(3), 175-191.