Quality Indicators and Dispositions in the Early Learning and Child Care Sector:

Learning from Newcomer Families

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Introduction

In the spring of 2020, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) and MacEwan University began a joint research project focused on the ideas and experiences of newcomer families in using child care. Specifically, the two research questions that drove this project concerning newcomers were:

1. For newcomer families, what are indicators of quality in early learning and child care?
2. What are the essential dispositions child care workers must demonstrate to meet the cultural needs of newcomer children and families?

To answer these questions, a scoping review of current literature was conducted. The results of this review are collected in this document.

While varying definitions are used throughout the literature, for the purposes of this scoping review, 'newcomers' are defined as those families that have recently arrived in their current places of residence as immigrants, refugees, or through other means. Additionally, 'child care,' 'child care centre,' and 'centre' are used interchangeably here to refer to the out-of-home spaces where children under the age of six years old are cared for by adults other than their family members. The term 'educator' is used to denote the employed individuals who plan and care for children in child care centres. Finally, the term 'dispositions' refers to the "tendencies [of educators] to respond to situations in particular ways" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 22 as cited in Davitt & Ryder, 2019, p. 20). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2002) defines dispositions as "the values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviours … as well as the educator's own professional growth" (p. 53). At times, different terms may be used in the works cited below, but the terms defined here will be used throughout this document for consistency.

Methods

In order to assess what the current literature states in response to this project's research questions, a modified scoping review method was employed based on Arksey and O'Malley (2005). The researchers began by defining a series of search terms and then employing those terms in several research databases. Additionally, an extended search was also conducted in the same databases using an extended series of search terms. Articles arising from these two searches were pulled and then were reviewed by the researchers to check for alignment with the research questions. The reference lists from these articles were also searched, in order to find more relevant articles. Once a finalized list of articles was established, researchers reviewed the full text of each article. Articles that directly and meaningfully relate to the research questions posed above are included in this document. An appendix is also available with more information on each article referenced here, and those used in the other phases of this project.

A NOTE ON VOICE

It is imperative to highlight that much of the data discussed below come from individuals who have more access to child care, university researchers, dominant languages, and other supports than do many

newcomers (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Additionally, some studies have demonstrated that country of origin and cultural group membership impact how parents consider different indicators of quality and dispositions (da Silva & Wise, 2006). Moreover, many of the studies that examined parents' perceptions of quality in child care relied on Eurocentric, reductive rating scales that did not capture the full extent of what newcomer parents may believe and prioritize (Quintero, 2012). With that in mind, we would like to stress that what is discussed here is not representative of all newcomers, but instead is a helpful starting point for considering what may be important to newcomers in the Edmonton area.

Results

Below, a synthetic summary of the different indicators of quality that have been prioritized by newcomer parents is provided, followed by a similar summary of the educator dispositions needed to support newcomer children and families.

INDICATOR OF QUALITY: SCHOOL READINESS/ACADEMICS

Across several studies, many newcomer parents preferred child care centres that emphasized "learning" in a traditional sense and had a focus on school readiness (Ceglowski, Gilbert, Wiggan, Johnson, & Traore, 2011; Guo, 2017; Jun, 2006; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Tobin, Adair, & Arzubiaga, 2013; Yamamoto & Li, 2012). For example, some newcomer parents who were originally from China valued curricula that explicitly taught math and science (Yamamoto & Li, 2012). In a similar vein, some newcomer parents who were originally from Korea felt that they valued their children's cognitive and intellectual development and educational achievement more than other parents, as described in a study of newcomer families in British Columbia (Poureslami, Nimmon, Ng, Cho, Foster, & Hertzman, 2013).

Some parents, originally from China and settled in New Zealand, felt that their child care centres did not include adequate academic learning (Guo, 2017). A study of newcomer parents from Mexico who lived in the U.S., and a study of newcomer parents from a variety of countries living in England, France, Germany, Italy, and the U.S., found that these parents desired less play and more direct instruction at their centres (Jun, 2006; Tobin, Adair, & Arzubiaga, 2013). Similarly, many newcomer parents from a variety of countries who settled in the U.S. viewed structured activities as being of high quality (Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012).

At times, the emphasis on school readiness was in opposition to the views of other parents and of educators. For example, Yamamoto & Li (2012) describe how newcomers who were originally from China placed more emphasis on learning outcomes than did European Americans when asked about what makes a high-quality centre. Similarly, Takanishi (2004) found that parents' ideas around education and children's development varied across cultures and economic groups.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY: LANGUAGE SUPPORTS FOR PARENTS

Many newcomer parents desired a language match between themselves, educators, and available information about child care. For example, Sandstrom and Chaudry (2012) found that parents who were

native speakers of Spanish sought out educators who were either bilingual or were also native speakers of Spanish when choosing child care. Similarly, De Gioia (2015) found that newcomer parents who spoke Arabic or Vietnamese appreciated educators with the same language backgrounds as themselves because they were able to learn more about the routines and expectations of the centre through this shared language background. A larger study of newcomer parents in the U.S. also demonstrated that parents preferred educators who spoke their home language across many cultural groups (Miller, Votruba-Drzal, Levine Coley, & Koury, 2014).

In a Canadian study of parents originally from China, Korea, Iran, and Afghanistan, Poureslami, Nimmon, Ng, Cho, Foster, and Hertzman (2013) found that parents desired multilingual, multimodal texts and language support in order to best communicate with educators. Similarly, Archambault, Côté, and Raynault's (2020) recent review of Canadian policies on access to child care found that multilingual communication is needed, with information provided in multiple ways (e.g. written, orally) and in multiple languages in order for families to make informed decisions about child care. Another study of Latino newcomers found that they appreciated a 'one stop shop' approach where language supports and other early child care services were centralized and accessible (Hale, 2009).

As Greenberg, Adams, and Michie (2018) demonstrate through interviews with newcomer parents who have and have not successfully accessed child care, low levels of literacy and misinformation about child care can deter newcomer parents from seeking care for their children. As such, communication with parents in multiple ways and in multiple languages is crucial in outreach and continued enrollment.

INDICATOR OF QUALITY: LANGUAGE SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN

Overall, newcomer parents expressed many differing ideas around appropriate language supports for children. Many newcomer parents indicated that ensuring their children could access and learn English was important to them (De Gioia, 2013; Hale, 2009; Tobin, 2020). Additionally, one study of newcomer parents across five countries (England, France, Germany, Italy, and the U.S.) found that parental isolation contributed to language-related decisions around care: parents who were more isolated from their linguistic communities advocated for bilingual programs while parents who lived in communities with many speakers of their home language(s) were more concerned with their children learning the language of the majority (Tobin, 2020).

At times, newcomer parents disagreed about the role of the educator and centre in teaching children languages other than that of the majority. For example, one study of newcomer parents in the U.S. who were originally from Mexico found many differing opinions about bilingual education: some parents felt it was a parent's duty to teach the home language, and others felt that learning more than one language at the same time would be confusing for children and would result in lower academic achievement (Jun, 2006). On the other hand, a different study of newcomer parents in the U.S. who were originally from Mexico, Iraq, Egypt, Dominican Republic, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, and Nigeria demonstrated that those parents wished that educators used more words from children's home languages (Adair & Barraza, 2014). Lamb's (2020) study of newcomers from a variety of countries who settled in Australia found that both parents and educators desired services that actively promoted home language rights, a step further than educators who might incorporate some key words.

Similarly, in a pilot program for newcomer families in Edmonton where children were supported by an English-speaking teacher and Kurdish, Somali, and Sudanese Arabic-language facilitators, there was a lack of consensus around how best to support the language development of children (Kirova & Dachyshyn, n.d.). Some community members described how maintenance of children's home languages is needed to preserve connections between parents and children, while some parents described English proficiency as a necessary element of school success (Kirova & Dachyshyn, n.d.). The program responded by dividing time equally between English and home languages (Kirova & Dachyshyn, n.d.). However, many of the Somali children in the study were fluent in English only, and ultimately required a program that was focused on language acquisition rather than maintenance (Kirova & Dachyshyn, n.d.). Clearly, there are several potential approaches that a newcomer parent may seek out in terms of home language support from educators.

While some parents may value bilingual educators, it may be that these educators are placed in positions where their language skills are used without fair compensation. One study of a Burmese-English educator in New Zealand, for example, revealed that she was often a guide for her colleagues and acted as a cultural broker in addition to being an educator (Harvey & Myint, 2014). This particular educator felt that her presence could counter deficit views of newcomer families, but it is unclear if her additional skill set led to appropriate recognition from her centre (Harvey & Myint, 2014). It is also important to note that studies of educators found that they were frustrated by differing levels of language proficiency among children and found it difficult to support diverse children in groups, which further complicates this issue (Jones Díaz, 2014).

INDICATOR OF QUALITY: GROUP SIZE

Some parents felt that a 'small' group size or an appropriate ratio of adults to children was desirable and that existing child care options in the U.S. were overly crowded (Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Takanishi, 2004). For children under the age of six, recommendations and regulations for group sizes change depending on the age of the child, with smaller group sizes recommended for younger children (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2016). However, in these studies, these parents did not suggest a more desirable alternative ratio of educator to children; instead, they desired more individualized attention for their child (Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Takanishi, 2004). Similarly, Lastikka's (2019) Finnish study of newcomer parents from a variety of countries of origin found that they identified a high ratio of adults to children as an indicator of quality.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY: CULTURAL MATCH

Studies around parents' views of educators who share membership in their cultural groups revealed divergent views of the importance of cultural match between educator and parent. Here, cultural match refers to care that is consistent with a parent's cultural beliefs, language, and practices (Miller, Votruba-Drzal, Levine Coley, & Koury, 2014). One study of a pilot program for newcomer families in Edmonton found that the presence of cultural brokers and home language facilitators in the classroom supported families and children in sharing their cultural practices and made newcomer families feel welcomed (Kirova & Paradis, 2010). Similarly, De Gioia's (2015) study of newcomer families in Australia who were originally from Lebanon, Iraq, and Vietnam found that they appreciated 'bicultural' educators who shared

families' cultural backgrounds and could bridge the differences between home and the centre. De Gioia (2015) also speculated that having a similar cultural background supported educators in developing and expressing empathy for newcomer families, while Randall (2008) argued that bicultural educators can help all educators build trust with families in her review of multiple international studies.

Two studies in the U.S. demonstrated that parents who placed a high degree of importance on cultural match between themselves and child care were less likely to select centre-based care for their children (Miller, Votruba-Drzal, & Coley, 2013; Miller, Votruba-Drzal, Levine Coley, & Koury, 2014).

However, a cultural match between educators and families was not always sought out by parents. De Gioia's (2013) earlier study found that newcomer parents in Australia who were originally from Pakistan, India, Iraq, the Philippines, China, and Samoa believed the role of the centre was to support their children in learning about and integrating with the dominant culture. As such, these parents appreciated when there were inconsistencies between their homes and their centres (De Gioia, 2013).

In a related vein, according to Huijbregts, Tavecchio, Leseman, and Hoffenaar (2009), the immigration status of educators (i.e. whether educators are newcomers or not) is not related to quality in the sense that newcomers as educators neither increases nor decreases the perceived quality of Dutch child care centres. However, according to this same study, educators who work in a culturally diverse setting are more likely to support diverse groups of children and adopt some of the cultural beliefs of their peers than educators who work in more monocultural settings (Huijbregts, Tavecchio, Leseman, & Hoffenaar, 2009).

INDICATORS OF QUALITY: FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Across several studies, parents indicated an appreciation for family partnership efforts from child care centres. For example, a German study demonstrated that parents rated activities such as parent-educator meetings and engaging parents in project work, planning, and decision making as important, and that parents who spoke a home language other than German emphasized the importance of taking parents' needs into account more than native speakers of German (Hachfeld, Anders, Kuger, & Smidt, 2016). Similarly, a New Zealand study found that some newcomer parents from a variety of countries of origin greatly appreciated relationship building between educators and parents (da Silva & Wise, 2006). Along these lines, a study from the U.S. also demonstrated that newcomer families considered efforts to build and sustain family partnerships when choosing a child care centre (Greenberg, Adams, & Michie, 2018).

Some parents also appreciated how family partnerships and outreach from their centres supported them in getting to know other families and building networks (Ceglowski, Gilbert, Wiggan, Johnson, & Traore, 2011; Lastikka, 2019). In practice, this outreach took many forms and included parties for family members, coffee mornings where parents were encouraged to stay at centres with children and educators, field experiences where parents supported a group of children outside the centre, and meetings of parents and centre staff (Lastikka, 2019).

One study in the U.S. found that newcomer teachers had more skills and ideas for engaging newcomer families than other teachers did, pointing to a need for multiple approaches in order to support the most families (Adair, 2016).

INDICATORS OF QUALITY: ENVIRONMENT AND SPACE

Many newcomer parents prioritized safe, healthy spaces in their considerations of high-quality child care centres, though this was often undefined in studies (Ceglowski, Gilbert, Wiggan, Johnson, & Traore, 2011; City of Richmond, 2017; da Silva & Wise, 2006; Friendly, Doherty, & Beach, 2006; Yamamoto & Li, 2012).

INDICATOR OF QUALITY: EDUCATOR QUALIFICATIONS

Newcomer parents often expressed a desire for qualified, credentialled educators. For example, one study of newcomer parents in the U.S. identified educators having a bachelor's degree as an indicator of a high-quality program (Takanishi, 2004). Similarly, another American study found that newcomer parents felt that educators with knowledge of child psychology and early development were of high quality (Ceglowski, Gilbert, Wiggan, Johnson, & Traore, 2011). In studies comparing newcomer parents to other parents, newcomers valued educator qualifications and credentials more highly and took them to be indicators of high quality (Jun, 2006; Yamamoto & Li, 2012).

Other studies indicated that the importance placed on educator training may vary by parental cultural background. For example, da Silva and Wise's (2006) study found that Vietnamese parents who had settled in New Zealand were less likely to value an educator's training at a care centre as an indicator of quality than Somali parents in the same child care centres.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF HIGH-QUALITY CARE

While parents considered many of the characteristics described above important, some studies found that the desire for high-quality care was often outweighed by the need to find childcare that was easily accessible, had a flexible schedule to accommodate working parents, and was affordable (Johnson, Padilla, & Votruba-Drzal, 2017; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012). Similarly, Archambault, Côté, and Raynault's (2020) recent review of Canadian policies on access to child care found that affordability is a major factor in parents' decisions around which centre they choose.

EDUCATOR DISPOSITIONS: WARMTH AND SUPPORT

Many newcomer parents in the U.S. preferred child care educators who exhibited a warm and caring nature (Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012). Parents across several studies also wanted educators who were affectionate, loving, safe, and trustworthy (Adair & Barraza, 2014; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Yamamoto & Li, 2012). These preferences related to the professional choices of educators as well, as one American study demonstrated that some parents valued educators who chose the profession based on a dedication to children rather than an interest in money or career progression (Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012).

EDUCATOR DISPOSITIONS: FLEXIBILITY

In some studies, parents expressed a desire for educators who were flexible in terms of how they supported newcomer children and families, and who were willing to make exceptions and change routines in order to respond to families. For example, Archambault, Côté, and Raynault (2020) found that Canadian newcomer families required adaptability in terms of their child care centres, and that this adaptability was related to perceptions of friendliness and made parents feel welcome in centres. Similarly, a study of educators in Italy found that those who adopted a flexible approach to children's participation in centre activities tended to view children as agentic individuals, which may have contributed to children's positive identity formation (Baraldi, 2015).

EDUCATOR DISPOSITIONS: ATTITUDES TOWARDS MULTILINGUALISM

Several studies investigated how educators thought about and valued bi- and multilingualism. In one review of early child care programs around the world, Randall (2008) found that educators often did not understand the benefits of bilingualism, and required more professional development on this topic. Similarly, Sawyer, Manz, and Martin (2017) found that some American educators of Spanish-speaking children viewed language acquisition as "magic" while others felt that learning a second language was "confusing" to children (p. 716).

Given the varied beliefs and desires around bi- and multilingual care expressed by parents and discussed above, some researchers argue that educators should adopt a flexible disposition towards language use, moving away from essentialist and universal ideas about what is 'correct' and instead acknowledging and supporting the language use and expectations of newcomers (Beneke & Cheatham, 2016). Additionally, Castro, Espinosa, and Páez (2011) argue that educators need to position bi- and multilingualism as an asset rather than a deficit, which would require considerable knowledge of language acquisition.

EDUCATOR DISPOSITIONS: FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Several articles identified a Funds of Knowledge approach as being potentially helpful or supportive of newcomer children and families. A Funds of Knowledge approach involves acknowledging, appreciating, and making space for the many experiences that children and families have had outside of the centre, and recognizing the knowledge and skills that have come from those experiences as equal to other kinds of knowledge and skills (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). Such an approach positions parents, educators, and children as co-creators of knowledge, and allows educators to better appreciate the larger context of education for children (McDevitt, 2016). One study of a French educator who sought knowledge of families' home lives and language practices described a Funds of Knowledge approach as a shift in power from educators to parents and children (Mary & Young, 2017).

Multiple studies indicated that parents felt it was important that educators have knowledge of both children and families, the home environment, and cultural markers and milestones such as festivals (Castro, Espinosa, & Páez, 2011; da Silva & Wise, 2006; Grethe Sonsthagen, 2020). Along similar lines, multiple studies found that families appreciated educators who listened to their concerns and ideas, were accessible, and were receptive to new practices and points of view (Adair & Barraza, 2014; Kirova, 2012;

Lastikka, 2019). Additionally, a recent study in Australia found that both parents and educators felt that child care centres should actively work to create culturally safe spaces, where parents and children are respected and listened to without judgement (Lamb, 2020).

A Funds of Knowledge approach has been identified as a gap in the dispositions of many educators. For example, Doherty, Friendly, and Beach's (2003) review of Canadian child care programs and policies noted that there is a need for greater awareness, acknowledgement, and sensitivity towards varied cultural practices throughout Canada. Others take this further and argue that educators should actively practice cultural humility, a practice of continuous self-reflection and self-critique in order to deeply understand and value the diverse experiences of families (Lund & Lee, 2015). Similarly, Beneke and Cheatham (2016) and Barrera, Kramer, and Macpherson (2012) argue that educators should adopt dynamic views of cultures and cultural norms rather than seeing them as static.

Some agencies and groups have sought to address this gap, such as CMAS (Childminding, Monitoring, Advisory and Support) and the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of British Columbia, organizations that have created guides for providing care and support to newcomer children. These guides advocate for child-centred programs that focus on children as individuals and actively value the home practices of families (CMAS, 2010; CMAS, 2016; Nabavi, 2011). Along similar lines, a study of child care in four countries (the U.S., Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia) demonstrated that educators who received professional development training on topics such as building relationships with families, working with diverse families, and social services for newcomers were more able to support newcomer families but also felt burnt out from this work (Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011).

EDUCATOR DISPOSITIONS: TENSION AROUND NEWCOMER EDUCATORS

While multiple studies found that newcomer families appreciated educators that they had a language and/or cultural connection with, as described above, some studies found that newcomer educators often identified tension between their cultural values, pedagogical goals, and the direction they received from their colleagues in child care centres. For example, Massing (2018) describes how newcomer educators in western Canada felt that their own cultural practices around mealtimes were not reflected in the routines at their centres, and some of these educators began to implement their own practices in spite of existing expectations. Similarly, earlier works by the same author and others demonstrate how some training and educational experiences for educators advocate for practices that contradict what newcomer educators know and value (Kirova, Massing, Prochner, & Cleghorn, 2016; Massing, 2016). A more recent study of newcomer educators in the U.S. found that newcomer Latina educators prioritized cultural values such as obedience and rule-following among children more than their peers did while working in child care (Garrity, Shapiro, Longstreth, & Bailey, 2019).

Next Steps

As Adair and Tobin (2008) state, "... [newcomer] parents hold ideas about early childhood education that differ from notions of quality and best practice held by early childhood educators and their professional organizations" (p. 147). As such, and given the varied and sometimes contradictory findings described

above, more specific exploration of the beliefs and values of newcomers in the Edmonton area is needed to support the needs of those in our communities. Additionally, as Peeters and Vandekerckhove (2015) argue, definitions of quality should be negotiated between researchers, professionals, parents, and children, rather than simply proclaimed by researchers as has been common in the past, and, as Lamb (2020) points out, several of the elements described above are often interconnected and need to be explored in conjunction. To that end, this project will continue with a series of focus groups centred on the ideas and experiences of local newcomers. In these focus groups, newcomer parents and the educators who work with them and their children will be asked to identify the indicators of quality and the dispositions that are most important to them. Focus group participants will also be invited to share broadly about their experiences and discuss the practices and approaches they have found supportive for newcomer families in Edmonton.

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