

## Building Partnerships with E2L Families in Multicultural Classrooms

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#### Abstract

This research revolved around investigating educators' perspectives on communication and relationship building between themselves and English as second language families. This qualitative study followed a narrative research design, incorporating semi-structured interviews, to uncover educators' opinions and experiences of their interactions and communication with these families, and to report on the challenges and difficulties that were present. The participants of this study consisted of 5, currently employed, Registered Early Childhood Educators across Ontario. Data analysis revealed 4 prominent themes in relation to educators' perspectives: factors impacting professional practice; how feelings and personal reflections influence professional outlook; respect for inclusion and cultural diversity; and the importance of communication to relationships. The main theme that resonated in both the data and literature included the topic of training and professional development opportunities available for educators to learn more about multicultural inclusion and teaching practices when it comes to incorporating diversity aspects of children and families in early learning environments. Further research examining these aspects in a larger context can gather more in-depth perspectives, in addition to evaluating if geographical locations of employment and years of experience are contributing factors to other educators in areas different than the ones that were reviewed in this study.

#### Introduction

The topic of this research revolved around immigrant families and children in the context of early childhood educational settings. Particularly, investigating the nature of interactions and communication between educators and families whom possess limited to no English language proficiency and what challenges and difficulties were present. As statistical data has revealed an impending immigration trend of children with an immigrant background in comparison to the number of RECEs employed in Ontario's publicly funded education system, this particular study was important in generating awareness to the ways in which multicultural education is being understood by educational professionals and implemented in early learning settings, in addition to the types of pre-service and in-service training and teaching programs available in regards to communicating with families of diverse cultures and languages.

#### Literature Review

##### Multicultural Education and its Importance in ECEC

- Since young children's perceptions of their culture are influenced by their interrelated environmental systems, both immediate and external, the research suggests that it is a requirement of education professionals to be knowledgeable and equipped with the necessary skills to recognize and understand the various contributing factors that make up a child's cultural identity, and to be able to utilise these actualities to implement transformative learning experiences with diverse contexts.

##### Educators' Understanding, Perceptions, and Biases Regarding Multiculturalism

- Although the teachers who participated in the studies stated their beliefs of recognizing the importance and benefits of a multicultural education in the early years, not many actually understood what multiculturalism means, or had very superficial interpretations – this is one of the main reasons why educators result to adopting a tourist curriculum approach when interacting with young children.

##### Multicultural Professional Development and Training Programs for Educators

- Due to the rapid increase of immigration levels, educators are often ill-equipped, lacking the necessary knowledge and skills, to effectively support E2L children and families. In order for multicultural education to be acknowledged and implemented effectively into early learning settings, the training programs that educators must complete should provide them with the essential skills to engage in self-reflective practices to address their personal beliefs, attitudes, assumptions and prejudicial behaviours regarding interacting with diverse cultures.

##### Research Question:

- What are educators' perspectives on communication and relationship building between themselves and E2L children and families?

##### Sub-Questions:

- How does communication and relationship building, in this context, impact children's development?
- What may be impacting the relationship building process/ development between educators and E2L families?
- What types of training/ professional development programs have educators taken in relation to multiculturalism and diversity in the classroom?

#### Methodology

##### Research Design

The investigator chose a qualitative methodology approach due to qualitative research being best suited to uncover participants' opinions and experiences. By specifically incorporating a narrative research design, the investigator was looking to collect and tell stories about people's lives and write narratives of individual experiences, and had deemed a one-on-one interview approach, with mainly open-ended questions, as the most appropriate strategy to receive data in answering the research questions.

##### Instrument

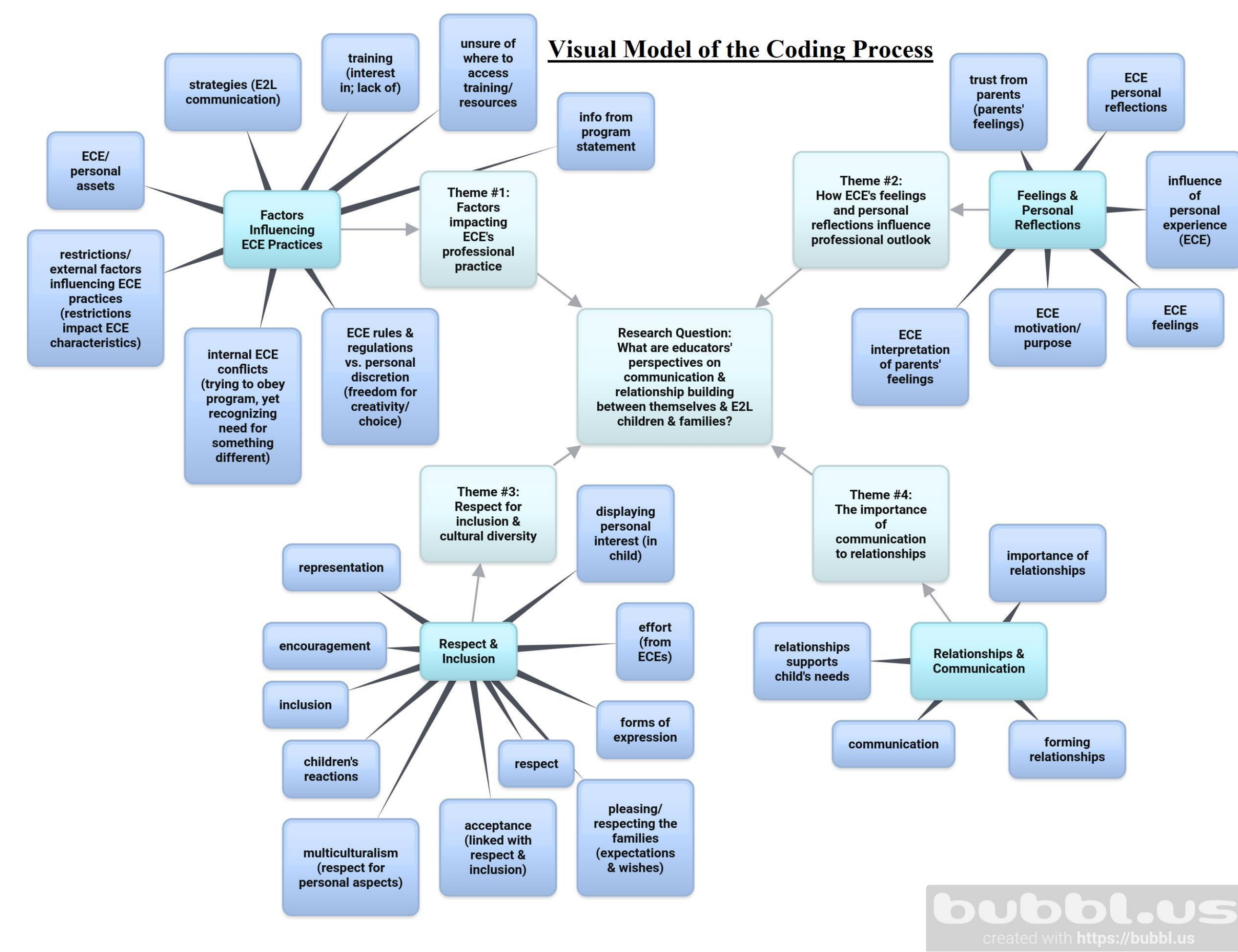
The interview consisted of approximately 12 questions; 4 introductory questions, followed by 8 questions geared towards revealing the perspectives of educators. Participant interviews lasted between 5-20 minutes in duration and were audio recorded. The investigator administered a pilot test of the interview procedure to assess whether the questions were clear, understandable, and relevant to the topic, in addition to receiving feedback from another perspective to report if any researcher's bias was incorporated.

##### Procedure

- Approval from Sheridan's Research Ethics Board was granted.
- Potential sites and participants were contacted; approximately 135+, which included various child care centres, community centres, before and after school programs, and peers and other professionals personally known to the principal investigator.
- Once consent had been obtained, one-on-one, in-person interviews took place; interviews were audio recorded with consent.
- Audio from the interviews were transcribed and verified by each respective participant for authenticity.
- Manual coding methods of the data took place to formulate categories and develop themes.
- Copies of the transcripts underwent triangulation methods from fellow researchers.
- Once coding of the data was complete, the investigator proceeded to review the analysis from the data, all the memos and codes, to interpret and formulate the results and discussion of the information in relation to the initial outlined research question and sub-questions.

##### Participants

As this study aimed to identify educators' perspectives on communication and relationship building, the participants consisted of RECEs in Ontario currently employed in any type of early learning setting, as these specific individuals directly interact with E2L children and families. A combination of purposeful sampling strategies was incorporated, specifically, snowball sampling. The recruitment process consisted of the investigator personally approaching approximately 135+ potential sites and participants that fit the requirements of this study. The 5 participants included in this research range from all over Ontario and vary in educational backgrounds, years of experience, and current working environment.



#### Results and Discussion

##### Results

The 12 questions that each participant answered provided information relating to the importance of relationships, specifically how relationships support children's needs, how educators respect multicultural aspects and include them in their early learning environments, reflections on professional and personal assets that contribute to their role as educators, as well as discussing various factors that impact that role.

Factors Impacting ECE's Professional Practice	How ECE's Feelings and Personal Reflections Influence Professional Outlook	Respect for Inclusion and Cultural Diversity	The Importance of Communication to Relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many had helpful personal assets that supported their responsibilities, such as years of experience working in the field, possessing both a diploma and a degree, and even speaking languages other than English.</li> <li>Participant J: <i>"I feel that my undergrad actually did help me with a little bit of this, because I did take a linguistic class...there was a big chapter in one of the classes that I took...working with immigrant families and children, with families who are ESL."</i></li> <li>However, there were also factors that hindered their abilities to support E2L children and families, such as limited exposure to these types of interactions, no specialised training to support them through these exchanges, or being restricted by the program guidelines.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When asked to share their perspectives, many educators reflected on their passion and commitment to wanting to do the best they could to support E2L children and families.</li> <li>However, when recalling various examples involving their direct interaction with these families, many expressed their limitations to the support that they were able to provide.</li> <li>Participant Fatima: <i>"...it was very difficult because it wasn't someone that we could just pick up the phone and speak to. The dad spoke broken English more than the mom. The mom couldn't speak at all. So, it was hard for us to be able to call and communicate with the mom...she was the one who was at home...so the communication always had to go through the dad, and we had to call his workplace. That's what made it more difficult."</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many of the educators, through stating their interpretations of multiculturalism, demonstrated their respect for being accepting of diverse children and families.</li> <li>Participant Nine: <i>"My understanding of multiculturalism is a society that has different cultures and diverse ways of thinking through all aspects of life. Religion, politics, philosophy, family values. And what makes it a multicultural society is everybody accepting one another for who they are and supporting that their culture might be different, but it's as important to them as their culture is to them."</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many expressed that communication is an integral part of not only forming those relationships with the families, but for supporting children's well-being and development as well.</li> <li>Participant Nine: <i>"...the relationship and communication between educators and families is imperative for the child's development because we need the children to see that their secured attachment, which is their parent, and their next attachment, which is hopefully their educators, are working together in a cohesive form to make sure that their success comes smoothly and that they feel like they have a support system wherever they're spending their day."</i></li> </ul>

##### Discussion

As the purpose of this study was to investigate educators' perspectives on communication and relationship building between themselves and E2L children and families, the data that was collected throughout this study revealed interesting findings relative to the research question, in addition to the sub-questions.

##### Educators' Perspectives on Communication and Relationship Building

- While the literature stated that educators' limited knowledge and lack of experience working with diverse cultures and languages creates challenges and affects their abilities when supporting the needs of immigrant children, the response reflected from one participant expressed that their past childhood experience has supported their professionalism as an ECE towards E2L children and families.

##### How Communication and Relationship Building Impacts Children's Development

- Many of the participants expressed the importance of communication to forming relationships and building strong connections with families to support children through their transition during early years education. Being able to communicate, in some form, with E2L families will only benefit the status of the relationship between both the educator and the families, but also between the children and the educators.

##### Factors Impacting the Relationship Building Process and Development

- The data revealed that the more experienced educators have had many interactions communicating with E2L children and families, compared to the participants who have had only a couple of years of experience. The literature discussed educators' lack of self-awareness regarding the ways in which their teaching methods are impacted by their personal biases and prejudicial attitudes towards diverse cultures.

##### Multiculturalism and Diversity Training and Professional Development Programs

- While all participants had similar interpretations of multiculturalism, the literature stated that educators tend to have a superficial understanding of what it actually implies. Although many inclusion strategies reported related to what the literature defines as a tourist curriculum, only a few of the participants stated that they had engaged in some sort of training relating to inclusion, but not cultural inclusion.

##### Limitations, Future Research and Implications

While this study did reveal answers to the research questions, the data collected was quite small to produce substantial findings regarding this subject. Though the participants were fairly diverse, further research examining these aspects in a larger context can gather more in-depth perspectives, in addition to evaluating if geographical locations of employment and years of experience are contributing factors to other educators in areas different than the ones that were reviewed for this study.