The immigrant perspective: Eastern-European parental discourses about the value of French, plurilingualism and plurilingual literacy practices

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THE IMMIGRANT PERSPECTIVE: EASTERN-EUROPEAN PARENTAL DISCOURSES ABOUT THE VALUE OF FRENCH, PLURILINGUALISM AND PLURILINGUAL LITERACY PRACTICES

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Abstract

Parental involvement is a crucial, but often, neglected factor for success in learning languages. A growing number of Canadian students from immigrant families attend French Immersion programs and bring additional languages to the classroom. Yet, the role of Eastern-European immigrant parents in their children's French Immersion education, their beliefs about speaking multiple languages, and developing literacy practices at home across multiple languages are under-researched. Rooted in a plurilingual framework to examine parental beliefs and practices, this paper uses critical discourse analysis to present data collected via interviews and journals. The data show that immigrant parents demonstrate awareness and a rich variety of beliefs about their children's plurilingual learning; they value French for instrumental reasons; and offer individual solutions for plurilingual literacy development. Implications for educators include valuing parental "funds of knowledge" and acknowledging how neoliberal educational policies widen the gap between plurilingual homes and bilingual classrooms.

Keywords: French Immersion, parental involvement, plurilingualism, discourses, plurilingual literacy practices, immigrant parents

INTRODUCTION

Immigrant parental involvement is a key factor in successful learning of second and subsequent languages among elementary school students (Sung & Padilla, 1998). Parental support and attitudes to language learning contribute significantly to students' motivation to learn additional languages (Iwaniec & Ullakonoja, 2016). In the Canadian context, immigrant parents[1] who come from non-anglophone and non-francophone cultural groups are at the frontlines of dealing with "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" (Haque, 2013). Canada's 1969 *Official Languages Act* (Canada, 1985a), which recognized English and French as founding languages, cemented Canada's status as an officially bilingual country. However, the official bilingualism policy silences hundreds of Indigenous and immigrant languages present within Canada's cultural mosaic (Thobani, 2007). Due to increased immigration and pressure from immigrant communities, the federal government of Canada acknowledged cultural diversity as a defining feature of socio-historical evolution in Canadian society by adopting the *Canadian*

[1] Immigrant parents are defined in this paper as those who were born and attended elementary and secondary schools outside of Canada.

Multiculturalism Act in 1985 (Canada, 1985b). While formally recognizing multiculturalism, this policy provides only a cursory acknowledgement of the cultural contributions of Indigenous and immigrant communities to Canadian society, which is typical of how neoliberal policies interact with multiculturalism (Kubota, 2004).

Despite official bilingualism, formal language instruction in Canadian schools operates within a monolingual paradigm (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2013). That is, French and English, are often taught as "two solitudes" (Cummins, 2007), where languages rarely interact, despite the research demonstrating the benefits of using intercultural and plurilingual pedagogical practices to support students learning multiple languages (Galante, 2019; Marshall et al., 2019).

This raises questions about the mismatch between macro and micro levels of language policy as they play out at school and among families (i.e., Ballinger et. al., 2020). If multiple cultures are acknowledged at the federal level, how is this reflected in language practices at school and at home for allophone children, whose first language is neither English nor French (Statistics Canada, 2009)? Subsequently, it is essential to locate parents in the social and cultural discourses about language and identity in Canadian society. Family practices, reported by parents who have children in French Immersion (FI), and how they fit within the macro levels of language policy in Canada, are a particular focus of this article. We argue that while the FI school environment is bilingual, the homes of immigrant parents provide a plurilingual context for their children, where they speak languages other than French or English, switch between languages, develop literacy in multiple languages, thus revealing a mismatch between linguistic environments at school and at home.

In this paper, we explore various language practices of Eastern-European (EE) immigrant parents[2] who have children in FI, while considering the linguistic hierarchies embedded in Canadian bilingualism and multiculturalism policies (Kim et. al., 2019). We decided to focus on EE immigrant families, because they constitute a growing but under-researched group of immigrants in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). Due to their whiteness, many Eastern Europeans are not always constructed as immigrants facing significant prejudice (Tereshchenko et al., 2019). As a result, their economic and educational struggles are invisible for policymakers and educators (Sadowski-Smith, 2018). Moreover, they often have a strong preference for the academic curriculum and view dominant Canadian pedagogy, rooted in social constructivism and guided discovery learning, as too "weak" (Antony-Newman, 2020). They express disillusionment with the Canadian school system and try to compensate for it by arranging tutoring (Silova, 2010) and sending children to ethnic community centers, which offer more academic curriculum, traditional pedagogy, and heritage language instruction (Antony-Newman, 2020).

RATIONALE FOR CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We examine how EE families navigate language policies through a plurilingual lens given the presence of multiple languages that have unequal status in Canadian society. Plurilingualism is a viable option for the Canadian educational context due to increased linguistic diversity as a result growing immigration (Statistics Canada, 2017). Canadian scholars respond to such changes in landscape by adopting plurilingualism as a theoretical framework (Chen et al., 2022; Galante, 2022; Lau & Van Viegen, 2020; Marshall et al. 2019; Prasad, 2014). Plurilingualism is

[2] We acknowledge the linguistic diversity of participants coming from nine different EE countries, but their common post-socialist experiences of everyday life and education make them a coherent group for analysis (Perry, 2013).

understood as a capacity and practice of using/be familiar with more than one language and culture in a variety of contexts, but without the emphasis on native-like proficiency in each language (Council of Europe, 2020). Our rationale for using plurilingualism as a theoretical framework operates on two main levels:

Contextual rationale: In this study, we focus on plurilingualism which is currently prominently featured in the context of French as a Second Language (FSL) studies in Canada (Dagenais, 2008; Dagenais & Moore, 2008; Moore & Sabatier, 2014). Plurilingualism is well established within FSL programming in Canada to create awareness of multilingual and multicultural context. It has already been introduced to teachers and has influenced the development of the FSL curriculum in many provinces/territories, including Ontario. Specifically, in Canada, there has been an ongoing conversation about the beliefs and practices of students and parents from different backgrounds using plurilingualism as a conceptual framework (Dagenais, 2008; Dalley, 2009). We are adding to this conversation by bringing EE parents into the fold.

Conceptual rationale: We acknowledge that the Canadian multicultural and multilingual context is fruitful for deploying various theoretical frameworks, including translanguaging (Kalan, 2022) and multilingualism (Dagenais, 2013) among them. In contrast with multilingualism, which views languages as merely social political constructions (Vallejo & Dooly, 2020), plurilingualism shifts to individual speakers' linguistic repertoires and their fluidity, aligning with our own focus. With translanguaging, the intent is to break the boundaries between named languages (Vallejo & Dooly, 2020), which would have limited analytical possibilities for our work.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: PARENTS AND FRENCH IMMERSION

Parents have always been important for the development of bilingual programs (Arias, 2015) and FI is no exception. The origin of French Immersion goes back to 1965, when a group of anglophone parents took the lead in initiating an experimental program for middle class English-speaking students. Traditionally, immigrant students have been strongly discouraged from joining FI, assuming this program is only for those with perfect command of English (Parkin & Turcotte, 2004), which has contributed to controversial perceptions of FI as an "elite" program for successful students (Delcourt, 2018).

Immigrant parents choose FI programs for their children viewing Canadian English-French bilingualism as part of national identity (Parkin & Turcotte, 2004), however Canadian teachers often express concern about the suitability of FI for allophone immigrant students (Davis, Ballinger, Sarkar, 2019), convinced that they would not have proper knowledge of English in the long run. Canadian Parents for French (2010) reports that allophone students are often actively discouraged (33%) or even disallowed (42%) from enrolling in FI education despite "impressive performance" (p. 5) and satisfaction with the program of those who do (Mady, 2014). Indeed, research shows that allophone students often outperform their anglophone peers in FI programs (Mady, 2017), while generally school administrators have limited awareness of the benefits of learning multiple languages (Mady & Masson, 2018). A better understanding of families' plurilingual literacy practices and their link (or lack thereof) to FI programs through empirical investigation may benefit future educational policy development.

Official bilingualism is promoted by mandatory FSL or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in most public schools (Early, 2008). For instance, French is a compulsory subject for grades 4 to 9 in Ontario. Families can also opt into the bilingual FI program, which provides

instruction in French across 50% to 90% of subjects (e.g., Math, Social Studies, etc.). Similarly, Extended French (EF) programs offer instruction in French for 50% of the curriculum. FI programs were not initiated by policymakers or school boards' representatives but by parents in 1960s Quebec, who wanted to ensure that their anglophone children would have an opportunity to develop high levels of proficiency in French (Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2008), proving the crucial impact parents can have on shifting educational language policy.

Today, an increased number of culturally and linguistically diverse learners has changed the population of FI programs due to growing immigration in Canada since the 1990s (Mady, 2017). Families' linguistic repertoires often include English, French, and other additional languages. We define these families as plurilingual because they use plurilingual literacy practices at home (e.g., using multiple languages for shopping lists, reading books in one language and discussing them in another). Various levels of language proficiency among allophone students lead to creative switching between English and other languages for different purposes (Piccardo, 2017). In these families, parents and grandparents foster the use of home languages, developing literacy in other languages (Slavkov, 2016), while siblings may use English for communication. Against the background of "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" discourse (Haque, 2013), exploring immigrant families and their plurilingual literacy practices shows how official policies affect Canadians in their everyday lives.

Focus on immigrant parents is also important because they represent one of the largest groups who experience misunderstanding regarding their role in students' learning. Immigrant parents have distinctive sets of expectations, which often do not correspond to those of non-immigrant teachers (Turney & Kao, 2009). Their unique challenges include a lack of familiarity with the school system in host countries and language barriers. As a result, immigrant parents are often perceived as "hard to reach" by educators who do not see parents being involved in their children's schooling in normative ways (Crozier & Davies, 2007).

IMMIGRANT PARENTS IN FRENCH IMMERSION CONTEXT

According to Ballinger et al. (2020), there is an ongoing mismatch between official language policy and family language policies disproportionately affecting immigrant families. We identified a few studies in the FI context that analyzed parental beliefs and practices related to their children's plurilingual literacy development. For example, in her study of Asian immigrant families, whose children attended FI programs, Dagenais (2008) examined plurilingual literacy practices used at home to maintain first languages to underscore connections between language, identity, and community.

Dagenais and Moore (2008) explored the alignment between school policy and parental beliefs in their research of family-school connections between plurilingual immigrant families and FI classes. They found that South American immigrants developed their children's linguistic repertoires at home. Families invested time, money, and emotions in maintaining their children's plurilingual literacy practices, perceived as social and economic assets for their children, which served as a means of maintaining familial and cultural identity. However, maintaining diverse plurilingual repertoires did not necessarily align with school policies and practices (Moore & Sabatier, 2014).

Parental beliefs about language and school choice are shaped by their home language and also depend on their experiences with Canada's official languages. Dalley (2009) found that Rwandan and Congolese immigrant families chose to place their children in francophone, FI or anglophone

schools based on their cultural experiences with English before coming to Canada. This study revealed tensions between the pride of being francophone and the utility of learning English in Canada (Dalley, 2009). These African immigrant parents with French heritage chose FI schools so that their children could learn English as well, but FI schools mostly cater to English-speaking children learning French. Subsequently, we observe a mismatch between the school language policy and family language policy for this immigrant group.

To summarize, the few existing studies that we reviewed for this paper explored the issues related to immigrant families who have plurilingual repertoires, demonstrating the importance of language in defining linguistic identity in Canada. Rooted in official English-French bilingualism and institutionalized multiculturalism, Canadian linguistic identity is inherently plurilingual on an individual level with diverse plurilingual literacy family practices. The research to-date suggests parents access French for utilitarian and emotional (i.e., pride, heritage) reasons, sometimes simultaneously. This illustrates the importance and complexity of social discourses around language and identity in parental choice and involvement.

The FI program was designed with non-immigrant Anglophone children in mind, but its current population is increasingly diverse, which makes it crucial to listen to voices of immigrant parents who choose FI for their children. While existing research examined Asian, South American, and African parents' beliefs, there are no studies examining Eastern European parents' beliefs about their children's plurilingualism and learning of French. We address this gap by posing the following research questions:

1. How do EE immigrant parents perceive the value of French?
2. What are EE immigrant parents' beliefs about plurilingualism?
3. How do parental beliefs about plurilingualism shape their plurilingual literacy practices at home?

The aim of this paper is to look at how Eastern European immigrant families operate in the context of a mismatch between their plurilingual homes and bilingual classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

Grounded in sociocultural theory, we conceive of language as a social practice (Gee & Green, 1998), which provides here insight into the relationship between discourse, language, and identity to reveal how parents make sense of their choices and their children's language learning experiences. Hence, we draw on structural critical discourse analysis to analyze parents' perspectives around the value of French, plurilingualism, and plurilingual literacy practices.

This paper combines new and previously unpublished analysis of data from two larger research projects (Antony-Newman, 2018a; Antony-Newman, 2018b), which involved EE immigrant parents in Canada. Primary data were generated in the participants' home environment (Toronto, Ontario), and all children attended French Immersion/Extended French classes. The respective goals of the primary studies were to 1) look at immigrant parental involvement in children's education overall (without an explicit focus on language education), and 2) analyze the influence of children's home languages on plurilingual literacy development and engagement. However, these studies generated a wealth of data from parents pertaining to questions about the role of L1s in their children' literacy development and offered a sample of participants who sent their children to FI programs. Given the dearth of research on EE parents' perspectives in FI programs, we sought to examine the data more closely to look at parental views and discourses

that emerge about French and plurilingual practices at home. Crucially, the data collected in these two primary studies was analyzed differently using critical discourse analysis to highlight the unique perspectives and contextual experiences of EE parents. Parents were fundamental to the creation of FI programs in Canada, and here we hope to underscore the ways in which parents might be negotiating discourses about bilingualism when living in a plurilingual home situation, and hence, revealing tensions between home and school language policies against the backdrop of bilingualism within a multicultural framework (Haque, 2013).

Participants

Parents in these studies helped their children learn not only both official languages, but also their home languages, and potentially other languages as well. In both studies, parents shared their views on different aspects of learning and maintaining multiple languages. All children were attending primary schools (ages 6 to 15) at the time of data collection.

Data collection and selection

Primary data were collected qualitatively in both projects, one using semi-structured interviews and the other using open-ended questions parents responded to in journal reflections (see Table 1 below). For the purposes of this study, we selected primary data related to parental beliefs and practices about language, decision to choose French Immersion (FI) or Extended French (EF) programs for their children, and support they provided to their children as they learn French.

Table 1 outlines the data from these two studies, relevant to parental beliefs about FSL programs and parental involvement in plurilingual literacy practices. Because EF and FI are both content-based immersive language programs, we refer to them here as FI programs. Parents have been labeled with a number to discuss their data in the findings section (i.e., P1, P2, P3, etc.)

TABLE 1. Participants' demographic characteristics

Parent (P)	Home language	Years in Canada*	Level of education	Data: semi-structured interviews (SSI), journal reflections (JR)	Program
P1	Hungarian	12	Bachelor's	SSI	FI
P2	Slovak	15	Bachelor's	SSI	FI
P3	Romanian	15	Bachelor's	SSI	FI
P4	Bulgarian	23	Bachelor's	SSI	FI
P5	Romanian	15	PhD	SSI	FI
P6	Serbian	22	Bachelor's	SSI	FI
P7	Macedonian	5	Master's	SSI	FI
P8	Russian	18	PhD	JR	EF
P9	Russian	12	College	JR	FI

P10	Russian	5	Master's	JR		EF

* *At the time of data collection.*

Data analysis

Foundational to our analytical framework is van Dijk's three-layer model of ideology to mark the interrelationship between discourse, cognition, and society developed to understand ideological structures and social relations involved in discourse (van Dijk, 2012). Tying back to Vygotsky's sociocultural ontology, this model for critical discourse analysis positions social cognition as a mediator between discourse and society. Social cognition offers a look at mental representations of individuals or models that determine how they act, speak, write, and understand their own and others' social practices in their interactions (van Dijk, 2015).

Data from interviews and open journal entries were entered into Nvivo 11 Pro and coded collaboratively with all three authors present to negotiate meanings of codes in real time. The research team met five times to work through the following phases of analysis. First, using an inductive approach (Saldaña, 2014), we combed through parental discourses to gather evidence of how they make sense of their children's experiences in FI programs and negotiate their beliefs about plurilingualism or plurilingual literacy practices with their children at home and at school. Emerging codes were labeled using participants' own words (e.g. *French is valuable for me* – value of French). Next, we combed through the evidence gathered to organize our coding into four categories to guide in our critical analysis of the discourse (van Dijk, 2012, 2015): social practices (*What practices did parents engage in with their children?*), social context (*What contexts do parents discuss?*), textual analysis (*How did parents linguistically express their ideas and beliefs?*) and intertextual analysis (*How are parents' ideas discursively intertwined with socially constructed discourses about learning French/languages?*). The critical discourse analysis helped to reveal how broader discourses about languages and identity inform parents' beliefs and choices. Finally, as we coded the data, we gathered analytical notes to understand possible connections between the different codes, how these contrasted or contradicted each other, and whether anything remained unresolved. Any disagreements among the research team were debated and consensus was reached by using evidence provided from the data.

FINDINGS

Below we discuss the themes that emerged from the data and contextualize findings within the Canadian discursive context about official bilingualism and multiculturalism. We have organized them according to the main foci of our research questions: parents' beliefs about the value of French, parents' beliefs about learning multiple languages, and parents' reported practices when it comes to helping their children develop plurilingual literacy practices.

Parental discourses about the value of French: Beyond cognitive and economic instrumental valuation.

Some parents adopted an instrumental approach to making decisions about enhancing their children's plurilingual literacy practices via FI education. Among our participants, parents' decisions to send their children to FI schools were shaped by their belief in the benefits of bilingual education in terms of both its cognitive (Bialystok, Craik, & Luk, 2012) and economic advantages (CPF, 2010). Several parents mentioned that because they already spoke an L1 and English at home, adding French to their children's linguistic repertoire would not be difficult. In

line with the neoliberalization of the educational process in which language skills are commodified as a form of human capital, valuable mostly for employment purposes (Holborow, 2018), parents in this study indicated that proficiency in French would improve future career opportunities related to the proficiency in both official languages. This was reflected in our data:

> *It's my view as an immigrant, when she finishes Grade 12 and she get the bilingual paper* ***it's easier after to get a job or position*** *... (P2)*

Parents' decision-making processes were also shaped by more pragmatic aspects. Discourses about studying French were rooted in convenience in terms of school location and community practices:

> *"The first big reason was* ***our home school has French Immersion, so it was convenient*** *... they are doing well and I heard from other people ...when they were small they talk Slovak ... and they take it easier..." (P2)*

In addition to the convenience of location for such parents, choosing a particular school and program also depended on what they heard from parents who belong to the same linguistic community. The findings highlight the power of cultural-linguistic communities, as parents' shared beliefs and values impacted decisions about school choice:

> *... first I didn't want it ... and why would I ... add another language, but then* ***we were living actually right across the school****, so most of our neighbours sent their kids there ... they were ...* ***in the same situation, they spoke a European language*** *and they added French beside the English environment. (P1)*

Despite the attractiveness of instrumental discourses, some parents demonstrated ambivalence towards French. Once in the program, the decision to stay there was determined not by the value of French per se, but its usefulness in comparison with other specialized programs (e.g., International Baccalaureate, sports and arts). For this parent, who expresses some doubt and flexibility towards staying in the FI program based on their child's skills and future interests, studying French is convenient until it stands in the way of other programs:

> *... we are deciding right now, I don't know... if he wants to go to that IB program ... or* ***something specialized that is not offered in French I won't be stopping him because of French,*** *but it's probably good for him to go all the way through ... (P3)*

Lastly, elitist discourses about FI programs informed parental decisions and afforded parents some control over school choice. As one parent explained, French Immersion became a means to "escape" the neighbourhood school they were not satisfied with:

> *... it's nice ... , your kids, would speak French ... but the main reason was ...* ***we didn't want kids in that school that we belonged to [our home school].*** *(P6)*

Overall, parents demonstrated complex and nuanced valuation of French not solely driven by discourses about the cognitive and economic benefits of learning French or the desire for their children to attain mobility in Canadian society by becoming bilingual in the official languages (Dagenais, 2008). They also chose FI due to proximity, recommendations from the linguistic community, and the ability to "escape" the neighbourhood school.

Parental discourses about plurilingualism: Challenging the stereotype of "hard to reach" immigrant parents

Contrary to discourses among educators about immigrant parents being "hard to reach" due to their assumed disengagement from their children's lives (Crozier & Davies, 2007), participants in our study showed significant awareness of their children's literacy development across all languages. Specifically, they showed that they are very aware of their child's linguistic repertoires and abilities. They know, very precisely, what their children are capable of doing or struggling with, as illustrated by the following statements:

> *She **fluently speaks and writes in both languages** [English and French]. The challenging part was Russian, since child almost doesn't have any writing experience in this language. (P9)*

> *It was relatively **easy to summarize** in English and French. I do not remember he had any problems with that. (P10)*

Their familiarity with their child's competencies in their respective languages aligns with prior research showing that parents know their children best (Kugler & West-Burns, 2010).

According to the literature, immigrant parents see Canadian official bilingualism as part of a national identity, which motivates them to learn French or enroll their children in FI programs (Dagenais, 2008; Parkin & Turcotte, 2004). The parents in our study very much aligned with this perspective, as this parent explain:

> *... first of all, **I value languages**, I am the ... person, who ... studied languages, taught languages, researched languages, so **to me speaking another language [French] is extremely valuable and it was without any question that the children would have to speak more than just English** and this is another reason why **we kept Romanian on the house** ... (P5)*

Valuing Canadian official bilingualism seems to be a way for plurilingual families to legitimize speaking and maintaining additional languages. If participants value languages in general, then having the opportunities to learn "another" language, in this case French, helps them rationalize maintaining a focus on the child's L1 proficiency as well. What is interesting is that despite official language policy discourses that place French and English at the center of the learning experience for Canadian children, for plurilingual immigrant parents, French and English bilingualism operates as reinforcements to maintaining the family L1. As we examined in the previous section, French works as a support tool for the children's plurilingual development until it outgrows its utilitarian function. Thus, learning French operates at the periphery of plurilingual development, where immigrant parents can assign greater value to their heritage language, disrupting the dominant official bilingualism discourse rooted in monolingual ideologies.

Parents often have specific ideas about language learning (Iwaniec & Ullakonoja, 2016), which affects their involvement in literacy activities. This was supported by our participants, who demonstrated, for instance, beliefs about plurilingual vocabulary acquisition:

> *... you can't build a language unless you are **actually exposed and learn vocabulary**. Right now, French, he is only exposed to at school ... it's hard, because he got to that grade when it's half-half. (P3)*

They also worried about their children learning additional languages as plurilingual learners, questioning their chances of reaching high levels of proficiency in all languages:

> *… my son is in Grade 5...* ***he is not as good in French as I would have imagined him to be, not as good in English as he would have been if he was in English system****, so that worries me a bit ... (P3)*

Despite progressive parental views on plurilingual language learning, parents still have some worries about subtractive bilingualism (Antoniou, 2019) or children "confusing" several languages (Ballinger et al., 2020), contrary to existing research on the benefits of bilingualism and learning additional languages (Bright & Filippi, 2019). There are multiple studies that emphasize allophone learners' advantages over monolinguals studying additional language (Mady, 2007, 2017).

Our EE parents were aware of their children's' plurilingual repertoires and their linguistic capabilities, alongside having complex beliefs about language learning. All this suggests that EE immigrant parents are not "hard to reach", contrary to the existing stereotypes about immigrant parents and their low involvement in children's education (Crozier & Davies, 2007).

Parental discourses about plurilingual literacy practices: Keeping it in the family

Most EE parents in our study expressed the belief that Canadian schools do not promote plurilingual literacies, *"especially in one's home language, because there is no school support for that." (P10).* As a result, many of these parents strove to solve these issues individually by developing their children's L1s and fostering French attainment via tutoring, purchasing books in multiple languages, and using community learning centres that offer tuition in L1s and French. These beliefs were tightly linked with the values of first language maintenance and plurilingualism in general and resulted in the active involvement in their children's language learning. Although immigrant parents were aware of the more dominant status of English, they found ways to develop other languages including French and their L1s. Many of the parents in our study had books at home or borrowed them from friends, visited local libraries or found them online.

EE parents in this study expressed their strong investment in their children learning and maintaining their L1s, revealed to be at significant additional cost in time and effort:

> ***I would definitely like him to keep reading in his first language****, but it would require lot of discipline on our and his behalf. (P10)*

Due to a lack of support from school and in the absence of plurilingual language policy at the federal or provincial level (Cummins, 2014), EE immigrant parents in the study demonstrated that they must shoulder the burden of developing their children's plurilingual literacies. Such an individual solution is a logical outcome of neoliberal approach to parental engagement, where the responsibilities of the state are shifted to parents and families (Nygreen, 2018).

As a result, parents interviewed for this study engaged in a range of individual solutions to develop plurilingual literacy practices of their children. Some had to arrange outside support, investing money, if unable to help themselves and/or provide support during the transition between programs:

> *I give them extra support … my older son used to go to a French Immersion ... now I decided that he needs to keep the French that he got in the first 4 years, so* ***I offer him, you know, additional French hours*** *aside from what he gets at school, which I don't think it's enough. (P5)*

Our EE parents did not perceive their lack of proficiency in French as a hindrance to offering literacy support. They often remained present and involved in their children's literacy development, even if they did not speak French:

> ***[I] kind of guide them through the homework*** *… it's all in French, and I don't speak French... I know what they are doing, because I am there … I am helping them if they need help. (P1)*

When our participants detected a lack of engagement in their child's literacy activities, they kept motivating their children to maintain their plurilingual practices. They were ready to offer various types of support, not always linguistic:

> *He asked for some words occasionally, but th**e most important help was to organize him and make sure he does the work**. (P10)*

Despite widespread discourses about immigrant parents being not sufficiently involved in their children's education (Crozier & Davies, 2007), we found that EE parents in this study were quite involved in their children's plurilingual literacy development, and in ways that went beyond purely linguistic support. Although some of these parents downplayed their involvement in their children's plurilingual literacy practices, they were always there to help their children. All participants indicated that they supported their children in various ways: helping with word meaning, syntax, morphology, word stress, and structuring time to complete work or assignments. The data above give examples of parental practices and levels of involvement in their children's home language and/or French language proficiency development. Parents indicated they would be glad to receive support from school, but currently they have to accomplish the task of plurilingual literacy development individually.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Just like parental involvement brought about bilingual education and creation of FI (Parkin & Turcotte, 2004), it is immigrant parental involvement that promotes plurilingualism. What can we learn from parents? Our findings around EE parental discourses about the value of French, beliefs about plurilingualism, and plurilingual practices suggest that immigrant parental involvement has its distinctive features which might be overlooked by schools as not meeting their expectations. While schools expect parents to be active on school premises with volunteering and fundraising (Stitt & Brooks, 2014), EE parents are more active at home (Antony-Newman, 2020). Eastern European parents come from countries where parents are active mostly in the home domain and trust educators in matters of curriculum and pedagogy (Antony-Newman, 2020). In the Canadian context, our participants followed this script and used family resources to meet the language and literacy needs of their children rather than advocate for change in the school system.

Parental discourses about the value of French, first of all, shape their intention to send children to FI and the decision-making process regarding the choice of languages for their children. Quite often, EE parents rely exclusively on their own networks to learn about FI programs. They adopt a somewhat instrumental approach (Holborow, 2018), focusing on either the usefulness or convenience of studying French. They express ambivalence towards the FI program itself, perceiving it as more useful than other programs, however being ready to transition to something else if necessary. EE parents are also aware of the advantages of the FI program with respect to cognitive development and potential economic benefits in the future (Lazaruk, 2007). The idea of

supporting official English-French Canadian bilingualism through FI programs (Dicks & Genesee, 2017) goes against parental discourses about the instrumental or practical value of French. EE parents use French not as an opportunity to become francophone but as a bridge towards becoming plurilingual.

Parental discourses about plurilingualism reflect that EE parents are extensively involved in maintaining their children's plurilingual competencies, demonstrating an awareness of their children's linguistic repertoires, and abilities to the language learning process. Although EE parents worry about reaching high levels of proficiency in all languages (Antoniou, 2019), they value Canadian bilingualism and see it not only as an opportunity to learn French as an official language but also as a way to legitimize other languages, disrupting the dominant monolingual ideology. Plurilingual beliefs of parents are mismatched with official bilingual discourses rooted in language separation (Palmer et al., 2014).

Parental discourses about plurilingual literacy practices reveal that EE parental involvement is substantial and dynamic, as it often adapts to their child's need over time (Proulx, Giasson, Saint-Laurent, 2008). EE parents do recognize the lack of L1 support at school and instead they offer home language and French language support in various forms: by arranging additional classes, tutoring, participating in the projects and assisting their children with language learning. They remain present in the learning process, engaging and motivating the children, while investing a lot of time, finances, and effort. As long as schools do not offer any plurilingual support (Duff, 2007) and Canadian language policies do not go beyond the "two solitudes" of offering English and French (Cummins, 2014), parents have to adopt individualistic neoliberal solutions (Nygreen, 2018) to support plurilingual literacy practices of children. The mismatch between the practices in Canadian schools and EE immigrant families is vast: not only are educators not aware of the "funds of knowledge" (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011) in parents' homes, but they also do not realize how progressive parents are when it comes to plurilingual literacy support practices.

Despite parents being key drivers for the creation of FI programs in the 1960s, their voices have been seriously under-investigated in FI literature (Masson et al., 2021). In particular, immigrant parents' voices are absent from the research that addresses non-immigrant or non-plurilingual issues (e.g., learning exceptionalities, issues of language hierarchy, etc.). Given that parental support and attitudes to language learning contribute significantly to students' motivation to learn additional languages (Iwaniec & Ullakonoja, 2016), it seems paramount to take into consideration immigrant parents' perspectives about maintaining several languages and plurilingual literacy practices for their children. Using data collected from Eastern European immigrant parents, we hope this research can provide further insight into the experiences of immigrant parents to enrich teacher and curriculum planners' potential for school and home collaboration with immigrant families.

Based on the data collected from one understudied immigrant group (Eastern European parents), this research offers a new understanding of the role of parental discourses and provides additional corroborative evidence about the mismatch between plurilingual homes of immigrant families and bilingual policies applied to the context of bilingual classrooms in Canada (see Haque, 2013, for discussion). We came to the conclusion that fluid and dynamic plurilingual practices are shaped by EE parental discourses about the value of French and other languages. However, the discourse of Canadian "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" (Haque, 2013) prevalent in schools, makes it difficult for educators to value plurilingual students' and parents' funds of knowledge. Educators, who overlook the fact that family literacy practices are

closely tied with cultural identity (Li, 2000), cannot fully address the sociocultural development that unfolds when children learning French as an additional language discursively construct their identities.

Recommendations to educators include becoming more familiar with their students' linguistic repertoires, for instance, by inviting parents to share their languages, cultures, and plurilingual literacy practices to be involved in school activities (Moore & Sabatier, 2014). Some teachers may perceive their classes as not linguistically diverse (because children use only the language of instruction in class) and believe that adding linguistically diverse students' languages may be detrimental to their learning. However, research shows that by increasing the amount of exposure to multilingual learners, teachers can modify their belief system about the place of plurilingual speakers in their classrooms (Arnett & Mady, 2018)

Finally, this research provides implications for policymakers to listen to the voices of plurilingual immigrant parents, who constitute the fastest-growing population in Canadian schools, and shift from official bilingualism, which contributes to separation of languages in the classroom (Cummins, 2007), to a more inclusive plurilingual education.

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