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Abstract

Success in integrating the children of immigrants - the second generation - is of enormous consequence for economically advanced societies that have received millions of international migrants since the 1980s. Education systems play a crucial role in this process. Availability and access of culturally diverse and appropriate preschool education are important factors for supporting long-term integration of immigrant children in host societies. In most industrialized countries, preschool programs are aimed at low-income and minority groups, offering education to hone the cognitive, language, literacy, and numeric skills of preschoolers, thus giving them a strong start upon entering elementary school. While, the evaluation of such programs indicate that entry into such programs is an avenue to improve the integration of immigrant children, research indicates that the design of these programs is imperative to their success. Finally, although well-designed early education programs aim to reduce ethnic group-related inequalities in children's cognitive skills and social competence, children in immigrant families are less likely to participate in these programs than are children in native-born families. This paper will

investigate the above key points by outlining the development of a research project to assess the adequacy of preschool program design in Greece to support the successful integration of immigrant children. The investigators will develop the project to evaluate the program design of thirty preschool programs in two cities of Greece, Athens and Alexandroupolis to indicate: 1) program design to meet the developmental needs of preschool children with the aim of successful entry into elementary school, and 2) access and availability of the education and health services provided by the well-designed preschool programs to immigrant children and their parents. In conclusion, the authors will make recommendations for public policies to promote well-designed early education as a key social support factor in the successful integration of immigrant children in the host society.

Introduction

The development, care, and education of children from birth to age 5 have been the focus of rapidly increasing public interest. Numerous early childhood public policy initiatives have focused attention on a major problem of coordination and collaboration of services for young children. This increased public interest in young children seems to stem from several factors:

- A sharp increase in mothers of young children in the workforce (Kamerma & Gatenio, 2003).
- A realization of the importance of early brain development and stimulation to later development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).
- Increasing evidence that a large number of young children enter the public schools unready to take advantage of what the schools offer (Zill & West, 2001; Kagan & Cohen, 1997; McMillen & Kaufman, 1996).
- Increasing pressure to improve school achievement for children at risk for academic and social failure (Neuman, 2003; Clifford, Early, & Hills, 1999).

Success in integrating the children of immigrants - the second generation - is of enormous consequence for economically advanced societies that have received millions of international migrants since the 1980s. Education systems play a crucial role in this process. Second generation immigrant children now constitute more than half of the student body in many schools in Europe and North America, presenting these continents with new challenges. Many young children in immigrant families do not have good access to education and health services. Availability and access are important factors for supporting long-term integration of immigrant children in host societies.

Three factors are indicated through research as imperative for a child's well-being by age 8: family economic security, access to health care, and access to sound early education (Fix & Passel, 2003); children's skills upon entering kindergarten and their achievement at the end of third grade are important predictors of their future life prospects (Neumann & Peer, 2002). Unfortunately, immigrant children tend to be disadvantaged in all the areas stated above. To the extent that their life prospects are compromised as a result, these children - and the entire society - suffer (West, et al., 2002). In most industrialized

countries, preschool programs are aimed at low-income and minority groups, offering education to hone the cognitive, language, literacy, and numeric skills of preschoolers, thus giving them a strong start upon entering elementary school. While the evaluation of such programs indicate that entry into such programs is an avenue to improve the integration of immigrant children, research indicates that the design of these programs is imperative to their success. Finally, although well-designed early education programs aim to reduce ethnic group-related inequalities in children's cognitive skills and social competence, children in immigrant families are less likely to participate in these programs than are children in native-born families (Leseman, 2007).

As immigrant numbers continue to rise across economically advanced countries, the number of the children of immigrants - the second generation - rises as well. Children in immigrant families are the fastest growing segment of the child population in host countries in both North America and Europe, with a significant percentage of these children being "young children", under the age of six (Hernandez, 2004).

Research indicates that immigrant children are twice as likely compared to native-born children, to experience multiple risk factors crucial to their development and access to health and education services (Hernandez, 2004). These risk factors include low parental education, low socio-economic status, living in a linguistically isolated environment, and living in a one-parent household (Ibid.).

Further exploring these risk factors reveals that immigrant children compared to native-born children are far more likely to have parents who have not graduated from high-school, which can have implications such as limited ability of parents in helping with homework and exploring educational opportunities for their children (Shields & Behrman, 2004), and limited cognitive stimulation in the home environment (Crosnoe, 2007; Leseman, 2007). In addition, families with lower parental education are less likely to enrol their children in nursery/preschool compared to families with higher parental education (Hernandez, 2004), which is a critical factor in further school success (Takanishi, 2004). Across a wide range of socioeconomic factors, children whose parents have higher educational attainment tend to do better in school than those whose parents have lower educational attainment (Hernandez, 2004).

Also, immigrant children are much more likely to be exposed to socioeconomic risks and live in poverty compared with the children of native families. Higher poverty rates often result in lack of access to quality health care and education (Hernandez, 2004; Shields & Behrman, 2004). Lack of economic resources also may sometimes lead to overcrowded housing which can have negative effects on child well-being and health, and even the ability to find a quiet place to do homework. Immigrant children once again are much more likely to live in overcrowded housing compared to native-born children (Hernandez, 2004).

Immigrant children are much more likely to live in a linguistically isolated household, where the primary language spoken is a language other than the native-one. Shields and Behrman (2004) indicate that, in the case of the United States (US), among immigrant

children, 72 percent speak a language other than English at home. Lacking competence in the native language can greatly affect the educational success of immigrant children, since the language of instruction in schools is often different from the one spoken at home (Christensen & Stanat, 2007). Furthermore, lack of competence in the native language can lead to further isolation, since it can make it difficult to communicate with teachers and with health and other service organizations (Hernandez, 2004).

Furthermore, many immigrant children have to face additional barriers to educational success, which stem from living in “mixed-status” families - where some of the family members are not citizens (for example illegal immigrants) and thus fear involvement with governmental agencies that provide benefits such as free health and education services (Hernandez, 2004; Shields & Behrman, 2004). For instance, refugees have more access to a variety of supports and benefits, which can partly explain that compared to other children with similar family characteristics, children of refugees, do better in school (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

All the aforementioned factors can hinder the well-being and, subsequently, the educational success of every child. However, as it has been illustrated, immigrant children represent a much more vulnerable segment of the population since they are more likely to have parents with low education levels, live in poverty or in near-poor conditions, be part of a linguistically isolated household, and be part of “mixed-status” families, compared to children born in native families.

This paper will investigate the above key points by using the case study method to assess the quality of preschool educational efforts in Greece as related to immigrant children. The investigators will evaluate the program design of 30 preschool programs in two cities of Greece, Athens and Alexandroupolis, to indicate: 1) program design to meet the developmental needs of preschool children with the aim of successful entry into elementary school, and 2) access and availability of the education and health services provided by the well-designed preschool programs to immigrant children and their parents. In conclusion, the authors will make recommendations for public policies to promote well-designed early education as a key social support factor in the successful integration of immigrant children in the host society.

Characteristics of Quality Pre-Kindergarten Programs

Because of the large increases in the number of pre-kindergarten programs, concerns about providing quality programs and using developmentally appropriate curricula have been heightened. Legislators and business leaders have maintained that high quality early education for all children is a needed investment and not an expense (Research and Policy Committee of the CED, 1989; Strother, 1987). Moreover, Adams and Sandfort (1994) indicated the first goal of Goals 2000 concerning school readiness will not be achieved unless children have access to high quality pre-kindergarten and child care programs.

Views regarding the importance of providing high quality pre-kindergarten programs for children have been expressed by other researchers and educators. Smith et al. (1995) depicted two reasons for offering high quality programs. First, high quality programs are critical in preparing children to enter the future workforce. Second, at risk children who have pre-kindergarten experience in high quality programs have higher levels of success in school, greater achievement motivation, higher vocation aspirations, and higher employments rates than at risk children with no pre-kindergarten experience.

Dodge (1995) suggested children's social competence, such as developing a positive sense of identity, learning to trust others, and acquiring the characteristics that enable them to be successful learners, is promoted by quality pre-kindergarten programs. Similarly, Zill and Wolpow (1991) stated that high quality programs with developmentally appropriate curricula help to nurture young children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Therefore, quality programs should be provided for all disadvantaged three- and four-year-old children (Research and Policy Committee of the CED, 1989).

Members of the Carnegie Task Force on Learning in the Primary Grades (1996) recommended that high quality public and private early care and education programs be provided for children 3 to 5 years of age because during the preschool years children make development gains that form the basis for their later achievement. Accordingly, the years from 3 to 10 are considered a crucial time in a child's life when the foundation is laid for healthy development and lifelong learning. The importance of developing and implementing quality programs was defined by the Carnegie Task Force on Learning in the Primary Grades in the following statement:

“For most children, the long-term success of their learning and development depends to a great extent on what happens to them during these years of promise. Children fortunate enough to attend a high-quality preschool or child care program and who enter the primary grades with adequate preparation have a better chance of achieving to high levels than those who do not.” (p. vii)

Criteria for quality pre-kindergarten programs have been developed by professional organizations as well as case study research (Smith et al., 1995). Small class size, low teacher/child ratios, comprehensive services, teacher qualification, parent involvement, and developmentally appropriate curricula are characteristics considered important in developing and implementing pre-kindergarten programs (Cummings, 1991; Day & Thomas, 1988; Mitchell, 1989; Morado, 1986; Schweinhart, 1988). Furthermore, Weikart (1989) determined that comprehensive services clearly linked to health, nutrition, and social support services and administrative support were essential components in high quality pre-kindergarten programs.

Regarding teacher qualification, one way to increase the quality of pre-kindergarten programs is to hire highly educated teachers (Barnett, Frede, Mobasher, & Mohr, 1987). According to the NAEYC (1991), the quality of the staff was the most important

determinant of the quality of any early childhood program. In relation to this concept, two criteria for the qualifications of staff positions in early childhood programs were developed by the NAEYC. First, staff members who are in charge of a group of children in an early childhood setting should have at least credentials or an associate degree in early childhood education or child development. Second, early childhood specialists with either a Baccalaureate degree and/or graduate degree in early childhood education or child development and at least 3 years of full-time teaching experience with young children should be hired to direct the education program in early childhood settings.

Researchers and educators have developed other criteria for quality programs. For example, Dodge (1995) listed 5 components of quality pre-kindergarten programs. First, quality programs are based on an understanding of child development and on recognition that each child is an individual with unique needs, learning styles, and interests. Second, in quality programs children's safety and well-being are of paramount importance. Third, the physical environment of quality programs is well-organized and has a variety of age-appropriate and culturally relevant materials. Fourth, in quality programs relationships between staff members and families are positive and supportive. Finally, staff members in quality programs receive on-going training and support from the administration.

Members of The Consortium for Longitudinal Studies (1983) noted several characteristics associated with high quality programs. The characteristics include intervention for children with special needs, services for parents (including home visits), low teacher/child ratios, and involvement of parents in their children's instruction. Additionally, use of an appropriate curriculum, implementation of staff training, and frequent assessment and monitoring of the program were seen as necessary components of high quality programs.

In summarizing the major findings from early education intervention research, Ramey and Ramey (1992) identified six principles that were characteristics of quality programs. First, young children benefit from intervention programs that begin earlier in their lives and continue longer than intervention programs that begin later in their lives and do not last as long. Second, programs that are more intensive in terms of hours per day, days per week, and weeks per year are more beneficial to children than programs that are less intensive in relation to time. Third, intervention programs that have direct daily learning experiences for children are more beneficial in producing positive and long lasting results for children than programs that lack direct daily learning experiences. Fourth, programs with comprehensive services are more beneficial to children than programs that lack comprehensive services. Fifth, greater benefits for children are provided through programs that match children's learning styles and risk conditions than programs that lack these components. Finally, initial effects of intervention programs for children will diminish unless the changes that are made are supported and maintained in each child's family, community, and school environments.

Other components for high quality pre-kindergarten programs have been noted by researchers and educators. Adams and Sandfort (1994) and Mitchell (1989) considered a comprehensive family service program a necessary component of a high quality program.

Also, the following 10 signs of characteristics of quality pre-kindergarten programs were developed by the NAEYC (1997):

1. Children have access to various activities throughout the day.
2. Children have an opportunity to play outside everyday.
3. The teachers work with individual children, small groups, and the whole group at different times throughout the day.
4. Children spend most of their time playing and working with materials or other children.
5. Classrooms are decorated with children's original artwork.
6. Children work on projects but also have long periods of time to play.
7. Teachers read books to children individually or in small groups.
8. Children learn letters and numbers in the context of their everyday experiences.
9. The curriculum is adapted for those children who are advanced academically, as well as those children who need additional help.
10. Children and their parents look forward to school.

Although children have benefited by attending quality pre-kindergarten programs (Carnegie Task Force on Learning in the Primary Grades, 1996), a number of factors have impeded the achievement of developing quality programs. According to Dodge (1995), low wages for teachers, high staff turnover, minimum state regulations for health and safety, the cost of appropriate teacher/child ratios, inadequate facilities, and inappropriate curricula have had an effect on the quality of some programs. Regarding teachers, Howes, Phillips, and Whitebook (1992) concluded that when teachers teach in programs meeting reasonable high standards of quality, they are more likely to provide appropriate care and developmentally appropriate activities than teachers who teach in programs that fail to meet quality standards.

Responses to Educational Disadvantage among Immigrant Children: Models of Early Education Programs

Researchers have tried to find ways of reducing the gap between immigrant and native children, regarding educational success. Attention focuses on early childhood interventions, as a critical way of helping reduce inequalities in skills upon school entry and immigrant children entering school better prepared (Magnuson et al, 2006). Studies have shown that children's skills upon entering kindergarten and their achievement at the end of third grade are important predictors of their future life prospects (Takanishi, 2004)

However, young children of immigrants are less likely compared to native children to participate in formal preschool education settings (Magnuson et al, 2006; Shields & Behrman, 2004) and educationally-enriching experiences at home (Crosnoe, 2007)

In response, initiatives across immigrant-host countries have been made. For example, the ministry of education in Netherlands funded a campaign to encourage immigrant parents to enrol their young children in preschool care (Eurydice, National Description

2003/4). In the United States, federally funded programs such as Head Start promote preschool education of children in poor families (Takanishi, 2004).

Leseman (2007), summarizes four major models of Early Education approaches which include, child focused and center-based; child-focused and home-based; parent/family focused with home support; and child- and parent/family focused and center-based with home support.

Based on a number of reviews, combining a center-based education program with parent support is the most effective approach, since child-focused, center-based education is paired with increased parental involvement, home-visits and family support services (summarized in, Leseman 2007). Examples of such programs include the High/Schope Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan and the Turkish Early Enrichment Program in Istanbul (Leseman, 2007).

Home-based models (which are explored later on) are not as effective compared to center-based and combination early education models (as mentioned in, Leseman 2007). Parent- and family-focused support models do not have clear effects on children's cognitive and language skills, but have been proven important in safeguarding children's rights, and protecting them, among other things, from child abuse (as mentioned in, Leseman 2007).

In addition, The Center of Child Development and Social Policy, at Yale University (2003) developed the School of the 21st Century model (21C), based on a community model approach. 21C schools emphasize family support services and preschool programs; including home visitation programs from the birth of the child until age three to guide parents concerning developmental and learning issues. 21C school programs and services vary depending on the needs of the particular community, and aim to ensure the inclusion of low-income and immigrant families.

Models of Home-based Pre-school Education

Most young children with working mothers still receive care in some type of home-based setting (Fuller et al, 2004). As Leseman (2007) mentions, the most important home-based education programs include:

- The Parents as Teachers Program (PAT) implemented in the United States
- The Home-based Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) implemented in Israel, the Netherlands, Turkey, and the United States
- The Mother (or Parent) Child Home Program (MCHP/PCHP) implemented in the United States, Bermuda, and the Netherlands

A study by (Baker et al, 1998) further describes HIPPY programs in the United States. Specifically, HIPPY is a free, two-year, home-based early education program targeting disadvantaged families. The program aims to develop a home learning environment in which parents will have the necessary skills and resources to teach their young children

(between the age of four and five years old) and better prepare them for school entry. This is accomplished through regular home-visits from a paraprofessional who models the teaching methods and provides the activity packets.

Furthermore, PAT is a home visitation program for families with children up to the age of three, that works with parents to enhance their parenting skills and inform them about child-development. The program reaches disadvantaged families (Center in Child Development and Social Policy/Yale University, 2003)

Overall, evidence suggests that home-based education programs are less effective than center-based programs (as summarized, in Leseman 2007).

Integrating Parent and Family Support in Pre-school Education Programs for Immigrant Children

Research demonstrates multiple benefits of parent involvement, or else called family engagement, in children's formal education and indicates that the earlier the parents get involved in their children's education the more positive impact it will have (as summarized, in Naughton 2004). Therefore, family involvement in preschool is vital. Family involvement is even more critical in the case of immigrant children who lack the native-language skills and the familiarity with the native educational system (2004). Leseman, (2007) in his report on Early Education for Immigrant children, mentions that center-based education programs with strong parental involvement are the most effective compared to other models of early education programs.

As mentioned in the Preschool Issues Brief of Children Now (Naughton, 2004) certain obstacles are more prevalent to immigrant family involvement and can be grouped into three main categories: logistics, family attitudes and institution based attitudes. Logistical barriers might include time constraints, work schedules and lack of information into the appropriate language. Family attitudes include issues such as parents' uncertainty about their role and degree of involvement, past negative experiences with other public programs or educational institutions, and lack of parents' language skills necessary to communicate with school staff (2004). Finally, institution-based attitudes mainly include inability to communicate in families' languages, lack of appropriate family engagement personnel, and inability to consider families' schedules when planning school activities (2004).

In order, to overcome these barriers pre-school education programs need to implement a number of strategies aiming at increasing parental engagement (Naughton, 2004). These strategies include building informal parenting networks in the community, conducting home visits, organizing training parenting courses, adopting effective communication methods with the family, employing staff that reflects the school community population, offering professional development courses for staff in order to be better prepared for dealing with culturally diversified student and family population and varying evaluating efforts that encourage parents' participation (Naughton, 2004).

Examples of successful immigrant family involvement in preschool education programs include, The Village for Early Childhood Education, in Colorado (<http://village.littleton.publicschools.net>), a community preschool, serving children from a number of different countries, which has taken active measures towards providing ways for immigrant families to support their children's learning. Some of these steps include, the hiring of Spanish-speaking teachers; the operation of a Spanish-language hotline, which allows communication between the Spanish-speaking families and the school; and the offering of parenting courses.

21C schools, based on a community school model, set another example of increased family involvement and family support services, including Parents as Teachers home visitation programs, bilingual kindergarten classes, and parent workshops (Center in Child Development and Social Policy/Yale University, 2003). Some 21C schools include, The Center/Pitts Elementary, in Leadville Colorado; Wilma Sime Roundy Elementary Columbus Junction, Iowa; The International School at Rogers Magnet Stamford, Connecticut (Center in Child Development and Social Policy/Yale University, 2003).

Educational Benefits of Preschool Programs for Immigrant Children

Overall, preschool educational programs can better prepare young children for kindergarten and school entry and have beneficial effects on children's cognitive skills and language development. In the case of immigrant children, access and participation in preschool education is even more crucial in bridging the gap with native children and reducing inequality upon school entry, since immigrant children are more likely to be living under conditions of poverty, with parents of low educational level and are thus less likely to be engaged in cognitive and linguistic activities that will prepare them for formal schooling (Crosnoe, 2007; Leseman, 2007; Magnuson et al, 2006; Takanishi, 2004).

Takanishi (2004) mentions that children's skills upon entering kindergarten and their achievement at the end of third grade are important predictors of their future life prospects. Furthermore, in a study involving children from Mexican immigrant families, preschool participation reduced the achievement difference between the immigrant children and their native peers by almost 20% (Crosnoe, 2007). Also, participation in preschool education programs raised English-proficiency of children of immigrants, as well as reading and math scores (Magnuson et al, 2006).

In addition, participation to preschool education programs, equips children with a range of social tools that help them integrate smoother in their "new" country, as in the case of young Ethiopian immigrant children who participated in the Parents Cooperative Kindergarten in Israel (Rozalis & Shafran, 2003)

Thus, participating in preschool education programs gives young immigrant children the opportunity to advance their cognitive and language skills and enter kindergarten and primary school better prepared. However, young immigrant children are less likely, compared to native-born children, to participate in preschool educational programs (Crosnoe, 2007; Shields & Behrman, 2004; Takanishi, 2004). Preschool participation

rates also vary by ethnic group, due to various factors that are not yet clear, including parental beliefs and accessibility to affordable preschool programs (Magnuson et al, 2006; Takanishi, 2004). For example, Latino children tend to participate less in all types of early childhood programs (Takanishi, 2004).

Finally, quality and design of preschool education programs must be taken into account, since young immigrant children tend to participate in lower-quality programs, and thus do not gain the maximum language and cognitive benefits possible (Leseman, 2007).

Policy Issues and Obstacles to Preschool Educational Integration and Success among Immigrant Children in Europe

Due to the crucial nature of preschool education, for cognitive and linguistic skill development and preparation for school entry, particularly for young immigrant children, policies need to be designed that ensure the increased enrolment of this segment of the population. Such policies need to make quality preschool education affordable to low-income families (Shields & Behrman, 2004; Leseman, 2007). For example, governments could directly subsidize early education programs to ensure access of low-income children to high-quality preschool programs (Leseman, 2007).

Based on the European Commission survey on Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe (Eurydice, 2003/04), some European countries have clear policies regarding preschool education, with legislation ensuring sufficient places for immigrant children in early education programs (Spain, United Kingdom). In Denmark and Sweden, young immigrant children are given extra support in pre-school education programs to acquire language skills prior to school entry (Eurydice, 2003/04).

Christensen and Stanat (2007) stress the importance of language support programs starting from preschool education through secondary school, but mention that governments need to make a long-term investment in order for these programs to have a long-lasting effect. Furthermore, Crul (2007) argues that whilst lowering the compulsory schooling age would be a complex policy change, preschool educational programs focusing on language acquisition, can be of significant value only if relevant policies are in place that ensure the alignment of these preschool programs with primary school goals.

Education and Policy Issues Inherent to Greece in Preschool Education Programs for Immigrant Children

Greece is home to nearly 1 million immigrants, including Albanians/Pakistanis and Kurds according to the International Herald Tribune Europe (Feb 10th 2007). As the number of immigrants living in Greece continues to rise, integration of immigrant children is becoming a vital issue in Greek educational institutions, introducing changes to promote intercultural education and combat racism and xenophobia (Dimitrakopoulos 2004; Vlachaki, 2007).

In the last fifteen years, the Greek education system has undergone significant structural changes, and a number of state schools transformed into Intercultural schools, in an effort to deal with the increasing number of immigrant students (Dimitrakopoulos 2004; Pantazi). However, these changes have proven insufficient, mainly due to inadequate funding, rigid administrative structures and a centralised education system that does not allow educational practitioners at the school level to take initiatives (Dimitrakopoulos, 2004). Thus, further legislative and policy reforms are essential, in order to promote intercultural education and attend to the needs of socially vulnerable groups, including immigrant children.

The majority of initiatives promoting intercultural education are aimed at primary and secondary levels of education (i.e. the case of 87th Primary School) (Dimitrakopoulos, 2004). Preschool education programs designed to meet immigrant children's needs hardly exist in Greece. Two major initiatives include: a) the Filipino School "Munting Nayon" aiming to cater for the needs of young Filipino children and, b) the "Inter-cultural Day Care Centre" founded by immigrants from Sierra Leone, to provide day-care services to low-income African immigrant families (Dimitrakopoulos, 2004).

Also, some non-governmental organisations including the Society for the Development and Creative Occupation of Children (EADAP), take educational initiatives to develop the potential of all children during their early education, including preschool (www.eadap.gr) For example, EADAP designed a series of training programmes (Aesop) to promote awareness and respect for diverse cultures, in school settings (www.eadap.gr)

Literature regarding the education and policy issues in preschool education programs for immigrant children in Greece is scarce. Therefore, there appears to be a significant and imminent need for further research regarding education and policy issues in preschool education programs for immigrant children in Greece. Research using Greek preschools across the country as a learning laboratory and database to illustrate the role of appropriate preschool design in successful integration of immigrant children is crucial to influence social and economic policy on these issues.

Methodology and Research Objectives

The lack of research attention to young immigrant children is notable, since the largest growth in immigrant families is among those with young children. It leaves unanswered some important policy questions that this study has used to develop its research questions:

- 1) Do immigrant children and their families in urban areas of Greece (in the case of this project, Athens and Alexandroupolis) have access to, and do they participate in, various social, health, and other services available to eligible native-born Greek children and their families?
- 2) Do immigrant children enter school ready to learn?

- 3) Do educators and other professionals have resources to effectively deal with young immigrant children and their families?
- 4) How do communities deal with the costs and stresses associated with the large increase in the number of immigrants?
- 5) How do the many schools now serving young children address the needs of immigrant children and families?

In this study, we sought to answer some of these research questions by evaluating program design of thirty preschools in Athens and Alexandroupolis to discover how the schools and communities in Greece address the needs of a growing population of immigrant students in preschool programs. The investigators sought to find and document practices that may inform educators and policy makers the strengths and challenges the preschools and local communities encounter in providing direct services to preschool immigrant children.

A team of researchers and fieldworkers will spend several months conducting a case study for each of the thirty preschools to be evaluated. This will involve a review of documents as well as extensive interviews with a range of school and community leaders, including school administrators, teachers, board of education personnel and representatives from social services and other agencies in the community. Immigrant parents and some of their children will also be interviewed, and they will tell, in their own words, how life goes for them— at work, at home and in school. Since immigrants follow jobs and settle in communities where they find employment, it is clear that businesses contribute to the changing makeup of the school. Both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used where appropriate, depending on the questions being asked. Returning to the central research questions of the study will guide analysis decisions, since the results will help answer those questions.

Because during the pilot stage of the study, the investigators that what educators, community leaders and the immigrants themselves had to tell us will be dramatic, it was agreed that traditional interview methods would not fully do justice to complete the goals of our data collection. Therefore, the research team will secure the assistance of a documentary film producer to film commentary from certain schools and communities. The film transcript will provide an additional database from which this report will be prepared. The investigators will also be seeking funds in the coming months in the hope of producing a video documentary on the study.

Data Analysis

The data will be organized to provide a case study of each of the schools participating in the study. Included in each case study:

- A historical perspective on each preschool and community.
- Description of the program design used in the preschool.

- Unique strengths of the preschool’s work with immigrant students.
- Challenges the preschools are facing.

Also included in each of the case studies will be quotes from educators, community and business leaders and the immigrants themselves, both parents and the children, who—in their own words—provide insight into their lives and how the preschools are supporting them. While each of the case studies will give an individual assessment and insight into the preschools and communities studied, the study’s conclusions will highlight effective practices common to all thirty preschools. It is the investigator’s hope that future policy can be written with a mindset toward what works, and what remains to be done to meet the preschool’s challenges in the future.

Program evaluation data are intended to improve program quality. In an open process, results are shared with stakeholders, who may include families, staff, community members, funders, and others. Objective discussion of strengths and needs in light of the program’s goals and design will help support decisions about changes that would create even higher quality and more effective service delivery to immigrant preschool children and their families. Thus, data from program monitoring and evaluation, aggregated appropriately and based on reliable measures, will be made available and accessible to the public.

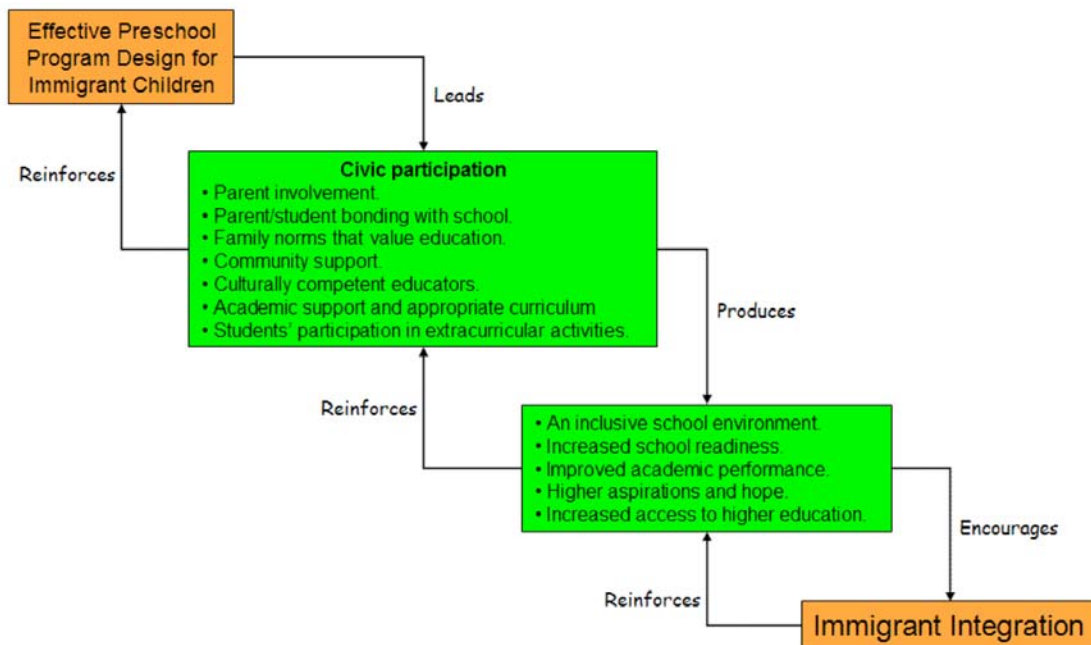
Study Benchmarks

Experts on early childhood and education have identified the following elements as critical for helping children of immigrants succeed in school and beyond.

- Provide early intervention through high-quality family literacy or preschool programs.
- Make educational programs accessible to immigrant families.
- Increase parental involvement in their children’s schools.
- Early intervention is critical: Studies have shown that children’s skills in kindergarten can predict their educational achievement level in third grade, and their achievement at the end of the third grade is highly correlated with future school success.
- Provide training to teachers and administrators to help them become familiar with the background of immigrant families and to develop effective teaching methods. Schools in new immigrant destinations are especially short of personnel who are familiar with different cultural backgrounds and who have training and experience in teaching foreign language speakers to learn the native language.
- Provide age- and developmentally appropriate support programs that help children of immigrants succeed at all levels of education, from early childhood through higher education.
- Help immigrant families and organizations advocate for better education.

Taking the above points into consideration, we have developed a visual representation of what we believe to be the optimal synergy between preschool program design and integration of immigrant children into the host society (see below). This diagram provides a sample of the outputs and outcomes that our study will use to evaluate the effectiveness of the thirty preschool education programs serving immigrant children and their families.

The Waterfall Effect of Preschool Program Design to Immigrant Integration



Summary

Those immigrants entering Greece in recent years are not a homogeneous group, and represent an incredible diversity in national background with marked differences among them regarding education and income status. While many immigrant families are successful, various communities house large immigrant groups that do not speak Greek and have little, if any, education - factors that are highly correlated with poverty and related difficulties. Immigration trends have serious implications for schools, especially considering that educators are now with the task of implementing national policies to ensure that all children have fair, equal, and meaningful opportunities to earn a high quality education. Another provision in local communities is for schools to promote and maintain parent involvement, especially in efforts too help parents make choices about their children's educational programs. Reaching out to parents who do not speak the local language is difficult, as educators in previous studies conducted in Greece on this topic point out.

Communities and educators throughout this Mediterranean nation are calling out for higher staff qualifications that extend to paraprofessionals who, in many schools, are

crucial to providing individual attention to immigrant students and parents. For schools with large groups of immigrant students who are not only from low-income families but also have limited Greek language skills, the difficulties facing educators are enormous. Schools face problems stemming from an immigrant family's inability to fulfil their children's basic needs, which take precedence if the children are to succeed academically. Many factors contribute to the stability of a family, from employment to housing to education and health. Families that emigrate for improved living standards in Greece experience stressful life changes and need stability in their daily lives. Their ability to cope with and adjust to changes in their lives depends on supportive programs, as is the case with all families experiencing stress and change.

At this time, Greece's preschools are struggling to address the many and, at times, insurmountable needs of immigrant students and their families. These needs go well beyond education and language instruction, and include attention to parents, providing them with help on housing, health, and social services issues, as well as assistance with learning Greek and local customs. Additionally, schools are called on to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that hinder equal participation by students in instructional programs.

Immigration affects an entire community. Labor shortages are at the crux of the issue as immigrants move to areas offering employment, and businesses, sometimes with the support of state policymakers, seek immigrant workers. While this fills regional labor needs and stimulates the economy, it also affects the community, requiring schools and organizations to attend to the needs of newly arrived children and families. School systems have gone and continue to go through vast changes effected by the recent increase in immigrant labor.

Also at issue is the fact that, from year to year, the demographic makeup of a school's population can change dramatically; considering this, schools are often unaware of what, if any, additional resources will be needed. Furthermore, school budgets, typically adopted in the Summer preceding the start of the academic year, leave very little room for additional expenses related to an increase in the immigrant population. Labor needs dictate when immigrants arrive and enrol their children in school. This is often once the school year has already begun and budgets have been set. Low-income school districts cannot prepare for the sudden changes in demographics that businesses and economic growth may bring. Clearly, businesses need to be part of discussions with educational and community partners to help them cope with the shift in demographics and the impact it exerts on the local community.

From a policy perspective, Greece lags far behind other European countries in assisting schools to cope with the demographic changes brought about by recent immigration trends. Lack of funding and the economic implications of increased migrant numbers have been mentioned in previous studies as major obstacles to ensuring that all children in Greece, including those from immigrant families, succeed academically. Nevertheless, the purpose of this study is to support and encourage schools in their efforts to accommodate such changes. The research team's hope and aspiration is to make it clear

that schools can and do respond to the needs of their students and meet the challenges before them when granted by law the appropriate resources.

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