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The home-school connection: Immigrant family
literacy practices and use of technology
in home/first language learning

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Form B
Abstract

The study addressed immigrant families’ and mainstream school systems’ support for young children’s home language learning in Basel, Switzerland. In Switzerland, as in many European countries and in Australia, early childhood educators work with growing numbers of children from immigrant, refugee and asylum seeking families. The culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse groups of children that now characterise childcare centres, kindergartens and primary schools result from these patterns of immigration and present challenges for teachers and other educators who cater for the needs of increasingly diverse student populations.

The literature on home languages acknowledges the importance of the relationship between a child’s first language and development in the second language and the essential role of language proficiency in academic success. Despite knowledge from extensive studies on the interdependency of first and second language development (Cummins, 1979, 1981b, 1991, 2001) and evidence that continued development in a child’s first language is crucial for overall cognitive development and transfer to second language learning (Collier, 1995), there is little focus on helping children maintain their home language in the early years of education.

Arguably too, information and communication technologies (ICTs) lead to increased availability and opportunities for global communication, affecting the nature of communication, and creating possibilities for new forms of learning in the home and school. Children must therefore have the opportunity to become proficient users of these new and evolving forms of technology in order to acquire the skills, including language skills that they will need for future employment.

In the light of this conceptual background, the present research focused on:

(1) Immigrant parent beliefs and attitudes to home language use and how languages were used at home.

(2) The strategies families used to promote home language learning in oral and written forms.

(3) The extent to which ICTs were used as a tool to support home languages in the family and school environment.

(4) The kinds of support offered in school and communities and what government policies and initiatives were afforded to home languages.
(5) The nature of school and community policies and practices on the promotion and maintenance on home languages.

These issues were addressed through a qualitative interpretive research approach drawing on the traditions of phenomenography (Marton 1986) and Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The research was based on three main data sources: (1) analysis of policy and curriculum documents from school systems, (2) interviews with key education personnel and (3) interviews with “immigrant” parents (n=58) from diverse socio-economic backgrounds living in Basel. Families were drawn from 16 countries including the former Yugoslavia, (Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia), Spain, South and Central America, and Turkey. All children, whose parents participated in the study, attended state run kindergartens and primary schools.

A major focus in the data collection and analysis was on (a) parents’ perspectives and experiences as they negotiated home language learning in the home, school and community and the extent to which they used ICTs to enrich home language development, and (b) mainstream teachers’ perspectives on the role home languages played in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, as well as the role ICTs and media played in teaching children from immigrant families.

The results of the study showed that:

(a) immigrant children’s home languages and culture as well as bilingualism and multilingualism are prominent features in Basel integration policy and curriculum documents but this focus is rarely translated to early childhood classroom practice,

(b) classroom teachers focus predominantly on children learning their second language (German),

(c) immigrant children’s home language and culture is valued and respected but formal opportunities for children to learn to read and write in their home languages begin only when they have reached second grade,

(d) there were a range of perspectives, reasons and strategies for maintaining and promoting home languages within families,

(e) ICT was not an integral part of children’s classroom experiences in kindergarten and scarcely integrated in primary classrooms, but was used in a variety of ways within homes to promote home language and communication,

(f) there were wide variations in parents’ and teachers’ perspectives on what constitutes parent involvement in children’s learning and education, and
(g) links between home and school were mostly ‘one way’ and formal and some parents desired more frequent, more informal and spontaneous contact with teachers.

These findings have considerable implications for Basel school and classroom practice and for early and middle year policy makers. They show that embedded assumptions of both teachers and parents may have a negative impact on children’s positive identification with both majority and minority language learning. Limited financial support for home language classes is likely to have a negative effect on immigrant children’s home language literacy learning. Dialogue needs to be sought on the potential for ICT use in home language learning. Policy makers’ efforts towards developing multilingualism in all children are problematic. Some parents drew attention to the challenge of learning a third language through a second language, L1 + L2a +L2b + L3+L4. (L1 = home language, L2a= German Swiss dialect, L2b = Standard German, L3= French, L4 = English).

To help better explain and increase awareness of the interrelationship between home languages, ICT use and the home-school connection, a model was developed that reflects the range of immigrant family perspectives on home language learning and the influences that appear to promote home language development within children’s environments. This ‘multilingual social cohesive communications model’ should assist in understanding the important links between home languages, ICTs and home-school communication.

The model emphasises the importance of developing bottom up local level strategies and recognises the vital role of positive interactions between parents and teachers. It builds on a sociocultural view of language learning, tapping on the potential of new learning tools (ICTs) in real and virtual communities. It recognises the importance of intercultural identity formation and at the same time the inhibiting effects of discrimination both overt and covert. The model incorporates the strategies schools need to improve communication with families and to strengthen links between home and school with the view to improving educational outcomes and prospects for immigrant children.
Dedicated to my children David and Julie, for demonstrating to me the true meaning of multilingualism. To Phyllis, for her guidance, support and motivation along the way. To Kathleen, Helen, Bill and Christine for their love and encouragement. To David, Julie and Werner, whose support and patience enabled me to complete this thesis.
# Table of Contents

Form B .................................................. iii
Abstract .............................................. vi
Dedication ........................................... vii
Table of contents ................................. viii
List of tables ....................................... xii
List of figures ..................................... xiii
Acknowledgements ............................... xiv

CHAPTER 1: Introduction ............................ 1
1.1 Introduction .................................. 1
1.2 The rational of the study ..................... 4
1.3 The focus and setting of the research .... 7
1.4 Theoretical perspectives informing the study 8
1.5 The research questions ..................... 10
1.6 Overview of the study ..................... 12

CHAPTER 2: Theoretical perspectives ............ 14
2.1 Introduction .................................. 14
2.2 The internal context ....................... 17
2.3 The external context ....................... 19
2.4 Creation of external environmental contexts 25
2. Summary and conclusion .................. 31

CHAPTER 3: Navigating pathways for home languages in early childhood education ........ 33
3.1 Introduction .................................. 33
3.2 Changing world demographic patterns and reasons for immigration ................. 35
3.3 The demographic, geographic, linguistic and educational context in Basel ........ 46
3.4 Summary and conclusion .................. 56

CHAPTER 4: The sociocultural context: The importance of home languages in microenvironment .......... 60
4.1 Introduction .................................. 60
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Multilingualism, neuroscience and language development in early childhood</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 The role of home languages in identity formation</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Positive environments that promote home and majority languages</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Literacy and home languages</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Reading and home languages</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 Conclusion</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: Home school interconnections in immigrant families</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Introduction</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 The mesosystem and home languages</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 The Basel context and home-school interconnections</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 6: The role of information and communication technologies in immigrant families home language maintenance and learning</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Introduction</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 ICTs and the knowledge-age in a changing world</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Technology as an integrating component in the bioecological model</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 The issues and complexities of the digital divide (e-inclusion)</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Technology and home language: enhancing social capital</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 ICTs in young children’s education</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Accessibility of home languages on the Internet</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8 The Swiss/Basel perspective: implementing ICTs in schools</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9 Summary and conclusion</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 7: Methodology</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Introduction</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Research questions</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Theoretical perspectives guiding the study</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 Justification of method</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 Method: Stage One (The family context)</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6 Ethics and negotiation of site entry</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.7  Contacting families  
7.8  Ethical considerations  
7.9  Interview design  
7.10  Stage Two (Teachers and School context)  
7.11  Stage Three (Data Analysis)  
7.12  Summary and conclusion  

CHAPTER 8: Immigrant families’ beliefs and their experiences with home languages in the home, kindergarten and school, and teacher beliefs about immigrant languages  
8.1  Introduction  
8.2  Demographics  
8.3  Parent views, opinions and beliefs about languages  
8.4  Parent aspirations for their children  
8.5  Government and teacher findings  
8.6  Teacher findings  
8.7  Conclusion  

CHAPTER 9: Towards an understanding of parent-school relationships for promoting home language learning: Perspectives from teachers and parents from immigrant backgrounds  
9.1  Introduction  
9.2  Parent perspectives: The extent of support for efforts to promote home languages  
9.3  Teacher perspectives: Home language support  
9.4  Strategies used to promote the home-school interconnection: Government position and teacher perspectives  
9.5  Parent responses  
9.6  Comparison of teacher and parent views  
9.7  Conclusion  

CHAPTER 10: Immigrant family and teacher perspectives on information and communication technologies in homes, kindergartens and schools  
10.1  Introduction  
10.2  Families’ and children’s home use of ICTs
10.3 Kindergarten and primary teacher use of ICTs and Education Department guidelines 241
10.4 Connecting homes and schools through ICTs 251
10.5 Summary of findings on ICT use in kindergarten and primary schools and concluding comments 254

Chapter 11: Redefining multilingualism to embrace social cohesion: New directions for home language learning 257

11.1 Introduction 257
11.2 Summary of main findings, implications and recommendations 259
11.3 The multilingual social cohesive communications model 271
11.4 Recommendations for further research 277
11.5 Conclusion 278

References 280
List of appendixes 309
Appendixes 310
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Basel-City schools’ Model for Language Learning</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Languages Available and Users on the Internet in 2005</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Languages Spoken at Home</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Number of Children in the Family</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Years Lived in Switzerland (Mothers and Fathers)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>According to Country of Origin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Educational Attainment (Mothers and Fathers)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Parent Occupation (Mothers and Fathers)</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Summary of Main Language Arrangements in the Family</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9</td>
<td>Children’s Home Languages Represented in Participant Teachers Classroom</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10</td>
<td>Common Strategies Used by Teachers to Legitimise and Encourage Home Language Use in Kindergarten.</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 11</td>
<td>Summary of Strategies Kindergartens and Primary School Teachers Use to Promote Home-School Communication.</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 12</td>
<td>School Initiated Contact with Parents as Reported by Parents</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 13</td>
<td>Strategies Parents Use to Collaborate with Teachers</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 14</td>
<td>Parent Initiated Forms of Collaboration with Teachers</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 15</td>
<td>Parent Involvement Strategies in Formal School Tasks at Home</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 16</td>
<td>Types of Computer Access and Use</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 17</td>
<td>Kindergarten and Primary Teachers, Gender; and Years Teaching</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1 Basel-City and Basel-Land Education System 49

Figure 2 The Mesosystem and Links Between the Home and School
Bronfenbrenner (1979). 85

Figure 3 New Forms of Distal Resources: New Technologies and Literacies 98

Figure 4 Model of Research Stages 116

Figure 5 The Multilingual Social Cohesive Communications Model 273
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This study set out to explore the ways in which immigrant parents in Basel Switzerland were involved in their children’s education at home and school and particularly the strategies they adopted to support home language learning in the German Swiss community. The research also set out to examine the strategies that German Swiss teachers of immigrant children used to cater for the confluence of diverse languages and cultures in the mainstream school culture.

Cities worldwide and specifically the population in Basel Switzerland have experienced dramatic changes in demographics over the past 30 years. These changes have resulted in increased numbers of immigrant children in early childhood and school settings. Culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse child care centres, kindergartens and primary schools are the result of changing patterns of immigration. Confronting changing demographics, (Clyne & Kipp, 2002; Wanner & Fibbi, 2002 in Eidgenössische Koordinationskommission für Familienfragen, EKFF) [Government Coordination Commission for Family Issues ] and teaching large numbers of children with a range of diverse languages pose a significant challenge for early and middle years educators.

The aim of this study was to examine the experiences of immigrant families as they support and negotiate home language learning in the home, community and school. It was expected that perceptions of ways in which parents fostered home language and the ways in which they promoted German, the main language used in school, and German Swiss, the main local language, would lead to an increased understanding of family and school literacy practices. This increased understanding would shed light on the complexity of relations between immigrant families, kindergartens and schools and the extent to which continuity and connectedness supported children’s learning. The study focused on families with children in
early and middle childhoods, whose first language was not German and who were from non-
German speaking backgrounds. It also included families where one parent was born abroad in a non-German speaking country.

In a globalised world, the social, cultural, economic and political environments affect children’s home language development, either directly or indirectly, and play a vital role in their future life trajectories. Little is known about the strategies that parents use to promote home languages and how these change over time as children enter the mainstream school and society. Correspondingly, little is known about ways in which they foster language learning in children’s second and additional languages. Yet according to a comparative review of immigrant student performance in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), among other countries, both Australia and Switzerland generally entrust parents to organise home language classes for their children (OECD, 2006b, p. 155). A primary focus of this study was to explore ways in which home language learning is contextualised within homes and the community, and ways in which parents, teachers and schools work together to support children’s home language learning.

Digital technologies can be seen as pervasive global communication tools and are widely used in all spheres of community action including in homes. Internationally and increasingly nationally, the role of technology is considered critical in children’s education and occupational futures and information and communication technologies (ICTs) have created possibilities for new forms of learning in the home and school. While they are less often used in the early years of education in kindergartens and schools (Angus, Snyder & Sutherland-Smith, 2003; Downes, 2002, 2004; Elliott, 2000), it is widely recognised that children need information and technology and digital communication skills. They must have the opportunity to become proficient users of these new and evolving forms of technology for their future employment and life as bilingual and multilingual global citizens. Of particular interest in this study is the role of ICTs in supporting the acquisition of home languages.

It has been argued in several contexts that technology can play a meaningful and supportive role in home language and literacy learning (Davies & Shade, 1999; Haughland, 2000; Van Scooter, Ellis & Railsback, 2001; Brooker & Siraj-Blatchford, 2002). For example, media and digital communications had a positive impact on Korean families’ (living in Yanji, China) home language learning and children’s bilingualism (Choi, Won & Lee, 2004). In the context of this study therefore, a key goal was to explore the extent to which immigrant
families and children in Basel, Switzerland employed contemporary digital technologies to communicate in home languages and support children’s home language learning.

Switzerland has one of the most restrictive immigration policies in the world. Immigrants do not have the same rights as in comparable developed world countries, such as Australia, Canada or USA. Immigrants are people who left the country in which they were born to live in Switzerland (Wanner & Fibbi, 2002). Their children, whether born in their parents’ home country or in Switzerland, are considered immigrants. Switzerland’s judicial system does not apply *jus soli* to its immigration laws. Therefore, even if children are born in Switzerland, they are still considered to be of *Ausländerherkunft* (of foreign country origin).

Swiss citizenship is very difficult and expensive to obtain; even second and third generation children of immigrants do not automatically obtain citizenship. They have what is termed a C permit, a renewable residence permit, as they are not citizens and are not permitted to vote or be elected for a political position. There are presently 1,5 million immigrants (20.5 percent of the population) living in Switzerland and another 500,000 who have obtained citizenship (Wanner & Fibbi, 2002, p. 10).

An understanding of the complexity of language constellations in the German Swiss Cantons, and the necessity for children living in Switzerland to speak several languages including their home language or languages, plus the majority languages (German and German Swiss), as well as the additional obligatory languages of the school curriculum, requires an explanation of the complex geopolitical landscape of languages. Switzerland has four national languages, Italian, French, Romance and German. The Canton of Tessin (Tecino) is the main Italian-speaking region of Switzerland, yet only 6.5 percent of the total Swiss population speak Italian. French is spoken by 20.4 percent of the Swiss population. French speaking people live mainly in the French Romandy region from Delémont to Geneva. A nominal proportion of the Swiss population (0.5 percent) speak Rhaeto-Romance in the Canton of Graubünden. The German language is the largest language group in Switzerland and is the main language spoken by 64 percent of the population. Other languages, spoken predominantly by immigrants include: Spanish, Croatian, Serbian, Portuguese, Albanian, Turkish and other minority languages (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2003) and are spoken by 9 percent of the population. As can be seen, more people speak immigrant languages than two of the national languages – Italian and Rhaeto-Romance. For this reason, when the term minority language is applied, in order to avoid confusion and mistaken meaning, it is important to differentiate between Swiss national languages that are in the minority and immigrant minority languages.
For the purpose of this study it is also important to differentiate between immigrant minority languages and Swiss minority languages. There are a large number of Italian, French and German citizens who cross the Swiss border daily. Originally, due to a labour shortage, from 1900 up until the 1970s a large number of people came to Switzerland as guest workers from Italy, Spain, Portugal, former Yugoslavia and Turkey (Wirth, 2005, p. 16). Family reunions and bi-national marriages are two further contemporary reasons for immigration. The guest workers either stayed on in Switzerland and their families joined them under the family reunion conditions of immigration, (as was the case in some participant families in the present study), or they eventually returned to their home country. Those who stayed could apply for citizenship or remain on a ‘C permit.’

Immigrants who apply for citizenship must pass a ‘Swissness’ test and have lived in Switzerland for 12 years. The Swissness test probes knowledge of government and democratic organisation, geography, customs and language. Until very recently (2005) families seeking citizenship were required to pay the equivalent of a month’s salary for each family member, attend a hearing at the local government and obtain a vote of confidence from citizens in the community in their ability to integrate and speak the language of the community.

As a result of the historical developments, children of immigrants have taken on an outsider status as the term Ausländer implies. The term Ausländer (foreigner) is widely used formally in government and school policy, research reports and the media. It is also used informally in school and society to refer to people who are not of Swiss heritage. The immigrant population prefer to use the term immigrant or migrant- or even Secondas or Secondos to define themselves as the term Ausländer implies exclusion. The Basel integration policy aims for positive “inclusion of all members of society” (Ehret, 1999, p. 29) and in this sense, the term Ausländer has an unhappy connotation. What is most disquieting, however, is the fact that immigrants without Swiss citizenship do not have the same rights as Swiss citizens and that many Swiss citizens are not receptive to immigrants from Turkey, Balkan countries and Africa (Fibbi, Wanner, Kaya & Piguet, 2003, p. 223; Society for Minorities in Switzerland, and Foundation Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, 2005).

1.2 Rationale for the study

Comparatively, countries with large scale immigration such as USA, Canada, Australia, Germany and Switzerland, have high proportions of immigrant students who are described
as early school dropouts or, as Skutnabb-Kangas (2004) pertinently refers to them: *push outs*. They have diminishing academic achievement and falling literacy rates (Cummins, 2000; Davolio, 2001; Garcia, 2002; M. Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Switzerland was shocked (Beck, 2004) when it first discovered that its performance was below average in reading in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). PISA is a major international study of 100,000 students across 32 different nations in reading performance, mathematics and scientific literacy. Further analysis of results found that the mediocre performance was unequally distributed along socioeconomic lines, with immigrant minority students performing worst of all. Students from Switzerland were ranked only 17th out of 32 nations, (Australia ranked 4th). Moser (2003), a leading educational researcher and consultant from the University of Zürich, who reanalysed Swiss PISA data, contended that students from immigrant families performed most poorly in all areas of the assessment and that many were unable to read adequately in German. It was also argued that this low level of reading ability contributed to their inability to find an apprenticeship or employment (p. 15) [my translation]. He argued that poor German literacy skills were influencing *Ausländer* students’ high school drop out rates, high unemployment, and extremely limited participation in higher education.

Contributing to the national debate surrounding Switzerland’s mediocre performance, Hagenbüchle (2003), a leading Swiss political and economic commentator, demonstrated that German-speaking Switzerland spent more on education per child than any other tested nation (15,500 francs per primary school student, p. 45), yet this high education spending, was not necessarily translated into strong educational outcomes. In fact, in the case of land-locked Switzerland where national wealth is generated mainly by sophisticated tertiary and financial industries and services, and a highly skilled workforce is synonymous with “Swiss Quality,” the need for a well educated, knowledge-ready workforce is paramount.

This position was reinforced by Beck (2004) writing in the Economist. She claimed that Swiss quality “is not what it used to be.” Complex problems arise when children are required to learn several languages from an early age “which may cause an overload” (p. 4). Switzerland’s concern with its mediocre educational performance in the PISA program led to major reviews and discussion on educational policy and practice, including an estimated two billion franc spending package (Hagenbüchle, 2003).
Immigrant children in Switzerland are all too often put into preparatory classes in primary school where they participate in a ‘special needs’ programme that takes two years instead of one, or they spend three years in kindergarten, or they repeat the first year of primary school (Lanfranchi, 2002b). For various reasons, immigrant children are increasingly over represented in separate, special education classes in schools as well as streamed into the lowest levels of secondary schools. The reasons for this streaming or segregation are not in all cases, a direct result of a child’s school performance (Lanfranchi, 2002b, Kronig, Haeberlin & Eckhart, 2007), [my translation] and as noted elsewhere, not confined to Switzerland. Immigrant children in the US, for example, are often also consigned to lower level and remedial classes on the basis of limited familiarity with the language of the school rather than an assessment of academic ability or potential (Ferguson, Koleski & Smith, 2001 in Bryan 2005; C. Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

One important dimension of discussions in Switzerland about immigrant children’s low level of academic performance, and ways of maximising learning potential and educational opportunity is a growing focus on the key role of early learning and early education. This new emphasis on early childhood education is mirrored elsewhere in the world as contemporary research, including the influential ‘brain research” which points to the impact of early experience on later social and academic development (McCain & Mustard, 1999).

Consistent with this new emphasis on early experience, language and culture, is a focus on sociocultural contexts for learning and especially the interrelationships between the home, community and the school. Central to any discussions on academic success for children from language backgrounds other than German Swiss must be a focus on their unique cultural and family contexts and early learning environments. Of specific interest are the role of early language and literacy in development and the role of sociocultural processes, and especially contemporary cultural tools in the learning process.

Parents play a significant role in supporting and promoting their children’s language learning. Researchers have concluded that parent involvement in their children’s education is important for school success (Cairney, 2000; Epstein, 1995; McCain & Mustard, 1999; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman & Hemphill, 1991; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004). Sanders and Epstein’s (1998, p. 495) review of studies in twenty different countries confirmed that educators are not ready and are inadequately trained to initiate, set up and sustain productive and supportive home-school relationships. Unfortunately, immigrant parents and their different culture have often been held responsible for children’s low school performance and for limited or ineffective home-
school relations. This *deficit perspective*, highlights the view that the main source of educational problems lies in the child and the family, rather than in other contexts such as the community and the school. Additionally, the view and embedded belief that children’s education is solely the responsibility of the school (Damarin, 1998) is no longer constructive in present linguistically and culturally diverse school populations.

Communication and links between parents and their children’s teachers are vital. When teachers do not share common languages or cultures with children in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, the messages they relay to both children and parents can strongly influence children’s views of themselves as learners and their learning pathways. The messages teachers relay to children may also influence the ways in which they value their home cultures and home language(s) (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, (eds), 1994; Cummins, 1986, 2001; Lanfranchi, 2002b; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

To date, no study has specifically examined connections between home languages, parent involvement and technology in the context of promoting and maintaining home languages for children. Ways in which technology could enhance the home-school connection to foster children’s improved learning outcomes must also be of interest for future educational planning and specifically, to strengthen home-school partnerships in today’s information and knowledge-rich world. Arguably too, knowledge about children’s home experience in immigrant families, from a parents’ perspective and the strategies families adopt to learn two or more languages, is central to developing immigrant children’s potential in Swiss schools.

In this thesis I argue, first, that learning and maintaining home languages is a central factor in children’s cognitive development, and that it has an important role to play in second language learning which may, in turn, boost academic outcomes. Arguably too, children’s healthy identity formation is dependent on home language maintenance. Further, that facilitating and combining communication and learning through new technologies with traditional tools of technology can provide enriching and engaging opportunities for home language learning.

**1.3 The focus and setting of the research**

In the light of recent changes in immigration together with constant and innovative developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs), the research reported in this thesis focused primarily, on the language experiences of immigrant families and their children between the ages of 3 to 12 years in Basel, including their use of ICTs to foster home
language learning. Predominantly the study was concerned with how immigrant parents negotiated their children’s home language learning when their home language (L1) was not a significant part of the daily kindergarten or school curriculum. Relatedly, it probed educational personnel and mainstream teachers’ perspectives on the role of home languages in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, the use of ICT in classrooms and in language learning in particular, and the nature of home-school communications.

The main part of the study was based on interviews with parents from 58 families who spoke languages other than German. The families were from the former Yugoslavia, (Kosovo, a province of former Yugoslavia currently under the protectorate of the United Nations peace keeping forces, Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia), Spain, South and Central America, and Turkey. The interviews were conducted from June 2003 through to February 2004. All children, whose parents participated in the study, attended state run kindergartens and primary schools. The school and teacher perspectives were gained from interviews with 12 teachers from Basel schools and from analyses of key policy and curriculum documents.

1.4 Theoretical perspectives informing the study

Several theories supporting linguistically and culturally diverse children’s home language maintenance were reviewed for this study. Due to the nature of the study, an interdisciplinary theoretical input was required. The role of family, extended family and community is crucial in the social context of children’s language learning and therefore is an essential ingredient for cognitive growth (Thomas, 1985). Underpinning this position is Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory which provides an explanation for the influence of culture on language. Rogoff (2003) extended Vygotsky’s theory as an “orienting concept for understanding cultural processes” (p. 10). These sociocultural perspectives inform language learning through their focus on interactions between cultures and diverse language groups in early and middle childhood environments.

The internal biological aspects of language and the external environmental forces that influence language maintenance and loss in immigrant families were reviewed. The internal and external aspects provided insights into the contexts for home language learning in children of immigrant families in Basel, Switzerland and in cities in other countries with significant levels of immigration. Knowledge of these theories of language helps educators to be aware of both biological origins and the environmental factors that influence language learning.
The internal biological environment included Chomsky’s nativist perspective (1957), followed by neuroscientific research on the “critical period” of language acquisition as they relate to home language learning. Neuroscientific research has alerted policy makers and educators to the importance of the first six years of life, especially in language development. The first years lay the basis for later learning as rapid language development takes place in the preschool and early primary years, and confident oral language use is a prerequisite for literacy learning and development. There is no doubt that a ‘language organ’ (such as that described by Noam Chomsky) helps to simplify an understanding of how languages might function. Knowledge of the critical period in language learning alerts early childhood educators to the importance of their role in providing rich opportunities for children of immigrants to both use their home language and to learn the majority language.

Of specific interest and relevance in the light of immigrant children’s language constellations and their sociocultural contexts for language learning were the relationship between reaching high competence in the first language and the notion of conceptual sophistication (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001). Correspondingly, uninterrupted language development in a child’s first language is crucial for overall cognitive development and transfer to second language learning (Clarke, 1996, Collier, 1995, Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000, Tabors, 1997). As is now well understood from extensive studies on the interdependency of first and second language learning and, in the light of first language competence in second and third language learning, the developmental interdependence hypothesis (Cummins, 1979) was reviewed. Understanding this ‘interdependence’ is crucial for an appreciation of the significance of home language learning for immigrant children. Yet very little is known about the strategies that parents of immigrant children adopt to support and maintain their children’s home language learning and how this changes over time as children enter the mainstream school and society.

The structures within society have been key to understanding the environmental influences on immigrant children’s language learning. The intervention framework also put forward by Cummins (1986), linked with the integrative conceptual model proposed by Garcia Coll et al. (1996), addressed the role of socioeconomic status as well as discrimination and segregation as core processes that affect children’s development. On a similar line, the deficit perspective was reviewed as interpreted by Bronfenbrenner (1979), and the relationship to children’s language development was drawn. The discussion was extended with Auerbach’s broadened interpretation of the deficit model in the family literacy
perspective through her social contextual (1989) and social change model (1995b), as they applied to immigrant families.

The main theories used to assist in guiding and explaining the environment of children from immigrant backgrounds were the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) and its predecessor, the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). They were reviewed in the sense that they offered useful concepts for understanding the relationships between different levels of the environment and how the interconnections between the immigrant child and others act to influence language maintenance or loss. These concepts included children’s interactions with people and tools and how they shape language learning over time. Together, these theories were woven in a logical sequence to form the theoretical background to the study and shape the research questions.

1.5 The research questions

Four questions were explored in the first two stages of the three-stage study (Stage One the Family Context, Stage Two the School Context and Stage Three Ongoing Data Analysis). The first group of questions sought to determine parent perspectives on their home language. In particular, I sought to determine the strategies parents used to support oral and written literacy in their home languages.

Specifically:

- To what extent do immigrant parents (in Basel Switzerland) believe maintenance of home language learning is important?
- Why do parents believe maintenance of home language learning is important?
- What strategies do families use to promote home languages?
- Do families believe that children should also learn to read and write in their home language?
- Do beliefs differ between and within linguistic groups?

The second element of Stage One was to focus on the extent to which parents used information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support and promote home languages. Questions included:
• To what extent do families use ICT to assist in the promotion of home language learning?
• What forms of ICTs are used in the home to foster home languages?

The third element of the study examined the extent of support for home languages afforded by schools and the wider society. Of specific interest were government policies and school and community initiatives in place or planned for Basel and adjoining Basel-Land.

• Does the Department of Education in Basel Switzerland believe maintenance of home language learning is important?
• To what extent do the department and teachers recognise the importance of home language learning in promoting cognitive competence in the dominant community language?
• To what extent do kindergartens and schools believe that ICTs can assist in the promotion of home language learning?
• To what extent do kindergartens and schools use ICTs to assist in the promotion of home language learning?

The fourth element (linking Stage One and Stage Two), considered the interactions and interrelationships that existed between parents and schools. Central to this dimension was the extent to which ICTs were used in facilitating these interactions and their role in the learning experiences for immigrant children.

• Do families believe they are supported in home language promotion by kindergartens, schools and community?
• What strategies do immigrant parents use to communicate with kindergarten and school teachers?
• What strategies do kindergartens and schools use to promote the home-school connection with immigrant families?
• To what extent do kindergartens and schools support families’ efforts to promote home language learning through technology?
1.6 Overview of the study

Chapter One provides an introduction to the study and identifies the problem under investigation, the rationale, the focus and the setting of the research. Chapter Two focuses on theoretical perspectives of an interdisciplinary nature encompassing internal biological aspects of home language development and external environmental forces that combined, affected and influenced home language maintenance. These theoretical perspectives establish the important relationship between home-school communication and ICT use in home language maintenance. Chapter Three presents the background to the study and incorporates key factors that frame and influence educational provisions, policies and practice at an international and local level context.

Chapter Four focuses on the micro level of language and literacy learning contexts and the role home languages play in children’s identity formation, social and cognitive development. Complementing this section, the meso level context of the interconnections between immigrant families and their children’s schools are explored in Chapter Five, highlighting the importance of forging these links to build sustained partnerships in support of home languages. Chapter Six explores the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as everyday tools to support language and literacy learning as well as the possible role ICTs can play in promoting resources and home-school communication.

Chapter Seven details the study’s three-stage research design and the methodology. As the voices of immigrant parents and their children’s teachers were the main focus of the study, an interpretive approach encompassing phenomenography as the main methodology was used.

Results and discussion are reported in three chapters. Chapter Eight focuses on the demographic characteristics of (a) participant families and their beliefs, experiences and aspirations for their children, and (b) teachers, and reports their beliefs and experiences about some aspects of working with children who speak languages other than German as their home language. Chapter Nine builds on the findings of Chapter Eight and focuses on parental perceptions of the support they receive from schools and teachers in their efforts to promote and facilitate home languages. This chapter also explores the extent to which educators provide support for families efforts to promote home languages. Chapter Ten is the final results and discussion chapter which describes parent and teacher use of information and communication technologies in homes and schools for both home language and home-school
communication. Important connections were made between micro level provisions for home languages and macro level educational policy and practice.

The summary of the main findings, suggestions for further research and the implications drawn from the study are presented in Chapter Eleven. Here, the key findings are represented in a multilingual social cohesive communications model that focuses on the interface of those experiences that take place between children’s schools and home. As explained, what occurs in this interface is central to immigrant children’s success at school, specifically language development and the ability to gain a sense and knowledge of one’s heritage. This requires a bottom up strategy that must incorporate factors that facilitate language and literacy development, building upon strong home language and rich home culture for children of immigrants.
CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical perspectives

2.1 Introduction

Several theories underpin structural considerations that affect the school experiences and life pathways of children from immigrant minority language backgrounds. Collectively, these theories provide a useful framework to help understand the experiences that can set children of immigrants apart from established resident monoculture children. In this chapter, theories that take account of the differences in life circumstances and experiences of children of immigrants as multiple language learners, and participants in two or more cultures are reviewed.

As explained in the first chapter, an “immigrant” and a “minority” language in Switzerland may be the same language, but life circumstances can differ substantially of a child of Swiss heritage, and a child of first, second or even third generation immigrants without citizenship, whose language, culture and national identity remain (in many cases) solidly with that of their parents’ or grandparents’ country of origin.

First, this chapter focuses on connections between immigrant children’s language maintenance or loss, and the proximal and distal environmental factors affecting learning. Although this connection has been part of many studies in urban areas in Canada, Australia, USA and in Scandinavian countries for many years, it has only very recently been discussed in the context of immigration programmes and large immigrant populations in countries such as Germany, France and Switzerland. Globally, and in these countries specifically, the number of children of immigrants is increasing and, with this increase is rising family
mobility, instability and disadvantage, including educational disadvantage (Haskins, Greenberg & Fremstad, 2004, p. 1).

Secondly, this chapter explores the theoretical nature of the connection between home language maintenance and the contexts for learning by clarifying the external environmental and internal personal elements affecting home/first language development. These external perspectives become an important background to the present study of children of immigrants living in Switzerland, and in families where German is not the home language. Thirdly, central to understanding the importance of home languages is the role of structures within society, especially macro structures that impact on children’s life experience and set them apart from established residence children. An important goal in understanding the Swiss context for home language development is the multidirectional contexts within the existing social environments that influence school and home learning for immigrant children.

Because the study is concerned with educators as well as with immigrant children and their families, understanding the orientation and pedagogical stance that they adopt when working with children of immigrants is critical (Tabors, 1997). An understanding of what influences teachers’ attitudes and pedagogical stances, and the ways they interpret and understand the role of home languages in immigrant children’s learning, is also important. These teacher views about language impact on both educational policy and practice.

I have approached the study from a sociocultural perspective. This sociocultural perspective assumes that language develops as a result of interactions in social and cultural environments over an historical period of time. The historical focus is vital in immigrant families because of the influence of time on language maintenance and loss over the generations and, indeed, over much shorter periods.

A sociocultural perspective has its roots in the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky who, as a child, not unlike many children in the present study, spoke several languages. He learned to speak German and Russian as well as Hebrew, the language of his family religion. He also spoke French and English and, in his later school years and at University, Latin, Greek and Esperanto. Although Vygotsky’s ideas were first developed in the 1930s, access to his work was denied due to restrictive communist censorship before, during and after the Second World War, until the 1950s. In the post war years his works were translated and published in several languages. His ideas have been developed and elaborated by scholars such as Luria (1982), Bronfenbrenner (1979), Rogoff (1990) and Wertsch (1990).

Vygotsky’s perspective on language learning was influenced by a multidisciplinary educational background, taking into account and acknowledging that children are “active
agents” in learning at school and in the community. He believed language developed as a result of interactions with people and, subsequently, became a tool for developing mental processes (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky believed that of all the aspects of cognitive development, language acquisition is the most significant (Blanck, 1990). A sociocultural perspective proposes that cognitive development occurs in social and cultural settings, and children learn their language through participating, observing and interacting with others.

I believe that if the discourse on improving children of immigrants’ school experience and life chances is to progress, a clearer understanding of the role of children’s home language learning at home and school is needed. This understanding might then facilitate a rich and creative interchange between immigrant families, educators and policy makers in the receiving society. The clearer understanding must include and recognise the “educational void” if schooling fails to account for the resilience, potential and diversity in immigrant families. The discourse is negatively oriented when it is dominated by deficits and problems faced by children from immigrant backgrounds in the receiving societies’ education system.

2.1.1 Chapter outline

The internal aspects, theories pertaining to the external environment and the ways they are linked to inform contexts for children of immigrants in mainstream majority language environments are explored. This chapter begins with the developmental interdependence hypothesis proposed by Cummins (1981b) and links with his framework for intervention. The intervention framework connects with the integrative conceptual model proposed by Garcia Coll et al. (1996). Relatedly, the deficit perspective is introduced as interpreted by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Auerbach extended and broadened the discussion of the deficit model in the family literacy perspective through her social contextual (1989) and social change model (1995b), as they apply to immigrant families.

The bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) and its predecessor, the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), offer useful frameworks for understanding the relationships between different levels of the environment and how the interconnections between the immigrant child and others act to influence language maintenance or loss. These frameworks include children’s interactions with people and tools, and ways in which they shape language acquisition over time. These theories are woven together in a logical sequence as the theoretical background to the study and underpin the research questions.
The internal context: The internal biological aspects of language acquisition

The internal components that may cause and affect language development, incorporating Chomsky’s nativist perspective and concepts of “critical period” of language development, together with insights from neuroscientific research, help explain the biological aspects of language learning.

In order to understand the biological factors in language learning, psycholinguist Noam Chomsky (1957), interpreted and explained language learning from what he termed a “nativist perspective.” This perspective views language as an innate biological function that originates from a language organ, a ‘faculty of language’ commonly known as the language acquisition device (LAD), (1957, 2002, p. 85). Chomsky believed that “a typical child will acquire any language under appropriate conditions … and in hostile environments” (2002, p. 85), but that language learning was dependent on acquiring vocabulary and “the triggering and shaping effect of experience” (p. 85). He also believed that knowledge of “lexical items”… with “complex semantic structure” would be “uniform among languages,” (p. 86) commonly referred to in the literature as universal grammar. He saw language development as “internally determined processes of maturation, yielding later states that seem to stabilize at several stages, finally at about puberty” (p. 85).

Chomsky’s position supports the biological argument for a ‘sensitive period’ of language development, which is defined as an optimal time for language growth during childhood. Most relevant to children from immigrant backgrounds’ language acquisition is his view that “the underlying logic or deep structure of all languages is the same and that human mastery of it is genetically determined, not learned” (Gale Encyclopaedia of Psychology, 2001, p. 1). He contended for example that, “any child can learn any human language. A Japanese child growing up in Cairo will learn Arabic just as well as a Mexican child can learn English [in San Diego USA] ” (Morris, 2003, p.1).

When language learning is only dependent on biological factors and takes place in an internal vacuum, then immigrant children will have no problems learning a second or a third language if they are exposed to it early, and on a regular basis. However, as discussed later in this chapter, as both external distal and proximal environments play a vital role in language learning, many children of immigrants in Switzerland and in other parts of the world fail to gain minimum proficiency necessary in majority languages needed to progress successfully through school.
2.2.1 Neuroscientific research

Complementing the work of Chomsky on the “sensitive period” for language development, is more recent evidence of a “critical period” for learning languages that grows out of the “brain research” or neuroscientific research.

Recent technological advances made with brain imaging have provided a new dimension for understanding language learning. Brain imaging has located speech to specific areas of the brain. The experiences that young children have in their life can influence their neurocognitive development, which in turn can cause functional and anatomical changes in the brain (Noble, Tottenham & Casey, 2005, p. 71). Relatedly, brain imaging has shown differences in a subject’s brain activation between early and later stages of language acquisition (Kim, Relkin, Lee & Hirsch, 1997). (A brief overview of this research will be given in Chapter Four). This new neurological evidence points to there being a “critical period” for learning languages. A definition of the critical period, its implications and impact on early childhood and primary school pedagogical practice is elaborated below.

2.2.2 Critical period in language learning

Critical periods for learning language are accepted in the biological argument, and are defined as “prime times for the development of specific neural synapses” (Shiver 2001, p. 2). Furthermore, according to Eliot (2000), a neurobiologist, the brain and the Broca region evolved a complex neural circuit for rapidly perceiving, analysing, composing and producing language. More related to first language development, Newberger (1997) reported that, “through hearing vowel sounds in their home language, pathways and connections are formed for those sounds that are significant in their own language” (p. 6) [My italics]. Focusing specifically on home languages, Newberger (1997) claimed that “children learn any language best in the context of meaningful play, day to day interactions with adults and other children who speak the language” (p. 7).

The reason why the critical period is so important for this study is that it is considered the best time, a so called ‘window of opportunity’, for language learning. This window is open in the early and middle years of childhood and is considered to close at around the age of twelve.

The ideas on language learning arising from Chomsky’s theoretical position have strongly influenced educational policy and practice in the Basel region context. For example, the first foreign language (French) is taught from the beginning of the fourth primary school
year in Basel-Land when children are about 10 years of age, and the fifth school year in Basel City. This same policy is however not extended to all immigrant languages within the primary school curriculum. As explained elsewhere, there is widespread recognition and understanding of the importance of maintaining young children’s home language as a base for mainstream language development. In spite of this recognition, the main focus on supporting home languages is the value of its contribution to children’s integration into the receiving society. (Erziehungsdepartement Basel Stadt, 2006). Socio-political factors rather than educational factors tend to influence this position.

2.3 The external environmental contexts

The previous section established the internal biological factors implicated in language learning. The factors that affect the overall context of language learning can only be fully appreciated when distinctions are made between the internal components and the external environment. A more thorough understanding can be achieved when the interactions and interplay between these two dimensions are considered.

2.3.1 The developmental interdependence hypothesis

Central to the external dimension is Professor Jim Cummins’ internationally renowned research on bilingual and immigrant minority children’s development and learning. Cummins has drawn on Vygotsky’s view that “while learning a foreign language we use word meanings that are already well developed in the native language and only translate them.” Further, he suggested that “the advanced knowledge of one’s own language also plays an important role in the study of a foreign language” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 160-161).

Cummins (1979, 1981b) proposed the “interdependence hypothesis,” also called the common underlying proficiency model of bilingual proficiency. The core of this hypothesis is that competence in first or home language predicts competence in additional languages. Specifically:

To the extent that instruction in Lx, is effective in promoting proficiency in Lx, transfer of this proficiency to Ly will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn Ly (1981b, p. 29).
Lx refers to the child’s first language acquired (L1=the home language) and Ly refers to the second language (L2 or the second language). Transfer from Lx to Ly will occur given that exposure and motivation are positively orientated. Of vital importance for young children from immigrant backgrounds, is a continuation of their home language when extensive exposure to their second language takes place. Their first/ home language skills must be facilitated and developed to guarantee maximum academic and linguistic functioning in the second language.

Numerous studies exploring the interdependence hypothesis have shown that children are more academically successful when they have instruction in their home language during the school timetable, as was found to be the case in children from former Yugoslavia and Turkey in Germany (Baur & Meder, 1992). Some of the studies that focus on language learning for children of immigrants are described in Chapter Four. In particular, they show the impact of complexities of power, identity and environmental influences on children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

2.3.2 An educational framework for working with linguistically diverse children

Cummins (2001) believes that the way children from immigrant minority backgrounds learn, is influenced by “identity negotiation” between child and teacher. In a classroom context this refers to the ways in which teachers demonstrate respect, and value the children’s home language and culture. Immigrant children’s identity negotiation in school and classrooms always: “either reinforces or challenges patterns of coercive relations of power in the wider society” (p. 652). Cummins (1986) proposed a framework for intervention to counter what he called “institutionalised racism” – the situation where dominated immigrant groups are “empowered” or “disabled” in educational contexts, as a direct result of their interactions with educators in schools. His interventionary strategy envisaged children and parents as active agents of their own empowerment (2001, p. 649). With empowerment would come educational improvements, but this could only occur if educational policy makers and teachers redefined classroom roles to facilitate a process of participant empowerment. Cummins’(2001) framework for intervention to empower children and families to address the “achievement gap” evident in immigrant students’ schooling outcomes, mentioned in the previous chapter, has its basis in educators defining their roles within four dimensions of schooling:
According to Cummins, this framework for intervention provides a platform to challenge racism within society and, in turn, within schools (Cummins, 2001, p. 216).

Cummins was convinced that most educational reforms aimed at improving immigrant children’s educational outcomes and tackling inequalities have failed to make any notable differences to children’s academic achievement in the USA educational context. Consequently, the “crisis” (in educational outcomes) has “gathered momentum” (Cummins, 2001, p. 650). A key part of this educational failure, he claimed, is linked to underlying problems of racism and discrimination as they relate to immigrant languages in mainstream educational systems (Cummins, 2000, p. 43).

Supporting and complementing Cummins’ perspective on power and equity issues in educating children of immigrants and children from linguistically diverse backgrounds, is the Garcia Coll et al. (1996) integrative conceptual model for educators working with children of colour and, more recently, applied to “children of immigrants” (Garcia Coll & Szalacha, 2004).

2.3.3 Integrative conceptual model

The integrative conceptual model builds on Vygotsky’s work to help understand the unique ecological circumstances of ‘children of colour’ and immigrants. Set in a social stratification framework, Garcia Coll et al.’s. (1996) integrative conceptual model stresses at its core, the impact of racism, prejudice, discrimination, oppression and segregation on development. Specifically, the model seeks to explain not only how the family but also societal dimensions of socioeconomic status, popular culture and media influence children’s development. The model proposes three challenges for teachers and policy makers working with children of colour and immigrants:

1) To identify alternative competencies in children of colour [children of immigrants] that are not measured by traditional assessment tools in developmental competencies, bicultural adaptation and coping with racism.
2) To analyse the implications of the causes of problems in negotiating two language systems for social policy and interventions, and

3) To recognize that human talent cannot continue to be wasted because of outdated racial/ethnic conceptualisations (p. 1908).

Given recent attention on children from immigrant families, Garcia Coll and Szalacha (2004) highlighted the need for widespread change in stereotypic views of “children’s development and the characteristics of racial and ethnic groups” (p. 1908). This change requires a clear focus on building and developing children’s abilities and competencies, and a focus on the strengths that diversity brings to a society. Specifically, Garcia Coll and Szalacha claim that both home and mainstream languages can be developed when children receive bilingual education, and this results in improved educational chances and outcomes. Further, they stress that developing home languages as well as the majority mainstream language enhance family communication and helps maintain cultural identity, values and traditions in the face of challenges from mainstream society. This integrative conceptual model (Garcia Coll et al. 1996) connects to the present study through language policy and language development in minority and immigrant language children.

2.3.4 Interconnections between the family and mainstream schools and spaces for language learning.

The main ideas emerging from the work of Vygotsky (1986) and more recently Bronfenbrenner (2005), Garcia Coll and Szalacha (2004), Cummins (2000) and Rogoff (2003) suggest that forging links between families and schools, and supporting families in their efforts to maintain home languages, is vital for improving educational outcomes in children from immigrant families.

Clearly, fostering children of immigrants’ home language learning and maintenance in mainstream school systems is a complex matter in early childhood and primary school settings. Whether or not children continue to speak their home language once they move outside their home into childcare, crèche, preschool or school, will depend on the provisions for immigrant languages in the mainstream community, and their interactions with each other and with carers and teachers.

As explained by Cummins, the extent to which both the home and school are supportive of the child’s home language will impact on children’s language learning. Factors such as the
status of the home language, families’ socioeconomic standing, and parents’ educational background play an important role in children’s use and maintenance of their home language, and their learning in general (Snow, Tabors & Dickinson, 2001).

2.3.5 Home languages linked with the deficit model

Collier (1995) and Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) claim that uninterrupted and continued development of children’s first/home language is vital to build positive attitudes towards their language and a sound healthy identity. With the exception of elite and middle class immigrants who have generally been very successful in mainstream school systems (Cummins, 1999; Tabors, 1997; Louie, 2001), discourse and concern surrounding non-middle class immigrant families tend to highlight the deficits in children’s language/s and, particularly, the language of the school. Here, the focus tends to be on the language they have not yet acquired rather than the strengths children have in their own language and their cultural ways of doing things.

Bronfenbrenner proposed and described what has become known as the “deficit model,” as the practice of looking for the deficit in the child or, if not found within the child, then seeking a deficit in the child’s family or ethnic group rather than seeking out the “constructive cooperative potential” (1979, p. 291). Typically, this means that schools tend to blame the home and parents for children’s lack of mainstream language fluency, rather than building on children’s strengths and competencies as a foundation for learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cairney, 2000; Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Clark-Salinas, 2004; Sanders & Epstein, 1998).

In contrast to the ‘deficit perspective’ is the ‘potential perspective.’ This proposes that children’s existing language competence and family literacy practices provide the basis for language and cultural development that should be harnessed by the school (Hardman 1998, Louie, 2001, Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez (1992). (The case of language as a potential perspective is discussed further in section 2.3.6 below).

However, with a prevailing dominating discourse of the deficit model, many education policies and practices still tend to focus on children of immigrants’ deficits in their second language, rather than the potential of their first language (Thomas & Collier, 1997; Lanfranchi, 2002b). This is especially true in Switzerland. Additionally, family literacy practices and other family characteristics such as lack of, or poor understanding of, the majority language, and lacking knowledge of the school system are also framed from a deficit perspective (Auerbach, 1995b). Auerbach said that the: “classic deficit views blame
marginalized people for their own marginalisation in ... genetic, cultural or linguistic deficiencies” (p. 645). She highlighted the following assumptions often held by educators:

1) Language minority students come from literacy-impoverished homes where education is not valued or supported.
2) Family literacy involves a one-way transfer of skills from parents to children.
3) Success is determined by the parents’ ability to support and extend school-like activities in the home.
4) School practices are adequate and it is home factors that will determine who will succeed.
5) Parents’ own problems get in the way of creating positive family literacy contexts (p. 169).

It is such beliefs and stereotypic images that typically underpin the widely held assimilation approach to education (discussed in detail in Chapter Three). The assimilation approach is where the school aims to immerse children in the majority language, rather than drawing on and supporting children’s home/first language. In essence, the child’s first language is replaced by the dominant language of the community (Clyne, 1991; Cummins, 2000).

2.3.6 The social contextual and the social change model in family literacy

In search of a more fitting model to explain the potential perspective, Auerbach (1989) proposed a social contextual model. This model is based on the premise that the school should capitalise on the strengths of the family, community and cultural practices. The model is grounded in the assumption that values, experience, knowledge and practices that may be different from mainstream practices in the wider society, must be valued as a resource by the school, kindergarten or preschool (p. 178). In addressing the question of “How can we draw on parents’ knowledge and experience to inform instruction, rather than how can we transfer school practices into home contexts?” (1989, p. 177), Auerbach discussed the influence of power that permeates every aspect of literacy acquisition and advocated an approach that “encompasses principles of multilingual practices plus placing emphasis on issues of power as well as culture” (p. 649). In particular, she stressed that “families and communities have the right to determine for themselves the direction of family literacy and school involvement efforts, rather than assuming outsiders know best for them” (1995b, p. 649).
In summary, understanding the deficit hypothesis and its traditional influences on educational policy and practice provides important insights into the reasons why some educational measures are unsuccessful in terms of educational outcomes for students. This understanding also helps explain why there is little or no focus on children’s home language and culture in some school contexts. Alternatively, embracing the view that home languages and experiences are enriching acknowledges the importance of the context in learning and development. Importantly, it provides the basis for respectful and cooperative educational endeavours between the school and home.

2.4 Creation of external environments

In seeking to understand the impact of the social and cultural context on children’s learning and development and, especially, their language learning, Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory has been particularly influential.

2.4.1 Ecological systems theory

In attempting to counter the deficit model, as described above, Bronfenbrenner’s work sought to strengthen the position of families and children in society. It is likely that Bronfenbrenner’s personal experience as a child of an immigrant refugee family influenced his writings. Like Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner was Russian. As his family emigrated from the former USSR to the USA in the 1930’s when he was six years old (Hamilton & Ceci, 2005), he would have had an intimate experience of a family’s adjustment to a new language and culture.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory provided a framework to examine the links between families, schools and communities. He (1979, 1989) considered the family held a central role in the wider context of society, and he defined ecology as the individual’s development over her/his lifetime. His ecological systems theory proposes that:

an active, growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (1979, p. 21).
This ‘ecological’ framework provides a model to explain the contexts and influences on learning which can be used to examine the links between families, schools, communities and the services that governments provide. Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceived the ecological environment “as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). (The child was considered central in the systems). He focused on the principles of interconnectedness and defined the microsystem as the “complex of interactions within the child’s immediate setting” (p. 7). The mesosystem represented the actual links “between the setting,” such as home, kindergartens or school (p. 7). Moving outwards from the child represented in the middle of the nested structure, to the third circle of influence, is what Bronfenbrenner called the exosystem. This system represents what a person may never participate in, but it may well affect what happens in the person’s immediate environment. Examples of this may be public policy for child care, or prior to school education and care for all children.

The fourth system, the macrosystem, incorporates the interconnections between the micro-meso and exosystems and is viewed “as a manifestation of overarching patterns of ideology and organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture” (p. 8). Bronfenbrenner was interested in specifying the properties and conditions of the social and physical environments that foster or undermine development within people’s “ecological niches” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 45). In the later years of his life and work (Bronfenbrenner died in 2005), he reassessed and extended his ecological systems theory to “highlight the potential importance for development of the personal characteristics of significant others in the immediate environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 227). Significant for the immigrant child is that these “others” may have different “systems of beliefs” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 227) from those in children’s home culture. Later, he added the chronosystem to his model, the missing dimension of time that accounted for constancy and change not only in the person but also in the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

According to Bronfenbrenner, developmental changes triggered by life events and experiences are of particular significance for immigrant children. The obvious life event for children of immigrants would be the family transition from the home country to the adopted country, or a transition from the home to school forcing a change from the home language to a second or even third language. Bronfenbrenner (1986) explained that the “critical feature of such events is that they alter the existing relation between the person and the environment (p. 201).”
2.4.2 Home-school connections

In explaining why parents and teachers should be working together to build partnerships so that children can profit from positive interconnectedness, Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 209-210) drew educators’ attention to the kinds of interconnections between home and school that impacted most positively on children’s learning outcomes. Drawing on insights from Vygotsky and others, Bronfenbrenner said that learning was a social experience as a result of interactions with peers and adults. Returning briefly to the mesosystem, Bronfenbrenner (1979) said there are four types of interconnections between home and school:

1) multisetting participation,
2) indirect linkage,
3) intersetting communications and
4) intersetting knowledge (p. 209-210).

Most important for immigrant parents is their ability to communicate with the community and school and their own knowledge of the school system and practices so that they can help their children. Paramount is the immigrant family’s knowledge of the receiving societies’ language and culture. When families begin to communicate with sectors of the adopted country in the community, for example in child care settings or kindergarten, it may not be clear to them what kinds of interconnections are possible or acceptable. The capacity to communicate effectively in trusting environments brings with it mutual respect and trust and makes a valuable contribution to impact children’s learning in a positive way.

In Epstein (1995) and Epstein et al. (2002), Joyce Epstein extended Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical perspective to underpin and facilitate their discussions about building partnerships between schools and families. Interconnections were recognised between the home, school and community that Epstein (1995) called “overlapping spheres of influence.” The basic principle was that when educators work in cooperation with families and communities for support, parents are informed about the ways of the school so that they can help their children.

However, Epstein’s framework did not particularly focus on the unique circumstances of the immigrant family and the ways of the home. At the most, these parents could be identified in the framework as those who are considered “difficult parents.” While the perspectives of immigrant parents are missing from this model, the notion of ‘difficult to reach immigrant parents’ prevails (Ramirez, 2003; Bryan, 2005). There is, for example, no recognition of the
effects of transitions on children as their families pass through the immigration process, or settle and establish themselves in a new country or community or school (Eidgenössische Koordinationskommission für Familienfragen, 2002). Further, there is scant recognition of the potential impact of resources specific to immigrant families such as those proposed by Greenberg, (1989); Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) and Vélez-Ibáñez (1988). These “resources” are a form of social capital where knowledge is shared, and strong interpersonal and intergroup relationships are based on exchange of mutual help through interconnections and wide networks that run between families and within language communities that are ultimately based on mutual trust. Termed “funds of knowledge” (Greenberg, 1989; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1988), these resources underpin positive aspects of participation and involvement from the immigrant family perspective. Too often though, recognition of the potential of these “funds of knowledge” is missing in the discourse on integration and educational policy and practice.

2.4.3 *The bioecological model*

Bronfenbrenner’s reassessment of the ecological theory placed emphasis on the developing personality of the individual, the interactions between persons, and the impact of the environmental influences. This emphasis on the individual is especially significant for children from immigrant backgrounds as they negotiate the differences between their home language and culture, and the language and culture of the mainstream school and community. Bronfenbrenner revised and extended his ecological systems theory, now called the bioecological model, to focus on both environmental influences and biological and personal elements (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 994-5).

This model has four principal components: (a) proximal processes (b) biopsychological characteristics of the person (c) interactions with objects and symbols rather than people, and (d) the new aspect of differing lengths of time: (micro, meso, and macro time). The four components are ‘dynamic’ and interactive (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 994).

2.4.4 *The external environmental influence of proximal processes*

A focus on the bioecological model Component A: proximal processes, and Component B, biophysical characteristics of the person, are significant for this study. Firstly, Ceci, Rosenblum, de Bruyn and Lee (1997) defined proximal processes as “reciprocal interactions
between the developing child and other persons, objects and symbols in its immediate settings” (p. 310-311). Proximal processes include interactions between a child and environment, function over time, and are posited as the primary mechanisms producing human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 994). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) explain that there is a vital difference between the concepts of the “environment” and “process,” and put forward a proposition to clarify this distinction:

*Proposition 1*

Especially in its early phases, but also throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. …Examples of enduring patterns of proximal processes are found in … child-child activities, group or solitary play, reading, learning new skills, athletic activities, problem solving, caring for others in distress, making plans, performing complex tasks, and acquiring new knowledge and know-how (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996).

Secondly, Component C, interactions with objects and symbols rather than people, includes cultural tools as they are incorporated into children’s learning at home and at school. While Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) and Ceci et al. (1997) did not specifically include interactive devices or communications technology as a form of distal processes, or objects and symbols, digital technologies and interactive devices are part of children’s daily environments. They are interacting with tools such as mobile telephones, television, multimedia and computers on an everyday basis. Given the ubiquitous presence of ICTs in children’s daily lives, it is likely they would be included in the model if it had been developed today. The way technologies are utilised, and the nature of the children’s interaction with them and people (peers, siblings, adult or teacher), will determine whether the activities are of a developmentally generative or disruptive nature.
2.4.5 Technology as a means to support proximal and distal processes in the bioecological model

As has been widely acknowledged, computer and telecommunication technologies have the potential to act as a catalyst for the development of intercultural understanding and to empower users (Auld, 2002; Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2006; Cummins & Sayers 1996; Meadows & Murphy, 2004). According to Cole (1990, p. 91) Vygotsky was concerned with cultural mediation and the processes of practical activity because:

human beings live in an environment transformed by artefacts of prior generations,…the basic function of these artefacts is to coordinate human beings with the physical world and each other. As a consequence human beings live in a “double world” simultaneously “natural” and “artificial” (p. 91).

These sophisticated technological (artefacts) tools, such as hand held devices, have developed to become an important part of contemporary culture. In all countries and communities, an artefact can also be a pencil or an agricultural tool. To borrow from Cole again- “the function of these artefacts is to coordinate human beings with the physical world and each other” (1990, p. 91).

Given the rapid pace of technological development over the past ten years, portability and mobility have added to the value of tools such as hand held devices, to provide new opportunities for learning. In the context of this study, artefacts are also considered to be “artificial” digital and interactive tools of technologies that are an integral part of culture. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner’s insights, these tools are a kind of a distal resource, which may be useful in “setting proximal processes in motion” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1009). Also, according to Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994, p. 572) “proximal processes are posited as the primary engines of effective development.” Whether or not these factors aid in development depends on so called “force characteristics” that are developmentally generative, such as the “tendency to initiate and engage in activity alone or with others” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1009).
2.5 Summary and conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight a range of theoretical perspectives; internal biological perspectives, sociocultural dimensions, and external environmental forces proposed to help understand the context of language learning for children of immigrants. Together, the internal and external environments shape the social and educational contexts for children of immigrants, and illuminate important issues for policy development and implementation. The internal biological aspects of language including Chomsky’s nativist perspective (1957), and insights from neuroscientific research with supporting evidence of a “critical period” for learning languages, have been particularly influential in informing and shaping language policy.

For the purpose of this study, Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model (incorporating the ecological systems theory) offers a valuable explanation of the interconnections between children’s main environments of home, school (preschool, child care) and community, and highlights the key role of experiences, relationships and resources in promoting children’s development. The model also acknowledges the existence of potentially disruptive experiences such as transitions in immigrant children’s lives, resulting interruptions in language learning, and the way these disruptions affect home language maintenance.

The theoretical perspectives focusing on developing first language skills and identity negotiation provide strong support for policy and practice that value and promote home languages within mainstream school curricula. Today, however, reality is that most children of immigrants often do not have the option of home/first language instruction in the receiving society school curriculum, and therefore do not have the opportunity to develop their home language and culture to their fullest potential. This is especially the case in the early years of education in Switzerland. Relatedly, the constructs of the integrated conceptual model and the negative connotations of the deficit perspective assist to clarify and locate the roots of assumptions and beliefs that underpin educators’ pedagogical stance and practices.

The theoretical perspectives highlighted in this chapter help explain several aspects of children’s individual circumstances, but do not sufficiently elaborate on educational disadvantage faced by children from immigrant backgrounds and societal structures that operate predominately in external environments. The integrative conceptual model and the social change model are two significant exceptions. In particular the need for new insights into the complexity and multifaceted nature of children’s and families’ experiences within
plurilingual societal and school contexts, as in the case of Switzerland, is pressing and high on the political agenda.

A main goal of this study is to explore language learning and home school communication from the viewpoint of immigrant parents. The insights highlighting the importance of families’ knowledge and experience are needed. Specifically, families’ beliefs about home language maintenance are necessary to inform current educational policy and practice in Switzerland and beyond. Furthermore, digital age information and communication technologies have been included because they enable previously unimaginable forms of global and interpersonal communication, and numerous possibilities for home language maintenance. Together, the impact of interactions between the areas of language maintenance, home-school communication and ICTs became the focus of the study.

In the next four chapters I review the literature on the impact of contextual backgrounds on immigrant families’ experience in the broader society and school. Specifically, I focus on relations between home language learning, home-school communication and information and communication technologies on the ways they may affect immigrant children’s language and literacy learning opportunities and their longer term academic outcomes. The following chapter (Chapter Three) focuses on the background macro (sociopolitical) and exosystem (parents’ world of work) influences that affect educational experiences for children of immigrants and their families. I outline and discuss micro level language and literacy learning contexts in Chapter Four. Chapter Five considers the meso level context and the role of home-school links in supporting home language learning. Chapter Six examines the role ICTs play in home language maintenance and development. These chapters collectively lead to a refinement of the research questions listed in the methodology in Chapter Seven.
CHAPTER THREE

Navigating pathways for home languages in early childhood education

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two focused on the internal and external theories that help explain immigrant children’s experiences in home and school microenvironments. As discussed, widespread immigration has brought with it cultural and linguistic diversity, and this has impacted on educational environments. Many schools and classrooms are now multicultural and multilingual places of learning where children speak two or more languages, and learn one or more throughout their compulsory school education. In addition, the view that immigrant families have a central role to play in their children’s education requires a rethink of educational practice if schools and classrooms are to embrace the cultural and linguistic diversity and realities of many families, and especially those from immigrant backgrounds.

As outlined in the previous chapters, generally children acquire their home language within the context of the family. Predominantly, childcare centres, preschools, kindergartens and schools provide the context for second and additional language learning. In the case of the Basel region of Switzerland, all children learn additional languages with their second, third and fourth languages being generally learned at school. For immigrant children, the second language (or in some cases their third or subsequent language) is also the main community language, that is, German Swiss. In addition, all children must learn Standard German, French and English. The language of instruction in Basel schools is Standard German. This is somewhat different from the main community language of German Swiss. As a result, the extent to which national policy supports both the common, mainstream language as well as immigrant languages is likely to impact children’s overall language learning.
In Switzerland, as in other economically developed countries, national language and local education language policies determine the official language of instruction and which languages are the first and second additional languages to be studied throughout the curriculum. These decisions are influenced firstly by historical developments, and secondly by national agenda on the economic value of the language (Lo Bianco, 2002-2003). In the case of immigrant languages, the political climate largely influences provisions for language teaching in schools and the wider community. Preferences for languages can be affected by prevailing community attitudes and anti-foreigner sentiment to immigrant minority language groups (Cummins, 2000) which can have positive or detrimental influences on the promotion of home languages. This has been demonstrated in Switzerland in a report commissioned by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The UNO commissioner, Diène, found cases of racism and discrimination amongst many immigrant groups and that a tendency towards a xenophobic climate is supported by some political parties (OHCHR, 2007; Wehrli, 2007).

Bronfenbrenner (1989) has highlighted the ways in which historical events shape the political and educational environment and, therefore, the potential options for promoting home languages. As children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds move through the educational system, their life trajectories are influenced by policy, curricula and practice at the school level, and macro events in the wider society. One of the effects of globalisation is that many young people from immigrant backgrounds who do not develop local language fluency and gain appropriate literacy skills leave school prematurely, are unable to find an apprenticeship in the workforce, and are over represented in unemployment statistics.

Chapter Three provides the background context to the study, describing the current ideology and responses to increased immigrant populations, specifically in Switzerland. Firstly, demographic details of immigration, changing world patterns of immigration in several economically developed world countries, especially in linguistically and culturally diverse urban areas including Switzerland are outlined.

Secondly, the reasons for immigration and globalisation are explained, and political and economic influences on language policy are discussed. Thirdly, the main Swiss national and local government approaches to integration and cultural diversity that indirectly or directly influence languages education policy in schools are outlined. Sociopolitical and economic influences on language policy are considered next, followed by language rights issues and issues relating to the status and power of languages. This is followed by an outline of the
demographic and geographic background, and the current general educational and language context in Basel. Finally, examples of overt and covert discrimination manifested in the present political and economic environment in Switzerland are described. It is this web of interrelated and multidimensional factors that combine to influence the sociocultural environments and later, the language and literacy learning of young children in many immigrant families.

3.2 Changing world demographic patterns and reasons for immigration

Early childhood educators in many countries are working with growing numbers of children from immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeking families. In Australia, more than six and a half million people moved to the country since the end of the Second World War (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007), and Australia’s population doubled last century from eight to eighteen million (Ozolin & Clyne, 2001, p. 347). It reached 20 million in 2003 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003). Similar demographic changes have occurred in other countries with high levels of immigration. In Canada, for example, 60 percent of children in metropolitan Toronto attend kindergartens from homes where languages other than English are spoken (Cummins, 1997). The USA census data projected that by the year 2030, some 40 percent of children from kindergarten to year 12 populations will speak a first language other than English (Collier & Thomas, 2002). These changes have vastly increased the number of new immigrant home languages, and contributed to further diversification of school populations (Hancock, 2002).

3.2.1 European contexts

European countries have also experienced significant levels of immigration. Germany, part of the European Union, reported that in one state, North Rhine-Westphalia, two million immigrants make up approximately 11 percent of the population. Of this group 22 percent are non-German speaking, the majority being of Turkish origin (Extra & Gorter, 2001). As a result of increasing immigration from within Europe and from countries such as Africa, European cities have increasingly cultural and linguistically diverse populations (Ozolin & Clyne, 2001). In Switzerland more than a quarter of the population originates from immigrant backgrounds, while Basel has an immigrant population of almost 30 percent with 50 percent of children attending kindergartens speaking home languages other than German.
A contributing factor to increasing immigration activity is war and related internal unrest. Civil and international wars in the Balkans, Iraq, Central Africa and Central America were, and still are, a major reason for many asylum seekers and refugees leaving their homelands. Recent data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNCHER (2007) estimated that there are 32.7 million refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons worldwide. Globalisation, war and increasingly climate changes have become the determining forces behind the culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse groups in urban classrooms in many countries, including in Australia, the UK, North American, Europe and Switzerland.

Also influencing increasing migration and population diversity in Europe has been the disintegration of the socialist/communist system in Eastern Europe and the reunification of Germany (Gogolin & Reich, 2001). Other gradual changes in the political and economic landscape have taken place in central Europe, most notably the expansion in the number of member states in the European Union. There are now 32 member states, all with equal language rights. This makes for a possible combination of some 400 languages across the European Union (Truttmann, 2004). Bulgaria and Romania are the two most recent states to join the European Union in 2007.

Because European Union policies indicate that all people in nation members have the right to speak and read in their language, there has been considerable activity in developing policies that promote language diversity, enrichment and maintenance. Such policies have impacted positively on the status of languages other than English, German and French, the so-called “prestigious or high status languages” (European Union InfoSociety, 2004). Theoretically, the lower status and less spoken languages are now on an equal footing with the high status “world languages.” In practice, however, preference for the majority languages prevail. Although there are 21 “official languages” in the European Union, a survey of the preferred second language used in the Union and the European Council revealed preference for: English (83 percent) German (34 percent) and French (24 percent) (Truttmann, 2004).

3.2.2 Approaches to cultural and linguistic diversity in societies:

The challenge for government integration policy

Governments in Canada, USA, Australia and some European countries have applied a variety of approaches to help integrate their increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse communities settle within the wider cultural context. Models and policies that are commonly
adopted to help individuals from different cultural and linguistic groups integrate into the mainstream society include: assimilation, multiculturalism and cultural pluralism. While these integration policies operate at a macro level, they are mirrored in the micro contexts of educational policy making. Understanding ways in which educational systems and schools have approached the influx of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and promoted language learning and social cohesion, requires some insight into the various integration policies and ways they are implemented.

3.2.3 The assimilation model in educational language policy

This section begins with a description of the “assimilation model,” the first of three kinds of “integration” models used by governments and education authorities to help immigrant families settle into their new communities. In the educational context, the assimilation model focuses on immediate language integration and adoption of the dominant, majority language of the country or community and school. Little or no value is accorded to immigrant minority group languages. In Australia, assimilation policies promoted monolingualism until the early 1970s (Clyne, 1991, p. 2). In France the assimilatory approach to education still prevails. Switzerland traditionally promoted its own four national languages, and has only recently adopted a multicultural approach to language learning (Ehret, 1999).

Assimilation traditionally begins with the presumption that differences in languages and culture will eventually disappear and groups of people will become homogenous. The rationale for this assimilation model is that the new language and culture of the majority society should be transferred as quickly and efficiently as possible to the immigrant children.

The educational aim of integration is for the immigrant child in mainstream schools to learn English in Australia, French in France, German in Germany and in the German speaking part of Switzerland (or French in the French speaking part, for example) so that children blend into the mainstream classrooms as quickly as possible. It is assumed that the minority groups will take on the culture of the majority group and as Cummins (1997) asserted, “leave their language and culture at the classroom door” (p. 101). Indeed, Durgunoğlu and Verhoeven (1998) emphasised: “There will be little chance for education in the minority language when policy is strictly directed at assimilation” (p. 298).

France is an example of a European country with strong assimilationist policies. However, as has been shown so vividly over the past few years, assimilation policies have failed to integrate immigrant families successfully. Recent race riots in France (November, 2005) are a
compelling reminder of the failure of such policies, and the inequalities and injustices that exist in French society today. These most recent riots demonstrate the fragility and inadequacy of assimilationist educational policies in some urban educational school environments to deal with diversity. Bourdieu, commenting on inequalities for immigrant children within school systems, emphasised (1998, p. 20) that assimilation policies in school systems promote and institutionalise social differences including academic outcomes. In France, as in several other European countries including Switzerland, many children of immigrants have poor academic achievement, and drop out of school before they have gained the language, literacy, work and life skills required of them to compete in the workforce and society.

Compounding the already negative impact of assimilation policies and practices are changes in political and community orientations that have lead to a surge of popular right wing constituents, including extremist Neo Nazis, in many European countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland and Germany. Growing Islamophobia, for example, has lead to an increased interest in assimilation policies, and less tolerance and support for some immigrant groups’ cultural and language initiatives, particularly for policies that would support teaching immigrant languages in mainstream classrooms.

Some negative effects of assimilatory oriented policies and attitudes have lead to discrimination, intolerance and religious insensitivity. These negative forces have lead to deep crises amongst some immigrant groups. In France, for example, the 2004 ban on headscarves and all religious symbols in French public schools caused some religious fundamentalist groups to move their daughters out of public schools to religious schools, a reaction that can hardly be considered an effective strategy to promote integration into society. While the French bans received international media attention, there have been less publicised debates about wearing headscarves in Denmark, The Netherlands and Sweden as well as restrictions in some German states (Schmid, 2005, Holenstein, Gross & Ulrich Stöckling, 2006; “France votes”, 2004, The Age, 2004).

Further, assimilatory, restrictive practices in education, and political demonstrations of right wing government initiatives are not confined to Europe. In California, the right wing inspired Proposition 22, prohibited or severely limited bilingual teaching (Cummins, 2001, Crawford, 2002). Many children are now denied the opportunity to develop first language skills in Spanish (or other languages), and are educated in English only (Crawford, 2002, p. 97). The “English only” movement, as it is known, has resulted in the official elimination of Spanish as a first language and the largest minority language in Californian public schools.
According to Cummins (1997, 2001), Garcia (2002), Jaspaert and Ramaut (2000), Reid (2000) and Kroon and Sturm (2000) many assimilation approaches in education are connected to outmoded ideas of pedagogy and child development, and to misconceptions about how children learn. Paneque (2006) and Baker (2000) reported that families are still told by educators to speak only English with their children because children might become confused by two languages and will integrate more successfully at school. Saunders (1988) also reported that teachers and medical personnel sometimes provided false and misleading information to immigrant families. For example, parents were advised that children who were having speech problems should stop speaking their home language. Baker (2000) stressed that bilingualism is not usually the cause of speech, other learning or social problems at school.

In several countries, for example, USA, Germany and Switzerland, children are often refused permission to speak their home language in schools and preschool settings, thus promoting a severe form of language assimilation. Such practices have historical origins in political colonisation and the idea that maintenance of national identity requires one national language. Evans (1978), cited in Cummins, (1997) reported that after the 1870 Education Act in Britain came into force, children were forbidden to speak Welsh and Gaelic, and were punished if they did so. In the United States, in the 1980s Auerbach (1995b) reported that teachers fined children if they spoke a language other than English. Similarly, Öktem and Öktem (1985) reported children were fined 10 to 50 pfennig for speaking Turkish in the Northrhine-Westphalia region in Germany. Today, in spite of a public recognition of multicultural policies and so-called acceptance of home languages within schools, children in some countries still suffer because they have expressed themselves in their home language in school.

The important point here is that sociopolitical contexts influence school systems’ approach to immigrant children’s education, and school language policy in particular. Social and political sentiments act to influence educational authorities’ language policy and the ways that members of the mainstream society promote or discourage immigrant languages. Assimilation policies that aim to discourage home language learning in preschool and primary aged children are contrary to Cummins’ (1981b) widely accepted developmental interdependence hypothesis explained in Chapter Two. According to Cummins, through maintaining a constant level of the first language, children can build on it in the mainstream language (their second language) thus supporting and facilitating their cognitive, and particularly conceptual development. In the light of this perspective, an assimilation approach to educational language policy does not acknowledge and reinforce children’s identity with
their home culture and language. Rather it encourages language loss and promotes disconnection with home cultures. Educational policies that advocate intercultural understanding and unity are needed if home languages are to be supported, taught and celebrated in educational systems (Power, 2000).

3.2.4 Multiculturalism and integration

Multicultural policy was first introduced in Canada in the 1970s, and was also widely adopted as a national policy framework in Australia in the 1970s. A multicultural perspective views cultural diversity as a resource and multilingualism is seen as an economic asset (Lo Bianco, 2002). Multiculturalism typically has an economic perspective, in that languages are perceived both as an asset, and a product that is a form of human capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Relatedly, multilingual ability is perceived as an asset and a potential skill that can be utilised in the workforce.

The concept of multiculturalism has only recently been adopted in Switzerland where it is interpreted as “the positive inclusion of all members of society” (Ehret, 1999, p. 2). However, as described above, there is a considerable gap between the policy rhetoric and the reality of day-to-day life and schooling for immigrant children in Swiss communities.

In order to better promote multicultural understanding and close the policy gaps so evident in countries such as Switzerland, the Council of Europe (a section of the European Union) Cultural Co-operation and Education Committee, commissioned the design of a European Language Portfolio for use at all levels of education. This portfolio, which aims to reflect (prior to May 2004 additions) EU languages for schools throughout Europe, is a multilingual model in fifteen different languages. The goal is to promote language awareness (a major element of the portfolio) and multilingualism so that all children become aware and learn some of each other’s home languages. The portfolio also aims to promote intercultural understanding in response to increasing diversity within countries and school populations. Basel has adopted this language portfolio as a tool to guide planning and assessment in its schools’ languages education programme.

3.2.5 Cultural pluralism

The third model reviewed is “cultural pluralism,” considered similar to multiculturalism, but with some key differences promoted by UNESCO. Cultural pluralism maintains the rules and
values of the majority, and at the same time encourages cultural and linguistic groups’ autonomous participation and development of language, cultures and religions. The main difference between cultural pluralism and multiculturalism in relation to language learning lies in the emphasis on the preservation of the home language (Ravitch, 2003), learning both the home language and culture as well as gaining adequate language acquisition in the majority language, as is the case in the adoption of an interculturalism policy in Quebec, Canada (Padolsky, 2000). On the other hand, a multicultural policy broadly embraces all language and cultural groups but does not necessarily place emphasis on the importance of majority language acquisition. Arguably, cultural pluralism is perhaps a shift from a multicultural policy towards interculturalism, and coincides historically with a shift in an emphasis on immigrants gaining adequate majority language skills. With these skills they are more likely to fully participate in the mainstream community and workforce as in the case of Australia, reinforced by the government in 2007 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003).

In many economically developed countries, because of their emphasis on immigrant groups’ maintenance of their unique identity, cultural pluralism has been viewed in a negative light and with suspicion, especially by right wing segments of society and political governing bodies in the USA, Europe and Switzerland. Evidence of this criticism is the negative image of the global religion Islam, and the marginalisation of some sectors of Islamic societies in many western societies. According to Mattson (2001) President of the Islamic Society of North America, numerous members of the public believe that the Muslim religion is “something bad” after September 11, 2001. These sentiments have been compounded and magnified by the bombings in Bali, 2002, Istanbul, 2003, Madrid, 2004, London in 2005 as well as the Iraq war in 2003-2004 and its aftermath.

Such negative beliefs and opinions are compounded, says Tibi (2002) professor in International Relations at Göttingen Germany and Bosch Fellow at Harvard University, the founder of Islamology (Islamic Studies). He said: “when integration policies do not function, the result is enclaves of immigrants who are against western ideas and globalisation. These immigrants, in turn, promote segregation and indirectly terrorism” [my translation], (p. 23).

The implications of neoracism for educational policy in Switzerland are that public sentiments, especially xenophobia, are reinforced by right wing political parties. In turn, these indirectly influence political and funding support for immigrant languages at the community level, and within the school systems. The recently declining levels of cultural tolerance in many Swiss and European cities have lead to a cocoon-like response from some fundamental
religious groups. Such responses tend to further impact negatively on mainstream community views about particular cultural and linguistic groups.

Given the present world political and economic climate, cultural and linguistic diversity is expected to increase. Prevailing social and political ideologies shape and influence the provisions for children of immigrants. And, as a consequence, current ideologies prevalent in many European countries are not conducive to promoting positive school and social environments for children from backgrounds that are culturally and linguistically different from their peers in mainstream society.

In summary, integration policies have evolved over the past fifty years where assimilation approaches were superseded by multiculturalism. In recent years a shift away from multiculturalism towards interculturalism, and a return to aspects of the assimilationist approach towards a firm commitment to majority language learning has occurred in many countries. Recently the Australian government removed “multicultural affairs” from its Department of Immigration and renamed the department “immigration and citizenship” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007). While in Switzerland, Diène in Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2007) suggested an obvious commitment to multicultural values is needed. Clearly, there is no one solution to integration as each country faces a unique constellation of political orientation and historical background. However, as stated above, a policy that promotes children’s home language and culture as well as the majority language, will best serve the needs of children from immigrant backgrounds.

3.2.6 Language as a right

It has been widely recognised that children learn best when they are confident and competent users of their mother (home) language (Toukomaa & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1977; Cummins, 1981b). According to several key researchers, children of immigrants’ success in education depends on their competence in both their home language and the language of instruction. This is related to both the quality of their language experiences and to the duration of their exposure to the languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004).

This section focuses on the broader context of rights and resource provision for home languages, development and promotion, especially in education contexts. It has long been believed “that the best medium for teaching a child is his (her) mother tongue” (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, (UNESCO), 1953, p. 11). A more
recent and general covenant from UNESCO supports the rationale for home language learning in a sociocultural context when it states that:

In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with others of their group, to enjoy their own cultures, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language (The United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966, cited in Extra & Gorter, 2001, p. 17).

Twenty years ago the EU highlighted home language rights in Europe (Directive 77/486/EEC) indicating that education in the member states:

would include intensive study of the language of the host country and provide more opportunities for teaching the children concerning their mother tongue and culture, if possible in school and in cooperation with the host country. Further it is a requirement of member countries to provide for teacher training and coordination within ‘normal education’ (EU, 2002, p. 1).

Consistent with this perspective, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) explained that “educators should be aware of the fact that minority languages are a human right as well as a resource” (p. 653). Only when the notion of “right” and “resource” are given equal consideration will educational success be possible for children from immigrant and minority language backgrounds.

In the light of these considerations, human rights and education experts proposed recommendations and guidelines for education for the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002). These guidelines apply to minority language groups and immigrant minority languages. The following is a summary of the guidelines from Articles 11-14:

1. Ideally, at preschool and kindergarten level, the medium of teaching should be the child’s language; states should provide this option to parents.
2. In primary school, the curriculum should ideally be taught in the minority language and as a subject on a regular basis. Bilingual teachers who have a good
understanding of the children’s cultural and linguistic background should also teach the state language as a subject on a regular basis. Towards the end of this period a few practical or non-theoretical subjects should be taught through the medium of the minority language.

3. In secondary school a substantial part of the curriculum should be taught through the medium of the minority language. Throughout this period the number of subjects taught in the state language should gradually be increased.

4. States should provide adequate facilities for the appropriate training of teachers and should facilitate access to such training (p. 184-185).

Skutnabb-Kangas (2002) reiterates that researchers are obliged to draw attention to the fact that many countries, including the USA, contribute to ‘linguistic genocide’ (p. 185), and that application of the above guidelines in educational contexts would greatly increase immigrant children’s motivation to learn, maintain their home languages, and strengthen their competence in the language of the school and community, resulting in better academic outcomes.

Central to strengthening home and community languages, Cummins (2002) has argued that “educators must build on the foundation of culture” that underpin language. He added “Any credible educator will agree that schools should build on the experience and knowledge that children bring to the classroom and instruction should also promote children’s abilities and talents” (p. 3).

### 3.2.7 Status and power of languages

The perceived value and status of home languages in the wider community is also important for home language maintenance in the context of the wider community and school. Both Vygotsky (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (2005) have emphasised the need to view languages as part of cultural and historical contexts. With this framework, the politics of language as a vehicle and reflector of power, status and resistance becomes influential in language choice and language promotion in education. One current example of the impact of language power and status from the viewpoint of the early childhood context is in East Timor. Nyland (2004) has described the political influences in, and complexities of, developing and implementing a multilingual educational language policy that encompasses the revived local language of Tetum, the colonialist Portuguese language, Indonesian (as a result of the Indonesian
occupation), and English as the language of economics and trade. Importantly, Nyland also highlighted the key role of early childhood education in reviving the local language and building the other key languages.

Globally, there are many examples of power struggles between diverse political and ethnic groups that influence policies on language maintenance and promotion in school contexts. Two recent examples of the struggles of Kosovo Albanians (Liakova, 2002) and the Kurdish peoples (in Turkey) to maintain their languages, demonstrate the adverse impact of political power plays. In both cases, groups have had to relinquish their own language because they were forced to use the declared national language. According to Durgunoğlu and Verhoeven (1998), Kurdish was not even recognised by the Turkish government as a language until 1983.

Not only do broad political conceptions influence the acceptance of languages, but schools themselves act as micropolitical environments thus affecting the acceptance and promotion of languages other than the main majority language of instruction. Generally, teachers are reluctant to alter their pedagogic practices that fit with their own cultural orientation. A study by Jaspaert and Ramaut (2000, p. 27) in Flanders, showing that many monocultural teachers felt uncomfortable in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms and that multilingualism challenged their teaching tradition, well illustrates teachers’ adherence to mainstream cultural perspectives and community views.

There is supporting evidence for this argument in Bourdieu’s concept of the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1982). The ‘linguistic market’ is a concept that works in a similar manner to an economic market, in that it implies that “the high status social groups who are by definition the natural users of “legitimate” languages dominate the exchange. Minority languages have no part in this market because of the social position of their users” (Bourdieu, 1982 in Jaspaert & Ramaut, 2000, p. 27). Jaspaert and Ramaut emphasise that this fact is fixed in peoples’ minds, and can’t be altered. When teachers in Flanders introduce Turkish in the classroom, no matter how well intentioned: “there is always unequal distribution between legitimate and non-legitimate languages” (Jaspaert & Ramaut, 2000, p. 28).
3.2.8 Section summary and conclusion

As the discussion on the sociopolitical context has shown, there are both positive and negative forces surrounding the status and power of languages. These forces influence community attitudes to home language maintenance and the school’s likelihood of valuing and fostering home cultures and languages. The discussion of the literature in Chapter Two and Five on the home-school connection shows respecting and valuing different cultures and listening to parents holds the key to building trusting, reciprocal relations between home and school that, in turn, support children’s social and academic success. In addition, the ways in which immigrant parents perceive the status of their own language and their beliefs, attitudes, and opinions about the value of their home language as a cultural and social tool, underpins their views about promoting home language learning.

In the light of the sociopolitical context and parents’ role in their children’s education, the perspectives of families from immigrant backgrounds are important voices missing in the general community and educational discourse about connecting with culturally and linguistically diverse children, including valuing and promoting home languages in educational contexts.

Given this largely unacknowledged important dimension of home languages, the integrative conceptual model proposed by Garcia Coll et al. (1996), together with the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) outlined in Chapter Two, and the clear evidence of mediocre educational achievement of children from immigrant backgrounds in Swiss schools, the research reported in this thesis has investigated two fundamental questions: To what extent do immigrant parents (in Basel Switzerland) believe maintenance of home language learning is important? Secondly, if parents believe it is important, why is it important? Before outlining additional research questions, background information on the context of the research is necessary.

3.3 The demographic, geographic, linguistic and educational context in Basel

Geographically, Basel is situated in north-western Switzerland and lies in the centre of Europe. Switzerland is not part of the European Union, although it recently signed bilateral agreements for opening up borders to facilitate workforce participation and education. Basel
is located on the river Rhine bordering on France and Germany and is often referred to as the tri-national area. Basel-City and Basel-Land are separated into half Cantons for political and educational purposes (The Swiss Canton has the political autonomy similar to an Australian state). Although they are joined in the same geographical area they have separate education systems. Basel-City covers 37 square kilometres and Basel-Land, 517 square kilometres.

Today, Basel is a centre for major multinational companies that attract employers from many developed countries around the world. In contrast, Basel traditionally attracted many guest workers in the building and cleaning industry, mainly from southern parts of Europe and, more recently, refugees and asylum seekers from war torn areas in former Yugoslavia and Africa (EKFF, 2002). The population of the Canton Basel is approximately 180,000, and a large majority of the 52,429 immigrants come from European countries.

Clearly, with over one quarter of its population coming from outside Switzerland, Basel is a 'multicultural' city. In response to its substantial ethnically and linguistically diverse population, Basel implemented recommendations from a white paper (Ehret, 1999) on integration policy in education, housing and the workforce. Essentially, the policy has three orienting key principles: (1) Utilising and promoting existing resources and potential; (2) integration as a matter of consideration for all members of society; and (3) “conscious and careful handling of difference,” is required through “closing information gaps” and breaking down prejudices” (Ehret, 1999, p. 28). Furthermore, multilingualism should be reflected in education policy and practice and promoted in schools. However, requesting rather than mandating a focus on multilingualism has meant considerable variation in interpretation and application at the school level.

### 3.3.1 Languages represented in Basel

As already stated in Chapter One, Switzerland has four official national languages spoken in separate geographical regions (German, French, Italian and Romance). The official spoken languages of Basel are Baseldütsch, one the German Swiss dialects, and Standard German. The official written language is Standarddeutsch or Standard German. Children speak and or learn German Swiss in kindergarten. Kindergarten is the first two years of education, and is not a part of primary school. It caters for children between the age of four and six. The second year of kindergarten has recently been made obligatory for all children. Recently, the Department of Education introduced a directive that the language of instruction in kindergarten should be Standard German (Felder, 2005), and all languages of the curriculum
will be taught through Standard German. When children go to primary school (typically between the age of six and seven), they learn to read and write Standard German.

Resulting from these differences, all children learn a second language, (Standard German) when they begin school (Gyger & Erzinger, 2003). In reality, this means that many children from immigrant families must learn Baseldütsch, as it is the local language of the community as their second language, and Standard German as their third language on starting school. While there are some similarities between German Swiss and Standard German, they are quite different in a number of ways, including basic grammar, sentence construction, pronunciation of vowels and some consonants.

While Switzerland has a significant immigrant population overall, the number of immigrants is far higher in the City of Basel than in other areas of Switzerland (Bollhalder, 2003). Renz (2002) reported that 20.5 percent of the current population in Basel are immigrants or migrant workers working on a short term visa, usually of several months to one year duration. Statistics on the number of immigrant languages spoken in Basel vary. About half the children enrolled in Basel City kindergartens (52%), depending on the neighbourhood area, speak languages other than German in their homes (Renz, 2002). In one mixed socioeconomic area of the city (Klein Basel) it was established that children come from 21 countries and speak 20 different languages (“Integrations Prize,” 2001). The lower secondary school consists of 3,588 students (186 classes, and 13 schools) from 71 different countries where 51 different home languages are spoken and 50 percent of the students speak a language other than German as their home language (Bollhalder, 2003, p. 29) [My translation]. The population of the vocational secondary school in Basel is predominantly made up of students from immigrant backgrounds (75%) and they finish school once they have completed nine or ten years of education.

In response to a very high number of immigrant children from predominantly low socioeconomic backgrounds in two neighbourhoods in Basel, a model (St Johann Model) to integrate home languages within the primary school curriculum was introduced about 14 years ago. The model is characterised by integrated lessons in the first languages for all students, special instruction for all students in small homogenous groups in the German language, and integrated special needs and support for learning differences. An evaluation of the model after 10 years of implementation revealed that children attending these two schools reported feeling better integrated into the school than children from regular classrooms in other primary schools (Ilg & Kung, 2003). It was not clear whether there had been a
concomitant improvement in learning outcomes, academic achievement, or in German language proficiency.

In the light of the linguistically and culturally diverse context in Basel, a major task for educational policy makers is to account for the needs and differences in the two categories of language learners in classrooms, those children from Swiss national backgrounds, and children from immigrant backgrounds. Of particular interest in the unique Basel context are ways in which children’s second and additional languages complicate children’s learning, and how to most effectively facilitate school adjustment, learning experiences and educational outcomes.

Figure 1.

* WBS Weiterbildungschule, the lower level stream (More than 75 percent of children of immigrants attend this school). FMS Fachmaturitätsschule, middle level stream leads to studies in social, kindergarten and primary level teaching, nursing. FMS Fachmaturitätsschule: simultaneous school and apprenticeship. SPF Schwerpunktfächer: Main focus subjects.
As can be seen in figure 1. above, Basel-City and Basel-Land have different curricula with different testing systems. The first year of kindergarten has recently become obligatory while education officially begins in primary school for the duration of five years in Basel-Land and four years in Basel-City. Furthermore there are a total of nine years of compulsory education. In order to attend University, students must complete *Gymnasium*.

Matriculation, *Matura*, is the name of the school leaving qualification for university entrance and other institutes of higher education, such as teacher education, and business and commerce schools. Only 20 percent of all school leavers obtain their *Matura* (Battegay, 2004), and the number is restricted and kept artificially low as a “quality control.” Yet in nearby European Union countries between 30 to 60 percent gain the highest secondary school leaving certificate in their country. European Union countries are non-restrictive in the number of students passing Secondary level education and, as a result of this, Battegay argues that students from EU countries have a better chance than Swiss students to study at Swiss Universities [my translation]. Students from European countries may now study in Switzerland due to the bilateral educational agreements with the EU.

Few immigrant students go on to attend university, and many students from immigrant backgrounds only complete the minimum school requirements and have low levels of literacy and numeracy skills. They are increasingly faced with the prospect of unemployment when they lack the necessary literacy and numeracy skills needed for an apprenticeship or to continue school. A recent initiative from the Schweizerische Konferenz für Sozialhilfe (Swiss social welfare office) to help combat youth unemployment, suggested that the school leaving age be increased to 18 years with an increased focus on improvements in literacy, numeracy and vocational skills. But as explained earlier, children’s learning is complicated as there are inherent increased challenges when they are required to learn through their second language. Added to this challenge is the number of additional languages that children are required to learn.
3.3.2 Basel Department of Education language model

As a result of the Basel integration policy recommendations (the positive inclusion of all members of society) described in detail above, and the school reform initiative in 1994 that restructured secondary education (Ehret, 1999; Lauer, 2003) to include a three year middle school section, as well as the Swiss wide national debate (1998) on how to synchronise second language learning within and between Cantons, the Erziehungs-departement Basel Stadt (the Department of Education) commissioned a group of experts and teachers to design a language model specific for the Basel context. (The second languages are one of the national languages, French, Italian, Romance but many Cantons have voted for English as the first second language in primary schools). It is intended that the model will be implemented over the next ten years at all levels of education including kindergarten, preschool and prior to school care in childcare centres (See Table 1 following).

As shown in Table 1 following, the model (Lauer, 2003) called the Gesamtsprachenkonzept, (General concept for languages) promotes multilingualism, and proposes coordination of all languages from preschool settings through to university. The model incorporates all languages in the school curriculum encompassing German, foreign languages and the home languages of immigrants’ children. The model proposes that all children achieve a high standard of spoken and written German and, at least, reach a functional level of competence in a second national language and English. In addition children must have the opportunity to acquire, use and deepen their own home language as well as an additional Swiss national language (for example, French), and other foreign languages.

Specific to the present study, and one of the defining properties of the Basel language model, is that it proposes that children in Basel-City and Basel-Land must firstly be conversant with the German alphabet before they learn to read in their home language. The model also proposes that most home languages and culture classes take place outside school hours for two hours on a weekday after school or on Saturday. Yet the Swiss national and local Basel governments do not finance home language classes outside school hours (with two exceptions). Further compounding inconsistencies between language groups, the consulates from Turkey, Serbia and Spain fund home language group classes outside the school curriculum. Conversely, many other languages, for example, Kurdish, Albanian or Chinese are financed and organised by parents and community organizations. Furthermore, some home language teachers work on a voluntary basis.
Table 1

**Basel-City Schools’ Model for Language Learning.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other</th>
<th>As SPF, Spanish, Latin, Greek, Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Continued as optional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GYM: Basis subject instead of French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>Subject as option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Obligatory second foreign language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remains obligatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May give up in WBS for the benefit of German and home Language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Obligatory first foreign language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remains obligatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May give up in vocational school and replace with German, HLC or in Senior Secondary for Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>Supplementary courses for German as a second language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home languages and culture</td>
<td>Continuous Home Languages and Culture classes (in few schools operates in the school timetable, most classes take place on Saturday or Wednesday afternoon outside school timetable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HLC</td>
<td>HEIMATSPRACHE UND KULTUR (HSK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative methods</td>
<td>Continuous - emphasising at different levels: teacher and class exchanges, immersion and bilingual phases or class groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Awareness</td>
<td>Continual, with emphasis changing at different levels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School level</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| School | Preschool Main focus on German | Kindergarten Main Focus: German | Primary school PRIMAR SCHULE | Middle school ORIENTIERUNGS SCHULE | Vocational Lower level stream WBS* | Senior Secondary (middle level stream) * FMS/BMS/GYMNASIUM | 10th School Year | Vocational And Apprenticeship |
|--------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Age    | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |

Lauer (2003, p. 8), Neue Sprachlernsystem [My translation with additions] WBS Weiterbildungsschule FMS / BMS Fach/Beruf Matura
To date, despite policy rhetoric, financial provisions for immigrant home languages are limited. There is government funding for home language teaching in the two model schools, St Johann and Volta primary schools. While the proposal for home language and culture classes for two hours per week after school is well intended and admirable, a policy without funding is somewhat pointless. It is not at all clear how these home language and culture classes would be funded and no budgetary allocations have been committed. In 2005, a Department of Education request for funding for home language classes in the legislative assembly was rejected. These discrepancies between policy and practice serve to widen inequalities in the school system because immigrant parents are required to pay for the language classes that should contribute to the maintenance of their children’s home language.

As stated previously in this chapter, French is the first foreign or second national language taught in Basel because it borders on the French-speaking region of Switzerland and France. English is taught in the middle level of secondary school, and Latin, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Russian and Chinese are optional. Languages available as additional classes outside the school timetable in primary and secondary education in Basel and the region are: Albanian, Arabic, Brazilian, Chinese, Farsi/Persian, Finnish, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Croatian, Kurdish, Spanish, Latin American Spanish, Macedonian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish, Serbian, Slovakian, Tamil, Turkish, and most recently, English. These classes are not part of the regular school curriculum and are usually funded by parents and community groups.

Equal opportunity and provision for all community languages are highlighted as major concerns in education and society in Switzerland and are key orienting concepts in the white paper on integration policy (Ehret, Basel Government Policy for Migration, 1999). In reality though, as mentioned earlier, home language learning is not an integral part of most children’s timetabled school experience, and there is no resource provision for this purpose.

While the Basel Department of Education initiatives to create and implement the language model are a first step towards fulfilling parts of the guidelines by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for children with immigrant minority languages, they are not accompanied by any resource allocation and, in fact, make provision for home language learning a formal community and family, rather than a school responsibility. Further, there are many inconsistencies between provisions for language groups.

In reality, Basel has been very slow to integrate home languages into the school curriculum, and the new policy is not without opposition. Perhaps this is not surprising given Switzerland’s complex multilingual environment, and the strong commitment to maintaining
its own four national languages (German, French, Italian and Romance). A second major contention is the present battle in and between Cantons over the first and second foreign language to be introduced in the future in primary schools. Proponents of teaching two ‘foreign languages’ in primary school, support the ‘economic resource view’, while opponents believe two languages will cause a decrease in the time available for other core subjects of German and Mathematics.

As a result of this nationwide debate, the discourse surrounding immigrant languages is not a central political concern. Further, there is some acknowledgement of the detrimental effects of “overloading” children whose home languages are other than German, and recognition that there are simply too many languages. To date, there is little understanding of the cognitive complexities of learning several languages, and little evidence of factors that contribute to successful mastery of multiple languages. Most contemporary research focuses on second and sometimes third language learning as in the case of Switzerland and Belgium.

3.3.3 The early years of education as a chance to improve educational prospects in Basel

In an effort to improve future prospects for immigrant children in Switzerland, Lanfranchi (2002a &b) and in Basel, Kessler in Rockenbach (2005) stressed the importance of strong, rich preschool and early school experiences. They claimed that the key to increasing educational outcomes and prospects for future employment is an earlier school start that places emphasise on learning the Standard German language, and the values and customs of Switzerland (Kessler in Rockenbach, 2005). The main point of the initiative is that children should learn one language well from an early age and bypass German Swiss so that they are not required to learn two new languages before they start school. While Swiss children must also learn Standard German, they are accustomed to hearing the language through social and cultural experiences and are exposed to Standard German language daily through the media.

The official integration officer in Basel, Thomas Kessler, and Urs Moser a policy advisor to educators and policy makers, both point to the need to make across the board provision for early care including early education for all families, especially for immigrant children from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that they can learn German before they begin kindergarten (Kessler in Rockenbach, 2005; Moser 2003, 2004). Moser also stated that children should begin formal literacy learning in German in the kindergarten years. However, the recommendations neglect to mention the vital interdependence between children’s home language, second language learning, and cognitive development. The recommendations made
by Kessler and Moser appear to be of an assimilatory nature and regrettably do not stress, with equal importance the value of home language maintenance in young children’s education.

Kessler’s strategies to promote more effective integration of immigrants are not consistent with Cummins’ developmental interdependence hypothesis and framework for intervention. Further, they do not focus on the central role of home language learning in second language competence. However, Kessler’s strategies are consistent with Lanfranchi’s (2002a) efforts to improve the prospects for immigrant children in Switzerland. Lanfranchi (2002a) also claimed that prior to school contact with German Swiss language and culture through home based family childcare, enabled children to learn German Swiss prior to starting school, and facilitated immigrant parents’ ability to communicate with Swiss-speaking mothers. This he argued, better prepared parents for their children’s transition to kindergarten and school, and helped develop children’s early language communication skills in German.

3.3.4 Unequal opportunities and cases of discrimination

Presently in Basel, many immigrant students speaking languages other than German experience school failure and academic difficulties and often leave school after completing only the minimum level of education. Clearly, limited education means limited employment opportunities in a country like Switzerland that relies so heavily on tertiary and knowledge based industry. Only one in seven immigrant students are likely to go to Gymnasium (senior secondary school and matriculate (Volken & Knöpfel, 2004), and even fewer attend University.

The picture is similarly bleak for immigrant school leavers seeking places in vocational training programmes. Very few gain a place in the highly regarded Swiss insurance and banking apprenticeships. A study by the Swiss Federal Commission for Migrants (commissioned by the government) using fictitious written job applications for apprentice positions, found poor job outcomes for young people with Albanian, Serbian and Turkish surnames. Some 90 percent of the same job applications, when lodged with a Swiss name and indicating German as a first language, proceeded to short listing. This research indicated that the discrimination Ausländer youths experienced during job searching were not solely linked to poor school results (Fibbi, Kaya & Piquet, 2003) [My Translation]. In a related Swiss case, it was found that a school leaver with a Turkish immigrant background who applied for 50
apprenticeships and was rejected in each case, was discriminated against because she wore a headscarf to job interviews [My translation] (Mit Kopftuch… [No apprenticeship…], 2003). In both these cases, the overt as well as “hidden discrimination” against non-German speaking background job applicants in some private companies and public sector industries such as hospitals, was highlighted.

In consideration of the earlier discussion on the sociopolitical context, according to Signer in Derungs (2004) Stabsleiter (head of staff) Basel-City Department of Education, while the “headscarf debate” has not been a problem within Basel schools, it can be problematic in “work experience” situations (two week practicum for apprenticeships) while students are still at school. In the Swiss context, work experience typically refers to a two week practicum that helps students gain an insight into a particular trade or profession. What is important, Signer says is “educating students to learn to differentiate between fundamentalism and a headscarf and the ability to learn to make decisions for themselves and within society” (My translation). It is here that intercultural understanding must be promoted through educating the wider community, and most importantly, employers so that there is reciprocal learning, understanding, and respect for diversity within religions and cultural traditions.

In the Basel context, despite some recent efforts to improve educational and employment opportunities for young people from non-Swiss backgrounds, overt and covert discrimination against school leavers from immigrant backgrounds weighs heavily on their future employment chances. In addition many of these students have not, in many cases, developed the necessary literacy skills, and may not have received the foundations for learning in all disciplines.

3.4 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an insight into the sociopolitical contexts that frame and influence educational policies and practices relating to home languages at an international and at the Swiss/ Basel local level. Additionally, approaches to integration policies including assimilation, multiculturalism and cultural pluralism, and their effect on the way languages are promoted in educational systems were outlined. Clearly, the macro context affects the extent to which the adopted country supports children and their families in their efforts to maintain their home language. New developments in integration policy show that the most useful approach allows and supports immigrant families to preserve their own language and
culture, while families also make a firm commitment to learn the majority community language. Also necessary, is a shift in the majority community thinking where social cohesion requires a willingness of all to participate in a dialogue towards intercultural understanding.

Efforts to better support young immigrant children’s learning through early care and education are currently high on the political agenda in Basel/ Switzerland. However, at this point, there is a considerable gap between policy rhetoric and practice. Few children participate in early educational programmes before starting kindergarten, let alone strong, rich language programmes that support home language development and German language skills. Although there are two years of formal kindergarten (for 4 to 6 year olds), immigrant children are immersed in German language with little or no input into their home language and literacy learning. This approach to language learning is continued in the primary school.

Rapidly changing demographic contexts mean that educators need to be sensitive not only to their own history, but also to the major world contexts that have lead to widespread immigration. When early childhood educators are working at the micro level with children from linguistic and culturally diverse backgrounds, an understanding of the macro level effects of globalisation, politics, economics and war is a prerequisite for building effective learning programs that provide for the needs and interests of children. Educators must also seek to work closely with families to ensure that immigrant families better understand the local educational system, and feel comfortable communicating with the school and supporting their children’s learning. Internationally, there is strong evidence that home-school partnerships are implicated in students’ academic success, and school progression and retention.

As indicated in this chapter, in the case of Switzerland, and particularly the Basel region, there seems to be growing community resentment toward immigrant groups, especially from non-EU countries. While there are some policy initiatives to embrace the diversity of culturally and linguistically unique groups, and to provide targeted educational language support in schools, this has resulted in some increased intercultural respect, tolerance and co-operation. However, there is simultaneous community resentment toward several immigrant groups (including two in this study from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia), and non-Christian communities. There are well established inequalities in education opportunities and outcomes (Power, 2000, p. 155). While underlying structural racism and discrimination are largely acknowledged by the Swiss national government, translation into policy and action at the Cantonal level is much more difficult. Encouraging local community thinking beyond individual assumptions and group stereotypes towards broader and more meaningful
understanding interactions with diverse linguistic and cultural groups is an important goal for government and education authorities. A key issue for Basel educators is defining the unique learning needs of children from immigrant backgrounds whose first language is not German Swiss, and those of established resident children, recognising, that immigrant children are learning through a second or additional language.

As discussed in this chapter, international focus on language rights should mean a central concern for policy makers and educators, immigrant children’s right to their home language and how this right is interpreted and supported by schools. In Switzerland, the United Nations directives on the provision for home languages for children of immigrants are interpreted variably and few schools recognise the importance of building literacy skills. Even fewer schools actually support home language instruction within the school curriculum.

In Basel, implementing language policy is complex. Approaches to implementing language policy are dependent largely on the historical developments of the nation and Cantons, the economic value and perceived status of the language, as well as public opinion towards the immigrant groups. Where direct democracy prevails, as it does in Basel, political support and financial provision for immigrant groups and language learning are dependent on public opinion. Historical and recent community commitment to maintaining a strong Swiss national culture, in the face of an already complex national linguistic base, seeks to support Swiss and local traditions rather than promoting diversity, and embracing cultural distinctiveness.

In the light of these issues and, specifically, the complex sociopolitical contexts in which Swiss immigrant families and schools must operate, four key questions emerged: What are immigrant parent aspirations and expectations for their children’s future? How do immigrant parents perceive their children’s future life chances? To what extent do schools afford and implement support for home languages and, how do schools implement government integration policies and initiatives? In addressing this question, the extent to which the education department and teachers recognise the importance of home language learning in promoting cognitive competence in the dominant community language was also explored.

Chapter Three has established that Basel educational practice assumes that it is best for children to learn German, beginning in the early years of education. In seeking to improve the educational outcomes of children from immigrant backgrounds, consideration of international perspectives on the language rights of children and the importance of home language promotion and preservation as proposed by Cummins (2000, 2001), Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, 2004) and further theorists and researchers, should be considered.
In the following chapter, Chapter Four, several micro issues are described and explained, specifically issues of identity construction, literacy learning, reading in the home language and culture, and why these are vital in supporting immigrant children’s foundations for language and literacy learning in the adopted country.
CHAPTER FOUR

The sociocultural context: The importance of home learning in microenvironments

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the social nature of children of immigrants’ language learning, and the role of identity construction and literacy learning in the home and school microenvironments. Bronfenbrenner (1979) said that language learning in microsettings is based on, and largely determined by, the ideologies of the mainstream society. The macro environmental influences in Chapter Three influence interactions at the microsetting level of the home, classroom and community. Chapter Four is concerned with the importance of literacy learning in the home language and culture and why it is vital to immigrant children. It also outlines the role of identity construction in children’s learning, and the key role of this dimension in children of immigrants’ language learning. Chapter Five is concerned with the interconnections in the meso-environment that affect children’s learning from immigrant backgrounds.

Overcoming inequalities in linguistic and literacy educational opportunities for immigrant children is a goal that needs to be addressed by many economically developed countries (Cummins, 2001; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001; Lanfranchi, 2002a & b). Addressing these inequalities requires an understanding not only of the sociopolitical contexts, as described in the previous chapter, but also of the sociocultural nature of the micro and mesoenvironments, and how they influence language acquisition.
4.1.2 Chapter outline

This chapter is divided into four sections: first it shows how second languages are represented in the cerebral cortex of children who speak and learn more than two languages in early childhood, compared to those who acquired a second or additional language later in life; secondly, it articulates the important role of home languages in identity formation and in social, psychological and cognitive development; third, it focuses on the important links between home languages and literacy including family literacy practices, and lastly, it discusses reading in home languages because learning to read successfully in the early and primary school years is a major predictor of academic success (Snow, Tabors & Dickinson, 2001).

In general, many children of immigrants in Switzerland have low literacy levels and generally low levels of academic performance at school. This is shown in the Programme of International Student Assessment results (Hagenbücche, 2003), and explained in Chapter One. Hagenbückl reported that reading results for one in five 15 year olds were at a low level. As discussed in Chapter One, these results prompted Swiss educational authorities to focus on new approaches towards literacy learning for children of immigrants. Central to the discussion on improving literacy learning for children whose home language is not the language of school instruction is the argument that learning to read in a home language should precede learning to read in a second language.

4.1.3 The importance of language development in the early years

Current and past research recognises the critical value of home language promotion in immigrant children’s education. However, there is a considerable gap between rhetoric and practice. The main focus in economically developed countries with large immigration intakes is on commitment to the mastery of the mainstream language in education systems. However, (as explained in Chapter Two) instead of building on the potential of the home languages, classroom focus tends to be on immigrant children’s limited proficiency in the mainstream language, and the strategies and measures needed to boost language learning. There is little room to focus on children’s education in home languages.

The picture is further complicated because in countries such as Switzerland, multilingualism is a central goal in education for all children. As mentioned in Chapter One, children in Basel Switzerland must speak German Swiss, Standard German, French and
English. Many also speak immigrant minority languages proficiently, so some children must speak five or six languages, as is common in some cross national families and in, for example, Kurdish families. The following section offers several insights on how first and second languages are acquired from a neuroscientific perspective.

4.2 Multilingualism, neuroscience and language development in early childhood

New information and insights from neuroscientific research has provided a useful platform for lobbyists promoting education and academic learning for young children (Bowman, 1998; Gammage, 2000; McCraw & Meyer, 1995). Several reports in the past (McCain & Mustard, 1999; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000) and, most prominently, the Early Years Report by Ontario Children’s Services (Mustard & Norrie McCain, 1999) in Canada, point to enhanced capacity for learning in the first few years of life. This report highlighted: “that a child’s brain development in the first six years of life sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour and health” (Harris, 1999, p. 1 in Mustard & Norrie McCain, 1999). In physiological terms, the early years are vital for synapse development in the brain as it is at this time that neural “pathways are formed and signals are transmitted” (Shiver, 2001, p. 2). Indeed, recent evidence on the key function of early brain development provides for a wide consensus and interest on the positive effect of young children’s education.

As a part of the wider interest in early brain development, research in Basel is investigating the effects of multilingualism and brain functions. Wattendorf, et al’s (2001) research, using Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) (neuro imaging techniques) studied two groups of bilinguals, early year bilinguals from three years of age and bilinguals who acquired their second language after the age of nine years. fMRI techniques determined the space and place in the cortex that were activated when speaking first and second languages. They showed that in the early bilingual group, identical areas of the Broca region were activated in first and second languages, that the same region was used to include and integrate later learned languages. In contrast, those who learned a second language after nine years of age used both the Broca region as well as nearby areas. Thus, this group of late bilinguals used more neural space for activating languages. Wattendorf, et al. (2001) argued that this difference in brain function demonstrated that young children learn a second language more readily than those who learn a second language later on in life. These findings suggest that there is a critical period for language learners although further research is needed (Personal communication, C. Nitsch, November 18, 2004). Prior to the Basel project, similar differences
in brain activation between early and later language acquisition were reported by Kim, Relkin, Lee and Hirsch (1997). They also highlighted, evidence of a critical period for learning languages.

Based on the available evidence from the nativist perspective (as proposed in Chapter Two), and more recent neuroscientific research, the argument for a critical period for language learning (UNI NOVA, 2001), together with the evidence from the developmental interdependence hypothesis (Cummins, 1981b), present a good reason to support quality educational provisions for children’s home language, not only in the preschool years, but also in the early primary school years. Further, many and positive experiences with home languages in micro settings contribute to strong identity formation, as will be described and discussed in the next section of this chapter. Relatedly, evidence of a critical period for language acquisition, presents strong support for teaching additional languages in the early childhood years, rather than postponing such teaching until secondary school as is typically the case in countries such as the USA and some states in Australia.

4.3 The role of home languages in identity formation

In the context of globalisation and multicultural societies, a major challenge for immigrant children and youth, and especially those children with dual nationality and perhaps dual ethnicity, is in forming a strong identity (M. Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Identity construction can be especially complex when children participate in more than one culture, and speak more than one language at home. The classic model of identity devised by Erikson (1968) that proposed there is one single identity “can no longer explain the lived experiences of many…children” (M. Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 358).

M. Suárez-Orozco (2001) suggested that those youths well equipped to live and work in a globalised multicultural world will be able to establish multiple identities, (those from cross national or cross cultural families), and will become multilingual and embrace characteristics from the multiple groups that operate in a multicultural society. The most successful youth from bi-national families will form a solid bicultural identity as they learn to value the traditions, beliefs and customs of the adopted society while preserving their own distinct ethnic identity and language.

According to Fishman (1991), language plays an important role in identity formation because it is “the symbol of ethnicity,” and the role of home language acquisition is critical for building a strong cultural identity. The role of other languages contributes to the building
of multiple identities described by M. Suárez-Orozco (2001). Whether immigrant children’s home cultural identities are nurtured depends on the quality of interactions between parents and their children at home, and children and their peers and teachers at school. When home languages and culture are embraced in the school curriculum, children’s home language environment connects through their own experience and identification with home and that of the school (Clarke, 1996; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Volk & Long, 2005). The degree to which these traditions are built upon, and embraced by the school, will assist a child in the process of identity formation. Rogoff (2003) defines home languages within the context of participating in cultural communities. She argues that they are “central to both individual and community functioning as people build on and contribute to community cultural traditions” (p. 79).

For children, the extent to which their home language is valued and supported in settings such as school, childcare or preschool depends on macro influences often outside the influence of children and families. For example, whether or not staff are able to understand and speak the child’s home language, will affect the extent to which they are able to support and promote languages. Yet, given the growing evidence on the important role of language and culture in identity formation, children need to hear and experience their language outside the home. Children need to be assured of the value of their home language especially in their school. This makes it possible for them to believe their language is valued, and that it is a legitimate and natural form of communication that exists on an equal footing with the majority language (Clarke, 1996; Compton-Lily, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Volk & Long, 2005).

As previously stated, home languages spoken by immigrant families play a central role in their children’s identity formation. Positive identity formation begins in the home, and children begin to construct their identity from a very young age (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). Later, as children enter mainstream society, the process of developing positive identity depends on the status of the language and whether or not it is accepted and respected by their kindergarten or school colleagues, as well as teachers in the school and community. Bialystok (2001) claimed that this psychosocial dimension is vital in language learning: “The language we speak is instrumental in forming our identity and being required to speak a language that is not completely natural may interfere with the child’s construction of self” (p. 5).

A similar view was put forward by Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) in offering a poignant insight into the psychological aspect of a young child, who due to structural reasons is transferred to another language group and is “made to want to identify with a dominant group instead of,
Rather than in addition to her own” (xxxiii) (bold face in original text). Further to this psychological dimension, Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) add:

We know that children pick up stereotypical knowledge and understanding from their environment and try to make their own meanings from this experience. Outside experiences can come from parental views, media images and the child’s own perceptions of the way people in their own image are seen and treated (p. 6).

Thus for a child who is bilingual or multilingual, negotiating more than one cultural identity is required according to parent’s language, status, visa, maintenance of roots in the home culture, and in the local neighbourhood. At the same time they participate in the culture of the adopted country and learn the language. Children are negotiating their identity continually. Roberts (1998) in Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) argues that “the process by which all children develop their self-esteem and identity rests heavily upon the type of interactions and relationships people form with young children” (p. 3).

At the same time, Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) warn early childhood educators of “the problem of essentializing people on the basis of a group label…” (p. 20). For that reason Obegi and Ritzblatt (2005) propose that it is important for people who work with young children to understand the process of developing one’s “own world view” before one can understand the world view of others, and that this process leads to developing ‘cultural competence’.

Children’s identity is inclusive of their home language(s) and culture, and the second (majority) language is also vital for developing children’s self-concept. In addition, adopting the values and traditions of the receiving society are equally important to ensure success at school. As Durgunoğlu and Verhoeven (1998) emphasised, “the degree of identification of minority children with the majority culture is crucial for second language development” (p. 131). Subsequently, the quality of interactions with carers or teachers from an early age contributes to either positive or negative identity negotiation.

Maintaining a positive image in both cultures and languages, and acceptance in the majority society has implications for future work prospects in the present world climate. A young woman with Turkish Cypriot origins living in Britain best explains the idea of dual or multiple identities (Küçükcan, 2000):

When I was very young my parents used to take me to supplementary school in order that I improve my Turkish and learn Turkish music and folk dance. They were very
persistent on that and I didn’t like it then, because it was difficult to spend the whole Sunday in school. Now, I realise that I have got similar feelings. I feel British as well as Turkish and a Muslim (p. 129).

Indeed, transmission of culture is important for parents so that their children do not lose the cultural values, traditions and beliefs that connect them to their roots (p. 129). Küçükcan (2000) proposes that many immigrant children develop a series of sub-identities “different forms of being British” (p. 130), In addition, Siraj-Blatchford (1996) in Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) believed “children construct their own identities in association with their perceived cultural heritage” (p. 8).

Addressing the barriers and equity issues in schools requires an understanding of negative labelling of children from immigrant backgrounds and the corresponding negative influence on constructing a positive identity. Many researchers agree with Ogbu’s (in Bronfenbrenner, 1979) conclusion, that minority groups’ “school failure is an adaptation to discrimination and attendant barriers to occupational and social achievement in adult life” (p. 251). Cummins (2001) supported this view by contending that, “any serious attempt to reverse underachievement must challenge both the devaluation of identity that these students have historically experienced and the societal power structure that perpetuates this pattern” (p. 651). Consequently, discriminatory elements in society that influence the perceived value of home languages in education may impact negatively on children’s identity formation.

The critical point in this discussion is that language plays a major role in children’s well being through their sense of belonging, and in forming a strong identity that assist in their daily transitions between the micro settings (Cummins 2001; Küçükcan 2000; Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2000; Wong Fillmore, 2000). As children progress through school, maintaining the home language and culture is particularly important as they adapt to learn the new language and cultural values, traditions and customs while building their cognitive competence.

4.4 Positive environments that promote home languages as well as the majority language

Many sociocultural factors determine whether children will continue to identify positively with their home language and culture as they participate in the mainstream society. Durgunoğlu and Verhoeven (1998, p. 297) concluded that for children to successfully maintain their home language, they need to be part of an environment where the target
language exists in written form and literacy is promoted, and is valued historically, politically, economically and socially. A number of points further explicates each aspect:

a) Historically and politically, the home language(s) is valued and supported in a particular society by the majority-language speakers,
b) Economically, there is perceived utility in maintaining the home language, because of the possibility of back-migration. Socially, the language is important for maintaining group ties or for ethnic and religious identity,
c) A writing system exists in the home language as well as books and literacy materials,
d) Literacy stimulation in the home language is strong enough (e.g. interactive storybook reading at home, high-quality teaching) to provide a good foundation that can later be applied to developing literacy in the majority language,
e) Individuals are able to define their linguistic needs and practices themselves.

Additionally, teachers who speak more than one language will work as supporting links (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 210) in the micro and meso system, which may determine whether or not home languages of children of immigrants will be successfully maintained and developed. The important point here is that links such as parents’ participation in school events or the classroom teacher visiting children in their home, facilitate school-home connectivity.

Given the current political and economic climate, as described in Chapter Three, a solid justification for promoting home languages and cultures in educational settings is necessary. Supporting this justification, after a wide review of the educational literature on linguistically and culturally diverse students in USA schools, Garcia (2002) concluded that children’s education does not suffer as a result of time spent learning their home language at school, and home language maintenance does not negatively affect children’s second language acquisition.

Although Garcia concedes that the processes and mechanisms that facilitate positive transfer between languages are not clear, several other researchers argue (Cummins, 1981b, Durgunoglu & Verhoeven, 1998; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) that in the case of children from immigrant backgrounds, ‘first language plays a vital role in how well their second language develops in mainstream society which, in turn, affects their cognitive development. The main proponents for continued and uninterrupted home language development (Cummins, 1979;
Toukomaa & Skuttnabb-Kangas, 1977) believe that when the majority language is spoken in the home at the cost of the mother language there is a danger of children becoming semilingual in both languages, which in turn has a negative effect on children’s general cognitive development. Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977) argued on the basis of research done with Finnish immigrant children in Sweden, that:

if in its early stage of development a minority child finds itself in a foreign language learning environment without contemporaneously receiving the requisite support in its mother tongue, the development of its skill in the mother tongue will slow down or even cease, leaving the child without a basis for learning the second language well enough to attain the threshold level in it (p. 28).

When conditions in the home and school are supportive of continued home language use, there are positive effects on a child’s cognitive development. In the light of the role of language learning in cognitive development, the next section highlights the specific cognitive benefits of learning the home/mother language plus the majority language.

4.4.1 The role of home languages in cognitive development

There are several cognitive benefits for children arising out of learning in two languages. In particular, researchers have identified the cognitive processes of: control over attention and inhibition (Bialystok, 2001, p. 248), mental flexibility, and stronger abstract thinking (Davolio 2001, p. 44), flexibility in language use and language awareness, (Diaz 1983 in Rogoff, 2003, p. 331) as being specific benefits. Consistent with the theories underpinning this study, Garcia (2002) emphasised the important links between the sociocultural perspectives and children’s language development. He acknowledged:

the sociocultural conceptualisations of cognition have placed language and culture in the centre of cognitive development…children utilize native language abilities as a tool to construct higher-order thinking processes. Limiting their opportunities to learn in their first language will limit their cognitive growth and related academic achievement” (p. 28).
Garcia’s argument is consistent with the notion of the importance of building on early language experiences and extending them throughout the school years. In addition, Collier and Thomas (2002) found that those students who had a large part of their education in their first language were the most successful, and had a high level of bilingualism and school achievement. These findings were echoed in Collier’s (1995) earlier position, that understanding of the notion of “uninterrupted” cognitive development is the key to understanding the need to maintain home languages. Parents and children who continue to communicate in their home language instead of the school second or third language, are building on the child’s real level of cognitive development. Presumably, when children converse in their second language (the majority language of the community) with their parents, they may be communicating at a lower level than they are capable of in their home language, using a limited vocabulary, which often leads to frustration either for children and/or parents (Wong Fillmore, 2000).

As indicated above, the early years are important for maintaining and teaching home languages. A number of key scholars argue that home language learning should take place early in the school programme as it builds the foundations for cognitive and academic development; and especially forming concepts and knowledge in subjects and literacy skills in the second language (Collier, 1995; Cummins, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Garcia (2002) concluded “There is no cognitive cost to the development of multilingualism in children; possibly, bilingualism enhances children’s thinking skills” (p. 81).

Large-scale research by Ramirez, Yuen, Ramey & Pasta (1991) and more recently by Collier and Thomas (2002), Thomas and Collier (1997) in USA supports Wong Fillmore’s position. Skutnabb-Kangas explained that those children who had mother tongue language as the main medium of education in primary school, were more competent in their second language and their general school achievement. The duration of mother tongue education was the most important predictor of educational success ahead of socioeconomic status (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004, p. 3). With this point in mind, ideally then, education in the mainstream majority language should begin early in immigrant children’s life, alongside their home language education, but not before children begin formal schooling, and not at the expense of home language development. Furthermore, Wong Fillmore (1991) believes that second language learning for immigrant children should only begin once children have a good basis in their first language. She explained that too many children lose their first language as a result of learning the mainstream language. This, she argues, can have negative effects on their overall development and especially on the “integrity of the family” (1991, p. 342).
Further complicating the context for learning are those children who live in environments where there are more than two languages as is the case of many immigrant children in Switzerland and across the globe today. Towards this end, Garcia (2002) said: “research that explores specific cognitive/academic functioning of multilingualism … is necessary” (p. 81).

4.4.2 A comparative Australian experience: current arguments for home languages

Australia is often used comparatively in Swiss reports on integration and educational issues. Comparisons are made with the Australian immigration experience because both countries presently have around 20 percent of the population as “foreign born.” Although this study is not about Australia, Australia has always been a country of linguistically and culturally diverse people. Accordingly, it is useful to briefly consider how home and first languages are managed in this traditional immigration country, especially in the light of Australia’s comparative success in international studies of student performance (OECD, Programme for International Student Assessment, 2006b).

The Australian Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, as part of three objectives in the language policy and communication in the national agenda for multicultural Australia (2002), said that “children whose first language is not English should be able to maintain and develop that language through the mainstream and ethnic schools systems” (p. 1). Secondly, it reported that “the Commonwealth will seek to ensure that opportunities to develop cross-cultural understanding are integrated in the curricula of the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors” (p. 1).

But this position has not always been so clear as Makin, Campbell and Jones Diaz (1995), writing about children who have a home language other than English, contended. They said “it is common for children in Australia to reach the end of their primary schooling having gained one language – English - but having lost much of their home language” (p. 52).

They went on to quote from Australia’s language policy which stated that: “Students who have not made adequate literacy development by the end of the third year of primary school are generally unable to make up the gap later in school. The first three years of school are therefore critical for literacy development and suggest the need for early intervention programs” (Australian Government Publishing Service (AGPS), 1991, p. 39, p. 60-61). Makin, et al. (1995) argue in support of the Australian government position that, “where possible, literacy should be established first in the child’s first language” (AGPS, 1991, p. 79, p. 61).
Echoing the need for stronger literacy, Lo Bianco and Freebody (2001) advocate “a series of measures…with specific aims to stimulate more effective literacy education in the early years of schooling, including an articulation with preschool education” (p. viii). Importantly, there needs to be a comprehensive plan to include home language promotion within effective literacy education in early childhood education.

It is reasonable to conclude from the literature reviewed above, that nurturing a positive attitude towards cultural and language traditions is beneficial to children from immigrant backgrounds so that they can negotiate both their home culture and that of the adopted country. Based on the available evidence in the literature, it is clear that positive input from microenvironments plays a critical role in children’s psychological, emotional, social and cognitive development. Therefore, building on the foundations of children’s home language background and knowledge is vital for positive identity construction and cognitive development. Again though, the rhetoric and the reality are very different between policy and practice and, are dependent on the language group and where the child lives. Few schools outside those located in areas with large immigrant populations provide any teaching in home languages within the school timetable.

4.5 Literacy and home languages

As argued previously in this chapter, the early years are important for developing literacy learning. And, as explained in Chapter Two, children’s participation in social and cultural settings both inside and outside the school contributes to their literacy learning. Early home language experiences are an integral part of children’s literacy development, and lay the foundations for lifelong learning. According to both the Australian and Swiss Governments, literacy is an important equity issue. Results from the Programme for International Student Assessment PISA study (OECD, 2006a) show that both countries have room for improvement in developing literacy skills in children who speak languages other than English in Australia and German in Switzerland.

A definition of literacy is necessary in the light of the diverse settings and cultures that are included in this study. The OECD (1996) said “the very notion of literacy has evolved; in addition to reading and writing and numeracy skills, people now also require technological and computer literacy, environmental literacy, and social competence” (p. 39). Essentially, literacy is communicating ideas in both spoken and written forms and grasping and understanding the meaning of messages received. In the early years of life, children firstly
learn oral language and gradually become confident users of their home language. The significance of oral language is often underestimated as a vital element in literacy development. Kazee, (2001), Bloom (1998) and Tabors (1997) all reported that preschoolers add five to ten words per day to their vocabulary. This has obvious implications for immigrant children who start kindergarten and school with a vocabulary and understanding in their home language but very little knowledge of words in the majority language spoken at kindergarten or school. Furthermore, as Cummins’ developmental interdependence hypothesis (1981) supposed, literacy development in the first language helps children learn their second language, and this facilitates knowledge transfer from one language to the other.

4.5.1 Studies confirming the developmental interdependence hypothesis

A wide range of research on children’s literacy learning in two languages, and also some studies between vastly different language systems that demonstrate the positive affects of bilingualism, have been carried out in the past 30 years. The developmental interdependence hypothesis (as explained in Chapter Two), for example, demonstrates that academic knowledge and skills can be transmitted across languages. Consequently, the information from this data is important for designing and informing language programmes for both mainstream and children from immigrant and minority language backgrounds (Cummins, 2000, p. 175).

The following are two examples of studies that focus specifically on children from immigrant backgrounds. Baur and Meder (1992) studied Yugoslavian and Turkish immigrant children’s home language and second language learning in Germany. Data were gathered on more than 800 children in their fifth through to tenth school year from former Yugoslavia and Turkey. There were five significant findings. Firstly, that promotion and support in the mother tongue did not hinder learning German as a second language (this finding being support of the interdependence principle). Secondly, those children who spoke the majority language at home did not speak German better than those children who spoke their mother language in the home. The children who spoke German at home in place of their mother tongue had a lower level of proficiency in their mother tongue than in those families who fostered their home language. The consequence being that speaking German at home did not have a positive effect on their overall language and cognitive development. Thirdly, that integrated home language instruction was considered to be more successful than afternoon home language instruction in separate, outside school classroom tuition. Fourthly, as students increased in age and only
spoke German at home, a gradual loss of the home language was the result. Finally, media used at home in the mother language had a positive influence on their mother language tests [My translation].

Further evidence to support the interdependence hypothesis was reported by Verhoeven (1994) in Verhoeven and Aarts (1998, p. 131) when Turkish immigrant children in the Netherlands were tested on (among other attributes) the transfer of literacy skills from one language to the other (N= 263 Turkish and N= 140 Dutch pupils in sixth grade with a control group in Turkey, n= 276 pupils). It was found that children reached a “native like” level of oral and written language ability in the home language, and children’s literacy ability in both languages was strongly predicted by factors including self-esteem, parent motivation and a stimulating home environment. Evidence from the study, therefore supported the developmental interdependence hypothesis.

The studies by Verhoeven and Aarts (1998), Baur and Meder (1992) and Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977) focused on immigrant children in majority mainstream schools, and shed light on the critical issues that immigrant families face in negotiating their children’s education in their adopted countries. These studies confirm that home language can play an important role in children’s cognitive processes, academic development and achievement. In addition to the studies supporting the developmental interdependence hypothesis, The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1998) explained the value of this cross language transfer in their position statement on learning to read and write. They say that children who must learn to read in the dominant language of the school (in this case English), will learn to read and write in English more easily if they have a good foundation of words and concepts in their first home language (p. 4). Preventing reading difficulties is a major goal in early education today and, for that reason, Snow Burns and Griffin (1998, p. 238) “urge initial instruction in a child’s native language whenever possible.” They also emphasised that a reasonable level of oral proficiency in the first language should be attained before any literacy instruction in any language is introduced.

4.5.2 Distinguishing between functional literacy and school literacy practices

At the primary school level it is important to distinguish between functional literacy and school literacy practices. Functional literacy (Verhoeven & Aarts, 1998) is related to day-to-day living. Current examples would include, writing SMS, letters or e-mails, reading the
newspaper, reading a bill or instructions on how to take medicine, reading a map or an instruction manual on how to load a SIM card into a mobile telephone and load a prepaid phone. On the other hand, academic literacy relates to aspects of grammar and discourse including academic tasks of spelling, reading vocabulary and comprehension and word decoding. As part of their investigations of the literacy level in children of Turkish immigrants in Netherlands, Verhoeven and Aarts (1998) developed a functional literacy test for primary school children that included items found in both Turkish and Dutch households; “a television guide, the front page of a newspaper, an application form and a map” (p. 118). The tests were carried out in the Netherlands and in Turkey. The key conclusion from the Verhoeven and Aarts research relevant to the present study is that transfer of literacy skills between languages L1 and L2 were found which again supported Cummins’ (1981b) interdependence hypothesis. Specifically they found that there was an interdependent relationship between home language literacy skills and those of the school language. Furthermore, school literacy skills had an effect on functional literacy skills, and the level of literacy in Turkish influenced the level in Dutch (Verhoeven & Aarts, 1998, p. 130-131).

To clarify this difference between functional literacy and academic literacy, Cummins (1981b) contended that it is important for educators and practitioners to be aware of the difference between basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic skills. Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) are everyday conversational skills that children use with peers. Cognitive academic language proficiency skill (CALPS), on the other hand, is the academic language of the classroom. Differentiating between BICS and CALPS is important because immigrant children generally acquire conversational skills after about two years in the majority language classroom. However, they need more time, between five to seven years, to achieve academic proficiency (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1981b). Children may quickly achieve conversational fluency, but it takes much longer to develop a high level of cognitive academic proficiency.

Yang and Benson McMullen (2003) confirm that it is important to take account of the distinction between BICS and CALPS. They added another dimension to the discussion that requires further consideration when working with children who speak a language other than the majority language. This dimension is best explained through an interview with a mother named Da (quoted by Yang & Benson McMullen, 2003) from Korea who was living in the USA. She said:
My child’s teacher did not appear to realize that my daughter had developed her ability to understand English much more quickly than her ability to speak... Mistakes made in spoken second language do not infer a low-level of cognitive ability (p. 13).

This point, which defines a clear difference in understanding a language and the ability to speak a language, is significant in that differences between individual children and diverse home languages lead to different patterns of spoken language use and understanding between groups. Educators must learn to recognise these important differences in children’s second language development.

Literacy development in minority language learners’ home language and that of the majority language is therefore dependent on effective practices that support both languages in microsettings. Ideally, integrated home languages in the school setting should be the norm, and fundamental to literacy development.

4.5.3 Family literacy

As explained in Chapter Two, Auerbach drew attention to the importance of family literacy from the “potential perspective” as a key aspect of literacy development in children (1989, 1995b). This section focuses on the role of family literacy in immigrant families because schools should capitalise on the strengths of the family to enhance learning, and help children succeed at school.

Family literacy is difficult to define because it depends on the sociocultural context and situation of each family. Conventionally, literacy is defined as

the ability to read and write prose and other print texts,... [and] is an integrated complex of language and thinking processes and skills, incorporating a range of habits, attitudes, interests and knowledge, serving a range of purposes in different contexts (Victorian Department of School Education and Catholic Education Office of Victoria, (1994, p. 329).

Kazee (2001), from the National Center for Family Literacy in the USA, offers a workable and broad definition of literacy for use in early childhood environments. She says that literacy includes “singing, playing make believe, creating art, writing in journals, asking questions, playing word games, speaking and telling stories” (p. 1). All of these activities can be
categorised as ‘family literacy’ practices if they take place as everyday occurrences in the family, extended family, with friends, neighbours and community. This definition is extended in the present study to also include use of technological devices; for example with computers, mobile telephones, including the function of SMS and MMS, fax machines, television, tapes, videos, discs, interactive toys and games.

Family literacy typically includes practices that occur within the family and extended family at home, community or church, mosque, synagogue, temple or any religious place of worship, in everyday situations as opposed to school practices that are connected to school types of homework such as reading and writing tasks (Cairney, 1994; Morrow, ed., 1995). Family literacy practices may also include learning a second language as is the case in some Turkish families where Arabic may also be learned in addition to the main home language.

Family literacy practices are important because a) they contribute to children’s overall social development and cognitive development, and b) children are more likely to build on everyday experiences that take place in the home if they are exposed to such practices in an incidental manner. These activities are part of distal family resources that can contribute to the ‘proximal processes’ in development described by Bronfenbrenner, (2005) and explained in Chapter Two. The crucial point in the significance of family promotion of literacy is that literacy activities must be meaningful, take place on a regular basis over time within a caring family and or community, and build children’s knowledge of their world.

**4.6 Reading and home languages**

Key researchers have long pointed to the important role of the family in children’s education. Probably one of the most significant underpinnings of a child’s education is a successful start in learning to read. Evidence suggests that reading success again is determined by multiple environmental factors including children’s internal biological sensory functioning, and significantly the role of the family in supporting children’s learning. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) considered reading to be an example of a proximal process. He emphasised the importance of frequent and enduring interactions that take place on a regular basis, in this case, the opportunity to read with others in the family or community.

According to Verhoeven and Aarts (1998), reading activities in the home contribute to stimulating home environments and play an important role in all children’s cognitive and academic achievement. Other researchers support this view. Huey, in Morrow (1995) argued as early as 1908 that the most important activity in a child’s education occurs when parents
Parents who read to their children from an early age are helping their children learn “meaning from print, using knowledge about the written alphabet and about getting knowledge about the sound structure of oral languages for purposes of understanding” (Rowe, 2005; Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998, p. vi).

Added to the advantages of a stimulating home environment, according to Snow, Tabors and Dickinson (2001), is “evidence suggests that learning about letters and sounds presupposes knowing a lot about the internal structures of words - knowledge that is hard to acquire without first knowing a lot of words” (p. 3). It makes sense then to begin to read in the language that a child already knows. They added: “even the fairly straightforward system of how letters represent sounds is simplified if children can learn and practice it by reading words that they know” (p. 3). Clearly reading to children in some home languages is not always possible because of a lack of reading material and an absence of a written language or absence of suitable books for young children. This can be especially true in the case of some immigrant languages.

The question of reading in the home language or the second language is not of itself of major importance rather the amount and frequency of reading appears to be the main indicator of success. Research in 32 countries on the amount of time children spend reading in the home language has shown that frequent and wide reading in the home language is a predictor of school success (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992). Yet children learn to read in their second language in many countries around the world. Added to this dimension is the question that Cummins (1999, p. 31) posed: “Will students suffer academically if they are introduced to reading in their second language?” He believed that “learning to read in a second language does not determine academic outcomes.” Further, a large-scale study by Collier and Thomas (2002) provided one clear answer to this question. They highlighted that the first language is “the strongest predictor of student achievement is [the] amount of formal L1 schooling. The more L1 grade-level schooling, the higher L2 achievement” (p. 4).

Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) address the Cummins’ question about the impact of learning to read in a second language and provide a more differentiated response to the pros and cons of learning to read in a second language. After a wide review of the literature on bilingualism and literacy, Snow Burns and Griffin (1998) concluded that, “initial literacy instruction in a second language can be successful… [But it] carries a high risk of reading problems and of lower ultimate literacy attainment than initial literacy instruction in a first language” (p. 238). This risk may be compounded by other adverse environmental psychosocial factors such as “…poverty, low levels of parental education [and] poor
schooling…” (p. 238). Snow Burns and Griffin concluded from “research findings and theories about literacy development, that initial reading instruction in the second language can have negative consequences for immediate and long-term achievement” (p. 238). Resonating with Cummins’ views regarding children learning to read in their second language, Snow Burns and Griffin argue that children may suffer academically when they are introduced to reading in their second language, and when they have not developed adequate oral communication skills in the second language.

A major problem faced by many children from immigrant backgrounds when they begin school is that they lack the prior vocabulary and knowledge in the language of instruction. “They are confronted with the task of analysing knowledge they have not yet acquired” (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998, p. 237). Majority language speakers have already learned to use about 10,000 words before they are six years old (Bloom, 1998), while minority language children must catch up. Typically, this vocabulary deficit may affect minority language children in a negative way when they spend their whole school day immersed in a new language and are not able to build on their vocabulary in their first or home language. As Wong Fillmore (2000) says, the consequences of this loss can have a major impact on the social and psychological development of children and their ability to communicate effectively with family members as described in section 4.3 of this chapter.

Compatible with the deficit ideology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Auerbach, 1995b) as explained in Chapter Two, Snow, Burns and Griffins (1998) examined reading difficulties across all socioeconomic groups. Their aim was to shift focus from the perceived deficits in children’s language/s as well as the language they had not yet acquired, to preventing reading difficulties generally in young children. They found that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds including many non-English speakers, and those living in urban areas were at a higher risk to learn to read adequately. A major reason for the disadvantage lies in the form of assessment: “immigrant minority children are tested in the majority language, their second language” (Snow, Burns & Griffin, p. 28). They argued “there is a lack of clear consensus about the advantages and disadvantages of academic instruction in the primary languages as opposed to early exposure to English” (p. 29). They suggested that the reason for this problem is that there is a mismatch between schools and families in the way they define literacy and teacher and parent teacher roles. Further reasons for the problem were low motivation and aspirations, discrimination and basically inferior education.

In support of learning to read in the home language first, Krashen (2002) believed that “learning to read in the primary language is a short cut to reading in the second language”
(p. 147). Krashen said there are three general factors that are important in learning to read:

1) Children learn to read by reading, by understanding what is on the page,
2) It is easier to understand text in a language you already know,
3) Once you can read you can read, reading ability transfers across languages
(p. 143).

To conclude this section, the literature review revealed that transfer of academic knowledge from one language to another is possible. This includes transfer in literacy and reading ability, provided the environmental conditions are favourable. Secondly, there is no doubt that learning to read widely and frequently is the main ingredient to ensure children’s school success. Most children from immigrant backgrounds first learn to read in their second or other language and, whether they are successful in this task depends on many factors such as motivation, home stimulation and parent education.

4.7 Conclusion

It is clear that positive interactions in the microenvironments play a critical role in children’s psychological, social and cognitive development. Recent focus and findings in neuroscientific research have informed society and educators of the vital importance of the early years of education for language development, and those years lay the foundation for later learning.

Building on children’s social, cultural and linguistic background is vital for forming a positive identity. It is also evident from the review of the literature that nurturing positive attitudes to cultural and language traditions is beneficial to children from immigrant backgrounds so that they develop a strong sense of belonging, and are able to negotiate both their home culture and that of the adopted society.

The literature also highlights the important dual role that immigrant parents play in their children’s education. The dual role requires those parents, who decide to promote the home language, not only to support mainstream language learning and school literacy activities in the home, but also to ensure that the home language is fostered and maintained. By helping to facilitate learning in both languages they are facilitating conditions to support transfer across the languages that will eventually benefit their children’s social and academic development.

In addition, priority, time and space must be given to home language and reading in the early and middle years of education as a vehicle for immigrant children to build their literacy
skills. Given that reading depends on available print material as well as instructional matters, consideration must be given to how home language resources could be provided in mainstream school systems. Both parents and teachers need to work in collaboration to help build a good fund of resources for children.

As outlined in Chapter Three, government and education policy support multilingualism. However, support *in principle* is not enough alone. The evidence in the literature is quite clear - the course for developing and establishing competence in languages is set early in life, therefore developing proficiency in the home language *in addition to* proficiency in the second languages must be a part of all children’s education from immigrant language backgrounds. The literature review also established that interactions and relationships between the home and school are vital to support children’s literacy and reading in both languages. Parent involvement and the relationship between the family and school in relation to their children’s language learning is the topic of the following chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

Home-school connections in immigrant families

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter, Chapter Four, focused on the role of identity construction and literacy learning in children’s home language and culture. This chapter focuses on the interconnections between immigrant families and their children’s schools. As stated in the previous chapter, a child’s continued uninterrupted development of his or her first/ home language (Collier, 1995) is vital for developing a positive attitude to his/her language and identity formation. Reaching back to the theoretical perspectives in Chapter Two, these interconnections draw on a deep examination of factors that help conceptualise the role of the home and the school in language learning, especially home language learning. The important role of home-school partnerships is considered a vital element in meeting the needs of children and families.

Research shows that effective home-school communication and parent involvement in children’s education enhances educational success and academic outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cairney, 2000; Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Clark Salinas, 2004, Ferguson, 2004; Sanders & Epstein, 1998). Caplan (2000) reported that the benefits of parent involvement include better scores on tests, attendance and graduation rates, more completed homework, positive attitudes and behaviour, and an increase in enrolment in higher education.

A dimension that has rarely been explored in home school partnerships, yet recognised as crucial in children’s language development, is the way parents facilitate their children’s learning in home language and culture as “they build the foundation for their children’s
academic achievement, positive self-concept, and appreciation for their multicultural heritage” (Auerbach, 1995a, p. 25). Home-school interconnections are especially important in supporting home language maintenance, yet it is a dimension that is exceptionally complex because of inherent cultural and language barriers. Accordingly, this chapter is also concerned with the extent to which parents and teachers communicate and collaborate in an effort to support children’s home language development.

5.1.1. Chapter outline

The main goals of this chapter are (a) to consider ways in which home language and cultural dimensions, as external environmental elements, feature in the home-school partnership discourse, (b) to explore the role of home-school interconnections in the development of home languages in children from immigrant backgrounds, and (c) to establish whether this connection is supported in mainstream education systems.

The chapter begins with a rationale for promoting home school partnerships and an explanation of a framework for developing partnerships (Epstein, 1995) is presented. A review of the mesosystem follows, focusing on inter-setting home-school linkages (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2001) as introduced in Chapter Two. This section then focuses on the role of social capital in home-school communication as a defining element in partnerships and forms of action for both parents and teachers. The deficit perspective is also discussed in the light of home-school interconnections. General frameworks of involvement are outlined, and parent involvement typologies are examined in the context of urban immigrant minority family experiences in their children’s education. Thereafter, issues are outlined specific to home-school partnerships in Basel. The chapter concludes with the research questions that draw on the main concerns identified that centred on immigrant families in the Basel context.

5.1.2 Rationale for promoting home-school partnerships

Theoretical perspectives pertaining to the external environment, informing the study outlined in Chapter Two (Bronfenbrenner, 2001) suggested that parents hold a central role in the education of their children, and that families should be supported in carrying out this role. The challenge lies in how teachers share this role with parents, and how parents maintain a sustained constant effort in supporting their children during their school years. Generally, it has been reported that teachers in mainstream education systems in economically developed
countries are unprepared for this role (Sanders & Epstein, 1998, p. 495), and many parents have increasingly little time to fulfill educational and support roles due to “work-family conflicts” (Bronfenbrenner (1988, in 2005, p. 261). Immigrant parents have the added challenge of negotiating new cultural expectations in their communities, including supporting their children in a language that they may not master with efficiency and competency.

5.1.3 A framework and definition of home-school partnerships

Promoting relationships between the family and school can support children’s language learning (Epstein & Clark Salinas, 2004). Leading school community researcher Joyce Epstein (1995, p. 702) has long been concerned with how the three intersecting spheres of influence 1) home 2) school and 3) community might form the basis for a partnership, and how these affect children’s school success. The three spheres are divided into an “external” and “internal” model (1995). The external model encompasses the environment of the school, community and home while the internal model is concerned with the actual interpersonal relationships that take place between people in the three environments. Communication at the institutional level, for example, might be an official invitation from the school. Communication at the individual (internal) level takes place in the form of person-to-person contact. In discussing these intersecting spheres of influence, Epstein (1995) emphasised that students may play an important role in facilitating these internal relationships as children often act as cultural brokers between the family and school (Orellana, 2001). The overlapping spheres of influence are clearly the most effective when parents know the ways of the school and feel comfortable with its goals and practices and teachers are supported in their efforts to help children learn.

Epstein (1995) proposed that the child is clearly at the centre of the model; “the inarguable fact is that students are the main actors in their education, development, and success at school” (p. 702). The child is situated similarly in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model discussed in Chapter Two. However, more recent frameworks for home school partnerships place the family at the centre of sociocultural contexts (McKeand, 2003), for example, in the case of developing mathematical literacy (Goos, et al. 2002). In this sense, they say, children learn in many different contexts. Given the diversity of home and family backgrounds it is clear that families constitute different learning environments, and children have vastly different home experiences including language and literacy experiences.
5.1.4 Partnerships as accountability criteria in schools

In Australia, the U.S. and the UK, home school partnerships are an ‘accountability criteria’ (Lopez, 2001) in schools. As a result of this accountability, increasing demands are placed on educators as they become responsible for developing and fostering improved communication between the home and school. The No Child Left Behind Act in USA, for example, requires that Title 1 (one) schools develop effective partnerships with families (US Department of Education, 2001). Also there are many initiatives to foster partnerships in the National Network of Partnership Schools (Epstein & Clark Salinas, 2004). In Australia, the Quality Improvement and Accreditation Scheme of the Federal Government require childcare centres to involve parents in centre decision making (R. Elliott, 2003; Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). All policy documents at the school level also contain explicit statements about improving home and family connections in children’s schooling. By implementing these criteria, children’s and families’ needs could then be addressed in a collective goal towards building children’s school success.

5.2 The mesosystem and home languages

This section of the chapter is concerned with the interconnections in the mesoenvironment that affect learning for immigrant minority children. It is based on the theoretical principle of interconnectedness (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 54). Interconnections relate to children’s internal setting experiences, as well as the impact of the consequences of linkages between micro settings of the home and school. As already explained in Chapter Two, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) provides a framework for studying children within a set of relationships that take place in and between different environments (See figure 2 below). The home school interconnection is described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as a main element of the mesosystem, “a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person becomes an active participant (p. 209).” He explained that the child who begins school is the “primary link” and there are also supplementary links, such as the child’s mother who attends a school meeting, or the child’s teacher who makes a home visit or the child brings a friend home from school. Figure 2 illustrates the importance of fostering a positive attitude to home languages in children in the home and school.
Figure 2
The Mesosystem and Links Between the Home and School (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained there must be a focus on personal communication in descending order of importance: “face-to-face, personal letter or note, phone, business letter and announcement” (p. 217). Secondly, communication and development will be enhanced when:

- processes of interchange between settings are bi-directional, sustain and enhance mutual trust and goal consensus, and exhibit a balance of power favourable to those linking parties who facilitate action in [sic] behalf of the developing person (p. 218).

5.2.1 Communication at the interface between families and schools

Several factors are important to consider at the interface of communication between families and schools. These include collaboration, building mutual trust and effective partnerships. Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that children’s transitions between settings are effective if the system has multiple links, such as, if the child’s parents, siblings or other family members help with the transition by meeting the teacher at school with the child (p. 210). Part of this transition process is also communicating positive attitudes to home languages and culture in children’s learning. In the case of immigrant families, when a child begins school, one or both parents may have a low level of competence in the majority language. Compounding this matter, when teachers do not speak the child’s home language, getting beyond simple greetings to facilitate effective communication, is a difficult task.
These elements of trust, collaboration in relationships and attitudes towards languages are what Rogoff (2003) believed “pervade individuals and communities” (p. 195). They are the cultural values and traditions that are part of interactions between people on an informal basis, and on formal occasions. When the formal and informal come into contact, the interface between the child and culture also enters into the picture, as do the variations in child rearing customs and the psychology of the caretakers (Super & Harkness, 1986, p. 545) must also be considered in the context of home school communication.

5.2.2 Links between the mesosystem and social capital

Connecting the theoretical perspectives highlighted in this chapter is the role of social capital as it works directly into the mesosystem through establishing links between settings. Social capital is “the raw material of society,” and it is based on people’s daily interactions (Bullen, 1999), networks and values. Important elements of interactions are trust and collaboration. Social capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Coleman, 1988, Putnam, 1993) links directly into Bronfenbrenner’s mesosystem where mutual trust and collaboration are considered the essential components for developing successful relationships between parents and school settings for the good of children. Furthermore, social capital is a vital element in immigrant family members and across generations. Those immigrants who have lived in the receiving society for many years, and know the ways of the education system can share their knowledge with new arrivals. Significantly, these family relationships and networks are based on mutual trust or what is considered by Milardo, ed. in Moll and Greenberg (1990), as confianza. They said that there are zones of knowledge that are the “complex interconnections bonding families to their social environments of kin, friends, neighbours, co-workers and acquaintances (Moll & Greenberg, 1990, p. 9). Social capital is therefore produced in interactions between people in communities in everyday situations.

More recently, the literature has focused on building communities through strengthening social capital to create communities of learners and social cohesion (Bryan, 2005, Epstein & Clark Salinas, 2004; Warren, 2005). In the context of this study, social capital can be viewed as a willingness to share responsibility in a community as a parent or teacher, and to participate in children’s life in a positive and effective manner. This requires participation and division of tasks and cooperation to share knowledge about children. In this sense, social capital strengthens the quality of partnerships for families and their children with the community.
In thinking about the school experiences for children of immigrants’ language development and tapping on potential resources, “social capital refers to people as creators not victims” (Cox, 1995, in Bullen, 1999, p. 5). A second aspect of social capital in the context of this study, is also associated with the notion of empowerment in family literacy practices, thus parents are “creators” rather than recipients of intervention school practices (Auerbach, 1995a).

In Germany, Weiss and Thränhardt (2005) reported on the interconnections in Turkish-Aleviten and Spanish immigrant parent associations. The Spanish parents networked with social advisors, teachers, Spanish priests, consulates and embassy services. Secondly, the Turkish-Aleviten are closely oriented towards Turkey, Turkish culture, beliefs and values from their home country and they are also well integrated politically and socially in the receiving society. Weiss and Thränhardt (2005) believed that local social capital was created through self empowerment, where parents employed a dual strategy towards keeping ties with their home country institutions while at the same time participated in, and were geared towards, the receiving society. In this respect they became transnational (My translation).

5.2.3 Funds of knowledge: Community resources within immigrant families

Facilitated and found within these zones of knowledge (as described above), are also funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). Moll et al.’s. research drew on the knowledge and skills found in the households of children of immigrant families from working class Mexican communities in Arizona. Funds of knowledge are skills that children gain through their participation in the labour activities in family households. They called these community resources “funds of knowledge.” The concept of funds of knowledge was first proposed by Greenberg (1989) and Vélez-Ibáñez (1988). Moll et al. proposed that teachers could draw on children’s experiences such as acting as a mediator between their parents and local government officials, helping with household chores, or visits to extended family over the summer vacation to their parents’ home country in Mexico. The children’s life experiences are then connected to the school curriculum, and children became active participants instead of passive recipients of information. Furthermore, Moll et al. proposed that teachers could act as a bridge between the children’s home and school world.

According to Moll et al. teachers gained an insight into these funds of knowledge through visiting children’s homes and inviting parents to talk at school. Through these experiences, teachers were able to gain an insight into a different culture and ways of understanding family
life, and the networks between families. The Moll et al. research helps explain how home-school connections can develop new forms of classroom practice where teachers take on a new role as learners. In adjusting their role to embrace and build on the funds of knowledge within families, teachers can create richer, more balanced relationships with children and parents (Moll et al. 1992, p. 139).

5.2.4 The deficit perspective

Elaborating on the discussion of the deficit perspective in Chapter Two, this section explores the educational discourse that is based on children’s limited proficiency in the mainstream language. The deficit perspective ignores the strengths and cultures of immigrant family homes, whereas these strengths should be considered the starting point for children’s learning at school. Rarely is the focus on the potential of children’s home language as a human resource in society. In addition, the home school discourse does not adequately address the element of cultural differences between families and mainstream school systems.

In the sense of developing social capital in home-school relationships, Suárez-Orozco and Gardner (2003) recommend that families and educators need to build communities “to replace hierarchies and guarded special interests- with a sense of shared mission and joint accountability” (p. 33). Further, Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) asserted “privileged groups… often have an interest in supporting the status quo to protect their advantages, the dynamics of such efforts often become a central focus of critical research” (p. 281).

Issues surrounding immigrant children’s home language maintenance and the sociopolitical structures of discrimination within society, help to explain the importance of effective communication between parents of immigrant children and teachers. Even when the adopted school policy promotes the majority language at the cost of the home language, parents should be told that the school also values their home language and that it is vital for their children’s overall cognitive development (Wong Fillmore, 2000).

Missing in the literature is a focus on ways in which home-school communication might address home language maintenance as children learn the majority language in the school. Wong Fillmore (1994) identified several reasons why parents from some minority groups in the USA stopped speaking their home language to their children. Some parents believed that the majority language of the country was more important because the home language cannot be used outside the home, and it may also symbolise low social status. Others believed children who used the home language would have less success at school. Children want
acceptance from teachers and peers and the majority language is often perceived as the key to acceptance. On account of the desire to be accepted, the home language is neglected or rejected.

5.3 Immigrant parental involvement in their children’s education

5.3.1 Defining involvement: From whose perspective?

Parent involvement is often defined from a western economically developed country middle class perspective. According to C. Suárez-Orozco (2001), parent involvement is usually determined by middle class standards, such as volunteering for classroom assistance and ensuring children’s homework is completed, involvement in parent teacher organizations, and parent-teacher conference attendance. Lopez (2001) believed that the middle class definition of involvement is problematic for many immigrant and minority families, and added: “predetermined involvement typologies… cause marginalized parents to be labelled uninvolved” (p. 432). A broad definition of parent involvement is simply where parents are involved, and might facilitate their children’s learning rather than being “involved” in the above types of school programs. Ideally, “involvement” should reflect relevant values of the local community and embrace the culture and community ways. Hughes and MacNaughton (1999, p. 27) argued that teachers needed to be agents of social change and co-creators of expertise, and adjust from acting as the expert to collaborate with parents to facilitate a model of involvement that is consistent with family needs and values aligned.

5.3.2 Factors that contribute to children’s learning in immigrant homes

Understanding how minority children learn in their homes has been the topic of many studies in USA (Snow, Tabors & Dickinson, 2001; Heath 1983; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman & Hemphill 1991), in Australia (Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995; Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid, 1998), and in Switzerland (Lanfranchi, 2002a). The literature has overwhelmingly shown that all parents are interested in their children’s education. Many immigrant families perceive education as the key to improving their socioeconomic status, and the desire to gain an economic advantage through obtaining a good education may be a decisive factor in emigration (Louie, 2001). Yet, according to Auerbach
(1995a), many teachers and schools believe that marginalised parents are not involved in their children’s education, and that the deficits are still sought in immigrant families.

Lopez (2001) proposed an alternative conceptualisation of involvement that is not limited to those types of involvement defined in traditional home-school partnership frameworks where parents facilitate their children’s learning. He said that involvement should be facilitating children’s learning in sociocultural values and lessons from life that families transmit to their children, and he stressed the need to seek out those forms that are yet to be acknowledged as legitimate involvement. These more open concepts of involvement include tapping into the potential of the funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992) that are often found in immigrant families. Lopez (2001) proposes the need to explore alternative conceptualisations of parent involvement activity. In this sense, parents in immigrant families are involved in their children’s learning although not perhaps in the traditional way of the majority society.

5.3.3 Conflicts in parent involvement

The review of the literature on parent involvement in children’s education revealed that communication between immigrant parents and schools was a contentious issue, which often lead to conflicts between teachers and parents. These conflicts acted as barriers to effective involvement and, therefore, student achievement (Cummins, 1986, 2001; Bryan, 2005). Some examples of conflicts between schools and immigrants from vastly different backgrounds were voiced in several research studies. Insights from studies in the USA (Pryor, 2001) show that many parents from former Yugoslavia, who entered the USA as refugees, felt ‘overwhelmed’ in adjusting to the new culture and language.

Ramirez (2003) interviewed immigrant parents from Latin America and teachers in a school district in Southern California. Ramirez concluded that a key problem occurred when different languages and cultures are not considered important or valued by educators. Mexican American immigrants reported feelings of frustration because they did not understand the structure and ways of the school system. Parents believed that schools were not receptive to their needs as parents. Interactions between parents and teachers were found to be difficult, and were often one-way from school to home. Ramirez believed a key finding in the Californian study was low teacher expectations, and a focus on perceived deficits of immigrant children that, in turn work negatively on children’s school progress.
5.4 The Basel context and home-school interconnections

Switzerland is a country having difficulty in coming to terms with large numbers of immigrant families from non-European countries in which German is not a first, second or third language. Basel-City has developed a comprehensive range of strategies to enhance and facilitate effective integration of immigrants into society. The Basel region was recently compared with Berlin-Neukölln and the Banlieu of Paris in a positive light, for developing successful integration strategies for second-generation immigrants from European countries (Keller, 2006). Studies of immigration in Basel (Wirth, 2005) revealed that German and Italian immigrants are long-term and established, and therefore more readily accepted and integrated into Swiss society than those who have emigrated more recently from non-European Union countries. In Basel, the Department of Education published guidelines for schools to initiate home-school communication, as outlined in Chapter Three, but traditionally there has been little if any explicit or active outreach to families.

Adding to the complexities of integrating immigrants into society, is the phenomenon that Swiss parents choose to live in areas where schools have the least number of children speaking immigrant minority languages (Holenstein, Gross & Ulrich Stöckling, 2006) and immigrant families tend to live in the most underprivileged neighbourhoods. Therefore, minority language children’s social interactions with Swiss children are limited in the local community. These limited interactions lead to what Snow in Tabors (1997, p. x.) called the “double-bind”: children can only learn the new language when they have social contact with children speaking the local language and until they have learned to speak the local language, social contact is limited. As a result of this double bind, “fear of the different prevents the contact that would dissolve the fear” (Tabors, p. x). As explained in Chapter One, this double bind is complicated by strict immigration policies where immigrants remain on a limited but renewable visa. Further strengthening this limited social contact is covert and overt discrimination in Swiss society that penetrates the school system.

5.4.1 Parent involvement in the Basel school context

Communication between schools and homes in Basel takes place in what Epstein (1995) called the institutional level. The institutional level is where the school administration sends invitations or information to all parents on a formal basis. In the Basel context, official guidelines in the Basel Education Department require that teachers hold parent interviews
once a year or every two years in kindergarten and primary school. Teachers are invited to attend parent evenings where formal information about the content of the curriculum is communicated to parents. Parents are also invited to visit and observe their children as an audience in their classrooms or attend a multicultural festival. At the same time, parents are not involved in the educative process, and schools do not generally collaborate with community groups. There is little communication between parents and teachers at a more informal level.

In recent years Basel-City introduced an *Elternrat*, a parent advisory group in primary, middle and secondary level schools (not including kindergarten parents). Parent representatives are chosen from each class and are responsible for general issues such as helping to solve problems with the local council about road-safety, or organising a school festival. They do not participate in policy or curriculum related decision making processes, and parents are not involved in the teaching program. The Elternrat is required to include representatives from immigrant parent groups. Owing to some parents’ immigrant status and their ineligibility to vote and influence macro policy in a formal way, this micro level of involvement is especially important. Gaining representation in school is a critical element in developing social capital in the school community. Parents are then empowered, and can take action in the interests of their children’s well being and school success.

Reconceptualising home-school partnerships in Basel and other high immigration urban areas is urgently needed. In order to understand the multiple dimensions in home-school partnerships, input is needed from diverse perspectives that account for the dimensions of language, culture and social backgrounds represented in the school population.

5.4.2 *The research questions*

The main goal of this chapter has been to outline issues relevant to immigrant families in the context of home-school communication. The discussion highlighted the need for parent involvement in their children’s education through trusting, collaborative partnerships with schools. These factors are essential in determining children’s educational success. Bearing in mind that the main aim of the study was to examine the experiences of immigrant families as they support and negotiate home language learning in the home, community and school, the ways in which parents share the responsibility for their children’s education with their children’s teachers is of major interest. Importantly, families’ cultural differences and their pre-immigrant experiences (Louie, 2001) influence their attitudes and expectations for their
children’s language learning, and these attitudes and expectations are central to gaining an understanding of immigrant family experiences.

A major issue in home-school interconnections in the context of this study is promoting home language use. Clearly, though proficiency in the main language of the school and community is critical to children’s school success, and the ability to communicate and be involved in their children’s education. In order to understand different and multiple perspectives surrounding language use and maintenance, perspectives must be sought from a range of people from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. The following research questions are posed:

1. Do families believe they are supported in home language promotion and in general by kindergartens, schools and community?
2. What strategies do immigrant parents use to build relationships with their children’s teacher and school?
3. To what extent do kindergartens and schools support families’ efforts to promote home language learning?
4. To what extent do kindergartens and schools promote the home-school connection with immigrant families?

Together, the above questions form the main part of the home-school element of the study.

5.5 Conclusion

Developing effective relationships between immigrant parents and teachers is complex. Indeed, it is difficult to define what constitutes effective relationships in linguistically and culturally diverse communities. Effective relationships require knowing what teachers want from parents and what parents want and expect from schools and teachers. The shape and content of home-school communication must be negotiated by schools, teachers and families, especially in linguistically and culturally diverse communities. Further, proficiency in both the home language and the mainstream language is important; this is a further complicating dimension in establishing home-school relations. While language proficiency is important, use of interpreters can aid communication in formal communications such as parent-teacher meetings, but they seldom support the more spontaneous and informal channels of communication so central to strong home-school partnerships. Negotiating the culture of ‘ways of doing things,’ and the ‘ways of learning’ in the home, and in the school system are as equally important as understanding the language.
Parents of immigrant children are clearly involved in their children’s education, but often in different ways from mainstream parents, simply because their life circumstances and cultural ways of doing and knowing things are different. As for most parents, beliefs and values about education systems are influenced by their own educational experience. Families need support in negotiating new school systems and they must also be supported in their crucial role as educators of their own children. Clearly families’ socioeconomic status and cultural background influence the ability or readiness to adapt to this role. However, as Epstein et al. (2002) argue, schools must assume a key role in reaching out to families.

As explained in Chapter Three and Four, grasping an understanding of the mechanisms of the role of power and identity in children’s education and how this filters down in interactions between teachers and children is vital. When home languages are only a peripheral consideration in educational contexts, educators must come to terms with how language and “how culture matters” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 7) in the home-school discourse.

Given the current right wing political climate in many developed world countries, where assimilationist language policies are on the rise (as explained in Chapter Three), and fear of the different leads to conflicts, seeking alternative perspectives on cultural ways of doing things and locating resources that can be utilised in children’s home language and cultural education both at home, school and within the community is needed. For example, new forms of technology, such as those that support social collaboration and build community, can support children’s home language learning. At the same time, technology is under-utilised as a tool to enrich home language experiences both in the home and the school. Accordingly, the role of information and communication technology to support home language learning is the subject of the next chapter. Building strong partnerships between the school and family might well benefit from better use of ICTs as communication and collaboration tools. Home language learning can be given a boost with access to new and developing technologies that are now commonplace in children’s homes and communities but less common in schools.
CHAPTER SIX

The role of information and communication technologies in immigrant families’ home language maintenance and learning

6.1 Introduction

As stated in the first chapter, the present study is primarily concerned with investigating immigrant families’ perceptions of the value of home languages in their new language and cultural environment, the way they promote and support the development of home languages, and their views about how schools should support their children’s home language learning. In the previous chapter, the impact of strong collaborative home-school relationships on supporting children’s learning to facilitate school success was established. Furthermore, international evidence is clear about the positive academic and social outcomes for children when there are strong interconnections between experiences in the family and school.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as everyday cultural tools in support of language and literacy learning. Further it reviews the literature on how ICTs could support home-school communication, promote social networking, and empower immigrant families and on ways in which ICTs can act as a bridge between home and school languages and cultures. Also included in this chapter is an exploration of current policy and application of ICT in Basel early childhood and primary educational contexts.

Specifically, the chapter focuses on

(1) the role of ICTs in a changing knowledge-based world,
(2) how technology is represented in the bioecological model and as a means to support proximal and distal processes as an aspect of children’s learning,
(3) the issues and complexities of the digital divide, (e-inclusion) equity, access and ownership issues,
(4) technology as a form of social capital in enhancing home languages and home-school communication,
(5) the role of ICTS in young children’s education,
(6) immigrant children’s and families use of digital technologies in the home to support home language acquisition, development, nurturance and reinforcement of cultural connectedness,
(7) accessibility of minority languages on the Internet and the inequalities of their representation including the UNESCO perspective on languages and ICT, and finally,
(8) the implementation of information and communication technologies in school policy and changing school contexts from the Swiss/ Basel perspective.

6.2 ICTs and the knowledge age in a changing world

New technologies are now recognised as contemporary cultural tools central to communication, connecting people, and in the case of this study, uniting immigrant families and their communities across the globe. ICTs are objects (artefacts) designed for a practical purpose that strengthen successful interaction with contemporary environments, as are other tools such as paper, pens and the telephone. As posited by Vygotsky (1978) and Rogoff (1990, 2003), tools or artefacts not only facilitate interaction, but also are in themselves facilitators of thinking and learning.

Today’s young children in economically developed countries are born into a highly technological world. ICTs are embedded in many aspects of their environment and, at the same time, central to the world of business and industry, and to government and political processes. At the community and home level, communication and relationships are facilitated through local and global telecommunication between families, within local communities and cities and across national borders.

In countries such as Switzerland and Australia young children grow up with computers, mobile telephones and other digital technologies. Mobile telephones are now at least ten times more powerful than the computers of 10 years ago (Heppell & Murray, 2004) and are capable of playing videos, sending e-mails, downloading digital data from the Internet, as well as taking and sending photos. In highly developed countries, these devices are now
commonplace in children’s everyday interactions with friends and family, and increasingly in their preschools and schools.

6.3 Technology as an integrating component in the bioecological model

As discussed in Chapter Two, a number of theorists and researchers have linked cultural tools or artefacts with learning, educational, social and cultural contexts. Digital tools and ICTs are an integral part of children’s everyday life, and an established element of their functional language and literacy development. The extent to which ICTs are used in facilitating language and literacy development depends on parents’, peers’ and educators’ ability and interest in making use of available tools to contribute to children’s language and literacy development. Contributing to this development are the processes and interactions that take place in the outer environment, accounting for culture, language, social class and historical era (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994, p. 572) and, in addition, the ways in which ICTs interface with components of culture and language.

For the purpose of this study and as explained in Chapter Two, digital and interactive technological tools are interpreted to be one kind of distal resource which may be useful in “setting proximal processes in motion” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1009). In the light of this suggestion, Figure 3 below, provides a model of ICT use in the home, school and community as a tool for scaffolding language learning and as a resource for promoting literacy learning. In particular, the model illustrates the importance of the interface between the home and school (or childcare centre and preschool) and social networks to ensure effective resourcing and use of ICTs in language and literacy learning.

Relatedly, in this model, ICT can also facilitate communication within and between families, and can play a decisive role in strengthening ties between the home, school and community, and perhaps even helping children succeed at school and in future work opportunities. As proposed by Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994, p. 572) “proximal processes are posited as the primary engines of effective development.” However, whether or not these processes aid in development depends on so called “force characteristics.” They described force characteristics as producing stability and change in children. As these are developmentally generative experiences such as the “tendency to initiate and engage in activity alone or with others” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1009), they have been placed at the centre of the model. Issues explored in this thesis concern the extent to which educators recognise the potentially valuable role of ICTs as developmentally generative
experiences, and the extent to which they facilitate children’s active engagement in meaningful school literacy practices through integrated and embedded ICT use.

6.3.1 Zone of proximal development (ZPD) and guided participation

Central to effective learning in school and other educational contexts are the nature and patterns of interactions that take place between children and adults, and increasingly between children, adults and distal tools such as the tools of technology. Ways in which children’s learning is facilitated and scaffolded by adults while working with cultural tools such as ICTs (Rogoff, 1990) and, especially, as the tasks and activities become progressively more complex, is of particular interest. The interaction between a child and adult (or more accomplished peer) is what Vygotsky described as the concept of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978; Grigorenko & Kornilova, 1997). The central point being, children can accomplish more under guidance from a knowledgeable adult and through collaboration.

Drawing on Vygotsky’s work, Rogoff (1990, 2003) contended that culture is central to learning, and children learn through using the cultural tools within their society and with
guided participation from more experienced peers and adults. Guided participation (Rogoff, 1990, p. viii) means providing guidance and, eventually, handing over the responsibility for learning and development to children. This happens when learners make connections between what they already know, and the new knowledge or skills they are experiencing. The guidance or scaffolding comes through directing, organising and supporting children’s efforts, especially their language, literacy development, and problem solving. Guided participation within the zone of proximal development ensures that children are learning and playing in a developmentally generative environment. A developmentally generative environment however, also depends on the context, and the quality of the interpersonal interactions. In today’s world, technological tools have joined more traditional tools such as pens and paper as learning scaffolds.

6.4 The issues and complexities of e-inclusion and the digital divide

Although ICTs are important cultural tools in business, the community and education, accessing ICTs presents a major difficulty for many families, especially low-income families, including low income immigrant families. Many studies point to a widening gap, a digital graben or digital divide between those who have access to ICT, and those who have limited access (Angus, Synder & Sutherland-Smith, 2003; Gorski, 2001; Kalinowski, 2001; Miller, 2004). In European countries, the term “digital divide” is used when people, for various reasons such as poverty, no access, or lack of ICT skills, are excluded from access to ICT resources (European Union Info Society, 2004). So concerned is the European Union about this digital gap that it introduced e-inclusion initiatives aimed at reducing the divide.

At the core of these initiatives is the goal that all European Union citizens should have access to information and communication technologies. However, to date there is little evidence of universal access in the community, home or school, and ICT equity issues are likely to become increasingly important over the next decade. Lack of ICT access and the concomitant lack of information and communication skills in many communities are impacting negatively on education and employment options. Lack of ICT skills and poverty go hand in hand, and are particularly evident in many low income immigrant communities in European countries (European Union Info Society, 2004).

Inequalities in access to ICT have been a concern in educational policy and practice for some time now. In most economically developed countries, computer ownership is growing because technologies continue to improve, and cheap home technologies are increasingly
accessible. For low-income families, both access and relevant engagement with the technology are social issues.

Many low-income Swiss families, for example, do not have access to computers or the Internet. As shown in a survey of Swiss households in which parents have completed the minimum years of education (9 years), only 35 percent owned a computer. In comparison, 80 percent of households where parents had university or equivalent levels of education owned computers (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2001, in Basler Schulblatt, 2004). Nevertheless, several writers from other developed countries have contended that while access is important (Angus, Snyder & Sutherland-Smith, 2003; Gorski, 2001; Wauschauer, 2002) equity issues are much more complex than mere ownership. They relate to gender, the content of material available in limited numbers of languages on the Internet and capability of using the technologies. Further, critical reflection on these equity issues is required of educators and policy makers if, taking into account the push for universal access, equality of access and opportunity in the knowledge age is to be ensured.

6.4.1 Immigrant families and e-inclusion

As stated in the previous chapter, immigrant families are found across all socioeconomic levels (Suárez-Orozco & Gardner 2003; Louie, 2001). Given the socioeconomically linked distribution of ICTs, and the link between educational levels and socioeconomic status in the wider Swiss community, it is likely then that home access to digital technologies is distributed in much the same way as for families from immigrant backgrounds. Swiss statistics also show, that just 30 percent of parents with low levels of education, and presumably low incomes, have access to computers at home. Specifically, children from low income families tend to lack resources needed to accomplish homework tasks and assignments (C. Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 582).

Alarmingly, children from poverty stricken immigrant families with limited access to ICTs at home are likely to be even more disadvantaged. As C. Suárez-Orozco (2001) said, parents’ with poor second language proficiency, lack of familiarity with schools and schooling systems in the new culture, and lack of time to spend with their children, impact negatively on children’s attitudes to schooling and successful completion of school tasks. Similar socioeconomically linked digital divide issues are apparent in school ICT access and implementation. Students from lower socioeconomic communities who are already disadvantaged are most likely to be by-passed by ICTs at school. While many progressive
teachers and principals have successfully integrated ICTs into their schools and classrooms, many still ignore or sideline computer-based activities (Brooker, 2003; Dibello, 2005; Schiller, 2003; Yelland, 1999). Ineffective use of available hardware is a worldwide phenomenon (Downes, 2004; A. Elliott, 2004a; Elliott, Findlay, Fitzgerald & Davies, 2004; Marti-Bucknall, 2004; Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2003) and many writers argue that using ICT effectively is not so much about the technology as about teacher competence in integrating ICTs into the curriculum (Angus et al., 2003; Dibello, 2005; A. Elliott, 2000; Gorski, 2001; Miller, 2004).

Further complicating the picture, Brooker and Siraj-Blatchford (2002) have also suggested that children who do not have home ICT experiences and especially those with limited or little mainstream school language, may already be disadvantaged when they enter school because of limited preschool experiences including ICT experiences. And even when ICTs are available in the home or preschool, the issue of inappropriate teacher guidance and outdated resources is a major concern (Dibello, 2005). As Elliott (2000; 2004a) argues, too often the classroom focus for ICT experiences is the novelty value rather than as a context for language and literacy learning and problem solving.

6.5 Technology as a form of social capital in enhancing home language development

In countries like Switzerland, with large numbers of immigrants who seek to retain their home languages, social capital is a central element in home language development. As already mentioned, there are few formal opportunities for learning home languages in the school system, and parents are often responsible for organising their own children’s home language experiences and formal classes where required (OECD, 2006b). The concept of ‘social capital,’ as discussed in Chapter Five, is integral to this study in the sense that it provides the context for resourcing learning. Rich social capital provides a strong base for learning. It is argued that social capital should refer to possession and access of ICTs, and knowing when and how to use technology. Rich social capital that includes ICTs provides an added means for communicating, building and sharing knowledge and strengthening social ties with families, teachers, the school community and language communities. Cummins and Sayers (1996) argue that computer and telecommunications technology have the potential to act as a catalyst for strengthening social links between people, and developing and maintaining intercultural understanding and critical literacy. On a similar note, Auld (2002, p. 43) has argued that ICTs capacity to connect people can be emancipatory.
ICTs can provide a sense of connectedness, because communication is ubiquitous, can occur interactively, and is instantaneous. Building community and family network, ties, skills and relations, especially in communities where families experience significant hardships is recognised as being critical to engagement with learning and longer term academic success (Epstein et al., 2002). In the case of immigrant families seeking to maintain home languages, ICTs can have an emancipating role in opening communications between families across the globe. Increasingly, family members living apart can communicate synchronously through use of web cam and video streaming, as if they are in the same house or room.

The characteristics of strong school, family and community relationships are well understood. However, real connectedness, especially in communities where most or some families experience significant social and economic disadvantages, and/or where there is considerable linguistic and cultural diversity, can be difficult. As many writers have mentioned, ICTs can provide new pathways for communicating and strengthening relations within families and communities.

6.5.1 I C T s and communication between the school and home

Increasingly, ICTs have the potential to improve communication channels between home and school. Many schools now communicate with families through regular e-mails, text messaging and e-newsletters. Families have access to children’s curriculum material and assessment on school web sites (Elliott, 2004a). Goos et al. (2002) found that e-mail, voice messages and web sites can all be used to enhance two-way communication. An important component of social capital is access to communication channels. ICTs enhance and speed up communication between families in schools. ICTs provide just-in-time opportunities for communication that is convenient for parents and teachers.

The potential of ICTs to connect people has had a liberating effect on communication in many contexts. For some immigrant parents who lack confidence and competence in the majority spoken language, ICTs have been especially useful where written communication has found to be more effective. Yang and Benson McMullen (2003) in the USA reported that immigrant Korean mothers preferred to communicate through e-mail because they were anxious or afraid to speak directly to teachers for fear of not being able to express themselves adequately. Because e-mail enables a person time to think and plan his or her thoughts, it can be reassuring for those who feel they cannot adequately express and define what they mean in
spoken face-to-face interactions. Thus, e-mail can be an effective medium for two-way communication, particularly when face-to-face communication is difficult (Ramirez, 2003).

Internationally, as reported in Chapter Five, researchers agree that parents play an important role in their children’s education, and most want to help their children to be successful at school. Further, as Downes (2004, p. 118) has reported, most parents perceive computers as an important tool in information gathering and in their efforts to help their children do well at school. Many parents believe that children need ICT experiences at home so they won’t be “behind” other children at school (Angus, Snyder & Sutherland-Smith, 2003, p. 32).

In Switzerland, as in other OECD countries, parents generally support the use of ICTs as learning and communication tools at home and school. As research in the Swiss context showed, families were strongly supportive of using ICTs for learning (Marti-Bucknall, 2001). Immigrant families, in particular, showed strong support for ICTs in classrooms. Parents also recognised the value of ICTs in supporting maintenance of their home languages, and insisted that high priority should be given to finding ways to support their children’s home language through the use of technology at school.

6.6 ICTs in young children’s education

Information and communication technologies have been widely used in many early educational settings in developed countries since the mid 1980s, with a growing increase in the early to mid 1990s. Evidence of their effectiveness in enhancing aspects of children’s cognitive and social development is well established and, if used effectively, computers can be powerful tools for learning across a range of curricula areas, including literacy (Bissegger & Stettler, 2001; Brooker, 2003; Brooker & Siraj-Blatchford, 2002; Downes, 1998, 2002, 2004; A. Elliott, 1996; Feldman, 2000; Haughland, 1992, 1999, 2000; Van Scooter, Ellis & Railsback, 2001; Yelland, 1998).

In the case of younger children, while evidence is clear that appropriate use of ICTs promotes early social and cognitive development, there is continuing concern that many early childhood educators still use computers for drill and skill type activities that are ‘non developmental,’ and potentially damaging to children’s creativity (Brooker, 2003; Haughland & Wright, 1997; Yelland, 1999). However, despite considerable evidence of the value of ICT in promoting children’s learning, many early childhood educators believe ICTs do not belong
in kindergarten and primary settings. In Switzerland, especially in the Basel region, there is a strong influential school of thought grounded by Rudolph Steiner based on the principles of the Anthroposophy movement (Ammon, 2001; Alliance for Childhood, 2007). The anthroposophical movement applies an imaginative and holistic approach to learning.

The Alliance for Childhood now has a global-wide influence made possible through the Internet. The Anthroposophical movement succeeds most effectively to influence early educators’ pedagogical practice in restricting or calling for a moratorium on technology in early and primary education. Often these educators are concerned about the abstract nature of the computer (Elkind, 1996; Stoll, 1999), and believe that machines rob children of their childhood (Haughland & Wright, 1997). In Switzerland, it is possible that anthroposophic pedagogical belief systems have influenced attitudes to technology and education more widely through the Alliance for Childhood. However, this is difficult to determine as writers who are sometimes negative about ICT use in education such as Healy (1998), Cordes and Miller (2000), Armstrong and Casement (2000) and Stoll (1999) have argued for caution on the basis of evidence of problems for children’s physical and psychological health as a result of excessive ICT use. These problems include eyestrain, obesity, violence and aggressive behaviour, addiction and social isolation. Researchers argue for caution, on the basis of evidence, there is growing concern in western countries about the links between children’s increasing sedentary lifestyles and health issues such as obesity. Not surprisingly, there is an understandable concern today that children’s physical wellbeing is compromised with rapidly diminishing space and a less active lifestyle. In the case of Swiss urban areas, there is evidence of limited outdoor space and activity in the outdoors and this is coupled with increasingly more screen time (Zehnder, 2006).

Despite this concern, researchers such as Elliott (2000), Marsh, Brooks, Ritchie, Roberts and Wright (2005), and Yelland (1999) have argued that computer use in early childhood centres and primary schools is so limited at present that too much screen time during early schooling is unlikely, and the benefits of rich, interactive computer-based environments are likely to support opportunities for literacy learning, thinking and problem solving.
6.6.1 Supporting emerging literacy skills with ICTs

The role of ICTs in promoting early literacy skills has been acknowledged in several contexts. Their interactive, scaffolding processes can act as bridges to facilitate language learning and cognitive development. They have important roles in supporting language learning and emerging literacy skills in first and second languages (Rogoff, 1990, 2003). On a day-to-day basis, ICTs can support children’s language and literacy learning through listening to and watching movies, reading text and symbols, writing and drawing, and playing games.

A number of researchers (Brooker, 2003; Davies & Shade, 1999; Yelland, 1999; Gardner, 2000) found that computers and the Internet are an excellent avenue for encouraging and promoting speech, reading and writing skills. For example, children have conversations and explain to each other how something works, at a particular point in a program (Davies & Shade, 1999). The range of rich engaging stories, games and resources provide many opportunities for children to explore language and use text. ICTs have the potential to engage children in active learning and especially to support early literacy learning (Brooker & Siraj-Blatchford, 2002; Feldman 2000; Haughland, 1992, 1999, 2000; Moore-Hart, 2004/05; Van Scooter, Ellis & Railsback 2001).

In focusing on the role of home and school use of ICTs in fostering language, cognitive and social skills in children’s learning, Brooker and Siraj-Blatchford’s (2002) study of children in an English nursery where children spoke a language other than English at home, found the nursery class computer provided English language experiences that allowed for “shared focus,” and “a very positive collaborative, and language enriched multicultural learning environment” (p. 269). These activities were particularly good for children who did not have access to home computer use, or to English language books and other resources in the home.

There have also been reports of ICT use in supporting language development and maintenance in Indigenous American communities. Haag and Coston (2002) for example reported on how computers were used to create speaking Choctaw puppet videos for teaching kindergarten children in the Choctaw community, and indicated positive outcomes for children’s language learning with this support. Linn, Berardo and Yamamoto (1998) and Villa (2002) reported success in using computers to support language learning and maintenance in Loyal Shawnee and Euchee language communities (p. 75), and the Navaho communities respectively. In each case the aim was to share information and knowledge between people within cultural groups.
Clearly, the range of new interactive and powerful converged technologies that blend communication and media now available in homes and communities are powerful platforms for achieving this communication and connectivity within families and communities in a local area or across the globe. Given Rogoff’s (2003) view on guiding children’s development, such experiences are likely to act as bridges to facilitate language learning and cognitive development in all children including those who require extra support in learning a new language.

6.6.2 Intergenerational learning and immigrant families’ use of technology

As discussed in Chapter Four, strong intergenerational ties can contribute to a child’s language and literacy development especially in immigrant and ethnic minority families. Modern forms of technology such as “telecommunication, satellite television and the internet” are powerful tools for supporting family relationships (Nauck & Settles, 2001, p. 462). A good example of this capacity to connect families was evident in Yagmur and Akinci’s (2003) study on intergenerational differences in Turkish immigrants in France. They found that:

in the age of the Internet, immigrants are able to access a rich variety of first language medium resources in cyberspace. These support factors, presumably, contribute to maintenance of Turkish language and provide a wide (and rich) social network for Turkish immigrants” (p 111).

6.6.3 Combining traditional and new forms of literacy

Given the recent proliferation of ICTs and converging technologies such as those used for processing natural languages (Nordmann, 2004), there is a growing interest in their role in supporting home language learning and literacy when families live in a community where they speak a minority language, and the language of instruction at kindergarten or preschool is other than their home language (Castellani & Tsantis, 2002; Marti-Bucknall, 2001). The value of ICTs for literacy learning is in their ability to “speak” to children in their first language, thus tapping into their prior knowledge and preferred ways of learning. This can then be used as a basis for further learning in the language of the school and the majority community. As discussed in Chapter Four, (Collier & Thomas 2002; Snow, Tabor & Dickinson, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) it is beneficial for children to learn to read in their home language.
first because they already have developed a level of knowledge and possess a working vocabulary.

Despite the impact of ICTs in most contemporary communities, and their potential to scaffold children’s language learning, little attention has been given to ways technologies support language and literacy in home languages and in second majority languages (See Chapter One for an explanation of these terms in the Swiss context). Generally, schools have not yet harnessed the potential of ICTs to promote language learning. While technology has the potential to connect children with their home language through spoken and written text, many low-income, disadvantaged families do not have access to the technology in their homes. Further, there is limited content available on the Internet of some of the most common immigrant languages in Europe, such as Albanian and Kurdish (See section 6.7 below for a detailed list of the available languages on the Internet). However, with newer converged technologies such as satellite TV and Podcasting, the need for languages to be formally available is less important. Web casting means that people can be in face-to-face, synchronous communication.

As also discussed in Chapter Four, children are likely to be most successful in learning to read if taught in their first language (Krashen, 2002; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). In view of this, multilingual web based resources have considerable potential impact on language learning. While some common immigrant languages such as Turkish, Kurdish and Albanian are rarely represented in educational software for children, this should not be an insurmountable barrier to language learning. However, as also mentioned previously in this chapter, not all languages are represented in digital form. Today ICT tools such as on-line bilingual dictionaries and multilingual proofing and writing tools with spelling and grammar correctors are available for teachers and parents, and could be readily used to translate most text-based literacy material into relevant home languages. This production of written and spoken text that is accessible to teachers, families and children is a classroom reality and could be used to support home language literacy learning in preschool, school and home contexts. For this to happen though, a collaborative effort between teachers and parents would be required. Clearly too, as mentioned earlier, for teaching and learning to be most meaningful, home-school connections must be effective and teachers must collaborate with parents to build resources for children’s home language literacy development.
6.7 Accessibility of languages on the Internet

Given that ICTs have a major potential for providing resources in home languages for literacy learning, a key drawback and barrier in supporting literacy acquisition is the scarcity of online and multimedia materials in immigrant languages such as Turkish, Kurdish and Albanian. Inequality is marked in and between languages represented on the Internet. UNESCO (2005) maintains that minority or lesser-used languages are a significant equity concern in Internet use. Yet, the potential of ICTs to facilitate home language learning is considerable especially given broadband Internet access to digital resources such as continuous streaming of voice and images including TV and radio programs and newer converged technologies that rely less on text and more on languages and images.

According to UNESCO (2004), linguistic diversity can and should be promoted through the Internet, yet ten languages make up 86 percent of the total languages represented (Nielson NetRatings and International Telecommunications Union, 2005). As confirmed in Table 2, Turkish, Kurdish, and the languages of former Yugoslavia, the major immigrant languages in Switzerland, are not represented in the main languages available on the Internet. While the limited number of immigrant languages available in text form on the Internet is of concern, newer technologies make this less of a problem for the future. Of greater concern in the school sector is raising awareness of the importance of ICTs as tools for learning and especially as tools for supporting home language learning, as discussed below.
Table 2

Languages Available and Users on the Internet in 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Internet users by language</th>
<th>Average penetration*</th>
<th>World population estimate</th>
<th>Language as % of total Internet users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>283,363,528</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>1,109,719,291</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>112,736,236</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>1,316,007,412</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>67,677,944</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>128,137,485</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>55,649,751</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>389,587,559</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>53,418,308</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>96,141,368</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>37,067,503</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>375,066,442</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>31,600,000</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>75,189,128</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>28,610,000</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>58,608,565</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>22,407,050</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>227,621,437</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>13,657,170</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>24,218,157</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top ten</td>
<td>706,187,491</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>3,800,307,391</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of the languages</td>
<td>111,259,656</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>2,611,759,794</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World total</td>
<td>817,447,147</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>6,412,067,185</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Nielson/NetRatings, International Telecommunications Union (Feb 14, 2005b)

Note* Average penetration is the ratio between the sum of Internet users speaking the language and the total population estimate that speaks that referred language.

6.8 The Swiss/ Basel perspective: Implementation of information and communication technologies in changing school environments

As Switzerland is reliant on its tertiary industries as the main source of income, a strong knowledge-ready workforce is vital to remain internationally competitive. Unlike many other economically developed countries, Switzerland was late to start with a strong educational policy position on increasing ICT capability initiatives in schools. To underscore just how recent ICT policy initiatives have been perceived, a statement made in 2001 by Federal Counsellor, Couchepin, (Couchepin in Bertschart, 2003) illustrates that ICT use is something for the “future” rather than the present. To date, this position tends to be common in contemporary educational thinking in Switzerland: “In the future, it should be taken for granted that ICT will belong to instruction in schools, just like paper, pencils or chalk and
blackboard are today.” (Couchpin in Bertschart, 2003) [My translation]. Although the Education Directors Conference published guidelines and aims for ICT in public schools in 1986, only very recently have ICTs been used in lower secondary school and rarely have they been available or used in lower primary schools, kindergartens or preschools in the Basel region.

The Federal Office for Vocational Education and Technology and the Swiss Conference for Cantonal Educational Directors also recently released a policy supporting ICT use in education and focused on improving ICT teacher competence through teacher training and professional development. However, there is no widespread understanding of the ways in which ICTs can be integrated to support learning across the curriculum and schools have been slow to acquire computers. Even in 2006, ICTs were rarely available in kindergarten and lower primary school classrooms. Their potential use as educational tools is still fiercely debated (Zehnder, 2006).

Introducing widespread educational reform in any aspect of Swiss education, especially in an area such as ICT, is complicated because of the complex nature of the educational context. Despite a population of only 7.5 million, Switzerland is divided into 26 Cantons, all have their own independent education system. As a result, coordination of curriculum policies, languages and cooperation between Cantons is difficult. Adding further complexities are the four different language regions coupled with present day population mobility. The urgent need to coordinate the structure of the school systems policy and curricula between Cantons is widely acknowledged, but it will be some time before any restructuring occurs despite a recent federal referendum in 2006 that unanimously supported a quest for educational “harmonisation” between Cantons. Over the next decade or so, this process of harmonisation aims to introduce one compulsory kindergarten year, align the duration of primary school into six years in all Cantons, and introduce two foreign languages into the primary school curriculum. The extent to which this will impact on ICT availability and use in primary schools and kindergartens though is uncertain.

In a country faced with low reading literacy levels, as identified in the PISA studies outlined in Chapter One, there is an acute need to explore all options to improve literacy learning. Yet to date, despite much rhetoric and proposed action plans, educational policy makers in Switzerland have only recently began to focus on new skills for the knowledge age, and the potential roles of ICT to support and complement improvement strategies to ensure all students have the literacy skills needed for now and the future.
A changing world context and a dramatic increase in ICT availability has lead to the inclusion of ICT in children’s everyday life. These changes bring a complex array of issues that face all families and educational systems, but particularly those with limited resources such as some immigrant parents’ children and the schools that serve them. While ICT use is widespread in economically developed countries, especially more affluent communities, ICT access is generally less available amongst low income families including those from some immigrant backgrounds. In Switzerland, home ICT access seems to be distributed largely along socioeconomic lines both in Swiss and immigrant families. It is clear from the available literature that there is a digital divide, or a digital graben, that leads to language and learning inequalities before children even reach preschool and primary school classrooms. This disadvantage is compounded once children reach school.

This chapter has established that ICTs can enhance many aspects of children’s cognitive and social development, and specifically emerging and developing literacy skills in first and second languages. Computer programs and the Internet are avenues for encouraging and promoting language, reading and writing skills. It was also established that ICTs are an under-used resource, yet one that has potential to support families’ efforts to facilitate children’s home language and literacy resources including lesser-represented languages.

In summary, the literature was clear about ICTs as a potential tool to facilitate children’s learning in a range of social and cognitive domains, especially in literacy learning. Technological devices are part of the core distal resources that can or could play a significant role in immigrant children’s home language learning within the family. Further, ICTs can be useful tools for communication within families and communities in their home language promoting valuable social networks. But there is little opportunity for less affluent families to access relevant technologies and few language resources in minority languages (for example, Turkish, Kurdish, Albanian, Serbian etc) that predominate among Swiss immigrant groups. Further, there is little, if any, use of ICTs in Swiss early childhood settings or primary schools to support learning in general, let alone to support language learning in home (immigrant minority) languages.

In the light of these issues, and especially the valuable role digital technologies have in connecting individuals and communities, utilising the potential capacity of ICTs in schools, strengthens pedagogies. There is increasing evidence that taking advantage of the capacities of digital tools of technology facilitates pedagogical best practice, and can be successful in
motivating and engaging students, especially in children and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, resulting in improved educational outcomes. Further, as a number of researchers (Elliott, 2004a, 2004b; Elliott, Findlay, Fitzgerald & Forster, 2004) have argued, as well as being strong learning tools, students want to use digital technologies to communicate with their friends, families and each other, because they are central to their social worlds.

Unfortunately though, despite their potential to enhance learning and to connect people with one another, relatively few schools and classrooms integrate digital technologies across the curriculum in meaningful ways to support learning, let alone harnessing ICTs for language learning opportunities. This is especially true in many schools in Switzerland. This limited use of technology suggests both a lack of understanding of children’s worlds, and of the value in building languages’ pedagogies, including home languages that are meaningful to children. Further, in Switzerland, as elsewhere, children in disadvantaged immigrant communities tend to have fewer opportunities to use ICTs both at home and school.

Internationally, the importance of utilising the potential capacity of ICTs to support learning is well accepted. How Swiss schools and communities deal with the equity issues presented by low literacy levels, especially amongst immigrant children, is becoming a major challenge for government, communities and schools. Better use of ICTs and their potential to bring home languages to classrooms might well provide a window to overall improved literacy learning and, ultimately, school success.

Although broad ICT access and curriculum issues are important in the context of this thesis, the key issues relating to the “digital divide” are most acutely focused on home language learning. Recognition that home language competence is important for social and cultural reasons and as well as providing the basis for literacy learning in the school language, means that all resources need to be harnessed in its promotion. High levels of literacy and problem solving are critical to functioning in a global community increasingly dependent on information and communication technologies. For Swiss society in particular, information skills are especially important, yet schools have generally not yet embraced ICTs across the curriculum, and are struggling to come to terms with their potential in enriching pedagogy and especially literacy learning.

If Swiss schools, and Basel schools in particular, are to connect with families, especially immigrant families and children, they need to focus on achieving real and sustained improvements in literacy skills, improve communication between families and schools, as well as understand the positive impact ICT use has on children’s learning. The following chapter brings together the main concepts about home languages, home-school partnerships
and the links with ICT integration evidenced in the research questions, and presents the methodology and research design.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Methodology

7.1 Introduction

Due to the complexity of the study, with its many and varied voices and perspectives on the subject of promoting home languages in immigrant children, a qualitative, interpretive approach to the research was chosen. Principally, the study was guided by Phenomenographic methodology. Phenomenography aims to clarify and explain possible conceptions that people have on a particular phenomenon. The method encompassed interviews, document collection, lectures and field notes. This chapter describes and explains the research design within the interpretive framework in which the study was situated.

The main aim of the study was to investigate immigrant parents’ perspectives on, and experiences of, promoting home languages for their children. Specifically, the research focused on the experiences of families and their children between the age of three and twelve years in Basel and the surrounding area. Children were enrolled in kindergartens or primary schools in the Basel area. The study was carried out in three main stages: (1) establishing the background and family context leading on to in-depth interviews with parents (2) in-depth interviews with teachers and (3) analysis of data and policy documents.
In developing the focus of the specific questions that would probe parents’ experiences in trying to maintain and promote home languages, I drew on the literature review in Chapter Two through to Six, as well as a previous investigation that I had carried out (Marti-Bucknall, 2001). I also relied on my own experience as a teacher in multicultural schools, and as a parent of bilingual children (English and German Swiss). With this research and personal background, I was able to narrow the topic down to several major themes. Subsequently I was confronted with the task of designing the research.

The study focused on immigrant families living in Basel who spoke languages other than German as their home language, plus German Swiss, (Baseldütsch, the dominant spoken language in the northwest region of Switzerland) and Standard German (the official written language and language of instruction in schools). Families came from former Yugoslavia, (Kosovo, Serbia and Croatia) and from Spain, South America, Central America, and Turkey and were from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. All participants’ children attended state run kindergartens and schools.

Stage One (The Family Context) established the context of the research leading up to the development of the interview guide and the actual interviews with parents. Figure 4 on the following page, represents a model of the three stages of research.

Questions to parents explored their own language background, and the ways in which the majority and home language was promoted and used in the family. Specific ideas and contexts that involved family literacy practices such as cognitive tasks, play, media use and ICT use in home languages were illuminated. Parents’ opinions and experiences on their communication, interactions and relationship with kindergartens, schools and their children’s teachers were explored.

The second stage of the study, the School Context, focused on perspectives from kindergarten and primary school teachers who worked in classrooms where the majority of children spoke immigrant languages. Questions probed their insights into: (1) home language integration and support within the classroom and curriculum, (2) maintenance of home languages within the classroom, (3) communication between the school/ kindergarten and home, and (4) the use of media, and particularly ICTs in home language integration and maintenance. The methodology is described in more detail later in this section.
Figure 4 Model of Research Stages

STAGE ONE: FAMILY CONTEXT

- Literature review
  - 1. Parent interview guide
  - 2. Ethics application
- Ethics approval granted
  - 1. Parent interviews
  - 2. Ongoing interview transcription and translation

STAGE TWO: SCHOOL CONTEXT

- Teacher interview schedule design
- Teacher interviews, ongoing interview transcription and translation
- Data analysis: coding, categorising, matrix, concept maps and memos
- Model building

STAGE THREE: Ongoing data analysis
Data were analysed progressively throughout the duration of Stage Two and Stage Three of the study. Interviews were first transcribed in German and then translated into English. I used a phenomenographic approach, (Marton, 1986) to identify categories in parents’ and teachers’ responses. I first categorised a wide range of perspectives from parents, and then extracted segments of the text from the transcripts in the form of examples of direct quotes from participants. In order to extend the phenomenographic approach and add further depth to the data, I also used some Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998) techniques of coding and diagramming as well as concept mapping and model building (Ryan & Bernaud, 2000). These perspectives were chosen with the goal of contributing a theoretical model for home-school partnerships with immigrant families and, additionally, their children’s language learning. Data that emerged in Stage One (The Family Context) were useful in informing the process of writing the interview guide for teacher interviews in Stage Two (The School Context).

7.2 Research questions

Four sets of questions were explored (The Family Context and School Context dimensions of the study). The first set of questions sought to determine parent perspectives on home language learning and maintenance. In particular, I sought to determine the strategies parents used to support their children’s oral and written literacy in their home languages. Specifically:

- To what extent do immigrant parents (in Basel Switzerland) believe maintenance of home language learning is important?
- Why do parents believe maintenance of home language learning is important?
- What strategies do families use to promote home languages?
- Do families believe that children should also learn to read and write in their home language?
- Do beliefs about home language maintenance differ between and within linguistic groups?

The second part of Stage One focused on the extent to which parents used information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support and promote home languages. Specifically, I asked:
• To what extent do families use ICT to assist in the promotion of home language learning?
• What forms of ICTs are used in the home to foster home languages?

The third part of the study examined the extent of support for home languages afforded by schools and the wider society. Of specific interest were government policies, school and community initiatives in place or planned for Basel and adjoining Basel-Land.

• Does the Department of Education in Basel Switzerland believe maintenance of home language learning is important?
• To what extent do the Department of Education and teachers recognise the importance of home language learning in promoting cognitive competence in the dominant community language?
• To what extent do kindergartens and schools believe that ICTs can assist in the promotion of home language learning?
• To what extent do kindergartens and schools use ICTs to assist in the promotion of home language learning?

The fourth part, as depicted in Figure 4 (linking Stage One and Two) considered the interactions and interrelationships that existed between parents and schools. The use of ICTs in facilitating these interactions and their role in the learning outcomes of immigrant children were also examined.

• Do families believe they are supported in home language promotion by kindergartens, schools and community?
• What strategies do immigrant parents use to communicate with kindergarten and school teachers?
• What strategies do kindergartens and schools use to promote the home-school connection with immigrant families?
• To what extent do kindergartens and schools support families’ efforts to promote home language learning through technology?
The relationships between the four parts will be represented in a multilingual social cohesive communication model in Chapter Eleven.

The research framework and research design outlined in this chapter, including the design of the research questions, were informed by multiple sources of information, including policy documents on integration and language education, newspaper articles, Basel-City Department of Education lectures open to teachers, parents and the public, as well as radio reports on specific projects in primary schools in Basel, and documents published on the World Wide Web by the Basel-City Department of Education. Multiple information sources are useful to build a rich picture of phenomena under consideration (Denzin & Lincoln, eds, 1994). In the following section, I outline the theoretical perspectives influencing the study, followed by a description of the methods.

7.3 Theoretical perspectives guiding the inquiry

Given the spectrum of participants flagged above, an interpretive epistemology appeared to be the most suitable approach to the inquiry. I chose the interpretivist approach on the grounds that it seeks “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty 1998, p. 67). This method originated from Weber’s thinking about ways of interpreting the social world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He stated that the aim of interpretivism is verstehen, that is, to understand (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Linked to this belief, Vygotsky, (Kozulin, 1992) who also worked in the early twentieth century, pointed out that it is important to understand rather than predict what is uniquely human (p. 263).

Thus this study is predominantly concerned with understanding varying contexts and approaches to promoting home languages in a range of immigrant families.

As one of the main objectives of the study of home language learning was to gain an intimate and personalised view of families’ approaches to maintaining home languages, there is strong support for using qualitative methods. Bogdan and Biklen (1992), for example, say that “by learning the perspectives of the participants, qualitative research illuminates the inner dynamics of situations-dynamics that are often invisible to the outsider” (p. 32).

As a methodology, phenomenography (Marton, 1981, in Richardson 1999) is linked to phenomenology. Phenomenology was considered by Crotty (1998) as a stream of the interpretivist approach to human inquiry. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) emphasised that “researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of the events
and interactions of ordinary people in particular situations” (p. 34). In the light of this understanding, phenomenographic methodology was useful in examining and describing the complexities involved in home-school partnerships between teachers and immigrant families.

Davies (1995), who was concerned with explaining approaches to applied linguistic research, added: “An interpretative qualitative study is concerned with the ‘actors’ meanings for social actions” (p. 433). As I considered myself an outsider (I did not teach in Basel state kindergartens or primary schools), but also an insider in some ways, and as I am an immigrant and a parent, it was especially important to seek many and various perspectives to inform the study and understand the reality and complexity of families’ experiences. Rogoff’s (2003) contentions about the meaning of “truth” supported the need for understanding the depth and complexity of experiences. She says:

what is referred to as “truth” is simply our current agreement on what seems to be a useful way to understand things; it is always under revision. These revisions of understanding build on constructive exchanges between people with different perspectives. Progress in understanding, then, is a matter of continually attempting to make sense of the different perspectives, taking account the backgrounds and positions of the viewers (p. 26).

According to Marton and Pang (1999), the nature of phenomenography is basically descriptive and methodologically oriented (p. 2). Rogoff’s (2003) contention supported this position when she said:

A learning attitude, with suspended judgment of one’s own as well as others’ ways, is necessary for coming to understand how people both at home and elsewhere function in their local traditions and circumstances for developing a general understanding of human development, with universal features built on variations (p. 24).

In this study, it was intended that participants’ varying backgrounds, as well as the constructive exchanges that took place in the interviews, would provide insights into their beliefs about home language maintenance and the strategies and practices they used to support and maintain home languages. In turn, this knowledge and understanding would help policy makers and teachers develop more effective strategies to work with children from diverse languages and cultural groups.
As Marton (Marton & Pang, 1999) explained, interviews are the main method used in phenomenographic studies to gain perspectives and an understanding of how people experience the world. Elaborating on this, Seidman (1991) said:

In-depth interviewing’s strength is that through it we can come to understand the details of people’s experience from their point of view. We can see how their individual experiences interact with powerful social and organizational forces that pervade the context in which they live and work (p.103).

Many examples of these powerful social and organizational forces that pervade the context of immigrant families’ experiences with home languages and education in the adopted country were described in Chapter Two through to Six.

7.4 Justification of method

My method choice arose from a need to gain an insight into the experiences, perspectives and voices of immigrant families living in Basel, particularly as they related to home language learning and schooling. Seidman (1991) acknowledged “interviewing is a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose life constitutes education” (p. 7). Seidman added, “if the researcher’s goal …is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient avenue of inquiry” (p. 4). Interviews with parents and teachers would then provide a window into their children’s daily experiences as well as their own.

As argued by researchers such as Dickinson and Tabor, (2001), Okagaki and Sternberg, (1993), Okagaki and Diamond, (2000), Rogoff, (1990) and Yang and Benson McMullen, (2003), working with and talking to families, leads to gaining important insights into parent beliefs, cultural values, and family literacy practices. In this study the parent interview guides were also translated into home languages to help facilitate the interview process in cases where participants were not completely proficient in the German language.
7.5 Method

7.5.1 Stage One (The Family Context)

Phase One

Stage One commenced in August 2002 and focused on a review of the literature on immigrant educational experiences and home language learning, and the relationship between home language learning, and proficiency, and school achievement. Literature and policy documents on language and integration policy specific to Switzerland and the Basel-City Department of Education were also reviewed. Specifically, this included material on: (1) intercultural pedagogy, (2) kindergartens, (3) primary schools, and (4) special education sections. Documents were examined with the goal of understanding policy perspectives on home-school partnerships and home languages. For this purpose, information available on a new language model developed for all levels of education in Basel was obtained. Discussions were also held with Department of Education and government language policy officials in Basel, and field notes were also recorded. Informal discussions with several teachers and department officials focused firstly on the role of home languages at each school level and, secondly, the steps that I would need to follow in gaining permission to carry out the research from the Basel Education Department.

7.5.2 Phase Two

In Phase Two, (see Figure 4) I designed an interview guide (See Appendixes A & J), and applied for ethics approval to do the research. The understandings about language learning and integration gained from the policy documents and discussions with educational leaders were used to inform the development of questions that would be directed to families. Cover letters including the permission forms, information outlining the aim and design of the project were prepared (See Appendix C; D, E &F).

7.5.3 Phase Three

Once I had received permission to carry out the research from the University Ethics Committee for Human Research, the Basel Department of Education, and the data protection authority, I commenced parent interviews in June 2003. These concluded in February 2004.
Participants in the study were 58 families whose home language was other than German. All families lived in Basel and the neighbouring suburbs. Parent participants were sought according to their home language and willingness to participate in the interviews. The specific language groups were chosen because they were most frequently represented in the last Volkszählung (2000 census) carried out in Basel-City by the Erziehungsdepartement (Department of Education and the Polizei- und Militärdepartement (Department of Police and Military). Apart from the four main official languages of Switzerland: (German, Italian French and Romance); Turkish, Spanish, Serbian, Croatian, English and Albanian were the most frequently spoken languages in Basel (Volkszählung [census] Basel City, 2000).

Families were recruited for the study through classroom teachers. Once teachers indicated that they were interested in participating in the study, they distributed information letters to parents of children in their classes who were from families who spoke one of the immigrant languages listed above. Permission forms were attached to the letter informing the parents of the purpose of the study and my request for their participation. Parents were contacted by telephone once they had advised their willingness to participate in the study. Interviews with families lasted approximately 90 to 120 minutes and were conducted mostly in their own homes.

Gaining a sufficiently large number of families to participate in the study was difficult and there were several obstacles to overcome. Firstly, I had to convince teachers of the value of my project. As an outsider, I was not part of their collegium, and students from Swiss Universities often made requests to carry out research in schools in Basel so teachers felt that they were overloaded with requests to participate in studies. Secondly, once I had gained the interest of several teachers to participate in the project, there were problems recruiting families due to difficulties in the collection of permission slips. Only when teachers had received the permission forms back from parents was I able to organise interviews. Time taken in introducing the project and gaining teacher and then parent interest was between two weeks and four months in each school setting.

7.6 Ethics and negotiation of site entry

The University of Canberra Committee for Ethics in Human Research approved the project. The project was also approved by the Basel-City Department of Education and the data protection authority in Basel. Permission from the data protection authority in Basel was granted only under the condition that I would not request direct access to school class lists.
Access was permitted only through teachers who were requested to voluntarily participate in the project by the various directors in the intercultural, kindergarten and primary directorates of the Basel Department of Education.

7.7 Contacting families

While the description in the following section is probably overly detailed, it is provided to illustrate the complexity of gaining access to the families who became participants in this study, and so willingly shared information about their experiences with me.

Access to families was sought through official channels in the Basel Department of Education. Initially, official contact was made through telephone calls to the Department of Education in Basel-City. I was then referred to three departments: *Interkulturelle Pädagogik* (Intercultural Education), *Kleinklassen* (classes for children with special needs), and Kindergarten. I met Frau Silvia Bolhalder, (contact person for intercultural matters and Konrektorin, Vice Director of the Orientationschule, Middle Schools), Herr Bruno Gadola, (Director of Special Education), and Frau Judith Strub, (*Rektorin* Kindergarten, Director of Kindergarten). Initially, I sought permission through the director for intercultural pedagogy Frau Silvia Bolhalder. Thereafter, written permission was granted to carry out the project through the designated teachers. *Heimatsprache und Kultur Lehrerinnen*, (Home language and culture teachers) work in those schools where there are enough children to run individual first language classes, for example, Turkish, Albanian or Serbian. They usually work in more than one school. I received an address list of home language and culture teachers so that I could contact them.

I was invited by Frau Strub to attend two area meetings designed to explain the aims and objectives of the study to kindergarten teachers. Five teachers expressed their interest in assisting me to gain access to immigrant families in their schools. Official support for the research came from Frau Judith Strub (*Rektorin* Kindergarten) (The Director of Kindergartens). I was also invited to give a short presentation on the aims of the project at a parent information evening in one kindergarten. Through these channels of access, I eventually gained access to 58 families.

7.8 Ethical considerations

Data derived from interviews with educational leaders, policy makers, parents and teachers were transcribed and coded with numbers and initials in place of names to ensure
confidentiality. All transcripts (tape, disk and hard copy) were stored securely and without any means of individual identification in accordance with University of Canberra ethical protocols. All parent participants were guaranteed full and total privacy, and gave their written permission to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any stage. A summary of the findings of the research will be sent to the teacher and parent participants, and to the Basel Department of Education.

7.9 Interview design

A review of the literature, analysis of policy documents, discussion with educational leaders, and discussions with parents and teachers over the two years prior to the interview period informed the content of the interview guide. As indicated in Chapter One, the original question on how home languages are supported and maintained in kindergartens and schools, grew from findings of a previous study that I carried out with Basel International School parents. This study was on home communication and information technology use, including support for home language learning for children aged between 3 and 10 years in their homes (Marti-Bucknall, 2001). Most International School families stay in Switzerland for a maximum of two years, but some remain on a permanent basis. Ehret (1999) described these people as the elite immigrants. The 2001 study showed an overwhelmingly positive reaction by parents to information technology use in the home and in schools. Significantly, every parent reported that using technology to support children’s home languages was a priority they had for their children. This finding led me to wonder what the situation on information technology use and home language learning might be for the “non-elite” immigrants in the Basel community, especially considering the growing community concern about unsatisfying educational outcomes for children from immigrant backgrounds so well publicised in the Swiss and Basel media.

Other support for the interview protocol used in this study came from Malavé’s (1997) work in the State of New York (USA) on parent promotion of bilingualism in their children. The elementary version of the Home Observation for the Measurement of the Environment (HOME) provided a useful background for the interview guide (Bradley 1989, in Gottfried, Fleming & Gottfried, 1998 p. 1452).
7.9.1 The parent interview guide

Structured, open-ended interviews (Cannold, 2001; Grbich, 1999) were used to ensure that questions were consistent between participants, and progressed in the same order. The parent interview schedule was divided into the following categories:

1. **Background information**: Demographic information included parents’ country of origin, their length of stay, languages spoken at home, education and occupation. Family details included the number of children in the family, their age, and the kindergarten and schools they attended.

2. **Strategies parents used to maintain and promote home languages**: Patterns of language use between family members, and parent attitudes towards home languages were sought. Strategies used to promote home languages were also sought.

3. **Family’s access to home languages outside the home**: I enquired into family participation in community and religious organizations, and language use with extended family, neighbours and friends. I also sought information on preferences for childcare and child minding services.

4. **Family literacy practices, including strategies, used to promote and maintain the home language**: Literacy practices that were explored included: reading, oral stories, understanding and listening, talking about everyday experiences, cooking, shopping, and playing games, including visits to the library.

5. **Children’s free time activities (extracurricular)**: I enquired into home language use in relation to out of home activities in cultural groups, such as religious education, language schools, music schools, dance schools, theatre, museums and multicultural libraries.

6. **Media use**: Questions that related specifically to media use included: radio, television, videos and DVD, CDs, audiocassettes, books, comics, magazines, and newspapers.

7. **Information and communication technologies**: Questions related to the use and availability of technological devices and telecommunication in home languages included: those pertaining to computer, Internet access, CD ROMs, software, World Wide Web sites e-mail, and mobile telephone use. Questions on telephone use and SMS were also included.
(8) *Home-school partnerships*: Questions related to home-school communication between parents and their children’s teachers.

As emphasised by Fishman (1991), it was important to ask questions that related to family literacy practices specific to each medium (reading, writing and speaking), because each of these skills involves separate cognitive tasks and teachers of immigrant children need to be aware of these differences (Cummins, 1986). For example, time taken to acquire basic interpersonal communication skills is less than time needed to acquire cognitive academic language skills.

The importance of good background information, especially when working within ethnic communities, is highlighted by Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan and Buriel (1990). Too often, educators assume that all families from different or even the one ‘ethnic’ or national or language group share the same sociocultural characteristics. Clearly, this was not the case. Families vary considerably along sociocultural and socioeconomic dimensions, even within the one language group. Hence, the “need to attend to the extreme heterogeneity among various ethnic groups, and to identify specific ethnic /demographic characteristics of the group studied in empirical investigations” (Harrison et al., p. 357). For example, people using a contemporary form of a language from a large metropolitan area may have different reasons for promoting their home language than a family who came from a rural mountainous area. The rural family may follow the traditional, cultural, religious, or village beliefs long outdated for those who have grown up in a contemporary urban environment. For example, some Kosovo-Albanian immigrants came from the capital city of Pristina and held professional position such as teachers or architects. Other Kosovo-Albanian families came from rural backgrounds, had very little education, and typically had blue collar or non-skilled jobs. Ramirez (2003) also claimed that parents believe it is important for teachers to be aware of such sociocultural variations in order to demonstrate sensitivity to both children and parents.

The interview guide was translated into the five target languages, and piloted with several immigrant parents (Turkish, Kurdish, Serbian, Albanian and Spanish). Minor changes were made to the interview guide after discussions with the translators. A copy of the interview schedule in English and German is contained in Appendixes A and B respectively.
The main focus of Stage Two was on (1) teacher perspectives on home languages and the strategies they used to facilitate and support them, (2) the nature of communication between teachers and immigrant families, and (3) media and ICT use in support of home languages and home-school partnerships.

Kindergarten and primary school teachers of classes with at least 50 percent of the children speaking languages other than German were invited to participate in the study. The reasons for embarking on Stage Two are best summarised by Hertz, (1997, as cited in Gergen & Gergen, 2000). She said, “multiple voicing is especially promising in its capacity to recognize the problems of validity while simultaneously providing a potentially rich array of interpretations or perspectives” (Gergen & Gergen, p. 1028). In the case of this study, the importance of hearing both the voices of teachers and parents enriched and informed understanding of the issues related to home language learning. Of particular interest here was whether teachers actually used or integrated the children’s home languages in day-to-day classroom activities and, if they did, how this was accomplished. Secondly, the study investigated ways in which teachers perceived children’s media and ICT use in their homes. And thirdly, it probed teachers’ beliefs about the role of ICTs in promoting home-school connections, and home language maintenance.

Importantly, gaining an understanding of how teachers’ insights, perspectives and voices are used to make sense of their multicultural, heterogeneous classes, was a major goal of the study. Developing “insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” and in this study, the ways in which teachers supported immigrant children’s home languages in the classroom were especially important (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 97). Marton and Booth (1997) support the idea of obtaining an array of perspectives and interpretations on phenomena when they suggested that:

In order to make sense of how people handle problems, situations, the world, we have to understand the way in which they experience the problems the situations, the world, that they are handling or in relation to which they are acting (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111).
7.10.1 Documents and lectures

In order to provide important background contextual information, I collected and reviewed three main documents from the Basel-City government: (1) White Book and Implementation Design on the Integration Policy of the Government of the Canton of Basel-Stadt (Ehret, 1999), (2) Erziehungsdepartment Basel-Stadt, Resort Schulen, 2003, Gesamtsprachkonzept Basel-Stadt [Language Model Basel-City Education Department], and (3) The European Language Portfolio, (Council of Europe).

I attended several meetings open to the public that were held on integration and languages in Basel-City schools. As a result of these experiences, I gained some insights into the concerns of parents, teachers, researchers and policy makers in a context outside the school and home and, specifically, into ways issues were approached and answered by government integration and Department of Education experts at the wider community level.

7.10.2 Teacher interview schedule

Three themes were included in the Teachers Interview Schedule: (1) home language promotion in kindergarten and primary classes, (2) media use that supported home languages and communication, and (3) strategies used to promote home school communication with immigrant parents.

(1) Home language promotion in classrooms. Teachers were asked to describe ways in which they took account of children’s cognitive and language development in their first language in daily classroom experiences. They were also asked how they made use of children’s knowledge from their first language, and how they perceived the relationship between a child’s first language and second language learning. Specifically, they were asked whether they felt that maintaining and promoting home languages were their responsibility. Teachers were also asked about projects and future plans for working with home languages.

(2) Communication with immigrant parents. Teachers were asked about the way they communicated with parents from diverse cultural and language backgrounds. Relatedly, teachers were questioned about the implementation of official guidelines provided by the department in working with parents from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds, and the effectiveness of these documents.
(3) Media and ICT use in support of home languages and the home school communication. Teachers were asked how ICTs were integrated in their classroom curriculum, and what forms of ICT and media they thought children used at home and school. They were asked about their own ICT experiences, whether they personally owned and used a computer, whether they had Internet access and whether their own children used ICTs. Additionally, they were asked about attendance and participation in professional development courses in ICT, and how they perceived ICT use as a possible means to enhance communication between parents and school/kindergarten. (The teacher interview schedule is included in Appendix J).

7.10.3 In-depth interviews

Twelve teachers, eight kindergarten and four primary teachers, registered their interest in participating in the study. Teacher interviews were carried out in teachers’ classrooms, in their homes, in my home, and in a restaurant. Interviews were of 40 minutes to two hours duration and responses were recorded on a digital mini disc recorder. Where interviews were conducted in the teachers’ classrooms or schools, field notes describing the surrounding environment of the kindergarten and school area were made.

7.11 Stage Three

7.11.1 Data analysis

Interview guides were available in the five languages for parent use during the interviews. I analysed the data using the following steps:

(1) Recorded interviews on audio digital discs were transcribed into transcripts. They were then translated from German into English and labelled with question numbers as identifying markers of text.

(2) Categories of different experiences and opinions were identified.

(3) The open coding technique was used where the transcripts were reread for understanding, and excerpts of examples of quotes were marked and labelled for use.

(4) Categories were recorded in four different forms of data display in order to work towards a theoretical model:

(a) Direct quotes from participants in segments of the text
For the purpose of this study both quantitative and qualitative data were used to address the research questions. Quantitative material was limited to background information about the participants (for example, number of years lived in Switzerland) and their media use. Graphs and tables were used to represent the demographics for personal background, media and technology responses. Segments of policy documents were translated. The narrative responses were analysed using qualitative methods.

Both phenomenographic and grounded theory methods were used to analyse the data. In phenomenography, the aim was to draw out different conceptions that people have on a topic. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990) “Grounded Theory is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (p. 24). It was anticipated that through analysing the transcripts from the interviews, field notes, and documents, it would be possible to identify beliefs, opinions and the issues on home languages, home-school communication and ICT use specific to home language promotion, that are important to parents, teachers and the Department of Education.

Once the recorded interview data was transcribed and translated, categories that described different perspectives on home language use, attitudes to home and majority languages, interconnections between the home and school and ICT use were identified. For example, there was a wide variation on the concept of “home language promotion” and the reasons given for supporting home languages. So Bogdan and Biklen’s (1992, p. 165) suggestion for identifying similarities, differences and themes was initially employed. Transcripts were later reviewed to gain a deeper understanding of the original categories identified in the first reading, and to establish internal consistency (Marton, 1986, p. 43). The Grounded Theory open coding technique was also used (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101) to analyse home-school communication questions, and focus on variations in participants’ experiences.

Once the data were examined, transcribed and coded, memos, diagrams and conditional matrixes were drawn to link phenomena and themes that arose from the perspectives of parents and teachers. A conditional matrix described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 158), to display and integrate the relationships between concepts was used. This tool also acted as a device to build the theoretical model described later in Chapter 11. A concept map was drawn to display the categories so that a visual overview was possible. Strauss and Corbin (1990)
emphasised that “memos represent the written forms of our abstract thinking about data. Diagrams, on the other hand are the graphic representation or visual images of the relationship between concepts” (p. 116). Written memos allowed for reflections on the issues that emerged.

While carrying out the research, guided by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), and Charmaz (2000), focus was on themes and issues emerging from the interviews. As the data analysis proceeded, these were developed and key issues crystallised. Three participants were interviewed a second time to help develop a deeper understanding of immigrant family home language experiences in the adopted society (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The concepts and perspectives drawn from the data were then used to address the main research questions. It was anticipated that responses to these questions would lead to the formation of a theoretical model on the three interrelated areas of family literacy, home-school communication, and technology for immigrant children (in relation to promoting home languages) that could then be applied for practical use in educational settings by parents, teachers and communities.

### 7.11 Conclusion

Given the wide spectrum of experiences and perspectives integrated in the study, the words of Bronfennbrenner and Morris (1998) seem fitting at this stage: “The journey is far longer than expected, and at the end, little may be there. What counts is what one learns along the way and passes on to future explorers of the uncharted terrain” (p. 1023). To this end, the challenge of interpreting the reality (Charmaz, 2000) of immigrant families as I understand the participants’ experiences and perspectives is the subject of the next four chapters.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Immigrant families’ perspectives and their experiences with home languages in the home, kindergarten and school and teacher perceptions on immigrant languages.

Results and discussion 1

“I would like to see every child in every kindergarten and school also learning their mother tongue, it’s easier then, for them to learn the German language.”

Parent participant 22 Kurdish (first generation immigrant)

8.1 Introduction

Chapter Eight is the first of three results and discussion chapters, and presents results on (a) demographic characteristics of families, (b) immigrant families’ beliefs and experiences regarding their children’s home language use in the home, kindergartens and primary classrooms, and (c) parent aspirations for their children’s education and future employment. Also included in this chapter, are (d) the Basel Department of Education position on languages, and teacher beliefs about the role of immigrant languages in school. Chapter Nine reports on parent-school interconnections for promoting home language learning and Chapter Ten presents immigrant family and teacher perspectives on information and communication technologies in homes, kindergartens and schools.

As explained in the previous chapter (Chapter Seven), I used a qualitative approach to the research, guided by phenomenographic methodology. Research questions were addressed by
drawing on information from three main sources: (1) parents, (2) teachers, and (3) relevant educational documents available to the public and press releases from newspapers.

This chapter reports mainly on family and educational background data gained from in-depth interviews with parents and teachers. All interviews were conducted in German, and transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Interview guides translated into home languages were also provided during the interviews. As established in Chapter One, voices, opinions and perspectives from immigrant families are missing in the discourse on immigrant children’s language education. This thesis attempts to provide this more personalised and contextualised perspective on language learning.

From the broad macro context of German speaking Swiss society, the main focus on immigrant languages in education and vocational training has been on the low literacy level of children of immigrants, the disproportionately high number of Swiss immigrant children in the lowest level of secondary school, and the disproportionately high number of early immigrant student school drop outs. Mediocre literacy performance of Swiss 15 year olds’ in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2003 was a major cause for concern, and a national campaign to improve language and reading skills in children and adolescents from immigrant families was prescribed. However the strategies planned to address literacy issues did not necessarily get to the root of the problem, that children of immigrants must feel comfortable in both home and school cultures early in their education to become proficient in the languages of their communities to succeed in school and life (Cummins, 2000). Consistent with the perspectives of Garcia Coll et al. (1996) and Rogoff (2003) that highlight the key role of the interplay and interconnections between children’s internal and external environments, I examined the processes of home language promotion as a vehicle for fostering academic success.

Given the disproportionately high number of immigrant children in the Basel area who attend schools that are the least academically demanding, and which present few opportunities or only indirect pathways to higher education (presently called Weiterbildungsschule, see Chapter Three), or attend special or remedial classes (Ehret, 1999), seeking alternative ways to facilitate immigrant children’s school progress and success is necessary to improve academic outcomes now and in the future. This chapter outlines some characteristics of immigrant families who participated in this study, and on children’s language learning. I also provide details of the Basel Department of Education position on languages, and outline teacher perspectives on home language promotion for children of immigrants.
Chapter Eight is divided into three main parts. Part One presents an account of family backgrounds drawing on demographic data obtained through the interviews. The demographic profile focuses on family characteristics; the number of years families lived in Switzerland, the languages spoken in the home, parental education attainment, and work force participation. Part Two presents data on parent beliefs about languages, activities and issues related to language learning and maintenance in immigrant families. It is divided into seven sections and reports on:

a) language patterns in the family and between siblings,
b) parents’ beliefs about the relative importance of home languages,
c) their reasons for maintaining home languages and promoting the majority language,
d) complications faced in language acquisition,
e) parents’ educational and occupational expectations/aspirations for their children,
f) literacy in home languages,
g) strategies parents used to maintain the home language in the family and strategies used to promote the majority language.

Part Three reports analyses of Basel Department of Education languages policy and teacher interviews. It is divided into five subsections:

a) the Basel educational policy position on home languages,
b) teacher demographics,
c) teachers’ beliefs about the importance of home language learning,
d) the extent of kindergarten and school support for families’ efforts to promote home language learning, and
e) the degree to which teachers recognise home language learning as a promoter of cognitive competence in the dominant community.

8.1.1 Limitations of participant sample

Parent participants in this study were drawn from diverse sociolinguistic, occupational and educational backgrounds in Basel-City and Basel-Land. Selection of parents and teachers was constrained by the limitations imposed by data protection requirements in Basel, civil law of the Committee for Ethics in Human Research at the University of Canberra and the Basel City Department of Education. The voluntary nature of participation and the busy lives of families and teachers further constrained the recruitment of a truly representative sample of immigrants and teachers.
8.2 Family demographics: Background and context

As shown in Table 3 below, the main immigrant groups included in this study were: Kosovo Albanian, Latin American, Kurdish, Turkish, Serbian and Croatian, and Spanish families. A total of 58 families were interviewed for the study; 15 interviews were carried out with both parents present, 41 with mothers only, and two with fathers only.

Table 3
Languages Spoken at Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language spoken at home</th>
<th>Kosovo Albanian</th>
<th>Spanish (Latin American immigrants)</th>
<th>Kurdish</th>
<th>Turkish</th>
<th>Serbian &amp; Croatian</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The Latin American group also included one person who spoke Quechua as a child (the indigenous language of Bolivia). However as an adult she speaks exclusively Spanish with her children.

In the majority of families, (n= 44, 76 percent) both parents were from the same country of origin and spoke the same home language. In 14 (24 percent) families, the mother and father spoke different home languages (cross-national couples). Children in cross-national families were exposed to two languages or more at home in the years prior to school. Of the 14 cross-national couples, eleven were binational, (one person Swiss national and the other foreign born). Cross-national marriages are quite common in Switzerland. In the year 2000, according to the Bundesamt für Statistik (Swiss Federal Statistics Office) (Wirth, 2004), one third of all marriages in Switzerland were binational. This means that, in many cases, a large number of children’s home languages are not accounted for as “other than German” in the school system because a child’s language is often recorded as the majority language when one parent is Swiss (My own experience as a parent).

Considerably lower than in the Swiss population as a whole, 5 (7 percent) families were single-parent families (The divorce rate in Switzerland in 2002 in binational couples was reported to be 39 percent compared with 45 percent where both partners were Swiss nationals.
The divorce rate in 2002 in Basel City was 48 percent, and in Basel-Land 38 percent (Merz, 2004, p. 3). This means that children of immigrants’ are more likely to be living in two parent families. These divorce rates are comparable to those of immigrant families in USA (Shields & Behrman, 2004).

### 8.2.1 Family size

Immigrant families tended to be larger than the typical Swiss family. In the present study, as shown in Table 4 below, 15 (27.5 percent) of the participant families had three children and 32 families (55 percent) had two children. The average Swiss family had 1.39 children in 2003. In Basel City, the average family size was 1.26 and Basel-Land 1.33 in 2000 (Wanner & Fei, 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children in the Family</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT FAMILIES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

### 8.2.2 Total number of children

In order to participate in the study, at least one child in the family was required to attend kindergarten or primary school (age range 4-12). Further, while this study focused predominately on children in the early and primary years, many of the participating families also had younger and older children. The information on families’ views about language learning for both younger and older siblings added to the depth of the perspectives on preschool and secondary school family experiences. At the time of the interviews, families had a total of 131 children, ranging in age from several months to 21 years of age. Of this group of children, 11 were at home with their mother, one child attended centre based childcare, 3 attended playgroup, 28 attended kindergarten, 59 attended primary school, 21 lower secondary school (mostly in the lower tracks) one bridging year, and two upper secondary school (Gymnasium). (See Chapter Three for an outline of school system).
8.2.3. Years resident in Switzerland

Table 5 below shows the number of years parents lived in Switzerland. Many fathers in the study lived in Switzerland longer than mothers (more than half the participants between 11 and more than 20 years) while more than half of the mothers lived in Switzerland between 5 and 15 years. Given language proficiency is linked to contact with a language, fathers’ longer residence in Switzerland means that they are likely to have a better command of the local German language.

Table 5
Years Lived in Switzerland (Mothers and Fathers) According to Country of Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years Lived in Switzerland</th>
<th>South America</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Kosovo Albania</th>
<th>Serbia and Croatia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Kurd from Turkey</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second generation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss national/ Born</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. M= Mothers  F= Fathers  *Never lived in Switzerland  (a) = Scotland, Germany

As a result, many mothers depended on their husbands to communicate with their children’s teachers, and some reported that they felt isolated due to the language barrier. This situation can be quite disadvantageous for some children because fathers have less time to engage with the school as they generally work during school hours. On the other hand, those fathers on shift work explained that they did have the time and opportunity to visit their children’s school.
The length of time parents have lived in Switzerland is also important because it impacts on their educational experiences. According to Thürlemann (2004), parents who came to Switzerland in the past 15 years generally had more education and were more skilled workers than those who came as guest workers before 1990. In the present study, only 12 fathers and 4 mothers have lived in Switzerland for more than 20 years, suggesting that the more recent arrivals have had better educational opportunities in their own countries.

8.2.4 Housing

Most participants (70 percent) lived in Basel City in crowded inner city neighbourhoods and 30 percent, lived in adjoining suburbs in Basel-Land. Basel-City families typically lived in apartments in lower socioeconomic areas. Many of these apartments were situated on busy noisy roads and in areas characterised by a high percentage of people speaking languages other than German. Some 23 percent of participants lived in middle socioeconomic neighbourhoods. Five families reported they had purchased their own house or apartment. Three families indicated they had bought a house in their home country, or they still had a house they returned to during school holidays. The neighbourhood and Canton where families live determines which school children are allowed to attend. Clearly this affects educational provisions for immigrants because in Switzerland, as elsewhere, school resourcing is closely linked to socioeconomic considerations.

8.2.5 Parent educational attainment

Parent occupation and educational attainment are listed in Appendixes G and H. A summary of parent educational attainment is listed in Table 6 below.

Mothers’ education. Variations were noted in the level of mothers’ education. As can be seen in Table 6 below, about 70 percent of mothers had completed only primary or middle secondary education, and they had a slightly higher level of education than fathers in this study. Just over one third of mothers and fathers had participated in higher education. Recent immigrants generally had a higher level of education (38.5 percent) in their home countries than Swiss nationals at 18.3 percent (Thürlemann, 2004, based on data in the Swiss 2000 Census). Degree level higher education was generally obtained in the home country. Postgraduate work was completed in a third country and, in the case of two people, in Basel.
Table 6  
*Educational Attainment (Mothers and Fathers)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Secondary</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Primary = 5 years; Middle Secondary = 8, 9 or 10 years, Upper Secondary = 12; Higher Education: Tertiary level 2 to 4 years, Post Graduate = 2 to 6 years.

Fewer mothers than fathers had primary level education only. Generally, mothers from Latin America, Serbia and Kosovo had the highest level of education, while mothers from Turkey, (Turkish and Kurdish speaking participants) had the lowest level of education. These findings are important for two reasons. Firstly, Hernandez (2004) found that immigrant parent education level is highly relevant in determining children’s wellbeing and development. According to Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman and Hemphill (1991, p. 114) and many other researchers, mothers’ education is important in predicting oral language and reading development. Secondly, as reported in many contexts (Elliott, 2006; Hernandez, 2004) preschool attendance is strongly linked to parent education level. Higher levels of parent education are associated with higher levels of participation in preschools. However, there were major variations in preschool attendance between the immigrant groups in this study. Just under half the three year old children in this study attended preschool (called playgroup in Switzerland). Children’s participation in preschool is fundamental to their second language development, and lays the foundation for their future learning.
Mothers’ education and children’s preschool attendance. Analysis of present data shows considerable variation in children’s preschool attendance, and that preschool attendance was dependent on several factors, not just mothers’ education level. The most common form of complementary care (Lanfranchi, 2002a) in Switzerland, and in the Basel area, is referred to as Spielgruppe (playgroup) where three-year-old children attend two, two-hour sessions per week (All Swiss children attend kindergarten from four years of age). The second type of preschool is called Tagesheim (childcare); children attend whole or part of the day while their parents work. There are generally two types of playgroups; those organised by individuals for profit groups, and those organised by local not-for-profit ecumenical church groups. Nearly half (45 percent) of families in this study used some kind of preschool arrangement in the German Swiss language for their children. A more differentiated insight can be obtained when mothers’ education is considered. In families where mothers had a high level of education (n=20), nine (50 percent) sent their children to Swiss play group. Of the 30 mothers who had a middle level of education, 12 (40 percent) families used Swiss playgroups or childcare. In the eight families where mothers had a low level of education, five families used Swiss childcare or playgroups. Many families however, chose to involve their children in relevant ‘mother tongue’ playgroups as well as or instead of the Swiss playgroup.

The reasons why families chose to send their children to play groups are important in their overall views about children’s learning and development, and about language learning in particular. Of the 45 percent of families who used Swiss/German speaking playgroups and childcare most said they wanted their children to learn to socialise and learn German vocabulary in preparation for their transition into kindergarten. Of those who did not use formal childcare, or preschool, most said that it was important for them to spend time in the family speaking the home language. Some others said they did not understand that it was important for their children’s language development to attend preschool. Approximately 26 (45 percent) families said that they arranged for their children to play with relatives and neighbours so that their children could play and speak in their mother tongue language. Several mothers explained that they had “tried” to send their children to Swiss play group, but it did not work out because the children were unhappy. Several mothers and fathers also explained that the first child in the family had not attended playgroup, but the second or third child had attended.

These findings offer a more differentiated insight into reasons for preschool participation and suggest that sociocultural explanations may be more relevant than considering parent education level alone. Several parents emphasised that they believed it was important to
socialise their children in both languages. Mothers speaking Kurdish in the present study who had a low level of education (five years) all sent their children to Swiss playgroups so that they could learn some German before they went to kindergarten. In addition, they also arranged for their children to play with other children speaking their mother tongue.

**Fathers’ education.** Most fathers (62 percent) had primary and lower secondary education and some 33 percent had higher education. According to Thürlemann (2004), there is a growing trend of immigrants who came to Switzerland since the mid 1990s with higher levels of education and training. As can be seen in Appendixes F and G, Kurdish and Turkish participants tended to have the lowest level of education and training. These findings of low levels of education are consistent with those reported by Yağmur (2002) for Turkish immigrants in Australia. Low levels of educational attainment generally mean that these immigrants will also be in the lowest levels of employment because they do not possess the skills necessary to compete on the job market.

### 8.2.6 Parent occupational status

Parent occupational status was significant in determining family income which, in turn, impacted their choice of living area. Most fathers in the study were employed on a full time basis mainly in occupations at the trades level. Only eight mothers (13 percent) were employed full-time, a further 43 percent (n=25) were employed on a part-time basis. Both parents worked in 28 (48 percent) families (this figure is comparative with the general Swiss level, OECD in Balmer 2004). In 19 (32 percent) families, fathers were the sole income earners and in only five (9 percent) families, mothers were the sole income earners. Table 7 below shows parents’ occupations by work category. As can be seen, about 30 percent of mothers and fathers are employed in a professional capacity. Most other fathers are employed in semiskilled areas while most mothers are in skilled occupation.
Table 7  
*Parent Occupation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Mothers Number</th>
<th>Mothers Percentage</th>
<th>Fathers Number</th>
<th>Fathers Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semiskilled</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td><em>3</em></td>
<td><em>5%</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *Included in homemaker but also looking for work*

8.2.7 *Mothers’ workforce participation*

Of significance in the study is the substantial level of underemployment. Although 18 mothers (31 percent) had professional occupations, only half of them were working in their profession. There were three reasons for this: First, the qualifications they had earned in their home country were not accepted in Switzerland; secondly, they lacked the language skills necessary to communicate in their profession, and thirdly, they opted to stay at home to care for young children. Parents generally explained that their underemployment was mostly due to their lack of language skills, and therefore they currently worked as semiskilled or unskilled labour.

8.2.8 *Fathers’ workforce participation*

Immigrant father occupations, as can be seen in Table 7 above, are distributed somewhat unevenly with almost half of the participants working in semiskilled or unskilled positions:

- 27.5 percent (n=18) worked in professional positions
- 22.5 percent (n=13) worked in skilled positions
- 43 percent (n=25) worked in semi skilled or unskilled positions

Two parents were unemployed (Architect and Unskilled person).

Parent educational level and the type of work that they carry out can affect language development and retention (Yağmur, 2002). Many parents who work in low paid jobs do not have the money or time to attend language courses, which means that they often develop and
use “foreigner talk” (Clyne 1991, p. 114). Typically they have less than full competence in the language. This foreigner talk eventually replaces the home language, and is often used in the family.

Structural factors resulting from the high cost and shape of the childcare and educational system in the German-speaking region of Switzerland are not conducive to promoting mothers’ workforce participation. Several mothers believed they were “forced” to stay at home and out of the workforce owing to the nature of Swiss kindergarten and school timetable structure. As described in Chapter Three, kindergartens and schools close for 90 minutes during the middle of the day, typically from 12–1.30 pm, so the responsibility of care of preschool and school age children lies with the families. Several mothers, (usually in those families who could afford to live on one salary) chose to stay at home to care for their kindergarten and school age children during the day. Most children in the German speaking region of Switzerland return home over the midday break. In some cases schools and kindergartens only operate in the mornings from 8 am until 12 pm. The mismatch between school and kindergarten hours and working hours means that parents must either pay for their children’s lunchtime care and some afternoon care, or return from work every mid day.

School closures in the middle of the day, reinforces the traditional/conservative ideological position that women should stay at home and care for children and not participate in the work force (Lanfranchi, 2002a). This structural anomaly in the school system makes it difficult for women to pursue a professional career and raise children. For this reason, most Swiss women must choose their profession over children, or give up their career in preference for children and family. The school system is not designed to facilitate the primary caregivers’ (typically mothers’) full time work. As of mid 2007, the Basel Education Department opened lunch time care in several schools to cater for the needs of children and their working parents.

Summary

The demographic backgrounds of the participants indirectly or directly affect language maintenance and retention in families and their children. Of particular relevance in this context is that mothers have generally lived in Switzerland fewer years than fathers, so their German language is likely to be less proficient than that of fathers. One third of parents attained higher education but this was not reflected in their employment status, especially for women. Most participants had low to medium levels of education. Work force participation was influenced by a combination of factors: Parent education level, language skills,
acceptance of country of origin qualifications and their children’s school attendance. Almost all fathers participated in the paid workforce, and more than half were in professional or skilled positions. Not all mothers with professional qualifications could work in their chosen profession. Almost half the mothers were homemakers and cared for their children. Finally, many families lived in lower socioeconomic areas, which mean their children typically attend schools with very high numbers of immigrant children.

In the following section, parents’ beliefs and opinions about home languages are presented. As will be discussed, parents’ beliefs are a reflection of their past and present sociocultural experiences and provide multifaceted insights into the factors that affect language maintenance and loss in immigrant families. These wider sociocultural experiences are important in shaping families’ perceptions of language learning and education in general because as Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1983) and Okagaki and Sternberg (1993), have argued, children’s educational outcomes cannot be entirely attributed to socioeconomic factors. Some of these processes that lead to differences between and within people’s beliefs and practices about education and language learning, are included in the following section of this chapter.

8.3 Parent views, opinions and beliefs about languages

This section outlines families’ current patterns of language use and beliefs about language and development for their children. As will unfold, their beliefs about home language promotion are embedded in their own past and present linguistic and cultural experiences and especially their experiences negotiating the Swiss sociocultural, sociopolitical, socioeconomical and educational contexts. Bearing in mind the important role of distal family resources in children’s educational success (Ceci et al. 1997), the strategies parents adopted to promote their children’s language learning are reported, together with parent aspirations for their children’s education and vocation. Excerpts from the interviews are used to illustrate parent perspectives emerging from the data.

8.3.1 Language patterns in families

Data from this study showed that both fathers and mothers were responsible for facilitating first language use. Both parents believed that home languages were important to maintain children’s home culture and relations with family members, and both actively encouraged
home language use, mainly by speaking and reading to children in the home language. Families were primarily concerned with day-to-day communication issues in the home. Clyne and Kipp’s (2002) notion of “Intergenerational transmission” of language, family focus on home language development is critical to the wider maintenance of language and continuity of culture across generations, in this case, outside the home country as well as within it.

Amongst the families in this study, the mothers’ first language was the main language of communication in the home, and solely spoken between mothers and their children in most families (n=44, 76 percent) and between fathers and children in 42, (72 percent) of families. In a further fifth of families (n=13, 22 percent), fathers spoke both their first language and German in the home. Only one family adopted German Swiss (the local language) exclusively as the home language. The findings clearly indicate that fathers are more likely to communicate with their children in the home language as well as the local language, a reflection of their contact with German Swiss gained from their workplace.

The Kurdish language group differed somewhat from other language groups in their pattern of language use in the home. Discussions with families suggest that Kurdish parents had complex language experiences in their country of origin, and these experiences are reflected in the patterns of language use with their own children and in their acceptance or rejection of their own language. Three mothers spoke Kurdish with their children, and one mother spoke Kurdish until her children reached kindergarten then switched to German with her children. Two mothers spoke Kurdish and Turkish to their children. Only one mother spoke Kurdish and German to her children. Five fathers spoke Kurdish; two spoke both Kurdish and German, and one Turkish to their children. In one case, a mother’s decision to reject her first language in favour of German and English was because she considered the high status languages to be “the most important world languages” (Participant 28).

Wide variations in home language use were also evident in the Latin American Spanish language group in both binational and cross national families. Five fathers (Swiss nationals) spoke their first language (German) exclusively with their children, while three Swiss fathers and two Swiss mothers spoke both Spanish and Swiss German with their children. Three Spanish language participants spoke three languages with their children within the family (Spanish, Italian, and German Swiss).

Arabic was promoted in some Albanian, Turkish and Kurdish speaking families. As well as using Arabic in the home, emphasis was on learning the alphabet and on reading chapters in the Koran. Arabic was clearly a part of children’s upbringing and family religious practices.
Clearly most children in this study experienced a diversity of languages in their homes. Although children were most likely to communicate with their mother in her first language, many also used their fathers’ language in the home when his language differed from the mother’s. These findings reveal that many children in immigrant families do not speak exclusively in one language at home indicating that many children are bilingual or multilingual. In many cases, children speak three and, in few families, four languages before school languages are added to their repertoire. For example, a child might speak Kurdish with her mother, Arabic with her father, play with friends in Turkish, and attend childcare in German Swiss.

8.3.2 Patterns of language use between siblings

The complexity of language use was magnified when languages spoken between children were considered. Younger children were more likely than older children to speak their home language at home. Clearly older children’s exposure to German Swiss and German in the school and wider community lead to a lesser use of the home language in families. Siblings younger than four years and those who attended kindergarten, communicated almost exclusively in their mother’s language at home in the family. In two thirds of the families (n=38, 65 percent) siblings communicated in both the home language and the local language in the home. Older siblings who attended primary school spoke more German Swiss at home. Parents reported that children attending secondary school tended to be more flexible about their language use and which language they used depended with whom they were speaking. Many younger siblings benefited from the fact that their older siblings were competent German speakers. As older children become increasingly involved in the wider community, and especially the school environment, they become more confident users of the language of the community, in this case German Swiss. Parents also reported that older siblings often read in the home language with younger brothers and sisters, thus acting as scaffolders of home language pre-literacy skills (Volk, 1998; Volk & Long, 2005).

Siblings in seven families (12 percent) spoke the home language exclusively at home as a result of the language being designated the family language. Four of the seven families were from Serbia. In eight families (14 percent) siblings communicated exclusively in German Swiss. Conversations with families showed that older siblings’ facility with German Swiss plays a key role in developing local language skills in the home. This facilitating role of the elder sibling mirrors that of the more advanced speaker, collaborator in Vygotsky’s (1978)
zone of proximal development, as well as the instigator of change in proximal processes identified in Bronfenbrenner’s (2001) bioecological model.

In this study, as has been noted elsewhere (Rogoff, 2003), many older immigrant children were active agents and learners in cultural and linguistic brokering between the home and the outside world. Linguistic brokering between children and the wider community, including the school, is of increasing significance given the number of multicultural and multilingual societies across the globe today. In families with only one child, the main home language spoken between parent and child was more likely to remain the home language. Viewing children’s language development from the perspective of the immigrant family, and gaining an awareness of the many and different combination of languages used in families is important information that schools and children’s teachers need to be aware of. Children may use up to three different languages other than German before they arrive at school. For this reason, teachers will need to use a pedagogical approach that accounts for children’s bilingual and multilingual backgrounds (Cummins, 2000).

8.3.3 The Importance of home language maintenance and literacy in home languages

Responses to questions about the importance of home language indicated that most parents (n= 47, 80 percent) were strongly supportive of the need to maintain and promote home-language learning in both spoken and written form. Families used a number of strategies to promote home language use. More than half 59 percent (n= 34) sent their children to home language and culture classes. These children attended one of three types of home language classes: (1) at primary school in the St Johann (model primary school), (2) at Orientation School (year 5-7), or in (3) Saturday or Wednesday afternoon school organised by the Turkish and Spanish Consulates in their respective languages. An additional 19 percent (n=11) of parents whose children attended kindergarten said that they intend to enrol their children in home language and culture classes in the future.

Immigrant parents’ focus on languages showed that they had a dual role to play in their children’s education. Parents’ role in facilitating learning in both the home and majority languages (as discussed in Chapter Four) helps facilitate transfer across the languages, which will eventually benefit their children. Eventually means that it takes time (approximately five to seven years (Cummins, 1981b), for immigrant children to develop the same level of proficiency as children who have spoken the majority language from birth.
Many parents believed that they must actively encourage literacy learning in order to promote their children’s home language development, and had developed a variety of strategies to support their children’s learning. Learning to write and read was complicated by the marked differences in the Latin, Cyrillic and Arabic alphabets as well as in grammar differences between languages. Two families from Serbia explained the differences between the two writing systems (Latin and Cyrillic script), and they expect their children to read and write in both languages. Three families from Turkey also explained that their children were learning the Koran Arabic script in the Koran school and at home.

Writing to relatives was the main reason parents gave for wanting children to write in their home languages as well as being able to fully participate in their culture and home country. Participant 6, from Kosovo had high ambitions for his children because he wants them to learn the language, culture and history of his country. On a similar line, participant 37 felt that learning to read and write in the home language is important because: *We don’t want to be foreigners in own country*. Participant 45 wanted her daughter to be able to study in a Spanish-speaking country, that’s why it *makes sense* for her children to learn to read and write in the home language.

### 8.3.4. Strategies parents use to promote home language learning

Families used a range of strategies to promote home language learning. Parents also were actively engaged in facilitating incidental literacy through interactions with their children in their home language, as well as through use of traditional and modern tools such as watching television and listening to stories on cassettes. Story telling (promoting oral language) was a lively pastime in many families. Parents described their own childhood stories about everyday life, people, places and tales about the parents’ home country and culture. The Kurdish and Albanian groups relied more on oral story telling. The main strategies are reported below.

### 8.3.5 Reading in families

The main strategies used to promote reading were through reading books and borrowing books from a library. Reading to children, and story telling in the home language was a popular family activity, especially with young children. More than half the families (n=32) 55 percent were members of a library, and several were members of the intercultural library.
Participant One did not find books in the Albanian language in the local library, but she used picture books in German and retold the story in Albanian. Similarly, Spanish participant 55 explained: *We have German books but we translate them in our head as we tell the story in Spanish.* Findings from a previous study (Marti-Bucknall, 2002) show that kindergarten teachers also translate from Standard German written storybooks into German Swiss. This means that the oral story does not match with the written text. This may cause confusion in early reading-spelling-sound connections.

Participant 11, a father from Turkey, explained that his wife reads to his children nightly in Turkish, and they go to the local library on Sundays after the family visit to the mosque. Participant 57 said that his children use the school and the local library for projects for school, as well: *We also have a lot of books in Spanish and encyclopaedias that I have purchased.*

Participant 45, a Spanish-speaking parent, explained *they have books in kindergarten in German, so I buy the same stories and songs in Spanish for home use.* Participant 24 also explained family story telling practices: *I tell the children a lot of stories. Mainly in Kurdish, stories from home, about my great grandparents from Kurdistan. I had a beautiful childhood...*

Participant 33 talked about her children’s love for stories from the home country: *They want to hear them all the time. They ask me so much!... What I did as a small child- I have a lot of stories to tell because I like children. I also tell stories not only to my children but to lots of others too.* In sum, it appears that both oral story telling and book reading are the most common strategies families used to promote reading in the home language.

### 8.3.6 Traditional media use in the home language

As will be discussed in Chapter Ten, traditional and interactive media are important sources of support for home language learning and for communication in the language of the wider community and school. This section reports on ways in which traditional media such as television viewing or listening to radio or cassettes were used to support language learning. Key findings revealed that most families made extensive use of traditional media, especially books, television and cassettes.

All families used some form or a combination of media as a major source of input into home language maintenance. Families used many traditional forms of media in their home language as well as in the language of the adopted country. (This information excludes...
contemporary forms of interactive media because information and communication technology use in families is covered in-depth in Chapter Ten).

Books in the home language were used by 71 percent (n=41) of all families, followed by 67 percent (n=39) television viewing. Television channels in all participant home languages were available; however some required a satellite dish or cable. Newspapers in the respective languages were available at the neighbourhood kiosks and were read by 41 percent (n=24) of the participant families. Families reported that although magazines and comics were not easily obtainable locally, 31 percent (n=18) and 29 percent (n=17) of families read magazines and comics. Parents subscribed to the magazines or purchased them on home country visits or borrowed from relatives.

8.3.7 Hobbies, dance, playing a musical instrument and or sport in home language

Many children participated in culturally specific activities in their home language. These activities were carried out after school and included sport, dance and music. Several parents said that they encouraged their children to learn a musical instrument in their home language. One boy, for example, was learning the sitar in Turkish, and several children were learning the Flamenco dance in Spanish. Children played football (soccer) in the local Swiss dialect, German Swiss while some played in Turkish and Kurdish.

Most participants celebrated their home country national days and several families followed the traditions of the religious calendar. Several families celebrated Serbian Orthodox Christmas, and children attended religious instruction in the Serbian language. Several families from Kosovo and Turkey attended the local mosque for prayer and services, and some of their children attended Koran schools in the Moslem community and followed the religious traditions of Ramadan.

Several participants stressed that they enjoyed celebrating international festivals and were open for other cultures. For example, Participant 35 from Serbia, explained their son’s interest in Judo had led to a family interest in the Japanese culture. The findings revealed a wide range of interests that were mostly culturally specific. Home language and culture was therefore not only promoted through attending language schools rather it is a part of children’s social worlds.
8.3.8 **Parents as teachers of home languages in the home**

Home language teaching by parents was found in all language groups. Parents used a formal type of instruction to teach the different alphabets and used incidental opportunities for promoting children’s learning. Several parents taught their own children the home language. Eight families explained that they teach their own children phonetics and reading in their home language. Turkish, Serbian and Spanish participants said they ordered schoolbooks through their relatives who had children attending school in their home country (Participants 14 & 33, 58).

8.3.9 **Language arrangements in the family**

The reasons for maintaining languages and the cause of language shift to Swiss German varied greatly between families and within language groups. Table 8 below provides a summary of main types of language constellations identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main types of family language arrangement:</th>
<th>Type identified in the following families/parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Consistent principle: one parent one language.</td>
<td>Cross national families: both parents speak (only) their mother tongue with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Only home language in the home</td>
<td>Same country of origin and same language parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Spontaneous and informal arrangements</td>
<td>Mainly occurred with same language parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Intuition</td>
<td>Mostly in families with the same language parents and only speak mother tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Followed advice from: a) Educators/Media c) Relatives b) Speech therapists</td>
<td>Reported in some families: Only speak mother language Only speak German with children in mixed language families.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Spontaneous and informal arrangements (no set arrangement of which language would be spoken) usually lead to a gradual shift to German in the language spoken between siblings and to parents. Some cross national parents made a conscious decision for the “one parent, one language principle” (Saunders 1988). They also generally had pride in their languages and also perceived the additional obligatory languages that their children would learn in the school curriculum (French and English) as a potential gain for future educational and vocational opportunities. Other parents facilitated their children’s German language acquisition by organising tutoring outside school hours in German in favour of promoting the home language.

As found by Papademetre and Routoulas (2001), the socioeconomic gain was considered the most important reason for the emphasis on the majority language use. In several cases, and across socioeconomic groups, the multilingual school curriculum, typical in Swiss schools as described in Chapter Three, was perceived as a burden rather than a potential gain for their children. Some parents believed that the number of languages that children were required to learn during their school years was problematic. In addition to their home languages, children are required to speak German Swiss, German and French, subjects that are obligatory and required for promotion. In several families, poor results in French prevented children from entering the highest track in secondary school in spite of their good German and maths results.

Findings from the present study also indicated that children’s transitions to school and between primary and secondary school usually triggered a gradual shift away from the home language towards the majority language, especially in children with older siblings. Bronfenbrenner’s (2001) bioecological theoretical perspective proposes that consistency and continuity are important in children’s development. This need for continuity and consistency could also be extended to languages, as well as relationships in the families in this study.

As previously indicated, Clyne (1991) explained that language arrangements either facilitate language maintenance, or shift from the home language to the majority language. In the present study, language use clearly shifted between siblings in families, excluding those families who determined the home language as the family language. Transitions in children’s life reflected a rethink, or a change in language orientation in several families.
8.3.10 Transitions trigger changes in language use in the family

Ecological transitions were acknowledged by Bronfenbrenner (1979) to be potentially disruptive experiences in general; they were, as the findings from this study indicated, also likely to have a disruptive effect on home language use. The transition from kindergarten to primary school is a critical time in immigrant children’s language development, as they must acquire literacy skills and learn to read and write in a language that is not their first language. As the participants in this study indicated, language shift began in kindergarten but children continued to speak the home language with their mother in the home.

The transition between kindergarten and primary school entrance signaled the beginning of a noticeable shift away from children’s home language use. Most observably, once children entered school, they spoke and used more German with siblings in the home. In all cases children’s first language development and use was clearly interrupted, as learning the local language at school had absolute priority in the school curriculum. As a result of the emphasis on the majority language, several second-generation parents spoke German with their children because they believed priority given to the German language was the key to school success. Only in those families where parents were committed to their children’s continued development of the home language and also insisted on their children speaking the home language, were children able to continue what Collier (1995) described as “uninterrupted cognitive development” in their first language. And according to Cummins (1981b), these skills that children continue to develop in their first language will transfer to their second (or third) language acquired in the school, providing that children are motivated to learn the second language.

These transitions in language use are also significant, as Bronfenbrenner (2001) proposed as “engaging in social interaction with others in progressively more complex activities and tasks” (p. 97). Such conditions in the external environment (the school environment, unless they attend one of the few schools that integrate home language into the curriculum) are missing, and therefore determine and signal to a large extent the beginning of children’s language loss. In families where parents were committed to maintaining the home language, the home language remained the main form of communication between parents and children. Furthermore, in the case of children’s language maintenance, the external school environment can be the cause of discontinuity and intermittent use of the home language over time, which may, as Wong Fillmore (1991) established, result in children forgetting or losing their language.
Wong Fillmore (2000) explained, language loss causes problems in many families because “it is not easy to socialize children in a language one doesn’t know well” (p. 206). Further, she believed, children need progressively more complex exchanges in home languages with their parents. When this exchange is absent in families, problems may arise between family members who do not have a good oral command of the local language, and the children who do not have a good command of their home language.

**8.3.11 Parent reasons for language maintenance**

Several main reasons emerged from responses to the question: Why do you believe maintenance of the home language is important? Parents provided more than twenty different reasons why their home languages were important. These reasons were categorised into several groups relating to:

1. Establishing bicultural and bilingual identity
2. Communicating with friends and family
3. Educational and economic reasons, and
4. Religious and spiritual reasons.

This spectrum of reasons indicates unique and individual variations in language use. Together, these reasons implicate the role of home languages in negotiating cultural identity. It is important to note that some of these circumstances in families led to the loss of the home language and, as Fishman (1991) explained, loss of both language and culture cause many adolescents to lose sight of their true self, and a security in a sense of self and their cultural origins. Language loss is the first step in losing contact with the heritage culture. The reasons parents gave for maintaining their home language were grouped into the following themes.

**Personal reasons.** The most common reason for maintaining the home language was based on personal beliefs. Participant number 2 explained: *So that they [the children] can communicate with me (mother.*) Participant 5 (father) explained: So that they [the children] can communicate with their mother (5). One Swiss mother whose first husband was from Spain believed that it was important for her children to maintain the father’s home language: *It is more important to learn Spanish because their father is a Spaniard* (50). Participant 51 gave a further explanation: *Our family language is Spanish. My husband speaks German Swiss with the children and I speak Spanish.* (51).
**Spiritual reasons.** The spiritual value of the home language was considered by some families to be a key reason for supporting the home language development in their children. The word “spiritual” was defined as being sacred to the family or the parent. *The more language you have the richer you are* (5). *It is good for the soul* (3). *Language is a gift, the Spanish language is a part of me and my children are a part of me too* (54).

**Ability to speak German.** Several parents’ linked their decision to speak their own language with their low level of ability to speak German: *It is important because my ability to speak German is not equivalent to my ability to speak in my own language* (31). For many parents it was taken for granted that: *They [the children] will learn German here anyway* (9), so it is a good reason to maintain the home language.

**Communicate with relatives.** The purpose of speaking the home language was closely tied with the need to communicate with relatives living in Switzerland, the extended family, and those in their home country: *So that they can speak to and understand their relatives who also live here in Switzerland* (16) and *so that when we visit our relatives in our home country they [the children] can speak properly* (5) (9), (22), (35), (34), (45), (52).

**Proficiency in the home language linked with cultural understanding.** The ability to speak well in the home language was a key concern in many families. A good command of the language was considered vital in many families. *It is embarrassing (to me) when a person can only speak half a sentence, whether it is French, Turkish or German. One should really master one’s mother language, that’s the least a person can do* (21). Researchers have consistently shown that speaking well has cognitive benefits for learning the second language (Collier, 1995). Similarly, an analogy can be made with this parent’s belief: *We don’t want to be foreigners with our own children* (5). Possibly, the mother tongue is the only language through which true cultural understanding of connections with those significant people in children’s lives can be achieved.

Understanding the subtleties and nuances of a language is only possible with a good understanding of the home language: *They often call their father and they have to know the language well to understand the humour- because it is much different in the German language* (51).

**Linguistic right.** As explained in Chapter Three, immigrant children’s home language is a linguistic human right. For the majority, living in developed countries, the *language as a right* is not a concern, it is a given. Whereas those people originating in countries where languages are suppressed and prohibited, such as people of Kurdish ancestry in Turkey, people who have left their home country because of suppression have a vastly different
mindset regarding languages. Participant 22 offers her insight in this context: *There is nothing better in life than when a mother gives her child her own language* (22). *Their grandfather believes it is important for the children to speak the home language, that is ‘the’ language for him* (22). *Imagine living in your own country and not knowing your own language? We have a right to our language* (22), (24).

**Linguistic and cultural identity and reactions to anti-foreigner sentiment.** Reinforcing and supporting cultural identity were grounds for parents to support their child’s home language maintenance. Wong Fillmore (2000) stressed that knowing where one comes from is a “basic element of central functioning” (p. 206). Within this context, one mother, originally from Serbia, poignantly illustrated the connection between home languages and cultural identity: *It is not important because of me, but because of her, she has to know where she comes from. She was born here but she is not Swiss and never will be* (23). This statement points to a clash in identity and a sense of discrimination that many people from Serbia feel who left former Yugoslavia before or during the civil war.

Participant 6 added his insight into his view on teenage self-acceptance: *When they are teenagers they are interested in their roots, they want to get to know about their identity and their roots. They are not accepted as Swiss, it isn’t clear to them. That’s why they look for their roots. I have experienced that with many teenagers here* (6).

Several parents expressed their concerns about the hostile sociopolitical climate (anti-foreigner sentiment) and the effects it had on their feelings of acceptance and rejection in the local community. During an interview with participant 6, I was shown a copy of a full-page newspaper advertisement. The advertisement was anti Kosovo Albanian, and against members of the Moslem community. Participant 6 said: *These newspaper advertisements shock me... It’s racist propaganda- it shows that our children will never be accepted in Switzerland. I think it is a shame for the Swiss [newspapers] that they accept such primitive propaganda and the government, I mean...*(Participant 6). Participant 6 felt deeply offended by the advertisements and believed that the responsibility of the media was placed in question when the media companies accept and print such advertisements. Participant 6 believed his own children and children from other families would not be accepted by the local Swiss community, and would suffer because of this lack of acceptance.

The prevailing xenophobic climate in Switzerland had a direct influence on why parents’ believe that learning the home language was so important for their children. Six parents (10 percent) felt that their future in Switzerland was uncertain because of the anti-foreigner sentiment, and this was a key reason for supporting their children’s home language learning.
These parents viewed the home language as a key to keeping their options open in case that they needed to return to their country of origin. *We don’t know what the future holds for us here so our children need to learn their home country language* (16), (5), (7), (34), (23), (35).

**Language signifies identity.** Personal identity is closely related to cultural identity, without language, it is difficult to negotiate true identity. Language is closely related to personal identity (Fishman, 1991) as knowing the origins and past history is an important aspect of developing healthy identity. There is also a marked difference between losing a mother tongue, and forgetting a language.

For this reason, negotiating identity was connected with maintaining the home language: *You can’t escape your identity* (6). *Children should not lose their mother tongue* (3), (33). *Children should not forget their mother tongue,* (2), (11), (13).

**Educational and economic benefits.** Some parents wanted children to maintain and strengthen their home language for education and for economic reasons: *Our children may want to study or live in our home country* (52), (54), (34). *We eventually want to return to our own home country to live* (34), (47), (50). Generally, these families believed that maintaining the home language was a key to successful transition to return to their home country: *In principle, there is no German spoken at home. We want them to speak Serbian* (34). Many families were motivated from the educational and economic perspective. Two parents explained: *My child can already see the benefits of having two languages and maybe one day will become a translator* (10). While these parents recognised that educational success depended on proficiency in German, the reasons for promoting the home language related mainly to reintegration into communities in their home countries should they have to return for social or economic reasons. For one parent, the reason for speaking the home language was quite clear: *It is normal that he will speak Serbian at home* (31).

Relatedly, several families believed that fostering their home language would give their children an educational advantage. *Knowing your home language is important to build vocabulary in second and other languages* (10). *From my own experience with my own children, they can learn three or four languages without any problems* (53). Intuitively, or perhaps because of advice from the school or other sources, these parents recognised the value of proficiency in more than one language. These responses reflect a key theoretical perspective that proficiency in one language is instrumental in attaining proficiency in a second or further language (Cummins, 1981a & b).
8.3.12 Parent preference for promoting the majority language

In addition to strong views on home language maintenance, most parents wanted to ensure their children’s proficiency in the German language. They recognised that academic and social success in Swiss society depended on German language proficiency. However, only seven families (12 percent) preferred that their children speak the majority language (German) at home. Two typical views of the educational benefits of German language proficiency were articulated by participant 41 and 11 who explained their family’s position about languages:

German has priority at school, they get Serbian anyway. We speak Serbian at home together and with our children. Their father speaks German when the children do their maths homework. We found, it is better for the children when they speak German because of the differences in the word order (Specifically relating to numbers).
Participant 41

Language skills in both the home and majority were considered crucial by Participant 11:

We [my wife and I] have asked ourselves, because my son speaks German Swiss and he speaks High German, but his grammar isn’t good yet because we still speak Turkish at home. I want him to speak fluent Turkish and that it stays that way, and from this point we thought that as soon as he goes to first grade that we will get a German teacher to come once a week, to help him with his grammar and pronunciation. I think that we have to admit to the fact that 90 percent of Ausländische [foreign] children have a German problem. I think we have to support his German very well and then we will see what he can do. That’s our own idea…. And in the end it all evolves around how well off you are because you need money to support the education of your children.

Most parents recognised the importance of being able to speak both home and local languages as emphasised below by two participants. As participant 39, who came to Switzerland when she was four years old, explained:

We speak both languages (Serbian and German) well. She hasn’t lost contact and she is integrated in both cultures. When my mother-in-law comes, she speaks Serbian very well.
We speak both languages, perhaps a little more German because of school - but my daughter is competent in both languages (39).

Parent personal experiences in their own childhood also appeared to play a key role in their language preference and language choice for their children. Participant 39 gave a detailed account of her own experience as a child immigrant in Switzerland, and as a person who successfully made her way in the world of work. Her position on home language maintenance was quite clear:

It is no use to the child at school when they speak perfect Serbian but can’t speak German. They get poor results, and they can’t get on at school. They won’t get good training or they won’t get an apprenticeship, they will just end up as unskilled workers, and what then? I don’t agree with a lot of parents. They need to make it clear that German is very important. After all, we live in Switzerland and we have to orient ourselves in this country. Everything else [to do with the home language] is wonderful and a valuable personal gain but we have to prove ourselves here, we have to perform well at work, and we have to prove our worth. And when we can’t do that, we are losers for life. And that is bad and I think that it is a shame. I know the mentality from my work. The majority of families, 80 percent or even 90 percent force their own language and this affects a lot of young people. I have an apprentice, she's in her first year, she is a Serb and although she was born here she speaks German poorly. Now I just got her interim report, and her teacher wrote “she has trouble following the lessons on the grounds of her insufficient German vocabulary.” I think she won’t be able to finish her apprenticeship.

Interviewer: Can’t she work on it? Is it really too late?
At 17 it isn’t too late. But the children grow up with this attitude. For that reason it is a little too late.

Participant 39 raised an important attitudinal issue to language learning. She believed that children who learn to value both languages are in a better position to take advantage of both languages. She also felt that the majority language must be valued in the home, and the home language must be valued, affirmed and respected in the school. This she believed would help children develop a positive attitude to both languages. Clearly then, parents want children to be fluent in both languages so that they can move successfully between cultures.
Participant 57 had similar views about the value of home language learning but said that children’s own views should be of prime importance in decisions about home language learning. Participant 57, also a second-generation immigrant whose own parents came to Switzerland as so called guest workers, speaks German Swiss and Italian to her children. She was born in Switzerland, and still speaks Italian to her parents. She explained that language preference depends on the children’s own attitude towards a language:

Today, it’s [the mother tongue] not as important because the kids are living in Switzerland, and it always depends on whether the children want to learn it or not. The problem is they only want to speak German Swiss.

Such different beliefs about home language maintenance are likely to impact on children’s views about the value of language and their language skills both in the home language and in German Swiss. Teachers who seek to extend and enrich children’s language experiences must recognise that each family has a unique perspective on its home language. This information is vital for teachers so that they learn about the position, ideas and beliefs about parents’ attitude to their children’s language development.

8.3.13 Strategies parents used to promote majority language acquisition

While the subject of this study was about home language promotion, a few parents did not promote the home language at all, and a small number of parents felt that once their children reached primary school, a greater emphasis on the German language would help their children. The majority of parents, however, explained that they fostered literacy in both languages. Parents organised after school tutoring in the German language, postponed mother tongue classes in favour of extra tutoring in German and other school subjects.

Several mothers said they wanted to learn German so that they could negotiate the school system and help their children with their homework. Furthermore, mothers who were not able to communicate and read in the local language, expressed their feelings of powerlessness. A statement from one Kosovo Albanian mother clearly demonstrated her need to learn to communicate in the majority language.

Several parents from a range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds voiced concerns about the structural problems within the school system. They said they wanted to move their children to another part of the city where classes contained children from non-
German speaking backgrounds and children of Swiss heritage. For example, participant 32 explained that her family would move to a different part of the city (away from the St Johann area, with a high immigrant population, where there would be a better mixture of Swiss and foreign children). Participant 14 from Turkey also said that her son attended a school in another part of the city away from the St. Johann area where they currently live.

Some parents had strong opinions about the inequalities that they believed existed in the school system. Participant 55 (second-generation Spanish immigrant) suggested a possible solution: Bussing the children as they do in the USA, to or from the neighbouring sections of the city, rather than concentrating all immigrants in the same schools. Participant 24 had formally complained to the authorities about class size composition in his child’s school and concluded that:

The system is the problem; there are 26 children in one class- and every child is from a different country- I think that’s great but what’s a shame is that there are no Swiss children in the class. The system is a catastrophe; I talked to the school inspector responsible for this part of Basel. But they consciously allocate the children that way. I know this, many Swiss parents send their children to schools where the children are better distributed. That’s separatism. That’s why I don’t want to live here in this part of Basel. I like to live here, it’s very nice but for my children…and in kindergarten that’s wonderful, there is a good mixture of children, half and half, that’s good the way it is and the teacher is excellent… We did not think Switzerland would be like this.

Participant 24 described additional forms of segregation in the secondary school. In particular, he was concerned about “hidden segregation” existing in The Music Orientation School classes (a section of the Orienterungs School) where students have two or three extra music lessons per week. Generally, this school is almost exclusively attended by Swiss children as few immigrant parents are aware of the benefits of attending the class. In a sense then, this streaming becomes a form of segregation and further widens the separation and inequalities between children of immigrants and Swiss national children. Swiss parents and some immigrant parents who were aware of this option, openly exploited the opportunity provided by the school system. Two Swiss parents (non participants of the study) also explained to me that they would enrol their children in the Music Orientation class so that their children would not be in a class with many children from immigrant backgrounds. Parent
concerns about segregation are not limited to Basel as hidden forms of segregation are often reported in the USA (Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Yang & Benson McMullen, 2003).

The parent concerns discussed above are considered taboo issues and are not a central political concern. Yet, according to Somm (2004), the number of foreign children in the major city areas of Switzerland has reached a critical point (p. 44). To further illustrate this problem, Moser and Rhyn (1999) carried out a study on the quality of schools in Zürich in 1999. They verified parents’ fears. Tests in German and mathematics given to 1,500 sixth grade students, revealed that a certain percentage of foreign speaking children in one class cause the performance of the whole class to decline. In classes with children amounting to between 25 and 50 percent foreign speaking children, whose mother tongue was their stronger language, tests showed they were proficient in 10 percent less tasks than children in other classes.

The key themes to emerge from this section indicate that parents are concerned about inequalities in their children’s schooling. The first theme was segregation, where many parents hoped that their children would avoid large classes with more than 50 percent of children from immigrant families. The second main theme revealed that parents wanted their children to be exposed to more German, and avoid the disadvantages in a class where immigrant children are in the majority.

**8.3.14 Complications in language acquisition in the local language**

Most parents wanted their children to be fluent in German so that they could do well in school, be well integrated into the Swiss community and gain a good job or do tertiary education. Several families stressed the importance of their children being fluent in German, and the benefits that would flow from this in terms of education and employment. Some families, while recognising the importance of proficiency in German, were also concerned about confusing children with too many languages or when they began to mix their languages. Participant family 16, from Turkey, insisted that their children perfect the German language, and described the problems connected with switching languages:

Mother: “We say they have to speak German at home, because they have to *speak* German perfectly. We ask them to speak German, but they *often mix* the languages. We want our children to *learn* German well.
Father: “Because German is *important at school* at the moment we want our children to speak German. Their mother language isn’t pushed to the side because of this, but right now, we want them to improve their fundamental knowledge in German.” (16).

Children from immigrant backgrounds quickly become conversant in the Swiss dialect in kindergarten through socialising in the playgrounds, from television and through wider community participation. Many parents who also spent all or part of their school years in Switzerland have a good command of the local Swiss dialect, and are also able to maintain the home language through day to day conversations with their children and with their own parents when they also live in Switzerland. However, there is an additional complication for both parents and children because of the difference between the local dialect and Standard German – the written language of instruction at school.

Although immigrant families may speak German Swiss well, they might not have a good command of Standard German, the language of instruction at school. Switching between languages and mixing languages was a common concern which occurred in many participant families. In German speaking Switzerland, an added complication exists when children switch between German Swiss (the local dialect) and Standard German, as it is sometimes difficult to keep the two languages separate. As a result of this complication, children must not only learn to keep the home language separate from the majority language but also become aware of the differences in grammatical structures between the Swiss dialect and Standard German.

Additionally, it is also common that Swiss teachers speak an array of dialects from different Cantons, and these variations in word use and pronunciation can cause confusion for some children. For example, the prepositions *up* and *down* are *uffe* and *abe* in Basel dialect, and in Standard German: *hinauf* and *hinab*. These prepositions may also be different in another dialect from another region in Switzerland.

As a result of the significant increase in the number of children speaking languages other than German, and the resulting challenges linked with teaching linguistically and culturally diverse children in Basel kindergartens and schools, measures have been taken to change the language of instruction from German Swiss to Standard German beginning in kindergarten classes in the 2006 to 2007 school year (Wittwer, 2005). As explained in Chapter Three, the Basel-City and Basel-Land Departments of Education recognised the complications for children of immigrants in using the two languages. Several trial research projects in kindergartens in both Cantons supported the introduction of Standard German in kindergartens. Both Cantons probed the use of only Standard German in several
kindergartens. Trials continue in the kindergartens, but no official measures have been taken to adopt only Standard German in all Basel-City kindergartens. In Basel-Land, a recommendation to use Standard German in kindergartens and primary schools was implemented.

From a sociocultural and sociopolitical level, the official attempts to change instruction to Standard German are meeting with considerable resistance. Kindergarten teachers and many members of the wider community believe that the German Swiss dialect is threatened if it is no longer used in kindergarten settings. Many teachers oppose the introduction of Standard German because they fear German Swiss will be lost (Gyr, 2005). Some teachers believed that dialect is the language of the heart. German Swiss is the warmer language used to communicate emotions and feelings and is used in personal everyday life, while Standard German is considered stilted, demanding, and half-foreign and used for written communication (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2005, p. 49). The fear of loss is similar to those sentiments expressed by immigrant parents later in this chapter.

**Summary**

In summary, most parents believed that home languages were very important for their children. They felt strongly about the value of being able to communicate with relatives, and the need to reinforce cultural identity through their language and culture. There was a very strong connection between home culture and home languages that most families sought to preserve and promote. At the same time, most families highlighted the importance of learning German well so that their children could participate effectively in the academic life of the school and the social and cultural life of the wider community.

**8.4 Parent aspirations for their children**

This subsection responds to the research question: What do parents expect or hope for their children’s educational and occupational future? Bearing in mind the sociocultural theory as outlined in Chapter Two, the effects of the immigration process on the family are also likely to influence parent aspirations for their children. Not unexpectedly, most parents weighed up their children’s educational chances in relation to their own language, educational and occupational experiences. For some parents whose children were attending kindergarten, the notion of educational and occupational futures was simply too far into the future to consider.
Others, (mostly second generation parents with older children) had consciously thought about their children’s longer term education and employment opportunities. One typical response to the question was offered by participant 22 who wanted her children: *To do something bigger than I did and have the possibility for promotion and have more education than obligatory school.* Parents hoped their children would have better opportunities than they had obtained.

8.4.1 Educational and occupational aspirations

All parents were keenly interested in their children’s education. Most parents wanted their children to do well at school, and to enjoy the experience. Some parents (26 percent) wanted their children to go onto higher education while an additional 10 (17 percent) stated that they wanted their children *to have a good education.* A good education did not imply university study, while others linked their concept of study explicitly with the faculties of medicine, dentistry or law. In the case of employment futures, apprenticeships and trades were considered ideal vocations in 7 (12 percent) families.

A further 18 (31 percent) parents believed that their children should chose their occupation/ career themselves according to their capabilities, learning styles and talents. Several parents believed that they should not and can not force their children to study, (participants 1, 16, 30, 17, 43, 45). There were no languages or culturally linked differences in families’ hopes and expectations for their children. However there was some evidence of gender-linked aspirations amongst several parents (9 percent) in the hope that girls would become teachers.

Parents generally had high expectations for their children; Yağmur (2002) also explained “sociological studies of Turkish communities consistently report that parents have high educational aspirations for their children” (p.201). Taking account of the differences and variations in immigrant family beliefs and opinions is a first step in acknowledging that their language learning experience is key to their present progress and future success at school. Participant 24 had experienced the hardships of life as a Kurd in Turkey, and only after moving and settling in Switzerland as an adult, was it possible to learn to read and write in his mother tongue:

That is a difficult question. I want my children to do something that is good for society…I think he [my son] should participate in sport and be active and do team sports then he will learn to be more sociable. As for my daughter, it is very difficult- I don’t
have high hopes because I know that I may be disappointed, rather I don’t have any goals for them both. I will do and give them what I can. When they are 18 then they will decide themselves. But until then I have to do what I can for both of them.

8.4.2 Role of language in educational aspirations

Proficiency or even excellence in the majority language (German) was considered by many parents to be the key to their children’s educational success. Second generation parents, who had spent some or all of their school years and vocational training in Switzerland, were aware of the structural barriers of racism, segregation and the inequalities in the educational system (Ehret, 1999; Fibbi, Kaya & Piquet, 2003) that they would need to overcome along the way, even if they were fluent in the majority language. Participant 51 believed that perceptions about immigrant children and the burden of having two or more languages might weigh heavily against them in their future employment prospects. Those parents who had no experience of the Swiss educational system were generally unaware of the structural barriers in the education system. Specifically, they were not aware of the consequences of early tracking, presenting an insurmountable barrier for many immigrant children (Hagenbüchle, 2003). Along similar lines, participant 41 explained that she was well aware of the discrimination, but she firmly believed that our children would do well because we can afford it, we will overcome the obstacles.

As seen in some responses to this question many families view the school system through the lens of their own experience in their home country. If this experience was positive, they tended to view the Swiss experience optimistically. If their home country experiences were negative they were hopeful that the Swiss experience would be better. In each case, through parents preconceptions, were mediated by local knowledge and experiences.

8.4.3 Unequal opportunities for children of immigrants

Many parents believed there were inequalities in the education system and related employment opportunities. As two parents, (participant 11 & 6) stated: What we want and hope for our children and what is possible are two different things. These parent aspirations and dreams for their children are affected by their experiences with discrimination and unequal opportunities. Some parents (participant 6, 7, 10) were aware that their children did not have a chance to get into the upper stream of secondary school due to early tracking (on the basis of testing during the fifth
primary year in Basel-Land), and secondly, because of their children’s teachers’ negative attitude to children from former Yugoslavian countries and Turkey. These factors, they believed, were partially to blame for the inequalities and discrimination in the school system, and later education and employment. Parents’ perceptions of the inequalities in education and discrimination are consistent with the reports by the Federal Commission for Foreigners (2003) that identified a host of structural barriers impeding educational opportunities for people who did not speak German Swiss and German as their first language.

8.5 Government and teacher findings

This section reports the findings from the document collection, and addresses the key question: Does the Department of Education in Basel Switzerland believe maintenance of home language learning is important? The answer to the question follows, and is based on the Integration policy document and information made available from the intercultural section of the Department of Education.

8.5.1 Official government position on home languages for children of immigrants

The official Basel City government integration policy is characterised by an emphasis on advancement, achievement and potential of immigrant languages, which indicates that language diversity is a valuable personal and community resource that must be supported and promoted. It stresses the need for schools to value and promote students’ home languages (Ehret, 1999). In the light of this policy, the Basel Department of Education legitimised and recognised immigrant languages as a potential asset. Immigrant families are encouraged to enrol their children in home language and culture classes outside the school timetable, and they are coordinated and partially organised by the Department of Education. In order to coordinate all languages, a model for school languages from preschool through to the final year of school was devised. For details of this model, see Chapter Three.

Resulting from the Basel integration policy position, and new government integration laws, an information campaign promoted the benefits of immigrant children’s Swiss playgroup attendance (Australianderdienst Basel-Land, 2007). The aim of the integration policy is to promote German language and culture in early learning settings to ensure more effective integration of immigrant groups. Additionally, the government is also emphasising the importance of German courses for immigrant mothers of young children. In sum, there are
two sides to the policy position, it recommends that parents learn German, but the negative side is that it does not place equal emphasis on the importance of children’s concomitant home language maintenance.

8.5.2 Provisions for home languages at the primary level

The Department of Education policy position on home language learning in primary school is derived from the wider government policy on integration. School aged children are supported, in principle, to learn and deepen their knowledge and understanding in their home languages. Home languages and culture classes are offered outside the school timetable, typically for two hours per week, in primary schools and the lower secondary schools. Presently, 20 different home languages are offered and coordinated through the Department of Education. Additionally, starting at the primary school level and with a few exceptions beginning in preschool, the consulates from Turkey, Spain, Italy and former Yugoslavia finance and organise classes beginning in primary school level. These classes are also coordinated through the language section of the Department of Education.

The macro provisions for languages play a significant role in immigrant children’s language learning. These provisions may include classes for a large number of languages in addition to the regular curriculum. However, findings revealed the limitations of provisions for languages for children of immigrants in the early years (kindergarten and lower primary school). Additionally classes are limited to two hours per week, and are mostly held outside the school timetable with the exception of the exemplary practice of integrated home languages in the St Johann and Volta primary schools.

While there have been some attempts to match practice with policy, 59 percent ($n=34$) of families attend home language classes outside the school timetable. “Claw back phrases” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004) such as “if there are enough children to organise a class,” have thwarted efforts to establish language classes, and prevented some participant families’ children from attending home language classes (Participant 49). Further, not all languages, for example, English (at the time of writing), are supported by the Department of Education, although there is a large group of English speaking families in the Basel region. Additionally, widespread government-spending restrictions have limited the availability of funding for new classes (Felder 2005).

Results also clearly show that there is a large gap in preschool and kindergarten provisions for home languages. Home languages are not taught and there are no bilingual classes for the
main immigrant language groups. This leads to a major gap in the opportunities children have to learn their home language, and the opportunities to build on their home language outside the home are limited. Therefore, the vital and initial years of their home language learning takes place in the home within the family and extended family. The implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter Eleven.

8.6 Teacher findings

8.6.1 Teachers’ beliefs and practices about home languages

The second stage of the research focused on teacher perspectives about home language learning. As already explained in Chapter Seven, the voluntary nature of the study prevented gaining a truly representative sample of teacher participants. Teachers were interviewed after stage one of the research process was completed (See teacher interview schedule Appendix H). In particular I was interested in the beliefs about the value of home languages, and the strategies they used, first to support children’s home language learning and to communicate with families. This section reports on responses from 12 teachers to questions about their beliefs and insights into home languages, as well as the extent of focus and support within the classroom and curriculum.

8.6.2 Demographic data: Teachers

Eight German Swiss kindergarten and four primary school teachers with experience in working with linguistically and culturally diverse children were interviewed. Kindergarten teachers had been working for an average of 13 years, and primary teachers an average of 6 years. Most teachers had limited understanding of immigrant languages and few teachers could speak immigrant languages fluently.

All primary teachers reported that they have a good command of French. Although Italian is a national language, it is not taught in primary school and is only optional at the secondary school level. It appears from the data representing teacher participant languages that most teachers opted for Spanish and or Italian during their own school years. According to several teachers, a knowledge and understanding in these languages proved useful in their work with linguistically and culturally diverse families.
The teachers in the present study all acquired at least two additional languages during their school education indicating a level of multilingualism. Several teachers indicated their

Table 9

Children’s Home Languages Represented in Participant Teachers Classrooms.

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<th>Language</th>
<th>Primary Teachers</th>
<th>Kindergarten Teachers</th>
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<td>J    K    L    M</td>
<td>A    B    C    D    E</td>
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<tr>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>X     X     X     X</td>
<td>X     X     X     X</td>
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Note: $X^a$ = plus Arabic and Swiss German. $X^b$ = plus Italian. $X^c$ = and Serbocroatian. $X^d$ = Mexican Spanish. $X^e$ = and German. Swiss
$X^d$ = Brazilian Portuguese. $X^e$ = plus German Swiss. $X^f$ = and German Swiss.
readiness and interest to learn immigrant languages to address the diversity in their classrooms. Four teachers wanted to learn Turkish, and one teacher had already taken a course in Albanian so she could communicate better with Albanian speaking parents who did not understand German.

It was clear from this sample of teachers that all spoke a range of languages as is common in Switzerland, and some teachers were proficient in the high status immigrant languages Spanish, Italian and English, but no teacher was fluent in the low status immigrant languages. Clearly Swiss teachers’ multilingual skills are useful but, in the context of this study where the focus is on the home languages of immigrant children, Swiss teachers are not unlike their counterparts in Australia or the US (Burriss & Burriss, 2004, p. 201). Few, if any teachers speak the languages of the communities in which they teach. To be realistic though, when teachers work in classrooms with children from many language groups as is the case in Basel and elsewhere, it is difficult to cater for the large number of different languages represented in the linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms.

8.6.2 Languages represented in kindergartens

As shown in Table 9 above, a total of 18 immigrant languages were represented in the children in participating kindergarten classes. The most common immigrant language was Italian, followed by Turkish, Kurdish and Albanian. There were also 13 other diverse languages represented in kindergartens.

In the primary participant classes there were also 18 different languages represented amongst the children. Turkish and Albanian were the most frequently represented languages in the participating primary classes. In some classes, teachers reported that 75 percent of the children or more spoke languages other than German Swiss as their home language, and in one kindergarten, there was only one German Swiss speaking child in the classroom.

All kindergarten teachers taught the same group of children for two years running. The four primary teachers taught lower primary level classes at the time of the interviews. Primary teachers in Basel-city teach the same class for the duration of primary school. The findings on the home languages represented in the classes show that teachers must be equipped to teach children from a wide range of linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

The following section reports the findings that addressed the key question: Do teachers in Basel Switzerland believe maintenance of home language learning is important? The key findings are presented below.
8.6.3 Key findings on teacher beliefs about children’s home language maintenance

Findings from teacher interviews revealed a general recognition and acceptance of home languages. Since a change in approach from a deficit perspective to a potential perspective in the integration policy, teachers advocate support for children’s home languages. They reported that they place emphasis on the importance of children’s home language development. Several participant teachers had recently done additional training in teaching children German as a second-language, and they reported that they were aware of the challenges and problems of teaching children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Whether teachers recognised the need to support children in their home language in kindergarten and primary school depended on the individual teacher, and their pedagogical stance on languages. All kindergarten teachers believed that a good basis in children’s home language supported learning in their second or additional language. However, facilitation and support in children’s home language was not a part of the kindergarten curriculum. All primary school teachers stated they recognised the important connection between knowledge in home language as a support for second-language learning, but German had priority in their classrooms. An atmosphere of recognition and acceptance of the legitimacy of the children’s home language was fostered in all classrooms but there was no home language teaching to facilitate children’s home language learning during their two years in kindergarten. In most participant kindergartens, teachers taught children of immigrants German as a second language. Teachers were aware of the influence of the home environment on language development and suggested that children benefited from having parents with a high level of education and command of their language.

The main expectation in the curriculum, as outlined in the language model, was that all children should develop a high competence in Standard German. The main emphasis, therefore, was squarely on the dominant, majority language, and this was consistent with parent aspirations for their children’s language learning.

8.6.4 Teachers’ level of support and beliefs about the importance of home language learning

Teachers reinforced the government integration policy position and emphasised the need for parents to learn German. The following excerpts from teacher interviews illustrate the main findings. Participant A, a kindergarten teacher, was asked: “Do you think it is important that
the kindergarten and school support first language acquisition?” Participant A had a great deal of experience working with culturally and linguistically diverse children, and placed the main emphasis on children learning the German language. She responded:

How can I do it? I can support them if they ask me if they should speak their own language or German. Then I can tell them, no, speak your own language because if the child can speak his own language then it is easier for him to learn German…I can also tell them about home language and culture classes but I don’t know how I could help otherwise.

Kindergarten participant C shared participant A’s beliefs:

I think it is important but we don’t speak the languages in kindergarten. What we do- we tell them [parents] that they should speak their mother language with their children. We have parents who ask and they don’t know how to do it and we always say, “do talk to them and support and enhance your own language”, their language is not fostered within our own classes.

A main theme emerging from the interviews with teachers was their belief that the parents’ role in supporting and fostering children’s home language was important. Kindergarten participants E and F highlighted support for children’s home language development. They offered the following insight:

Yes we support learning the home language, we find it is good to learn a second language and when the parents’ home is strong then they [the children] learn it at home- they have a well developed vocabulary. When the family is from a disadvantaged background then the children have more difficulty. If you know the reasons for it then it is logical. I think it is important, but they have to be conscious of it, that they speak their language, that they speak to their children and only then can they build on it. I think it is more important that the parents help than when we offer something.

Kindergarten Participant D gave a similar account of her experience:
We place a great deal of value on it [the home language] and we say, speak to your children in your own language at home, that it is good for their language development. Otherwise I don’t do much more than that.

Evidently, kindergarten teachers believed that the responsibility of promoting and supporting children’s home language lay clearly with parents. In this sense, parents were held accountable for promoting their children’s home language as kindergarten teachers shifted the responsibility away from themselves.

Perspectives from kindergarten teacher D introduced the theme of parent insecurity and how some parents lacked an understanding of how to manage language use within and outside the family. Clyne (1991, p. 111) claimed that the realities of everyday coupled with beliefs about home languages are often accompanied by feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and scepticism. Kindergarten Participant D believed that speaking to the parents about the value of the home language was important because of their feelings of insecurity:

Parents often ask about the languages. It’s often the case that they are unsure. As well, they often can’t speak German perfectly either. So I say it is better when they speak their own language so that it's not a stress for both parent and child. Then we really tell the parents to speak their mother tongue, apart from the situation when they are bilingual themselves. I feel that there is a lot of insecurity, also that has apparently been understood and accepted and on the other hand many parents don’t know that it is important. It’s also something that we can say at parent evenings, but in some situations if there isn’t an interpreter then it’s too complicated to explain it. And then there are people who just don’t understand. It’s often two worlds clashing against each other.

These two worlds refer to the clash of living in urban and rural societies as well as a general clash of cultures and languages. Because of these uncertainties, this clash may reinforce inequalities as communication is undermined by the inability to gain a shared understanding about languages (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2001). Parents on the one hand want to maintain their home language and, on the other, know that their children must become proficient in German so that they will be successful at school. These beliefs about placing priority on German were held by several parents in the present study who believed that German had more weight in their children’s schooling. For many parents the issues surrounding which language to foster was therefore, understandably confusing and, in a way, contradictory. In this sense,
in the interests of both parents and teachers, reaching a shared understanding about languages would be an ideal goal to achieve for children’s development.

Teacher participant B touched on the issue of teacher responsibility to inform parents of the role of home language in children’s development. Participant B said:

Yes, I think the parents must have the idea themselves first, but when they don’t, I feel a responsibility to tell them. I have a pedagogical education and the parents don’t, so I think it is important to explain that (theoretically). I have advice sheets that I give out because I think it is important that they know that the first language is important.

8.6.5 Primary teacher responses

The responses from primary teachers also clearly indicated that they advised parents to speak and use the home language with their children at home. Primary Teacher K said:

We often discuss, or what often concerns us is the intercultural education, or first language acquisition. It has been clearly shown in research that when the mother tongue is not promoted it is practically impossible to learn a second language properly. Because of this we actually ask the parents to speak their mother language with their children at home.

Teacher K illustrated her point about the importance of developing and maintaining the home language with an example of children who have had a limited exposure to the home language and a low level of majority language. She said:

I know of cases where children grow up without a language. There is an example of a boy, whose parents came from Africa, they spoke an African dialect and they only spoke German with him, and so poorly, that the child was really without a language.

While this may be an exception, the example above suggests subtractive bilingualism, a term used by Skutnabb-Kangas (2004) where children learn the majority language at the expense of their home language. Children often have a low capacity in both the home language and the majority language. Studies by Baur and Meder (1992) on immigrant children’s language
development in Germany have also shown that children do not gain an advantage when their own parents speak the majority language at home.

Teacher K’s perspective also echoed kindergarten D’s insight into parent insecurity about languages. Conversely, teachers reported that some parents also spoke of feeling a certain *instinct* that speaking the home language is the right thing to do. Teacher K continued:

If the parents ask about the language, often they are unsure, whether they should speak German at home, then I say no, let the child for example, read in German from the newspaper, but don’t speak German to your child. Many can understand, and many say that they feel instinctively, that it is right when they speak their mother tongue with their children.

Some teachers gave explicit examples of children who were either strong or weak in language learning. Primary teacher Participant J explained her interpretation of the differences and factors that played a role in influencing children’s ability to learn languages:

There was one boy from France. He could speak and write in Arabic and French. Well, he learnt German really quickly. He had educated parents. On the other hand I came to realise too that I also had parents who couldn’t read or write and their children were often the ones who had difficulty learning to read and write and listen. There was also a Turkish boy who could only say the first or second syllable of a word. Whereas others spoke and thought about it and asked: “How do you say that?” and they thought it over. Others were often strong verbally and weak in writing. I haven’t seen many children who are strong in writing and weak in spoken language.

The insights from Teacher J, suggests that the knowledge about the time it takes for children to gain oral proficiency, compared with the time it takes to gain academic proficiency in a language is of extreme importance for teachers who teach children whose first language is other than German. Cummins (2000, p. 35) suggested, there are many factors (psycholinguistic principles) that must be accounted for in children’s language acquisition, such as the differences in the time it takes to acquire listening, reading and writing skills in a second language. Cummins suggests that long term progress must be a major consideration in teaching children, rather than aiming for solutions in the *short term.*
8.6.6 Recognition of the importance of home languages in promoting cognitive competence in the second language.

This section reports on the findings that addressed the following question: To what extent do the Department of Education and teachers recognise the importance of home language learning in promoting cognitive competence in the dominant community language? As explained above in section 8.5.1, the Department of Education supports the development of home languages at all school levels.

Generally, teachers explained that they were aware of the importance of home language learning as a promoter of cognitive competence in the dominant community language. The findings revealed eight significant categories for interpretation that linked directly or indirectly with home languages as promoters of cognitive competence in the second language. The categories were (a) switching between languages, (b) the language catch up process and missing and limited vocabulary in the home language, (c) book reading in home languages, (d) the difficulties in gaining a clear picture of children’s ability in their home languages, (e) the vital role of parent–teacher communication in gaining insights into children’s home language knowledge and use, and (f) the relationship between children’s perceived intelligence level and the home language environment, (g) the speed at which they acquire conversational proficiency, (h) the influence of social competence on language learning. The following extracts from the teacher interviews were chosen to illustrate the main categories, beginning with responses from kindergarten teachers followed by primary teachers.

8.6.7 Kindergarten teacher responses

Participant B, discussed the issue of language transfer with her colleagues:

I think it is important to discuss it [the transfer aspect] with colleagues, I find the exchange good...

Language transfer is often linked with changing from one language to the other within a sentence or a whole conversation. Children often switch languages in mid sentence. When they cannot think of a word in one language they use the word that comes to mind in the other language. Switching is sometimes used purposefully and may be used to divulge a certain meaning or put a particular stress on a word or give specific meaning to a sentence. According to Baker (2000), switching is often linked with the deficit perspective and considered a
problem to be solved. However, once children learn to separate the two languages, switching is justified, has a function, and can be advantageous. Participant B offered her interpretation of switching through the following description of children’s language use:

A lot happens every day without me knowing why. There are children who stand out behaviourally, and I can see how they can switch between the languages and then there are others – who can’t switch. Mostly, I realise it if they understand….

Participant D made the link between play, self-awareness, and developing body awareness to help develop language. He responded:

A lot happens in play but I think it often comes by feeling. I think that when the children are really capable in their first language - they have many possibilities – that these children can speak [German] within six months and I think these children - you realise these capabilities fairly quickly that the children can transfer what they know into the new knowledge - and the children who haven’t learnt to do it also in their own language - it happens, that they don’t make progress in language acquisition and I realise that they don’t know certain things in their first language, also I see that in the way they move that we can build on that. It’s more if they bring something with them [vocabulary and understanding in their first language], they can transfer it, and when they don’t bring it with them the main thing is to catch up on what’s missing. I have a lot of children who can’t speak German and in those cases the first thing that has to be done is build up their self-awareness and sense of perception in movement experiences. So then without movement it’s difficult.

8.6.8 Primary teacher responses

Primary teacher, participant L talked about the importance of encouraging children to read books in their home language. She believed that supporting and expanding children’s vocabulary in their home language would be beneficial in developing their second language skills. Participant L explained:

In everyday classes, it [home languages] doesn’t have much room in the first and second years but we encourage the children to go to the HSK courses [home language and
culture courses]… that they should go to classes…. We tell them that if they know their vocabulary in their own language then we can build on that… I don’t know enough about it. Actually, we encouraged the parents of the children in the third and fourth class to go to the JUKIBU [Intercultural library] to lend books in their own language - or read the newspaper-

Interviewer: Have you taken the children?
No, but I would have liked to, but they are only open in the afternoon and it is difficult for us to go when we don’t have school then.

Primary Teacher J explained the difficulties involved in gaining an insight into children’s ability to use their home language, and introduced the concept of the value of gaining information from parents about children’s home language use:

I can’t get a clear picture / insight into their mother tongue. I can only rely on what the parents tell me and if the parents tell me- it is the kind who knows their mother tongue well and they can communicate very well. It can be good and then, I think there are a few parents from ordinary rural backgrounds, then their vocabulary is modest too.

Teacher J also touched on the theme of intelligence and the relationship with the home environmental influence on language acquisition. Teacher J added:

It is difficult to evaluate for me, I have the feeling, but it is an absolute subjective opinion- the kids who have a high level of intelligence have a home with a rich language experience, where a lot of work is done whether it is in their own language or in German because of their knowledge in their home language. And because of this, they have had a much easier pathway into German.

Teacher J also introduced the theme of the difference between the relatively short time it takes to acquire conversational proficiency compared with the length of time required to develop and achieve the same level as Swiss children in academic language skills. Teacher J continued:

The others, it is difficult to say - one girl, I can say, is very intelligent – she learnt German really fast. Then another, she had trouble with the language, she was much better
in maths and social and environmental studies, so language was a stumbling block for her here, but I think that by the time she finishes primary school it will not be a big problem any more because she is intelligent enough with her cognitive ability – she can keep up.

Teacher J also talked about the advantages of children who have well developed social skills and, therefore, profit from a strong sense of self in their inclination to be able to ask questions when they don’t understand words in German. Teacher Participant J continued:

Then I had a boy who had only been here for three years from South America. He learnt really fast and the words that he didn’t understand, he asked what they meant- while others didn’t ask- and once he heard the meaning he knew it- it sunk in really fast. I think he would have been unhappy had he not been able to express himself.

Teacher J’s insight raises an important issue about the differences between those children who are able to ask questions, and those who are less able or less inclined. The question at hand is whether or not there is a cultural explanation for those differences (Rogoff, 2003). Research carried out by Heath (1983) suggested that children from different social and cultural backgrounds learn socially accepted ways of interacting with adults, and these forms of communication influence children’s ability and inclination to ask questions in school settings. These differences may well prolong the time some children take to learn the language of the school setting. Therefore the speed at which a child acquires their second language must take into consideration multiple social and cultural factors, not just a child’s perceived level of intelligence, or the perceived home environment.

8.7 Conclusion

Keeping pace with the developments in education that occur as a result of changing demographics in school and society is a challenge for educators. In the light of these continuous changes, both governments and schools must find creative ways to deal with children from multilingual language backgrounds. Finding out what these language constellations mean for teachers is a challenge to researchers, pedagogy and practice. Preferably, teacher educators and teachers will need to rethink their methods that only account for the monolingual child. Today, even the bilingual child has been superseded in a global multilingual context.
The Basel Government suggests a progressive approach to language acquisition in a multilingual environment. Meanwhile teachers address the issues of multilingualism on a daily basis, and government policy does not always reflect the reality for teachers of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Teachers are clearly not trained to deal with multilingual language learners, and research is scarce into multilingual language acquisition. Arguably, however, it is known, based on information from an array of research fields, quality interactions in rich language environments linking to children’s prior knowledge are best for their language development and continuity (Collier, 1995) in children’s home language learning is of major importance.

The findings revealed that children of immigrants’ home languages are not a significant part of their kindergarten or school setting experiences suggesting discontinuity of home language learning in early educational settings. The main focus in kindergarten and school settings is on children’s German, and additional language acquisition in the school curriculum. As parents hope for a better future for their children through gaining a good education at school, schools and teachers expect parents to take responsibility for their children’s home language development. It is a paradox as the responsibility for maintaining home languages is shifted from one environment to the other.

Parents revealed that they were interested in their children’s education. The fact that most parents in this study were concerned with providing varying extents of support in one or both, home and majority language was crystallized in the data. Some parents were dedicated to helping their children succeed in learning both languages, and a high level of commitment and support for their children’s education was found in many families.

Findings from the teacher perspectives clearly revealed that they promoted the principles of the interdependent relationship between the home language and second language acquisition. However it was also apparent, that beyond superficial support, although most teachers promoted a positive attitude towards the home language in the early years, active support for their home language in kindergarten and school was not possible. Additionally, at the primary level, proficiency in the German language had priority. Access to home languages for two lessons per week outside the school timetable provides the minimum amount of exposure to ensure development of literacy skills in the home language. As a result of these macro influences, it is quite likely that children are more dependent on their parents to foster and maintain home languages through communication in the home and, to a large extent, through participation and activities in the diverse cultural communities.
Therefore parents play a vital role in the education of their children. Most parents in this study clearly expressed that home language(s) and culture matters in their children’s lives. Teachers also emphasised the importance of parents speaking their home language with their children, which then places parents and siblings in the position of scaffolders of learning. Accordingly, communication between teachers and parents is vital to maintain mutual understanding and ensure school success. How parents are engaged and involved in their children’s education in kindergarten and school settings, and the forms and channels of communication between parents and teachers, is covered in the following chapter.
CHAPTER NINE

Towards an Understanding of Parent-School Relationships for Promoting Home Language Learning: Perspectives from Parents from Immigrant backgrounds and Teachers

Results and Discussion 2

9.1 Introduction

Chapter Nine focuses on home-school communication between teachers and families from immigrant backgrounds, and strategies used to support families’ efforts to maintain their home language. In Chapter Eight, I presented and discussed the demographic information on participant families and teachers, and examined the results on their beliefs and experiences regarding children’s home language use in the home, kindergartens and primary school classrooms. Through these results, an insight into families and teacher beliefs and opinions about home language learning and maintenance was obtained. Parents also described their aspirations for their children’s education and future vocation. Further, a rich array of family literacy practices were illustrated as strategies that parents used to promote home language learning indicated strong parent involvement in their children’s home language development. Finally, teacher perspectives reflected their beliefs and opinions about teaching immigrant children home languages.

As already established in Chapter Eight, children’s language acquisition is influenced by unique contexts that reflect their linguistic, social, cultural, historical and religious background. Chapter Nine builds on the findings of Chapter Eight and focuses on parent perceptions of support for their efforts to promote and facilitate home languages. Chapter Nine also focuses on the extent to which educators provide support for family’s efforts to promote home language learning in kindergartens and schools.
As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, children’s success at school is linked to both language acquisition, and how well parents and teachers collaborate to support children’s learning at home and school. In the light of the importance of home-school interactions, this chapter focuses on teacher and parent perspectives on home-school communication, and how the interconnections and messages within their relationships, specifically cultural differences, influence children’s home language learning and sense of belonging in the receiving society. Strong home-school interconnections are especially important to facilitate early educational success, establish positive attitudes, and motivation to do well in the receiving society.

This chapter is structured into five parts around the four main research questions drawn from the literature review.

1. Do families believe they are supported in home language promotion by kindergartens, schools and community?
2. To what extent do kindergartens and schools support families’ efforts to promote home language learning?
3. What strategies do kindergartens and schools use to promote the home-school connection with immigrant families?
4. What strategies do immigrant parents use to build relationships with their children’s teacher and school?

Questions posed to teachers included:

1. How do you communicate with parents from other cultures and language backgrounds?
2. How do you promote contact between the home and school?
3. Are there official guidelines for communication between the school/kindergarten and immigrant parents?

In addressing each of these questions the main foci were on (a) parents’ perceptions of the receiving society’s support for their efforts to promote home languages, (b) educators’ perceptions of their role in supporting families, (c) the strategies educators used to communicate with immigrant families, and (d) the strategies families employed in attempt to build sustaining relationships with their children’s teachers.

The third results and discussion chapter (Chapter 10) describes parent and teacher perspectives on Information and Communication Technologies use in homes and schools for both home language support and home-school communication.
9.1.1 *Data presentation*

Data were drawn from parent interviews in Stage One, and teacher interviews in Stage Two. The interviews were mainly conducted in German and transcribed and translated into English. Given the focus on home-school interconnections, perspectives were needed to provide an accurate picture of home-school relations. Participant responses recorded as direct quotes, are presented in the form of “outcome spaces” to best reflect the conceptions of parents and teachers (Janesick, 2000; Marton, 1986; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander 2000).

Analysis of parent and teacher responses to each question facilitated insights into the complexities and dynamics of their communication and relationships. Understanding the nature of relationships from *marginalised* immigrant groups and schools, and possible communication barriers, is especially important where there are well-documented barriers to educational achievement (Auerbach, 1995a &b, EKFF, 2002; Harvard Immigration Project, 1997, Lopez, 2001; OECD, 2006b).

9.2 *The extent of support for efforts to promote home languages: Parent perspectives*

Parent views on the extent to which they are supported in promoting home languages by kindergartens, schools and community indicated that they had mixed feelings about the support they received. Parents knew that their home language was supported in principle by kindergartens, schools and the community, but day-to-day reality in Swiss society and schools revealed a different story. Parents expressed six main concerns:

1) Inherent structural problems in the school system lead to parents believing they hold the main responsibility for persevering and supporting children’s home language.

2) Most immigrant languages are not included as examination subjects.

3) Teachers lacked qualifications to deal with classes composed of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

4) Political orientation and motivation of foreign Governments that organised language classes was problematic.

5) Teachers had low expectations of immigrant children.

6) Promoting the German language was more important than promoting the home language.
Parents’ first concern was about structural problems in the school system. Specifically, they feared that too many languages were represented; that their children would not learn enough because of the large number of children from immigrant families in the classrooms and, that children would have to learn *too many* languages as part of the school’s core curriculum. As explained in Chapter Eight, children in schools typically learn three languages - German, French and English, and many children from immigrant backgrounds already speak two or more languages when they start school.

Most families did not feel supported in their efforts to promote their home languages in schools or in the wider community. In almost all cases, maintenance of the home language was a separate practice that took place outside the school’s core curriculum, and outside mainstream schools. Only five families (7 percent) expressed satisfaction with the way the schools supported their children’s home language learning. Only two families said their children participated in integrated home language and culture classes at school (St Johann Primary School).

Some nineteen families, however, reported that their children were not old enough to go to language and culture classes yet, and a further five families explained that their children would attend classes once they were old enough. Clearly though, there was no practical support for home language learning in the pre-schools or kindergartens attended by young children.

Findings also confirmed what was established in the literature review in Chapter Three, that there were no home language classes offered or organised by the Department of Education at the kindergarten level (four to six year old age group). Yet as Cummins (1986) Makin, Campbell and Jones Diaz (1995); Tabors (1997); Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977) point out, home language teaching in the early years is the critical time for developing *both* languages, where social interaction (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978) is the means by which children learn languages.

Parents explained they were advised and encouraged by kindergarten and primary school teachers to speak their home language with their children at home, yet the message is clear from the government policy (as explained in Chapter Three) that children must begin learning German and the customs and traditions of the local community as early as possible so that maximum integration will be set in motion. These new policies contradict EU policies outlined in Chapter Three, that children must be able to maintain and be supported in their home language *as well as* learn German as an additional language because the early years are
a critical stage of children’s learning. The findings in this study revealed that many parents feel very strongly about maintaining home language as one participant explained:

You just can’t imagine how bad it was [speaking about the families’ persecution] so my father believes very strongly in speaking Kurdish in the family and it is important that his grand children speak Kurdish too. (Participant 22)

Despite this strong feeling about wanting to promote their home language, this and other families rarely felt their efforts to promote home language learning were supported in schools and kindergartens. Adding to parents’ feelings about lack of support for home language learning, parents said they had little support from their children’s teachers about their children’s language learning. As one parent said, sometimes parents just wanted reassurance:

Sometimes you just need to be reassured with what you are doing, that it is right, that the mother language is supported at home and that the idea is also reinforced in school, that the mother tongue language is important and valued (Participant 22).

9.2.1 Parent responsibility and perseverance

Many parents believed that they were being left to carry the responsibility of supporting their children’s home language learning, as well as the obligatory additional languages of the school curriculum; French from fifth grade in Basel-City (fourth grade in Basel-Land) and English from seventh grade. As a result of a new federal government Education Directive, all Cantons will be required to begin to teach the first foreign language in third grade, and the second in fifth grade by 2012. Several families (n=5) were most concerned that the number of languages their children must learn compromised their academic achievement and their home language learning opportunities. As one parent said:

… I have to teach the children three languages, Kurdish and later Turkish and also German. So I am afraid that they will learn a bit of all the languages but not learn one properly. But there are teachers who are specialised and trained for that (Participant 22).

Several parents expressed concerns about teachers’ lack of qualifications and skill to teach children who were speakers of other languages. These concerns are well founded. Swiss
teachers are generally not trained to teach children from plurilingual backgrounds. Few are trained for teaching German as a second or additional language (OECD, 2006b), and teachers attend professional development on multilingual issues only on an interest/voluntary basis (Teacher participant B).

Participant 22’s concern for her children’s language development is not unfounded. Returning to Cummins’ (1981b) developmental interdependence hypothesis, successful acquisition of the German language depends to a large extent on how well the first language is supported, and adequate exposure and motivation to learn the home language is a key element to ensure successful transfer to the second language (Cummins & Swain, 1986, p. 87). In many families, this is clearly not the case, where children’s home language is not supported at preschool, kindergarten and the primary school level. Furthermore, as the findings in this study in Chapter Eight indicated, some parents prefer that their children not learn their home language, and some children choose not to learn their home language.

Participant 54 believed that government and school support was the key to ensuring quality language learning in home languages. She offered the following opinion:

They [the government and schools] need to support the foreign mothers so that they speak their mother language with their children and they should speak it properly. Not just two or three languages at once. It isn’t good when they speak half and half in one sentence (German Swiss and Standard German or home language plus Standard German and German Swiss). What is really bad is when in one sentence there is one word in one language and two in another language and then it is also wrong in German. I think that’s really bad… rather all in their mother tongue and correct than mixed and wrong (P. 54).

In addition to the absence of support for home languages in the early years, parents believed that perseverance was an important ingredient in home language maintenance. Participant 37 believed that continuing to speak the home language with her children is hard work and you have to persevere. When children are immersed in culturally dominated majority language kindergartens and schools, there is little time to respond to all children’s home language and culture. Added to this lack of response to children’s home languages in early years settings, sometimes parents are the only persons in their children’s social world their children can communicate with in the home language. In spite of this difficult situation, Wong Fillmore (2000) said, children need to “attain a mature command of their first language” (p. 209).
Parents can achieve this if they talk to their children, read or tell stories, and especially, expect more mature speech from their children at home.

9.2.2 Examination subjects exclude most immigrant languages

In addition to the absence of home language support in kindergarten and primary schools, as pointed out by several parents, very few immigrant languages are included as examination subjects at the secondary level of school. Clyne (1991) a prominent Australian linguist contended that home languages offered as subjects for examination are more valued. When languages are valued by the receiving society, they tend to be maintained rather than lost. In the Swiss context, parents did not believe that their languages were equally valued as examination subjects (with the exception of European Spanish and Chinese at the upper and middle stream level of senior secondary school, and Turkish at the middle stream level of senior secondary school (Widmer, Glutz & Rapp, 2005).

9.2.3. Sociopolitical and historical events influencing home language class attendance

As explained in Chapters Three and Eight, the Department of Education coordinates home language and culture classes through providing a directory of contacts to the various community language groups. Community language groups operate under a social network basis or through the various government consulates.

The influences of sociopolitical and historical issues and events on parents’ acceptance of language classes were apparent in the Serbian and Turkish language groups. The past and present political orientation and climate in Serbia continued to strongly impact immigrant parent decisions to use home language classes organised by consulates. Both participant 32 and participant 41 (Serbian), felt that Serbian home language classes should not be organised by the Serbian Government.

The way in which national history was interpreted was also a concern for one family from Turkey. Participant 16 believed that his children should only learn Turkish language and not Turkish history. Further complications were voiced about the Spanish language context by parents from different regions in Spain, where the national language may not be the language spoken in the home. Participant 57 explained, even when the consulate provides classes:
The problem is that the kids are not all only Spanish and there are four different languages in Spain. The children’s parents are from all different regions of Spain or for instance, they have one parent Spanish and the other parent speaks another language like Swiss. The teacher speaks Castellano from Madrid. If the teacher is from the north (Galicia) she still has to teach in Castellano. Then there are also the Basques and the Calegio dialect. They all write in a different language. The Vasquetlan speak very fast and the Catalan have a different accent. Yes, there are many things to learn!

9.2.4. Low teacher expectations

Low teacher expectations of children from immigrant backgrounds were raised in the literature review (Felder, 2005; Lanfranchi, 2002b), and are a central aspect of the deficit perspective described in Chapter Two. These low expectations, as explained by several parents, lead to further inequalities and were considered barriers for children in reaching the highest track in secondary school. Participant 16 from Turkey outlined the problem with his son’s fourth grade teacher. He believed:

As foreigners we have language problems with German. Sometimes we talk to the teacher about it. Foreign children are treated somewhat differently to Swiss children - we suspect that. There are discussions between the parents and teachers. We contact the teachers. They try to prevent it [Us contacting them]. The teacher told my son that he would make a good hand worker. In the end they say, he [my son] can’t do that anyway [cope with the highest track of secondary school]. I think that is idiotic and derogatory.

9.2.5 Preference for German

A major theme arising out of the interviews with parents revealed that parents feared that their children would not learn German quickly enough so their children could not compete in examinations with Swiss native speakers on equal terms. As already discussed in Chapter Eight, they also believe there are too many foreign speaking children in one classroom. Participant 43, from Ecuador lived in a middle to upper income suburb bordering on Basel-City. She explained Swiss national mothers advised her which school her son should attend:
They [the Swiss mothers] told me that I should send Michael to another school because there are too many children from immigrant families in the school close to where I live. For me, this school is nearby and he can walk there alone. The other school is further away from where we live. The others say it isn’t good but I realise I am a foreigner too! They are learning… It’s like this; when there are too many children from other countries they have problems in the fourth grade— in primary school, they have problems. It is better to go to a school where there are many Swiss children because when there are so many foreigners they don’t learn so much. And then they will have problems in secondary school.

In addition, participant 43 had the following to say about her son’s first grade class at primary school:

When the children [at school] speak German then it’s good but when they don’t speak German then it’s difficult. Michael goes to school with many immigrant children and I realised that many parents are afraid because there are so many immigrants. Michael is in a group where they speak German well. There is another class that takes two years to cover one year of the school curriculum (Michael does the first year in one year), because their father and mother both speak another language. I have heard they speak German well and in spite of that they still go to the Einführungs class.

Significantly, children attending these extended first grade classes, as explained by participant 43, do not concurrently attend home language classes. Parents were concerned that children would not learn enough German, or move fast enough through the curriculum to keep up with children in other parts of the city or Canton where there are less or no children of immigrants in classes, and this would affect their chances of reaching the highest track of secondary schooling.

Participant 17 was aware of the barriers to school success because he moved to Switzerland when he was 14 years old. He therefore had limited opportunities to progress beyond the number of obligatory school years because of his limited proficiency in German. Now, concerning his own children’s education, he said:
I am afraid, when I go to my son’s class and I ask if he is getting through the curriculum - she (the teacher) says that the children understand 60 percent and they don’t understand 40 percent of what is meant. Then I am astounded. For almost every second child she has to explain it twice and she is alone with the class.

In the light of the theoretical perspectives, and linking parent concerns to the review of the literature, it is clear that immigrant children take several years to catch up and achieve native level language proficiency (Collier, 1995; Collier & Thomas, 2002; Thomas & Collier, 1997). It is therefore not surprising that some parents believe their children are treated differently than Swiss children (Participant 16). Many immigrant children are linguistically disadvantaged when they compete in the same examinations against Swiss students. Children are tracked into the lower levels of secondary school (Lanfranchi, 2002b, also explained in Chapter Three) after only attending five years of primary school in Basel-Land and seven years of primary and middle school in Basel-City.

In summary, parents explained different structural problems responsible for negatively affecting their children’s progress in school. These problems, in turn, affected whether parents felt legitimised in their efforts to support their children’s home language by schools. Taking into consideration the theoretical perspectives, beginning in middle childhood, Garcia-Coll and Szalacha (2004) proposed that children from immigrant backgrounds experience symbolic racism. These predispositions are reflected in the low level of provisions for home languages in the early years of education, and an exclusive emphasise on the majority language in the mainstream schools.

This section has raised many issues that speak to a combination of theoretical perspectives presented in Chapter Two, of the need to understand the complexities of the external environment. Garcia-Coll and Szalacha (2004, p. 83-84) proposed that there is a set of moral “abstractions and attitudinal predispositions” within society, in spite of the “principle of ethnic or racial equality being supported by the majority in the mainstream.”

In summary, most parents reported that support for children’s home languages is available only after they reach second grade in primary school, and only if parents decide to pursue this educational option. As a result of these options, and the late start, it may already be too late for many children’s home language maintenance. Findings revealed that the amount of support depended on the location of the school, the availability of classes, and the sociopolitical dynamics of the language group. Parent initiative, an important element in social capital, also played an important role in facilitating participation in home languages.
Parents from the Latin American Spanish language group organised, financed and arranged transport to home language classes.

If the Department of Education genuinely believes in creating equality for all students, then home languages in the main immigrant languages must be offered, consistently supported, and organised by the Department of Education in the early years. In fact, much points towards the conclusion that there are many contradictions in language provisions in the school system, and the issue of the amount of support required for home languages is still to be resolved.

9.3 Home language support: Teacher perspectives

This section addresses the key question: To what extent do kindergartens and schools support families’ efforts to promote home language learning? In addressing this question, perspectives from teachers were analysed. Further, a comparison of teacher and parent findings will be presented at the end of this section.

The general consensus amongst classroom teachers was that they could not support parents’ promotion of their children’s home languages, apart from suggesting that parents speak their home language at home with their children. Integrated home languages in primary school would be the ultimate goal in education, however there are several reasons why it is not possible to integrate home languages into primary schools. Primary Teacher, participant K, offered her insight into why home languages are not taught as an integral part of the core curriculum in primary schools in Basel:

We would like to have more integration of home languages in the school but it would take a lot to convince the present staff. Staff already believe they have enough to deal with. There is a lot of team teaching involved and a lot of people are wary of that. I am divided on the issue. It is good (the St Johanns Model) but from the effort perspective, then rather not.

As can be interpreted from teacher K’s perspective, funding cuts aside, the real barriers to integrating home languages into primary schools are teacher beliefs, and a lack of conviction or the ‘will’ to include home languages.
9.3.1 Key findings on teacher perspectives on courses of action for supporting families’ efforts to promote home language learning

Teacher findings revealed there was no official support for home languages in the first three years of children’s schooling (Kindergarten and grade 1). As reported in Chapter Eight, home language support at the preschool level was organised on a private or community language group basis and very few children in kindergarten and grade one of education actually have exposure to their home languages outside the home.

Teachers G and H offered the following insightful comments into the problems associated with developing children’s concepts and vocabulary in home languages when there are no allocations for home language learning in the early years:

There isn’t any Turkish in kindergarten. There are classes for older children in primary school. By the time they get to primary school, two years have passed and there isn’t much for them to connect their mother tongue to by then. German is then like their second mother tongue.

Teacher G and H’s insight into teaching languages is a valuable point - implying that in the process of learning German in kindergarten, children begin to disconnect from their home language. As the findings in Chapter Eight also revealed, children begin to use German at home. Rather than children building on their home language, they become increasingly more distanced from their home language in the cognitive and social domains of learning.

9.3.1.1 Messages communicated to parents

Messages that teachers communicated to parents affected home language maintenance in children. Teachers influenced some parents’ attitude to their home language. As described in the review of the literature, the messages that teachers communicate to parents can play a significant role in children’s educational progress. These interactions between teachers and children, and parents and teachers can become subtle but sure avenues for maintaining inequalities in the education system (Cummins, 2001). Participant F attended a six-month course in teaching German as a second language. She explained how the recommendations by
professionals have changed on the advice given to parents of children of immigrants in respect to language use:

Ten years ago we were told that parents should speak German with their children. Now we say: “speak your language”… and I think it is better now- if you know the reasons for it then it is logical. In our course they told us you have to be consistent and follow through on it and tell the children that one person speaks one language and the other person German because switching makes the children unsure of their language.

Consideration must also be given to the manner in which parents act on teacher advice in regards to the language they use with their children at home. As indicated in Chapter Eight, several parents did not accept teacher advice on which language to use in the home. They believed that acquiring and learning German was more important than speaking the home language in the family. In this sense, children are receiving conflicting messages. On the one hand, teachers advise families to speak the home language and, on the other hand, parents are advising their children to speak German. These conflicting messages may be confusing for children, and they may also influence children’s motivation towards second language acquisition. This finding may well be a central factor in determining success in children’s second language acquisition.

Equally significant was the message passed from teachers to parents about the importance of parents’ own readiness to learn the receiving society language. Teachers B, C, E, F and J believed, parents should learn to speak German. In this respect, teachers are reinforcing the government integration policy initiatives but, more significantly, either consciously or unconsciously reflect their perceptions about which language should be promoted in the classroom.

Participant D also explained his experience with parents, and referred to the clash of cultures not only between urban and rural societies, and low levels of parent education compared with high levels of education, but also the clash between the old and newly adopted country where values, traditions and customs may differ markedly:

We reassure parents, I feel there is a lot of uncertainty- many parents don’t know that it is important [To speak their mother tongue with their children]. It is often the case of two worlds clashing against each other.
The review of the literature also revealed contradictions between the idea of using the home language. Skutnabb-Kangas (2004) maintained that on first sight, it seems to go against common sense for children of immigrants to speak their home language at home and at school. However, large-scale research has in fact demonstrated the importance of supporting home languages beginning in the early years, and continuing for at least 8 or 9 years of children’s education (Ramirez et al., 1991; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

Research carried out by Collier and Thomas (2002) and Cummins (1986) found that it takes a minimum of four to seven years to catch up to native speakers in their age appropriate language level, a cause for inequality and disadvantage because immigrant children not only have to catch up to native speakers, but also compete with them for the places in the upper tracks of secondary school. Children from immigrant backgrounds therefore, are doubly disadvantaged due to the time it takes to catch up to native level language proficiency, as well as the discontinuity and disruption in their home language use in the early years.

9.3.1.2 Parent responsibility

A major theme arising from the interviews was that teachers believe parents have a major role to play in promoting home languages, and that parents hold the main responsibility for supporting their children’s home language learning. All teachers indicated that they, in principle, supported children’s home language development. Furthermore, two teachers believed that home language support would be good for children in kindergarten, but home language learning should take place outside their own kindergarten. These findings suggest inconsistencies pervade the messages that teachers communicate to parents. There were also variations in teachers’ course of action in supporting families in their efforts to promote home languages.

Teacher B believed that the parents’ role in children’s home language learning was more important than the kindergarten. She also believed that parents hold the main responsibility for supporting their children’s home language:

Firstly, I think that the parents have to get the idea [about speaking their own language with their children] and work it out themselves, but if they don’t, then I feel I have a responsibility to tell them, after all I am the professional with training and the parents don’t have that.
I have done professional development in the area [teaching children second languages] and I think it is important to explain the transfer factor in language learning. Secondly, I have a book that was given to kindergarten teachers that contains lists, questions and forms designed for working with children of immigrants [Riederer, 2001]. I give the parents the handout information from the book. I can explain at parent information evenings and parent meetings that “research shows parents should keep speaking their mother language with their children and it even helps children learn their second language” ...and when I explain that, that makes them sit up and listen. At the same time we encourage mothers to learn German too.

Participant E supported and echoed participant B’s position:

I think it is more important that the parents are the ones who can help with their children’s home language development. Support is important but they have to be aware and be conscious of it, so that they speak their own language. They have to talk to their children a lot and then they can build on it.

Participants G and H however, admitted that parents have trouble in understanding the important role home languages play in children’s second language learning:

We encourage the parents to speak their mother tongue, because their mother tongue is always better than their German. They sometimes hardly believe it, that it [mother tongue] should be good for their children.

Primary teacher K explained her beliefs about promoting children’s home languages. She did not provide support and said that it was the parents’ job to support their children’s home language development:

I can’t offer any support in the children’s first language because that’s the parents’ job. I can make recommendations and I can tell the parents how important it is that they speak their mother tongue with their children. I can reassure them that their children will still learn German and that they will probably learn German better if they master their mother tongue.
9.3.1.3 Mother tongue knowledge is central to learning a second language

Central to the overall findings was a question recurrent in teacher responses. Teachers D, G & H stressed “How can I support learning in German if they [the children] don’t know their mother tongue?” These findings, as already established in Chapter Eight, indicate that children’s language acquisition may well be influenced by teacher beliefs. Teachers encouraged parents to speak their home language with their children. In addition, teachers believed that the benefits of having an age appropriate level of the home language was important, and those children who had a mature level of the home language would learn German. Participant E & F believed the key to children’s language acquisition was in their vocabulary:

Some children arrive at kindergarten with a well-developed mother tongue vocabulary, others not. Their written language is important too but I think that it is more important that the parents are the ones who can help the most with their mother language. When the parents’ home language is strong then the children learn and expand their home language vocabulary at home, they develop a mature level of vocabulary, but when they [the parents] are from a lower educational standing the children have more difficulty and their vocabulary is limited.

In Table 10 below, common strategies teachers used to legitimise children’s home language in kindergarten are displayed. Responses from kindergarten teachers revealed several strategies used by teachers to legitimise and encourage home language use. Children played in their home language in all kindergartens indicating a general acceptance of children’s languages. All teachers held cultural festivals - a common approach used in multicultural classrooms.

Children’s home languages were used in some classrooms when teachers introduced new vocabulary in German. In this way, linking the home language vocabulary with the language of the classroom legitimised children’s home language. Through the strategy of encouraging parents to use home languages, vocabulary development was supported, as Primary teacher K explained:

Take vocabulary, I ask if they know the word in their language or then I ask the stronger children in Turkish to explain it to the weaker ones. They don’t have the vocabulary in their home language either. I encourage parents to tell their children stories in their home language. We encourage parents in third and fourth class to go to
the intercultural library. We also encourage the children to go to HSK classes. We have a Turkish teacher and we want her to come during class time so that the children can work in Turkish too.

Table 10

*Common Strategies used by Teachers to Legitimise and Encourage Home Language Use in Kindergarten*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples of strategies</th>
<th>Number of responses (n=12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children as translators</td>
<td>If children are at a developmental point [feel comfortable about it] then they can translate for other children in the class. There are children who are capable of translating, helping when another child doesn’t understand.</td>
<td>2 (B,D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play in home language.</td>
<td>The children play in their mother tongue.</td>
<td>12 (all)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing, counting, rhyming</td>
<td>Greeting songs and role play. With rhymes, songs, counting and vocabulary.</td>
<td>3 (C,E,F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing and talking</td>
<td>We also work in groups and I work a lot with pictures, then we talk and draw in the different languages. We play with words.</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>Pizzamiglio, a test designed for testing language understanding. (Mostly through pictures).</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural festivals</td>
<td>We hold cultural festivals.</td>
<td>12 (All)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidental use</td>
<td>In kindergarten a lot happens everyday without me knowing why; there is a lot that takes place incidentally.</td>
<td>1 (B)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9.3.3 *Teachers additional concern of subtractive language environments*

Teachers highlighted an additional theme regarding the effects of using two languages inadequately on children’s language. Teachers were concerned about children who they considered lived in what is sometimes termed subtractive language environments. As a natural part of the sociocultural environment, children copy the patterns of language their parents use; also when they have “less than full competence in the language” (Clyne, 1991,
Clyne also explained that having less than full competence in the majority language could lead to stigmatisation on the basis of their language ability in German. This language ability often does not match their first/home language ability, and in some cases their home country educational level or previous socioeconomic standing (Clyne, 1991, p. 210).

Participants G and H taught in a low socioeconomic neighbourhood where all children spoke a language other than German as their home language. According to these two teachers, parents had developed what Clyne defined as Foreigner talk (Clyne, 1991). Foreigner talk is determined by the language used in the parents work environment, and is developed through a mixture of languages. Participant G explained: There are also parents who speak foreigner talk, even in the family, and then I don’t know what to do next. Children in the early years, according to Tabors (1997, p. 139) model the language that they hear at home.

9.3.4 Comparison of teacher and parent responses on supporting children’s home language learning

On comparison, most parent and teacher findings corresponded in regards to the amount of support offered by schools for home languages. In two cases, the parent findings conflicted with the teacher findings. One parent reported that her child’s teacher perceived children’s home languages as a “barrier” to learning German. Many immigrant languages are still considered from a deficit perspective. In addition, Felder (2005) reported that children from immigrant backgrounds are considered “handicapped” with the number of languages to learn. Reinforcing this negative and intervention-based approach (Auerbach, 1995a); according to EKFF (2002), and Signer (2005), the deficit perspective on home languages still dominates the discourse. Thus recognising differences within and between language groups is necessary to understand the needs of children with different backgrounds within language groups and between them.

Parents also reported cases of children receiving negative messages about their home language. The following example is contrary to those reported in the teacher findings, and revealed that there are exceptions and not all teachers adhere to the department policy on supporting home languages. When teachers suggest children should stop learning their home language, it is harmful to children’s language development and their respect and appreciation for their own language (Paneque, 2006). To illustrate this point, participant 51 from Mexico explained in detail the exchanges that her son and his friends had with their teacher in one primary school classroom:
The teacher thinks that the children who speak two languages have a problem. It’s the idea that they simply have a problem, it doesn’t matter- it’s what she [the teacher] imagines in this situation. My son’s friend from Sri Lanka said he’s not going to Tamil classes anymore.

So I asked, “why?” He said: “because it is boring… no, it isn’t boring.”

He said: “it’s not really boring but the teacher says:” “You should stop learning your language because you haven’t learnt enough German properly yet.” It is a complicated situation to understand, especially for the children, because of the expectations on children who speak two languages.

The following section of this chapter covers the strategies that kindergartens and schools used to promote communication between the home and school.

9.4 Strategies used to promote the home-school interconnection: Government position and teacher perspectives

This section of the chapter reports on the findings related to the key question: What strategies do kindergartens and schools use to promote the home-school connection with immigrant families? A short description of the guidelines provided by the Department of Education follows, thereafter teacher perspectives are presented.

9.4.1 Basel City Department of Education guidelines for teachers working with children of immigrants.

The Department of Education acknowledged the presence of immigrant languages in society. Department officials and experts continue to work on refining the language model for schools. Guidelines from the Basel City Education Department, Erziehungsdepartement (2001) for teachers working with foreign speaking and multilingual children are available on the Internet at www.vademecum.bs.ch. The following section is a translation of the major elements emphasised as important for teachers working with children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.
9.4.1.1 Starting point for working with parents. The concept of home-school communication is an integral part of Swiss Schools. In order to achieve effective integration, including parents in their children’s education, is of great importance. Parents should be able to have a clear insight into their children’s lessons and classrooms, and have the possibility to become familiar with the expectations as well as the social and ethical values of the school.

9.4.1.2 Forms of communication. Many foreign speaking parents come from cultures where spoken (oral) communication is the preferred form of communication. Direct contact in person is highly valued. Fundamentally, verbal communication is trusted more than written information. Written information often leads to confusion and misunderstanding. Contact is made easier when it is made known that teachers are interested and knowledgeable about customs of the families, and show respect and frankness.

9.4.1.3 Making initial contact. Ideally, contact should firstly be made through verbal communication, by telephone, or in person. This initial contact lays the foundation for establishing trust between parents and teachers.

9.4.2. Strategies teachers used to promote home-school communication with immigrant families

This section reports the main findings from teacher responses on the strategies found in kindergartens and schools used to promote home-school communication with immigrant families. Teachers used an array of strategies to promote communication between the kindergarten and home. Several common themes were found in the data analysis, and were categorised as communication strategies outlined in Table 11 below.

Teachers and schools vary markedly in their commitment, enthusiasm, availability and time towards developing relationships with children’s parents. The responses from teachers indicated that in most respects, teacher strategies matched with those recommended by the Department of Education. However not all teachers interviewed were aware of the guidelines for working with parents from immigrant backgrounds.
Table 11
Summary of Strategies Kindergartens and Primary School Teachers Use to Promote Home-School Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Strategies</th>
<th>Kindergarten Teachers</th>
<th>Primary Teachers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A  B  C  D  E  F  G  H  J  K  L  M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold official class meeting</td>
<td>x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold official individual conferences with parents</td>
<td>x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use interpreters</td>
<td>x  x  x  x</td>
<td>x  x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use informal interpreters</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x  x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use mediators</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for informal talks</td>
<td>x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Swiss celebrations</td>
<td>x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic play performances</td>
<td></td>
<td>x  x  x  x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organise parent classroom visits</td>
<td>x  x</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer parent classroom visits</td>
<td>x  x</td>
<td>x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural festivals</td>
<td>x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x  x</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use and are aware of guidelines for working with parents</td>
<td>x  x</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings revealed that generally, the daily kindergarten structure lends itself to more frequent interpersonal interactions, and enables spontaneous contact between parents and teachers. Several kindergarten teachers described themselves, as being open towards parents from
diverse cultures, and gave their time generously both before and after kindergarten, while others lacked the personal initiative and time commitment. Primary teachers on the other hand generally restricted their communication with parents to the official requirements from the Department of Education.

Those teachers who had worked in the field for many years, had developed a clear concept for working and communicating with parents. Participant B who had worked for eight years as a kindergarten teacher was particularly active in promoting communication, and said that she was still searching for the right approach. Teacher J, who worked for five years as a teacher, claimed that home-school communication was a difficult issue and a main area of contention for her colleagues.

Primary teacher participant L summarised, and explained the strategies she used for establishing communication with immigrant parents:

We hold a parent teacher information evening after 7 weeks so that we get to know each other. We have a project week and the parents bring something to eat from their own culture. We emphasise the importance of parents attending German classes and we send letters to the parents in German.

The communication strategies presented in Table 12 above are discussed below.

9.4.2.1 Official meetings. Official meetings between teachers and parents were obligatory in kindergartens and primary schools. Meetings were highly structured to outline the content of the curriculum for the school year, and to inform parents of organisational details and upcoming events. Teacher K, a primary teacher described the requirements in Basel-City for primary school parent-teacher communication:

It is obligatory that we organise a meeting with parents two times in the four years of primary school.

9.4.2.2 Official strategies that teachers use to help parents understand school culture. Addressing the needs of immigrant parents was acknowledged to varying degrees, depending on the teachers’ personal commitment and sensitivity to the needs of families. Participant D, a kindergarten teacher offered the following insight into the strategies she used to communicate with parents:
They [the parents] get a large folder of information, on consulates, language courses and schools. The information is not in the different languages as far as I know.

Teacher G explained her approach to informing parents, and the type of interpersonal exchanges that take place:

I emphasise the importance of parents coming to parent information evening. I am authoritarian in that respect. I held one parent information evening and I gave a short talk about what we do. We also gave them brochures, partially in German and partially in the various mother tongue languages. I asked if they wanted more information and most said it was enough. That’s why I don’t’ do it [Hold more information events]. There is also the daily information if parents want to talk then they can have it. We can talk spontaneously- we have the daily contact. Sometimes it is difficult- sometimes it depends if we are both working, and then one has time, also for longer as well. They can come and tell us if they want a talk. But they seldom take advantage of it. They can also come to kindergarten on a morning and observe but hardly anyone comes. If we want to talk to a parent then we send an invitation home. In the new plan we are supposed to hold a talk to the parents once a year. But I’m not exactly sure about that. It is obligatory and we are obliged to talk to the parents about their children’s transition to school, not all parents come then, but mostly they do.

9.4.2.4 Organise interpreters. Teachers explained that interpreters were available, but it was sometimes complicated and took two weeks to organise. Teacher K:

The official offer of an interpreter makes things easier and if they [parents] have problems they can contact the school principal or the school inspectors. But that’s not only for foreign speaking parents it’s for all parents in general.

9.4.2.5 Use informal interpreters. Several teachers said that many parents were well organised. Teacher participant A offered her perspective on how parents often take the initiative themselves to organise the first visit to kindergarten:
Often they bring someone with them to translate- that’s more the rule- and otherwise we organise interpreters for parent evenings. It can be tedious to organise but we’ve done it two or three times already.

Teacher C also used parents available in the kindergarten: *For day-to-day things we sometimes ask a mother to translate for us.* Kindergarten teacher D explained her approach to communicating with immigrant parents:

> The aim is not to speak to the parents in their mother tongue. In some cases there are parents who speak very little German and the discussion can often become complex. We can organise an interpreter to come but we need to give two weeks notice.

### 9.4.2.6 Mediators

Only two teachers reported using a mediator. Teacher C explained that cultural interpreters would be of most value in communicating with parents when there is a mismatch between Swiss values and customs and that of the families.

### 9.4.2.7 Hold obligatory transition conferences

Obligatory transition conferences were held once in the second year of kindergarten for the purpose of informing parents on children’s readiness for primary school. The school system selection process begins in kindergarten. Most children are allocated to first year primary school, but a high number of children from immigrant families are allocated to so called *Einführungs* classes (Two years are taken to cover the first grade curriculum). Transition conferences were also held with parents at the primary school level. These conferences are not as significant in Basel-City because children are not tracked in the first year of Orientation School. In Basel-Land primary school students are tracked into one of three secondary levels. Conflicts often arise between teachers and parents as a result of these conferences when a low level of communication and little interpersonal contact has taken place throughout the primary school years.

### 9.4.2.8 Opportunities for informal talks

Providing the opportunity for informal talks was on all kindergarten teachers’ agenda, but only one primary school teacher. Kindergarten teacher B explained:
I hold one parent information meeting and two extra evenings with activities. I also have days when the parents can visit… I simply have the need to talk to parents but I haven’t quite figured it out how to go about it in the best way. It is very difficult.

Establishing rapport with parents was recognised by several teachers as being an important aspect of making connections between the settings of home and school. Kindergarten teacher E explained her approach to the initial meeting with parents and the strategies that she used to work with linguistically and culturally diverse families:

I am often curious; I ask questions about their country, I like to do that…That’s the advantage in kindergarten because we always have the parents here. We can talk in the garden or on a daily basis but if we realise it is going to go longer then we make up a date to meet at another time.

9.4.2.9 Traditional Swiss celebrations. All teachers reported a continued emphasis on traditional kindergarten German Swiss celebrations in their kindergartens and schools. Teachers reported that the goal was not only to teach children the traditional customs and values of the German Swiss culture, but also as an avenue to involve parents. Teacher F described an example of her approach to traditional Swiss celebrations:

We carve a lantern out of a turnip at Räbeliechtli fest- that’s planned so that the parents have something to make- it is easier for them to talk then. But not everyone has the confidence to come up and say, “Hello, here I am, and who are you?” We also have parents who never come but that’s more to do with their religious beliefs and then there are the parents who hold back.

Teacher E also explained how she had altered their programme to account for the changes in children’s cultural and religious backgrounds:

We have changed our yearly calendar for celebrating festivals. We have kept Christmas and Easter but we try to be more open for festivals and celebrations from other cultures.
Teacher F also explained her approach to celebrations:

We have had an intercultural festival based on a short play. We realised it was a real icebreaker and the parents have more confidence to come into kindergarten. We also arranged breakfast on a Saturday morning. We have organised crafts during advent and they come and have a look at the kindergarten, it is an opportunity to talk.

9.4.2.1.0 Offer parent classroom visits. Teacher D was very specific about the strategies she used to develop relationships with parents. This approach was influenced from her own experience as a parent and her interpretation of the important role of home-school communication. She emphasised the value of initial contact, dialogue and parent participation. She explained:

What’s important for me is when the parents join in and that’s important work - that could be coming to help or joining in. I realise that what’s important is the dialogue with the parents right from the beginning, that I get in contact as soon as possible, simply...so that they get over the initial fear - and I have had the experience that when there’s a problem and, if you only contact them then, then trust has not been established. Yes, there are parents- I know from my own experience [as a parent] when you only hear from the teacher, for the first time, when there is a problem- then the situation is strained. If you have already talked together once, when there aren’t any problems- that’s important- they are simply not afraid.

For this teacher, communication was clearly important in building a basis for establishing trust and understanding. Effort on behalf of the teacher, was necessary to establish contact, dialogue and trust with parents to avoid problems and strained relationships. Two additional views raised by teachers were that parent proficiency in German language was considered the key to home-school communication and secondly, stepping outside their own cultural ways of doing things was not an option.

9.4.3 German language, the critical factor in communication

Language was considered of most importance and crucial to promoting effective communication between parents and teachers. All teachers emphasised their belief that the
crucial factor in communication is that parents learn to speak German. Teacher D exemplified the importance of immigrant parents learning German. Teacher D was explicit in her beliefs about parents’ readiness to learn German:

It depends partially on their own education and what they’ve experienced prior to coming here, if they came from a war torn area or have been tortured or persecuted then they can’t learn the language until they have worked through the trauma. I think it is difficult when they are simple people from rural areas. In spite of that, they have a social network and it’s difficult when they don’t have their people to support them anymore. I think they may be ashamed sometimes.

A comparison of parent and teacher beliefs about learning languages is followed by the section on parent responses.

9.5 Parent responses

This section addresses the key question: What strategies do immigrant parents use to build relationships with their children’s teacher and school? Wide variations emerged from the parent findings in the amount and type of communication parents sought and experienced with their children’s teachers. The data analysis revealed that parents’ own culture-based expectations as well as school policies and practices contributed to these variations. Some parents reported they were in regular contact with their children’s teachers, and that they knew the channels of communication in the school and what was expected of them. For many other parents, the concept of home-school communication was a vague notion due to the experiences they had with teachers in the school system, together with what they perceived as systemic barriers, cultural differences and, in a few cases, a language barrier.

Parents reported that it was not uncommon to experience several different avenues for communication within one school, with three different primary school teachers. These differences caused some parents to feel confused. For other parents, communicating with teachers was vague and ineffective. Several parents also reported that teachers had low expectations for their children. Several parents said they were angry and frustrated. There was an obvious mismatch between parent needs and expectations when they spoke about interactions with their children’s teachers. Examples of parent responses on school initiated contact are included in Table, 12 below.
As explained in the previous section of this chapter, teachers are expected to establish communication with immigrant parents. Information gained from parent perspectives revealed that the most common avenue of communication between their children’s school and kindergarten teacher was through official letters, and parents’ attendance at individual conferences with teachers. Of major significance to the study (in Table 12 above), in spite of reports of conflicts between parents and teachers, was that no parents reported using a mediator, and only one parent said that he could ask for an interpreter if he needed one.

Parent beliefs about the number of meetings that they believed would sufficiently fulfil their needs varied considerably with official school guidelines. Participant 24 said he would like to have:

About 5 or 6 talks with the teacher, so that I get to know the weaknesses of my child. If I ask my son, he just says I’m good at school but that doesn’t convince me. I want to know what he is getting enough of or not enough of. It is a weakness here – 26 children in one class and no Swiss children. I would like to see 50 percent mixed. The system is a catastrophe.
9.5.1 Communicating formal school information

Most parents reported receiving letters of day-to-day information in German. Only some parents reported that they received the official information in their home languages. One mother who best understood written Turkish said:

I have had the official department information come in German, French and Italian but not in Turkish (Participant 18).

Some parents believed that it would be more helpful if the information came more often in their home language because it would ease the burden on one parent who was stronger in German. That parent was then always responsible for communication between home and school and, as reported in Chapter Eight, most fathers had a better command of German than mothers because they had lived longer in Switzerland.

Connecting with the issue of taking responsibility for interactions, Participant 11 had attended a German language course, but she could not understand the letters that were sent home from kindergarten. Participant 11 explained that it would help his wife feel more involved and integrated in the kindergarten if she could read the information too. This inability to understand meant that she was dependent on her husband to read the information in German, and he was then responsible for communication between the kindergarten and family.

9.5.2 Parent description of Elternrat (Building social capital)

Parent teacher organisations, or so called parent groups, work on an advisory basis, and have only recently been introduced in schools in Basel-City. Basel-City, considered somewhat progressive in the Swiss school landscape, has recently introduced parent advisory groups in the lower secondary level and some primary schools. One parent explained, for example, when there are more than 30 percent of immigrant parents, there must be at least one immigrant parent representative on the parent advisory committee. The advisory group represents parent interests and functions as a liaison between parents and teachers. The advisory committee is not involved in decision making processes, curriculum, or at an organisational level. The advisory group functions rather on an interpersonal level for
organising social functions, and it is seldom used, as for example, an activist platform for road safety issues.

9.5.3 Building foundations for establishing trust and understanding through collaborative partnerships

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), building trust and understanding is critical if the links between settings are to function and be effective. (See section 5.21 in Chapter Five). Epstein (1995) believed that interactions between children, parents and teachers are a platform to build trust and respect, and these elements, must be established in order to establish successful partnerships. Participant 51 from Mexico believed it was important to forge trust between parents and teachers, and offered her opinion about the relationship between her children’s teacher and her desire to connect with other families in the school:

My experience is the following: as it is actually- I understand the way the system works but unfortunately the structures are already in place. There are no alternatives, to do it differently because I feel there are so many foreigners, that you are distanced in a language group. Then there are others who don’t want the contact and leave [the parent-teacher meeting] as quickly as possible without conversing with the other parents (as I would like to). Specifically, about the teachers, there are two teachers and they only speak and answer questions about the themes that they designate themselves. I think first and foremost one must seek trust and build understanding – only then would it be the beginning of an open relationship. Trustworthiness is missing, because we are many different people from different cultures and different languages….

9.5.4 Strategies parents adopted to collaborate with teachers

Common strategies that parents used to collaborate with teachers were categorised, and samples of parent responses were listed in Table 13 below. There is an important difference between Table 12 and Table 13 in the way parents accepted school initiated contact, and the way parents adopted strategies themselves to collaborate with teachers. A further differentiation in parent responses is displayed in Table 13 below. Categories of parent-initiated collaboration were characterised by a preference for face-to-face contact. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stressed that face-to-face contact was the most effective form of
communication. Participant 21 gives an insight into the reasons why face-to face contact is the most important link in establishing trust and understanding between parents and teachers:

When a parent is interested and shows interest in their children then they always have the possibility to go to the teacher and that’s what makes the difference. Earlier I went one or two times but now it’s really good. I think it is much better. In primary school we didn’t have visiting days- the teachers said it is so, rather, when someone said that they could come, when it suited them, on short notice. At the lower secondary school, I went for two hours in the morning and after that, I went to work- it was very useful for me. I could ask how he [my son] was, he had phases when he had problems, then I was there and I knew about it. With the first child I was less in the school and with the second child I was much more conscious of it. I have the responsibility for them now- I have to know and I think I know a lot more.
Table 13

*Strategies Parents Use to Collaborate with Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sample of parent response</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for short informal talks</td>
<td>We can make a spontaneous visit. I go to school and talk to the teacher. I understand it. I talk to the teacher at school at 12pm or at 4pm.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend when invited</td>
<td>We go when we are invited. My second child’s teacher is super. She tells my son when he does something good and she invites me to come and see and I think that’s great. We know what to do we have conferences with the teacher.</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept invitation to informal occasion to meet other parents</td>
<td>In the beginning I went to two afternoons to kindergarten to get to know the other parents. They had food and drinks in the first and second year. If there is something for the parents, then I join in.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the parent booklet</td>
<td>I use the booklet and I only phone in an emergency.</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept invitations classroom visits</td>
<td>We may stay and watch but not talk to the teacher about the lesson after the class is finished. I visit the class every month. I visit the classroom when I can.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept offer from teacher classroom visits</td>
<td>We can make a spontaneous visit. We are always well informed and we go two more times as well as the official two times.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural festivals</td>
<td></td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14

*Parent Initiated Forms of Collaboration with Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Parent response</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Go directly to school</td>
<td>I go to the school and talk to the teacher. I can’t write very well. I write in the parent notebook when she has been sick but otherwise I prefer to speak to the teacher. I prefer to go there when I have time.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make appointment</td>
<td>I called the teacher and said I wanted to come to see a lesson- but I didn’t feel like I was welcome. We can talk to the teacher if we have an appointment. I need to have direct contact with the teacher but I have to make an appointment first.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>We phone when we need to contact the teacher We telephone and when it is important, we go to the teacher.</td>
<td>4, 5, 6, 7 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer teacher assistance And parent expertise</td>
<td>My second child’s teacher asked for assistance with sport so I go and help sometimes.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9.5.5 *Parent involvement strategies*

The main parent involvement strategies in school type activities were categorised and described in Table 15 below.
Table 15

*Parent Involvement Strategies in Formal School Tasks at Home*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sample of parent response</th>
<th>Participant number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help with homework</td>
<td>My husband helps my daughter with her maths homework and they speak German together then.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We help the children with homework, especially in maths.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I help a lot with homework.</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My daughter needs more support than my son.</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I help a lot with homework.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41, 7, 52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign tests</td>
<td>We sign tests.</td>
<td>All in primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be at home to help the children</td>
<td>As parents you have to find time and be home and help then when they need it. Now I only work 50%, I have more time and I know what’s going on more than I did earlier when I worked full time.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use school parent booklet</td>
<td>Write in parent booklet.</td>
<td>1, 5, 7, 9, 50, 51, 52, 53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9.5.5.1 *Children as the main carriers and source of information*

Children were the main connecting link between parents and teachers. They delivered official letters and reports and messages from teachers. Renowned researchers in home-school communication in education such as Epstein (1995, p. 702) also maintained, for some families, the main source of information comes from their children. Participant 5 explained how communication functions between the home and school:

“They ask and we ask. It’s like a zigzag. The son tells us too, he is like a go between.”
Participant 5 perceived this avenue as a positive form of communication. However, not all parents were of the opinion that their children should act as the go between. Participant 49 explained her perception of receiving information in the following terms:

“I think working with parents is very important. Normally we find things out from the children, not the teacher.”

Participant 17, a father from Turkey, explained his attempt to promote intercultural understanding with a teacher who, he believed, was not open with parents in his eldest son’s class:

I asked if she would like to come to the mosque to see what the children do in the mosque and she thought that was great. She said, “Aha, the Albanian speaking children are also here. So we showed her something of our culture. I could offer to show her a lot more but I think she is a little apprehensive (participant 17)

9.5.5.2 Homework as a source of concern

Homework was a major area that parents devoted their attention to with their children. Epstein (1995, p.704) emphasised helping families understand schools and helping families establish home environments to support children as students is an important aspect of parent involvement, and establishing home-school partnerships. Several parents who had a high level of education reported that a different approach to doing mathematics was used in schools in Switzerland, and it was an area of concern. While participant 49 explained that they have different ways of doing mathematical operations, participant 52 was concerned about her child’s homework: The teacher doesn’t check to see if they’ve done their homework. Linking the parent experiences in this study with a study carried out in USA by Pryor (2001), furthers an understanding of the effects when parents have trouble helping their children with homework. Pryor said “Parents believed that these barriers weaken their role as natural leaders in their children’s lives” (p. 279).

9.5.5.3 The Parent booklet (Elternbuchlein)

The parent booklet was a tool used by most teachers in primary school. Officially, the school parent booklet is used to exchange messages and information between parents and teachers. Students are responsible for recording information, test results, and daily homework tasks.
The parents’ task is to check and sign the booklet at the end of the week, explain any absences from school, as well as record messages that need to be given to the teacher. The teachers’ task is to help students record their timetable, important dates and information, and check that parents have signed the booklet at the beginning of each week.

Not all parents reported that their children’s teacher made use of a parent booklet. When their children possessed a parent booklet it was used sporadically. Some parents also felt inhibited about writing messages in the notebook because they could not write well in German. Teacher K explained the function of the Elternbuchlein:

The children have the parent booklet, that’s the main form of communication. The parents can write in it any time they need to. I can write something down and the children give it to their parents. That’s how I usually make appointments with parents. I think that the parent notebook is good for the children so that they can take a certain amount of responsibility. We tell them that they have to show their parents otherwise the information gets lost and that can sometimes have consequences. It mostly works out. They sometimes forget it, but I give them the information early enough so that can forget it once and there will still be enough time.

The parent booklet serves several purposes, firstly to help children take responsibility for acting as a messenger between their teacher and parents, secondly, as an avenue of communication for teachers to parents, and thirdly, it provides a possibility for parents to communicate with teachers on a written basis. It is questionable whether the booklet is fully effective in serving its function. As explained in the department guidelines for working with immigrant parents, writing is problematic for many parents and time consuming, therefore the purpose of the booklet as an effective connecting link from parents to teachers, is questionable.

9.5.6 Barriers to establishing effective communication

Although the key question to this section of the chapter was concerned with establishing the strategies parents used to build effective communication with their children’s teachers, many parents were more or equally interested in expressing their concerns and beliefs about what they thought were barriers to building trusting relationships, and gaining a thorough understanding of the school system. Several categories of concerns emerged from the parent
responses. The categories included recognising and helping parent work through psychosocial trauma, and conflicts between parents and teachers. These categories suggest that the core to ensure equality in education is central not only in education, but lay within the wider discriminatory elements in society.

9.5.6.1 Addressing psychosocial needs of parents and children

Many parents from former Yugoslavia have difficulties working through recent past experiences in their home country. People who have experienced personal losses and, when their country has been destroyed by war, have trouble trusting due to past experiences. Building trusting relationships in the adopted country can be difficult, and a barrier to establishing parent-school partnerships.

Participant 40, a mother from Serbia with three children, offered her insight and view into the difficulties of entering into trusting relationships for many people from her country:

You know, where I come from, but not only from there, I think there were so many lies and many people simply cannot trust anymore, so if I say something and it is wrong - like many people, they just don’t want to get involved. These are the difficulties.

9.5.6.2 Conflicts between parents and teachers

Parents reported that they had experienced unresolved conflicts with their children’s teacher. Conflict was a common theme experienced across all language groups. Parents used the phrase: to fight for my children several times and in different contexts. Participant 4, a mother from Kosovo, described in detail the difficulties that she and her husband experienced when they were learning to deal with the situation of their son’s giftedness, and their dealings with teachers, psychologists and officials:

I would like to have fought [for my son] more. I have to say that but I wasn’t able to speak enough German and my husband wasn’t happy and did not want to go any further. We had no one to support us. I just did not have the language, it’s like you are dumb/ stupid. As I realise now it’s better if you know the language, you get to know people who can help you. Everything is better if one can speak the language.
Clearly, participant 4 was at a linguistic disadvantage; she was less able to express what she really meant with school officials, and it was an episode that continued over two years of their son’s education. Participant 4 was quick to blame her low level of German proficiency, however, she identified perhaps an equally important aspect of the conflict - they had no one to support them. On analysis, misperceptions about children’s developmental level from Kosovo may have been a cause for teacher misjudgements about this individual child’s development. Other researchers underscored the problems that parent participant 4 encountered with school officials such as Noguera, (1996, 2001, 2003 in Bryan 2005, p. 1) who stated: “Little attention is paid to… the effect of the assumptions, fears and stereotypes of school personnel or their interactions with urban minority children and families.” Participant 4 expanded on the actual reason for the conflict:

We were having trouble with our son, he didn’t want to go to kindergarten, and so we went to talk to the kindergarten teacher. After that we sent our son to the school psychologist. Then to a private psychologist- he said that it would be okay [to go to school] sooner. The kindergarten teacher didn’t agree though. We were not pleased about it. When my son finally went to first grade, the teacher called us and said they wanted to test him. They found out that he was capable of working at a grade three level! And then the first grade teacher asked why he didn’t go to school earlier...

9.5.6.3 Labelling children, reinforcing the deficit perspective of immigrant families

Parents from Turkey and former Yugoslavia feared that their children would be stigmatized, as was often the case in the wider Swiss society. Several parents said it was a major concern to them. Parent participant 21 offered this insight into her son’s class:

In one of my child’s classes the teacher had already labelled the children- that’s the trouble with her [the teacher] and she favours the girls. What is important is to be fair and not have preconceived ideas about Turkish children.

Participant 17’s insight also highlights unresolved conflicts between some immigrant parents and their children’s teacher:

I think, as well as the other parents, we would like her [the teacher] to be more open with us. I have talked to the local government to see if they would at least decrease the
size of the class and not have so many immigrant children in one class. The problem is that she isn’t open. They have preconceived ideas about us.

Participant 31 from Serbia, further conceptualised Participant 21 and 17’s concern. Participant 31, said:

I just pray that my son has a teacher who is open-minded and who doesn’t look at my son with a label that is already attached. So I hope I have enough strength to fight. I can’t accept that he is not equal in his ability to express himself - and I hope he will not be afraid to express himself - we hope this for the future.

Further to participant 31’s concern was a blatant description of teacher stereotyping immigrant children and also an example of how one teacher provoked her student into reaction. Participant 7, a mother who was a teacher of mathematics in Kosovo before the war broke out, had this to say about an exchange between her daughter and her daughter’s secondary school teacher:

My daughter is in the ninth class, she’s in what they call a bridge year. She still wants to go to the middle level of secondary school. She had an average result of 4.9. She wasn’t happy, and then in the past few weeks the teacher made war with my daughter, he said: “You are a Balkanerin [a girl from the Balkans]. In Kosovo the teachers hit the children.”

Now, my daughter can usually control herself, but the teacher provoked her. She said to the teacher: “why did you say that? Why do you say that about the Kosovo Albanian people? - Here [in Switzerland] it was the same earlier.” The teacher said: “I am pleased that you go to Real School and not to Secondary School.” [the lowest level of secondary school].

Then my husband said to my daughter: “Why did you argue with the teacher? You are in Switzerland now. I told them to stop [arguing]. My daughter has a heart and pride too. It was really so. Now she is getting better results at school, so we hope it will be better.
Further sources of conflict were aired by participant 5, a mother of three children who was concerned about inconsistencies in the school system in Basel-Land, and the resulting effects that it will have on her son’s future education:

We were very upset about our eldest son’s school. Up until two years ago it was different- no tests- now it’s with tests but you can’t change what’s happened in the past. Many parents were upset, not only us. We hoped that the children would achieve a bit more. He had the tests and he wasn’t good enough, he got a 4 plus, which is good enough to get into secondary level, but not Progymnasium. In maths he was good, it shouldn’t be decided only from one test. A 4 plus is not enough. A test alone- how can you know what a child knows from a 40-minute test? We spoke to the teacher and we told them we’re not pleased. We have an appointment with the teacher. You need to achieve a result between five and six in order to go to Progymnasium. This is very important because it will play an important role in his future life. That made us angry because we helped him a lot. Out of the whole class, only one child gets to go to Progymnasium. That isn’t a very good reflection on the teacher is it? What do you think? [Progymnasium is the upper stream of secondary school].

In comparison, several primary school teachers offered their insights into tracking. They concluded that the teachers at primary level hold expert knowledge in this area, and simply know which level the child is suited, from children’s performance in tests over the three years, their social and emotional adjustment, including their family background. Participant J believed that they are seldom wrong in the way that they allocate students into the three levels of secondary school in Basel-Land.

According to Cummins (2001) equality and social justice, two core values of society, are only occasionally on the political agenda. Relevant, and of issue in this study, are how closely the concepts of power, identity and status are related to home languages as the central factor in establishing identity and bicultural identity in immigrant children. More recently, these power and identity concepts have increasingly been highlighted as contributing factors in how children of immigrants will fare at school (Bryan, 2005; Garcia Coll & Szalacha, 2004). Teachers in this study are holders of power because they are responsible for allocating children into the two sections of first grade in primary school, and the three sections of secondary school.
9.5.7 *Parent ideas on effective forms of communication*

Participant 17’s conception of a parent-school partnership is an important insight in the present study on parent ideas about what is needed to help children succeed:

I say there are three points that are important. If the child is doing well and the teacher isn’t then it doesn’t work. If the teacher is good but the parents don’t cooperate, that doesn’t work either. There are parents who send their children to private lessons for tutoring and they don’t ask how their children are doing. Then there are the parents who fight for their children; I really believe that. Sometimes people from our own culture are interested but they are inhibited. It just takes time.

9.6 *Comparison of parents and teachers views*

Several comparisons between parent and teacher findings highlight important insights into promoting cultural understanding between parents and teachers. The responses from the parents were compared with teacher responses to illustrate different perceptions of home-school collaboration and to determine what was important to both groups. Four areas for comparison included home visits, zones of comfort, the double bind, and reaching parents.

9.6.1 *Home visits*

A comparison of one parent’s and one teacher’s perspective manifests how cultural-based expectations and inhibitions play a decisive role in facilitating interconnections. Parent participant 17 from Turkey (second generation) had the following to say about the rejection of an invitation extended to his child’s teacher for a home visit:

I think if the teacher accepted our invitation and visited us then she can see where the children live, if they could accept that, then they can see what the child’s room looks like and what the parents are like so that they can form a picture of the family. If I invite the teacher then she should come, maybe not straight away but we could make an appointment. It only needs 10 or 20 minutes but they say they won’t come and I think that’s a shame and I know that the teacher can’t concentrate only on my child because there are 24 others.
Teacher K’s view on visiting a family at home reveals her apprehension and her personal reasons for not accepting home visit invitations. (Teacher K is not the teacher who participant 17 was referring to):

If for example I were invited to a Turkish family that I don’t know then I would have to get very well informed. Otherwise – I would feel uncomfortable because I would always have to hope that I don’t do something wrong. There are so many things to consider; what should I wear, how should I greet the people, what should I take with me or what shouldn’t I take? How should I behave when eating, when sitting? There, I don’t have a very good feeling [feel comfortable]. However, what would be possible, for example, if a child invites me to a violin concert- then I would go- that I can imagine, but a home visit-for me personally – rather not.

These two parent and teacher insights are valuable because they illustrate that there are still many assumptions made and inhibitions that work as barriers against establishing effective partnerships. Teacher participant K missed out on a valuable opportunity to learn about one family from Turkey who was willing to share their home culture. On the other hand, middle class school/society type activities (Lopez, 2001, C, Suárez-Orozco, 2001) such as a violin concert are acceptable to the teacher, but to take a risk and accept an invitation to a family home from an unfamiliar culture, is considered unacceptable. Moll et al. (1992) emphasised the importance of teachers positioning themselves as learners to gain funds of knowledge about families.

9.6.2 Zones of comfort

Teachers interpreted collaborating with parents widely. Teachers were generally unprepared to step outside the institutional boundaries to learn about families. Some teachers organised more than the obligatory parent teacher evenings, while others held only one obligatory meeting. In the sense of developing collaborative partnerships, teachers also need to step outside the comfort zone of their own way of knowing, and establish two-way communication with parents in order to learn about their own and other cultures. Teacher participation in children’s communities outside the boundaries of the school is an element rarely found in Swiss communities, and parent participation in primary school is also a component that is missing in the school landscape.
9.6.3 The double-bind and language learning

As established in section 9.3, all teachers believed that the key to establishing effective communication with immigrant parents was in their German language skills. Mothers in this study, who had a low level of German proficiency, were enthusiastic and keen to learn German. Several mothers participated in German language classes as part of integration courses. They explained that the few opportunities to socialise with people speaking German are a hindrance to their own language acquisition. As a result of this situation, it was difficult to improve their language skills so that they could communicate with ease with their children’s teachers. Tabors (1997) recognised this problem as a social and language double bind. Tabors said that teachers need to grasp an understanding of how people acquire languages and gain an awareness of family circumstances. Clearly, families that don’t intend to remain in Switzerland, must maintain and continue to develop their children’s first language. Those intending to remain in Switzerland are confronted with a dilemma. Implicated in Swiss society, the message is crystal clear: to be successful at school, children must learn German as quickly as possible. As indicated in the parent responses, several parents preferred German to their home language in spite of their own limited competency and proficiency in German.

9.6.4 Parents considered ‘difficult to reach’

Difficult to reach parents are often considered to be those who have a low level of education, and a low command of the majority language. This often results in low teacher expectations of children (Lanfranchi, 2002b). New pathways in communication need to be sought to deal with these issues at the interface of communication. Teacher D described difficult to reach parents:

There are the ones you can’t reach [parents] and I know then that there are many different reasons for it, and then you can’t do anything. On the other hand, I realise that there are parents who you can reach. That’s a sensitive issue- how can we reach them and should we do that- it is extremely difficult.

Again there is a sense of apprehension that comes to mind when a teacher asks, “should we try to reach parents?” Two categories of parents stand out from the teacher perspectives, those
who display their interest through physical presence at meetings, and those who don’t attend meetings. Participant 17 said that some primary school teachers say foreign parents don’t show up for parent teacher conferences because they are not reachable or because they are foreign.

A different picture emerges when parents explain the situation of being difficult to reach from their own perspective. They believe they did not get the right kind of support, or they were not able to get the support that they needed from the community. Participant 7, a teacher from Kosovo and mother of two children, offered her interpretation of the phenomena:

I don’t know, because of the teacher, it was also our problem too, we didn’t have a permit to be here, so we thought we would have to go back [to Kosovo]- so because of all these worries, I didn’t help her [my daughter] enough, but now we have to. For my son, it will be better, with the second [child] it is always easier.

Some families have to cope with very difficult life circumstances, and parents may be unreachable because of these difficulties. Participant 7 explained her life situation before her family fled to Switzerland:

The war was a very difficult time, we have all cried a lot. I told the children, in three days it will be over- (when the parents are sad then the children aren’t happy either). We lived with fear, politics and police. In the last days before we left it was very bad, they [the Serbian Police] were like the Nazis. We had to learn their language. I worked for 10 years as a maths teacher. They wanted the Albanian-speaking children to speak only Serbian and learn about their language and culture. In the last years it was bad. We were with the children and the doors at the school were locked. The Serbian police came on a patrol; and they had weapons. The children were afraid. We wanted to begin the school year with our language and system - after 10 days I came here with my husband. My husband also had problems with the Serbian police- it was getting worse and worse. When we came here we thought we would only stay three months because my husband had a lot of work to do at home- but the situation unfortunately got worse and worse- then the war started- I lost my father- he stayed there- we don’t know what happened to him. My mother was afraid and wanted my brother to leave too.
It is questionable to label parents as *unreachable* when they are under psychological stress because they have been traumatised by war. According to Pryor (2001), overcoming personal and psychological problems is a major issue in family adjustment for many immigrant and refugee parents. They are often “overwhelmed with personal problems” (p.276), and that’s why some knowledge of families experiences before they were forced to leave their family and home country is essential for understanding the psychological state in some immigrant families.

Participant 51 reveals the complexities of home-school communication and home languages. This final quote not only reflects reality as she sees it, but at the same time it is a source of a shimmer of hope in moving towards an understanding of the significance of home language and communication. This insight includes several interrelated issues that are often on the periphery of educational concerns. The issues include: the role language plays in barriers to communication, the perceived value of both languages, development of a world view for children belonging to two cultures and two languages and bringing children up to live and survive in two different worlds and the results of semilingualism.

I try to go there as often as possible, [Mexico] so that they [the children] can live and experience Mexico, it is good for them. It is important for me, being in the situation, having children who speak two languages, that they value their language and that they value their second language - Spanish. They should learn not that one place is better than the other, rather, that they differentiate between the various ways of living, that the systems are different there than they are here, that they experience it themselves. That means that it is not only wrong to convey a false image that it is a better place here than there, or it is worse, after all there are good and bad aspects, one must differentiate and learn to live in both cultures, and on this point, in our family, it is very important that the children learn to speak in both languages. For their generation, for the future, it means better integration in this and the other society because they are brought up to live in two worlds. In practice, I can say there is a strong and a weak language, that’s normal. Can you say that it’s normal, where we are now- that’s clear that’s the strongest language and that’s the negative side of it for the other language but the hardest thing, for me, is doing something about it. For children with two languages, the situation is so; when both languages are weak, then for me, that would mean that there would be no quality for these children.
This insight illustrates the way one parent perceives her children’s languages in terms of power and identity, the weaker and stronger. It is also an insight that could well develop further understanding in working with linguistically and culturally diverse families. There is an obvious need to develop an honest worldview towards home languages and cultures in a global community.

9.7 Conclusion

In this chapter important connections were made between the sociocultural and sociopolitical factors that influence support for home languages. Basel is admired in other parts of Switzerland for the measures it has taken to promote integration of immigrant families, and that it officially advocates the promotion of home languages. However the government does not offer consistent support in home languages in kindergartens and schools during the early years of children’s education. Consistent support is a necessary requirement to ensure children’s adequate uninterrupted home language development.

The issues of underachievement and inadequate support for preschool and kindergarten aged children is not high on the political agenda- in spite of sound theoretical and practical knowledge that point to a need for support in this crucial stage of children’s language development. Home languages are acknowledged to varying degrees depending on the teacher’s personal commitment and sensitivity to addressing the needs of linguistic and culturally diverse children.

Together with a major emphasis on the German language, home languages are only minimally promoted and supported in most primary schools. As a result of this strong emphasis on German, policies tend to work assimilatory rather than as powerful integration forces. There is no doubt that the ability to speak and understand the local language is the key to educational success. However, the key opens a passage way to one culture, and closes the door on the other. It then becomes a one-way cultural pathway instead of opening many doors to bicultural and intercultural opportunities. Immigrant children are required to negotiate different pathways to be successful at school compared with Swiss national children. This difference must be acknowledged by teachers working in linguistically and culturally diverse kindergartens and schools.

Few teachers used a variety of strategies towards promoting two-way communication while many parents reported that communication was often one way and they experienced teachers as not being open for communication. The results were clear, parents reported that
communication took place at the official level, and there was a mismatch in rhetoric and provision for the needs of immigrant families. Teachers are generally not prepared to step outside their institutional role, and few teachers position themselves as intercultural learners.

More needs to be done to assist present efforts to support home language learning in families- this would require increased and more frequent communication between schools, teachers and parents. A thorough understanding of the sociocultural determinants of children’s learning would provide a useful platform for establishing more effective home-school partnerships between immigrant parents and their children’s teachers. The home-school discourse must include how home languages can be effectively integrated into the education of young children in childcare, preschool, kindergarten and lower primary school.

Children’s and family well being must also be accounted for, so that children can develop a positive identity in both languages and cultures. Only then will it be possible for the discourse to move away from the deficit perspective of the language as a problem, to regard all languages from a potential perspective. Participant 51, who had a sharp insight into the current barriers to communication between school and home said:

> The will to open up is missing, especially because you think, in school, the teachers are responsible for everything, and then perhaps the teachers think the same about the parents. Every time there is more distance between the parents and the teachers - I think it is a shame. I can’t say that what I do and think is right- the only way, but the consequences are there for everyone. It would be a good idea, useful that we could work on this theme.

The results indicated parents were aware of many barriers that prevented their children from succeeding at school. These barriers included tracking from the early years of schooling and the number of foreign languages in the school curriculum. The findings therefore point to an inherent inequality for immigrant families in the school system.

The focus of the following chapter incorporates both family and school perspectives on ICT use in the home and school, and the use of information and communication technologies as a tool for promoting and maintaining home languages and communication.
CHAPTER TEN

Immigrant family and teacher perspectives on information and communication technologies in homes, kindergartens and schools

Results and discussion 3

10.1 Introduction

Chapter Ten is the last of three results and discussion chapters and expands on the findings of Chapters Eight and Nine. This chapter focuses on the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in language learning, and in enhancing communication between the home and school. As shown in Chapter Nine, strong links between immigrant children, their parents and schools are vital to ensure active parent involvement and cooperation. However, in this study family involvement in education was not always optimal, as there were several barriers to engagement. Language, for example, was a major barrier for some immigrant families. Lack of familiarity with German, the language of instruction in schools, impeded their efforts to help children with homework and to communicate with their children’s teachers. Therefore, alternative ways to support links between immigrant families and their children’s schooling as well as to support home language maintenance and promotion, are needed. It is here that ICT has a key role to play.

This chapter, though, focuses on the existing uses of ICTs in home and school settings, factors that help and hinder their use, and ways in which digital technologies might be better harnessed to maintain and promote literacy in home languages and communication between the home and school. Specifically, this chapter focuses on immigrant families’ and school use of ICTs as a tool in general, and for promoting and maintaining home languages and communication. Both family and school perspectives focused on the types of technology used, and the nature of engagement with ICTs.
Three main topics addressed in this chapter are: (1) the extent to which families used ICTs to assist in promoting home language learning; (2) the extent to which kindergartens and schools used ICTs, and especially in the promotion of home language learning, and (3) the extent to which kindergarten and primary school teachers believed that ICTs could assist in promoting communication between schools and immigrant families.

In response to these questions, several key findings arose. ICT applications specific for maintaining home languages and supporting second language learning were found to maintain close communication with family members in home countries, and to keep up with current events and cultural developments. Families used ICTs to assist their children learn and maintain their home languages, and to complete school related homework tasks in the German language and additional school languages. Some parents used ICTs for everyday activities such as banking and searching for information. Older children downloaded music and videos and looked up information for school related tasks on the Google search engine and in the web based collaboratively authored free encyclopedia, Wikipedia. Most importantly however, ICTs were a valuable social resource.

Computers were rarely available in Basel kindergarten and primary school classrooms. As only one teacher at the primary school level had used a computer to support children’s learning, and the Internet was not accessible in classrooms, it was very unlikely that teachers used ICTs generally in the educative process of children’s learning let alone home language learning. There was little or no ICT use in kindergartens owing to a lack of official support for ICT use, and a clear view amongst teachers that computers are detrimental to children’s health and of limited benefit for learning and development. Teachers’ reasons for not using ICTs seem to stem not so much from a lack of hardware but, more subtly, their negative views about technology. Hence, their lack of interest and desire to use them and their limited knowledge about the potential benefits for children’s learning.

Not surprisingly, given the lack of computers and Internet in schools, the findings revealed that ICTs were not used as a communication tool between schools and immigrant families. The reason was again not only a lack of hardware and Internet in classrooms, but more importantly perhaps, teacher beliefs and assumptions that parents did not have appropriate user skills or, if they did, they believed parents who lived in disadvantaged neighbourhoods did not have computers or Internet in their homes.
A review of the research stages

As indicated in Chapter Seven, data for this study were obtained from parent and teacher interviews. Parents responded to twelve questions (see parent interview guide, Appendix A) about their use of ICTs in their home language, and the way their children engaged with digital technologies in the home and especially their use of ICT to promote and maintain home language use.

Teachers responded to questions about their use of technology in their classrooms (see Appendix J), and the extent to which they used ICTs and traditional forms of technologies to promote and maintain home languages. They were also asked about their awareness of children’s home use of ICTs, their ICT professional development attendance, and about their own personal use of digital technologies.

10.2 Families’ and children’s home use of ICTs

10.2.1 Distribution and access to ICTs in homes

This section outlines immigrant families’ computer access at home, and addresses the extent to which families used ICTs to assist in promoting home language learning. The key finding was that ICTs were commonplace in immigrant homes, and were used to support home language maintenance and further language learning. Table 16 shows the distribution of computers amongst immigrant families in this study. As can be seen, computer ownership was high with 81 percent (n=47) of families owning a computer, and 70 percent (n=41) of these families with Internet access in their homes. These levels of computer and Internet access are considerably higher than for the general Swiss population, although the wider Swiss statistical data are from an earlier period.

Data indicate that approximately 64 percent of Swiss households own a computer (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2003), and 86 percent of students attending primary and secondary schools had access to at least one computer at home (Niederer, Greiwe, Pakoci & Aegerter, 2002, p. 50). Given these data, although the recent most available data are some five years old, and computer ownership has increased dramatically in very recent years, it is likely that Swiss ownership is now significantly higher and probably more similar to that found in this study of immigrant households. More recent figures on Internet use in Switzerland from
December 2004 (Nielson/NetRatings, 2005a) showed 4,589,279 Internet users which was a 62 percent penetration (the sum of Internet users in the total population).

Table 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Group</th>
<th>Family Computer Ownership</th>
<th>Internet access</th>
<th>Use Software In Home Language</th>
<th>Email in Home Language</th>
<th>Use Internet sites in Home Language</th>
<th>Other tools</th>
<th>Total families in each group</th>
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<tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 web cam</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kurdish</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 IMS</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serbian and Croatian</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latin American Spanish</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Spanish</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 - Digital cam</td>
<td>- Digital cam</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total families</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IMS = Instant messaging service

Not surprisingly, home computer ownership amongst participating families varied according to the age of the children. Only 57 percent (n=15) of the participating families with preschool aged children owned a computer, whereas 81 percent (n=26) of the participants with primary school aged children or older owned a computer. These differences are consistent with the Li and Atkins’ (2004) findings in USA, and Downes’ (2004) Australian findings that computer ownership is associated with having school-aged children who use computers to help with, or complete schoolwork.

In the present study, the families who did not own computers (n=11) gave several reasons for this lack of computer ownership and/or not having Internet connections (n=17): 1) in particular they related to the high cost of hardware and digital telecommunication providers, 2) lack of awareness of the value of computer use in young children’s education, and 3) that
access to a computer was easily obtainable outside the home, for example at work, at friends’ houses, or in public places such as libraries.

There was some evidence that computer ownership was linked to parents’ educational levels, as has been found in other international studies (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003; US Department of Commerce, 2000) and in recent Swiss data. Of the 11 (19 percent) households which did not have computers at home, 8 parents (80 percent) had a minimum level of education in their home countries (5 years) or the minimum level obtainable in Switzerland (9 years). This link between computer ownership and education level is consistent with similar findings by The Basel Department of Education ICT experts who concluded that only 35 percent of parents who completed the minimum number of school years (9 years) owned a computer at home, compared with 80 percent of parents who completed tertiary education (Swiss Federal Statistics office, 2001 in Basel Schulblatt, 2004, p.19). Again, these comparisons must be treated cautiously as the Swiss data were collected in 2001, some three years before the present study. Findings from the older Swiss statistics are likely to underestimate current computer ownership because the cost of hardware, which has continued to decrease in recent years, means that computers are much more affordable to families.

Despite the findings of the link between parent education and computer ownership, conversations with immigrant parents showed that the link between education level and computer ownership was not clear cut. Certainly, low levels of education did predict lack of computer ownership in most households, but other factors such as parents’ recognition of their value in children’s education, parental unemployment and hence limited resources, computer access outside the family home or a lack of interest, were also implicated in lack of ownership.

What is perhaps more at issue here, than ownership and parental education, are the factors that influence children’s opportunities for learning. The lack of computers in homes can present a multiplicity of equity issues when children from low income immigrant families lack proficiency in the majority language (C. Suárez-Orozco, 2001), have limited capabilities in using technologies (Wauschauer, 2002), and limited preschool experiences (Lanfranchi, 2002a).

An important consideration must lie in the way children who do not have computers at home or at school, develop their confidence and motivation towards using digital technologies. As Bowman (1998) stated: “young children can learn …what knowledge is exclusive and more available to some people than to others” (p. 14). The possibility to
develop digital literacy skills through building on home experiences acquired through using technologies such as digital cameras and complementing picture processing programs, or video programs are not equalised through lack of school access as is possible in developing other forms of literacy through the availability of books for reading to develop literacy skills in schools.

Those families with Internet access were able to use World Wide Web sites and e-mail, and use instant messaging service in their home languages. Parents generally used the Internet to keep up to date with current news and affairs in their own country and culture, and communicate with family members in their home country. Some parents also used a combination of other digital accessories and peripherals such as Webcam and digital cameras. One parent also reported using the Internet to complete a course through distance education.

10.2.2 Children’s use of ICTs in homes

In the 41 homes with Internet access, children used the Internet for a number of purposes. The most common uses by older children were (1) writing e-mails and supporting written language in German and their home language, (2) for home work tasks and school assignments in the German language, (3) accessing music, movies and stories in their home language, and (4) as a source of entertainment and playing games in the German and English language. For younger children (those in preschool and kindergarten), technology was used mainly to play and for entertainment, and children wrote e-mails under the guidance of parents or older siblings.

10.2.3 Children’s use of software in home languages

Despite the high level of computer and Internet access, ICTs were not widely used for other purposes in the home language because of the limited amount of software programs in most immigrant languages (with the exception of the Spanish language). While e-mail and face-to-face conversations with family and friends in home languages were common, and Internet access of news and current affairs in home languages was popular, there was less use of traditional software for children’s educational or entertainment. This limited use was linked to the limited availability in languages other than English, German, French, Italian and Spanish. There is limited software in Turkish and almost no software in Serbian, Albanian and Kurdish. This lack of availability is reflected in UNESCO’s Education (2004) position that
linguistic inequality in ICT and digital technologies is rife, and has not been adequately addressed by the world community.

Table 16 above shows the limited availability of software in home languages as reported by the Serbian, Albanian and Kurdish language participants. As can be seen, in spite of recognition that the home languages are important, access to software for children, and indeed, adult software programs, is only available in a very small number of high status languages. Table 16 shows the limited availability of web sites for immigrant children in Basel and elsewhere.

The following illustrate some of the difficulties immigrant families reported in obtaining software in home languages, and ways they used German language software with their children. The Serbian and Croatian parents reported having some software in their home language but said that it was difficult to obtain. Several Serbian families reported that they had software that was designed for learning the Cyrillic Alphabet. Most Serbian (n=10) and one Croatian family reported that their children had used and played with software in the German language. Of the language groups represented in the present study, Spanish software was the most commonly available. All Spanish-speaking parents reported using both Spanish and German web sites and software. More than half of the Latin American families used software in their mother tongue. Typically this software was obtained in the home country.

One example of a bilingual Spanish German speaking child’s home computer use is provided below:

Four-year-old Anita was ‘playing’ computer in the living room and was capable of using the family’s digital camera to take photos and put them into a program on the computer. The text and instructions in the photo program were in German. She told me that her father (who spoke to her in German) had shown her how to do it- so she didn’t need to rely on written instructions or prompts. She was quite capable and skilled at finding her way through the program. By the end of the interview she had managed to take photos of myself, her mother and grandmother (who did not speak German) and was able to enlarge them on the computer and add background music. During this time she was speaking Spanish to her Grandmother and in German to me. From this example it was clear that Anita was a capable user of digital technology in her own home and was able to move between the two languages as needed.
Software available in the Kurdish language was reported to be scarce. Participant 25, a first generation Kurdish immigrant, had managed to obtain some children’s software in Kurdish from his family in Norway. Kurdish participant 26 explained that his son was interested in ICTs, and it didn’t matter to him which language his children used. He added:

My son went to a two-week computer course in the summer holidays. He learnt to use e-mail and the Internet. He also uses a computer at school to access web sites such as www.kidscat.ch. At home he owns and uses CD ROMs in the German language on motorcycling, football, plays the Microsoft word games and plays pinball, solitaire, and minesweeper.

Kosovo-Albanian parents reported they did not have any software in the Albanian language, but their children had software in German and English. One participant explained that he was in the process of making resources for children’s Albanian language learning on the computer.

Many children in the present study also used German language software for entertainment and to support German language and mathematics learning. Several parents explained that their children used software to learn the “second” foreign language whether that be French, English or Spanish, as well as to support their German language skills. Finally, several families reported that older brothers and sisters scaffolded their younger brothers and sisters guiding their computer use and helping them with games and finding information on the Internet.

10.2.4 Family e-mail use in home languages

As established in Chapter Six, the Internet supports social networks between families and friends around the world. E-mail was used in 36 families (62 percent) communicating locally for work and leisure purposes, and internationally for work and with families and friends. Participant 47 said that she still preferred to write and receive traditional letters, but her daughter likes to write to her Aunt in Mexico so they are beginning to use e-mail for this purpose. Participant 25 explained how he used e-mail and elaborated his beliefs about the usefulness for his children:
“E-mail, I like that, you can send so many nice things, I send photos – I write in Kurdish and sometimes they answer in another language and then sometimes they begin to write in Kurdish too. By the way, people answered me in Kurdish while I was chatting too (Instant messaging). That’s good, one writes but one has to have enough time. I write e-mails more for Swiss purposes but also for relatives around the world, also in Turkey.”

Interviewer: And the children?
“No they haven’t started with e-mail yet - but I want them to have one [an e-mail address] that would be great when they write. They have a lot of cousins they could write to.” [In Norway, Australia and Turkey].

Participant 46 also explained how e-mail is important in communication between her children and her relatives:

We get a lot of e-mails and attached photos from my sister in law in Argentina. The children write in English to my side of the family and Spanish to their father’s side; they also write to their Grandparents.

10.2.5 Parent restrictions and monitoring of ICT use

While most parents were open to ICT use in their homes, several parents were active in restricting the amount of time their children used digital technology and their television viewing time. Most families said they limited the amount of total screen time that their children consumed. Several families reported that they did not allow their children to use the computer at home. Two families with children attending kindergarten stated that they didn’t want their children to have a computer yet because they felt that outdoor play was more important. Participant 47’s five-year-old daughter attended a four-week computer course while they were visiting family in Mexico. At home in Basel however, she restricted her daughter’s use of the Internet because:

She likes to watch TV and I am afraid she will get fixed on it [the Internet] like she is on TV but I see she’s interested and she copies us at the computer with her own toy computer. It will be good later, especially for Internet- there is a Barbie site, and in Mexico there’s a state Channel [Internet site] and there are lots of things for children.
10.2.6 Summary

In summary, most immigrant parents who had computers in their homes used them to communicate in their home language and in the German language. E-mail was a common form of communication between immigrant families. Some families kept in contact with grandparents via Webcams or similar. Instant messaging service was also considered a good form of communication to keep in contact with friends and relatives. Most immigrant families who had Internet access also used web based learning opportunities, such as children’s web sites for language learning.

Conversations with immigrant families showed two main types of ICT applications were used to maintain home cultures and languages. First, ICTs were widely used to maintain close communication with family members in home countries mainly through e-mailing, and to keep up to date with news and events at home. Secondly, ICTs were also used by families to assist children learn and maintain their home languages, and to complete school related learning and homework tasks in German or additional school languages. In addition some families used ICTs for everyday activities such as banking, and older children downloaded music and videos, and searched for information. Most importantly, ICTs seemed valuable for keeping social networks alive which, in turn, contributed to psychological well being of families.

While most immigrant families in this study were able to use the Internet to communicate in their home languages via e-mail, and access some media and related material in home languages, plus support children’s home language learning, some families from Turkey, Kosovo and Serbia had difficulty accessing relevant software in home languages. As explained in Chapter Six, a limitation of the Internet can be its exclusiveness in that it is limited to those people who understand the languages English, Chinese, Japanese and German, the top four languages represented on the Internet. In this study, most families were able to communicate in their own languages with family and friends by using e-mail and Webcams. They could also access Podcasts and newspapers in home languages. However, they were less able to find suitable literacy learning and support materials for their children in relevant home languages, particularly in Kurdish and Albanian. As computers are not widely used in schools in Turkey, Kosovo and Serbia, it is not surprising that there is limited educational software in Turkish, Albanian and Serbian.

The findings outlined above showing the widespread use of ICT in maintaining home languages, and promoting learning in the majority language are consistent with those from a
Korean Chinese study (Koreans living in China) where children’s use of ICTs was found to play an important role in the development of bilingualism (Choi, Won & Lee, 2004). In the Korean Chinese study, as in this study, children used ICTs in the majority language (Chinese) as well as in the home language, indicating that ICTs can play an important role in facilitating language learning in general. Furthermore as highlighted in the Yang and Benson McMullen study (2003) as discussed in Chapter Five, ICT use for communication between schools and homes improved parent feelings of connectedness with their children’s teachers. As noted in this study, ICTs may have a significant impact in changing ways of communicating and building bridges between parents and teachers. Given that the majority of parents used ICTs as a form of communication, Basel schools could well take advantage of the newly available hardware purchased for schools in 2006 and 2007 to improve and increase the amount of communication between homes and schools.

10.3 Kindergarten and primary teacher use of ICTs and Basel Education Department guidelines

This section reports on teacher interviews and, specifically, the extent to which kindergartens and schools used ICTs and believed that ICTs can and do assist in the promotion of home language learning. Four grade one teachers from three primary schools (children six to seven years of age) and eight kindergarten teachers from seven kindergartens (children from four to six years) were interviewed (See Table 17 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten teachers</th>
<th>Primary teachers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher identification</td>
<td>A  B  C  D  E  F  G  H  J  K  L  M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>F  F  F  F  F  F  F  F  F  F  F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching experience (in years)</td>
<td>19 8 5 5 18 20 18 8 5 3 10 4</td>
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</tbody>
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Responses from teacher interviews revealed that computers and Internet access were rarely available in classrooms. Only one primary school teacher and one kindergarten teacher reported having a computer in their classroom. Internet was not available in kindergartens or any of the primary teachers’ classrooms. Clearly, participant teachers rarely had the opportunity to use ICTs in kindergartens or primary school classrooms. Two kindergarten teachers said they used or had used ICTs for drawing and painting on a very limited basis in their kindergarten. They said that a computer and relevant software might be useful as a tool for supporting second language learning. Only one teacher at the primary school level had used a computer to support children’s learning. Needless to say, no teacher had used ICTs to support children’s home language learning, and only one teacher had used ICT to support children’s language learning in German.

10.3.1 Official Education Department guidelines for primary school ICT use

The finding that teachers who participated in these interviews did not use computers to support children’s learning in general, let alone their language learning in home languages, is not surprising. Although computers are widely used to support children’s learning in classrooms in Australia, the US, the UK, and many parts of Europe, they have not yet impacted significantly on teaching and learning in Basel schools. There are two main reasons for this. First, the Basel Education Department published its initial framework for using ICTs in schools in 2004. So there is no long term “official” understanding or acknowledgement of the potential value and role of supporting children’s learning with ICTs. Secondly, few teachers in Basel schools, as reflected by the views of teachers in this study, recognise the value of using ICTs to support learning. In fact, the ICT section in the Basler School Newspaper (4/2004) (Basler Schulblatt) reports that although all schools have at least two computers for students per classroom, and a computer for teachers, ICT is not integrated into the classrooms. (This statement is contrary to the findings in the present study. Teachers reported that they did not have computers in their classrooms). And according to one report:

The department does not have a pedagogical concept that sets out the aims and goals for use of ICT at different levels of school. A working group was developing a pedagogical framework for technology integration that should have been binding and used by all schools in the Canton [Municipal]. The guidelines included emphasis on the significance of cultural techniques of reading, writing and arithmetic and that use
should be heightened through ICT rather than in competition with ICT. Further, several factors were considered decisive in order for successful integration of ICTs into the curriculum to occur: Further education and professional development was deemed necessary to ensure teachers gain the right attitude towards using computers in their lessons. Successful integration would also depend on teacher knowledge, infrastructure and the location of technological devices. Teachers need to be guaranteed on the job support and they need concrete examples of material that show how ICT can be connected and used through the curriculum (ICT Department, Basler Schulblatt 2004). [ICT Department, Basler School Newspaper, 2004] [My translation].

10.3.2 Computers in kindergartens

Only one of the eight kindergarten teacher participants interviewed had a computer in her kindergarten classroom. Two kindergarten teachers, participant E & F, explained that they had used a computer as a part of a short-term project (as part of a course in teaching children German as a second language). They introduced a computer with a children’s paint program into kindergarten for two months. They found that the computer was useful, but no more than traditional tools they had in their kindergarten. The computer was not used after the project was completed.

The lack of computer use in kindergartens can be partially explained by a lack of policy support, but more importantly perhaps by an “unofficial moratorium” on computer use that was called at a kindergarten teachers’ conference in 2004 (Personal communication K. Bissegger January 22, 2004). Many kindergarten teachers hold valid concerns and are strong opponents of ICT use in the early childhood years, and this “moratorium” reflects long held concerns in Basel and elsewhere about the impact of computers on children’s social, physical and cognitive development.

Taking into consideration the moratorium, less than one in five kindergartens in Basel City had a computer. One computer specialist was appointed by the Department of Education for kindergartens. Kindergarten teacher (Participant E) explained:

Computers? No, we could [have one] for a while but they stopped distributing them. There were a lot [of teachers] who were against computers. I personally, wanted to have one, and then they said there are no more computers. I had two temporary jobs where they had a computer in the kindergarten. For me, I thought it would be good to
have contact with an electronic medium – in kindergarten we can have clear structures, where- I think it wouldn’t be a problem. I know, I experienced it, it was good there and we have a computer at home for our kids and we let the kids use it. It was clearly structured in the kindergarten–we had a list of children’s names and they only allowed two on the computer for half an hour, not alone and not ask constantly if they can go again and again every day. They had software that was specially selected for kindergarten, where they learn something – and funnily I experienced that they weren’t that interested- the interest remained for two weeks. Just like other games that are new. But they thought that the children have enough of it at home and I can also see that, that argument is right too- so I think for me personally I use it like another game, I don’t hold it in special value, I think it is a playful way to do things but otherwise it’s just like all the other things in kindergarten. So the medium that I use the most is books and cassettes. We use it in workshops and they love to record things.

In elaborating her views about teachers’ reluctance to include computers as learning tools in early childhood classrooms, Participant E also acknowledged the importance of introducing children to technologies in schools, but recognised the clash between traditional and modern forms of technology and the contrast between children’s home use of computers and their lack of use in kindergartens. While she recognised that sheltering children from ICT experiences in kindergarten is a form of disconnecting them from their real world experiences, she was nevertheless adamant that computers were inappropriate for young children. Participant H also explained her decision not to use ICTs in her kindergarten:

If you want to have a computer in your kindergarten, you have to do a course. I did one three years ago. It was a 12-hour course. A kindergarten teacher showed us different programs, how to evaluate programs, how to make a plan so the children share the computer, how much time and what the children can learn. Our school administrators decided to put a stop to it. Those who already had a computer are allowed to continue to use it, but for reasons based on pedagogical grounds, no more kindergartens could receive one. The Directors of Kindergarten made the decision. There are perhaps some teachers who think it is a shame but teachers can still do the computer course.
10.3.3 Why kindergarten teachers do not use ICTs

The reasons reported by teachers for not using ICTs were linked with their pedagogical beliefs and approach to teaching. Generally, they considered computers and ICTs irrelevant and extraneous to their work with children. They generally believed computer use to be a passive experience, and did not appear to value computers as an educational experience. They were particularly concerned with developing fine and gross motor skills and coordination and felt that the abstract nature of computers could not support this.

Another main reason for not using computers in early childhood classrooms, reported by three teachers, was the view that media and technology use is already a problem in children’s homes, and they did not want to exacerbate the problem by also using ICTs at school. The teachers believed that children have too much exposure to media at home so it is not necessary to include ICT in Kindergarten. Teachers said children have diverse digital technologies in their homes such as PlayStations, computers, TV, stereo systems, Nintendos and Gameboys. Teachers reported that too much exposure to ICTs and television viewing was a major area of concern for parents and for teachers. Teacher B stated:

It’s a really big issue. Sometimes it a problem with the children too... when they arrive in the morning, because they have already watched two hours of TV before school or they have already played hectically on the PlayStation. When they come to kindergarten in that condition you can’t work with them. Another issue is, if they watch TV until eleven or twelve o’clock at night- it’s not only because of the short time they sleep but also because of the films they watch. I know that several children already use a computer at home but I don’t know if they use Internet. Some even have their own computer.

Participant C outlined a similar picture:

We ask them on the first day we meet them, if they have a TV in their room at home. We ask them what they watch because a lot of them watch TV for two hours before they come to kindergarten already. We ask if they watch the news. Some have computers- mainly games and PlayStations. It is a big issue and we ask them to try to do it differently and we say they can’t do this and we try to tell the children not to do this, to change this.
On the surface, it seems that teachers may have been using this apparent over-exposure to technology in the home as an excuse to discount the use of ICTs in their classrooms. There was no attempt, it seems, to debate the use of media with children’s families and come to a better understanding about the educational value of digital devices in homes and in classrooms. Rather than trying to achieve a better balance between home and school ICT use, teachers simply abandoned any efforts to use ICTs as a tool to support children’s learning and communication. Teachers did not appear to consider that ICTs had any value as an educational tool in their classrooms or in children’s learning, let alone in language learning.

In contrast, participant C explained that her own young children used a computer at home but it was not suitable for the children in her kindergarten because of its limited educational value, and her lack of understanding about the developmental and pedagogical issues related to ICTs. She said:

We could have a computer, it would not be a problem, we would get the support too…but I link it with the developmental stage of the child, with our children they firstly have to have their first experiences, we have manipulatives for three year olds, so it [computers] isn’t for them. But I would say there are children who could use it, for example my own children [three and five year old], I already have to ensure that Andreas [my son] doesn’t do too much, so I am not against it, and I think it is positive, but you have to keep an eye on it, all the time and see what they are doing. And I would say you have to accompany them while they are at the computer. I let them play and write and they use a drawing program when they go to visit their grandfather. So yes they can draw too.

Clearly, the changes that have taken place in children’s homes and other outside school experiences are not reflected strongly by the Basel Department of Education, or in individual schools and kindergartens. Participant B explained further and stated:

I wouldn’t use it [a computer] because it isn’t necessary at that age. We could use it if we had a strict framework, but I think I have other things that are more important. The whole social and emotional area that I find they have to learn, rather than using the cognitive side. Then what is also the case is that I have a lot of kids who don’t get enough exercise. They run around at kindergarten, and then at home they sit in front of
the TV. And they have to work through all that information that goes through their head [the impressions from the films on TV], and I don’t want that.

Given the lack of Education Department support for ICTs in kindergartens and schools, teachers’ negative views about ICT use are not surprising. Despite over 20 years of ICT use in most school systems in the UK, US and Australia, Basel schools are only just beginning to confront the reality of a digital world, and the dramatic changes to learning and teaching that are possible with ICT support.

In Switzerland, as in most countries, decisions to supply computers and Internet to kindergartens and primary schools in local education authorities are made at the local level. In Switzerland, this means by local governments. Education policy, for example in Basel-Land however, is shaped by conservative forces, and has very traditional beliefs about social, emotional and physical wellbeing of children. Recent political debate, views ICTs as having a negative influence on children’s social and emotional development. There is considerable concern that ICTs are educationally unacceptable for young children and do not provide relevant learning experiences or opportunities. Local pedagogical beliefs focus predominantly on children’s need for direct contact with the outside environment, for “hands on learning” and for one-to-one interaction with peers and teachers, rather than abstract experiences in a virtual world. Clearly, use of computers and hands on real world experiences are not mutually exclusive, but they appear to be in the minds of many local teachers. Such views represent local political opinion and cement teachers’ rejection of ICTs in young children’s education (extracts from a protocol of a government session in Basel-Land held on May 20th 1999, Kanton Basel-Landschaft, 1999, 2005).

10.3.4 Summary of ICT use in kindergartens

In summary, conversations with teachers and an examination of relevant policy documents indicated that there is little or no ICT use in Basel kindergartens, a lack of official support for ICT use in schools, and a clear view amongst teachers that computer use adversely affects young children (Armstrong & Casement, 2000; Cordes & Miller, 2000; Healy, 1998, Stoll, 1999).

The discourse surrounding digital technologies and media is dominated by a focus on restricting and limiting children’s ICT use, including rejection of ICT as a tool to develop
language and literacy learning. Teachers also advocated restricted use of ICT in children’s homes.

In the light of the discussion in Chapter Six about teachers’ central role as knowledge power brokers (Cummins, 2001; Bowman, 1998), their reluctance to embrace ICT use to support young children’s learning, especially in areas where they could be especially beneficial such as language learning and home language learning in particular, is problematic. The evidence outlined in Chapter Six indicates the value of ICTs in providing authentic and motivating contexts for learning across a range of curriculum areas and specifically in supporting home language learning. Moreover, as most children are already viewing ICTs as an integral part of their world, and use them extensively in their homes, continuity of experience would seem important. Today, ICTs are everyday communication and learning tools for children and in the wider community. The almost exclusive rejection of use in Basel early childhood classrooms found in this study is in stark contrast to the reality of children’s worlds, and is at odds with most contemporary thinking about scaffolding children’s early learning (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Leung, 2003; Rogoff, 2003).

10.3.5 Primary school use

This section reports the findings from interviews about teachers’ ICT use and their beliefs about ICT with four primary school teachers. Participant responses revealed that digital technologies were not a common part of children’s primary school experience. Secondly, home languages were an integral part of children’s daily education in only one of three classrooms. Only one of four teachers had a computer in her classroom, and no classroom had an Internet connection. A computer lab (with six or seven computers with Internet access) was available for general class use in each school, but had only been used by one teacher at the time of the interview. Therefore the potential of using ICTs to support learning across the curriculum, let alone integrating ICTs in immigrant children’s school experiences for home language learning, was not recognised or not considered by teachers.

Teachers’ reasons for not using ICTs seem to stem mainly from their lack of hardware, and lack of interest or desire to use them. Teacher beliefs about technology are perhaps more significant than a lack of resources, and their lack of knowledge about the potential benefits for children’s learning. They believed that computers would take up too much time and prevent children from doing more important work. These findings are consistent with a finding in the UK by Elliott, Findlay, Fitzgerald and Davies (2004) who suggested that
teachers regard technology as “interfering” and “distracting.” Furthermore, findings from a study by Dawes (1999) suggest an explanation that teachers who have not had adequate training tend to be “reluctant users” and “fear technology.” Therefore attributing limited ICT use to a lack of hardware, and a lack of official support to introduce digital technologies into primary classrooms, may be superficial.

The one teacher (grade one), who had two computers in her classroom and used them in a very limited way, was a recent teacher education graduate and was aware of the value of ICTs. She said she did not have an adequate supply of computers or Internet connection to facilitate learning through digital technologies. None of the classrooms in her school had Internet access. Participant K who had participated in two years of ICT classes in her teacher training explained:

you have to take the initiative yourself if you want a computer in the classroom. I have two computers in my classroom, my own old computer and a very old laptop. There is no Internet access in the classrooms, imagine the cost of the wiring! No there is no funding available for that.

Undoubtedly, given the recent advances in wireless technology, lack of wiring in old classrooms is no longer a viable reason today to exclude Internet use in classrooms. Nevertheless, as explained in Chapter Six, Basel primary schools are upgrading the ICT infrastructure to take advantage of the new technologies (Zehnklusen, 2005). However, once the infrastructures are in place, teacher attitudes as outlined in this study may present greater barriers to facilitating children’s learning through ICTs.

Participant K was the only primary teacher interviewed to hold a positive attitude towards ICT use in classrooms. She recognised that ICTs had considerable potential as tools to scaffold and support children’s learning. However she was concerned about lack of official support to introduce digital technologies into primary classrooms, and a lack of time:

I use the computer mostly for myself and the children work independently at the computer. It’s amazing how well the children can use it. They all know how to use it from home. I have different programs, for example: a calculator trainer, something for reading and then I let them use the word program for writing, then they can print their work and I collect it. The children are only allowed on the computer when I say they can use it. We haven’t done any group work on the computer yet and we have a
computer room in the school with Internet access but I haven’t been there with this class yet. In the computer room you can easily work in groups. There are lots of really great things you can do. When I am planning for my lessons I also get information from the Internet but these activities usually involve more time. On the other hand, there is a large array of materials for lessons that we have that works much better without the Internet. I see the advantage of the computer when it is used for specific purposes and that’s seldom the case. Because we only have two computers and 21 children, we don’t have much time for the computer and we have a curriculum that we must follow.

The other three teachers each held very negative views about ICTs in schools. Contrasting with Participant K’s views on the potential value of ICTs in children’s learning, Participant L, an experienced primary school teacher, stated that she was “not a fan of computers” and preferred not to use them. At first it seemed that she had made an active decision to reject an offer to have a computer in her classroom, but further probing revealed that there had never been any supply of computers (for children’s classroom use) to this school. Unlike Australia, the US or the UK, there has been no wide scale supply of ICTs to Basel schools. To this point in time, the potential of ICTs as teaching and learning tools is not acknowledged.

Similarly, Participant J (grade two) did not have a computer or Internet access in her classroom. She had little understanding of the potential uses of ICT in supporting children’s learning, and had not participated in any preservice or in-service training. Her understanding of classroom use of digital technologies was limited to keyboard skills. She recognised the value of typing skills and said that her children “enjoyed using a typewriter to practice their typing skills.” Not unexpectedly, she had never used the computer lab in her school.

While these three teachers’ negative attitudes toward ICT use are not surprising in some senses, given the lack of Education Department support for ICT use in primary schools, it is more surprising that international acceptance of ICT use in education has not had greater influence on pedagogical practice in Basel classrooms. As Cummins and Sayers (1995 in Cummins, 2001) say “the dismissal of technology in general and of the information superhighway in particular by many progressive educators ignores the fact that it is here to stay (p. 288).

A major problem in Basel educational approaches seems to be the continued reference to the “future needs of children,” but little emphasis to addressing deep seated, traditional pedagogical theories and beliefs that underpin teacher practice, and specifically in classroom
ICT acceptance and use. There are limited opportunities for educators to engage in professional development, little consideration of worldwide innovations in education, and scant attention to pedagogical reform. Most teaching in Basel schools is teacher centred and guided by very specific curriculum documents and associated text books. Without Education Department support for rethinking traditional pedagogy, there is unlikely to be significant changes to teachers’ thinking about the ways children learn, and the potential for new tools to support and enhance their learning.

Given schools’ and teachers’ lack of ICT awareness, their seemingly deep cultural distrust of technology in learning, and the limited penetration of ICTs into Basel schools and classrooms, it is unlikely that digital technologies will have any impact on teaching and learning in schools, let alone language learning in this decade. In spite of these powerful and inhibiting limitations that impact on ICT implementation, ICTs have extraordinary potential for use in supporting language learning. There are extensive curriculum resources for primary schools and kindergartens for learning German, English and French as a second language. The Internet provides opportunities for just-in-time learning and many different forms of communication tools that students can use in both the majority and home languages.

10.4 ICTs for connecting homes and schools

Given the important role of ICTs in facilitating communication in contemporary society, a focus in this thesis was intended to be on ways in which schools used these technologies to facilitate communication with parents. As the research developed, it became clear that ICTs were almost never available in children’s classrooms, that schools had just one “computer room,” and that teachers rarely recognised their potential as teaching and learning supports, let alone communications tools. So this section then, reports more on why teachers didn’t use ICTs to communicate with parents, although the question was intended to probe how teachers used media or technology to improve communication between parents and kindergartens and schools.

Other than teacher use of answering machines, there was no technological support for communication between schools and homes. The twelve teachers interviewed had little conception, first of the need for active communication with families about their children’s learning and development, and secondly, about the potential of ICTs to facilitate the communication process. The most significant view was that teachers assumed that most parents, and especially immigrant parents, were not computer literate and believed that they
did not have Internet access in their homes. Obviously though, even if teachers had wanted to communicate with parents using the Internet, they did not have ready Internet access in the classrooms. Most schools have Internet access points only in the administration section.

Teacher C’s and teacher H’s responses were typical of the lack of awareness of the potential of using ICTs to communicate with families:

No, I haven’t thought about it, [ICTs to communicate with parents] I think it might depend on what parents there are, lots of our parents work as cleaners all day long and they don’t have the knowledge and user skills of how to use a computer. I would never have had the idea to communicate with the parents through computer (Teacher C).

It just wouldn’t work - to send e-mails instead of sending letters home because although many have a computer at home, many don’t have Internet access. We have a lot of families who live in socially subsidised flats, (a disadvantaged neighbourhood) and they surely don’t have a computer (Teacher H).

Similarly, Teacher G said:

I’m not against it but I don’t need it (using ICT to communicate with families). If I imagine that everything would be done via computer, no, I don’t want that because the personal contact will be lost.

While teacher Participant G had not thought of communicating with families in an interactive two-way sense using ICTs, she did recognise the value of a one-way type of communication with families and described a video made by the Department of Education to help facilitate the transition to school for children from immigrant backgrounds. Clearly though her use of expressions such as “to inform” the parents indicated that she perceived communication as a one-way process- from school to home, rather than a more interactive sense of developing mutual awareness and understanding of respective cultures of the home and school:

We showed the parents a video in the beginning, before kindergarten started. That is one thing that can help- it is more that you can put something together on a video... Pictures where they can see it in their language about things we want to tell them. It is more from us to them and not from them to us. No I don’t have an idea [about using ICTs to communicate with families].
That teachers valued the idea of personal contact with parents is important. However, in reality, there is little contact between parents and teachers in most schools, and especially in disadvantaged areas. Further, as discussed in Chapter Five, many parents, especially those who lack familiarity with the language of the school, have little confidence to approach teachers. Moreover, in Basel schools, there is limited focus on parent involvement in education, and little policy recognition of the value of working closely with families to strengthen relations between home and school. Traditionally there has been greater focus on parent communication and involvement in kindergartens. Today, with many working mothers, the interpersonal communication once held “sacred” by kindergarten teachers is not realistic. This traditional view places the mother in the home, and assumes personal availability at all times during the day.

Notwithstanding the above, as outlined in Chapter Five, some parents, including immigrant parents, preferred the idea of communicating with teachers via the Internet. They preferred a more impersonal style of contact with teachers. As Yang and Benson McMullen’s (2003) study showed, Korean immigrant parents preferred to use e-mail to communicate with teachers because they were not restricted by oral language difficulties, and it was a more convenient and efficient form of communication. Teacher D’s response summarises the general position on the issue of ICT as a communication channel between schools and homes:

That would mean that all parents would have to have a computer and I personally think that I enjoy the personal contact- that’s more important. I think that would be a disadvantage if communication went in a technological direction because personal contact is more important. Maybe it’s future music but for me the personal contact is more important.

In considering ways of communicating with families, teachers seemed to think that personal modes of communication, written communication and ICT enabled communication, were mutually exclusive. Clearly they are not. The basis of trusting relationships requires effort and can be provided through diverse forms of communication that help parents and teachers construct appropriate expectations for children’s learning, and further, so that parents can be involved in their children’s education and learning. Increasingly diverse urban communities contain complex family constellations with an array of language combinations, and people from cultures holding different expectations from the mainstream community. Therefore, an array of strategies to enable home school communication is needed. These
might include contemporary electronic and digital forms such as the popular Short Messaging Service (SMS) and e-mail as well as traditional forms of communication such as newsletters and parent-teacher meetings.

10.5 Summary of findings on ICT use in kindergarten and primary schools and concluding comments

This chapter focused mainly on ICT use in families, the ways in which ICTs were harnessed to promote home language learning, and the extent to which kindergartens and schools used ICTs. Specifically this chapter has focused on immigrant families’ ICT use and school use of ICTs as a tool in general, for promoting and maintaining home languages and communication. Both family and school perspectives focused on the types of technology used, and the nature of engagement with ICTs.

The findings in this study suggest that families used ICTs as well as traditional media (as described in Chapter Eight) in their homes for both home language maintenance and majority language learning. Most families had a computer and the Internet in their homes. They were aware of the value of ICTs in their children’s education, and the importance of computer literacy for their children’s future workforce opportunities. Families used ICTs for everyday tasks that included sharing and searching for information in both the majority and home languages. Children played games and used the Internet for downloading music and videos and looking up information for school assignment tasks. Both younger and older children used ICTs to play and as a form of entertainment. The findings therefore suggest that home ICT use support children’s language learning in the home and majority language.

In kindergartens and primary schools in this study, there was extremely limited use of ICTs and therefore, not unexpectedly, children did not engage in home language learning and school language learning was not facilitated through ICT use. Kindergarten and primary teachers did not acknowledge or accept the value or role ICTs could play as a tool to promote home-school communication.

Teachers’ position on ICT use in young children’s education was in sharp contrast with that of parents.’ Teachers rarely had access to ICTs in their classrooms and were negative about the potential of ICT to support children’s learning. Lack of ICT use appeared to be influenced by a combination of factors; a lack of Education Department support for ICT use in schools; teachers’ negative views towards ICTs in young children’s lives, a lack of understanding about their potential to promote children’s learning, and few professional
development opportunities to learn about meaningful ICT integration coupled with a strong commitment to traditional teacher-centred forms of teaching with close adherence to quite rigid syllabus documents and text books. To an extent, teachers’ lack of awareness of ICTs in education arose out of the negative image of educational ICT use in the media, and views about young children’s education that were grounded in traditional pedagogies that idealise the early years as a place where children play freely with natural mediums rather than sitting “passively attached to a machine.” Needless to say, both active play and less physically active pursuits can be accommodated in a classroom. The two are not mutually exclusive, and physically inactive play can of course be cognitively active as in the case of ICT engagement. In a sense, the debate surrounding funding, supply and resources is therefore superfluous when teacher attitudes and beliefs present real barriers to ICT use.

Clearly, there is a major mismatch between education policy and practice. For example, free of charge high speed Internet access has been made available to all Swiss public schools, and the Basel Department of Education has stated that schools must respond to the obvious inequalities arising from the digital divide through promoting ICT competence in students. However, it has only very recently in the 2006/2007 school year that the Basel Department of Education began to supply ICT hardware to primary schools, and offered optional professional development for teachers to support their ICT use.

Further barriers to ICT use are shaped by teacher attitudes. The potential for integrating home languages through ICT in kindergarten and lower primary classrooms has not been explored due to broadly based negative attitudes towards ICTs promoted and accepted in teaching at the early education level in Basel-City, coupled with a lack of appropriate hardware and limited Education Department support for ICT. Given the discrepancies between home and school use of ICTs, it is clear that they are not likely to be used for promoting home language and literacy learning any time in the near future. Clearly too, given the lack of ICT penetration in schools, the potential value of ICTs is unrecognised as an avenue for communication between parents and teachers. What may appear to be a logical step in using ICTs for communication in the present age of instant communication (as it is in other OECD countries) and children’s real life world experiences, is presently not reflected or an option in Basel-City kindergartens and primary schools.

In thinking about ways in which ICTs might be employed to support learning in kindergartens and primary schools, what is needed foremost is a critical dialogue and a debate that extends beyond the ‘use or not to use, proponents versus opponents, restriction and protection’ position towards an understanding of children’s and families real life world ICT
experiences, and ways in which ICTs can support curriculum goals and improve learning outcomes in meaningful ways. Only when ICTs are fully integrated as learning and communication tools in classrooms can their potential as a tool to promote home language learning and as a communication tool between parents and teachers, be explored. Denying the present reality of instant communication and digital tools to reinforce and scaffold children’s learning, signifies that teachers are both out of touch and reluctant to adapt to change. Given the challenges of changing patterns of global migration and technological advances in communication, teachers and schools must be willing to adapt their curricula and approaches to better cater for all children’s learning needs. In particular, the potential for ICTs to support language learning for children who do not speak German, and who also want to maintain their home languages, needs serious exploration. With Switzerland’s mediocre performance in international tests such as in the OECD’s PISA, and indications that students from immigrant backgrounds have low reading literacy levels, children need many and varied opportunities to develop their literacy skills.

Chapter Eleven brings together the main points from the three results and discussion chapters. It highlights ways in which ICTs and more effective parent-school communication can be harnessed towards supporting children’s first language development. Most importantly, it presents a series of recommendations for education authorities who are faced with the need to provide responsive, meaningful educational experiences for children from immigrant backgrounds who start school speaking home languages only, and who need and want to maintain their home language. Finally, Chapter Eleven presents a ‘multilingual social cohesive communications model’ that draws on the conclusions from the present study, highlighting the value of effective and collaborative communication as a vital ingredient to ensure children’s educational success and home language maintenance. The model provides a framework to promote and facilitate uninterrupted home language learning in families, schools and the wider community, with the goal to promote multilingualism through social cohesion, incorporating interactions, relationships, and tools that shape children’s home language development. These factors and strategies are intended to serve as a guide to schools and educational authorities to facilitate language and literacy development in the early years for children of immigrants. Suggestions for future research will also be outlined.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

Redefining multilingualism to embrace social cohesion: New directions for home/community language learning

11.1 Introduction

This research focused on the processes involved in children’s home language learning in the home, community and school. In particular it examined the experiences of immigrant families as they supported and negotiated their children’s home language learning. Also, the ways in which families used ICTs to promote, support and facilitate home language maintenance and learning, and the extent to which schools valued and promoted home languages as an integral part of children’s schooling, were addressed.

The final chapter provides a summary of the main findings, discusses the implications of the findings in terms of Swiss educational policy and practice, and suggests further research to forge avenues to improve educational outcomes for children from immigrant backgrounds. Most importantly, this final chapter highlights ways in which ICTs and effective communication can be harnessed towards supporting children’s first language development, and a consolidation of their literacy development in all languages.

Finally, a ‘multilingual social cohesive communications model’ is proposed. This model provides a framework that could be used by policy makers to promote and facilitate uninterrupted home language learning in families and schools where the goal is to promote multilingualism through social cohesion. Under the guiding principle that children should learn and make sense of their own social and cultural worlds, the model incorporates the interactions, relationships and tools that shape children’s home language development both in
the home itself, in the school, and between the home, school and wider community.
Specifically, the model proposes that effective communication is an essential component in
promoting collaboration between families and schools across environments to ensure
educational success. As indicated in the model, collaboration can take place in many forms,
and may include building community locally and through the Internet, together with people
with the same interest in promoting their children’s home language learning. It is only when
these vital elements of communication are embraced and employed, that educational
outcomes for immigrant children in Swiss communities are likely to improve.

The internal, biological and external environmental forces that influence language
learning also provided insights into specific attributes affecting language learning and the
contexts for home language learning in children of immigrant families. The major theoretical
perspectives underpinning the study grew out of Vygotsky’s work and followers such as
Bronfenbrenner and, more recently, the scholars Cummins and Rogoff. Significantly,
Vygotsky’s sociocultural perspective proposed that children’s language developed as a result
of interactions with other people through participation in social and cultural settings.
Bronfenbrenner’s work extended this view and highlighted the ecological environmental
factors including the distal and proximal resources and processes that influence language
learning. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 291) said it is the “constructive cooperative potential” that
must be promoted if children’s home language is to be valued and strengthened. On a similar
line, children’s productive use of ICTs can act as constructive cooperative tools for learning.

Bronfenbrenner’s theories also linked with Cummins’ work on the interdependency of
first and second language development and later, the role of environmental factors of power
and discrimination on children’s educational outcomes. In particular, as indicated in Chapter
Eight, strong home language development also helps maintain connections with the home
country and culture, and underpins healthy identity formation. According to Cummins (2000),
developing a positive self-identity is especially vital for first, second and third generations of
immigrants as they establish their roots in the new country. In addition, it is only when
children possess healthy self-identities can they develop ‘multiple identities’ which, according
to M. Suárez-Orozco (2001), is a necessary ingredient to successfully negotiate diversity in a
multicultural society.

According to these perspectives, it is paramount that children have uninterrupted home
language development and strong first language skills on which to build second (or
additional) language competency. With strong language skills, students will have a chance to
develop the literacy and other academic skills that promote school success.
In German speaking Swiss society, and educational contexts in particular as explained in Chapter One and Three, there has been a growing concern about the educational difficulties faced by non-German speaking students. Clearly, the educational and occupational outlook for many children from immigrant backgrounds in Switzerland is not inspiring. Although home languages are viewed as a strength, as is the case in educational policies such as in Australia, the main focus on Swiss education and vocational policy in the wider community has been on the perceived ‘deficits’ found in academic outcomes of children of immigrants: the disproportionately high number of Swiss immigrant students in the lowest level of secondary school, and the high number of early school leaving and unemployment amongst immigrant students. As discussed earlier, children of immigrants must become proficient in both the language of their communities and that of the host country to succeed in school and life. This may add up to five or six languages or more. To date though, despite growing acknowledgement of the importance of strengthening home languages in the school setting, there has been little change or action at the national or school level.

Clearly, given the disproportionately high number of immigrant children in the Basel area who are failing at school, seeking alternative ways to facilitate their progress and success is necessary to improve educational outcomes now and in the future. With this in mind, this study sought to explore ways in which families promote children’s home languages, their perspectives on learning and education, and their views on ways in which home and school could better connect to enhance educational outcomes. Importantly, families’ perspectives about education were the focus of the study and, as shown in the previous chapters, challenged the stereotypic impressions and views of immigrant parents as non-supporters of their children’s learning and education.

11.2 Summary of main findings, implications and recommendations

The main findings are divided into parent and teacher sections. The corresponding implications are specified and recommendations are delineated in each section.

11.2.1 Parent perspectives about home languages

All families and all children experienced multilingual language environments. Children tended to speak more than one language and, in many cases, they spoke or were exposed to up to four languages before they entered educational settings. Most parents promoted home
language learning and were committed to support their children’s educational progress in the Basel school system. Most valued education and supported their children’s learning both in their home languages and German. Generally, parents were motivated to improve their own German proficiency so that they could communicate with their children’s teacher and help them with their homework.

Parent views about home language maintenance fell into three main categories: (1) those who wished to maintain spoken home languages but gave German and school second languages high priority due to the educational requirements of the school system, and their understanding on children’s needs to function effectively in the Basel community, (2) those who consciously and actively promoted home languages, and believed that German was mostly only for school use and in the wider community outside the home, (3) families who rejected their home language because they believed the ‘high status languages,’ German and English, were of more use to their children. These families felt that there were longer-term educational, social and economic benefits for children who could speak these global languages fluently.

Those families who believed home language maintenance was important used a variety of strategies to support children’s home language learning. Parents encouraged their children to speak, read, write and attend culturally specific activities in their home language. The most common strategies employed included using the home language for everyday conversation, reading to children in the home language, and teaching children the alphabet of their home languages. The vital role of home languages in children’s family life and education means that it must be supported consistently throughout children’s education and, most importantly, beginning in the early years. And in addition to developing children’s home languages, all children must reach high proficiency in German to succeed at school.

Furthermore, discussions with parents during the interviews clearly revealed children’s transitions between educational and care settings triggered a shift away from the home language towards the majority language. As maintained in the literature (Collier, 1995; Cummins, 1979, 2000; Wong Fillmore, 1991, 2000), discontinuity as opposed to maintaining a steady growth in children’s home language resulted in a gradual loss of the home language, and a decrease in a mature level of communication between family members.

11.2.1.1 Implications and recommendations. In contrast to children’s home experiences, parents reported that their children’s home languages were not a significant part of their kindergarten or school setting experiences. These findings implied discontinuity of, and
disconnection from, home language learning in early educational settings. Failure of the education system to recognise and act on this problem will lead to a negative effect on children’s overall cognitive development, and the opportunities to develop a positive self-identity are limited.

Clearly, based on the findings in this study and sound research evidence from large-scale studies in other developed countries, the Swiss government and Basel education authorities must seek a course of action to finance and support all home language classes within the school curriculum. Significant financial support for children’s home language learning will lead to general long term improvements in children’s German language and literacy learning which will result in improved general schooling experiences and outcomes for school leavers.

In order to achieve improved outcomes, the Department of Education together with preschool and kindergarten settings need to reconceptualise their preferential focus on the German language. Children speaking languages other than German should have the opportunity to build on prior knowledge in their home language so that this knowledge and understanding of their worlds can be reflected in their preschool/school experiences and their second language learning.

11.2.1.2 Barriers to children’s educational success. Consistent with findings from previous studies (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2002), all parents wanted the best for their children. They viewed education as the chance to improve their children’s life circumstances. However, several parents were concerned for their children’s future, and were cautious about predicting or expressing their own desires for their children for fear of disappointment. On this account, parents perceived the main barriers to children’s educational success encompassed: (1) early tracking (often into the lowest educational stream), (2) discrimination, (3) the number of languages in the school curriculum, and (4) segregation.

Although, Switzerland and Basel are aware of the official structural barriers of racism, segregation and the inequalities in the educational system (Ehret, 1999), very few initiatives arising out of the new integration policy in 1999 have improved educational outcomes for children from immigrant backgrounds. Compounding matters further, parents who had no prior experience in the Swiss educational system were often not aware of the structural barriers and the resulting consequences of early tracking in their children’s transition from primary to secondary schooling.

Further, some parents believed that isolated cases of discrimination in the form of negative teacher attitudes to children from former Yugoslavian countries and Turkey, were
barriers to their children’s educational success. Together, early tracking and anti-
foreign sentiment (Cummins, 2000) in teacher attitudes were considered real barriers for many
children to succeed in primary school. Low teacher expectations early on in primary school
meant that children could not enter the highest track of secondary school.

The number of languages in the school curriculum was considered a barrier to school
success by many parents. Parents were also largely aware of the complications arising from
the burden of the language curriculum on their children’s schooling. Parents from both
disadvantaged and middle socioeconomic standing expressed the difficulties involved in
learning the school foreign, second and third language. In support of these parents’ views,
world renowned expert Skuttnabb-Kangas (2000) believes that children are most effectively
taught foreign languages by teachers who teach in the children’s home language, or by
teachers who know the children’s home language.

Further complicating children’s language acquisition, parents reported firstly, that
children mixed and switched between the home language, Standard German and German
Swiss and, secondly, the differences between these two languages lead to confusion especially
in grammar, sentence construction and pronunciation. Compounding inequalities, parents
believed that segregation takes place in Basel City in the way that the Department of
Education assigns children to schools and classes. This form of physical segregation ignores
“structural inequalities within the education system” (Cummins, 2001, p. 652) as children are
allocated to schools according to their neighbourhoods. Several families moved away from
highly concentrated migrant areas to avoid their child’s enrolment in school classes where
there were more than 50 percent of children from immigrant backgrounds. They wanted their
children to be exposed to more German and not, as they believed, be disadvantaged in a class
where immigrant children were in the majority.

11.2.1.3 Implications and recommendations. Consistent use of Standard German across
preschool settings, kindergartens and primary schools is advocated. Many educators support
the policy, to change instruction from German Swiss to Standard German instruction in
kindergarten, many do not. The government and Department of Education must therefore
continue to support and encourage the use of Standard German in kindergarten so that
educators cater for the needs of children speaking languages other than German from diverse
socioeconomic backgrounds.

Exposing segregation, and facilitating changes to the kindergarten and schools’ system
for allocating children to classes, challenges the power and political structures within the
present society. Children from disadvantaged and immigrant backgrounds are likely to be assigned to the same schools according to the location of their homes, while children from privileged backgrounds are exclusively allocated to their own neighbourhood schools with very few children who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and children from immigrant families.

A major mismatch between government and education policy and practice is the resulting consequence. Schools are still widely deficit oriented. This type of physical segregation may, on the other hand, be advantageous to children’s home language development, when children from the same language groups in the same early years educational settings (as recommended by the European Union, 2004) would be provided with mother tongue language education for part of the school day, with a focus on building on L1 language skills as well as German skills.

11.2.2 Parent experiences with home-school communication

The study clearly demonstrated that parents wish to be active agents in the learning process of the education of their children. They sought avenues to effectively communicate with their children’s teachers. Several parents also reported that they were aware that their low level of German language ability was a barrier to effective communication.

Home-school communication was the most effective at the kindergarten level. Communication was best at this level as it allowed informal, more frequent and more spontaneous communication. Interrelationships generally functioned well on a personal level in kindergarten for those parents who could communicate in the majority language with the teacher. At the primary school level, little time and space was reportedly given to fostering home-school communication apart from invitations to parents to observe classroom activity, and to participate in cultural celebrations.

Interactions between parents and schools were considered by many families to be problematic. Many parents wanted to be involved in their children’s education. They wanted to “cross cultural and communication bridges,” or to “participate in a round table discussion.” Parents want to move beyond the symbolic “tug of war” to communicate with their children’s teachers in the interests of their children.

Lack of communication, or a breakdown in communication between parents and teachers, occurred in all language groups. Only five of the fifty-eight families reported that they were content with the form of communication between their children’s school and home. Several
families experienced disappointment and frustration with their children’s teachers as they said they were labelled Auslanders (foreigners), and ‘non participants in the educational process.’ Parents were labelled as having a low level of education and therefore were disinterested in their children’s education. In addition, it was perceived by some teachers that immigrant parents could not speak enough German, or they were illiterate in their own language and therefore could not be expected to learn the German language.

Several parents described conflicts between themselves and their children’s teachers, and an inability or unwillingness on behalf of the teacher to ‘open up’ and communicate. They also reported that teachers followed their own agendas for parent-teacher meetings, and were unwilling to include discussions with parents in a two-way dialogue.

11.2.2.1 Implications and recommendations Arguably, strong links between immigrant children, their parents and schools are vital to ensure parents have the opportunity and are empowered to dissolve preconceived negative ideas and stereotypic views. Parents must maintain positive images and ideas about their own language and culture and reflect these constructive images to their children. The research is clear that effective home-school communication and parent involvement in children’s education enhances educational success. The benefits of parent involvement, as the review of the literature revealed, for example, were observed through children’s better scores on tests, attendance and graduation rates, more completed homework, positive attitudes and behaviour and an increase in enrolment in higher education (Caplan, 2000).

Many families invested in private tutoring in the German language and additional school languages for their children because they hoped and believed that, through tutoring, their children would gain an educational advantage. Alarmingly though, evidence of a “shadow education system” (Bray, 1999), is immersing in Switzerland as private tutoring is flourishing. While private tutoring supports children’s language learning, the financial outlay exacerbates inequalities within the education system for immigrant families, and leads to further social inequalities.

Connections between the home and school can be strategic in developing new forms of classroom practice resulting in more balanced relationships with children and parents (Moll et al., 1992, p. 139). This can only occur through cooperation, collaboration, and parent involvement in their children’s education. More recently, informed frameworks for home school partnerships place the family at the centre (Goos et al., 2002) of children’s learning in sociocultural contexts. Consequently, policy initiatives that focus on education through the
family perspective with a strong emphasis on parent involvement in schools and family literacy practices, must be carried over into practice.

11.2.3 Immigrant families use and support of ICTs

Most parents in this study supported their children’s use of ICTs in their homes. In family homes, across language groups and socioeconomic standings, there was a general understanding and recognition of the value of ICTs for home language maintenance and support for children’s learning. ICTs were commonplace in immigrant family homes. Parents used information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support and promote home languages.

Only 10 percent of participant families in this study did not have access to a computer in their home, indicating that an access divide was not a main issue for most families. At the same time, the findings are significant for these six families’ children who also do not have ICT access at kindergartens and schools. As a minimum, children must be able to acquire appropriate ICT user skills.

Findings revealed a language divide in software and information available in immigrant languages on the World Wide Web. Software and World Wide Web sites in the Spanish language were the most commonly available amongst the language groups in this study. The rapid advances in the availability of web based content in the past five years may be a step towards counteracting this inequality in the limited availability of software in immigrant languages. In the past five years, rapid advances in sharing information, promoting community and social networking through initiatives such as the Open Content Alliance (2007) enabling free access to digitised books and cultural artefacts, Wikepedia and YouTube, have been achieved.

11.2.3.1 Implications and recommendations. Obviously, in spite of these advances, it would be wrong to assume that all languages are equally represented and that information is equally available and shared on the Internet. In 2007 the large majority of information is still only available in the English language on the Internet. Provisions and initiatives from the Swiss national government level for online support for resourcing language learning must be made available to support families’ efforts to promote their children’s learning.
11.2.4 Teacher beliefs about home languages

The educational discourse surrounding languages was multifaceted, and languages were a major concern for most teachers. While the Education Department accepts that home language learning supports children’s German language skills, it was not possible for kindergarten and primary teachers to actively support children’s home language beyond symbolic acceptance of children’s different languages. Rather than focusing on the educational discourse, teachers focused on the appropriateness of the implementation of Standard German replacement of German Swiss in kindergartens and primary schools, and which additional national or foreign language should be taught first in the school curriculum.

Although all teachers said that they reinforced and valued the importance of parents speaking the home language with their children, and they were active in communicating this message to parents, there was little focus within Basel schools on helping children maintain their home language in the early years of education. Therefore, a major gap in children’s home language learning already occurred at the preschool, kindergarten and school level, and the opportunities that children had to build on their home language outside the home were limited.

11.2.4.1 Implications and recommendations. Support for home language learning was inconsistent across primary schools and between language groups in Basel, and the social, economic and community advantages of learning home languages were not widely understood by all teachers and parents. Teachers focused on the school curriculum, and children’s German and additional language acquisition. A lack of support for home languages was in many cases closely linked to teachers’ entrenched traditional pedagogical belief systems.

Yet, home language maintenance and support are not only the key to increased German language and literacy skills, but also a form of human and economic capital, and also a rich form of social capital. Consequently, there is a need for a public statement from the Swiss national government and Cantonal level about the benefits of learning and teaching home languages in the school curriculum, and specifically supporting languages at the early years and at the kindergarten level. Instead, educational debate focuses on the national languages and the continuing disagreements about the appropriateness of additional second languages for the primary school curriculum.
At present there are few initiatives linking the critical connection between home language learning and improved German language and literacy proficiency. Schools must be encouraged to adopt and adapt their own programs that complement and enhance the delivery of home languages. The research already undertaken in the St Johann project must be disseminated. The St Johann Primary School model in Basel (Luginbuhl, 2002), as described in Chapter Three, provides a sample of exemplary practice for integrating immigrant languages into the school curriculum in Basel primary schools. Essentially this school has successfully integrated home languages into the school curriculum. Teachers and administrators in other schools and other parts of Basel should be encouraged to transform and reorganise their pedagogy and practice in order to adopt the model in their schools as Felder (2005) suggested.

A focus on updating teacher education is also necessary. Accordingly, the key for teacher educators is in recognising the vast difference between teaching children a new language through an additional language, in contrast to teaching children through their first language. The critical point for teachers is to be aware, that immigrant children are always learning academic school content language through a second or third language, and this is not the same as learning through their first language. Teachers must also demonstrate greater awareness of the time it takes for immigrant children to establish native level language proficiency.

11.2.5 Teacher findings in home-school communication

Teacher enthusiasm for involving parents beyond the institutional level of communication (Epstein, 1995) was low. Epstein’s description of separate spheres of influence, best described home-school communication in the families in this study. Information flowed mostly one way from school to homes. Teachers said they were interested in communicating with families, but it was a difficult part of their work.

11.2.5.1 Implications and recommendations. Partnerships between schools and homes must be forged to honestly and fairly address the time it takes children from immigrant backgrounds to catch up to native level proficiency in the majority language. This requires an approach that shares the responsibility for children’s language and literacy development between families, community language groups and schools. Many educators need to rethink their pedagogical practice in the way they involve parents in their children’s language
education. Researchers in children’s and family literacy development have highlighted the need for a positive change, to reverse the one-way school to family model.

11.2.6 Teacher use and attitudes to ICTS in kindergartens and primary schools

Generally, the majority of kindergarten teacher participants believed ICTs, and especially computers, were inappropriate for young children. They rarely used them in the classrooms so they could not use them to support home languages. Some primary school teachers used ICTs, but their use depended largely on their attitude and orientation towards technology in general. No kindergartens or primary classrooms had Internet access at the time of the study. Primary school classes had access to a computer lab where Internet was available and booking was required. However, only one participant teacher in the study used the computer lab.

Therefore the discourse of ‘prevention and restriction’ of ICT use dominated the kindergarten landscape in Basel. Teacher enthusiasm for ICT use in children’s education at kindergarten and primary school was very low. There was very little acknowledgement or consideration for the potential of ICTs in supporting children’s home language learning by teachers in this study. Complicating matters even further, and an equity issue in education, are those children with little knowledge of majority language who do not have experience with ICT at home, and limited ICT experiences in preschool, may be disadvantaged on entering school (Brooker & Siraj-Blatchford, 2002). Consequently, there was a definite mismatch between home ICT use and kindergarten and school ICTs use.

The attitude to ICT use in kindergartens and primary schools in Basel is not unlike many other developed nation education systems. On the one hand, the literature review revealed that progressive teachers and principals successfully integrate ICTs into their schools and classrooms (Schiller, 2003), while many others sideline computer-based activities or ignore them all together (Brooker, 2003; Dibello, 2005; Schiller; 2003; Yelland, 1999). Many writers argued that ineffective use of available hardware is a worldwide phenomenon, and effective ICT use depends on teacher competence in integrating ICTs into the curriculum. Furthermore, inappropriate teacher guidance and outdated resources is a major concern (Dibello, 2005) even when ICTs are available in homes and preschools.

Not surprisingly, there was no recognition of the connections between supports for home language, through ICT, as vital contributions to children’s learning. Key strategies such as those reported by Davidson (Davidson, 1999 in Davies & Shade 1999), where children from diverse immigrant backgrounds use multilingual software are not utilised. In these classrooms
children’s intercultural understanding and home language literacy is promoted. As a result, resources available through software or open sharing of online content in home languages and on the World Wide Web, are not used or considered a possibility in kindergarten and primary classrooms in the present study.

Inevitably, UNESCO (2004) considered multilingual access to the public domain to be a major priority. The English language still dominates web content, but visionary thinking by people such as Sanger and Wales who created a web-based, free encyclopaedia have lead to entries in 250 languages in the past five years. Nevertheless, 250 languages are still only a relatively small percentage of the estimated 6,000 languages of the world. Recent advances (since 2001) towards building community, enable people to communicate through the Internet. For example, families can read and share web based content from free mass collaborative authoring, or view the 70 million videos that “connect people with similar interests” (YouTube, 2007) for helping their children maintain their home language.

11.2.6.1 Implications and recommendations. The Department of Education must find alternative ways to promote home language learning through ICT use. Teachers should also receive professional development in this area. Necessarily, a coordinated and systematic strategy for the development of ICT online and multimedia materials must be developed that builds on and taps on the expertise of teachers, community language schools and parents at the national and international community and educational level. Mass collaborative authoring is now available on the Internet, and educators must take advantage of these tools so that they become a common part of children’s education at schools and not only as a separate part of out of school activities.

In addition, ICT has a key role to play as an alternative to support links between immigrant families and their children’s schools. Furthermore, ICTs have created possibilities for new forms of learning in the home and school. They can provide, as Bronfenbrenner flagged, distal and proximal support for children’s home language maintenance. All children must therefore have the opportunity to become proficient users of these new and evolving forms of technology.

Policy makers need to focus on teacher education and promote a culture of support for ICT if teachers and students are to use computers effectively. No teacher can create change in a vacuum. Challenging traditional pedagogical belief systems and acknowledging the value of ICT in home language learning, together with a critical dialogue on the “protection and restriction” position on ICT use would be constructive. To this end, promotion of innovative
use of ICT for supporting languages is needed. Teachers in kindergartens and primary schools must gain the necessary skills to use ICTs to promote and facilitate home language learning. Schools should use ICTs to access innovative models of language teaching, and use ICTs towards this goal.

11.2.7 Conclusion to the main findings and recommendations

There is no doubt that fulfilling the needs of immigrant children must include a focus on improving language and literacy skills. The literature review established that children’s early years literacy experiences are critical for promoting children’s success in school, and for their effective participation in future knowledge and information based workforces. Early years education must be of a high quality and, as demonstrated in Lanfranchi’s (2002b) extensive research and the finding from this study, children from immigrant families are less likely to attend prekindergarten programs. The Swiss national government and local governments could therefore focus, not only on providing places in preschool care settings, but also on providing high quality educational experiences with a focus on language and literacy experiences for children from immigrant backgrounds.

Towards this end, a reconsideration of the policy principles of the Basel white paper on integration (Ehret, 1999) is needed. The deficit perspective of compensative measures in education that focus on ‘German only’ programs should ultimately be reconsidered and revised with the ‘human potential’ perspective, and also focus on children’s capabilities and competencies. Promoting multilingualism in schools requires not only a focus on the language as a human and economic resource, but also highlighting languages as a social resource. This requires showing respect, appreciation for and recognition of the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of children and their families. Preparing children to live in a pluricultural society requires recognition and action against the inequities and structures in the education system, that reinforce the privileged Swiss nationals’ position at the institutional, educational and vocational level. This also requires working on the basis of children’s home language and literacy experiences and background as a pathway towards developing their overall language and literacy skills.

At the same time, teacher educators and further educators of early years preschool, kindergarten and lower primary school teachers must prepare teachers to work in schools with linguistically and culturally diverse communities. Teacher educators must not only recognise but demonstrate the importance of reading in children’s home languages as well as German,
build on and recognise the strong links between supporting children’s home languages, and successful second language development.

There has not been a true recognition of the ineffective responses to children of immigrant families’ educational needs, and the unequal distribution of educational opportunities in Switzerland (Lanfranchi, 2002a, p. 28). A re-examination of school reform strategies is therefore required with a focus on quality early education and provision and integration of children’s home languages in the majority-dominated settings. This requires provisions within the education system in the early years, in children’s own mother tongue home language. These classes, called “language shelter” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), are part of majority language dominated settings, which require teachers to be bilingual in the majority language as well as one immigrant language (for example, German and Turkish or German and Albanian). This would be a giant step towards catering for the needs of children from immigrant backgrounds. However, insufficient government funding may limit the ability to implement such programmes and, thus, the effectiveness of schools.

11.3 The multilingual social cohesive communications model

Drawing on parent and teacher findings, an attempt to address communication for an improved understanding of the important role of effective communication, and catering for the needs of children of immigrant families in school and society, is presented. The relationship between children’s social and literacy practices in their language learning environment, as implicated in the findings in this study and the way they are interconnected, including the elements of family, home-school communication and ICT, are represented in the following communication model for promoting multilingual language development.

The model (depicted in Figure 5 below) is a graphic representation of the dynamic elements of home, school and community (for both local and online, virtual communities). Communication at the interface of each element will affect home language maintenance in covert or overt ways as succinctly illustrated in the findings. Communicating family beliefs and attitudes about the home language to the child occurs within the family. In addition, attitudes, beliefs and opinions are conveyed to children outside the home in school and the community in diverse ways.
The model is a form of a triskele composed of three interlocked spirals. The three spirals separately represent the family, the school, and community including global and virtual communities. Yet each spiral is continuous and blends with the next as it represents the home language of each individual child.

The model is characterised by a commitment to promote effective relationships at the interface between the immigrant child and his/her family school and community. It is based on theoretical perspectives outlined in Chapter Two, relevant to the immigrant experience combined with input from parent and teacher perspectives.
Multilingual Social Cohesive Communications Model

**Interface**
- Seek:
  - cooperation
  - trust based on honesty and mutual respect
  - time to explore new and more ways to initiate links
  - to achieve a balance of power
  - mutual understanding of cultural conventions

**School**
Promote:
- home language and literacy learning as well as the majority language
- effective educational strategies
- awareness of teacher and parent assumptions
- strategies against racism and discrimination
- action against structural segregation
- support and complement family efforts
- communication plan
- parent involvement
- community support for ICT access

**Family**
Promote:
- a positive attitude to home language maintenance and mainstream majority languages
- avoiding the intergenerational gap in language learning
- communicating and negotiating shared responsibility for children
- the provision of primary resources in home language
- ICT experiences for children
- sustaining relationships

**New learning communities**
Promote:
- ICTs as a tool and possibly as a catalyst for language and literacy learning
- ongoing continuous social communication with others
- children as active agents in language and literacy learning
- access to home languages via global virtual community
- use of collaborative authoring tools in immigrant languages
The aim of the model is to propose a visual representation of the spaces for learning. These spaces envisage children as active learners, interacting between and within both cultures. The ‘here and now’ of learning replaces the mindset that ICTs are predominantly good for future learning. Further, the model provides a visual representation of the environmental spaces that act on children’s language maintenance. The aim is also to avoid linguistic and generation gaps through ensuring continuity in the home language, and applying the model to educational contexts both within and outside the family home and community, based on continuity, cooperation, to win mutual trust and respect in balanced power in each of the three parts of the triskelion. These spaces include the strategies and processes parents and teachers need to engage in and be aware of, in order to improve and balance home language learning opportunities in a majority language environment and ultimately, to improve children’s present educational outcomes and future life chances.

The space where the spirals intersect represents the interface between the family, school and community. Effective communication in the interface is crucial for immigrant children in their early and middle years, and also later in their adolescent years, to ensure healthy identity formation will occur so that they can negotiate the multiple identities that are required of them in a multilingual and pluricultural society.

The whole model suggests movement and change in the early and middle childhood years when children’s language development within the family and school environments continue through an active process of change and growth as they interact with others, and undergo the transitions from one setting to the next. It is discontinuity in children’s home language use in learning and play that prevents them from maintaining a mature command of their home language and the resulting influence on their academic outcomes and pathways through the education system.

One of the unique factors in the model is that it represents and recognises individual differences between immigrant families and their children. Their life circumstances are unique and different from those of children in the mainstream. There may be similarities within groups but even then, each family has an individual history and life pathway that they have experienced through the immigration process.
11.3.1 Communicating the idea of the model

The idea underpinning the multilingual social cohesive communication model is adapted from Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model where it proposed, “individuals influence the people and institutions of their ecology as much as they are influenced by them” (Lerner, 2005 in Bronfenbrenner 2005, p. ix.). Bronfenbrenner said that to ensure effective proximal processes take place, the continuous element of time is important for developmentally instigative characteristics to occur. Continuity and continuous relationships over time are equally important for home language maintenance, including intergenerational continuity in the home language. This belief is represented in the band that flows continuously (See Figure 5).

The following principles need to be applied to ensure teachers’ underlying assumptions that sometimes generalise to all immigrant families are prevented from strangling initial attempts to communicate with parents, especially when teachers hold negative preconceived ideas about parents from specific language groups. As explained in Chapter Four, children’s first language is fundamental to their linguistic, social, cultural and cognitive development (Cummins, 1979). Yet, as a result of the immigration process, there is often a great deal of discontinuity in the education process and in the family: refugee experiences, for example, have shown that children have gaps in their schooling, or have been unable to attend school due to war.

The inner dynamics of the social relationships between the home and school environments as indicated in the findings in this study, may be invisible to outsiders. The model aims to focus on the catalysts for learning and the value of constructive cooperation between families, schools and communities, so that families can build on constructive exchanges between people with different perspectives and take account of different family backgrounds. The model emphasises the importance of developing bottom up local level strategies, and addresses the vital role of positive interactions between parents and teachers on children’s learning. The phrase ‘bottom up strategy’ is used to seek individual ways to accommodate local situations at the interface, inclusive of all participants, and define potentials, such as the “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992) existing within families and communities.
11.3.2 Attributes of the multilingual social cohesion communications model

11.3.2.1 Interface. At the outset, all participants should seek to communicate in the education of children of immigrants. Cooperation between parents and teachers or between members of the same language group is necessary to ensure social cohesion. Cooperation requires taking time for initial and further discussion to explore new and more ways to initiate links between the home and school. A balance of power is required in relationships where openness towards establishing trust, mutual respect and understanding of cultural conventions is a priority, and round table discussions are common.

11.3.2.2 School. Schools must recognise that support for home languages has an additive effect on children’s second and additional language learning (given that effective forms of language promotion in the home language are available). They must also recognise that discrimination, racism and segregation (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000) are a problem in Swiss and other economically developed societies, and consider how this affects individuals at the kindergarten and primary school level. Teachers and schools can develop strategies to improve educational processes and cultural relevance in curriculum. Schools need to promote spaces (time within the curriculum) where children can actively build on their home language while learning the majority language. This requires effective educational strategies and teachers who are aware of their own assumptions when working with children of immigrant families. They should also support and complement family efforts through promoting parent involvement and a communication plan.

11.3.2.3 Family. Clearly, the responsibility of maintaining and supporting learning in the home language lies squarely with parents. The family plays a central role in the way children form their attitude to the home language(s), and the mainstream majority language. This is central to avoid language loss and an intergenerational gap. Parents need to communicate and negotiate shared responsibility for their children and provide primary resources in home languages. The parents’ role is also vital in promoting and sustaining relationships. The family recognises the value of intergenerational learning for language maintenance, and the value of language, traditions, history and perhaps religion. Majority language learning by all family members is acquired in *addition to* and *not* in place of home languages.
11.3.2.4. New Learning Communities. ICTs act as a tool and possibly a catalyst for language and literacy learning, they also furnish an arena for language use. Real and virtual communities play an important role in promoting proximal processes and distal family resources. Via the virtual community, it has been, and is possible for immigrant families to tap into the potential of these learning opportunities as well as to take advantage of the ease of communication that is available to families around the globe. Through ICTs, children can embrace new learning communities, accessing sites in their home language that are universally accessible. Since 2007, access to the Internet in Basel primary schools is no longer an issue. (This access is not extended to the kindergarten level). All primary schools in Basel have computers and access to the Internet. These new resources can be fully utilised by children, parents and teachers. Parents and teachers can use authoring tools to assemble content; create texts, story books, videos, and translate stories from and between immigrant languages that are culturally meaningful and relevant for children. In order for these communities to be successful, teachers will need significant professional development.

11.4 Recommendations for further research

This study provides many directions for further research in the disciplines of immigrant children’s language development, home school partnership development, and harnessing ICTs to support home language learning. Some questions arising for teacher educators from the findings in this study include:

- How can the mismatch between government policy and teacher practice be addressed? Addressing this mismatch may include questions related to the contrasts between traditional and transformative pedagogy (Cummins, 2000).

Given the number of languages that many immigrant children are exposed to:

- What are the extra cognitive challenges that children face when they are exposed to five or six languages? As found in the present study, some children speak four languages at home and school and in addition, they are required to learn a third and fourth school ‘foreign language’ through what is essentially their second or even third language. To date there is no research that explores the complexity of this cognitive
challenge, yet many children from immigrant backgrounds are confronted with this task.

Connecting parents and teachers with web based learning opportunities:

- How can web based material in immigrant languages, where children could practice emerging oral language, reading, and written communication, be integrated in their learning in early childhood and primary school settings?
- What are the possibilities for locally based immigrant language community groups to promote and support development of new resources for home languages through the Internet?

Given that arranging and organising home language classes is often left up to parents in many countries (OECD, 2006b), parents need advice on this matter.

- How do parents in other language groups and other cities in developed countries organise classes, and how are frameworks, goals, standards and evaluation of children’s learning incorporated in the programme, and how is this coordinated with the mainstream education system?

11.5 Conclusion

The outcomes of this study provided a window into a small segment of the immigrant population in Basel Switzerland. They show that many steps must be taken to accommodate the educational needs of children from immigrant backgrounds. As this study has highlighted, families adopt many strategies to promote language acquisition, and each family is unique in the way that they chose to maintain, or in very few cases, reject their home language.

When languages are considered from an intergenerational perspective, the early childhood years are critical for learning in general and, the opportunities for language learning are irreplaceable. Families must ensure that languages are not lost between generations resulting from the immigration and educational process. Supporting language shift from home languages to German is not reflected in the goals of the Basel integration model.

Unquestionably, language learning is extremely complex for children of immigrants and their families. The complexities encompass sociopolitical issues at the macro level, and the number of languages that children are required to learn in order to be successful in the Basel
education system. To date, the responsibility for ensuring educational success in the Basel system lies heavily on parents.

This study also highlighted parents’ desire for two-way communication with schools, the contradictions in policy and practice on home-school communication and ICT use, and the mismatch between government and education directives. ICTs and digital tools are an integral part of children’s social worlds and an established element of their functional language and literacy development. The mismatch between Education Department policy was evident in this study, as teachers advocating the prevention and restriction of ICT use seldom see ICTs as a potential catalyst for children’s learning in kindergartens and schools.

Given the ideological extremes and increasing divisions in the present world political climate often resulting in anti-foreigner sentiment (Cummins, 2000) in many developed world countries, I urge prioritising support and fostering immigrant children’s home language and cultural identity so that the home language is perceived as a positive asset and in addition to the majority language in mainstream schools. Researchers and educators must also be cognizant of children’s linguistic human right to their home language even when it does not seem realistic to attempt to maintain 250 different languages in one education system. “Doing nothing is not an option” as contended by the OECD in 2006. What is needed, as Foreign Minister of Switzerland, (and the 2007 president of Switzerland) Micheline Calmy-Rey in World Summit (2003) suggested is, “people who are ready to find new ways and to take new action.”

Through trial and application of the central components of the communications model and its application to educational policy and practice context, specific strategies such as family literacy practices that support and complement learning can tap into the prospective true potential benefits of immigrant plurilingualism. As Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) suggest: “There is evidence that great potentials lie untapped, not from more of the same but from some of the other. The risk we face is not in exploring the unknown, but in retreating to the comfort of the ‘known’ (p. 189).”
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295


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List of Appendixes

A  Parent Interview guide (English) 310
B  Parent Interview Guide (German) 313
C  Information Letter to Parents (English) 316
D  Information Letter to Teachers and Parents (German) 318
E  Cover Letter to Parents (English) 320
F  Cover Letter to Parents (German) 322
G  Parent Occupational Status (Mothers) and (Fathers) 324
H  Parent Educational Attainment (Mothers) and (Fathers) 329
J  Interview Schedule Teachers 331
K  Letter to Teachers (English) 333
L  Letter to Teachers (German) 334
M  Sample Parent Interview Transcript (German) 336
N  Sample Interview Transcript Parent (English) 348
P  Sample Teacher Interview Transcript (German) 359
Q  Sample Teacher Interview Transcript (English) 369
Appendix A

*Parent Interview Guide*

**Interview: Home language environment**

*(Throughout the interview refer to home language as Turkish or whichever language the mother/father or main caregiver language is used to communicate with the children)*.

1. Participant number ……

Mother:…………………………… Father:……………………………

2a. Mother Tongue/First language………….. 2b…………………………………

Country of birth………………………………       ………………………………………

3a. Occupation……………………………….. 3b…………………………………

4a Education………………………………. 4b……………………………………

5a How long have you lived in Switzerland?

5b. Do you have relatives in Switzerland that you can you visit and speak to in your home language?

5c. Do you have friends or colleagues from work that speak your home language?

6. How many children live in your home?

7. How old are they?

8. What level of school do they attend?

9. In which language do you speak to your children? Which language do they reply?

10. Which language do your children speak to each other in?

11. Do you read to your children? In which language?

12. Do the children read to each other or to you?

13. Do you tell your children stories, rhymes and sing songs in your home language?
14. Do you talk about every day experiences with your children, for example about school?

15. Do you play games? Cards or board games, puzzles, etc.

16. Do the children cook with you?

17. Do you visit, or are you a member of an ethnic/cultural community?

18. Do you celebrate national days?

19. Do you use the multicultural library in Basel?

20. Do your children have a hobby, play a musical instrument or play sport? What are they?

21. What level of education would you like your children to achieve?

**Questions on the use of technology and the media in the home language.**

22. Do your children watch / listen / read in their home language:

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<td>Newspapers</td>
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23. Have you got a computer in your household? If not, do you have access to a computer elsewhere?

24. Is the computer connected to the Internet?
25. Do you use the Internet with your children?
26. If so can you list some of home language sites that your children visit?
27. Can you list a few examples of the type of software that your children use at home?
   Educational, games, language programs, etc
28. Does your family use an E-mail program?
29. Do you receive e-mails? Do you write and send e-mails with your children?
30. Do your children participate in any type of exchange programs with your home country?
    For example: pen friends?
31. Do you chat in the Internet with relatives or friends from your home country?
32. Do you call people from your home country? Do they call you?
33. Do you have a mobile telephone? Do the children use SMS? Which language?
34. Is it important that your children learn, maintain and develop their home language?
35. Should your children learn to read and write in their home language? If so why?
36. How does the school seek to involve you in your children’s education? (How if you wished, could you get involved in your child’s education at school or kindergarten?
37. How do you communicate with the school and the school with you?
38. Have you got any ideas about how parents can work together with the school/kindergarten teachers or officials?

As I stated in the information letter, real names will not be used in the report.
A summary of the findings and a copy of the final report will be sent to you.
I thank you once again for your willingness to participate in this project.
Appendix B

*Parent Interview Guide in German*

Fragebogen: Förderung der Muttersprache.

1. Teilnehmer-Nummer .........................

Mutter: 2b. Vater:

2a Muttersprache.................................. 2b........................................

3a Beruf................................................. 3b........................................

4a Welche Schule(n)......................... 4b........................................

Seit wann wohnen Sie in der Schweiz?

5a.................................................... 5b................................................

6. Haben Sie Verwandte in der Schweiz, die auch mit ihrer Familie etwas unternehmen?

Zum Beispiel: Helfen mit Kinderbetreuung?......................................................

7. Wieviel Kinder wohnen in Ihrem Haushalt?

8. Wie alt sind diese?

9. In welcher Sprache reden Sie (hauptsächlich) mit Ihren Kindern?

10. In welche Sprache reden die Kinder untereinander?

11. Lesen Sie Ihren Kindern vor? In welcher Sprache?

12. Lesen die Kinder untereinander, in welcher Sprache?

13. Erzählen Sie Ihren Kindern Geschichten (von früher) von ihrer Heimat?

14. Reden Sie zusammen über die Erlebnisse in der Schule?

15. Spielen Sie in der Familie Gesellschafts-Spiele zusammen? (In welcher Sprache)?

16. Kochen Sie mit ihren Kindern zusammen?

17. Besucht Ihre Familie einen Türkische Treffpunkt, oder sind Sie Mitglied in einem .....(Türkische) Verein?
18. Feiert Ihre Familie bestimmte nationale Feste der Türkei?
20. Üben Ihre Kinder Hobbys in türkische Sprache aus? (Z.Bsp. Musik Unterricht oder Sport?
21. Haben Sie eine Vorstellung davon welche Ausbildung Ihren Kindern in der Zukunft zugute kommen soll?

Fragen zum Gebrauch von Medien:
22. Welche Medien benützen Sie in .................. Sprache?

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<td>Zeitungen</td>
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23. Haben Sie einen Computer?
24. Ist Ihr Computer ans Internet angeschlossen?
25. Benutzen Sie das Internet gemeinsam mit ihren Kinder? (In welcher Sprache?).
27. Hat Ihre Familie Software in türkische Sprache?
Können Sie ein paar Beispiele nennen, welche art Software Sie Benützen?

Unterhaltung_______ Lernprogram_______ Sprach-programmen

28. Verwendet Ihre Familie das E-mail-programm?
29. Schreiben Sie E-mails?
30. Haben Ihre Kinder E-mail Brieffreunde?
31. Chatten Sie im Internet mit Verwanten in der Türkei?
32. Telefonieren Sie mit Ihrer Verwandten? Sie mit Ihnen?
33. Haben Sie ein Handy? Wenn ja; benutzen Sie SMS? Benutzen die Kinder SMS?
   In welche Sprache?
34 Ist es ihnen wichtig, dass die Kinder die Muttersprache lernen und pflegen?
35. Und dass sie schreiben und lesen lernen ist auch wichtig?
36: Wie ist der Austausch zwischen der Schule und ihnen?
37 Wie werden sie in der Schule einbezogen?
38: Haben sie einen Wunsch, wie man die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Kindergarten/Schule und Eltern verbessern könnte?

Ich Danke Ihnen für Ihre Interesse und Ihre Mitarbeit!
Letter omitted due to privacy legislation.
research may lead to meaningful ways of communicating which may then enhance children’s home language learning. Information gathered during the interview, specifically about resources, could be used in an Internet web site that families of home languages could use. The web site would provide supporting information on media resources for the various languages, books and literature, interactive books, cassettes, CD’s, videos, software, and links to organizations, and appropriate web sites for use in learning and teaching.

Description of the research
1) Participants are sought for the interviews whose mother tongue/ first language is Turkish, Serbian, Croatian, Albanian order Spanish.
2) Participants in the research need to be able to speak some German or English for the interview.
3) An interview will be held with parents about how they support their children’s learning in their home language. Questions will also be asked about which books and other types of media are used in the home in their children’s first language, such as cassettes, CDs, software, computer and Internet sites.
4) The interview will take about 90 minutes to complete and will be recorded on an audio recorder. The interview will be held at a place chosen by the participant.
5) Research data, in the form of transcribed interviews will be coded to ensure confidentiality. All transcripts (tape, disk and hard copy) will be stored securely and without any means of individual identification in accordance with university ethical considerations for a period of five years then destroyed. (The data will be stored safely in Basel, Switzerland for data analysis and then later at the University of Canberra). All participants will be guaranteed full and total privacy.
6) Participation is voluntary, participants may withdraw at any stage without penalty and participants are not required to answer question they do not wish to answer
7) A summary of the findings of the research will be sent to the participants and the Basel Education Department.

Informed consent

I have read and understood the information provided and I agree to participate in this research.

Signature ___________________________
Letter omitted due to privacy legislation.
**Durchführung und Umsetzung**

1) Die Sprachgruppen Albanisch, Kroatisch, Spanisch, Serbisch, Türkisch werden ausgesucht.
2) Für mein Projekt suche ich Eltern, die auch entweder Deutsch oder English reden können.
4) Die Interviews, die ungefähr 90 Minuten dauern, werden mit einem Tonbandgerät aufgenommen.
5) Die Identität des Eltern wird kodiert um Anonymität zu gewährleisten. Alle Daten werden anonym behandelt, die Angaben werden sortiert und analysiert.

**Wie werde die Information umgesetzt?**

Ich hoffe, mit diesen Informationen ein Bild der sprachlichen Ressourcen der Migrationsfamilien zu erhalten. Dieses Bild kann nützlich für die Eltern und die Lehrerschaft sein.

*Die Resultate (der Arbeit) könnten ein Hilfsmittel sein für ein besseres gegenseitiges Verständnis zwischen Schulhaus und Elternhaus.*

Die Ergebnisse werden an der Lehrerschaft und den teilnehmenden Eltern zu Verfügung gestellt.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Einverständniserklärung**

Ich habe die obenstehende Information gelesen und verstanden. Ich bin damit einverstanden bei diesem Projekt mitzumachen.

Unterschrift der Eltern oder Erziehungsberechtigten_____________________________
Date....

Dear Parents,

I am working on a research project as part of a PhD degree program at the University of Canberra, Australia.

Supporting immigrant home languages is the topic of my research. Research into home language shows that children whose home language is supported in their homes by their families do better at school in reading and in learning the main language of the host country.

I am hoping to gather information about how you support your children’s home/first language learning. I am also interested in the way and types of media used in any way in your home in the support of first language learning. I am looking for parents who speak either: Turkish, Croatian, Serbian, Albanian or Spanish with their children.

If you are willing to participate in the project, I would like to arrange an interview with you at a date, place and time that is convenient to you. I intend to record the interview with a cassette recorder. All data will be treated with confidentiality and reported responses will be anonymous. Please sign up on the form below so that I can contact you.

I will send a summary of the findings of the research to all participants.

Sincerely,

Wendy Marti-Bucknall

For more details about the project see the information sheet and consent form enclosed.
Participation form for home language interview

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO __________________________(Teacher’s name).

Name___________________________________

Address__________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Telephone_______________________________

Home language___________________________

* Would like more information
Liebe Eltern,


Ich suche Eltern, die Kinder zwischen 3 und 9 Jahre haben und die entweder Albanisch, Türkisch, Kurdisch, Serbisch, Kroatisch oder Spanische mit Ihren Kindern reden. Ich werde Ihnen meine Fragen auf Deutsch oder Englisch stellen.


Selbstverständlich werde ich Sie über die Ergebnisse meiner Studie informieren.

Ich Danke Ihnen für Ihre Interesse und ihre Mitarbeit.

Mit Freundlichen Grüssen

Wendy Marti-Bucknall
Anmeldeformular

Name_____________________________ Vorname________________________

Adresse____________________________________________________________

Telefon_________________________________

Heimatsprache____________________________

Jahrgang des/r Kindes/r ______________________

Klassenlehrer/rin ____________________________

0  Wünsche mehr Informationen

**Beiliegen**: Genauere Informationen über das Projekt, lesen Sie bitte das Informations/Merkblatt.
## Appendix G

### Occupational status (fathers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin/ Present occupation</th>
<th>Participant Number</th>
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*A Was a professional in home country. Data for one participant is unknown. War in Kosovo Albania caused one participant to discontinue his University studies in Law he is now working as a hospital maintenance worker. Many fathers are underemployed and working in jobs that are below their occupation and educational capacity.*
Appendix G

*Occupational Status (Mothers)*

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<th>Country of Origin/ Present occupation</th>
<th>Part. No.</th>
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<th>Spain</th>
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* Presently homemaker, as well as 15, 55, 56. *2 underemployed, worked as a professional in country of origin. 38 is a nurse with diploma in home country.
### Appendix G Parent Occupational Status (mothers) (continued from above)

<table>
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<th>Country of Origin/ Present occupation</th>
<th>Part. No.</th>
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<th>Swiss</th>
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diploma in her country of origin.
### Appendix G Parent Occupational Status (fathers) (Continued from above)

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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Cooks assistant</td>
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<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Farmer in country of origin. *2 Underemployed, worked as a professional in country of origin.
### Appendix G Parent occupational status (Fathers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin/ Present occupation</th>
<th>Part. No.</th>
<th>Serbia And Croatia</th>
<th>South America</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Swiss</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<td>Sportsperson</td>
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<td>46</td>
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<td>Pharmaceutical manager</td>
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<td>Book keeper</td>
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<td>Locksmith</td>
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<td>Industrial mechanic</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Missionary worker</td>
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<td>Technical secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semi-skilled</td>
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<td>Apartment maintenance*2</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Builders Labourer*</td>
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<td>Truck Driver Self employed</td>
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<td>48</td>
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<td>57</td>
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<tr>
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<td>58</td>
<td>Cooks assistant</td>
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## Appendix H

### Parent Educational Attainment (Mothers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin/ Level of Education and Training</th>
<th>Kosovo Albania</th>
<th>Serbia/ Croatia</th>
<th>Educated In CH</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Kurds Born in Turkey</th>
<th>South America</th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
<th>Spain Born in CH</th>
<th>Swiss National</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Middle Secondary</strong></td>
<td>1 (K&amp;S)</td>
<td>4 + 1 (all in CH)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (Italian)</td>
<td>1 (Spain)</td>
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<td><strong>Completed Secondary</strong></td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td><strong>Apprenticeship in country of Origin</strong></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commerce/Secretarial school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Higher Education</strong></td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Post Graduate Study in Switzerland or other country</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>*<em>Further education in CH <em>1</em></em></td>
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<td><strong>Other*2</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CH = abbreviation for Confederatio Helvetia (Switzerland)
South American include Mexico, Equador, Columbia, Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru.
K&S = Four years primary education in Kosovo and four secondary education in Switzerland.
*1= Six month course language teaching school, four years technical tourism school
*2= Short courses.
Please note: the participant group includes several cross national couples two Swiss nationals.
Appendix H (continued)

*Family Background Educational Attainment (Fathers)*

Please note: the participant group includes several Cross National Couples that include nine Swiss nationals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin/ Level of Education and Training</th>
<th>Kosovo/Albania</th>
<th>Serbia/Croatia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Kurd Born in Turkey</th>
<th>South America/ CH Other:</th>
<th>Spain/ Second Generation</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Middle Secondary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1(Swiss National)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Completed Secondary</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1(Swiss National)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship in country of Origin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship in Switzerland</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8(Swiss National)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce/Secretarial school</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>+1*Z</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*X Degree incompleated  
*Y Educated in Switzerland  
*Z details unavailable  
CH = abbreviation for Confederatio Helvita (Switzerland)  
South American include: Equador, Columbia, Argentina, Swiss fathers in cross national couples. Other: Spain and Scotland. Two of four Spanish fathers and two Turkish fathers were second generation, their parents came to Switzerland on guest worker permits.*1= Six month course language school, four years technical tourism school. 2= Short courses.
Appendix J

*Teacher Interview Schedule*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Teaching level</th>
<th>List of home languages in class</th>
<th>Years of teaching experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Teacher language profile

The questions are in the following three areas:

First language support and maintenance.

Communication with immigrant families.

Media and ICT use in support of the above two themes.

1. How do you take account for children’s first language world in everyday kindergarten/school?

2. How do you as a teacher experience children’s first language in the classroom? (Listening, speaking, reading, writing - in other forms)

3. How do you make use of the children’s first language knowledge?

4. Is the theme of the relationship between a child’s first language and the dominant language of the classroom discussed between colleagues? Give an example.

5. Do you think it is important that the kindergarten and school support first language acquisition?

Are their any projects or plans for the future in your region/school?

Do you have your own ideas and what would you like to see as future developments in home language support and acquisition?

**Communication with immigrant families**

6. How do you communicate with parents from other cultures and languages?

7. How well do immigrant families know what is available to them in Basel and the region?
How do parents access this information? In what languages is the information available?

8. How is contact between School/Kindergarten and parents approached?

9. Are there official guidelines to assist with contact and communication between the school/Kindergarten and immigrant parents?

**Media use**

10. How is media in Kindergarten and school integrated in the classroom curriculum?

11. What forms of media (ICT) do children use in their homes?

12. Do you use a computer and Internet at home? If so how do you make use of it?

13. Do your own children use a computer?

14. Are there professional development opportunities in the area of technology integration in kindergarten/school?

15. How could you use media/technology in order to improve communication between parents and school/Kindergarten?

Thank you for your participation.
Appendix K

Cover Letter Teachers

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA
Division of Communication and Education
School of Teacher Education

31 March, 2003

Dear Colleagues,

I am working on a research project as part of degree in Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Canberra, Australia.

Supporting immigrant home languages is the topic of my research. Research into first language learning shows that children whose home language is supported in their homes by their families do better at school in reading and in learning the main language of the host country.

Through an interview I am hoping to gather information about how parents support their children’s home/first language learning. I am also interested in the types of media used in any way in the home in the support of first language learning.

I am looking for parents who speak either: Turkish, Croatian, Serbian, Albanian or Spanish with their children. I would like to interview parents in German or English.

If you are willing to assist me with the project, I have prepared a letter for the parents, that you would be required to ask the children in your class, to take home to their parents. You would then collect the filled out forms which I will collect from you. Your part in the project would then be completed.

I intend to record the interview with a cassette recorder. All data will be treated with confidentiality and reported responses will be anonymous. A summary of the findings of the research will be sent to all parent and teacher participants as well as the Basel-City Education Department.

I will call you within the next week to ask if you are willing to assist me in contacting parents.

Sincerely,

Wendy Marti-Bucknall

Please find enclosed: detailed information sheet on the project and consent form as well as a copy of the letter to parents.
Liebe Kolleginnen,

Ich arbeitete an einem Forschungs-Projekt in der „Doctor of Philosophy“ an der Universität Canberra, Australien. (Abteilung Erziehung und Kommunikation).

**Konzept und Zielsetzung des Projekts**


**Durchführung des Projektes:**

Ich suche Eltern, die Kinder zwischen 3 und 9 Jahre haben und die entweder albanisch, kroatisch, serbisch, spanisch oder türkisch mit ihren Kinder reden. Durch ein Interview mit einem Fragebogen, möchte ich herausfinden, wie die Kinder zu Hause in ihrer Herkunftssprache gefördert werden. Ich möchte untersuchen, auf welche Art Migrationsfamilien, ihre...


Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Wendy Marti-Bucknall

**Beilegend:** Genauere Informationen über das Projekt entnehmt ihr aus dem Informations/Merkblatt.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fragebogen: Förderung der Muttersprache.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teilnehmer-Nummer: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a Muttersprache: serbisch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b serbisch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a Beruf: Pflegerin, arbeitet aber im Office. In Serbien war sie Schneiderin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b Bauarbeiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a Welche Schule(n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: 8 J. Primarschule in Belgrad, 3 J. Mittelschule,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: 8 J. Primarschule in Belgrad, 3 J. Mittelschule I zu I: Und nachher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Nach der Schule sind wir in die Schweiz gekommen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Seit wann wohnen Sie in der Schweiz?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Seit 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Seit 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Haben Sie auch Verwandte oder Bekannte hier, die mit den Kindern serbisch sprechen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Ja, meine Mutter spricht serbisch und wir auch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Haben sie noch andere Bekannte, Kollegen oder Verwandte, mit denen sie serbisch sprechen können? M: 5b. ja, ich habe einen Cousin in der Schweiz Er wohnt in Kaiseraugst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Ich habe niemand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Und sie besuchen einander?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

336
M: Ja
F: Wir sprechen immer serbisch.
6 I: Haben sie am Arbeitsplatz serbisch sprechende Kollegen?
M: Ich muss deutsch sprechen.
7 und 8 I: Sie haben zwei Kinder? Wie alt sind sie?
I: 6. Haben Sie Hilfe bei der Kinderbetreuung gehabt, als die Kinder klein waren?
I: Sprechen sie mit den Kindern serbisch?
M: Der Junge hatte grosse Probleme mit der deutschen Sprache, aber jetzt geht es besser. Er kann jetzt auch besser lernen.
9. In welcher Sprache reden Sie (hauptsächlich) mit Ihren Kindern?
F u. M: serbisch.
10. In welcher Sprache reden die Kinder untereinander?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Liest du deiner Schwester vor?</td>
<td>Knabe: Ja, in serbisch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Spielen Sie in der Familie Gesellschafts-</td>
<td>100 km südlich von Belgrad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spiel zusammen? (In welcher Sprache)?</th>
<th>94</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M: Ich habe keine Zeit, aber die Frau spielt. Vielleicht einmal Karten. Ich weiss nicht, wie das heisst.</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Ah, Land und Stadt, ich denke ich weiss, was das ist. Meine Kinder spielen das auch gerne.</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Sie spielen ein serbisches Spiel, das ist mit Mathematik. Das ist schwer. In der Schule ist es manchmal zu schwer, aber beim Spielen geht es.</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Noch nicht. Beim Kuchenbacken manchmal.</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Und dann reden sie serbisch?</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Im Kindergarten und in der Schule reden sie deutsch. Da ist es wichtig, dass sie zu Hause serbisch reden. Denn wenn sie die Muttersprache beherrschen können sie andere Sprachen leichter lernen. Das Mädchen konnte am Anfang im Kindergarten noch nicht gut deutsch, da haben wir gedacht, es ist besser, mit ihr zu Hause deutsch zu sprechen, aber die Lehrerin hat gesagt, wir sollen sie lassen. Und jetzt ist es nicht schlecht beim Mädchen.</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: z.B kennt er die Sterne. Er hat ein Buch über Astronomie auf deutsch und darin liest er</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
immer. Er weiss viel und ich frage ihn, woher weißt du das?


M: Er spricht auch mit dem Logopäden über den Krieg der Türken. Und was machen die Türken. Dasselbe wie vor etwa 200 Jahren in Serbien.


F: Das ist echte Geschichte. Aber das ist schlecht.

M: Aber wenn eine Besetzung 100 Jahre dauert ist das so. Aber wir haben viel Kultur, türkische Kultur. Manches sagen die Türken wie wir. Z.B. das neue Jahr.

17. Besucht Ihre Familie einen Türkischen/ Quartier Treffpunkt, oder sind Sie Mitglied in einem Türkischen/ ******* Verein? Kirchen?
M: Ja, Wir gehen zur Kirche (St. Alban). Und in die serbische Schule, wenn da ein Fest ist. Das ist unsere Kultur, unsere Folklore.

18. Feiert Ihre Familie bestimmte nationale Feste der Türkei?


I: Andere Festtage oder Feiertage, Geburtstag.


I: Ist das von wo sie herkommen oder ist das sind das verschiedene Arten von Kirchen oder hat jede Kirche ihre eigenen Heilige?.


I: Gibt es einen Namen für dieses Fest?

F: Sankt Georgi, serbisch Slava

I: 19. Benützen Sie die Juki Bibliothek im St., Johann? Wie z.B. GGG?

F: Ja, einmal sind sie gewesen mit der Lehrerin

20. Üben Ihre Kinder Hobbys in serbischer Sprache aus? (Z.Bsp. Musik-Unterricht oder
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport?</th>
<th>193</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>M:</em> Der Junge seit 3 Jahren Karate-Training, und ins Schwimmbad gehen.</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>F:</em> Und er spielt gerne mit anderen Kindern im Park.</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Haben Sie eine Vorstellung davon, welche Ausbildung Ihren Kindern in der Zukunft zugute kommen soll?</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M:</em> Ich weiss nicht. Vielleicht Theologe. Er ist nicht so gut in der Schule.</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>F:</em> Er interessiert sich für des All, für Astronauten.</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M:</em> Er kann gut zeichnen.</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. TV</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M:</em> Es gibt jetzt 2 Kanäle in unserer Sprache: Tele Belgrad und Tele Montenegro. Man muss dafür extra zahlen. Der Sohn schaut eine Serie in Deutsch. Die Kinder schauen nur ganz selten TV. Ja, am Sonntag gibt es eine Kindersendung in serbisch 1-2 Stunden.</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos?</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M:</em> Ja, ich habe Kassetten. Das sind alte. z. B. “Bambi“.</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>F:</em> Das hier ist sehr alt, das ist ein Roman. Eine Liebesgeschichte, aber ohne Erotik und Porno. Es ist interessant. Es ist serbisch, aber ein ganz anderer Dialekt.</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M:</em> Ein alter Dialekt aus unserer Region. Sogar wir selber verstehen nicht alles. Es ist ein traditioneller Film.</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Also haben sie Videos auf deutsch und auf serbisch?</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M:</em> Ja.</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sohn: Ich schaue, wenn ich will 1-2 mal pro Woche oder pro Monat, sowas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M: Wir haben kein Radio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>DVD, CD’s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M: Wir haben nur Musik auf CD und DVD. Folklore-Musik.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bücher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>M: Ja, wir haben serbische Bücher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I: Liest du jeden Tag?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sohn: Ja.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Comics?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Zeitschriften?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I: Können sie mir das aufschreiben?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sohn: Ich habe den orangen Gurt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>F: Im März hat er wieder eine Prüfung.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I: Hast du viel gelernt?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sohn: Ja, japanisch. Ich habe ein wenig japanisch gelernt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>F: Das ist eine sehr schöne Kultur. Das Essen und so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I: Kaufen sie serbische Zeitungen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>F: Serbische Zeitungen haben wir einige.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
„Dama“ und „Novosti“ und „Vesti“. „Pistoli“.
Zu Hause hatten wir das Hobby „Jagen“. Das ist Kaliber, eine Jägerzeitung. Das ist ein Hobby.
Mein Sohn liebt die Jagd nicht. Er liebt Karate, Fussball und so. Die Tochter interessiert sich für das Jagen. Die Kleine mag das. Sie ist gut im Kindergarten, aber zu Hause ..........
I: Habt ihr einen Computer?
Sohn: Ja.
I: In welche Schule gehst du?
Sohn: In die Margarethenschule.
I: „Vesti“ ist das eine serbische Zeitung für Leute, die im Ausland wohnen?
I: Gibt es eine Kinderseite?
M: Ich glaube nur samstags. Ja sie kostet Fr. 3. --.
I: Ist ihr Computer ans Internet angeschlossen?
M: Nein.
I: Gibt es anderswo einen Computer, wo sie ins Internet können?
M: Nein.
27. I: Haben sie Software? CD-rom mit Spielen?
F: Ja, mein Sohn.
I: Was spielst du am liebsten?
F: Er interessiert sich für Automobile.
I: Gibt es etwas auf serbisch?
M: Nein, alles deutsch.
Wenn sie Software kaufen würden, was?
Unterhaltungsprogramm, Lernprogramm oder
Sprachprogramm?
Haben sie am liebsten etwas, was Spass macht oder etwas zum Spielen oder lieber etwas zum Lernen?
M: Spass ist gut, aber Lernen ist auch gut
I: Hast du auch ein Lieblingsspiel auf dem Computer?
Sohn: Also sie spielt die Spiele, die ich auch spiele.
Haben sie E-Mail?
M: Nein.
I: Gibt es Computer in der Schule?
Sohn: Ja. Ich mache das jede Woche am Dienstag nachmittag.
I: In der Schulkasse?
Sohn: Wir machen das in einer Gruppe.
I: Ist das dann eine Themenarbeit?
Sohn: Wir üben schnell rechnen. Z.B. mit dem Programm „Training Rechnen“.
I: Telefonieren sie viel mit ihren Verwandten?
M: Ja, meine Frau.
M: Immer telefonieren.
I: Täglich?
F: Ja.
I: Haben sie ein Natel?
M: Ja, zwei.
I: Schreiben sie SMS?
M: Ja.
<p>| I: Schreiben sie auch serbisch? | 325 |
| F.: Ja serbisch. Bei SMS ist das besser. | 326 |
| 34 I: Ist es ihnen wichtig, dass die Kinder die Muttersprache lernen und pflegen? | 327 |
| M: Ja. | 328 |
| I: Warum? | 329 |
| M: Wenn wir nach Hause gehen. Und wenn wir vielleicht einmal wieder nach Serbien gehen. | 330 |
| I: Sie wissen nicht, wie lange sie in der Schweizbleiben können? | 331 |
| M: Wir wissen nicht, ob wir bleiben möchten. | 332 |
| Meine Eltern sind alt. Aber bei uns ist ein anderes System. Wir wissen auch noch nicht, was später wird. Es wäre gut, wenn die Kinder hier die Lehre machen könnten. Vielleicht müssen wir vorher gehen, aber es wäre schade für die Kinder. Oder wenn nur ich gehe kann es hier Probleme geben. Wir wissen es noch nicht. Das ist eine schwierige Frage. | 333 |
| F: Serbien wird wirtschaftlich auch besser. Deshalb ist es wichtig, dass die Kinder kyrilisch und deutsch lernen. | 334 |
| M: Schwierig ist das Geldverdienen. Es gibt zu wenig Arbeit und wenig Lohn. Aber vielleicht müssen die Kinder dann dort studieren. Deswegen ist die Muttersprache sehr wichtig. Aber unsere Schule ist viel schwerer als die deutsche Schule. | 335 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M: Ja, auch deswegen.</th>
<th>358</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36 I: Wie werden sie in der Schule einbezogen?</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Ja, wir wissen was sie machen. Und wir gehen 1-2 Mal pro Jahr zur Lehrerin zum Elternabend (Sitzungen).</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Wie ist der Austausch zwischen der Schule und ihnen?</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Telefonieren. Und wenn etwas ist telefoniert auch die Lehrerin. Das ist wichtig. Und die Elternabende sind gut. Wir sind gut informiert.</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Haben sie einen Wunsch, wie man die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Kindergarten/Schule und Eltern verbessern könnte?</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Ich bin zufrieden mit beiden Lehrerinnen.</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Im Kindergarten haben sie angefangen, zusammen das Essen zu „Rüsten“. Das ist ein neues Programm, ich weiss nicht. Und sie haben eine kleine Küche. Sie lernen den Tisch decken. Das ist sehr gut.</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Es ist super. Mein Sohn hatte Probleme im Kindergarten, aber in der Schule ist es gut. Das ist eine junge Lehrerin, das ist gut.</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Darf ich die Bücher anschauen?</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Auf der Migros Bank musste ich lateinisch schreiben, kyrilisch geht nicht</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant number 2 KG and Primary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Mother and father Serbian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a Mother tongue: both Serbian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b Country of birth: Serbia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a Occupation: mother: cleaning offices in hospital, in Serbia sewing clothes in a factory</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father: Builders labourer.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a Education</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8 year primary and 3 years secondary (School Diploma). Father finished same number of school years as mother and came to CH directly after finishing school.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a How long have you lived in Switzerland?</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother: arrived 1991 (12) Father: arrived 1987</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b. Do you have relatives in Switzerland that you can visit and speak to in your home language?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Yes I have a cousin in Kaiser Augst and his father, brother and mother.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: They always speak Serbian.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: I don’t have any relatives here.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We only speak Serbian at home, German not.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5c. Do you have friends or colleagues from work that speak your home language?</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father must speak German at work.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother: I have two colleagues who speak Serbian at work I have to cook and do service so I have to learn German.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How many children live in your home?</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Son is nine and a half and our daughter is five and a half. She is in the first year of kindergarten</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<td></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(The son came to help with the questions).

I address the child: are you in the third class?

Son: Yes

8a. In which language do you speak to your children? Which language do they reply in?

M: They always prefer Serbian and my daughter prefers Serbian.

My daughter speaks German when she plays at home, she is much better now. Our son had big problems with German but now he is getting better. My son doesn’t have any problems with German. Now it is much better.

10. In which language do your children speak to each other?

F: Serbian

M: My son prefers to speak Serbian.

F. but that’s interesting: more character when he changes his clothes or plays, he always speaks German. That is interesting. When we have visitors who speak Serbian, my son always speaks German when they are playing. The mother speaks Serbian. It is interesting, perhaps because they speak German at school

I: Maybe it is because of school and the other children?

F: I am not sure (laughs).

11. Do you read to your children? In which language?

Yes, he already knows a lot, that we have another other writing system.

M: Cyrillic and Latin, he can already read and write in both scripts.

F: Cyrillic (child also assists with finding the words).

[He can] read and write very well.
M: My son has been learning Cyrillic for five years.
F: Wife helped a lot.
M: Prefers to play.
Maths.
He must speak German.
The script is the same as Russian or Macedonia
Not Greek.
12. Do the children read to each other or to you?
I: asks child: do you read to your sister in German or Serbia?
Child: Serbian.
13. Do you tell your children stories rhymes and sing songs in your home language?
Yes, yes
I: Children’s stories or something else?
F: We talk about how it was and our home was. The children like to hear about our life, what it was like there.
I: Do you go home during the school holidays
F: Yes, in the summer.
M: We didn’t go for three years because of our holidays
I: Once a year?
F: Yes once.
I: Then the children have been to the place where you lived, know your family and know the area?
F: Yes the grandparents and family
Yes all our family are still living.
I: Are you from Belgrade?
F: One Hundred kilometres south of Belgrade.
We fly to Belgrade then afterwards travel by bus or car.
14. Do you talk about every day experiences with your
F: I don’t have much time but my wife does.

15. Do you play games? Cards or board games, puzzles etc.
M: Yes, always playing, calculating.
F: [laughs] Yes playing. There’s a game...
Not too many, I don’t have much time because I work the whole day and when I get home, my wife goes to work. Perhaps we play cards or something.

Son talks to his father and they agree that they will tell me about a Geography game. (Naming cities, countries an animal).
I: I also play that game with my children but I always ask if I can play in English and they say no.
M: Yes that’s good, always speaking German.

My son plays a Serbian game – that’s with maths. It’s difficult. It is sometimes too difficult in school but playing it at home is easier.

16. Do the children sometimes help you cook?
M: Yes
F: Do you mean with the children? [laughs]
Not so much.
I: Baking cakes or bread?
M: Yes, the small one likes to help, then we speak Serbian. Sometimes we bake a cake.
F: They speak German in Kindergarten and at school.
It is important that they speak Serbian at home. If they can speak their mother tongue well then it is easier to learn other languages. Our daughter couldn’t speak German when she first began kindergarten. Then we thought it would be better to speak German with her at home but the teacher said we should leave it [the way it is]. Now her German isn’t too bad.
M: Why but why?

I: Because that is your language

F: When you speak and understand your own language well, then you can learn and understand to speak German better. (Later)

Problem when my daughter – she can’t speak German when she goes to kindergarten. We think it is better if they speak German at home.

F: Now it is getting better.

I: I read a lot of information for my research in many different countries: that it is better to speak the mother tongue at home.

M: Intelligence [It is also to do with]

My son has many interests. My son is interested in the planets. He is always asking questions. He knows some of the things ahead of the others, he always wants to know. For example he knows all the stars and planets.

I have a book he can read it. He knows a great deal and I ask him where he learnt that.

The teacher asked him how do you know all that?

My son must go to the speech therapist. He likes history he is interested in the Turkish history, he talks about it to his speech therapist.

They talk about the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire and Turkey. He talks to the speech therapist about the Turkish wars- and about what they did. What they did 200 years ago in Serbia. Small children learn very early, they learnt about the military and to forget their identity- where they come from. That was a professional military. Then they sent them back to Serbia. They had no emotions or feelings. That’s what really happened – and he talks about that with the speech therapist. I don’t know how much the speech
therapist knows about that. Children were taken away from their parents - they may have lost a hand or something else then they couldn’t be in the Army any longer. That’s real history, but it’s terrible. When a country is occupied for 100 years, it is just so. But we have a lot of culture from the Turkish culture. That’s when we got Islam. Some Turkish traditions are like ours. For example our New Year. We have a lot of Turks in Serbia. There are a lot of Turkish names.

17. Do you visit, or are you a member of an ethnic/cultural community?
F: Yes, we go to church and Serbian school. They organise a festival and for our Folklore. My son knows.

18. Do you celebrate national days?
Christmas on 7th of January. New year was last week. Other festivals?
We celebrate birthdays We have something else..... Yes, we have two celebrations at home that’s something like Christmas like Saint Nicholas- a celebration at home. Not all Serbs celebrate this tradition. Some celebrate Saint Nicholas, some Saint Georg and Dimitri. Is that saint from where you come from, or is that different sections or does every church have its own saint?
F: No that’s in the family. That tradition comes from 200 years ago. We have a house and it is important that we have the celebration, when for example, a woman marries, the husband’s family has to organise the celebration. That’s important. And always in your
own house. And that’s two times a year. Once it was very important. That’s our tradition and many Serbs have this tradition.

What’s the name?: Slava

Is that right?

19. Do you use the multicultural library in Basel?
M: Yes we visited there once with the teacher.

20. Do your children have a hobby, play a musical instrument or play sport? What are they?

Three years of Karate and swimming, playing in school

21. What level of education would you like your children to achieve?
F: I don’t know.
M: He is good at drawing.

Questions on the use of technology and the media in the home language.

22. Do your children watch / listen / read in their home language:

Television We have our programmes. There are three now but we have to pay extra for the third. Tele Belgrade. My son is not very interested in it.
M: My son likes German TV.
There are children’s programmes
Video Yes, I have a cassette.
I have the novel too- it is a very old traditional story. It is an old dialect it is from our region. It is very interesting.

How often do you watch videos?

When I want to- maybe once a month
From folklore.

Radio no I don’t have radio We have radio and CD and DVD for music
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do the children like the music too.</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They like it</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassettes</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books Yes we have books</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comics Yes Mickey Mouse, in Serbia you can get</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mickey Mouse. Sponge Bob</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines Serbian Culture it is for children.</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She’s not tired. She’s afraid.</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you write the name?</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimm brothers.</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My son has a magazine about Karate</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which belt do you have?</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son: I studied in Japanese for the next exam. Yellow</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read a little in Japanese.</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My husband has a hobby, he’s a hunter.</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: It is not aggressive. My son is not interested but my daughter is.</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That is one on hunting and on politics-(magazine)</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s my hobby this one is about animals.</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers: In the Sunday paper there is something for the children</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Have you got a computer in your household?</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which school do you go to?</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Margaretha.</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Is the computer connected to the Internet?</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Do you use the Internet with your children?</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No not yet</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. If so can you list some of home language sites that your children visit?</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Can you list a few examples of the type of software that your children use at home?</td>
<td>Yes that’s my son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you like if I may ask? With cars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there something in Serbian? Educational, games, language programs, etc [Software] for fun is good, but also for learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F:Daughter plays what the son plays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Does your family use an E-mail programme?</td>
<td>Does your family use an E-mail programme?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Do you receive E-mails? Do you write and send E-mails with your children?</td>
<td>Do you receive E-mails? Do you write and send E-mails with your children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Do your children participate in any type of exchange programmes with your home country. For example: pen friends?</td>
<td>Do your children participate in any type of exchange programmes with your home country. For example: pen friends?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you have computer in school? Son: We do training in calculations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there something for learning German?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there something for learning German?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31. Do you chat in the Internet with relatives or friends from your home country? Yes specially my wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My mother is sick, I am always afraid, I don’t smoke or drink, because I prefer to call my mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32. Do you call people from your home country? Do they call you?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33. Do you have a mobile telephone? Do the children use SMS? Which language? Yes, in Serbian SMS is better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34. Is it important to you that your children learn to speak and maintain your home language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, when we go there, they don’t have problems. When he is 18 years old, maybe he has to go to school there. We don’t know.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Don’t you know if you are staying here?
We don’t know if we can stay.
Yes, my parents are old, when one parent dies, it is
different by us. Things get stolen when the house is
empty. It is a difficult question. It is better, difficult,
money there is little money there.
Maybe he will have to study there.
Our school is much more difficult.
The Swiss school is much better. For the first class we
have 12 books- it is much more difficult.
34a. How important and why?
It is very important to write and learn.
35. Should your children also learn to read and write
in your home language?
This is first grade work.
Only culture
36. How does the school/kindergarten involve you as a
parent in your child’s education?
We know what to do. We have meetings we know
exactly what happens in school. When there is a
problem we telephone. But we go two times more when
we go and drink and eat something.
Last year once.
And you like that?
We are always well informed.
37. How do you communicate with the school and
which form of communication do you prefer?
Telephone and when it is important we go to the
teacher.
38. Do you personally have any ideas, statements for
working together with the kindergarten or school for
the education of your child?
I am happy. It is better.
In kindergarten, she is learning to prepare food. That is very good. At home [in Serbia] it is only theory so it is better here.

That’s good in Switzerland.

My son had problems in KG.

It is much more difficult.

- It is very bad. That’s Russian.

I went to the bank and signed in Cyrillic script system, they told me it was no good I should sign with the Latin writing system.

As I stated in the information letter, real names will not be used in the report.

A summary of the findings and a copy of the final report will be sent to you.

I thank you once again for your willingness to participate in this project.
Interview Fragen
1. te Klasse 21 Kinder
Erstesprache; Deutsch, Türkisch, Kurdisch, Spanisch, Englisch, Vietnamesisch, Tamilisch, Portugiesisch, Albanisch, Serbisch
Im 3. Jahr Berufserfahrung

I: Sie haben gesagt, die Kinder reagieren besonders, wenn Sie z.B. Spanisch sprechen. Warum?
H: Sie sind dann verwundert und fragen sich, wieso

Fragen sind zu drei Themen:
a. Erstsprache-Förderung.
b. Zusammenarbeit mit den Migrationseltern.

1. Wie nehmen Sie die Sprache-Erlebnis Welt der Kinder in der Schule Alltag/Kindergarten Alltag auf?


2. Wie erleben Sie als Lehrerin/en die Erstsprachen der Kinder im KG (PS)?

(Hören, sprechen, schreiben (andere Schrift, forms of writing), lesen?)

H: „Stören“ tut es mich, wenn ein Kind etwas erzählen möchte und der Wortschatz reicht nicht aus. Ich habe

I: Und z.B. das Kind aus England, konnte es schon englisch schreiben?


I: Woher haben sie die Informationen?

I: Wie erleben sie die Erstsprache der Kinder in der Primarschule?
singen ein Lied, in dem verschiedene Sprachen vorkommen und ich frage dann, was heisst „……………” und dann sagt jemand wie es auf deutsch heisst. Fremdsprachige Bücher haben wir in der Schule nicht. Ich habe nur eines in Englisch.

3. Wie machen Sie Gebrauch von der Erstsprachkenntnissen der Kinder?


H: Was wir oft diskutieren oder was uns nahegelegt worden ist ist die interkulturelle Pädagogik, oder Erstsprachenerwerb. Es ist ganz klar erwiesen, dass wenn die Muttersprache nicht gefördert wird, es praktisch unmöglich ist, eine Zweitsprache, was in unserem Fall deutsch ist, zu erlernen. Sodass wir eigentlich die Eltern bitten, mit den Kindern zu Hause in der Muttersprache zu reden. Ich kenne Fälle, in denen Kinder „sprachlos“ aufwachsen. Das Beispiel von einem Knaben, die Eltern kamen aus Afrika und sprachen einen Stammesdialekt und mit dem Kind reden sie eigentlich nur deutsch, aber so schlecht, dass das Kind wirklich sprachlos ist. Ganz schlimm. Wenn die Eltern fragen, oft sind sie unsicher, ob sie zu Hause deutsch sprechen sollen, dann sage ich „nein“. Lassen sie das Kind aus der Zeitung vorlesen, aber reden sie mit ihrem Kind nicht deutsch. Viele sind da auch
einsichtig und viele sagen, dass es das ist, was sie
instinktiv spüren, dass es richtig ist, wenn sie mit ihrem
Kind in der Muttersprache reden.

Ich gebe den Eltern manchmal wie Hausaufgaben. Wir
arbeiten jetzt mit dem Grundwortschatz und dort
können sie spezifisch mit den Kindern üben und sie
lernen selber auch etwas. Also sie können den
Wortschatz üben, aber im Alltag sollen sie die
Muttersprache benützen.

I: Wie weit ist ihre eigene Erfahrung als Kind.

H: Es ist nicht so bewusst. Ich habe das Phänomen,
also bei mir ist es als Kleinkind passiert, als ich
sprechen lernte, habe ich eigentlich nur hebräisch
gehört und als ich in den Kindergarten kam  eigentlich
nur noch deutsch. Und dann habe ich das Hebräisch
fast vergessen. Ich kann mich erinnern, ich war damals
zwischen 5 und 8 Jahre alt, da konnte ich kaum mehr
ein Wort Hebräisch sprechen. Wirklich nur noch einige
einzelne Worte und dann war es plötzlich wieder da.

Ich kann mir das nicht erklären. Aber es ist nicht
perfekt. Es hatte sicher damit zu tun, dass meine Eltern
sich getrennt haben und mein Vater zurückging und ich
hatte dann keine Möglichkeit mehr, die Sprache zu
hören oder zu reden, weil ich mit der Mutter deutsch
gesprochen habe. Für mich ist es einfach ein
Phänomen, dass es zurückgekommen ist und ich mir
nicht erklären kann woher. Es kann vielleicht sein,
dass ich es durch die Trennung irgendwie abgestossen
habe, aber dass es irgendwo gespeichert blieb und
dann ein grosser Teil plötzlich wieder hervorkam.

Meine Schwester spricht auch hebräisch, aber viel
schlechter.

Ja, ich habe auch schreiben und lesen gelernt, aber das

5. Finden Sie es wichtig, dass der Kindergarten/die Schule die Familien beim Erlernen der Erstsprache unterstützt?

H: Nein. Es kommt darauf an, was Sie mit Unterstützung meinen. Ich kann natürlich keine Unterstützung anbieten, um die Erstsprache zu erlernen oder zu festigen und ich denke, das ist auch
Aufgabe der Eltern. Ich kann Empfehlungen abgeben.


Gibt es derartige Projekte/Pläne?


Es soll auch für die Eltern ein gewisser Anreiz sein, sich auf deutsch zu unterhalten. Früher kam es oft vor, dass die Kinder dann alles machen mussten, wo man
die Sprache braucht. Das ist aber nicht Aufgabe der Kinder. Die Eltern brauchen auch einen Anreiz, warum sie die Sprache lernen sollen.

Haben Sie selber Ideen oder Wünsche?

H: Es wäre ein Wunsch, dass die Eltern deutsch lernen wollen. Ich erlebe oft, dass die Großeltern z.B. kein Wort Deutsch sprechen, aber die Eltern sind schon seit der 1. Generation in der Schweiz und teilweise reden sie sehr gut deutsch oder zumindest so gut, dass man sich verständigen kann. Es ist natürlich klar, dass ich mit einem albanischen Vater ein anderes Deutsch spreche als mit einer Schweizer Mutter.

Zusammenarbeit mit den Migrationseltern


H: Ich bin eigentlich sehr direkt. Ich frage meistens, woher sie kommen, wie sie das machen zu Hause oder sie erzählen sehr oft auch von sich aus, wie es in ihrer Heimat geht oder wie es dort früher war usw.

Ich habe den Eltern von Anfang angeboten, Schulbesuche zu machen, denn es ist ganz wichtig, dass die Kinder wissen, dass ihre Eltern interessiert, was sie in der Schule machen. Und es sind schon viele Eltern zu Besuch gekommen. Es ist vielen Eltern ganz wichtig, was mir ihren Kindern ist. Sie kommen oft und fragen, wie es geht und sind sehr interessiert.

7. Wie gut kennen Sich die Migrationseltern im Basel Stadt / Baselland aus?

Welchen Zugang haben die Eltern zu den Informationsquellen? In was für sprachen?
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Wie wird der Kontakt zwischen der Schule/Kindergarten und der Elternhaus gepflegt?</td>
<td></td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In was für Bereichen? (Zum Beispiel: Tägliche Kommunikation, Lehrplan, Themen-Arbeit, gemeinsame Projekte)</td>
<td></td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Gibt es offizielle Leitlinien für Euch als Lehrerin um die Verbindung zwischen Schule und Migrationsfamilien zu erleichtern?</td>
<td></td>
<td>286</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fragen zum Mediengebruch.</td>
<td></td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Wie werden Medien in den Kindergarten / Schulunterricht integriert?</td>
<td></td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Software, Internet, play station, Handy, Fax maschine?</td>
<td></td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Benutzen die Kinder zuhause elektronische Geräte zum Beispiel: Software, Internet sites, Play Station, Telefon, Handy, Fax maschine?</td>
<td></td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Wie könnte man Medien/ Technology verwenden, um die Kommunikation zwischen Eltern und der Schule/ Kindergarten zu verbessern?</td>
<td></td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Q

Sample Interview Transcript (English) Primary Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Teaching level</th>
<th>List of home languages in class</th>
<th>Years of teaching experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary S 2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Serbocroatian</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Albanish</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chec</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish/Italian</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total 20 &amp; Swiss</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>German</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher language profile - Swiss German, German, English, French, Italian

The questions are in the following three areas:

1) First language support and maintenance.
2) Communication with immigrant families.
3) Media and ICT use in support of the above two themes.

1. How do you take account for children’s first language world in everyday kindergarten/school? Vocabulary- word practice and basic, 5 to 7 words/animals/clothes/ training intensive practicing. Story telling- in German.
With their mother tongue- partially, I ask if they know it in their language or explaining that the stronger children in Turkish explain it to the others, the weaker ones are mostly Turkish. Do you think the Turkish children can translate already- more readily?
In this class, out of the 4 Turkish children, 3 are very weak. They are not supported at home and they don’t have the vocabulary in their home language either. What I have noticed, is that the Serbo-croatian and Bosnian children, that the children are stronger in German than the Turkish children. (Now in this class). In the last class, Albanian and Yugoslavian children were often stronger in German than the Turkish children.

2. How do you as a teacher experience children’s first language in the classroom? (Listening, speaking, reading, writing- in other forms)
Not a lot,
3. How do you make use of the children’s first language knowledge?
Not much apart from when they explain words to each other or to encourage the parents to tell their children stories in their own language.

4. Is the theme of the relationship between a child’s first language and the dominant language of the classroom discussed between colleagues? Give an example.
In everyday classes it doesn’t have much room in first and second but we encourage the children to go to the HSK courses –
What is the reason for that- that they should go to HSK- How do you convince the people?
We tell them that, if they know the vocabulary in their own language then we can build on that in German – I don’t know enough about it. Actually, what we did with the third and forth class; we encouraged the parents to go to the JUKIBU to get books in their own language to lend- or read the newspaper.
Have you taken the children? – No, but I would have liked to, but the library is only open in the afternoon, and it is difficult for us to go there when we don’t have school.

5. Do you think it is important that the kindergarten and school support first language acquisition? Yes
Are there any projects or plans for the future in your region/ school?
HSK, Gesamtsprachen project- at the moment it an issue but we don’t have the room here and there is a lot of persuasion needed amongst the teachers. They have the feeling that they already have enough to deal with. With the Turkish children, we have a HSK Turkish teacher, we asked her if she would come during class time- so that the Turkish children could work in Turkish too.
But that’s all unfortunately.
It is a lot of work and effort- team teaching, people are wary of that.
Personally would you like it? I am divided on that- I think – yes from the sense- but from the effort and how that should be- rather not.
Do you have your own ideas and what would you like to see as future developments in home language support and acquisition?

Communication with immigrant families
6. How do you communicate with parents from other cultures and languages?
We have parent teacher talks already after 7 weeks, how it goes at home and just to get to know each other. What I did in the last year- the parents brought something to eat during a project week.
There is a parent advisory committee at the middle years level: in OS not at the Primary level.

7. How well do immigrant families know what is available to them in Basel and the region? I don’t know - I think it is different – I think it is open to interpretation now- I think the Turkish parents, I have the feeling that they live mainly in Gundeli, they go shopping in Germany and about the other cultures- I don’t know.

Language classes- we distributed flyers and information and the last parent information evening we placed emphasis on German Classes for parents

How do parents access this information? In what languages is the information available?

8. How is contact between School/ Kindergarten and parents approached?

Parent letters- that parents get the information in German- I don’t have to give extra information

9. Are there official guidelines to assist with contact and communication between the school/Kindergarten and immigrant parents?

No. not that I know of.

**Media use**

10. How is media in Kindergarten and school integrated in the classroom curriculum?

In the first class not much. We had a part of a video- Computer and internet we aren’t a fan (my Partner and I) but in the last class we worked together-

CD player

Cassette recorder –once a week

Overhead projector to explain – twice a week,

TV – for theme work

Not a fan for computer- we have a computer room with 6 computers

Some teachers use it and there are some who have it in their room 2 or 3 teachers.

There is one teacher responsible for the computers, he gets one lesson per week as compensation for this job.

His job is to support nothing else. No fax.

11. What forms of media (ICT) do children use in their homes?

PlayStation and TV, all of them have it and Nintendo as well.

Software- I think in the last class, 2 or 3 had software, and maybe a quarter had one together with their parents.

Supplies in school- we can get software but we have to get our own computer. Internet is not possible, but you can get one old one from the bank- through connections- not from the Education Department, but only from using your own initiative.
12. Do you use a computer and Internet at home? If so how do you make use of it?
Computer but not internet for school
13. Do your own children use a computer?
14. Are their professional development opportunities in the area of technology integration in kindergarten / school?
There is a lot through ULEF- yes but it was really weak
15. How could you use media/ technology in order to improve communication between parents and school/Kindergarten?
Communication- I don’t know how I would use it. In our class, there are two or three who can’t write in their own language- so it is difficult to communicate at all for them.
Do the teachers have email? (60 teachers : three quarters have an e-mail address, but at home.
There is learn software, is okay- I think they should experience things and go to the zoo. They are so much at home in front of the screen whether it is computer, TV I think it doesn’t matter if they don’t have it (computers) here.
Have you asked the children: in this class? (About their screen time habits?)- Not yet, but in the last one (class)- we did.
The last parent evening, we had it as a theme, that the kids shouldn’t watch TV before school and not over lunch time – Or with parents, I think in the fourth class more than half the children have a TV in their own room or sit in front of the computer so that they avoid talking and discussing things. One father said- The discussion at home was about arguing over which programme to watch: “I want to watch that program” and Papi wanted to watch something else, so [he said] that the solution was – get another TV.

Thank you for your participation.