

# research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



## Multilingualism Strengthens Multiculturalism in Local Communities

### What is this research about?

Public schools are spaces where language diversity practices takes place. In cities like Toronto, this has allowed for different types of 'integration' to emerge. This includes unidirectional, reciprocal and multifarious integration. English language learners (ELL) and English as a second language (ESL) learners demonstrate multifariousness. That is, they represent a plurality of cross cultural exchanges in the effort to learn and acquire a new language. Integration is experienced differently by different language learners. Support is needed to accommodate these distinct ways of integrating. However, the growth of market-based policy approaches has seen less funding to address the language needs of communities that are multifarious.

### What did the researcher do?

The researcher looked at two public boards of education in the city of Toronto. These were the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB.) She looked at their schools as an example of the varied experiences migrants have when they integrate with their new homeland. The researcher noted that as the province of Ontario restructured public education, many cutbacks were made to

### What you need to know:

Institutional spaces like schools provide opportunities for language preservation. They also help redefine integration in community-defined ways. However, many schools offer some resources in the way of ESL classes, but very few international language classes.

services that met the language needs of migrant youth. The result has seen different outcomes for different groups.

The researcher looked at the number and types of international language classes and English as a second language (ESL) classes offered across the city. She used this data to identify the levels of 'integration' by language groups.

### What did the researcher find?

Multilingualism and integration in Toronto has evolved differently for different groups. Available international language classes varied according to the resources and instructors at hand. However, these classes were initiated as a result of community action and demand. This demonstrated the likelihood of community mobilization outside of the schools. A majority of the languages spoken by the top ten refugee intake countries were offered by one of the school boards. This also proved

the value of language classes for identity and belonging after migrant displacement and exile.

The researcher found that schools with more language diversity were also more multifarious. Different language groups had a complex interplay of diversity and solidarity. This reflected the different ways groups were integrated with others. Thus, important alliances are made by different language groups over similar but distinct experiences in being displaced, alienated or feeling loss.

Languages that had a high level of integration could be noted by the likelihood of it being taught with another language. Also, ESL students were more likely to attend a school with a high enrolment and a number of international language classes.

The researcher found that 9 types of schools could be identified depending on the nature of integration that took place. From these distinctions, she observed that over half of the schools in Toronto have a medium amount of ESL resources available. But these schools offered low to no international language opportunities. She noted that there appeared to be a low interest in language classes if there was an absence of ESL students. Schools that were multifarious were present in neighbourhoods that had higher migration levels, but not where unemployment levels and recently arrived migrants were high. Thus, different groups integrated at different paces, depending on their comfort levels, as well as their class, race, status and employment.

### **How can you use this research?**

This research may be useful to educators and settlement service providers. It may shed insight

on the distinct language needs and barriers experienced by students in public education. It also offers a review on how important these linkages are to processes of integration. It highlights the various community factors that come into play when working with diverse language groups.

### **About the Researcher**

Ranu Basu is Associate Professor of Geography at York University.

[ranubasu@yorku.ca](mailto:ranubasu@yorku.ca)

### **Citation**

Basu, R. (2011). Multiculturalism through multilingualism in schools: Emerging places of “integration” in Toronto. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 101(6), 307-1330. Available online at <http://bit.ly/1jYOqIm>

### **Keywords**

Poverty eradication, Language, Immigrants, ESL, Education, Multiculturalism, Multilingualism

### **Knowledge Mobilization at York**

York’s Knowledge Mobilization Unit provides services for faculty, graduate students, community and government seeking to maximize the impact of academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary has been supported by the Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation at York and project funding from SSHRC and CIHR.

[kmbunit@yorku.ca](mailto:kmbunit@yorku.ca)

[www.researchimpact.ca](http://www.researchimpact.ca)

