



# Supporting home languages



## Language and identity

Language, culture and identity are strongly related. Contemporary academic discourse highlights that language is more than words, phrases and sounds but the coming life of social interaction (Evans 2014, p3). Further to this, culture is recognised as not only surrounding language, but also residing within it (p187). Respecting children's cultural identities, including their languages, is a keystone of culturally competent practice.

A child's languages, particularly their first or home languages, contribute to their wellbeing, identity and sense of agency through helping them to express their feelings and thoughts and to be understood (VEYLDF, p28). Educators affirm a child's strong sense of identity by supporting and encouraging the use of the child's home languages, both outside of and within the service.

- How are children at the service supported to develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities through using their home languages to construct meaning? (VEYLDF, p19)
- What opportunities currently exist in the service to observe bilingual children openly expressing their feelings and ideas in interactions with others? What other opportunities could be overseen or missed by educators? (VEYLDF, p19)

## Bilingual benefits

A current estimate indicates that more than half of the world's population grows up with more than one language (Parodi 2015). There is significant evidence to confirm that learning more than one language has many benefits. In recent articles (Espinosa 2015 and Okal 2014), some of the benefits of bilingualism investigated and substantiated by peer-reviewed research include:

- a greater social adaptability
- advantages in cognitive abilities
- a greater appreciation and understanding of different cultures and experiences
- increased job prospects
- mental flexibility
- creativity
- possible links to executive brain functions.

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework acknowledges that maintenance of a child's home or first

languages is important for identity, wellbeing, communication and learning (p28). The Framework recognises bi- and multilingualism as an asset and compels Early Childhood Professionals to support children to maintain their first language (p11).

- What attitudes do families and children attending the service have towards when, where and with whom they use their home languages? What obligations do Educators have to ensure home languages are respected and encouraged?
- How are children and families encouraged to use their home languages as languages of education and learning?
- To what extent are home languages taken into account when considering evidence of the VEYLDF outcomes, particularly Communication?

## Learning English

Children have the right to be continuing users of their home language as well as to develop competency in Standard Australian English (EYLF, p38). With sufficient quality input in both languages, children can learn English alongside their home languages. In order to learn English, it is important to support the continuing development of the child's home languages as this provides a foundation to transfer skills from one language to another (Clarke 2009, p9).

The process of learning a language comprises a number of stages. Recognising a child's progression through these stages can ensure children are supported appropriately at the right time. Detailed information on additional language acquisition can be found through the FKA Tip sheet Learning English as an Additional Language and in the VCAA resource *Supporting Children Learning English as a Second Language: birth to six years* (Clarke 2009).

- How is English language development assessed in the service? What resources are available to educators and families?
- How frequently are referrals made regarding language development difficulties or delays for bilingual children? Are signs and stages of language acquisition taken into account before making assessments and referrals?
- What information is shared with families in regards to their child's ongoing language development?

## Bicultural support

Bicultural support is provided by FKA Children's Services to eligible services. Through this program, services have access to on-site consultancy and bilingual workers for a fixed period, helping to enrol, settle and include children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Bicultural support can help with supporting children's sense of belonging in the early childhood service. This includes development and maintenance of home languages through conversations, stories, songs and play. For families, bicultural support can facilitate the exchange of information with educators about their aspirations for their child and their child's education.

- How are families currently encouraged to participate in and contribute to children's learning and development experiences (VEYLDF, p10)? How could bicultural support resources, including a bilingual worker, enhance family-centred practices in the service?

## Further considerations

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (see 'Further Information' below) explicitly outlines that children have the right to use their own language and enjoy their own culture, particularly if these relate to minority groups.

- What role do educators play in upholding this right for all children in the service?
- What role do educators have in advocating for this right to be acknowledged and respected in the wider community?

## Practice tips

- Utilise bilingual educators, fkaCS bilingual workers and interpreters to facilitate conversations and interactions (see Early Childhood Interpreter Service and Support from fkaCS below).
- Discuss home language practices with families. It is important to find out where, when and with whom different languages, including English, are used.
- Encourage children and families to use their home languages at the service. Also encourage educators to use their own home languages at the service.
- Families may ask if they should to stop using their home language. Families must be encouraged and supported to maintain the home language as this is critical to learning English as an additional language.
- Contact the FKA Multicultural Resource Centre to discuss and borrow appropriate resources, including books, games and posters.

- Invite family members to spend time in the service and participate in reading or other activities using their home language/s.
- Ask families about the types of things they do together at home and ask them how you can replicate these in the service.
- Encourage families to replicate some activities at home using their home languages to provide more opportunities for the child to engage in the learning. For example, story bags and simple games.

## How we can help

Bicultural Support is provided by FKA Children's Services throughout Victoria. We offer early childhood education and care services access to skilled and experienced professionals who provide specific language and cultural assistance to help enrol and settle children. The Bicultural Support Team can be reached on 9428 4471 or by contacting [fkacs@fka.org.au](mailto:fkacs@fka.org.au).

FKA offers a range of professional learning opportunities for services, which are customised according to individual needs. Check our website for upcoming opportunities, or contact the Professional Learning Team by calling the office or emailing [training@fka.org.au](mailto:training@fka.org.au).

## Further information

How to request bicultural support <http://fka.org.au/bicultural-support/request-bicultural-support>

Free Interpreter support for Victorian Government funded early childhood services, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/comms/Pages/interpreterservice.aspx>

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner - Convention on the Rights of the Child <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

## Research and frameworks

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development & Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2009, *Victorian early years learning and development framework for all children from birth to eight years*.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations & Council of Australian Governments 2010, *Educators' guide to the early years learning framework for Australia*.

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Espinosa, L 2015, *Challenges and benefits of early bilingualism in the Unites States' context*, *Global Education Review*, 2(1), 14-31

Evans, D 2014, *Language and Identity: Discourse in the World*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing

Okal, B 2014, *Benefits of Multilingualism in Education*, *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 2(3), 223-229

Parodi, T 2015, *Speaking in tongues: the many benefits of bilingualism*. Available from:  
<http://theconversation.com/speakingintonguesthemanybenefitsofbilingualism49842>. [8 December 2015].