

INCLUSION

Supporting the Development and Maintenance of Multiple Languages

Australia is becoming increasingly multilingual. Australian Bureau of Statistics data illustrate that approximately 25% of children in Australia are currently growing up in a bilingual or multilingual home environment.

This information sheet aims to provide information on the importance of a child's first language as well as encourage the use of language development strategies by early childhood professionals to expose children to additional languages.

Research shows that bilingualism benefits overall emotional and cognitive development as well as communication skills. It shows that supporting a child's home language during the early years can lead to better educational outcomes and a more positive attachment to their own cultural identity and family.

Here are some ways to support children from linguistically diverse backgrounds to retain and build on their first language as well as introducing additional languages to children from an English speaking background.

THE FRAMEWORK

Express your commitment to linguistic and cultural diversity in your service philosophy, policies and procedures and demonstrate in all your actions by:

- Collaborating with families and community based groups and services to expose children to community languages on a daily basis
- Educating parents on the benefits of bilingualism.
- Using various community languages:
 - when displaying notices for children and parents
 - during daily routines and transition times
 - actively expanding your vocabulary in partnership with children and families

Create opportunities for children to contribute to activities in various languages during:

- storytelling
- musical performances
- regular multilingual items during mat sessions Where possible, recruit bilingual staff and promote the educational use of a range of languages in your setting.

THE SETTING

Non-verbal communication

Most of us learn best by doing, rather than listening.

This is also important for children learning languages. The more a child is involved in doing rather than listening passively, the quicker their understanding of the language will develop as they make the association of the action with the words.

Some ways to do this are:

- **Gesture/Mime:** When talking/giving instructions, mime as much as possible what you are saying. To increase the impact create guessing games by reversing the use of mime and language.

- **Visual aids:** Use picture cards to illustrate what you are saying. Let children have access to the picture cards to enable their use in day to day communication.
- **Facial expressions:** Your face and its expressions are a great media for expressing and asking about a child's emotion: "are you happy or sad?"
- **Music:** Use music to reinforce the words/phrases you are focussing on. "When you're happy and you know it..." "Heads, shoulders, knees...."
- **Arts and crafts:** Encourage art and craft activities around themes/language focus, e.g. when learning the names of animals, create opportunities to draw and paint animals, reading stories about animals, sing songs about animals, play games involving animals their sounds and movements and habits.

Collaborative and small group work

The fastest way for a child to learn a language is by including as much collaborative interactions and small group activities into the child's day as possible.

When pairing children who have various language competencies and complement each other in social skills and areas of interest use natural settings such as:

- when initiating transitions from one activity to another
- when small groups of children are involved in art and craft projects or special activities
- during occasions such as watering plants, carrying something to the kitchen, helping the educator with a task

Intentional language teaching

When planning activities such as storytelling, ask yourself how you create opportunities for children to engage with and contribute to the story.

- What are the essential words and phrases that „tell the story“?
- How can I create actions/visual aids and sounds around them to strengthen their impact? Am I asking open ended questions?
- Are there activities and games that could be used to lead towards the story being told and to introduce those key words and phrases in other settings?

Ideas for this might be:

- pretend games that include words and phrases of the story
- re-creating characters, scenes and items within the story during arts activities such as painting, drawing and collages.

References

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