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TITLE: Nurturing a multilingual ecology

CAROLINA CABEZAS-BENALCAZAR, RESEARCHER & EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL: The new practice guide explores concepts and theories that support educators and families, to discuss bilingual learning from a strength-based perspective. Some of these terms may be new to early-childhood educators and parents. This guide includes a glossary of terms that educators can use to facilitate access to definitions.

[A teacher and child converse in Vietnamese]

CAROLINA CABEZAS-BENALCAZAR: Early childhood educators can nurture multilingual ecology that supports children and family, sustain the family language, and be exposed to rich bilingual learning experiences and outcomes.

MELODIE DAVIES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FKA CHILDREN'S SERVICES: In 2018, on International Mother Language Day, Salzburg local fellows called on educators, businesses and governments to promote language diversity as a global norm and to adopt a multilingual mindset that celebrates and promotes language diversity as the global norm, tackles language discrimination and develops language policies that advance multilingualism.

CAROLINA CABEZAS-BENALCAZAR: The term 'emergent bilingual' highlights a child's potential to develop bilingualism. It includes all children that practice languages bilingually and that stand in a bilingual continuum of more or less access to different languages.

The term 'languaging' refers to the way people practice and learn languages, which is always dynamic and fluid and cannot be understood nor confined to the limits of the home or the educational setting.

MELODIE DAVIES: In early childhood education and care, every child is viewed within the context of their family and community. A multilingual ecology ensures that we view the child within the context of their language identity. In this space, we've moved beyond the declaration of supporting family language to a practice of embedding language in our curriculum.

CAROLINA CABEZAS-BENALCAZAR: Children become bilingual by learning and practising the languages across different contexts. By making interrelated connections between their languages, using words, concepts and phrases of each language in a flexible and fluid manner, they construct meaning and develop the cognitive advantage of distinguishing between different language systems. This fluid, dynamic and flexible use of their whole linguistic repertoire is called 'translanguaging', and it's the natural way that bilinguals use language.

Mixing languages is not a mistake, nor the wrong way of speaking. Rather, it's the natural way that bilingual speakers make sense of their languages, make meaning, and strengthen their communication skills. Translanguaging can also refer to teaching strategies and pedagogies that use bilingualism as a resource for learning.

Bilingual and monolingual educators who aim for inclusive practices that sustain bilingualism can use translanguaging in everyday interactions to scaffold instruction, aid comprehension and make sense of language and learning. This practice guide encourages educators to move beyond a monolingual mindset of education, which understands teaching and learning in one language and one culture only. The practice guide has strategies for educators to nurture multilingual ecology in which all languages are valued, acknowledged, represented and supported.

[A teacher reads to a group of children in Vietnamese.]

MELODIE DAVIES: The resource includes examples of ways to embed home language in our practice by, for example:

* using multilingual books, games, oral storytelling and songs,
* supporting bilingual and multilingual educators to use their family language,
* using keywords in family languages meaningfully,
* remembering to use everyday words and phrases, not just the words of instruction,
* using bilingual language support workers and/or community members,
* taking care to ensure signs and messages and visual cues are in community languages, and
* taking the time to explore the language heritage of all children and extended community as a way to value languages.

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