**Part 3: Supporting home languages (video transcript)**

00:12 [Anne Stonehouse]

Maintaining and developing the home language is important for a child learning English as an additional language. Home language is part of culture, and both culture and language play a significant role in children’s sense of identity. Skills in the home language support the acquisition of English. This means that educators and teachers need to be culturally inclusive in all their practices, as well as helping children to become proficient in English.

Research shows that the best way for children to acquire English is for families, educators and teachers to actively encourage and support children to use their home language. Bi-lingual educators and teachers and multicultural aides in schools also support children to learn English and maintain their home language.

01:02 [Jacques – Parent, Springvale]

I mean you know, he’s learning… my wife speaks Chinese to him, so I speak French to him. I know when he goes to school he will learn English, so that’s fine, because I think these days in Australia, being part of the whole world, we need to have different skillsets. These days I think too many focuses on ‘you only learn English’ for example. But, we are very close to China – not the fact that my wife is Chinese he has to learn Chinese – but for career prospects in the future.

01:33 [Sophie – Parent, Springvale]

With my background being Chinese I do attempt to speak Chinese to all the boys most of the time at home. Their dad is English, so obviously daddy will speak English to the boys and my parents would also speak Cantonese to the children. So, in the centre here they facilitate that and help us by encouraging them to be more bilingual when the educators who can speak Cantonese I’ve said ‘OK, help them along, develop the language and speak Cantonese when you get the opportunity’. But, with English being the language here they get to also learn, my wish is that they become fluent in both languages and be bi-lingual.

02:11 [Georgina Dearnaley – Preschool Teacher, Kingsville Kindergarten]

By valuing their culture, we’re saying that your language is important and it’s important to keep that, and we sort of make that quite clear. It’s important that they understand and even some parents come in and say ‘no we don’t want to speak English to them -in whatever language, we only want to speak English to them now’ and we say ‘it is important that they still maintain those connections so they understand their own identity and where they’ve come from and who they are.

02:34 [Sadia – Parent, Kingsville Kindergarten]

I speak Urdu at home, because all of my family members speak Urdu, Back in Pakistan, and most of them can’t speak English. At home I also speak Urdu with Azaan so he can interact with his grandparents and all family members in Pakistan and whenever he has to visit Pakistan he can interact with them and he knows his culture at use and his mother tongue. Actually, I want him to keep connection with Pakistan and with his religion, so it is important.

03:10 [Anne Forbes, Kingsville Kindergarten]

We do support the parents in making sure they maintain their first language and making sure that the children are actually competent in their first language. We’ve had workers at different times, bilingual workers, who will help us assess the language skills of a child to see whether they’re actually competent in their first language. But it’s just regular communication with the families to say that if we can speak a few words in their home language it actually gives them a sense of belonging that we’re actually taking time to get to know a bit of their culture and make them feel a bit more comfortable in the setting.

03:46 [Monique, Kingsville Kindergarten]

I think there are lots of benefits to knowing two languages or more languages. One, it’s the cultural connection to their place of birth where we always hope to be able to go back and maybe one day live there as well. So that’s a very important reason to have the language, as well as the educational benefits and benefits in living in a global society in the future.

04:17 [Anne Stonehouse]

Some families may think that using their home language will impede their child’s progress in learning English. This is not the case, and educators and teachers may need to explain to families that continuing to develop the first language provides the literacy basis for the subsequent languages to be developed

04:36 [Sadika Iqbal – Multicultural Aide, Dandenong West Primary School]

Some of the parents will come and ‘we don’t want them to forget the language’, some of them will come and tell you ‘we don’t care’, they will forget the language. The main thing is their education. It depends on the parents, what they are going to ask.

04:50 [Filiz Omer – Primary Wellbeing Worker, Dandenong West Primary School]

We recognise that students and families come to Australia with their home language and they’re confronted with having to settle into Australia and learn a new language. And we always encourage parents to interact with children in their own language and not feel pressured to have to always try and speak to their child in English because we know that children get exposure to English at school as part of their learning and they get exposure to the English language in their social interactions with their other peers, and it’s OK to go home and read a book with mum that might be in their home language.

05:38 [Debbie David – Foundation teacher, St. Albans Primary School]

You don’t want the families to feel that they’re going to lose part of their culture or their first language. Lots of parents will say ‘my English isn’t very good’ and I think, as long as you ask your child in your own language ‘how was your day? What were you learning?’ If you can’t read the books, you can share them in your own language. You would be so surprised in the classroom how quickly they pick up English, just through interacting.

06:02 [Lisa Taverna – Foundation teacher, St. Albans Primary School]

And that’s something that both Debbie and I do when we talk to the parents, is we stress that with them, it doesn’t matter that you can’t speak English. You can still help them at home with, as she’s just said, have a look at the pictures in the book and talk about the pictures in your own language, talk about things at home, naming objects. It’s one of the things that we work a lot on at the beginning of the year, name them in your own language, so that when they come to school they may not know it in English but they know it in their own language.

06:36 [Anne Stonehouse]

It’s very important to monitor all children’s language development, particularly in their early years, including children who are learning English. Educators and teachers, especially those who are bilingual, play a vital role in monitoring children’s language development in English and in their home language.

06:54 [Tracie Quigley – Assistant Principal, St. Albans Primary School]

We rely on interpreters and our MEA staff a lot to let us know what the child’s language is like in their first language. We place a high emphasis on maintaining the home language, yes, definitely. A lot of the families I see, because I work in intervention, are children that are having difficulties at school, children that have been assessed as having cognitive difficulties, language difficulties or some sort of learning difficulty. And that’s a common question that parents ask us ‘Will it help if we stop speaking our language, our home language if we just speak to them in English? Should we just speak to them in English?’ And we’re constantly reassuring parents that no, that’s not the case, that you keep ... maintain your home language; skills will be transferred from language to language. It’s not the language that matters so much; it’s the skills that the children are developing. And if the parents are more au-fait in their home language, then it’s best to stick to that because they will model more advanced language skills to their children.

07:55 [Zina Al-Gazaly – Education support & family liaison officer, Wilmot Rd]

So what happens is it’s usually a bit harder for the little ones, the Foundation students, even grade 1 and 2’s, because they’re more around English and they watch English TV, they have stronger English than they do Arabic. But that’s when they’re younger, and then sometimes they would say words to a teacher in Arabic instead of English because they just get that mixed up. But as they get older, their Arabic becomes stronger, they go to Arabic classes, they get stronger. And then, by the time they are in grade 6 and then onwards, their language is really strong.

08:32 [Rachel Morgan– Foundation Teacher, Wilmot Rd Primary School]

Their home language is very important, especially for making connections, so obviously we all learn through making connections. If they can connect something in English to something in Arabic, then that learning is going to be more important to them and more valuable so they’ll hopefully retain it. So I think it’s very important that they, that we acknowledge their home language and promote it in the classroom when needed.

08:54 [Sharon Thompson – Literacy EAL coordinator, Wilmot Rd Primary School]

Part of my role is working with parents when they come in, and I certainly advocate to them all the time, even with the home reading, the parents may not have English, but actually conveying the message across, reading the illustrations even for these students is really important in their native tongue. It actually builds their proficiency in their first language, which then actually corresponds across to the second language of English. So it’s not seen as a deficit as such, but actually a real strength model because these kids become fluent in two… some of these children, by the time they’re through the school, are actually proficient in three or four languages and that’s really quite special and something quite unique. And often when we have new students in, even at the Foundation level, we get others to help out in their own language if they can’t get a concept, because we still need to know whether they can take up that concept in their own language - whether it’s a learning difficulty or a language difficulty, and I think it’s really important to distinguish between the two. That takes a long time to develop.