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TITLE: Children's rights and language education.

CAROLINA CABEZAS-BENALCAZAR, RESEARCHER & EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL: The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework highlights the principle of equity and diversity and encourages educators to recognise multilingualism as an asset and support children:

* maintain their first language,
* learn English as an additional language,
* and learn languages other than English.

Early childhood educators play a fundamental role in according, protecting and enacting children's cultural and linguistic rights.

MELODIE DAVIES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FKA CHILDREN'S SERVICES: The Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia acknowledges that culture is the fundamental building block of identity, and the development of a strong cultural identity is essential to children's healthy sense of who they are and where they belong. It asserts that children must have access to services that nurture, celebrate and reinforce their culture and support the development of their cultural identity.

CAROLINA CABEZAS-BENALCAZAR: Research shows children use languages and develop bilingualism depending on the experiences and environments that they are exposed to. They can be simultaneous or sequential bilinguals, meaning they can learn two or more languages from birth or acquire then consecutively.

Children learn to differentiate their languages from a very young age, and they're able to distinguish how to use their languages with different people in different contexts and for different purposes.

The ecological model underpinning the Victorian framework acknowledges the life of each child within social, political, economic and environmental context, which shapes and influences the learning and development.

By understanding the importance of children's emergent bilingualism and language learning from a holistic perspective, early childhood professionals can develop strategies that foster multilingualism, and encourage children and families to maintain their family languages, to learn English, and to establish connections that strengthen their bilingual identities.

Early childhood educators can also plan, implement and advocate for programs and practices that hold high expectations and work for the best interest of every child.

MELODIE DAVIES: In the early childhood education and care setting, much work has been done to genuinely uphold the image of the child as a rights holder and a competent learner with capacities to learn from birth. However, more work needs to be done as we move from an attitude of inclusion to thinking with a rights lens.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines this approach as requiring a paradigm shift away from approaches in which children are perceived and treated as objects in need of assistance rather than as rights holders entitled to non-negotiable rights. The convention goes on to describe the responsibilities of duty bearers, to meet their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil those rights. As early childhood organisations, teachers and educators, we are those duty bearers.

HELEN KING, TEACHER: We know that in this climate of our history, there are strengths in understanding where you come from. So, that is about your uniqueness and about your difference. And so we know that it's really important to be open to people who are different, but it's about understanding that we are all equal when we walk through this door.

[Thanks to the children and families at Boroondara Kindergarten who participated in these videos. Thanks to Boroondara Kindergarten staff: Helen King, Early Childhood Educator; Khanh-Tho Nguyen, Early Childhood Educator; Luu Hong Vuong, Co-educator; Intissar Saeed, Additional Assistant; Vanessa Soo Wing Yuee, Pre-Service Student. Authorised and published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority]