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Supporting Children's Language Awareness and Cultural Identity

Family Handbook

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SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

FAMILY HANDBOOK

"As a team, we will:

Communicate openly and honestly in order to build on one another's ideas.
Respect each other's differences, but keep the goal clear (for the children).
Encourage and motivate each other to enjoy the process through humour and
positivity.

Use flexibility and critical thinking to collaborate on shared goals."

Berlin, November, 2017

Group production by:

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AUTHORS' NOTE

In this book, we use the term “family” for all kinds of structures where adults take emotional, financial and legal care children. We use the term “parent” to describe the most significant adult taking care of the child/children, who has an emotional bond with them. We use the word “educator” to describe the person working with a group of children in an institutionalised setting. We use the word “kindergarten” to describe this institutionalised setting for early years education. When referring to the general “child,” we use the plural pronoun “they,” in order to remain gender neutral. We recognize gender, culture and identity as a spectrum and intend for everyone to be represented in this text.

A NOTE FOR TRANSLATORS

The authors request that the careful choice of terminology, gender neutrality and representations of all genders and cultures will be respected in all future translations of this text.

INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this handbook, you may have an interest in how to support your child's language development in a new multilingual setting or are considering moving to a setting with your child that is focused on a new language. Members who took part in this project have all worked in multilingual and multicultural kindergartens and have experience in making the process of settling young children into a diverse kindergarten a positive one. This can be an exciting but maybe overwhelming time and can have implications for the whole family. This handbook was created with children between the ages of 11 months and 7 years in mind. The aim is to help your family understand the unique aspects of settling your child into a new environment and how to assist in the language learning process through the exciting journey you have embarked on. Your child may be immersed in more than one language and surrounded by diverse cultural influences in the kindergarten setting. Transitioning into this new and diverse setting may bring questions on how to best accompany your child in this process and their language development.

We will discuss:

- Early years language acquisition
- Non-verbal communication with children
- Cultural and linguistic identity

A compilation of experience and personal tips from educators, as well as theoretical information, are included in this handbook in hopes to offer a deeper insight into children's language development, aspects of cultural and linguistic identity and how the two relate to one another in a kindergarten context. We consider it important to understand the benefits and potential challenges that every child may face when being part of a multilingual and multicultural environment. By sharing our experiences and expertise, we hope to offer ideas on ways of assisting your child in their time in kindergarten and promoting the relationship and cooperation with your kindergarten. The handbook should be providing information and descriptions of specific situations that may arise in kindergarten and how they may be handled. This handbook can be used as reference to positively add to the whole experience that is a multicultural and multilingual kindergarten.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE AND AFFECTION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

We, as educators, have committed to taking an empathetic, child-centred and affectionate approach to teaching and caretaking in early childhood education. Not only does this continue to be essential for strengthening our bonds with the children we work with, but we are also convinced that emotional care, love, affection and empathy are vital to a child's development and a fundamental aspect in the kindergarten as well as in the home. In recent years, the growing research in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, psychoanalysis and biochemistry with regards to emotional life are converging to offer a deeper understanding of emotion that supports our experiences and beliefs as educators. In Sue Gerhardt's, *Why Love Matters*, she references neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, and writes that "the rational part of the brain does not work on its own, but only at the same time as the basic regulatory and emotional parts of the brain" (Gerhardt, 2015). Feelings and emotions play a tremendous role in raising healthy and stable children: they are an undeniable aspect

of human life, parenting and teaching. Through our work in early childhood education, we are dedicated to nurturing the feelings and emotions of children and hope to offer them a view of the world that is shaped by respect, empathy, love and affection. All aspects of this handbook, therefore, stand on the fundamental ideas of a respectful, empathetic and affectionate way of interacting with one another.

CHAPTER 1

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN

Language is an essential part of our identity, providing a key means of self-expression, enabling us to form relationships and bonds, to communicate needs and express our opinions. Language helps to support the child's learning processes in all other areas in the kindergarten, including social-emotional skills, as well as simply navigating through their days at kindergarten. Acquiring language skills, for instance, is related to the ability to focus, take turns, problem solve and successfully interact with others. It serves as a foundation to promote learning in all developmental fields. Language provides a way for the children to express themselves and to reflect, to be understood, to cooperate with others, as well as the ability to understand cues and read and process emotions, all these aspects forming the base for future learning.

Being able to communicate with those around you and being understood is vital for your child's time in kindergarten and considered a basic need. When there are communication barriers or we feel misunderstood, it is common to feel uncertain or frustrated. This can occur, for instance, when a child's home language is different from the new language spoken at the kindergarten. While children are, of course, able to read body language and communicate without spoken words, being immersed in a context where an unfamiliar language is spoken can be an intimidating experience. It is also important to keep in mind that children are, to an extent, dependant on the adults in their environment. This becomes evident when children lose the ability to understand and actively communicate with the people around them, those people the children need

to cooperate with in order to feel safe and comfortable.

The transition to a setting with a new language can be one of those situations. The potential loss of means for verbal communication in the new language can be a challenging experience for the child and it could possibly lead to feelings of insecurity, loneliness, low self-esteem or exclusion.

Seeing and understanding your children's reaction to unfamiliar situations like this might seem unclear as their feelings can be expressed in different ways. For some children, it results in retreating and shying away from interactions, for others, it leads to anger or resentment, potentially frustration and aggression.

More Than Words

Language and communication cover far more than just spoken words. Think about the many different ways you can say the simple phrase “you are going”.

Your child will receive a range of different messages from the following:

- “You are going!”
- “YOU are going.”
- “You ARE going.”
- “You are going?”

From the simple change of tone and emphasis, we can derive four completely different meanings from the same three words. What other aspects of communication can you apply this to in interactions with a child?

When used consciously, language can serve as a bridge between the adult and the child and help establish a positive connection between the two. Language and communication encompass more than just spoken language and include listening skills, body language, tone of voice, pace and volume. The mentioned characteristics of speech provide the child with enough information about the current situation and the state the adult is in, even if the child does not speak or is in a setting where they do not understand the language offered. Here, language serves more as a tool of social interaction than mere comprehension. The social dimension of language can at times provide more information than the actual spoken words themselves.

The question of how parents can assist their child in this process can be answered with their support during the time outside of kindergarten. Parents are not necessarily present throughout the child's whole day and the kindergarten becomes a space for the child to grow and learn. Children have

many different interactions during their day at kindergarten and will develop in areas like self-efficacy, self-confidence, autonomy, empathy and resilience. These are skills that children need to learn for themselves. Outside of kindergarten, it can be valuable for parents to support their child to use language and communication to help prepare them for what is ahead by talking about experiences and reflecting together. This can benefit children during their time at kindergarten without their parent being physically present. How and when a parent communicates with their child can help the child feel more relaxed and comfortable in challenging situations. When relaxed and comfortable, the child, in turn, will be able to actively explore their surroundings and stay open to learning and new experiences. Parents can serve as role models in the home by using communication and language to address important situations and by comforting and supporting their child in new and unknown situations outside of kindergarten. Language can, therefore, be used as a tool to guide and support the child.

The Pikler approach, from the pedagogy of Emmi Pikler, refers to the conscious use of language as a tool to form an authentic and deep bond with a child. The language used with the child should be respectful and attentive as it tries to mirror the child's actions, interests or initiatives. A calm and interested tone of voice coupled with the continuity of communication accompanies the child in their world of experiences and gives the child a feeling of safety, joyful interaction and appreciation, building a relationship between the adult and the child. Using the Pikler approach, the adult observes the child and narrates what the child is doing and what will happen to the child next. This use of language accompanied with the shared experiences between parent and child prepares the child for changes or unforeseen situations, provides a feeling of security, of being seen and being in control. This should be an empowering experience for the child.

Families can support their child through discussing their child's day with their educators, and in turn discussing po-

sitive or challenging experiences with their child at home. Continuing to support the home language(s) and ensuring that the child has a solid language base from which to express themselves contributes to a strong, positive sense of identity. This sense of identity is crucial to consolidating a child's sense of belonging and understanding their place in the world.

CHAPTER 2

LANGUAGE LEARNING IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Language is an important means to express ourselves and constitutes a part of our identity. It contributes to who we are, where we feel at home and builds the foundation for communication with others. As your child is about to learn a new language, it would be useful to know the processes of language acquisition and how you can support your child on this journey. In this chapter, you will also find information about different ways of learning a language, which will help you understand your child's unique experience in a multi-lingual and multicultural environment.

HOW DO CHILDREN ACQUIRE LANGUAGE?

A child learns their first language early in life and they will most likely reach fluency in this language first. Although often referred to as “mother tongue”, this term does not represent the fluid nature of languages and the ability to acquire more than one language si-

multaneously. Speaking of languages in fixed terms with clear distinctions between the languages disregards the hybridity and uniqueness of linguistic influences throughout a child's life.

The process of learning an additional language can be referred to as “second language acquisition”. Your child might learn another language during their time in kindergarten. This usually happens in two ways: Either through a natural, non-instructive way, usually occurring at the same time as the child's first language acquisition, or through an instructive way of learning, which usually refers to classroom teaching in a group context. The latter being more common with older children in school. Although it is a complex subject, learning a first and second language at an early age is a natural process and does not necessarily lead to difficulties in acquiring language in general. Your child is the one who leads and controls the pro-

cess of language acquisition, and the family can be a guiding and supportive factor in the process. Most of the time, children can acquire several langua-

ges without difficulties, depending on their environment and their cognitive predisposition (Fillmore, 1991).

Five Key Points to Consider as Children Learn Language

1. Children go through the same developmental stages although not necessarily at the same rate.
2. Children create systematicity in their language and develop rules to govern their language knowledge and language use.
3. The rules that are developed do not necessarily correspond to the rules of the adult language.
4. Correction does not always work.
5. Language acquisition is not determined by intelligence.

(Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. p.37f)

When your child is settling into a new kindergarten you may be interested in how exactly languages are being learned. It can help you understand the process your child is going through and assist wherever possible. Children acquire language systematically and develop internal rules

to govern their language acquisition (Gass & Selinker, 2008). These rules are established quite early and can later only be modified to a certain extent. Sounds, words and sentence structures your child is exposed to on a regular basis can turn into systematic rules for your child's language acquisition.

THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEARNING

It can be helpful for you as a parent to understand the internal processes of language acquisition of children in a multilingual environment in order to assist your child on their journey in a multilingual setting. This chapter is meant to give a short overview of the theory behind learning. For the purpose of this handbook, this chapter aims at giving a basic understanding on what internal processes happen as soon as your child is exposed to different languages in a kindergarten setting.

IMPLICIT LEARNING

A child is exposed to unknown intonation, sounds, words or sentence structure. They become familiar with the specific characteristics of the language and implicitly take in the underlying structure of the language without any conscious effort. Children are like sponges, absorbing the language around them.

EXPLICIT LEARNING

A child starts to notice the unknown characteristics of the language they

are exposed to regularly. They investigate the differences in this specific language in order to make out its structure.

INCIDENTAL LEARNING

A child can learn certain features of a language from context. They can grasp the meaning of a word from the context, without obvious intention or awareness. This is most noticeable in younger children.

INTENTIONAL LEARNING

The unclear meaning of a word leads to intentional inquiry. The child might observe or ask questions. The child might explicitly ask for a certain meaning when unsure (pointing towards an object - "This? - "This is a chair") or might explain that what they are holding is a teddy bear ("me teddy bear").

THE DIVERSE USE OF LANGUAGE IN CHILDREN: CODE-SWITCHING

"Ich bin finished" (I am finished), "Tu-letko sinä outside?" (Are you coming outside?). These are examples of code-switching, which is the alternation

between two or more languages within a single conversation (Myers-Scotton, 1993). In the past, code-switching was often seen as a sign of confusion, but current research shows that this is not the case. In fact, code-switching is a sign of linguistic competence that requires a high structural understanding of both languages. Changing language in mid-sentence is a vital part of your child's learning process and should be supported rather than being seen as negative.

Once your child masters two or more languages, there can be reasons for switching languages relating to the child's emotional state. As a parent, understanding why your child may use different languages in certain situations can help you and your child in a multilingual kindergarten.

COGNITIVE CONTROL

Cognitive control allows the brain to make a conscious decision based on goals rather than habits. A child may have several languages to choose from and when emotions are heightened, they could choose which language they speak in depending on the context. When a child is in emotional

distress, they might, for instance, resort to their first language.

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Your child may be used to expressing their deepest emotions in the languages you use at home and the languages used at the kindergarten may have less of an emotional connection for the child. Your child may feel comfortable in speaking about the weather and colours, but struggle with other aspects which deal with more intense emotions for the child.

CULTURAL FRAME SWITCHING

Your child may choose a language as more appropriate than another for expressing their emotions consistent with a particular cultural frame (Panayiotou, 2004). Emotional terms are not universal, so it can be difficult to find exact translations for certain emotions. A child may code-switch so that the emotions they are trying to express are not lost in translation.

The above theories are just some potential reasons for code-switching, and each child has an individual pro-

cess of learning and using languages. A child may switch due to how they view the language of the family or the language of the newly adopted

country/culture. Usually, between the ages of three and six, children develop a social awareness of language differences.

Influences on the Development of a Child's Language Attitudes

- Peers
- Community
- Educators
- Fluency
- Experiences
- Knowledge of other languages

LANGUAGE TRANSFER

Language emerges from social context. Therefore, social interaction is crucial to a child's language development. The more time your child is exposed to a language, the better the chances are that they will learn it successfully. The general assumption that children learn languages like sponges is correct if they are offered enough opportunities to learn it (Annika Bour-gogne, 2015).

Language transfer refers to when a child transfers their knowledge of language A to language B. There are two types of language transfer. One is positive language transfer, when the acquired and applied set of rules work in both languages and the other is negative language transfer, when the same rules do not apply (Cummins, 1986).

At some point, your child will be able to distinguish between these two types.

SUPPORTING LANGUAGE AWARENESS IN YOUR CHILD

The child's environment does not determine their language acquisition, but it is an important factor in contributing to the child's language development.

The kindergarten you have chosen and you as a family can guide your child in their language acquisition by creating a supportive environment. As a family, you can give your child security by using your first language at home and being consistent in this.

Supporting Your Child's First Language

- Be consistent. Speak your first language to your child, even if they reply in another language. Do not give up!
- Reply with the correct form. Your child might make some mistakes when speaking a language or might mix two languages. That is normal with bilingual children. You can always reply to them in the correct form.
- Read. Don't skip the evening stories. The more you read to your child, the better they will learn a language.
- Meet people that speak the same language as you. It is important for children to understand there are other people who speak the same language. They learn so much from different social contexts.
- Be supportive. When your child makes a mistake, don't mention it. Just reply with the correct form. It is important for them to build self-esteem.
- Engage in different activities together. It is the best way to learn or consolidate a language. Find things you are both interested in and have fun!

CHAPTER 3

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN A KINDERGARTEN SETTING

Language can be distinguished between that which is spoken, known as verbal communication, and that which is unspoken, known as non-verbal communication, i.e., “body language”. Non-verbal communication is the ability for a child or an adult to communicate without the use of spoken words, and this includes grunts, hand gestures, facial expressions or pointing. Non-verbal communication can exist on an unconscious level, as we may use gestures or facial expressions without consciously intending to do so.

In his communication model, Paul Watzlawick argues that one cannot not communicate: “As soon as two people are together, conscious or subconscious communication takes place” (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967, p. 51). When your spoken words contradict your body language,

it can be very confusing, especially for children. They rely on the information they get from non-verbal communication in an interaction as much as they do on spoken words.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND SENSORY AIDS

Communication always requires that at least two people are involved in the process. We distinguish between the sender of a message and the recipient.

Parents and educators can foster children’s imagination and provide alternative ways of expression by including sensory aids. This offers an additional and positive source of communication which supports the child, especially in a time of transition into an unfamiliar setting.

Channels of Communication

- Acoustic (what you can hear)
- Visual (what you can see)
- Tactile (what you can touch)
- Emotional (what you can feel)

AUDITORY AIDS

Bells, chimes or songs can accompany activities in your daily routines. This can strengthen the bond with your child and stimulate positive communication. It is also helpful to include all the child's senses and use auditory aids to focus the child's attention on what they can hear.

VISUAL AIDS

Visual aids can help structure the environment and daily routines for your child. They can help your child prepare for their day at kindergarten or special events where they might not be familiar with the languages spoken. The challenges in such a situation can be lessened when your child

has had the chance to look at pictures, books, photos or any visual tools that help prepare for what is ahead. These aids can also help your child process any experiences during their time at kindergarten. Allowing time and space at home to address issues through visual aids will help your child gain confidence and comfort. They can also ease stress or potential hurdles due to language barriers as they will feel prepared and in control despite not understanding the language offered.

SCHEDULES

A clearly visible timeline based on pictures helps children visualise the daily routines or weekly events and enables them to anticipate what will happen next. Calendars where the days of the week, month and date include pictures or colours is a great tool. The colours or symbols could indicate the days of the week or stand for who will be coming for pick up that day. Especially for parents or families who travel frequently, this can be a great tool to prepare your child for the separation and a way to visualise the time spent

apart. With a visual schedule or timeline, your child can count down the days until the family is reunited. It is an age-appropriate way of incorporating a schedule for your child and encourages participation.

LABELS

Using labels or stickers to organise the child's room and their belongings can be helpful for children. Labelling where certain toys and objects belong in the room can support participation when tidying up and encourages children to independently structure and organise their space. Labels can also be helpful to use for your child's belongings at kindergarten to make clear which items belong to your child, even in situations where language barriers exist.

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP WITH NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Gestures that can be understood regardless of language will help the child understand the connected words. This can be, for instance, mimicking the action for "drinking," or gesturing for "come," etc. Incorporating consistent gestures or body language into life at home can provide your child with a tool to use their own body language to navigate through their time at kindergarten. This applies particularly for children in a multilingual setting and the sensitive phase of settling into a new environment. For your child to be able to express consent or not with the help of their body language will make it easier for the people around your child to understand them and for your

child to make themselves understood, although there might not be a shared language. This is extremely important for the settling in phase and general communication for your child in a multilingual context. In the settling in phase in a multilingual context, the child and the educators will rely heavily on the information they can exchange through non-verbal communication. By modelling and encouraging non-verbal communication at home, your child will be able to navigate different situations in a multilingual kindergarten more confidently and expand their communication skills in their new environment.

Recognising and understanding non-verbal communication with children is equally crucial to parenting or teaching. A lot of information about

the person or situation is conveyed through non-verbal communication and includes signals such as facial expressions, eyes, touching, tone of voice, as well as dress, posture and proximity. Parents should make a conscious effort to read their child's non-verbal cues and their behaviour to best respond to their needs. Even if, as a parent, you do not immediately understand what your child is trying to express or what they need in that moment, paying attention to your child's non-verbal communication is a good way to start exploring your child's feelings and needs. Parents and children then engage in a unique and valuable way of non-verbal interaction, making up a big part of their communication.

CHAPTER 4

DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Children construct their cultural identity, their individuality and their group affiliation in relation to their family and closest members of their community (Gay & Hall, 1996). Awareness of other cultural influences develops in children based on their understanding of their own experiences. As they expand their experiences in kindergarten, they will learn more about who they are and the world they live in.

For young children, culture is not abstract. Culture is lived and learned through everyday experiences and

through ways in which family and community members relate to one another; Through language, family histories, values, as well as household practices and traditions. (Cummins, 2001).

It is important to understand what shapes your child's cultural identity and a sense of self. There are many different influences throughout a child's life that will contribute and influence your child's sense of identity. Especially in a multilingual and multicultural environment, supporting your

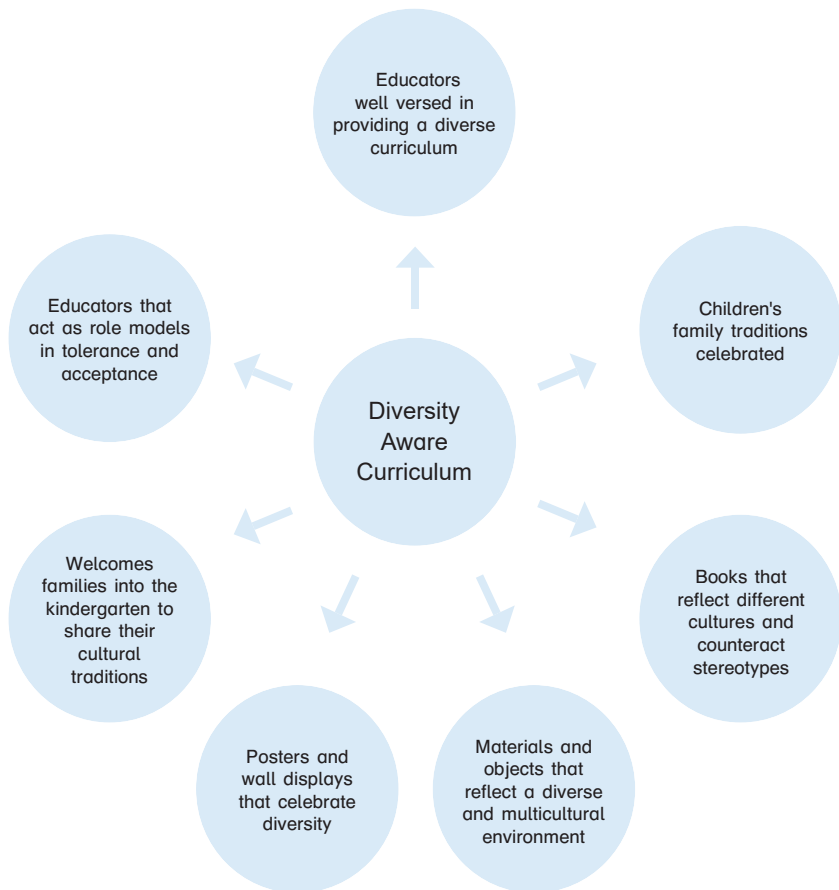
Influence on Cultural Identity

- Experiences with significant adults, family members and community
- Role models in other children and adults
- Belonging to a respective group of children, family and community

child in seeing who they are, who or what plays a big part in their lives and what their personal and family's story is, is fundamental to understanding and exploring all the different facets

of their lives. Children need to be met with a diversity sensitive and culturally appreciative attitude to explore and broaden their understanding of the diversity that is surrounding them.

HOW DIVERSITY CAN BE REFLECTED IN THE CURRICULUM:



The kindergarten's 'diversity sensitive curriculum' can play a big role in this and it can be helpful to ask about the curriculum and for families and kindergartens to work together.

How Can You Support a Diverse Curriculum?

Try to participate and offer cultural activities with your child and the group of children or expand the activity for the whole kindergarten.

Explain to your child that while there are cultural aspects that all members of a particular group celebrate, each individual family lives its own specific family culture within this community, and they choose how they celebrate it. For example, if you are joining your child's class to do a cooking session for Diwali, you may want to share what meaning the dish has for your family. You could offer the children different experiences through various ways of expressing the culture you are celebrating. Of course, the kindergarten should help and support you with these activities and it can become a shared experience.

In creating a diversity sensitive environment at kindergarten and at home, you as a parent act as a role model for your child.

We suggest to model how you would like for your child to approach diversity in various situations.

LANGUAGE AND ITS INFLUENCES ON CULTURAL IDENTITY

Language development in the early years is not an isolated process but ties into the holistic process of your child's development and influences your child's sense of self. The reason for this is that language and communication are one of the main forms of self-expression.

With language acquisition, your child now gains the ability to actively engage in social interaction, verbalise needs, wishes, boundaries, preferences and dislikes. These all form their self-expression, self-confidence, self-awareness, autonomy and independence.

Your child's identity is largely shaped by experiences in their life as well as the verbalised sense of self. The main aspect that comes into play when talking about a child's language and identity is belonging. Other aspects of

cultural identity include dressing in a certain way and expressing one's cultural background, views and beliefs. It is vital to allow children to find their own personal story based on their experiences in a multilingual, multicultural setting. It is important that all the significant people in your child's life are supporting them in maintaining a healthy connection with themselves. Children with a strong sense of identity will become adults who have learned to trust themselves.

Especially during the time of settling into a new environment, your child will be confronted with unfamiliar situations and unfamiliar people. This can be a testing time for a child and their sense of self. By supporting your child, openly communicating about their experiences and having a positive mindset towards settling in your child into a diverse institution, you can contribute to the settling in experience for your child and other children.

CHAPTER 5

LANGUAGE AS A TOOL TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Language is a powerful tool in building relationships with children. Parents can use communication with their children to comfort them in new and unfamiliar situations and prepare their children for an easier adjustment. By preparing your child for the transition before they start the settling in process in kindergarten, your child will feel more secure and will be able to draw on the emotional support that they have received from you. This preparation can occur in the morning before kindergarten or at home after kindergarten by discussing and acknowledging the process they are going through. Using language and communication to accompany them in the process will strengthen their confidence, calm them, empower them and acknowledge the effort it takes to adjust to a new environment. It will help the child positively experience the settling in phase.

HOW TO NURTURE A RELATIONSHIP THROUGH THE CONSCIOUS USE OF LANGUAGE

Language can serve as a tool of social interaction between the adult and the child and establishes a meaningful connection. The social dimension of language can provide more information than the actual words spoken.

Adults should aim to accompany the child through their language learning process rather than acting as a language teacher. The shared experiences serve as a base to build a stable relationship with the child. The language used to accompany the child is an attentive and esteeming way of mirroring the child's actions, interests or initiatives. The adult can follow the child's lead and comment on what the child is doing, what they can observe

or what they are about to do/what will happen soon. This prepares the child for any changes or unforeseen situations and provides a feeling of security and being in control which can be very empowering for the child. The child will be able to have trust in their carers and themselves. Using conscious language to accompany the child is a respectful, appreciative and considerate way to approach and interact with them. It allows for the adult and child to form an authentic and deep bond.

THE TONE, PACE AND INTENTION OF LANGUAGE AND HOW IT AFFECTS THE CHILD

Certain characteristics of speech, like a slower pace, soft volume, soft tone, etc. will provide the child with enough information about the current situation and the state the adult is in. Even if the child cannot speak yet or is in a setting where they do not understand the language offered, these characteristics are still important. This way of speaking will help the child feel relaxed and

comfortable, allowing them to actively explore their surrounding and be open for new experiences. Even if the child does not fully understand the spoken words, they will notice the responsive and respectful attitude of the adults around them. A mutual object of interest to talk about is a good way to encourage the child to join in the conversation. The calm and interested tone of voice and the continuity of communication accompanies the child in their world of experiences and gives them a feeling of safety, joyful interaction, appreciation and builds a relationship between the adult and the child.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BOOKS

Literature offers children awareness and appreciation for their own cultural heritage as well as those of others. It helps children develop emotional intelligence and creativity, nurtures the growth and development of the child's personality and social skills. The stories and themes may pass on from one generation to the next.

Reading Books is Fun but it Also...

- Develops emotional intelligence and creativity
- Nurtures growth and development of the child's personality and social skills
- Solidifies the child's own cultural identity while introducing other cultures
- Starts conversations and extends thought processes
- Impacts the child's knowledge about the world and people

Children's literature can be an excellent starting point for celebrating the diversity of our world and people. By using stories that feature a range of characters and settings, we can hope to foster the values of tolerance and mutual respect. For instance, a study in 2006 found that reading stories that showed characters with disabilities developed improved attitudes and acceptance towards others with disabilities among its participants (Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Children read and explore picture books repeatedly.

This repetition reinforces the ideas and messages they depict and emphasizes the need for quality diverse literature (Burke, 2013).

Parents and educators can provide a counter-narrative to exclusion by providing books that challenge stereotypes with characters who are sensitive and emotionally balanced. It is important to select diverse literature that does not perpetuate negative stereotypes of already marginalised groups (Symeonidou & Loizou).

Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors

Picture books are a wonderful educational tool for all children, particularly during their early years. They can act as

- Mirrors: A way for children to see themselves reflected in literature
- Windows: A way for children to see the lives of others
- Sliding glass doors: A way for children to see themselves as able to cross between groups and worlds (Bishop, 1990).

The right book in the hands of a child at the right time can be powerful, and parents can help make this happen for their child.

MIRROR NEURONS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF BOOKS

Mirror neurons are special nerve cells in the brain that make humans compassionate and responsive creatures. These cells react not only when we experience suffering, pain or joy ourselves, but also when we perceive these sensations in someone else through verbal and non-verbal communication (Graf & Seide, 2018). An important way to develop mirror neurons is through shared books and stories.

From birth, humans are equipped with mirror neurons but the ability to

reflect does not develop on its own. A child needs a partner and a form of communication they understand. A story with diverse characters and content can provoke thoughts and conversations with the child. With toddlers, it is the family who activates the possibility of mirror actions (Cummins, 2001). The child must first learn to understand and feel the feelings of others. Researchers assume that mirror neurons are fully developed between the ages of three and four years. From this point on, a child has their own, independent view of the world (Graf & Seide, 2018).

Supporting a Love of Books

Make trips to the local library together! Explore what books you want to borrow and ensure that your child has a say in which books they are interested in. You may notice certain trends in books your child likes that you can use to supplement other activities. If your child likes books about trains, you could play with a train set together and take a short trip on the train just for fun!

The following is a list of books to start with on your own reading journey. These books have been used by the educators and professionals on this project in their classrooms to promote discussions about these topics.

Llama
Llama
Misses
Mama
-
Anna
Dewsney

Timothy
Goes
to
School
-
Rosemary
Wells

The
Kissing
Penny
-
Audry
Penn

Bob and
Floie
-
Rebecca
Ashdown

Bunny
Bungalow
-
Cynthia
Rylant

Was It the
Chocolate
Pudding?
-
Sandra
Levins

Books Without Words

Wordless picture books allow children to develop their own dialogue for the story. Encourage your child to not only talk about what they see in the images but what might happen next or how the characters are feeling.

Mirror - Jeannie Baker

Babies Around the World - Puck and Violet Lemay

A Color of His Own - Leo Lionni

The Great Big Book of Families - Mary Hoffman and Ros Asquith

Unique and Wonderful - Dee Smith

Mostly Monsterly - Tammi Sauer

All Kinds of Families! - Mary Ann Hoberman

Lovely - Jess Hong

Books in Your Home Languages

You may struggle to find books in your home languages in your local library or bookstore.

Don't be afraid to translate a book and retell the story in your own words. Alternatively, find out which books your child enjoys during kindergarten storytime and try to find the same books online.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL TOPICS

Guess How Much
I Love You

-
Sam McBratney

The Tiger Who
Came to Tea

-
Judith Kerr

The Rainbow Fish

-
Marcus Pfister

Teeth Are Not
For Biting

-
Elizabeth Verdick

In My Heart

-
Jo Witek

How Are You Feeling
Today?

-
Molly Potter

I Feel Angry

-
Brian Moses

The Huge Bag
of Worries

-
Virginia Ironside

Molly the Mole

-
Alice Reeves
and Phoebe Kirk

Making a Difference

-
Cheri J. Meiners

Carlos the Chameleon

-
Alice Reeves
and Phoebe Kirk

A Book of Feelings

-
Amanda McCardie
and Salvatore Rubbino

This chapter has aimed to provide you with an understanding of how you can assist your child's language development, transitions and wellbeing at home through the simple process of reading books together. The positive outcomes that have been discussed in

this chapter include emotional competence, a greater perspective on diversity and the solidification of your child's identity. Experiencing books together should be a pleasurable experience, strengthening the bond between you and your child in a fun and lasting way.

CONCLUSION

This handbook has provided you with a range of information, tips and theory on the best ways to develop your child's linguistic capabilities from home and reflect on the work of your educators in your child's kindergarten.

Language development in the early years is not an isolated process but ties into the holistic course of your child's development. Language development is fluid and you may find that your child develops the ability to talk about different things in your home language and in the language of the kindergarten. This process will change as language is acquired and it is your task to accompany your child through this learning process. Your confidence and commitment to this process will ensure your child has the support to develop their language skills further. For your child, the differ-

ent languages are not easily distinguished or clearly separable, they are a hybrid of languages. It is this complex and fluid construct of linguistic influences that form the child's own personal linguistic and cultural identity.

It is important to recognise that your role as a parent is one that will develop and grow throughout your child's life and that your child's wellbeing is a collaboration between all the people in their lives. By promoting a sense of pride and strength in your home culture and an openness towards the outside world, you are providing your child with the building blocks they need to thrive. You have taken a wonderful first step in this process by showing a willingness to learn and adapt to your child's needs. The benefits of multilingualism will be something you and your child will enjoy for many years to come.

MATERIAL LIST: EDUCATORS AND PARENTS AS PARTNERS

In addition to these handbooks, the research team has provided a series of materials to help educators as well as families as they embark on the settling in process. One intention of the materials for educators is to bring more attention to the care and the effort educators must put into this process for it to go as smoothly as possible. From the connection and communication between the teaching team, attention to the individual child, to the way educators communicate with parents, it is important to highlight how these tools can go a long way.

The second intention of these materials is to help educators and families work together from the beginning to strengthen the home/school connection. The members of this project believe whole-heartedly that parents are the experts of their children in the home, and educators are experts of children in the classroom and that it is important that we work together to learn and grow from one another. Without this connection, which also

shows both sides how important the image and the safety of the child is, a positive settling in process cannot occur. Below, you will find a list of the materials we have included with a little information on what each material entails.

PARENT & CHILD MATERIALS

PARENT/CHILD RECIPE SAMPLE

This material is a suggestion of what educators could do to help families feel more comfortable with the food being served in the kindergarten. It provides a sample recipe, written in a child-friendly way, with pictures, big letters and simple instructions, so that families can make dishes with their child in anticipation of what may be served at the kindergarten.

SPOTIFY PLAYLISTS

This material focuses on the auditory connection children make between home and school. There are a variety of pre-made playlists provided as an example of how music from different cultural celebrations can be played both at home and school to reinforce this home/school connection as well as the importance of celebrating all cultures.

COLOURFUL FRIENDS

This material explores language connections through drawings and colours and is recommended for children three and above. These pictures can be given to families to help children learn simple words, such as colours and how to say hello in the language of their new kindergarten.

GLOSSARY

Definitions to apply in kindergarten context:

BILINGUALISM

Fluency in or use of two languages (Lexico, 2019).

CODE-SWITCHING

The alternation between two or more languages within a single conversation (Myers-Scotton, 1993).

COGNITIVE CONTROL

The brain makes conscious decisions based on goals rather than habits (Williams, Srinivasan, Liu, & Pearl Lee, 2019).

CULTURAL FRAME SWITCHING

Bilingual and multilingual speakers choose one language as more appropriate than another for conveying their emotions (Panayiotou, 2004).

CULTURAL IDENTITY

The definition of groups or individuals (by themselves or others) in terms of cultural or subcultural categories (including ethnicity, nationality, language, religion and gender) (Oxford Reference, 2019).

DIVERSITY

A range of different things or people being included in something (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019).

FIRST LANGUAGE

The acquisition of one's native language or "mother tongue", usually learned in the family setting and with a primary bonding person (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007, p. 7).

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The acquisition of another language "in a setting in which the language to be learned is not the language to be

spoken in the local community”, usually in a formally instructed way, in a classroom or school context (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007, p. 7).

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The act of acquiring a language.

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

The feelings, beliefs and attitudes people have about language in general, their language and the language of other people (Yu-Hsiu Lee, 2018).

LANGUAGE HIERARCHY

Language attitudes reflect language-based social evaluations and expresses an explicit preference and judgement of a language, its speakers and users (Yu-Hsiu Lee, 2018).

LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE

Practical experience and use of a language (Chomsky, 1980).

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

The unconscious knowledge of grammar that allows a speaker to use and understand a language (Chomsky, 1980).

METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS

The ability to objectify language as a process and an artifact.

MIRROR NEURONS

A type of sensory-motor cell that is activated when an individual performs an action or observes another individual performing the same action.

MONOLINGUALISM

Monolingualism considers people who speak one language.

However, monolinguals usually use different varieties, styles and registers of their language. Most commonly these are different dialects, creoles or slangs within a language (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007, p. 7).

MULTILINGUALISM

The ability to use more than two languages equally. These languages can be acquired simultaneously, learning multiple languages at the same time from birth, or by successively learning languages after the first language has already been established (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007, p. 7).

SECOND LANGUAGE

The acquisition of another language “in a setting in which the language to be learned is the language spoken in the local community,” in an instructed or non-instructed way (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007, p. 7).

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Berlin Cosmopolitan School - Erasmus+ Research Team







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Children need healthy environments in which to grow, develop, play and learn. Their environments are complex and ever-changing.

The adult can be a role model, providing children with appropriate, healthy options and behaviour in all aspects of life.

This way, educators and families are helping children develop into confident, independent people who have a strong sense of self-efficacy, empathy and are internationally minded.

