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Good afternoon and welcome. My name is Kerri McLachlan, student number 2316526. The module code for this presentation is ECEY4004.

My presentation today will look at the benefits of both bilingualism and multilingualism and their effect on brain development and divergent thinking. I will explore some of the frameworks used, to help and encourage children using more than one language and will also discuss the importance of English as an additional language.

According to Study Smarter (2024), bilingualism refers to someone able to speak two languages. Individuals may have been raised speaking both languages alongside each other, known as simultaneous bilingualism. Some bilinguals may have learned a second language later in life, eventually becoming fluent in both their first and second languages. This is called sequential bilingualism. The term bilingualism can be broken down further, as being individual or societal. Study Smarter (2024) defines an individual bilingual as one person who can speak two languages, whereas societal bilingualism refers to a whole country or community who all speak two languages.

Okal (2014) defines multilingualism as the ability to express oneself in several languages, speaking each with equal proficiency. Wei and Moyer (2008), consider a multilingual to be someone who can communicate in more than one language, either actively, or passively.

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Dictionary.com (2024), suggests that a multilingual can use, write, or speak several languages with some degree of success. Baker and Wright (2021) say other factors can affect whether a person is considered multilingual. For example, whether they write and

speak the language, or simply understand and read it. Some bilinguals may use different languages in different settings, whilst some may still be developing their second language, whilst being fluent in their first. Others could be so proficient in their second language, that their first language begins to recede. Whichever the case, Baker and Wright (2021) consider it rare for bilinguals to show equal proficiency in both languages, with one usually being dominant.

According to Diaconu (2022), settings that encourage multilingualism, are adding academic and educational value to children's learning. Exposing children to multiple languages creates cultural awareness, giving them an appreciation of the values held by their peers. It can also enhance creativity and help children to recognise and appreciate diversity in their community. Baumgart and Billick (2017) state that bilingualism is also linked to higher levels of controlled attention. Being bilingual can safeguard against the decline in executive function during old age, as it contributes to cognitive reserve. A disadvantage, however, as stated by Baumgart and Billick (2017), is that bilinguals may have a smaller vocabulary and exhibit slower word retrieval for each language they speak. Chibaka (2017) considers the sociocultural aspect to be advantageous. Similarly to Diaconu (2022), Chibaka (2017) considers that culture is shared and expressed through language, therefore multilinguals are also multicultural and can adapt to and understand unfamiliar cultures more easily, leading to the lessening of racism and intolerance of cultural differences. This view is shared by Vygotsky (1962), who believes that good social and cultural relationships are crucial to a child's development. Vygotsky considered a child's earliest speech as a baby, as being a purposeful attempt at communicating socially with others. Okal (2014) states that multilingualism gives jobseekers a competitive edge over other candidates, who may only possess basic professional and academic skills.

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With increasing numbers of EAL children in settings, there are many considerations for the Early Years practitioner. According to NALDIC (2015), one in six primary school pupils did not have English as their first language in 2013. This amounts to over 612,000 pupils, a figure that has doubled since 1997. Attainment of Pupils with English

as an Additional Language (2019), states that EAL children who start school prior to Year 2, have a slightly higher attainment score, reinforcing the fact that the difference we can make in Early Years is substantial. The Early Years Statutory Framework (2023) dictates that providers must give sufficient opportunities for children to learn English, reaching a good standard before they reach Year 1. This is essential as all assessments of children's communication, language and literacy skills must be done in English. Burnham (2016) suggests if a child is not confident in the English language, practitioners should explore their knowledge and understanding with parents, in their home language, to check for language delays. Programmes such as Wellcomm (2017-2024) provide simple methods of assessing children's speech skills, detecting problems at an early stage, and suggesting suitable interventions to combat these difficulties. Early Years Alliance (2022) further suggests making use of bilingual staff or children in the setting. If this is not possible, it can be useful to ask parents for a few key words in the child's home language, to help you connect and communicate with them. In practice, steps should be taken to ensure effective communication with EAL parents also. When only one parent speaks English, NSPCC (2014) considers they can become a filter between the non-English speaking parent and the outside world. This could lead to help and support being restricted for them, or in the case of a child who acts as interpreter for a parent, the child may unwittingly become involved in inappropriate conversations. Open Access Government (n.d.) recommends the use of symbols, enabling children to point to what they need, if they are unable to verbalise.

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The pictorial system is also recommended by Burnham (2016), who promotes the use of visual props, rhyme, and song. This is a method I used in my activity, using visual cards, and making up a rhyme to recap what we had learned in our session ('What can we see? Numbers 1, 2, 3' and 'What did we try? Eins, zwei, drei'). Burnham (2016) also mentions the importance of giving EAL children time to play with English speaking peers, so they learn English in context. There are lots of opportunities for group play in the Early Years setting, for example role play and singing songs. Birth to Five Matters (2021) mentions the importance of building strong relationships with home and other

places of importance to a child. Celebrating and respecting the diversity of communities gives children and their families a sense of belonging. Language is part of their culture and it is important to support them in continuing to use their mother tongue, as well as teaching English. This links in with articles 7 and 8 of the UNCRC (UNICEF 1989), which states that all children are entitled to a name, nationality, and identity, of which language is an important part.

Turning to the effect of multilingualism on brain development, according to Participate Learning (2020), a 2004 study by psychologists, Ellen Bialystok, and Michelle Martin-Rhee, showed bilingual children to achieve better results than monolinguals, when asked to sort items by size and colour. It was also found that children who learned a second language at an early age showed more empathy towards others, as they were able to see things from multiple perspectives. Nacamulli (2015) talks about the two sides of the brain and their functions during language acquisition. The brain's left hemisphere is responsible for analytical, logical processes, whilst the right side is involved in social and emotional processing. Learning a language involves both sides of the brain and this therefore led to a 'critical period' theory, where the plasticity of a child's brain lets them use both sides at once. Due to reduced plasticity, an adult learning a second language would mostly use the left side of their brain, meaning they

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would not have the same holistic grasp of the language, as a child may have. It was however found, that regardless of age, the processes involved in retrieving words in two or more languages, resulted in higher density of grey matter in the brain, containing more neurons and synapses, therefore making it healthier.

We now turn to the effects of bilingualism and multilingualism on divergent thinking. A study by Kharkhurin (2008) found that Russian-English bilinguals outperformed monolinguals in verbal divergent thinking tasks. Also, Farsi-English bilinguals had a higher capacity for innovation than monolinguals, when considering the originality of

their ideas. Comparable results were however not found, when doing the same test with Russian-English bilinguals. A more recent study by Booton et al. (2021) casts doubts on Kharkhurin's findings, revealing no difference between bilingual and monolingual children. Similarly, Lange et al. (2020) also found no advantage to divergent thinking in young adults and neither did Ritter et al (2012), who believes that the more varied life experiences of bilinguals affect their creativity more than the fact that they speak two languages. Overall, results are non-conclusive, and it should not be assumed by practitioners that bilinguals will automatically do well at creative thinking tasks.

With regard to frameworks and programmes designed to help bilingual or multilingual children in our settings, there are many available resources. As well as information to assist practitioners, it is important to know about materials we can signpost to parents and carers who may have worries or concerns about their child's language development. Bookstart UK (2019) can provide dual language books in over 30 languages and websites such as Multilingual Parenting (n.d.) can provide personalised support for EAL children and families. Referring to the EYFS Statutory Framework (2023) and the Early Learning Goals for People, Culture and Communities,

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also assists practitioners in providing suitable activities to support the achievement of these outcomes. For example, children are required to know the difference between some religious and cultural communities, which could be achieved by inviting families of EAL children into the setting to talk about their lives and traditions. University of Massachusetts Global (n.d.) states that children perform better if their home culture is incorporated into their school environment. This shows they are represented and respected amongst the school community. Similarly to Bruner (1977) as cited by Tonkin, Alderson, and Roberts (2008), the University of Massachusetts Global (n.d.) suggests using examples that connect to the children's lives, when talking to EAL students. During my activity, I compared the German word for 'three' (drei), to the English word 'dry', being the opposite of 'wet', to assist with the pronunciation of the German word. This supports Bruner's spiral curriculum theory, where children need to

make sense of their knowledge, before being moved to the next stage of their learning. As mentioned by Teachkloud (2017), the way a practitioner caters for language acquisition in their setting will depend on their personal views on the many language theories available. If you believe a child learns language by themselves, you may not become as involved in their acquisition planning. Also, if you believe language develops naturally as a child grows older, you may not be keen to push language acquisition at such an early age.

In conclusion, the benefits of being bilingual or multilingual appear to outweigh the disadvantages. To show awareness and respect of children's home culture is key in making them feel comfortable and welcome in their Early Years setting and can also provide numerous ideas for enriching activities which all children can share and learn from. In turn, this helps children to feel valued and included in their environment and serves as a good basis for acceptance of all cultures throughout life in education and beyond. A world where no one feels excluded or discriminated against, is a world we should all aspire to achieve. Thank you for listening.

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