TONGA SCHOOLS - NETWORK

Framework
Communication between plurilingual families and school stakeholders
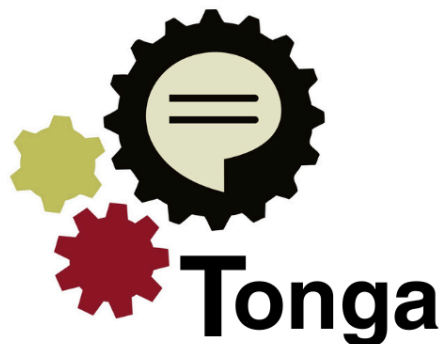
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FRAMEWORK
&
TOOLKIT for School Staff

Project Nº 2023-1-FR01-KA220-SCH-000154396

Introduction

The manual you are holding is part of our **Tonga Schools Network Project** - a cooperation project between five organisations[1] from five European countries and funded by the Erasmus+ programme. This project aims to support and help **develop good communication and collaboration between the schools and their staff with the plurilingual families** whose children are attending their school. With the ongoing flux of migrant families arriving in Europe, the number of children who speak other languages than the school language has increased dramatically in the school. Moreover their parents do not always master the local or societal language and can be at a loss when it comes to (compulsory) education. They have come to a new society and have to send their children to a system they have heard about, but do not know from the inside. As for the schools and their staff who welcome those children and their families, they are not always armed with the right tools to welcome those families, nor to communicate with them. The diversity of languages and stories can make the life of the school difficult and they sometimes find themselves at a loss.

In this project, we want to give schools and staff tools to help them communicate better with the families whose children are attending their school and who do not master the school and/or community local language. We aim to empower plurilingual parents [of migrant background] in language planning and guide them on how to communicate about their languages and usage with school stakeholders. Plurilingual upbringing is not a one-time language choice but a dynamic and complex process.

The project is a practical contribution to the discussion on **Family Language Policy as well to the discussion on Family and School collaboration** for the well-being and academic success of the children especially when the families are plurilingual and of migrant and/or low-socio economic backgrounds. What is Family Language Policy? Family Language Policy or FLP is linked to the language usage in the home

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[1] *APAM in France, IMIB in Germany, iFALL in Sweden, Fundacion Red Incola in Spain and UCLan in Cyprus.*

and between the family members. It refers to the planning of the home languages, or heritage language. FLP has been under study by researchers as it is there that many languages are being passed on, acquired or even lost. Isabel Velázquez (2019) considers the home as a "small places"[2] and her book she explains how Family Language Policy and thus the manner parents are able to transmit their language can affect the maintenance or the loss of heritage languages, and thus of the cultures attached to them. Our project is not on FLP, however, we encourage the school stakeholders to encourage parents to have one and to keep using their heritage language(s) with the children.

Effective communication and collaboration between school stakeholders and plurilingual families are essential for children's well-being and their academic success. This includes everything from simple reminders, like bringing swimwear for a pool visit or packing a sandwich and drink for a school outing, to more significant interactions, such as explaining classroom activities and maintaining strong relationships between teachers and parents or tutors regarding school events, classwork, and extracurricular activities.

It is important that the school understands what parents are expecting from the school. It is just as important to let parents know what the school is expecting from the parents and what the school expects from the children. Coming from different cultures, this is not always obvious for the families. They often are at a loss. This is an important aspect of good communication and collaboration.

The tools created in this project are:
➔ "Tonga Schools Network - A Manual for Schools" which is providing information and practical ideas for the school stakeholders - it is divided into a framework (which you are now reading) and a toolkit booklet which can be downloaded from our website;
➔ "Tonga School Network - Training Online" which is providing training for school staff on multilingual and intercultural education;
➔ "Tonga School Network - A Family Booklet" which is providing plurilingual parents with tools on up-bringing their children with several languages as well as presenting them how to talk about their choices around them;
➔ Videos about some important elements of the toolkit;

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[2] Velazquez, Isabel (2019) *Household Perspective on Minority Language Maintenance and Loss* - Multilingual Matters

➔ Portraits presenting challenges that parents are faced with and how we suggest solving them;

➔ Parents' Cafés which are places for parents to learn about the school system, the formal education of their children and for school stakeholders to meet the parents and share with them.

All those tools are in six languages, the different languages of the partners of the project: English, French, German, Greek, Spanish and Swedish and freely downloadable from our project website: www.tonga-schools.eu

The aim of this framework is to help those who are working in a primary school to collaborate and communicate as easily as possible with parents from different backgrounds, different cultures and different languages. By using the tools and strategies outlined in this manual and toolkit attached, schools and families can build stronger partnerships, ultimately ensuring the well-being and academic success of all children.

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*"Good collaboration between schools and families
can create an environment that promotes
students' emotional wellbeing as well as their academic skills"*

Paccaud A, Keller R, Luder R, Pastore G and Kunz[3]

I. General introduction - Framework

Introduction

Multilingualism is very common around the world, one in three people is bilingual or plurilingual (Wei 2000). More and more children are growing up with several languages, either because they grow up in a binational family, or because they have moved to another country and have a language at home and another one at school. It can be two languages; however, it can be more and they all have an importance for them and their parents who have been passing them on. Raising children with several languages can be quite complex, especially when the languages spoken at home are not the languages of the environment. Languages used at home which become the main home languages can be re-defined as the cultural frame of reference changes. In other words, the heritage language is always staying the same, but home language can vary as children are growing up, the family gets bigger and/or if the family moves. Languages spoken in the "small space"[4] (Velásquez, 2019) are of great importance for the identity of the children and parents who speak them. Languages may experience positive or negative social pressure. Parents are the prime educators and the choices they make for their children are therefore of great importance, also in terms of languages which are passed on to their children. It is certainly not an easy task for the parents, and it can be complicated for families who have lived migration and/or are economically and socially disadvantaged. Societal pressure, school pressure may lead parents to abandon heritage language(s) for the local language. There is then a loss, both for the parents and the children; this loss is a loss of a language, but also what a language means in terms of identity, culture and heritage. Migrant and refugee families have so much to do when arriving in a new country that they can find it

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[3] *Paccaud A, Keller R, Luder R, Pastore G and Kunz A (2021) Satisfaction With the Collaboration Between Families and Schools – The Parent's View. Front. Educ. 6:646878. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2021.646878*

[4] *Isabel Veláquez calls home a « small space » in « Household Perspectives on Minority Language Maintenance and Loss ». (2019)*

difficult to find the time and energy to look after the language education of their children. They can also find it complicated to have access to the (scientific) findings and resources which are not so readily available in a language they understand.

Let's start with a few points which are important to develop a good collaboration between the migrant plurilingual families and the school.

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"A child's experience of schooling depends on the connection between his family and social environment, and on welfare in case of families at risk. [...] The nature of cooperation depends on the local tradition and culture as well as socio-economic status of school district"[5]. The research has shown that the inclusion of family contributes to better educational outcomes, improves attendance and increases students' responsibility for fulfilling school obligations (Catsambis & Beveridge, 2001; Simon, 2004). They[6] go on quoting Epstein: "if the communication between teachers and families is regular and transparent, students' attendance improve and chronic absence decreases over the year"[7] (Epstein et al, 2004; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). The same goes for student achievement. School is a place where people meet and where communication happens.

"It is important to establish sustainable relationships between school principals, teachers, students, and families in order to promote students' academic success and well-being (Hattie, 2010; Sacher, 2016)." Recent research has shown that parents and schools used to have separate roles in the education of children, i.e. school was in charge of the formal education and the family in charge of the extracurricular education. Nowadays, school and family share both education, both the school and the family are places of socialisation and learning for children and teenagers (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Epstein, 2011). Communication is a key element for a good collaboration between the families and the schools; however, it is not easy and it can be difficult to implement. "Schools and teachers need to pay more attention to the development of a culture of living together - (Cankar, Deutsch, Sentočnik - 2012)"

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[5] *Cankar, Deutsch, Sentočnik "Approaches to Building Teacher-Parent Cooperation" in C*E*P*S Journal - volume 2 | N°1 | Year 2012*

[6] *ibid*

[7] *ibid*

The quality of the cooperation and communication between school and families is of great importance, even though the quality is a subjective reality as it is linked to people's feelings and the emotional relationships between them. This can also be linked to the attitude we have towards some languages and some cultures. There must be some mutual agreement between schools and families.

The school guidelines for the family-school cooperation are based on the assumption of a shared value system; which is usually not the case, in particular with plurilingual families of migration backgrounds, as they are missing a similar foundation which could create harmony.

The method used by teachers to communicate with parents is of importance (web page, email, personal visit, brochure…). Parents must be able to understand what they receive, so it should be in a language they can read when it is in writing. If parents are not literate, the school should try and invest in a method that those parents can understand, such as oral communication.

If parents have the possibility to visit the school, it gives them a chance to visualise where their children are going to spend most of their days. This is reassuring for them. It is also important for the school to try and have parents' involvement in extracurricular activities

What kind of cooperation?

Teachers questioned the type of activities in which parents can be involved. Parents can accompany them during outings; they can be part of a parents' association or a parents' café. However, the school has to let them know those possibilities do exist.

Teachers should also let the parents see what is happening in the classroom. Usually, teachers do not appreciate parent's interference with their work in the classroom. However, when parents understand how the class is working, this makes a big difference.

Having the parents' presence in the classroom may not be a habit of your school. However, we suggest that at the beginning of the year, parents could sit in silence at the back of the class to see how the teacher is interacting with his/her students. This is reassuring, especially for parents who have never attended schools. Parents with a migration background who are not used to our school system are only wishing to look and discover. They are not going to intervene. This just gives them the chance to get familiarised with the teacher's approaches and instruction. Teachers may feel

judged by those families, but in fact they are there to judge, they are there because they only wish to feel reassured as to where their children are going to be.

Some parents may wish to help the teachers, we would then suggest to see what your school can do and see with the parents what abilities they can bring to the class.

There are common variables determining the quality of school-to-home cooperation, especially in primary school. These are the sex of the parent, the parental education, the frequency of parents' attendance of formal school events, and the location of their home. Each of these variables undoubtedly contributes to the quality of parental cooperation with lead teachers and schools (*Cankar, Deutsch, Sentočnik (2012))*. Those variables have to be taken into account in your communication with the plurilingual families in your schools.

Schools have to be aware of this: mothers can be more involved in European cultures. However, according to culture, it could be the fathers. It can be the father who is supervising what is happening, or it can be the mother. The school needs to know what is being done in the country of origin of the family in order to appreciate what is happening and why they meet such or such a person. It is not a question of being inquisitive, but of understanding to be able to better communicate.

Teachers are rather a homogeneous professional group performing their work on a routine basis; communication and cooperation with the parents are part of their job. They are usually well-educated. They can find cooperation with the parents as an obligation. They do not see it as a partnership which should be developed for better education of the students. It is however key to the well-being and success of their students. On the other hand, parents are not a homogenous group, they come from different social groups, they have different experiences and expectations and the success of their children at school varies. Working on knowing the families, their backgrounds, their languages is an important key for your work as a teacher.

Schools may not inform parents enough. Frequent communication is the key to the development of a trusting and responsible relationship between parents and schools. In fact, when we live in a certain culture, we sometimes forget that what we take for granted may not be obvious for people coming from other cultures. It is thus of great importance for the schools to give as much information as possible to the

parents, keeping in mind that families with a migration background would have different experiences than ours.

Involvement of parents in school councils is also part of a good relationship with the families. "Teachers are not overly enthusiastic about putting their [the parents'] claims into practice. They perceive parents' involvement as an attempt to establish cooperation between professionals and non-professionals (Resman, 1992; Vincent, 1996)." It is important to see the parents as partners and not as competitors or enemies.

When it comes to putting their children at school, difficulties are ever present as parents from other cultures than ours may not know where to go, how to register even if there are many associations helping them.

At the same time, school attendance may not be so important for them as they need their children to help them for various jobs such as going to a place where they can help with the language for example. You have to explain to parents that attendance is of importance to help their children.

This manual you are reading has no objective to give teachers new teaching methods [although we could] when in their classes, children are speaking other languages than the school language, but rather to help the communication with their parents as the latter may also not master the school language, nor the school jargon.

The better the collaboration and the relationships between the families and the school staff and teachers is, the happier and the more successful the children as students are.

"Families and schools are the two central living environments of children. Their collaboration is therefore seen as an important factor in education, having a high impact on learning outcomes, motivation, and children's health" (Paccaud, Keller, Luder, Pastore & Kunz, 2021)[8]. All parents are wishing their children to succeed and feel happy at school. However, there can be some tensions between schools and families as the goals, the competencies and the roles in education can be conflicting. School staff have to be aware that parents from other origins could or

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[8] *ibid.*

would have a different view and different expectation for their children than other (local) parents. Children's success and happiness are influenced by all the actors they are meeting when growing up: family, friends, carers, teachers, educators, etc. Of course, their success at school is also linked to the atmosphere in the classroom, the relationships with the teachers, the help they are getting and among those the collaboration between the families and the school community is of great importance. The research has also shown that the parents' involvement in the schooling education of their children proves to have a positive effect on the children, at school, on their attitude, on their results and on their general development. At the same time, **not every culture knows how to act as parents of pupils and students and it is up to the school to invite parents to become pupils' parents and to show them the way.**

We can be tempted to decide to educate parents, but is it the solution? Pourtois (1984)[9] published the results of a research-action on how to train parents in supporting better the school education of their children. In France, for example, you have social workers working in that direction. Using psychological research, they are working on how parental commitment in education helps the cognitive development of the children and their academic success. This is not done everywhere. The idea is not to get into training the parents, but rather to be able to communicate with them in such a manner that they will feel engaged in the academic life of their children.

There are several fields which have to be looked after carefully for the relationship and communication between the schools and the families be a success;

1. It is important for the communication to be diversified - using different medium and facilitates:
   a. It is a priority as it is a [written and oral] dialogue between the parents and the schools and it will be the place where the role of the parents, their participation in the life of the school and the collaboration with the community can start.
2. It is important to facilitate the role of the parent:
   a. It concerns the importance of informing the parents on their role(s) as well as giving them the opportunities to share about their worries about the development of their child(-ren).

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[9] *Pourtois (Jean-Pierre) et al., Éduquer les parents ou comment stimuler la compétence en éducation, Bruxelles, Labor, 1984, 254 p.*

3. It is important to encourage the parents to take part into the life of the school:
   a. It concerns how the school is able to mobilise the parents or groups of parents for events in the schools, to volunteer in school activities, and this can be done in several manners.
4. It is important to collaborate closely with the community to be able to answer the needs of the parents quickly:
   a. It concerns the link between the schools and the other groups, usually associations, in the community. The school is invited to know the other groups / partners in the community. In knowing them it is easier to create links and answer needs. This can have positive effects on the school.

Through our interviews with school stakeholders, including school staff, it became clear that there is a significant gap in training on effectively fostering school-family collaboration, particularly when families do not have proficiency in the school's language. It is quite complex as well, especially when there is a lack of training and information. We suggest following some of the guidelines we are giving in our toolkits.

Of course, good collaboration and communication imply a mutual commitment and we have been creating guidelines for parents as well, so that they know what schools and their stakeholders could be expecting from them.

Explanation of what is expected from the parents and what the parents may expect from the school according culture

Understanding school expectations and the mutual roles of parents and educators is often straightforward in many European contexts. However, for migrant families coming from countries with different educational systems and cultural perspectives on schooling, these expectations can be less clear. This highlights the importance of fostering inclusive communication and collaboration to bridge cultural differences and ensure all families feel supported and engaged in their children's education.

There are however a number of challenges: One of the challenges schools face is that many educational systems are rooted in a mono-cultural and mono-lingual ideology, which can pressure families into assimilation and silence (Changkakoti, Akkari, 2008). Our Tonga project seeks to challenge and transform this mindset by

promoting inclusive and collaborative practices. This is what Adebayo underlines in his article[10] in 2023. He writes: "teachers sometimes struggle to handle diversity in the classroom". And he goes on explaining that the reason is that they usually do not receive adequate training in intercultural education. Even if Adebayo's research is based on what is happening in Ireland, we can say it is quite the same almost everywhere in Europe.

Parents can also be really worried about the lack of cultural knowledge from the school staff, as it might affect their children. When the school welcome children coming from different origins whose parents are not familiar with the school system, the school staff should take into consideration that:

- Parents may be unfamiliar with the customs and practices of the education system in their new host country.
- Language barriers can hinder parents' ability to engage with their children's school, even though research shows that parental involvement benefits children.
- A lack of diversity among school staff can limit the perception that the school is inclusive.

However it is not always as simple as this. As parents may not understand what is happening and what is expected from them, school staff may think that they are giving up on their children's education. In fact, the parents find themselves in a position where they have to discover a new system in a language they cannot always understand. There can then be a "blame culture"[11] when parents are blaming the schools and the schools are blaming the parents.

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[10]

https://theconversation.com/the-worries-parents-from-ethnic-minority-backgrounds-have-about-their-childrens-experiences-at-school-202901

[11] Gold, E., Simon, E. and Brown, C. (2002). Strong neighbourhoods, strong schools : the indicators project on education organizing. Chicago, Illinois : Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform and Research for Action.

This framework also aims at giving important notions and information on:
- the difference between multilingualism and plurilingualism
- knowing how children are growing with several languages make a difference in your daily work with them
- the impact of a good mastery of heritage language
- the importance of a good communication

What is multilingualism and plurilingualism?

It is important to make the difference between multilingualism and plurilingualism. The difference between the two terms is not huge, however we should be careful when using them. We would refer it to a definition given by La Maison du Multilinguisme which you can read here: link.

"Multilingualism is the coexistence of several languages, multiple languages, on one single territory, within one society. They are all the languages which are coexisting, which cohabit in one single country, one single place. Thus, a country is multilingual; a big business can be multilingual; a television channel can also be multilingual if it offers programs in various languages. The Council of Europe also tells us that a school or an educational system can become multilingual if they are offering a diversity of languages. The individual, in other words you, CANNOT be multilingual."[12]

Whereas

 "As for plurilingualism, it is the language experience of the individual in its cultural situation, which goes outside the family and the social group. It is about the individual, so yourself as a person. It says that anybody who is able to communicate in several languages is a plurilingual person. Without classifying the languages and cultures that you know, and if you are able to use these languages and communicate using them, then you are plurilingual. No need to have a perfect mastery of all the languages you know, you just need to be able to use them. Before,

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[12]
https://www.lamaisondumultilinguisme.net/2018/04/19/plurilinguisme-vs-multilinguisme-plurilingualism-vs-multilingualism-over-meertaligheid/

you are first bilingual (2 languages), then trilingual (3 languages) and then plurilingual."[13]

So, countries, societies, schools are multilingual and they welcome plurilingual people.

Presentation of the various strategies to raise children with several languages.

When raising their children with several languages, parents are faced with some dilemmas which they have to solve. Do they want to pass on all their languages or only some of them? Do they want their children to be able to speak, understand, read and write in all their languages or not? Those are decisions that parents are taking for the up-bringing of their children. This is not always easy as they can face adversity from the environment, from the school, from the society.

Our project is not about telling parents how to educate their children with several languages, however we think that it is important for school stakeholders to know the various strategies that parents are using as this will help understanding how the children are using their languages, as well as knowing what they are likely to know in each language and why they do not always master some vocabulary for example. It will also help create an environment which is open to all the languages of your pupils and students so that they will be fully accepted with all their languages, to accept their multilingual and multicultural identities.

The main strategies that parents are using are the following:

I.   one parent one language - OPOL

This is the strategy which is presented more often to the parents. It is thought to be the best strategy for parents to pass on their languages. The idea is that each parent speaks only his or her language to their child(ren) to be sure to pass it on. However as children grow up, they realise that parents can communicate in one of those languages, that they also speak the environment language and thus things are changing. It is a very good strategy when children are small. This strategy has been used since 1908 when Maurice Grammont observed how his colleague Jules Ronjat - a linguist married to a German woman - was raising their child with two languages.

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[13]

https://www.lamaisondumultilinguisme.net/2018/04/19/plurilinguisme-vs-multilinguisme-plurilingualism-vs-multilingualism-over-meertaligheid/

It is often thought to be the best method as each parent is using the language in which he/she feels more at ease, the language he/she masters best. However, the research has proven that only a quarter of the children brought up with the OPOL method will become bilingual[14]. How to succeed with this method? You need to be very consistent, however when in a group, children will notice that their parents can speak other languages. It is also important to explain to the children why this is done.

m. one language at home, one language outside the home

This method is rather simple to follow. As its name says it clearly, one language is used at home and the other one is used outside the home. However, it means that the two parents speak all the languages of the household. It is rather easy for parents to follow and also for children to adhere to, especially when the families are of migrant, refugee or even expat origin. It is also called minority language at home as the language used between the family members is not the society language which is the language spoken by the majority of people in the surrounding. Research has shown that the big majority of the children brought up that way become bilingual. Although this strategy is making the difference between home and outside the home, we feel that it should go further as it should be with the family and outside the family.

n. one language per activity

This strategy which is also called time and place language strategy can be a good manner as well to pass on the languages to the children. This is a strategy where parents are choosing a language according to the time of the day and the activity. When children are getting older, parents may change their strategy and decide to use languages according to the activities of the day. Thus meals can be in one language, and sport in another one. Families are to be well organised to use this method. It allows children to develop their language while getting more vocabulary in some activities rather than others. This balances out when they grow.

o. A mix or a personal method

Some families do not follow any of those strategies or methods. Some families use one language one week and another one the following week. When they have three languages or more, they can also mix the various strategies to find time for each

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[14] De Houwer, Annick (2007). Parental language input patterns and children's bilingual use. Applied Psycholinguistics, 28, 411-424

language to be used. Each family is using their languages according to a strategy or method which suits their own circumstances best. The best way would be that they ask for advice and consult a language consultant[15].

It is important to know that families will change their strategies as their children grow older; it can also happen when they move, when another child is born… nothing is definite. Children may also react against some language and parents will have to find ways of having them use those again. The environment and the school can also be challenging for parents who speak several languages at home, and they need to be encouraged to keep doing so. The ErasmusPlus Project Planting Languages help parents of young children to choose the best method according to their own circumstances and help them think about the meaning of their languages for themselves and the future of their children.

It is important to note as well that it is rare that bilinguals or multilinguals are equally proficient in all their languages (Grosjean, 1982, 2010). So, you cannot expect children to have the exact same proficiency in all their languages, nor to have the same vocabulary in all their languages.

Let's look at some ideas about language policy!
Plurilingual children are using their languages according to Place, Purpose and People (3 P's). They know which language to use, for which purpose, where and to whom. Without asking them, without telling them, plurilingual children will know which language to use with whom and in which circumstances. They know and feel if someone does not understand them in one language; they would then use another one.

It is important for the school stakeholders to know how languages are distributed within a family. Why? This will allow you to know how the children are functioning, how they use their languages. This will also help to understand the vocabulary that they may or may not have for school. "Children need to be exposed to a word to

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[15] *Language consultants help families, societies, schools etc to help to establish a language policy / language strategy / within the family or inside a company, an organisation, a school… there are not many language consultants -*
We would recommend: "La Maison du Multilinguisme" https://www.lamaisondumultilinguisme.net ; "The Multilingual Garden" https://www.themultilingualgarden.com/ - they are working in several languages.

learn it » (Rose, Armon-Lotem, Altman, 2023[16]). So, if they are not exposed to school vocabulary at home, they will not know it. Children speaking other languages than the school language at home will have more home-related vocabulary than school-related one. The language used at home impacts the vocabulary in the heritage language and less the societal and thus school language. The choice of family language policy is influencing the development of vocabulary, depending on how the languages are used in the family as vocabulary is being learned when it is used. Let's not forget that vocabulary is also very much culturally tinted. There are languages with more vocabulary than others for colours for example. Note as well that: « Bilingual immigrant parents' personal experiences with language(s) are a powerful determiner of language choices they make for their children » (King & Fogle, 2006[17]).

Before we delve more into family language policies, we would like here to point out that when children are supposed to have acquired a certain number of words at a certain age, this number of words is not for one language only. For example, if a child aged 2 is to know around 300 words; if this child is bilingual, those 300 words will be unequally divided between his/her two languages, it could be 180 in one language and 120 in the other one. They could be similar, or they could be different. As the child grows, the number of words known will grow as well, but it will be divided between all of his/her languages and may become equal later in life. It is an important point to keep in mind.

It is important here to note that: "Monolingual school policies that explicitly or implicitly shun the use of heritage languages by emphasizing that all learning and assessment should be exclusively conducted in the dominant language further build reluctance for bilingual families to speak their heritage languages ». (Wiley & Garcia, 2016)[18]. There are what Kaveh (2020[19]) calls **"unspoken dialogues"** between homes and schools on language policies, in other words neither the school, nor the families discuss and share about the languages used at school, the languages used at

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[16] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2215039023000474

[17] King, Kendall & Fogle, Lyn (2006), Bilingual Parenting as Good Parenting: Parents' Perspective on Family Language Policy for Additive Bilingualism - *https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2167/beb362.0*

[18] T.G. Wiley, O. García (2016) -*Language policy and planning in language education: Legacies, consequences, and possibilities - The Modern Language Journal, 100 (S1), pp. 48-63*

[19] Kaveh, Yalda M. (2020) *Unspoken dialogues between educational and familiy language policies : Language policy beyond legislations*
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0898589820301121?ref=pdf_download&fr=RR-2&rr=8d321ae74e909587#bib0090

home, the languages used in the society. Educational language policies are often decided according to official guidelines which are implemented within the school boundaries, they are institutional and linked to beliefs and ideologies about languages, which are often monoglossic, i.e. favouring monolingualism.

Languages can be seen as a problem, rather than as a right or as a resource (Ruiz's, 1984)[20]. We, at Tonga School Network believe that languages are a resource and people have a right to use them.

Even if schools do not have written official language policy (promoting one or several language[s]) which can be found and is published on their platforms, the use of one language can be implicit in the schools. They are often monolingual even if they agree that bilingualism and plurilingualism are valuable. Teachers and staff are usually not informed of any language policy in the schools where they work. When using one single language, they usually believe that they serve the students and help their success. Even if they think bilingualism is a great asset, they keep using the one language. On the other hand, families consider the languages they use at home as useful for their children and that they will help them in their future. Their perception of success is different; in valuing their heritage languages which they consider as useful, they are giving them a sense of belonging, an identity, as well as tools for self-development and social mobility. Plurilingual parents think that knowing several languages facilitates their children's skills in communication with more people and make them smarter.

Those "unspoken dialogues" about family language policies [as Kaveh calls them] should become "spoken dialogues". It is of importance that schools and families talk and share about languages, about languages spoken at home, languages spoken in the environment. Even if the language practices done at home are a family matter, it should be discussed with the school. It is important for the school to understand how languages are used as it helps to understand why such vocabulary is known or not for example. This "spoken dialogue" would then help the children as well as the communication and the relationships between schools and staff. It will also help the linguistic development of the children and will help schools to recognize the languages spoken in the homes, either in the classroom or even better within the whole of the school.

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[20] Ruiz, R (1984) *Orientation in language planning* - NABE Journal, 8(2), pp 15-34
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We believe that an official language policy should be present in the school, so that parents know the policy. If language policies in the country are to protect the rights of language-minoritized communities, stakeholders such as schools should take them into account.

Impact of a good mastery of heritage language on the learning of the school language.

        p. for the acquisition of the school language

A good mastery of the home language helps the acquisition of the school language, as the children have a foundation on which to rely. Have you heard about the **Ivy Hypothesis** (Paradis, & al, 2011) which tells us that the home language is the foundation, they are the wall of the house, what you can build on. In other words, you can learn another language when the basis of your own mother language is built, when the foundation is there. So that you can build on them. When learning another language and/or the school language for example, it is like the Ivy which grows on a structure; it grows on the foundation. In other words, when a child speaks in a language in which (s)he is weaker, this child uses portions of the structure as well as vocabulary from the stronger language(s) (s)he masters to build on, to learn the new language. This can create some code-switching or code-mixing, but the child is then making connections, learning and improving.

So, to build something strong, you need strong foundations. It is thus important for the plurilingual children attending your schools to have a good mastery of their heritage or home language(s) to be able to learn quicker and better the school language as they have a foundation on which to rely. Children would transfer what they already know into the school language. The use of the heritage or home language will not damage the development of the school language, on the contrary. They will complement each other as the Ivy can hold a wall.

It is important to note that hearing the school language at home does not mean the child will acquire that language faster and parents who do not speak the environment and/or school language well enough should be encouraged to use their home language to help their children acquire it and also to maintain that language.

When children receive school support for the home language, there is still the sharp increase in developing abilities in the community, and thus school, language BUT the home language continues to develop and this is also of importance.

Why is it important to encourage the home language?
Valuing the home language of the children is of great importance. Let us just mentioned some of the reasons:
- ★ it increases the chance of successful learning;
- ★ it gives higher self-esteem to the students;
- ★ it improves the relationships with parents and family members and thus school;
- ★ it fosters a positive sense of identity;
- ★ it opens greater academic possibilities.

There are also three important points to remember[21]:
1. Language skills are distributed across languages and tend to vary over time This means that a bilingual child may know some words in one language only, for example they would have vocabulary about home in their home language and not necessarily in the school language. When you think of the number of words a child has, you have to include all their languages. When their language is tested, it's not unusual for multilingual children to do better on some tasks than on others. So, they might be good with vocabulary and story-telling in the home language and not so good at these in the community language, especially when they've just started school.
2. The languages interact with each other. Each language of a child is not stored in a different part of the brain; so they are connected, they interact with each other. This explains the mix or the switch of languages which can happen. The children do not get confused. And this explains sometimes that children use the grammatical structure of one language when using another one. For example a child may say: "j'ai promening au-dessus de mon vélo", this would not be grammatically correct in French, but the structure is right in English: I am riding on my bicycle. So when your child does this mixing, it might just be that they do not have the word that they need in one language, so they popped in the equivalent word from another language - pretty cool when you think about it.

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[21] Kohnert, K. (2010) Bilingual children with primary language impairment: issues, evidence, & implications for clinical actions. Journal of Communication Disorders 43: 456-473

3. Every child is different. There are a range of factors that affect language development which are unique for every family. Things like the number of languages spoken, the ages at which children are exposed to the different languages, the opportunities they have to use the languages, their own motivation which can change over time, how similar or different the languages are, the social value attached to the languages and so on

q. plurilingualism and language disorder

It is also very important to note that being bilingual or plurilingual and speaking several languages **does not create** any speech delay or disorder, not even a temporary delay. However some children can be reluctant to speak in a language which they feel they do not master properly. Then they do not speak, or speak very little, or only with people with whom they have confidence.

A very small number of plurilingual children may develop some sort of selective mutism for a short period of time. This could be linked to stress in being immersed in another language and in an unfamiliar culture. Knowing that if they are speaking in their home language they will not be understood; feeling insecure about their skills in a new language, they are then anxious. They know that they will not be understood, so they keep silent. It is thus very important to create an atmosphere where those children will be free to speak in any language, even if you - as an adult - do not speak it, nor understand it.

It is also of importance to note that if a child has learning difficulties, it is **not just** in the school language, or in the home language, it is **in all his / her languages**. So, the assessment should be done by several speech-therapists speaking those various languages. It is a lot of work, we know. There are NO speech-therapists trained to look after plurilingual children. Moreover, it **never** necessitates the abandoning of any language the child may need to communicate. It can be difficult for you as school staff, and this is also where good communication with the parents comes important.

We would like you to note as well that research has proven that bilingual and multilingual children who have dyslexia or autism are overcoming their difficulties more easily.

r. Language biography and why it is important

What is a language biography? Why can it be useful? A language biography can also be called a language diary. It is a small booklet in which you can record all the elements linked to the language practices of a person. As understood by the word biography, it tells about the biography of someone but it is linked to his/her languages. A language biography is a language history of someone.

It is not just an inventory of the language spoken by a person, or his/her abilities in those languages. It is also showing the emotional and identity elements of the languages of that person. It presents where and with whom those languages are spoken. It shows where they have been learned, acquired; who passed them on?

In creating language biographies of your students and also with your students, you will be able to understand how their languages are being used, but also the relationships they have with those languages. You will understand the importance that some of the languages they speak have for them. It is all part of the person, it is who they are.

Students can include the language(s) they speak and understand, the language(s) they read and write, the language(s) they learn as well as the language(s) they heard through songs, travels, the language(s) which have been lost… Those language biographies represent a story of the students through and with languages. They are individual realities and a language and cultural backgrounds. Language biographies can be done with language portraits which we describe in our toolkit. We also encourage you to look at what the European Council is suggesting: here.

How important is good communication?

Good communication between parents and schools is crucial. It helps children to succeed academically, emotionally and socially. When parents and schools share information, and collaborate, they work together for their children. It builds trust and understanding, as well as a positive environment for the children.

Parents benefit from positive communications and are more likely to get involved in the school if the communication is done in an open positive manner. The quality of the communication affects the quality of the parents' involvement with their children's learning. It is thus important to share good news and encourage, because if the school only shares bad performance, parents may feel they cannot help their

children in an effective manner. Research has also shown that when parents are involved, teachers can focus more on the teaching part.

A good two-way communication between families and school is necessary for the children's success at school. The more parents, teachers and schools stakeholders share information about each other, the better it is for the children. It is important to let the parents know they are valuable partners in their children's academic achievement. It is important too to acknowledge that they can participate in the school events and thus feel involved in the school life.

There are different ways the school informs the parents. Here are some ideas:
- ❖ Parent's meetings;
- ❖ Parents-teachers associations;
- ❖ Notes / folders about the work done at school which are sent at home for parents to look at;
- ❖ Phone calls;
- ❖ Emails;
- ❖ School website;
- ❖ School app;
- ❖ Etc.

An effective school-home communication can be complex to establish; however, it is necessary. The diversity of the families means one single type of communication is not possible. It is not possible to rely on one single method to communicate with the homes, there is a need to use several strategies according to the needs of the families and their schedules. We give you some ideas in our toolkit. Using various manners and methods will help you make sure the message has reached the parents. Some methods include:
- ❖ Newsletters;
- ❖ Open days;
- ❖ Home visits;
- ❖ (Personal) Phone calls
- ❖ Homework helpline;
- ❖ Website of the school;
- ❖ Parents' café where workshops can be held;

❖ Communication focused on fathers as well as communication focused on mothers (we think here about the differences in cultures and the message will be worded differently).

Schools should initiate contact with the homes, and teachers should try to get into contact with parents when a new student arrives in their class. It is important not to wait when a problem occurs to avoid it becoming bigger and having to find a solution quickly. It is important as well to meet parents in a consistent manner and to use a clear simple language, let us not forget that the parents do not necessarily understand the school language, just as they would not be familiar with the school jargon. Parents of foreign origin are not teachers and may not know the education system and its jargon. The language used should then be easy to understand and grasp to be sure that the message is understood.

Good communication between home and school also improves the attendance of the children at school. It is proven that if parents receive good communication from the school, they are more likely to send their children every day to attend class, because they know what is happening. A confidence link has been established - see as well our information about parents' insecurity in the toolkit. As regular attendance improves academic success and parents would be influential in their children's attendance. A well-designed school communication will generate a positive engagement from the parents.

Let us underline here that there can be a gap between what the school intends to communicate and what is understood by the families. So, the wording and methods of communication have to be taken into account. Using simple language is of importance to be sure the message is understood. The school should consider creating a school communication plan to communicate with the plurilingual families of migrant origins. To create this communication plan, you need to take into account what you wish to tell, what you wish to be understood, how it will be understood and which medium you are going to use. The tone and the language used are of importance for the message to be received the way the school wishes it to be received. Some positive personalised communication is more effective than big speeches. We can help you create this communication plan. To help you create this effective communication plan, these are some of the questions you could try and answer:

● how frequently are we going to communicate with the families?

- in what ways are we going to communicate with the families?
- is our communication clear? Helpful? Supportive?
- do the families find our communication clear? Helpful? Supportive?
- should we have automated communication?
- how accessible is our communication (accessibility, literacy of the family's members, easy-to-understand language)?
- are we using the right medium for the families we are targeting?
- do families have clear and reliable ways to communicate with the staff?
- do they feel they are heard and valued as partners in their children's journey at school?

To have effective communication you have to have a family-centred communication. You have to know the families before you can communicate with them, knowing them does not mean to be intrusive, it means knowing their history, their languages, their cultures. You have to know who they are, where they are coming from, which language(s) they speak, whether the parents went to school, etc. Having a knowledge of those points, you will be able to choose the best way to communicate with them, to enter in relation with them. They must not feel overwhelmed by the information they receive in order to process it. As Coady[22] writes, the "social-emotional needs of children and families are priorities" if we do not want to enter "miscommunication". She is talking about social and emotional needs, those two points are essential as they are directly linked to the way they can listen to what you have to say.

Here are some points about communication which should be kept in mind.

There are different types of communication
        s. verbal and non-verbal communication
Even if parents do not know the words you are using, they will hear the tone of your voice, they will see the way you move, the way you look. So it is of importance to have an attitude which puts them at ease, in a position where they are ready to listen and hear what you are saying. Too many gestures could lose them.

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[22] Coady, Maria (2019) - *Connecting School and the Multilingual Home - Theory and Preactice for Rural Educators -* Multilingual Matters

t. written communication

When sending messages in a written manner, there is another challenge. We know what we want to write, but it can sometimes be read differently. This is why it is important to use plain language and avoid rhetorical speech and figurative talk.
For plain language, we would suggest that you look at this website for English:
(https://www.plainlanguage.gov/about/definitions/)
It is all the more important when parents have a limited knowledge of the school language and thus have difficulties in reading it. The simpler, the better.

u. importance of knowing the cultural differences

When communicating with the families, it is also important to keep in mind the different cultures the families are coming from. Not that you have to know in detail how things are happening in the various countries, but understand how families are reacting. Sometimes you are going to meet the fathers or the eldest brother rather than the mothers. This is part of the cultural difference. So your communication will have to be adapted. Those men are not necessarily coming to impress you or to put pressure, but rather because it is their role in the society they are coming from, or because they master the local language better. So it is important to adapt your message and your communication according to families and cultures.

Our suggestions

We would suggest following the guidelines that we present in our toolkit, as well as our recommendations. It is important to have a positive attitude towards all the languages.

Of course, we know it is not as simple as this could sound. Of course, you are faced with many challenges. You may have limited resources, you also have constraints and this can make it all the more difficult. Do not forget that the benefits of a multilingual, inclusive approach should outweigh these hurdles. Schools can take incremental steps toward creating a more supportive environment for multilingual students.

And let us conclude with a message from Jim Cummins: "When school rejects the language of the child, it rejects the child"[23]

23

https://fabriquedespetitslecteurs.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Article-Jim-Cummins-La-langue-maternelle-des-enfants-bilingues.pdf page 5

List of resources:

To be found on our website -> they are classified according languages.

<u>Short Bibliography:</u> (for those interested we will offer a longer list on the website)

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