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**Parental Plurilingual Capital in a Monolingual Context: Investigating Strengths to Support Young Children in Early Childhood Settings**

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## Introduction and literature review

Despite the fact that the majority of the world's population is bilingual or multilingual, monolingualism is often positioned as the norm, and bilingualism/multilingualism as a deviation from the norm (Ellis, 2008). As such, bilingualism/multilingualism is the subject of much academic interest. Over 30 years ago Grosjean (1982) argued that bilingualism is more than the sum of two languages and that the language repertoire of every bilingual person is a unique and fully functioning system tailored to his or her communicative needs. However, despite this early proposition, it remains common for bilingualism to be positioned as a 'competition' between two languages. The use of terms such as balanced bilinguals and ideal bilinguals imply that there are other, less complete forms of bilingualism (Romaine, 1995; Garcia, 2009). In other words ideal or 'true bilingualism' is perceived to be 'double monolingualism' in which speakers have equal fluency and proficiency in two languages. This is uncommon, and the vast majority of people who are bilingual use their two or more languages in different domains such as home or work. Hence one language is usually less well developed than the other in any given domain, and these differing competencies in language repertoire are seen by the monolingual mainstream from a deficit perspective. Consequently, it is not uncommon for those for whom English is not their first language to be positioned in an English-speaking culture as intellectually limited and/or socially disadvantaged (Ruiz, 1984). In this sense having a language other than English is considered as the cause of problems (Canagarajah, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2007); that is, having more than one language is a liability (Menken, 2008). The need to recognise children's funds of knowledge {Moje, 2004 #5878;Moll, 1992 #5876}, that is the expertise they bring into their education from their family and community, has long been recognised as an important strength that is often overlooked by this deficit thinking.

More recent research has introduced the term 'plurilingual' to denote "... the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social actor has proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of

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several cultures” (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 2009, p. 11). Plurilingualism recognises the complex and dynamic nature of individual language acquisition and use (Lüdi & Py, 2009). Plurilingual competence is not simply an addition of competence in two languages; rather speakers are able to choose language and communication strategies appropriate to circumstances and may be able to switch codes in the middle of a communication (Coste et al., 2009; Taylor and Snoddon, 2013). In a sense plurilinguists have language capital (Coste et al., 2009) and they call on different elements of that capital in different circumstances and contexts. This perspective positions language as a resource (Ellis, 2013; Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000; Ruiz, 1988).

In translating the linguistic term ‘plurilingualism’ into concepts more accessible to early childhood educators we are drawn to the notion of deficit versus strengths-based thinking (see Sims, 2002; 2011 for further explanation of these terms). Our understanding of the concepts underpinning plurilingualism leads us to posit that those who speak multiple languages use those languages in different ways, in different contexts to support their overall communication capacity. In that sense, the various languages making up an individual’s *language repertoire, or language portfolio* represent a collection of communication strengths upon which the individual can draw to suit any occasion or context. In earlier research {Moll, 1992 #5876@@author-year} positioned this as funds of knowledge. ‘Language repertoire’ is a well-established term in the literature on bilingualism and plurilingualism (Garcia, 2009; Baker, 2011) to refer to an individual’s varying levels of competence in languages and dialects as referred to above. The emphasis is on languages as overlapping and complementary systems, from which the speaker can select choices of language, dialect or register as appropriate. The concept of ‘language portfolio’, however, refers to the notion that the resources in a parent’s language repertoire are available to be directed to a particular purpose – that is, in this case, to facilitating a plurilingual upbringing for their children. In this sense such resources form linguistic capital which can be drawn on in developing family language policy. The term ‘language portfolio’ is also used in the Council of Europe’s “European Language Portfolio” which is a physical document

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comprising a language passport, a language biography and a dossier, and used by learners of languages to record their achievements. It is intended to facilitate mobility in both tertiary study and employment, by the use of a standardised document. Both tangible and intangible uses of the word 'portfolio', then, acknowledge languages as assets to be deployed as appropriate (Council of Europe, 2015).

Our specific interest in this paper is the exploration of strengths in plurilingualism as they relate to early childhood practice. In setting this context, it is first necessary to acknowledge that maintaining children's multiple languages provides cognitive advantages (Adesope, Lavin, Thompson, & Ungerleider, 2010), enhances executive functioning (Carlson & Meltzoff, 2008) and metalinguistic awareness (Lightbown, 2008), challenges ethnocentric thinking (Coste et al., 2009) and may be linked to structural plasticity in the brain (Mechelli, 2004). Good quality early childhood practice has for many years emphasised the importance of supporting parents to maintain children's multiple languages (currently exemplified in the current Australian Early Years Learning Framework - Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). For early childhood educators, working with children who are plurilingual requires an understanding of each child's language strengths, and, through working in partnership with families, the development of strategies to support the overall language repertoire. This can be difficult when early childhood educators are expected to work with children whose languages are not ones with which they have any familiarity, parents themselves may prefer to emphasise the use of English in educational settings, and the pervasive nature of English in educational settings creates a habitus where English is highly valued and other languages are less valued (Lightbown, 2008). It is certainly difficult in a context where children's strengths in a language other than English may be perceived as linked to a deficit in English itself, and where performance in English might be positioned as indicative of cognitive disadvantage.

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Good quality early childhood practice in relation to supporting children's multiple languages therefore is to some extent dependent on early childhood educators' understandings of plurilingualism, and on their ability to establish effective partnerships with parents (who are themselves influenced by their own values, beliefs and practices around their plurilingualism and the plurilingualism of their children). This paper examines data from a major ongoing study (see Sims & Ellis, 2014 for a description of the study pilot); specifically data that relates to parental language portfolios. We ask as plurilinguists, what strengths do parents call upon in attempting to raise their children as plurilinguists, and what does this mean for early childhood educators attempting to establish partnerships with these parents in order to support children's multiple languages in early childhood settings? Using the framing of Coste et al. (2009) we are seeking to identify assets in parental plurilingual portfolios and speculate how these assets can best be utilised by early childhood educators to support children's plurilingualism.

## Methodology

The research is underpinned by an interpretivist ontology and a social constructivist epistemology. We propose that parents construct their own understandings of plurilingualism based on their own experiences with languages. The experiences and understandings of each parent are then reconstructed in the family as they jointly build a family culture around their children that features multiple languages.

### The main study

The main study<sup>1</sup> is funded over the years 2014 – 2016 by the Australian Research Council to investigate the strategies used by parents living in three regional towns in NSW, Australia when they are attempting to rear their children to speak more than one language. Federal government policy is encouraging migrants to settle in regional areas yet moving into an English-speaking community with few or no other speakers of a family language means the absence of a co-located speech community that might be found in metropolitan areas. Our study focuses on these isolated families, enquiring into whether and how they are able to stem the shift to English that is frequently found even in more favourable circumstances (Clyne & Kipp 1997). Since the only significant language resources to be found in the contexts in which they are living are those of one or both parents, it is crucial to identify the language portfolios that parents bring to the task of bringing up plurilingual children.

### Participants

Twelve families were recruited into the study. Selection of families was based on the following inclusion criteria:

- The family lived in one of the three regional towns that were the foci of the study;
- The family had a child (who would become the focus child for the study) aged between 2 and 4 years;

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Bilingualism in the bush: Reconceptualising ‘speech community’ in immigrant family language maintenance in regional Australia. Australian Research Council Discovery Grant 2014–2016, DP140100443

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- The family were committed to raising their child with more than one language;
- One of the parents had sufficient command of English to function effectively in English interviews and conversation.

## Method

The study is ongoing and families will be followed over a period of two and a half years. Families are visited 3–4 times in one data collection cycle and over the period of the project 5–6 cycles with each family will be completed. The data for this paper arises from the information gathered from a carefully-structured set of baseline questions which sought information on demographic characteristics, family language biographies and the family goals for bringing up their children plurilingually. In line with current research on family language policy (King & Fogle, 2013, Schwartz, 2010) we view parental goals, aspirations and beliefs as important contributors to the language practices in the family. At the first interview with each family the study was further explained and fully informed consent was obtained. General background information about the family was gathered, families talked about their reasons for wanting their child to have multiple languages, and parental language history and experiences were discussed. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and after each interview the Research Assistant wrote a reflective journal.

## Analysis

A process of constant comparison (as originally defined by Glaser, 1965) was used to identify quotes from the interview data and interviewer reflective journal that illustrated the elements of the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework was developed in an iterative fashion, originally from the literature, but constantly refined throughout the analysis process so the final version as presented in Figure 1 represents the result of data analysis.

*Insert Figure 1 here*

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From the literature we identified the concept of a language portfolio which we also saw as the language capital held by the parents in the study. We posit that parental exposure to a range of language experiences throughout their lives to date (that is as children, adolescents, adults and now as parents) is a key element in their language portfolios. These experiences shape both the value parents place on plurilingualism and the support (that is the effort) they are willing to provide to raise their children with more than one language. These factors all combine to create a family system where parents devise strategies to help them rear their children; strategies that offer children plurilingual experiences.

### **Ethical Issues**

The project received ethical clearance from the University Ethics Committee. Issues relating to informed consent were addressed by ensuring initial screening of families covered English fluency and that the Baseline Interview repeated the information provided in the required letter, and again checked for permission. Permission for audio recording was (and continues to be) sought at each interview. We do not link families to the towns in which they live in order to protect family identity. Quotes are edited where required to ensure that anonymity is preserved. All names used in this report are pseudonyms.

### **Results: Assets in parental language portfolios**

Descriptors of family languages are presented in Table 1. This data is used to frame the presentation of results in the three categories outlined in our conceptual framework: that is the assets in the parental language portfolio (parental funds of knowledge) are analysed in terms of: parental experiences, parental values and parental support for bilingualism.

### **Parental experiences of being raised themselves as plurilingual**

Being raised in a bilingual/multilingual environment, we suggest, gives parents experiences upon which they can call when raising their own children. These experiences might include awareness of



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strategies their parents used coupled with an understanding of the realities of being a child who functions in multiple languages. Thus, we argue, the strengths upon which parents who were themselves reared bilingually/multilingually can draw will be different than the strengths available to those parents who learned other language(s) as adults. We sought to identify these different opportunities in our data so we could compare parental language portfolios.

For the Olivier, Afolayan, and Argarwal and Lange parents (Families 2, 5, 10 ,11), English is not the first language of either parent. The Olivier parents (Family 2) speak French and Ewe (a language of West Africa) and learned English at school. They have spoken English since arriving in Australia and are now using English as the main language in their home. Father was doing fieldwork overseas at the time of the baseline interview and Mother was beginning to use some French with her child. The family intend to return home in a few years where the child will have more exposure to French. It is interesting that this family, who have a strong background in French, were struggling to maintain French in their home in Australia but appeared confident that their child would manage in French and Ewe when they returned home. Thus whilst this family have 2 languages other than English in their language portfolio, the value they place on English and the opportunity to learn English while based in Australia appears to influence the amount of exposure they are offering their child in French. They are currently not using Ewe at all with the child (but he is hearing them speaking Ewe with each other) because they believe it is not a language that will advantage their child and, as with French, there will be exposure to Ewe when they return home. The Lange parents (Family 10) both speak Afrikaans and use this in the home with the children, and with Afrikaans speaking friends outside the home, though they prefer to speak English when interacting with English-speaking community outside the home. The Afolayan parents (Family 5) both have Amharic as their first language and use Amharic in the home all the time. This family has a refugee background and have not yet developed fluency in English.

*Insert Table 1 here*

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Lajesh and Aashi Argarwal (Family 10) offer a different background than the majority of the other families in the study. Both parents grew up in a multilingual environment where it was common to speak 3–4 languages and both learned English at school and are now fluent. However, the parents' first languages are not the same so English is their main language of communication. Consequently English plays an important part in their family life and the parents often have to try and remember to speak their first languages to their children. They place a higher value on English proficiency than proficiency in other languages. They are relaxed about their children's language learning, particularly because the children spend a considerable amount of time with their Telugu-speaking grandparents. Aashi said:

*We'll try to make sure, I mean we'll try our best for them to know one/two??*

*language, that's it, nothing else, we haven't talked about it.*

In eight of the families one parent's first language is English and the other parent's first language is not English. In 3 of these families Father was the parent speaking a language other than English. In the Anare family (Family 8), Tomasi shares care of the children during the working week with his English-speaking in-laws (he has the children for half a day every day) so when he is alone with the children they are exposed only to Fijian. The remainder of the time the family communicate using English. The sharing of child care responsibilities in this family provides more opportunity for children to be exposed to father's language. The amount of time children spend with the parent who speaks multiple languages is thus a considerable asset in the family language portfolio, an asset noted by de Houwer (2007, 2011).

In the other two families where Father speaks multiple languages (Families 3 and 4, the Zellweger and Yanev families), Mother has gained some small proficiency in the other language, providing opportunities for her to share in conversations and enabling Father to use multiple languages in family contexts, not just when he is alone with the children. In these families the ability of mothers to

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have some understanding of fathers' languages is an asset as this means that family occasions can be shared using multiple languages. In the Yanev family when Hebrew-speaking grandparents visit, Mother is able to participate in a Hebrew immersive environment. The Zellwegers (Family 3) are now experimenting with a German-only day once a week; this strong support of multiple languages and their weaving the language into the fabric of family life is a strong asset in the family language portfolio.

In five families (Families 1,6,7,9, 12) Fathers' first language is English and Mothers' first language is not English. In all these families, Mother is the main caregiver of the children and as a consequence, spends a lot of time with the children, creating, in most cases, opportunities to immerse the children in her languages. As mentioned previously, the amount of time children spend with the parent who speaks multiple languages is thus a considerable asset in the family language portfolio.

Angelina Zavala (Family 1) explained:

*No I really don't want it to get lost, especially because I don't have family here. So I thought ... when we arrived ... I just started speaking to him in Spanish – a hundred per cent Spanish – and he was only seven months – and now he's two years and one month – so I haven't stopped. I don't speak a word of English to him.*

Ada Ralston (Family 6) also spoke only in her L1, Finnish, to the children in their early years:

*... they should have mastered the language, especially when I was full time at home. So they didn't go to daycare or anything for the first 4 years.*

For these two families the choice of Angelina and Ada to use only one language, (respectively, Spanish and Finnish), not English, means that children in their early years spent time each day immersed in a language other than English. The children are exposed to English through their fathers

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and the wider community. This determination and commitment of the families to multilingualism can be positioned as an asset in the family language portfolio.

In contrast, the Aspen family (Family 7) tend to use a mixture of Portuguese and English. Elisabet speaks Portuguese to the children most of the time. Barry has medium fluency and will often use Portuguese when he wants to say something to the children and not have others understand (using it as a secret language). He said:

*I generally speak to them in English, but sometimes if we're out in public and I don't want other people to know what I'm talking about, I talk in Portuguese – it might just be simple stuff, you know, “don't do that it's disgusting!” ... so it's sort of slightly strategic use of language*

The identification of this language as 'secret' may be an asset as this might motivate children to identify the language as a source of fun and as a means to bond with parents

Annika Kappel (Family 9) learned English, French and German at school and felt that languages were easily picked up through exposure to media, music and other environmental sources. This experience made her less insistent on using Dutch in the family in comparison to the Zavala and Ralston households (Families 1 and 6) even though she wants the children to understand their cultural background and to be able to communicate in Dutch when they visit Holland. She used Dutch with her children when they were little more because she felt able to express things in Dutch that she was less able to express in English, rather than as a deliberate strategy (as in the Zavala and Ralston families). She said:

*.... there [was] a sense of, I don't mean to be cliché, but you know the whole mother the interaction between mum and the baby you know it's quite intimate*

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At the same time, she feels it is rude to speak her language when Mitch is around as this would exclude him even though he is trying to learn Dutch. Consequently the children are exposed to a large amount of English in the home. She said:

*And I used to, you know, I used to um, don't speak the Dutch, because he was home and I thought "Oh that's rude" you know, because he's not that fluent in it, but I've sort of come to realise, oh yes, and if he's not here anyway why don't I do it, you know (Annika Kappel, Family 9)*

In this family Annika's language and her ability to communicate with her children in two languages is an asset in the family language portfolio.

In summary, parental experiences of multiple languages provide a range of different assets contributing to the family language portfolio. In some cases, childhood experiences create an expectation that languages will be easily absorbed from a variety of factors outside the home (the media or school). In other cases, parents' first languages are strongly emphasised in the home and the ability of some parents to immerse their children in their home language is also a significant asset. The willingness of the parents for whom the language other than English is not a first language to learn some level of fluency is also an asset as it enables communication in the other language to extend into family communication and not simply be limited to communication between one parent and the children. This point is recognised in the research undertaken by Venables, Eisenchlas, and Schalley (2014).

## Parental perceptions of the value of plurilingualism

Whilst all the families in the study were committed to raising their children to speak more than one language, the families all demonstrated different reasoning underpinning their choice. Some parents placed a high value on their first language (when this was not English) as this was perceived to be an

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important part of their own personal identity which they wanted to share with their children. As such, the home language held emotional overtones for the parents:

*If the girls don't learn Hebrew, it's almost like they will never get to know me in a way ... English will never be mother-tongue – there will always be things that I can only say in Hebrew – nuances ... you need to know the language to get them*  
(Lael Yanev, Family 4)

Oki Nhan (Family 12) explained that her first language is:

*... my background, root of a tree that I grew up from – I love that language because you can describe things very poetically, long history of Korean language, some kind of joy when you understand word play, when you read a well-written book – want the girls to have that.*

In a similar manner, Annika Kappel (Family 9) speaks of her first language as one that gives her a “deeper connection” and one in which subtleties such as “the feeling you get from the words, or even some of the sayings” are present. In contrast her learning of English, where “because I know the words I suppose, and I’ve learned how you say something you know” has resulted in what she calls a “surface language” despite her fluency. In a similar vein, reflecting why she struggled to speak Hebrew with the children, Emilie Yanev (Family 4) reflected that English was her “intuitive language” and she just didn’t have the words in Hebrew at this deep/subtle level of communication.

However, for some families the emphasis was on English competency because there was a perception that English is a universal language which provides better opportunities for employment.

The Lange family (Family 11) encapsulated this concept when they referred to English as a “functional necessity”. For the Olivier family (Family 2) it is important to learn English to enhance their job prospects when they leave Australia:

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*English is like a second language for me and in my country is like a business language ... in my work, in my country, general in Africa – get good job language (Elaine Olivier)*

For the Afolayan family (Family 5) it is important for the whole family to learn the language of the country in which they now live:

*... English is ... important – especially you know to communicate – also I have to read a lot of things – because every ... especially for knowledge – (Yvonne Afolayan)*

### Support from family

In 5 of the families English was the first language for Father, and in another 3 families this was the case for Mother. In these families, the ability of the parent for whom English was the first language to communicate in the other language varied considerably, and in one case, this parent had no ability to speak the other language. The ability of these parents to gain some fluency in the other language was considered important as without this ability, family conversations tended to be in English so as not to exclude the English-only parent:

*... we always, you know, said well it's rude to, cause even to each other if my husband would be around, you know, they'd try and speak English together, because it's rude to (Annika Kappel, Family 9).*

In some families, the English speaker worked hard to try and learn the other language to at least the level needed to engage in family conversations and one family even attempted to have a German-speaking day once a week.:

*after German Wednesday last week was the first time that Gabriel has made a concerted effort to speak German (oh) – he's made lots of attempts at making up*

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*some words but also he's speaking it a lot more – just from that day - like some kind of normalization thing – but it was a bit of a struggle to do it though – I just don't have the words and I don't have the structure – I don't how it all goes together (Eleanor Zellweger, Family 3)*

Parents recognised the support of the English-speaking partner was essential encouraging them to persevere with multiple languages and this is recognised by researchers such as Venables et al. (2014) who note the importance of support from the “majority language-speaking parent” (p. 430). Oki Nhan, Mother in the Yates family (Family 12) explained that her husband Ed was very supportive of the children learning Korean and will try to use basic instructions in Korean when he can:

*He tries simple things like “where is your drink bottle” in Korean to girls, yeah, mhmm. So school kids can take Korean language as seriously as English, yeah, so he's quite supportive in that way*

For the parent whose first language was English, trying to support the other language was sometimes hard work

*It's such an effort – for me it's hard to remember to [use it] (Eleanor Zellweger, Family 3)*

Despite these difficulties, we argue that the support of the English-speaking parent is an asset which contributes to the family language portfolio and, in the long term, impacts on the strategies families use to support their children's plurilingualism. These strategies are currently being explored as the research is ongoing.

In addition to support within the nuclear family, some of the families had close links with family overseas and regular visits to and from, for example, grandparents, provided rich language experiences for children. For example, the Aspen family (Family 7) have strong contact with



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extended family who visit and only speak Portuguese during these visits which adds to the importance placed on the language. The Hebrew-speaking Yanev grandmother (Family 4) visits the family for about three months every year and whilst she is staying with them the whole family speaks Hebrew all the time. Similarly, the Telugu-speaking grandparents visit the Argarwal family (Family 10) for extended periods and, during these visits, provide immersion in Telugu for the children. Place and Hoff (2011) identify the importance of children's exposure to language coming from multiple sources, and in these families in our study, grandparents and other family provide opportunities for children to engage in language from sources other than their parent(s). These opportunities to engage in language with family other than immediate parents provide additional value to the language, thus ongoing relationships with other family members who speak another language is a considerable asset in the family language portfolio.

## Implications for Early Childhood educators

It is well established that sound language development requires nurturing and rich conversations where young children are immersed in the language(s) they are learning (Pearson & Mangione, 2006). Place and Hoff (2011) for example, argue that children's language competence is related to the number of different conversational partners available using a particular language and the degree of exposure to native speakers of that language. Sorace and Ladd (2004) emphasise the importance of children's need to communicate with the people around them., and it follows that children need to acquire the language(s) needed to facilitate that communication with the significant people in their lives. If, for example grandparents do not speak English and the child does not acquire their language, the possibility of a relationship is lost or much reduced. Sorace and Ladd (2004) point out that if children "never hear the 'less important' language except from one parent, they may not get enough exposure for that language to develop naturally. It is especially true when both parents understand the 'more important' language, children feel they need not learn the 'less important' one" (Sorace & Ladd, 2004, p. 2). At the same time there is significant support internationally for

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plurilingual competence (Coste et al., 2009). However, not all families who attempt to raise their children to speak more than one language are able to easily fulfil the necessary requirements, as identified above, to support their children's language acquisition. Similarly, many early childhood educators struggle with what they perceive as the tensions in their role. They are charged with providing a rich language environment in the language(s) each child in their care is acquiring, but they face logistical limitations in appointing plurilingual staff and/or building partnerships with plurilingual members of the local community. Further, in a society with a monolingual mindset (Clyne 2005) the teaching profession is overwhelmingly monolingual, and even those educators who are plurilingual may not share languages with the children in their care. These factors can lead them to a fear of being judged as deficient when they cannot provide appropriate linguistic resources (Coste et al., 2009). We suggest that the role of early childhood educators in supporting the development of multiple languages for the young children in their care is both more complex and simpler than this tension.

We begin by noting there is evidence that factors such as parental language portfolios and parental perception of opportunities provided in educational settings combine to support children's maintenance of multiple languages (Verdon, McLeod, & Winsler, 2014). As is commonly understood in early childhood settings, the partnership between families and services is essential in supporting children's learning (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). A true partnership requires both partners to work at understanding each other. Early childhood educators thus need to seek to understand parental perspectives and the importance of the assets parents bring in their language portfolios.

The results from our study suggest several issues that early childhood educators and parents can explore in order to establish a shared understanding. Firstly, parental experiences of exposure to other languages are likely to have an impact on the assets they bring into the partnership. In this study parents from some of our families, both of whom were reared in a plurilingual environment,

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were somewhat *laissez-faire* about the way in which they expected their children to acquire languages. Because they were exposed to multiple languages from their early years, and acquired multiple languages easily because of that exposure, they assumed their children would do so. These parents were relaxed about their children's exposure to English and were quite happy for an English focus to be maintained in settings both inside and outside the home except when grandparents were visiting.

In contrast, other families (often families where parents learned additional languages in middle to late childhood or adulthood) were more deliberate in the way in which they exposed their children to more than one language. They were conscious of the need to surround children by sounds from the languages they wanted them to learn, often took a didactic approach, and were more likely to be worried that their children were exposed to too much English. One family particularly mourned the growing preference for English demonstrated as the children moved out of the home into early childhood and later primary school settings. These parents were more likely to request early childhood educators to support their children's multiple languages.

Some families perceived English as a language offering significant advantages and, whilst they wanted to try and maintain their multiple languages in the home, the high value they placed on English suggests that they would be less likely to request early childhood services to support their children's multiple languages. For these families, L1 appeared to be a private language, and not one they wanted to profile outside the home. Thus these children may present at an early childhood service with limited English, but parents are unlikely to want to put effort into establishing a partnership with early childhood educators to support multiple languages. Rather they are likely to request that the focus remain on English, which they may not be able to fully support in the home if, as in some cases, they are still learning English themselves. Such a strategy may be problematic for children's overall plurilingual development (Lightbown, 2008). In support of this parental position is the research undertaken by Place and Hoff (2011) that demonstrates "non-native input is less useful

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to language acquisition than native input” (p. 1847). Many language intervention programmes are structured around the idea that children’s exposure to rich and complex language in their homes is crucial for language acquisition (Lekhai et al, 2010, Wagner, Spiker & Inman, 2002, Webb et al, 2004, McCormick et al, 2006). Bruce and Spratt (2011) emphasise the importance of a multisensory approach in creating a rich language environment so that children’s language experiences incorporate movement, three dimensional props and language play (for example rhymes and rhythm). Makin (2005) also emphasises the need for a rich language environment which offers opportunities for children to play with sound (and she emphasises the play element here), as well as extensive participation in songs, rhymes, rhythms and a range of written and oral stories. Where children’s language experiences lack such complexity, the risk of language impairment increases. It is this lack of rich language experiences to which the language impairments of children who are deaf are attributed (Knoors & Marschark 2012).

The point we are making is that just because parents speak multiple languages, does not mean that they all bring the same language assets into the partnership with early childhood educators. It is important that educators develop relationships with parents so they can not only understand parental language assets, but also the value that parents place on the various languages available to them and what that is likely to mean in terms of their expectations of the early childhood setting.

Establishing a shared understanding of the assets parents bring in their language portfolios, the value they place on multiple languages along with the supports they have available lays a sound foundation upon which early childhood educators and parents can develop language plans for each child. Where there are parental expectations that the early childhood environment will attempt to provide multiple language exposure, the partnership can jointly explore the many options that are now available using information technology, community resources and educational/bicultural support services.

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Information technology (including the internet) provides many opportunities for children to see appropriate material written in multiple languages, to play games where multiple languages are used as the medium of communication and to engage in interactions with appropriate language speakers. For example, some families in the study regularly contact a child's grandparents or other relatives in the home country or another part of Australia using Skype. In an early childhood setting, family members might become involved with all the young children in a service through such regular Skype sessions. Suitably screened community members can be involved in the programme: for example as volunteers who come in to tell stories in multiple languages. Cultural inclusion support services such as the New South Wales Bilingual Support Programme have a rich array of resources (printed material, games, ideas etc) that can be used to enrich the culture of the classroom.

We argue in this study that understanding the assets in parental language portfolios is an essential prerequisite for early childhood educators to develop a successful language programme for each child in their care. One size does not fit all: different parents bring different assets and different motivations and these lead to different expectations. We propose the framework of the parental language portfolio, with its components of parental experiences, parental values and intra-familial support, as a useful tool to assist early childhood educators to develop strong partnerships with families from which language programmes can be developed. We also suggest that arising from these parental language portfolios are the strategies parents themselves use in the home to support their children's plurilingualism. Our research is ongoing and we aim to identify and report on these strategies in future papers. Underpinning our research is the acknowledgement of the benefits of plurilingualism to both those who are plurilingual and to society as a whole. We position plurilingualism as a right and it is our intention through our research, to support parents and educators in effectively addressing this right.

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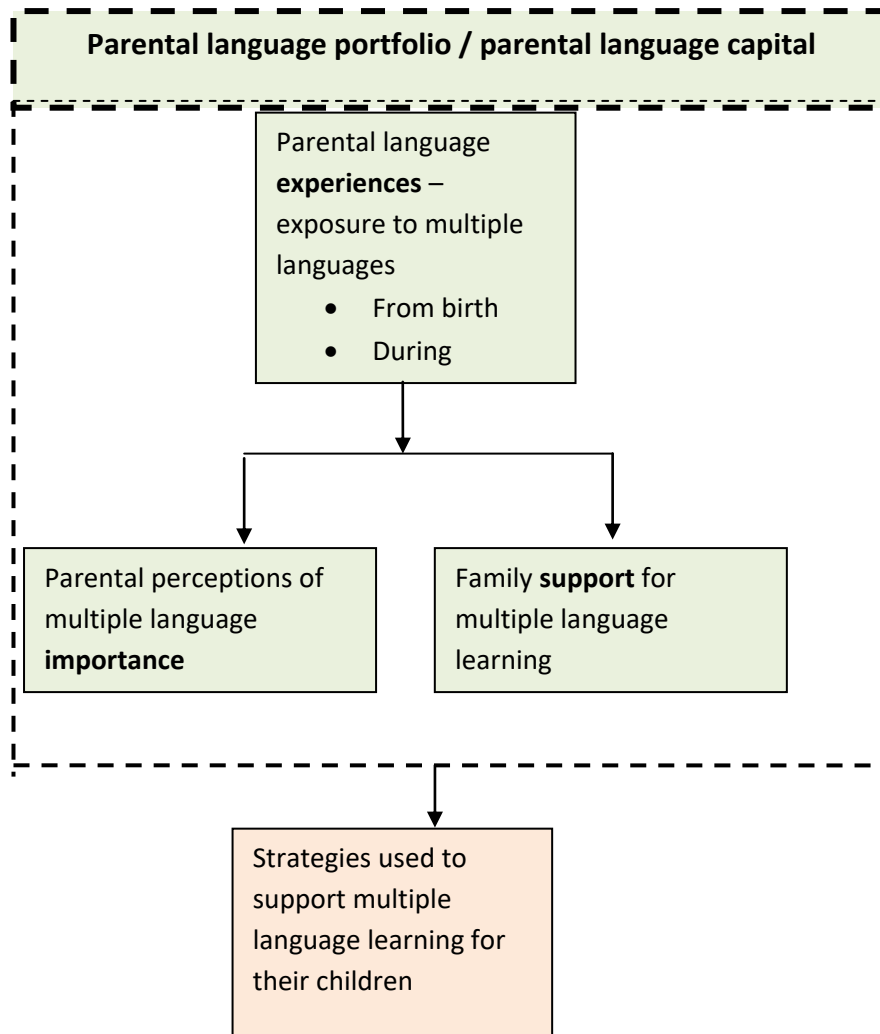
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Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



*Table 1: Bilingualism in the Bush Family Language background*

Family	Children – Age at baseline	Mother	Father	Language use – parents
Zavala family M: Angelina F: Norm	Boy Xavier – 2yrs 1mth	Grew up in French-speaking Canada/Parents from Peru L1: Spanish L2: French (from kindergarten on) fluent L3: English (from school) fluent	Grew up in Australia L1: English L2: Spanish (as adult) basic	Mother speaks only Spanish to child, but plans to introduce French soon Mother speaks in English to Father Father speaks in English to mother and child Family communication is in English and Spanish
Olivier family M: Elaine F: Oscar	Boy Lane – 2yrs	Grew up in Togo L1: Ewe L2: French L3: English (from school) medium fluency	Grew up in Togo L1: Ewe L2: French L3: English (from school) medium fluency	Initially French and Ewe, but on arrival to Australia, both mainly speak English to child Both parents are introducing some French to child Mother and Father communicate in French and Ewe in a mixed manner to each other as well as using English
Zellweg er family M: Eleanor F: Kurt	Boy Spiderman – 4yrs 9mths Boy Fritz – 1yr 11mths	Grew up in Australia L1: English L2: German (as adult) basic	Grew up in Germany L1: German L2: English (from school) fluent	Mother speaks English to the children and Father Father speaks 95% German to children but uses English if mother is present Father speaks English to mother
Yanev family F: Lael M: Emilie	Girl Alicia – 6yrs Girl Amabel – 3yrs Girl Nina – 11mths	Grew up in Australia L1: English L2: Hebrew (as adult) medium fluency L3: Danish (as adult) medium fluency	Grew up in Israel/Turkish parents L1: Hebrew L2: English (as adult) fluent	Father speaks Hebrew to children 70-80% of the time Father and mother speak English to each other Mother speaks mainly English to children but also uses some Hebrew When Grandma visits (approx 3 months a year) everyone speaks Hebrew 100% of the time

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<p>Afolayan family F: Malachi M: Yvonne</p>	<p>Boy Leonel – 3yrs 6mths Boy Bo – 7mths</p>	<p>Grew up in Ethiopia (Oromia – Parents spoke Oromigna) L1: Amharic L2: Arabic (speaking only) L3: English basic</p>	<p>Grew up in Ethiopia – (Parents from Eritrea) L1: Amharic L2: Tigrigna (Eritrean L) L3: Arabic (speaking only) L4: English medium fluency</p>	<p>Mother and Father speak to each other in Amharic Family communication in Amharic – to each other and to children. The family is beginning to use some English at home</p>
<p>Ralston family M: Ada F: Trev</p>	<p>Girl Aino – 9yrs Boy Sammu – 7yrs Boy Steen – 2yrs 11mths</p>	<p>Grew up in Finland L1: Finnish L2: English (from school) fluent L3: Swedish basic L4: German basic</p>	<p>Grew up in Australia L1: English L2: Finnish (as adult) basic</p>	<p>Mother tries to only speak Finnish to the children the majority of the time Father speaks English to the children Parents speak English to each other</p>
<p>Aspen family M: Elisabet F: Barry</p>	<p>Girl Adelina – 3 yrs Boy Ivo – 10 mths</p>	<p>Grew up in Brazil L1: Portuguese L2: Spanish (from school) medium fluency L3: English (as adult) medium fluency</p>	<p>Grew up in Australia L1: English L2: Portuguese (as adult) medium fluency L3: Norwegian (as adult) fluent L4: Spanish (as adult) medium fluency</p>	<p>Mother speaks mostly Portuguese to children but English with father. She uses only Portuguese when Father is away. Father speaks mainly English to the children but uses Portuguese occasionally. He tries to teach children some Norwegian The family speak 100% Portuguese when they visit Brazil</p>
<p>Anare family F: Tomasi M: Erin</p>	<p>Girl Anika – 23 mths Boy Epeli – 11 mths</p>	<p>Grew up in Australia L1: English</p>	<p>Grew up in Fiji L1: Fijian L2: English (from school) fluent</p>	<p>Mother speaks English to the children Father speaks Fijian to children most of time Parents speak English to each other Family communication is English including grandparents</p>

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<p>Kappel family M: Anika F: Mitch</p>	<p>Boy Gunnar – 2 yrs 6 mths Boy Finn – 5 yrs Boy Devan – 7 yrs 6 mths Boy Christian – 9 yrs</p>	<p>Grew up in Holland L1: Dutch L2: English (from school) fluent L3: French (from school) basic L4: German (from school) basic</p>	<p>Grew up in Australia L1: English L2: Dutch (as adult) basic</p>	<p>Mother speaks a mixture of English and Dutch. Tries to speak Dutch to children when they are alone Father speaks English to the children. He is learning Dutch Family communication is in English</p>
<p>Agarwal family M: Aashi F: Lajesh</p>	<p>Girl Anjali – 2 yrs Boy Nasir – 6 mths</p>	<p>Grew up in India L1: Hindi L2: Kannada L3: Telugu L4: English (from school) fluent</p>	<p>Grew up in India L1: Telugu L2: English (from school) fluent</p>	<p>Mother speaks English and some Hindi to the children Father speaks English and Telugu to the children Grandmother often visits and speaks only Telugu to the children Parents speak English to each other</p>
<p>Lange family M: Esther F: Neal</p>	<p>Girl Mayra – 4 yrs Boy Nash – 2 yrs 6 mths</p>	<p>Grew up in South Africa L1: Afrikaans L2: English (from school) fluent</p>	<p>Grew up in South Africa L1: Afrikaans L2: English (from school) fluent</p>	<p>Both parents speak Afrikaans to the children and to each other when they are at home. Sometimes they mix Afrikaans with English to the children. Outside home they mainly speak English.</p>
<p>Yates family M: Oki Nhan F: Ed</p>	<p>Girl 1 Aahana – 4 yrs Girl 2 Aryanna – 2 yrs</p>	<p>Grew up in Korea L1: Korean L2: English (from school) medium fluency</p>	<p>Grew up in Ireland and Australia L1: English L2: Korean (as adult) basic</p>	<p>Mother speaks mostly Korean to children but uses some English as well Father speaks English to the children and tries a little Korean to them sometimes Family communication is in English</p>