



# PRIMARY LANGUAGE LITERACY PROJECT

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

First Words Preschool Speech and Language Program of Ottawa

### **1. Does research support the use of first language at home?**

Many studies support the use of first language at home. Research shows that encouraging first language use at home promotes the development of strong language skills in the first language. When a child has a good understanding of his/her first language, these strong language skills help him/her to learn a second language. Studies have also shown that children with strong language skills do better in school.

### **2. What can I do to support parents in using their first language at home?**

- ❖ Show respect for the different linguistic backgrounds of the children in your program through an accepting and open attitude.
- ❖ Promote the use of first language at home.
- ❖ Encourage parents to borrow heritage language books from the Ottawa Public Library.
- ❖ Encourage parents to speak their first language when talking with their child at drop off and pick up times - this helps to foster the relationship between parent and child.
- ❖ Increase parents' awareness of using consistent approaches to learning two languages at home i.e. one parent-one language.

### **3. I am an Early Childhood Educator and a lot of children in our centre speak another language at home, other than English. I am hearing a lot about the importance of parents using their first language at home with their children. Does this mean that I have to learn these languages to use at work with the children?**

Teachers should use the language that they are most comfortable with – the language that is the most natural or fluent to them and/or the language used in the daycare environment. It is important to make your language easy for the child to understand. Here are some things you can do to help children in your care learn a second language:

- ❖ Use grammatically simple sentences.
- ❖ Make important words stand out.
- ❖ Slow down while speaking.
- ❖ Repeat, repeat, repeat.
- ❖ Use simple, everyday vocabulary.
- ❖ Use gestures.
- ❖ Talk about the here-and-now.

### **4. Our teaching team has noticed that children in our program who speak another language at home don't speak very much at first. Should we be concerned about language delays?**

Many children who are learning a second language are thought to be language-delayed when they are not. As a teacher, you can expect the following:

- A silent period of up to 7 months - children need time to understand the new language before using it.
- A mixing of the two languages - children often use words from both languages in one sentence to help fill in words they don't know.
- Grammatical errors - children will make mistakes in the new language until they figure out all the rules.
- A loss of the first language - if children don't keep speaking the first language at home while learning the second one, they will lose skills in the first language.