



Bilingualism Forums 2014

Armidale
Wagga Wagga
Newcastle
Wollongong
Coffs Harbour
Gosford

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Introduction

Between June and August 2014, Bicultural Support conducted a series of six “Bilingualism Forums” across rural NSW, with the aim of educating early childhood education and care staff, health practitioners, families, parents and the community in general about the benefits of bilingualism. Facilitated by speech pathologist Nisrine El-Chouefati, the forums sought to answer the question: “Does learning two languages in early childhood result in language delay or disorder?” Forums were held between June 2nd and August 1st in Armidale, Coffs Harbour, Gosford, Newcastle, Wagga Wagga and Wollongong (as indicated by the blue stars in Figure 1, below).

Figure 1: Location of Bilingualism Forums



Purpose

The 2012 Bilingualism Conference, and a follow-up Bilingual Forum in Sydney in 2013, made it clear that when it comes to bilingualism, there remains a substantial gap in knowledge among educators, parents, health professionals and community workers. In an attempt to address this, Ethnic Child Care, Family and Community Services Co-operative and Bicultural Support, with financial support from Children’s Services Central, resolved to facilitate a series of forums across regional NSW in 2014.

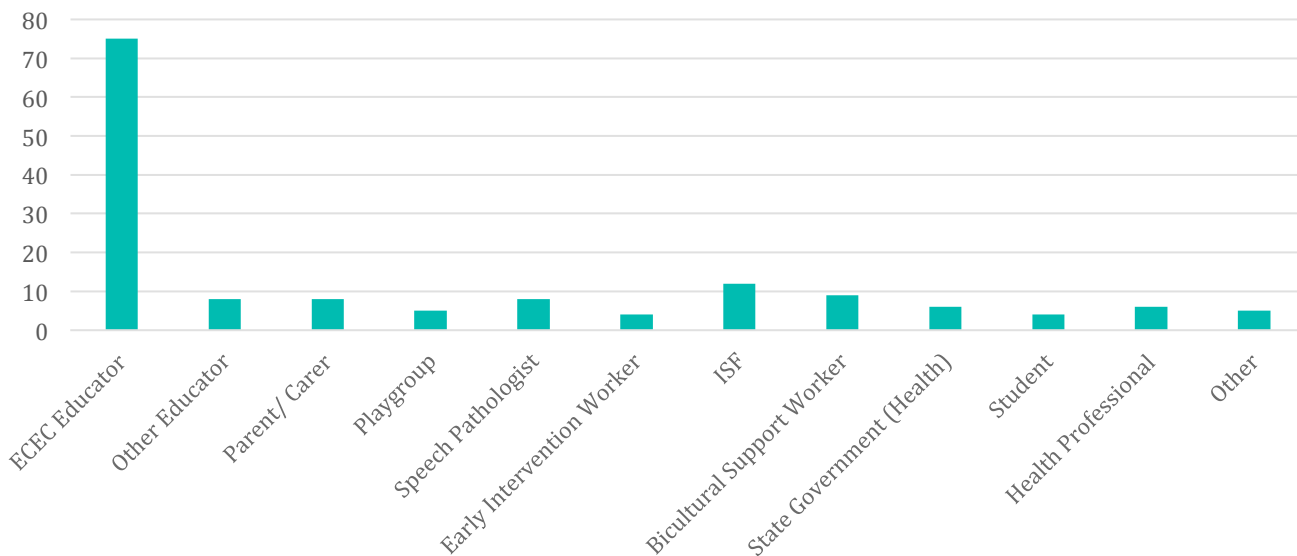
ECEC educators were asking Bicultural Support workers whether they should encourage the children in their service to speak their home language, or insist on English only. Bicultural Support workers were concerned that parents were asking them not to speak to their child in his/her home language. Some parents and educators seemed to be of the belief that if a child maintained their home language, their English would suffer and they

would fall behind in school. The need for education around the impacts and benefits of bilingualism, as well as the common stages of bilingual language development were obvious. Nisrine El-Choueifati, a multilingual speech pathologist with expertise in bilingual language development, who had been involved in both the 2012 conference and the 2013 forum, was recruited to facilitate the sessions. The forums sought to answer the question: “Does learning two languages in early childhood result in language delay or disorder?” Each workshop provided a framework for considering how bilingualism can be supported when there may be communication delays. It encouraged participants to consider a range of child, family and educational factors that can be addressed to support children with communication delays to stay connected with their culture, community and identity.

Participants

The forums were open to the public but were particularly aimed at parents, early childhood education and care professionals, inclusion support facilitators, Bicultural Support workers and health professionals (including speech pathologists). The majority of attendees at each session were ECEC educators from a range of services including long day care, family day care, outside-hours school care, occasional care and multicultural playgroups.

Figure 2: Who Attended the Bilingualism Forums?

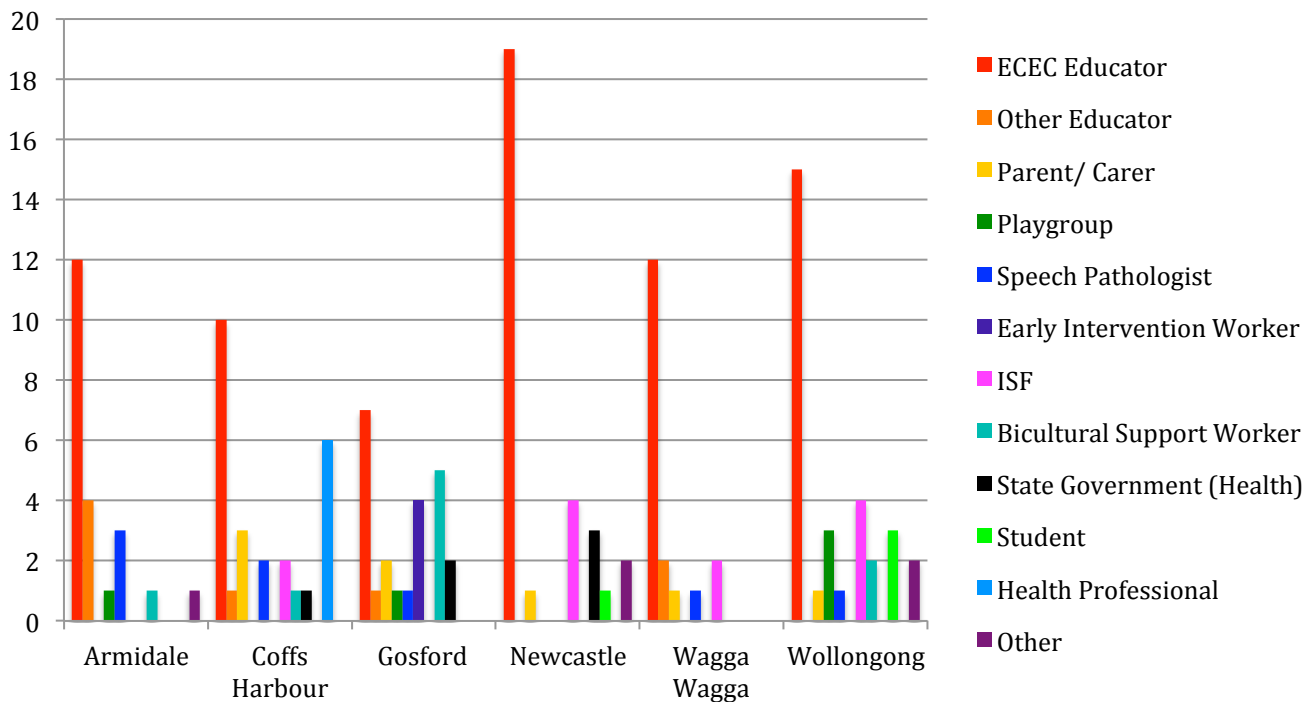


There were minor differences in the composition of participants throughout the six regions (see Figure 3). For example, Coffs Harbour was the only forum that attracted health professionals (other than speech pathologists), in this case, six child and family health nurses; there were no Inclusion Support Facilitators present at either Armidale or Gosford; and ECEC students were only represented at Newcastle and Wollongong. These differences are likely a result of the fact that each forum was promoted with the assistance of the local Bicultural Support Consultant(s), each of whom has different networks within their region.

The level of engagement among participants varied quite substantially between regions. For example, in Gosford, the forum with the smallest number of attendees Gosford, the distribution of participants (i.e. from different personal and professional backgrounds) was more balanced. In addition to ECEC educators, there were relatively high numbers of Bicultural Support workers and early intervention specialists, as well as a primary level educator, parents, a speech pathologists, and employees from the local health office. This combination of a varied distribution combined with a small number of participants, created an excellent audience. From the beginning of the session, participants were comfortably asking and answering questions, offering up their personal experiences as case studies, and working on activities in small groups.

Interestingly however, the Wagga Wagga forum, which had the largest number, and least diversity, of participants, was also particularly interactive. It is interesting to note that the Wagga Wagga forum was the largest, despite being the smallest city visited (with a population under 50,000 compared to Newcastle which has a population of over 500,000). Perhaps this is indicative of the fact that Wagga Wagga, as a small city in a reasonably regional location, does not attract a lot of professional development or training sessions from outside the region and thus, when workshops are run in the area, the locals are particularly keen to participate.

Figure 3: Who Attended, By Location



Facilitators

The primary presenter for all six sessions was Nisrine El-Choueifati, the early intervention team leader and speech pathologist working at Bankstown Community Resource. Nisrine was involved in the development and implementation of the Training in Interaction, Communication and Literacy (TICL) across nine child care centres in Bankstown LGA. The TICL program provided on-site workplace training to whole teams of early

childhood professionals to awaken the opportunities for communication and literacy through everyday routines. Nisrine's key interest in collaborating with early childhood professionals within the early childhood context resulted in her completion of a postgraduate master's research project with The University of Sydney in 2011. The master's research project involved developing and validating the Interaction, Communication and Literacy Skills Audit a measurement tool used by both Speech Pathologists and Early Childhood professionals to measure the skills required to support the language and literacy of all children.

The Armidale Forum was run slightly differently from the others because it was co-hosted by the University of New England and Northcott Society. After Nisrine's presentation, Dr. Liz Ellis, a senior lecturer in linguistics at the University of New England presented on: "Current Research on Family Language Maintenance (Bilingualism in the Bush) – Emerging Issues for Families with Young Bilingual Children."

Dr. Liz Ellis is a lecturer in Linguistics at the University of New England Armidale, where her research focuses on bilingualism, especially bilingual teacher cognition and bilingual family practices, as well as on second language learning. She is an experienced presenter and qualified teacher who has given parent workshops and media commentary on many language issues. She has taught TESOL and trained TESOL teachers in 9 countries. She is also a parent and a speaker of Spanish. Liz's research interests are in the intersection of bilingual and multilingual studies and teacher cognition, in family bilingualism and in critical approaches to TESOL.

Support Staff

Each forum was attended by a full-time member of the Bicultural Support team. Bicultural Support's Program Coordinator, Meni Tsambouniaris, attended the forums in Armidale, Wagga Wagga and Coffs Harbour. Ashley Hill, a Bicultural Support Project Officer and Consultant, attended the forums in Newcastle, Wollongong and Gosford.

Each forum was also supported and attended by the local Bicultural Support Consultant for the region: in Armidale, Merle Olson; in Wagga Wagga, Jasmine Lander; in Newcastle, Zenaida Edmunds; in Wollongong, Marina Popovska; in Coffs Harbour, Sandra Grant and Siandra Webb; and in Gosford, Moira Fraser.

Finally, additional logistical, administrative and promotional support was provided by Pam Grammenos and Divina Cergol.

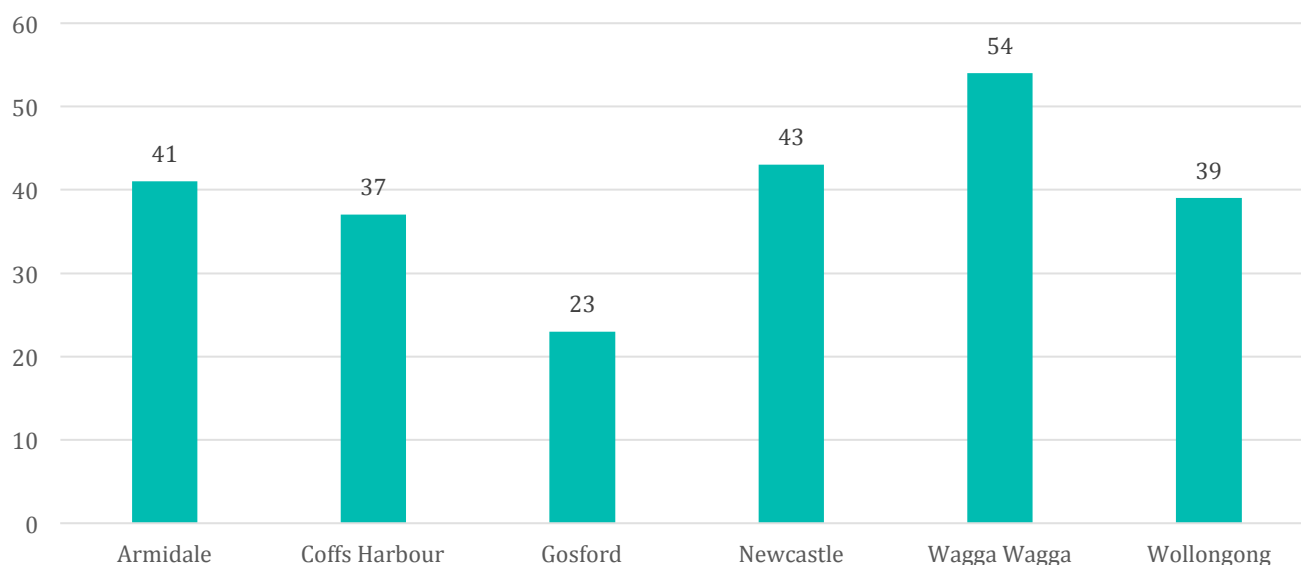
How Many Attended?

According to sign-in sheets, a total of 237 individuals attended the 2014 Bilingualism Forums. However, it is suspected that several individuals entered each session without signing in and thus the actual number of attendees is likely higher. Most attendees registered for the forums in advance, however a handful of attendees at each forum had not pre-registered. There was also a reasonable number of participants for each session who pre-registered but did not actually attend. The number of attendees varied by location from 23 in Gosford to 54 in Wagga Wagga (see Figure 4).

As mentioned previously, the relatively small group size worked very well as they allowed a lot of time for questions and discussion. We found that at the smaller forums, attendees were more likely to ask questions,

volunteer case studies and participate in discussion. At Gosford in particular, the attendees were very engaged; they remained at the location well after the formal presentation had ended and continued to discuss raised issues among themselves, and with the presenter.

Figure 4: Number of Attendees at Regional Bilingualism Forums



Agenda

With the exception of the Armidale Forum, each forum was structured along the same lines. Morning tea was available for participants once they had registered. The session opened with a brief overview of Ethnic Child Care, Family and Community Services Co-operative and the Bicultural Support program, followed by the main presentation, which was split into two, with a lunch break in between. Each session lasted approximately three hours (with the exception of the Armidale forum, which ran for four and a half hours). The timing of each forum was slightly different, however the presentation itself was roughly divided as follows (a copy of the full presentation can be found in the Appendix):

1130-1200pm: Registration and morning tea

1200pm: Acknowledgement of Country

1202pm: Introduction to ECCFCSC and Bicultural Support

- Why Bilingualism?
- Housekeeping

1215pm: Does learning two languages in early childhood result in language delay or disorder?

- Expectations of participants
- Objectives and Aims
- Case studies – evidence of lack of knowledge
- What does the evidence say?
- The importance and benefits of being bilingual

- Language is just one aspect of culture
- The role of speech pathologists
- Case studies – small group discussions
- Child Factors
- Normal behaviours in second language acquisition
- Misinterpreting behaviours

130pm: Lunch break

200pm: Does learning two languages in early childhood result in language delay or disorder?

- Family factors
- Linking to the Early Years Learning Framework
- Essentials for communication
- Why might bi/multilingual children be more vulnerable?
- How can bicultural support help?
- Cultural competency
- FAQs
- References
- Questions?

300pm: Closing and dismissal

In Armidale, a light lunch was served on arrival with a coffee break mid-way through the afternoon. The session closed with Dr. Liz Ellis's presentation: "Current Research on Family Language Maintenance (Bilingualism in the Bush) – Emerging Issues for Families with Young Bilingual Children

Outcomes

The outcomes of the 2014 Bilingualism Forums can broadly be divided into two categories: raising awareness of the Bicultural Support program; and improving knowledge about bilingual issues.

Bicultural Support

- Introduced Ethnic Child Care, Family and Community Services Co-operative as the peak body on CALD issues in children's, disability and aged care services
- Made Bicultural Support program known to several ECEC services and parents who were not aware of its existence
- Distributed several Bicultural Support Worker applications
- Promoted Bicultural Support as a fee-for-service program for non-eligible services
- Provided 250 people across regional NSW with resources to help them support bilingual and bicultural children and families
- Further developed relationship with the University of New England

Bilingualism Learning Outcomes

- Bilingualism does not result in language delay or disorder
- Communication, cultural, cognitive, academic and economic benefits of bilingualism
- Normal behaviours in second language acquisition
 - Silent period

- Code switching/language mixing
- Interference
- Language loss
- Avoidance
- Fossilisation
- Reduced exposure to home and second language
- Commonly misinterpreted behaviours
- Language is strongly entrenched in culture
- The role of speech pathologists
- Factors affecting language development – child factors, family factors, education factors
- The impact of personality on communication and vocalisation
- Importance of communicating effectively with families
- The importance of building strong, positive and trusting relationships with children and families
- How Bicultural Support can assist ECEC services in supporting bilingual children and families
- Children need a reason, a means and a partner in order to develop language
- Strategies to support language development
- In certain situations, bilingual children may be more vulnerable to speech delay
- Strategies to build cultural competency and develop reflective practice

Evaluation

Promotion

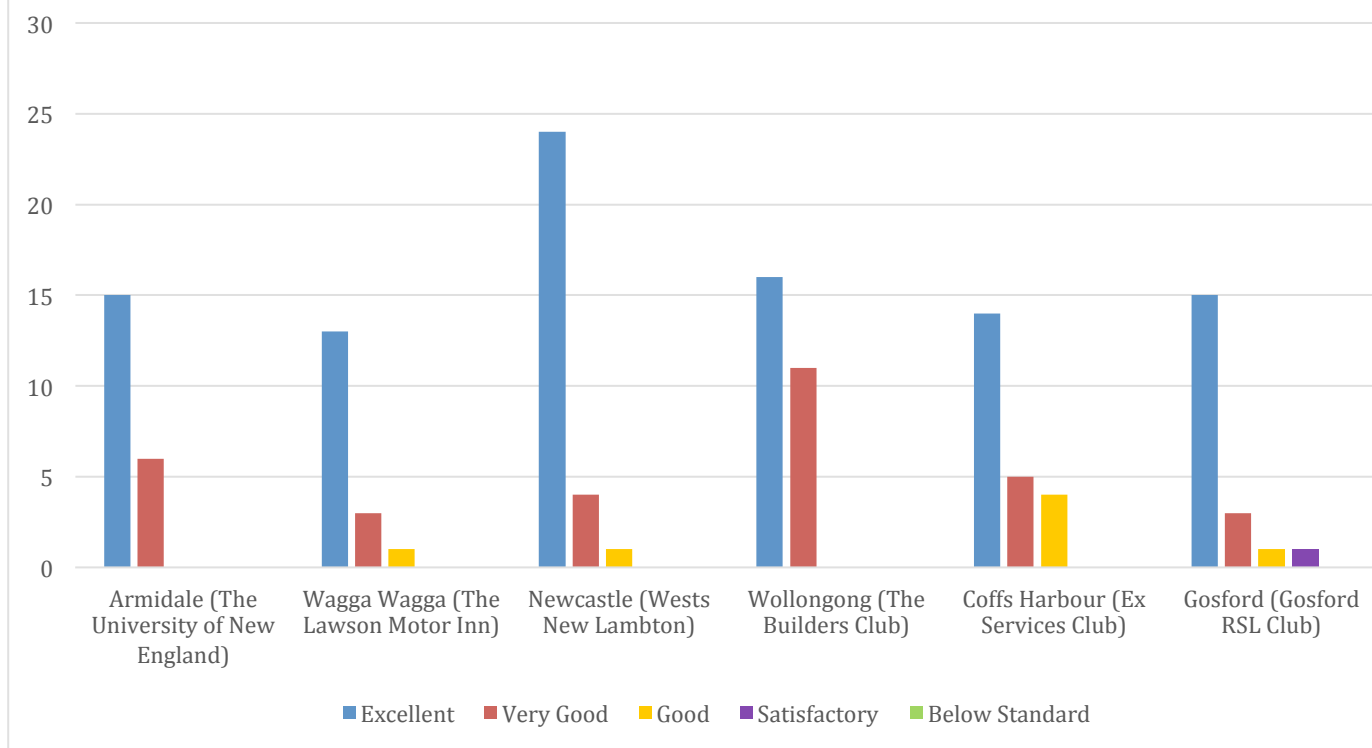
The forums were promoted through a variety of sources. A flyer created by Children’s Services Central was distributed by email to all relevant Inclusion Support Agencies who were then asked to forward it on to their ECEC services. The local Bicultural Support Consultants for the region also promoted the forums among their networks and contacts. Local Bicultural Support workers were also invited to attend.

Venue

Each forum was held at a local club, with the exception of the session in Armidale which was held at the University of New England and the session in Wagga Wagga which was held at a local hotel. Most venues were able to provide a projector, laptop and technical assistance as required. These facilities combined with on-site catering made the clubs an obvious choice of venue.

Interestingly, the venue set-up seemed to have an impact on participation levels. Where the room was set-up banquet style, with chairs set around round tables, participants seemed to be more participatory. Conversely, where the room was set up auditorium style, with rows of chairs facing the screen, participants seemed less engaged. Tables also made it easier for participants to make notes, participate in group work and get to know other attendees. In the future, if possible, banquet style seating would be preferred for interactive workshops.

Figure 5: Participants' Satisfaction with Forum Venues



Risk Assessment

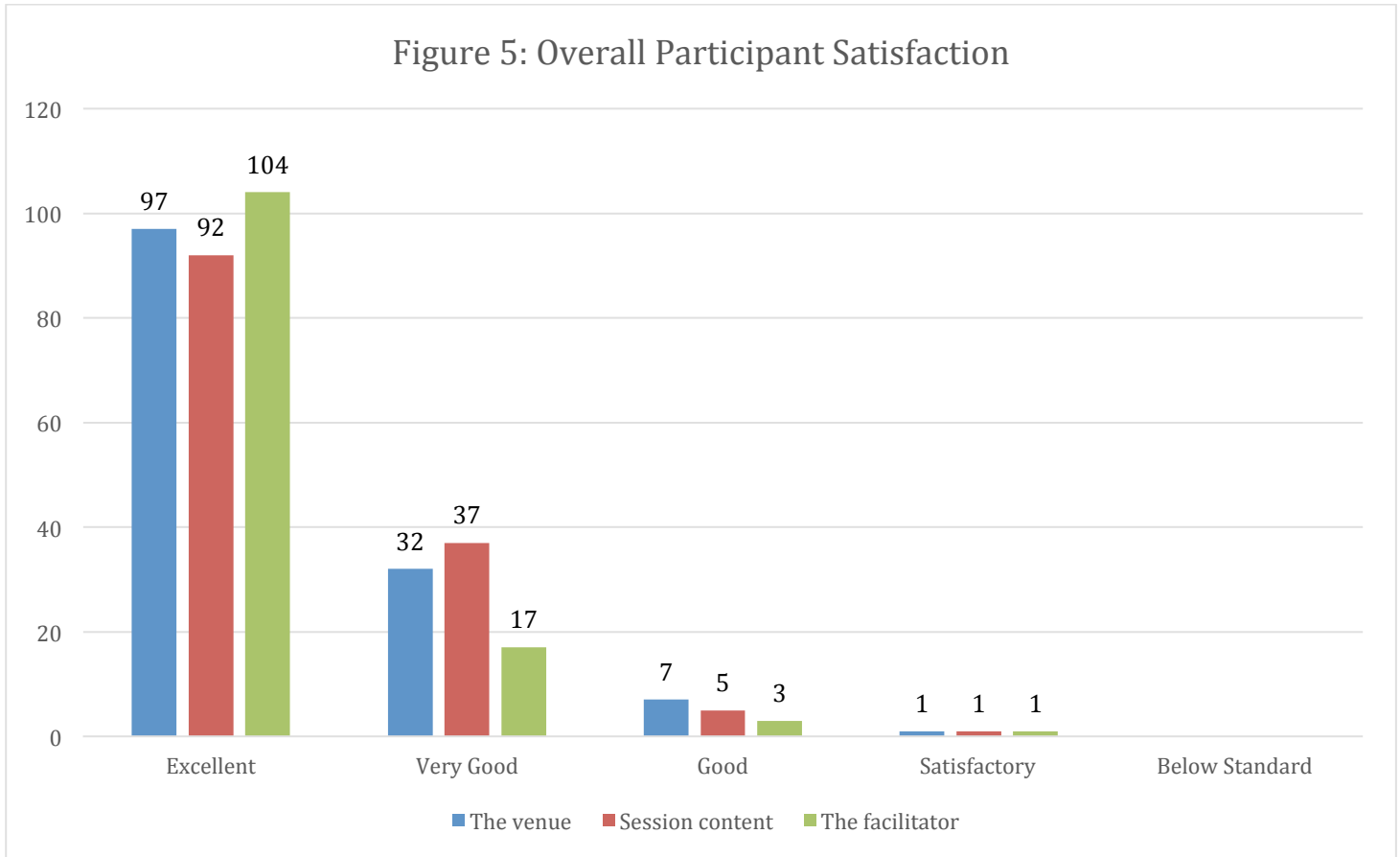
No health or safety issues occurred at any of the forums. The venues were accessible and food was organised by each venue’s internal catering service. Participants noted any dietary requirements upon registration and these were passed on to each venue. Where children were present, permission had been requested, and arrangements made, with the venue in advance.

Food

In general, the food at each venue was excellent; the catering at Newcastle and Gosford was particularly notable. Several participants at each session commented on the quality of the catering, and how impressed they were to be fed at all given that the session was free. Dietary requirements were requested from each person who registered and were catered for when sufficient time was given. There were no complaints about the quality of the food, however there were several objections to the quantity. The amount of food provided at each venue was more than necessary and there was thus substantial wastage at each location. The general policy for most clubs is not to allow the food to be taken out of the venue, and not to allow club staff to consume leftovers. In the future, for catered events, I would recommend that the number of participants be underestimated to reduce the amount of wastage.

Participant Feedback

Overall, the participant feedback was excellent. Each participant was asked to submit a completed evaluation form at the end of the session. The evaluation form asked participants to rate the venue, session content and facilitator as either “excellent,” “very good,” “good,” “satisfactory” or “below standard.” A copy of the evaluation form can be found in the Appendix. The majority of attendees rated the facilitator, the venue and the session content as “excellent” and no participant rated the forums as “below standard.”



Participants were also asked questions about their learning expectations prior to the session, the learning points that had the most impact on them and what changes they would make as a result of participating in the session.

What questions did you have prior to this professional development session?

Most participants were interested in attaining an answer to the forum’s main question: “Does learning two languages in early childhood result in language delay or disorder?” However there were also more specific practical questions including:

- How to best support bilingual children and families
- How to convince parents to maintain their home language with their children
- Strategies to use to promote the benefits of bilingualism
- The normal process of acquiring two (or more) languages

- How to support children (and/or parents) who do not speak English
- How to incorporate multicultural perspectives into the service
- Is it better to use English or the home language at the ECEC service
- Will a child learning two languages be stunted in one of the languages
- Is learning two languages confusing for children
- What are the positive and negative effects of bilingualism
- Why might a child not be speaking at school
- How can we communicate with a child who is nonverbal
- How can Bicultural Support help us
- Do children benefit more from being in a culturally rich environment
- How can you distinguish between an accent and language delay
- Should families focus on English only, if the child seems to be delayed in English
- Is it better for children to learn two languages
- How can I build relationships with bilingual families
- What strategies can I use to bridge the gap between Aboriginal English and standard English
- How do you differentiate between language delay and personality

Identify two things that have had an impact on you from this professional development session:

There were a number of messages that strongly resonated with participants. Many people commented on understanding the importance of developing positive and trusting relationships with children and families; the practical strategies recommended at the forum; appreciated learning about normal behaviours in second language acquisition; and the importance of communicating effectively with the family in order to learn more about the child. Other learning points included:

- Importance of being open to conversations with families
- Practical strategies to take on board and implement at the service
- The importance of celebrating the culture and heritage of children in our care
- Supporting a child first requires the development of trust
- There is enormous misunderstanding among adults regarding normal language development
- Find out why a family is so adamant that their child speak only English
- If a child is “silent” – don’t push them to speak
- A child’s personality can affect their communication/vocalisation
- Language is entrenched in culture
- Children will speak when they are comfortable
- Importance of gathering more information about the child – from family, observation etc.
- Make use of a child’s interests to encourage bilingual learning
- Use specially designed tools and resources to support information gathering
- The importance of building respectful relationships with families
- The educator has a role in supporting bilingual development in children
- Parents are great cultural and linguistic resources
- Build community links and involvement to support families and children
- Importance of understanding the family’s expectations for communication
- One language, one context (as opposed to one language, one person)



- Importance of children feeling like they belong

What changes will you make as a result of attending this professional development sessions, and how will this action improve quality outcomes for the children and families that you work with?

Many participants promised to share what they had learned at the session with their colleagues, and the families at their service. Others stated their intention to use the tools and resources provided, for example, the Family Planning Tool, the Communication Passport and the Survival Words book, and to access Bicultural Support in the future. Additional potential changes and improved outcomes include:

- Researching bilingualism further
- Building better relationships with families
- Displaying multiple languages at the service
- Revisiting normal language development
- Involving families more often
- Incorporating multiple cultural perspectives into the service
- Developing a resource for enrolments to better understand the families' beliefs and motivations
- Reassuring parents of the value of bilingualism and maintaining their home language
- Organising translations of important service documents in key languages
- Observing children more carefully to help identify potential issues
- Improved confidence in working with bilingual clients
- Encourage discussion of bilingualism within families
- Assisting services to be more self-reflective

Additional Comments

Participants were also given the chance to leave additional comments. The vast majority of those who left comments thanked us for providing the forums. Here is a selection of their comments:

- Thank you. This was incredibly interesting and will hopefully help with my multicultural families
- Thank you for a wonderful, interactive session
- Many thanks for a different, thought provoking session
- A great workshop
- Excellent forum – really enjoyed listening to other people talk about children in their service. The use of case studies worked well
- Wonderful open discussions!
- Thank you for linking to the EYLF, opening my eyes to ways of collecting information on families and how all areas impact others
- Great presenter. Clear, concise information
- Thank you for allowing parents to participate. Very appreciated
- Take home information very good and will hopefully be helpful in encouraging our service, providing for children learning English as a second language, while assisting them and encouraging them to continue to develop in their home language also

- An excellent range of information regarding speech development for all children, especially multilingual children. Loved the links to the EYLF
- Nisrine was a great speaker, very intelligent and helpful
- Thanks. Great training. I'd love a repeat so that more of the services we support could hear these clear and positive messages
- Fantastic – would be a great KU conference
- I feel that the clarification on social and academic language is very important and not one I had considered previously
- Thank you. I felt that coming to this workshop would provide an update on this topic – but I am inspired as well as updated!

A few participants mentioned that the session went overtime, or dragged on because other attendees asked questions specific to their service. Conversely, there was a request for a longer, full-day workshop. One person had hoped for more detailed information on the stages of normal language development.

Follow-up

All registered participants who signed in upon arrival at the forum have been emailed a Certificate of Attendance by Bicultural Support. Any questions that arose from the forums that we were unable to answer on the day were followed-up upon return to the office.

There were several requests from non-eligible services about accessing Bicultural Support. Educators were directed to the resource page of the ECCFCSC website, emailed the Multicultural Resource Guide, and given suggestions about local organisations and individuals who may be able to provide assistance. Services were also reminded that they could access Bicultural Support on a fee-for-service basis of \$50 per hour.

Comments

All six forums were highly successful. For the most part, participants were interested in the material and engaged with the presenter and other attendees. Some participants noted to Bicultural Support staff that Nisrine was the best presenter that they'd ever seen; that they'd attend in training given by her in a heartbeat; or that the Forum was the best, and most relevant, professional development training that they'd ever attended. Several participants requested a return of the Forum so that other colleagues, families and community members could benefit from the information. Additionally, Bicultural Support workers and consultants, in addition to educators, in regions where no forum was offered have made requests that we bring the workshop to their local area.

Nisrine was an excellent presenter. Her knowledge and passion for bilingualism is clear and the perspective that she was able to provide as a speech pathologist was a very practical and useful one for all participants. Additionally, her personal experience in the ECEC sector was clear and very much appreciated by participants who commented that they often attend workshops where presenters have little knowledge and no practical experience working in the sector. Nisrine continually adapted and improved her presentation, taking note of participants' responses and comments, and incorporating them into the following sessions. For example,

because she noted that many of the participants particularly appreciated her use of practical case studies, she incorporated further case studies into the presentation and allowed more time for discussion and questions.

The forums in small cities were particularly successful. This may be because less professional development and training opportunities are available in smaller areas and thus participants are particularly appreciative, interested and engaged when training sessions do occur. Perhaps it is worth considering focussing attention on some of these smaller areas.

The process of running these six Bilingualism Forums only further highlighted the fact that there is an enormous lack of awareness around the benefits of bilingualism, as well as of the normal stages of second language development. From discussions with forum participants, it is clear that this lack of awareness is widespread – among ECEC educators and staff, parents and families, early intervention workers, medical professionals and even speech pathologists. While the forums have targeted this knowledge deficit in several areas, further action is needed.