



Some students at Calgary's Edelweiss Preparatory School are in the process of learning their third language. PHOTOS: ADRIAN SHELLARD/FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Children quick to pick up second languages

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When Malina Suchand and her family moved to Calgary in 2009 from Irving, Texas, the Puerto Rico native wanted her children to be educated not only in English but also Spanish.

"I grew up speaking both English and Spanish, and it was important to me," says Suchand.

As her eldest son approached preschool age, she started looking for a place where he could learn about Spanish, and she found Edelweiss. The preparatory school offers basic Spanish as a second language for preschool and pre-kindergarten students.

"I love the idea that someone else would be talking to him in Spanish; usually, they only get it from me," says Suchand.

Her olderson has since moved on to Grade 1 and now her youngest child is attending Edelweiss.

"I think it's the best age to learn. The younger they are, it becomes normal to them — it's not necessarily learning 'another language.' It's a gift giving a child a second language. They feel special and it gives them a sense of confidence."

Research shows that exposing young kids to a second language at an early age "enhances their cognitive abilities and creative think-

ing skills," says Edelweiss director Margaret Reid.

"There's a lot of brain development going on there ... we have a child here that (Spanish) is their third language."

Learning a second language early on also enhances a child's appreciation of other cultures, says Reid, adding her school's entryway has a flag for every country represented by children who have attended Edelweiss — 77 flags and growing.

Other languages are also on offer in the city. Active Learning Programs is one of a number of Calgary preschools that offers bilingual French immersion, working with kids from 18 months and up.

"At a young age, they absorb a lot easier — they observe both languages," says teacher Eliane Marois-McKenzie.

She says the young children get to learn basic French phrases and words, becoming more advanced as they get older. When they move on to kindergarten and beyond, "they know the colours, numbers, days of the week, months of the year ... those basic words."

Adds Reid: "Young children ... possess the capacity to develop near-native-like pronunciation and intonation in a new language (which is something that becomes) more difficult as they get older."

