

TEACHING MULTILINGUAL CHILDREN



**ADVICE FOR
TEACHERS**

More than 300 different languages are spoken in UK schools. Learning English is important for children to make social and academic progress in school, but maintenance of home language(s) is also vital.

Research tells us that multilingual children may:

- Develop stronger social skills
- Be better able to understand how languages work
- Have enhanced skills in literacy because they have knowledge about languages
- Have enhanced skills in creativity and problem solving
- Have a strong sense of identity and can communicate with their extended family



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long does it take for a child to develop competence in English when it is not their mother tongue?

On average, it typically takes about two years to develop verbal competence and it may take up to 5 to 7 years to develop academic competence (understanding the vocabulary and concepts specific to each subject). Studies show that older children, such as those in Key Stage 2, who are already fluent in their native language and know how to read and write, can achieve proficiency more quickly than younger children.

Should I advise parents to speak English at home?

Getting some exposure to English before starting school is certainly useful for children, but it is also crucial that parents keep using their native language at home. There is evidence that, where parents are not fully proficient in English, this may end up doing more harm than good to children's English language development. Using English in the home also reduces the opportunities for rich exchanges that will develop secure proficiency in home languages. It is equally important to encourage parents to support

their children's development of literacy skills in the home language because studies show that some literacy skills can transfer from one language to the other.

What should I do if a child uses both languages in the classroom?

Multilingual children sometimes switch back and forth between languages, but that does not mean that they are confused about what language they are speaking. They may switch because a word in English does not occur to them, but also because a concept, or a joke, may be better conveyed in their home language. If there is a situation in the classroom where sticking to English is preferable, the teacher may wish to encourage this rather than direct a 'no languages other than English' policy.

Is learning English grammar helpful for multilingual children?

Research shows that introducing children to the explicit conventions of written English can be very helpful. By learning grammar, children are encouraged to notice and analyse the properties and regularities of a language and this may help them make

sense of it. They will also have another language to compare with English and this 'meta knowledge' about language is a key advantage for multilingual learners.

If I teach a multilingual child that is proficient in English, how much additional support do I still need to offer him/her?

Research shows that even if a bilingual child receives as much as 80% of their language input in English, this is not equivalent to getting 100% as is the case for a monolingual child. Often, these very fluent multilingual children still need support to access content and to learn how to use subject-specific academic language. You can draw on the The Bell Foundation Proficiency Scales to support your understanding of how proficient a child is.

How do I evaluate how much support a multilingual child will need in my class?

We advise making a pupil profile by gathering information on the child's family and their educational background. For example, is the child literate in their home language? How many languages are spoken in the family and what is the main language of the home? How many years of school did the child complete before coming to the UK? Did the family

migrate by choice or necessity? Some Local Authorities have very good examples of pupil profiles for multilingual learners which we recommend schools try and use.

Is it more challenging for multilingual children to learn another European language at Key-Stage 2?

There is no evidence that learning two languages at the same time is problematic for children. Multilingual children can sometimes be better language learners than monolingual children because they are more used to noticing regularities in a language and more open to new sounds.

Should we offer a support plan out of the classroom?

Depending on the nature of what is being taught, spending time out of class with a learning support assistant can be useful. For example, teachers may wish to offer some pre-teaching where the child is guided through the vocabulary of a lesson that will be taught shortly after. Already knowing the meaning of the words that will be used will allow the child to focus all their attention on the content of the lesson.

WHO ARE WE?

The Centre for Literacy and Multilingualism at the University of Reading is the host of a branch of Bilingualism Matters, which provides research-based advice and information on child bilingualism to anyone interested or involved with raising, educating and caring for bilingual and multilingual children.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

Browse our website for events, useful information and answers to the most common questions about bringing up bilingual children <https://research.reading.ac.uk/celm/>

USEFUL TOOLS

Our BM@Reading section on the CeLM website has blogs and recorded interviews with experts that you may find useful in planning for the multilingual learners in your classes.

If you have concerns that a multilingual child in your class may suffer from language disorders or delays, ask the parents to complete the ALDeQ questionnaire. This consists of questions about early milestones, family history and current abilities and can be used to identify evidence of delay or difficulties in the first language. You can download the ALDeQ questionnaire from the BM@Reading section on the CeLM website.

We have close links and can recommend the online advice and resources from the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC) and The Bell Foundation

TEACHING MULTILINGUAL CHILDREN

i For more information, please visit our website <https://research.reading.ac.uk/celm/>

Bilingualism Matters@Reading

University of Reading, Earley Gate,
Whiteknights, Reading, RG6 6AR

www.reading.ac.uk/celm

