

BILINGUAL LEARNERS IN THE EARLY YEARS

How you can help:

Parents

- It is important to have a good relationship with parents. It should be made possible for bilingual parents to have equal access to what you provide and to be as equally involved as the other parents.
- Prepare translations of notices and basic information for parents. A range of generic translations can be accessed in a number of languages through the EAL Service. Arrange interpreters for parents meetings and use telephone interpreters for everyday incidents. More information on accessing interpreting and translation services can be found on asn-aberdeenshire.org/english-as-an-additional-language/.
- Parents are a good resource for background information about culture and religion.
- Be aware that if the family are refugees they may not want to talk in detail about their background and the children may not want to mention the home they came from. Be sensitive.

Children

Think how you can change what you do and what you use to make access to the curriculum and access to relationships with other children equal.

What you can do:

- Be careful to pronounce children's names correctly; listen to how the parents say it and note how they spell it.
- Make a photo book of what the children do in class. Let the children take it home so that they can share their experiences with their parents. They may have learnt English words in school that they don't know in L1; parents can teach them the new words.
- Find out about festivals and traditions from the parents or another authoritative source and include them in your curriculum.
- Break down the activities into small steps and demonstrate them.
- Make sure there are lots of visual clues for everything.
- Make sure that you enforce the rules for the bilingual children. They will be confused if they are treated differently from the other pupils.

The Environment:

In order to help the bilingual children feel comfortable in your class and to feel that their cultural background and language are valued include some of the following in the classroom. (Ask parents for help):

- cooking and home life realia from different cultures in the house corner
- clothes from different cultures for dressing up
- pictures of different, homes, architecture, families, food, animals, countryside etc from around the world
- books about different countries and cultures, books from different countries and cultures, bilingual books
- notices, posters in different languages www.JUSTposters.org, twinkl, <http://uk.mantralingua.com/>

Routine:

Routine gives children security so it is important that the children are made aware of the routine as soon as possible. Remember that if you take children out of the classroom they will not know where they are going. This may upset them. Also if other teachers or visitors approach them they may be afraid, not knowing what to expect.

A visual timetable not only helps children to know what will happen next; it will help them prepare themselves if it is something they are not keen on and it will enable them to feel the excitement of anticipation if it is something they like.

- Create a visual timetable using photos taken of each activity.
- If you go out of the classroom for a visit or to do PE, show photos of these places.
- If visitors come to the classroom or other teachers lead some activities then put photos of these people on the timetable.
- Show the class the visual timetable each morning and talk about the activities. This will help the bilingual children learn the names of the activities, the places and the people involved.
- Put the visual timetable where the children can go and look at it to check what is happening next.

Routine is also an important structure for children to begin to learn the English words for what they do at school, and enable them to communicate their likes and dislikes, hopes and fears.

Organise for independence:

- Observe the bilingual children to assess accessibility of activities; if a child does not know what to do or does not join in activities ask yourself why not?
- When children first arrive introduce them to the routine using a visual timetable.
- At appropriate times have an adult or peer on hand to assist access e.g. modelling what to do.
- Give the child time to watch others first when a new activity is introduced.
- In all activities be realistic about what a child can achieve, but give him/her a challenge too.

Rules that exclude:

- school uniforms: allow for track suit bottoms instead of shorts, head dresses (some religions require arms, legs and heads to be covered)
- jewellery: some cultures allow bracelets and earrings from a very young age and children are used to wearing these all the time. They may be upset if asked to remove them for PE or some play equipment. Explain the need for safety to the parents and let them explain to the children.

Strategies for teaching

Visual support:

- When talking to the whole class use gesture, objects, demonstrations and refer to classroom displays explicitly.
- Use the interactive white board and import appropriate pictures or other visuals.
- Seeing the words as well as pictures will help prompt them to use the words especially if the pupils have begun to read.

Time:

- When talking to the whole class give the bilingual children time to listen and absorb before asking them for a response.
- Always give them thinking time before asking for a response.
- Find a short time each day to give them individual quality time.
- Give them time for free talk in a small group of peers both social talk and focussed curriculum talk.

Focusing on words and phrases:

- Teach the bilingual children their peers name's (eg ask them to hand out jotters with a partner to help).
- Explicitly model social language conventions and help peers to reinforce these. (Good morning, how are you? Yes please, no thank you, please may I...,) Encourage the bilingual pupil to use these.
- Highlight key words when talking through events or activities (eg on a visual timetable)
- Highlight phrases (e.g. frequently used instructions)
- Play games with repetitive language (eg board games, circle games)
- Use audio stories with the written text.
- Use games on the interactive white board which have clear pictures with words.
- Ask closed questions.
- Prompt with the words the pupil needs if they are struggling.
- Repeat back a word or phrase correctly.
- Expand and extend what the pupil says.
- Focus on the pupils meaning not the words.

Peer support

- Find a buddy who speaks the same language or who is a good model of English who can support the child with school and class routines.
- Use peers to model routines (eg getting ready for PE, home, reading etc).
- Use peers to model games or routine activities (eg maths games, spelling, tooth brushing)
- Play games with peers in small groups.
- Paired activities (eg problem solving, research)
- Small group activities (eg sorting information, interpreting information, story writing).

Home/school links

- Encourage pupils to make links with their home language (e.g. words that are similar, words that are the same)
- Encourage pupils to teach the class some words (e.g. numbers, months, days, colours) These could be used regularly when doing the calendar or dinner numbers)
- Label displays in English and the languages of the bilingual pupils.
- Send lists of key words for topic work etc home to be translated.
- Send home books that the class is going to share or base a topic on, so that the story can be discussed in the home language.

- Encourage parents to talk about homework tasks and reading at home in L1. They don't need to speak English. (It may help to send home pictures or photos of class activities to help.)
- See Aberdeenshire EAL guidelines on asn-aberdeenshire.org/english-as-an-additional-language/ and EAL advice and resources on blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/as/ealaberdeenshire/.

Activities which may cause particular difficulties:

Whole class time when teaching or introducing activities

Reading Stories

- Sit the bilingual children close to you so you can try to keep them engaged.
- Use props, puppets, pictures from the books for the children to hold. Prompt all the children to hold them up or show them when they appear in the story. www.storysack.com
- Read stories from the child's culture or stories familiar to him/her.
- Ask parents to read stories in the 1st language and then have the story read in English using bilingual books where possible. <http://uk.mantralingua.com/>
- Use props etc (as above) in a box, or make a book of pictures related to stories, to allow the children to choose their favourite story by pointing.
- If you are introducing a new story give it to the parents to take home and talk about with their children before you read it to the group. (Books showing animals dressed as humans and acting as humans may be very strange to some cultures. Few other cultures have our attitude towards animals and pets.)

Singing

- Use props, puppets, pictures from the songs to illustrate the songs as they are introduced.
- Find songs from the child's culture or songs familiar to him/her. Ask parents to lend CDs or to come and teach songs.
- Use props etc (as above) in a box, or make a book of pictures related to the songs, to allow the children to choose their favourite song by pointing.
- Songs for teaching language see www.funsongs.co.uk

Circle time

- Make sure there are lots of visual clues for everything
- Use persona dolls www.personadoll.uk
- Illustrations of activities.
- Play repetitive games: allow the bilingual children to go last so that they have a chance to see what to do before they take part.

PE

- Give the child time to watch others first when they are new to an activity. In this way they can not only observe what to do but also what the safety rules are.
- Make sure that you enforce the rules for the bilingual children. They will be confused if they are treated differently.

Free play

Free play is another time when children may become difficult.

Behaviour

Problem: Often, when bilingual children demonstrate bad behaviour, it is because they are confused or frustrated.

It is important to observe if there are particular activities which prompt the bad behaviour. The activities above are often times when children are difficult. This may be because they do not understand and therefore become bored or frustrated. It may be because they want to join in but do not have the words to do so.

Solution: The suggestions above are designed to overcome these issues.

Problem: Some children become quite physical if they can't express their needs or wishes in words. They may snatch or push because they can't ask. They may become very possessive of certain things that they need and are afraid of them being taken from them in case they can't get them back.

Solution: Teach the bilingual children some basic words to help them such as no, yes, please and thank you, my turn, wait, not finished yet, finished. You could find out what these words are in L1. Explain to the other children why the bilingual child is having this difficulty and ask for their co-operation in responding appropriately to please and thank you etc.

Problem: Some children will only play with one thing because this gives them security. This is often a computer game as this is interactive in a safe way for them.

Solution: Encourage other children to invite the bilingual children to play.

Problem: Some children wander from activity to activity and do not settle at anything. Sometimes this is because they are just taking time to observe and they join in when they are ready. Sometimes it is because they want to join in but don't know how to approach.

Solution: Encourage other children to invite the bilingual children to play.

Problem: It may be that bilingual children who have been born in the UK have been quite isolated. Their parents may not have build up relationships with local families and they may not know of other families from their own nationality. This means that their children may not be used to playing with other children. This is one more thing that they have to get used to (on top of a new language, new culture, new food etc)

Solution: Ask an adult to sit with a small group of children and encourage the bilingual child to join in a more organised game like a board game or a puzzle.

Problem: Most bilingual children become more tired than their peers during the teaching day. This is because they have to concentrate much harder than their peers to make sense of their new surroundings. This may make them unresponsive or irritable at first. They may also be stressed by the situation which contributes to their tiredness.

Solution: If the bilingual child seems to be tired, either causing inattention or bad behaviour, allow them to go and do something they enjoy on their own eg look at a book, construction, computer. Explain to the other children why this child is allowed to do this if it is out of the routine.

Build up relationships with parents and discuss any problems with them. Misbehaviour may also be due to culture clash. Discuss with parents what the different expectations of children's behaviour or learning may be in their culture compared to ours. For instance

many countries have a more formal way of teaching. If children are not attending school regularly or are often late it is important to have a meeting with parents, using an interpreter, to find out what parents expectations are and tell them the schools expectations.

Relationships

If staff accept the bilingual child then the children will.

- Encourage and support bilingual children in a small group by playing games and other group activities with children giving each other instructions, turn taking and repetition. Bilingual children learn most of their English from other children so encourage them to join in as much as possible.
- When the children have settled in and are gaining confidence stand back and let them form their own relationships; do not smother them.

Other small group activities where children can focus on language

In order to focus on language it is not necessary for an adult to join in. If the activity has a practical focus the language will come from the children and will be visually supported by the material used. Remember the two most important things that help children learn new language: visual context and repetition. Bilingual children will learn more language from the activity if there is a small group as this allows for repetition and it allows the children to learn from each other as they take turns.

- Table top games
- Craft activities

Why encourage the use of the first language (L1)?

“It is through the language or languages that we speak that we form a sense of identity, community and belonging. The way the languages we speak are perceived also influences the way we feel about ourselves.” Siraj-Blatchford 1994 p33

Having a good knowledge of L1

- Supports learning
- Aids intellectual/cognitive development
- Supports self esteem/confidence in own ethnicity
- Supports relationships with family and community
- Extends vocational and life options Languages for Life 1994 p15

All bilingual children have a ‘silent’ period as they become used to the new language and gain confidence. It may last several months. This is normal.

See *Be Bilingual* leaflet available on the EAL Service Glow Blog at <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/as/ealaberdeenshire/>

Resources

Build up your own resources. When the bilingual children move on you will have resources to support multicultural education and be ready for the next bilingual child who arrives.

However do not expect that everything you have learnt about this child and their culture will be the same for another child from the same culture. Do we all celebrate Christmas in the same way?

Many of these resources and methods help all children with language acquisition.

- Equality and Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com/en
Good Practice: Education Code of Practice for Scotland and Education Race Relations Act
- Mendi CD Family Matters – Working Together, Empowering Minority Ethnic Families and Disabled Children

Further Resources for background reading

- ❖ CERES, 1998, *Bilingualism, Community Languages and Scottish Education*
- ❖ DFID, Scottish Executive, Ideas, Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2001, *The Global Dimension in the Curriculum*, Dundee, Learning and Teaching Scotland
- ❖ GTC Scotland, 2001, *Educating for Anti-Racism*
- ❖ *Guidelines to support bilingual learners, 2017, Aberdeenshire Council EAL Service* asn-aberdeenshire.org/english-as-an-additional-language/
- ❖ Home Office, Feb 2001, *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 – New Laws for a Successful Multi-Racial Britain, Proposals for Implementation*
- ❖ Learning + Teaching Scotland, 2000, *Education for Citizenship in Scotland*
- ❖ Learning + Teaching Scotland & others, 2004, *Race Equality Audit for Schools – A Self Evaluation Resource*
- ❖ *Learning in 2(+) 1 Languages, 2005, Scottish Executive, Ceres, SEALCC, Learning and Teaching Scotland. The National Guidelines.*
- ❖ NALDIC working paper 1, 1997, *Guidelines for Classroom and School Practice*
- ❖ NALDIC working paper 3, 1998, *Guidelines on Bilingualism*
- ❖ Learning + Teaching Scotland, 2003, *Educating for Race Equality – A Toolkit for Scottish Teachers* CD Rom esp. Teachers Views, Glossary, FAQs
- ❖ Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, 1994, *Languages for Life – Bilingual Pupils – 5 - 14*
- ❖ Siraj-Blatchford, I. 1994, *The Early Years – laying the foundations for racial equality*, Stoke on Trent, Trentham
- ❖ Siraj-Blatchford, I. 1994 *Supporting Identity, Diversity and Language in Early Years Education*, Stoke on Trent, Trentham