

Helpful Hints for Supporting *Bilingual Learners Aged 0 – 4

Strategies for use in School Nurseries, Private Nurseries and for Child Minders



Contents:

Parents/Carers	p2
Children aged 3 - 4	p3
Organising for Independence:	p5
Strategies for organising activities to support the Bilingual Learners	p5
Activities which may cause particular difficulties	p7
Challenging Behaviour	p9
Focusing on Language	p11
Working with very young children	p13
Important strategies for two year olds	p14
Resources	p15

***Definition of 'Bilingual':** This term is used to describe a learner who uses two or more languages to communicate. [NALDIC - The national subject association for EAL - NALDIC](#)

Parents/Carers



It is important to have a good relationship with parents/carers. Documents, posters and labelling should be in place so that bilingual parents/carers have equal access to whatever you provide and to be as equally involved as the other parents/carers.

The language barrier can cause parents/carers to be shy of communicating their needs.

Building a relationship with them can enable them to gain confidence.

- Find out what language the parents/carers speak. They may speak more than one other language at home. They may speak a dialect of their main language. These things are important especially when asking for an interpreter. Be aware that sometimes it is not obvious what their language is e.g. they may say “Chinese”. Do they mean Mandarin, Cantonese or Hakka? If in doubt ask the EAL service for help with this. Also check if the parents/carers are literate in their home language and in English.
- Create a welcoming environment using translated posters and signage. Prepare translations of notices and generic information for parents. Arrange interpreters for parents’/carers’ meetings. Use a phone interpreter for everyday incidents/accidents.
- In an initial parent/carer meeting, with an interpreter, find out what the parents’/carers’ expectations of your setting are and information about their child and their languages.
- Seek the parents’/carers’ views regularly either in a face to face meeting, with an interpreter if necessary, or in a telephone conversation again, using an interpreter if necessary.
- Ask the EAL Service for translated generic notes for parents/carers, translated letters and organising an interpreter. Interpreters are free for School Nurseries and Partner Providers. The EAL Service can also provide general information about the child’s cultural background and language. See also
- Parents/carers are a good resource for background information about culture and religion. Especially ask them for recordings of traditional stories, nursery rhymes and songs in their own languages.
- Be aware that if the family are refugees they may not want to disclose their background. Traumatic experiences can accompany the child/children into school, where they may impact on the child’s ability to socialise, speak or learn English. Some children may require support from Ed.Psych. Services. The EAL Service can provide you with information about the background of refugees and support for supporting refugees.
- See the EAL Service’s website for translated material and support for parents: [Translated Messages \(Home School Communication\) – Aberdeenshire EAL Service \(glowscotland.org.uk\)](https://www.glowscotland.org.uk/eal/translated-messages)

Children aged 3 to 4

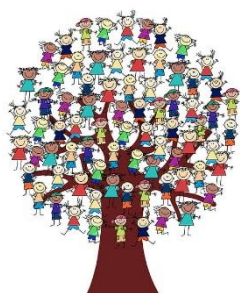


Think how you can change what you do and what you use to make access to relationships with other children, adults and play equally accessible for bilingual children.

What you can do

- Be careful to pronounce children's names correctly: listen to how the parents/carers say it and note how they spell it.
- Make a photo book of what the children do in your setting. Let the children take home a copy so that they can share their experiences with their parents/carers. They will have learnt English words in your setting that they don't know in L1 (the first language); parents can teach them the new words.
- Communicate regularly via social media or an online profile using pictures and short simple sentences that can be easily translated by the parents/carers. (Some parents/carers may find this way of communication difficult).
- Find out about festivals and traditions from the parents/carers or another authoritative source and include them in your activities.
- Break down the activities into small steps and demonstrate them.
- Make sure there are lots of visual clues for everything: pictures on equipment storage, pictures of the day's snack/meal, pictures on the toilet door, pictures of what they need to put on to go outside etc.
- Make sure that you enforce the rules for the bilingual children. They will be confused if they are treated differently from the other children.

The Multilingual/Multicultural Environment:



To help the bilingual children feel comfortable in your setting and to feel that their cultural background and language are valued, include some of the following in your setting. Ask parents for help:

- cooking and home life realia from different cultures in the house corner
- clothes from different cultures for dressing up (commonly worn, not "traditional").
- pictures of different homes, architecture, families, food, animals, countryside etc from around the world
- picture books about different countries and cultures, books from different countries and cultures, bilingual books: www.mantralingua.com

- notices, posters in different languages: www.JUSTposters.org
www.mantralingua.com/, www.twinkl.co.uk
- Music, songs and nursery rhymes from home culture in different languages and translated <https://europeisnotdead.com/european-nursery-rhymes/>
<https://www.youtube.com/user/SuperSimpleSongs> - songs and rhymes available in different languages.

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 setting they will not know where they are going. This may upset them. Also if other adults who they have not met 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 preferably with them in the photo.
- If you go out of the setting for a visit or to do an activity, show photos of these places with the other children there.
- If visitors come to the setting or other adults lead some activities then put photos of these people on the timetable.
- Show the whole group the visual timetable at the beginning of each session and talk about the activities. This will help the bilingual children learn the names of the activities, the places and the people involved. By showing the whole group you show them that these things are for everyone.
- 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 in your setting, and enable them to communicate their likes and dislikes, hopes and fears.

Relationships



If staff welcome the bilingual child then the children will.

- Encourage and support the bilingual child in a small group by playing games, turn taking, 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.

Organise for independence



Observe the bilingual children to assess access; if a child does not use equipment or join in an activity ask why not?

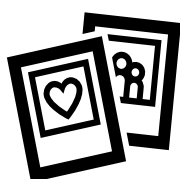
- When children first arrive introduce them to the routine using a visual timetable.
- At appropriate times have an adult on hand to assist access e.g. modelling what to do.
- Give the child time to watch others first when a new activity is introduced.
- In all activities be realistic about what a child can achieve but give him/her a challenge too.

Rules that exclude:

- **Uniforms:** allow for track suit bottoms instead of shorts and long sleeved T shirts for PE; (some religions require arms and legs 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.

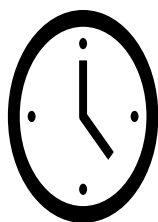
Strategies for organising activities to support the Bilingual Learners

Visual support:



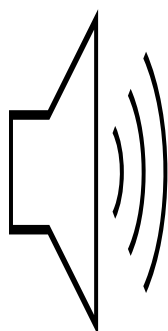
- When talking to a group or an individual use gesture, objects, demonstrations and refer to displays explicitly.
- Use the interactive white board (or other device) to help by importing appropriate pictures or videos.
- Seeing the words as well as pictures will help prompt the bilingual learners to begin to see differences between their home script and English.
- Use communication fans e.g. Twinkl Communication fans (some of these are translated into different languages)

Time:



- When talking to a group or an individual give the bilingual children thinking time to listen and absorb before asking them for a response.
- Don't ask them first, so they can hear other's responses.
- Find a short time in each session to give each individual quality time.

Focusing on words and phrases:



- Teach the bilingual children their peers name's (e.g. ask them to hand out snack etc with a partner to help (when they are ready) naming the children as they go.
- Explicitly model social language conventions and help peers to reinforce these. (Good morning, how are you? Yes please, no thank you, please may I have...) Encourage the bilingual pupil to repeat these.
- Name pictures and point when talking through events or activities (e.g. on a visual timetable).
- Emphasise phrases (e.g. frequently used instructions such as "wash your hands", "tidy up time") modelling at the same time.
- Play games with repetitive language (e.g. board games, circle games),
- Use audio stories with the book illustrations.
- Use games on the interactive white board (or other device) which have clear pictures with the spoken words.
- Don't be afraid to repeat games, stories and songs as often as the child is interested. This gives them time to listen, understand and repeat when they are ready.
- Ask closed questions.
- Prompt with the words the child needs if they are struggling.
- Repeat back a word or phrase correctly.
- Expand and extend what the child says.
- Focus on the child's meaning not their words.

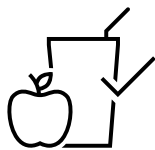
Peer support



- Allow the bilingual child to watch their peers to model routines (e.g. getting ready for PE, home, etc).
- Allow bilingual children to watch their peers model games or routine activities (e.g. PE, tooth brushing)
- Play games with peers in small groups with an adult.
- Small group activities (e.g. sorting, drawing, building)

Activities which may cause particular difficulties:

Snack time



- **Following instructions:** Give the child time to watch others first when they are new.
- **Do they know what they are eating?** Have a visual menu for each day displayed where parents can see it, with labelled photos (in home language and English), so parents can talk to their children about what they are going to eat.
- **Are they allowed to eat it?** Check with parents for foods their children may be allergic to, or not allowed for religious reasons.
- **Introduce food that they have at home;** ask parents for help.
- Mealtime and toileting behaviours may be different in bilingual children's families. Modelling, and reinforcing ways of behaving by praising children, can help the bilingual child to understand better and to copy.

Story time



- Sit the bilingual child close to you so you can try to keep them engaged.
- Use props, puppets, pictures from the book for the children to hold. Prompt all the children to hold them up or show them when they appear in the story. These can simply be cut out pictures on a stick or objects from the setting such as farm animals, figures from the doll's house etc. www.storysack.com
- Read stories from the child's culture or stories familiar to him/her.
- Invite parents to come and read stories in the home language and then have the story read in English using bilingual books where possible. www.mantralingua.com If you can't find a bilingual book the parent could tell the story from the pictures or bring in a book from home and an adult in your setting can tell the story from the pictures (this is better if the book is a familiar story in both languages such as traditional tales.)
- Keep props etc (as above) in a box or make a book of pictures related to the stories, to allow the children to choose their favourite story by pointing. Allow the children to play with these if they choose after the book is read.
- If you are introducing a new story give it to the parents to take home and talk about with their child before you read it to the group. Books showing animals dressed as humans and acting as humans may be very strange to children from some cultural backgrounds. Few other cultures have the British attitude towards animals and pets.

Song time



- Use props, puppets, pictures from the songs to illustrate the songs as they are introduced.
- Find songs and music 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: <https://personadoll.uk/>
- Have illustrations of the activities or things you are going to talk about ready on an interactive white board or other device.
- Play repetitive circle games: allow the bilingual children to go last so that they have a chance to see what to do before they take part.
- If you do show and tell find out what the child has brought and let them hold it up whilst you talk about it: “Is this your car?” “Is it red?” “Is it your favourite?” etc
- See also school-plan-it.com/circle-time-area.html


Physical play




- Give the child time to watch others first when they are new to an activity. In this way she/he 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.



Challenging Behaviour


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


It is important to observe if there are particular activities which prompt the bad behaviour. The activities discussed 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.


Free play


Free play is another time which bilingual children may find difficult.


 **Problem:** Some children become quite physical if they can't express their needs or wants in words. They may snatch or push because they can't ask. They may become very possessive of certain toys that they like. They may be afraid of them being taken 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, finished. You could find out what these words are in their home language/s. 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 can be a computer game as this is interactive in a way they can understand and respond to.

 **Solution:** *From time to time gently lead them to another activity and play with them there, possibly where there are no other children at the time.

 **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. Some bilingual children may need time more at first to observe what's going on from a distance to work out how their peers respond to certain situations and language.

 **Solution:** Give them time. If things don't improve try the strategy above*.

 **Problem:** It may be that bilingual children who have been born in the UK have been quite isolated. Their parents may not have built up relationships with local families and they may not know 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, new environment etc).



Solution: Give them time. If things don't improve try the strategy above*. Or 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. This will help them build up relationships.

Tiredness



Problem: Most bilingual children become more tired than their peers during the time in your setting. 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, causing inattention or bad behaviour, allow him/her to go and do something he/she enjoys on their own e.g. looking 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. Some bilingual children may need this more at first because they need a rest from processing so much information in the new environment.

Build up relationships with parents and discuss any problems with them. Misbehaviour may also be due to culture clash. Discuss with parents what your expectations of children's behaviour and learning are and ask what theirs are. For instance, in many countries nurseries are more like a babysitting service with no expectation of a curriculum or teaching elements or of regular attendance.

Parents may not bring their children in regularly, then they do not build up familiarity with the adults and children and may miss the special events that the others experience. Find out why they are not attending regularly and discuss a solution.

Refer to the EAL Service which will help with organising an interpreter and give advice. In discussion with parents it may be possible to change the hours the child is in your setting, making sessions shorter for a while whilst the child builds confidence, or stop going to the setting altogether until the child is more mature. Of course the parents circumstances may not allow for this.



Focusing on Language

Small group activities where children can focus on language



In order to focus on language, it is necessary for an adult to join in with these activities to facilitate a focus on the vocabulary. It is important to remember the two most important things that help children learn new language: visual context and repetition. Often, when doing craft activities, an adult take one child at a time. However a bilingual child will learn more English from the activity if there is a small group. This allows for more repetition as the adult helps each child, and it allows the child to learn from the others as they respond to the adult.

- Table top games
- Playdough
- Craft activities
- Looking at books
- Teddy Talk <http://www.ealhighland.org.uk/teddy-talk-narrative-based-language-development-programme-eal-children-nursery-school/>

As bilingual children learn English they will begin to say words and phrases that they hear frequently e.g. car, jacket, tidy-up-time, so naming things and pointing to them is important. Re-model a word or phrase back to the child if it is pronounced in an unrecognisable way. Always praise efforts and encourage with positive facial expressions and body language.

Home/school links



- Encourage pupils to make links with their home language e.g. find words that are similar or the same with parent's support and use them.

Encourage pupils to use their own language (e.g. with peers who speak the same language, listening to songs, nursery rhymes or stories in their own language or use a talking pen with a picture dictionary and repeat the words with the child). These should be used regularly. Songs, rhymes and stories can be recorded or invite parents/grandparents/carers in to sing and read. (*For the Talking Pen see Mantra Lingua*)

- Label displays in English and the languages of the bilingual pupils so that they can see the differences in script and so that the parents can read them to their child. (Ask parents to help).
- Send lists of key words home for topics or a new story so that parents/carers can use the words in their home language to build vocabulary and aid understanding.
- Send home books that the group is going to share or base a topic on before you introduce it in your setting so that the story can be discussed in the home language. Use bilingual books if they are available (see Mantra Lingua)

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 ways the languages we speak are perceived also influences the way we feel about ourselves.” Siraj-Blatchford 1994 p33

Having a good knowledge of their home language:

- Supports learning
- Aids intellectual/cognitive development
- Supports self esteem/confidence in the child's own ethnicity
- Supports relationships within his or her 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 Leaflets in English and many other languages at <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/as/ealaberdeenshire/>



Working with very young children



In an initial parent/carer meeting, with an interpreter, find out information about the child and what the parents'/carers' expectations of the setting are.

Ask them about how they care for their child: the food they give, the routines they have, the things that comfort their child when upset etc. For example there may be a particular song that calms them. Ask the parents/carers for a recording if so.

What you can do:

- Be careful to pronounce child's names correctly – listen to how the parents say them and note how they spell them.
- Make a photo book of what the children do in the setting such as going out for a walk or playing in the garden. Send a copy home so that parents/carers know what experiences their child has had. This will help the parents understand what happens in the setting. The children will have heard English words for things in your setting that they have not heard in their home language; parents can use equivalent words so that their child learns the two languages in parallel.
- Communicate regularly via social media or an online profile using pictures and short simple sentences that can be easily translated by the parents/carers. (Some parents/carers may find this way of communication difficult).

The Multilingual Environment:



- To help the bilingual child feel comfortable in your setting and to feel that their cultural background and language are valued, include music, songs and nursery rhymes from the home culture in English and translated into their home languages (ask parents for help) Music, songs and nursery rhymes from home culture in different languages and translated

<https://europeisnotdead.com/european-nursery-rhymes/>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/SuperSimpleSongs> - songs and rhymes available in different languages.

Routine

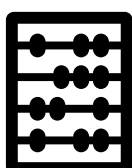
Routine gives children security so it is important that the children are made aware of the routine as soon as possible. Bear in mind the routines used at home which the child may recognise.

Routine is also an important structure for children to begin to learn the English words for what happens in the setting. Commentate what you do with the children no matter how old they are. With repetition he/she will become familiar with the words for the things she/he sees and the things he/she does.

Important strategies for two year olds:

- Routine – at this age children respond to regular routines and social groupings.
- Communication - it is normal for all two year olds to struggle to express how they feel and what they want. Use illustrations of emotions to help your bilingual children e.g. Twinkl communication fans
- Listening – Two year olds need adults who will talk to them and listen to them. It is sometimes difficult to talk to children if you think they do not understand. However if you talk about what you are doing with the child there will be a visual context to help. The child may reply in her/his home language. You can assume that they are also talking about what you are doing so nod and smile and reply in confirmation.
- Realia – Two year olds enjoy pretend play with familiar domestic objects so if there are some things unique to their culture which they may have at home such as woks and chopsticks, make sure you include them in you setting. Ask parents for help.
- At this stage children are beginning to understand symbolic representation so using pictures to indicate emotions or everyday items may not immediately be useful but will be part of their learning about their environment.
- As part of this learning provide opportunities to draw, “write”, make objects and see books including from their cultural background e.g. bilingual books or their parents’/carers’ writing.
- It is especially important for two year olds that practitioners know about their background: their relationships and where they live or visit, so make sure you have accessed this information from parents/carers using an interpreter if necessary.
- At this stage children are beginning to build up relationships with each other. Usually language is not a barrier between them but it is important that you enable relationships to grow if a child seems left out for some reason.
- Stories and rhymes are particularly important at this stage. Make sure you include some from the bilingual children’s cultural backgrounds. (See above)
- Don’t let the language barrier get in the way of communicating with parents/carers at this important stage.

(Information taken from “Early Learning and Care for Two Year Olds” by Jean Carwood-Edwards, Early Years Scotland, Maggie Simpson Scottish Childminding Association and Dr Christine Stephen, University of Stirling.)



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.

Bilingual books available from Mantra Lingua for 0 – 4 year olds

Deepak's Diwah

Samira's Eid

Swirling Hijab

Handa's Hen

Handa's Surprise

Tom and Sofia start school

Walking through the Jungle

from www.mantralingua.com/

Other Websites with good strategies and downloadable visual resources (e.g. communication fans, starter instruction fans, literacy, numeracy, topic cards, posters, games and audio stories):

- www.earlylearninghq.org.uk
- www.twinkl.co.uk
- www.bbc.co.uk/languages/other/quickfix see and hear common words & phrases to learn welcoming phrases before a new pupil arrives
- www.elite.net/~runner/jennifers/ hello, goodbye welcome etc. in many languages
- www.freechildmindingresources.com Free 'Welcome' posters in six languages

Further background reading

- ❖ <http://asn-aberdeenshire.org/english-as-an-additional-language/>
- ❖ Bilingualism in Development: Language, Literacy, and Cognition
Ellen Bialystok, Department of Psychology Ellen Bialystok
Cambridge University Press, 16 Apr 2001
"Bilingualism in Development explores language and cognitive development in bilingual children, focusing on the preschool years. It begins by defining what we mean by bilingualism and what the standards are for considering children to be bilingual. Then it examines how children who learn two languages early in childhood develop both linguistic and nonlinguistic cognitive skills."
- ❖ BILINGUAL LEARNERS IN THE EARLY YEARS - sateal.org.uk
[https://www.sateal.org.uk/resources/may13/BILINGUAL LEARNERS IN THE EARLY YEARS.doc](https://www.sateal.org.uk/resources/may13/BILINGUAL_LEARNERS_IN_THE_EARLY_YEARS.doc)

- ❖ 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
- ❖ *Learning in 2(+) Languages*, 2020, Learning and Teaching Scotland. The National Guidelines.

DVDs which explain the various stages of development of children and how to support them. May be useful for parents, or if you ever do parenting groups.

<https://www.sirenfilms.co.uk/shop/>

Especially:

The wonder Year

Born to talk

Exploratory Play: 7 months to 3 years

Learning through play: 3 – 4 year olds – Observation

Learning through play: 3 – 4 year olds – Documentary

Communicating and Socialising: 15 months to 6 years

