

BILINGUAL CHILDREN

WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US

- Children take up to two years to develop 'basic interpersonal communication skills' (playground/street survival language) BUT it takes from five to seven years to acquire the full range of literacy skills ('cognitive academic language proficiency') needed to cope with the literacy demands of GCSE.
- A silent (receptive) period is natural the learning of a second language and not a sign of learning difficulties in the first/early stages.
- There are developmental factors in common to both native and second language acquisition. Pupils learn roughly the same regardless of their first language background.
- Teachers /schools should have basic information available about the language backgrounds of bilingual pupils. (see Chapter 4)
- There should be an awareness by all that a focus on mother tongue is a valuable channel to support learning and NOT a hindrance. Teachers should not advocate the use of English only, either at school or at home.
- Parents should be encouraged to share language and literacy in speaking and listening as well as in reading and writing. This can be as valuable in first/home language as in English.
- Bilingualism can be educationally enriching and has a positive effect on intellectual performance.
- Bilingualism should be valued as a special achievement.
- Where there are academic difficulties, teachers should first critically examine the teaching they are offering in terms of motivation and the language used.