

A Birth Right: Young Children Learning Two Languages

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Advantages of two languages

- The IQ scores of bilingual children are higher into adolescence.
- Bilingual children show greater cognitive abilities on tests later on in their schooling.
- Cultural awareness increases as one learns the traditional and contemporary sayings, idioms, history and folk stories, music, literature and poetry of the culture.

- Being bilingual helps with learning further languages
- Speaking more than one language helps children ability to code switch, allowing them to work and play with greater number of peers and adults.
- Later on employment opportunities expand.

How about children with impairments?

- Researchers have shown that children with disabilities can learn a second language and function in both languages as well as their peers who do not have disabilities.

Do two languages confuse young children?

- Numerous researchers have found that bilingual children in the one- and early two-word stages of development are able to use their languages differentially and appropriately with others.
- For example, 2.6 year old French-English bilingual children were able to modify their choice of language when the adult expressed lack of comprehension and requested clarification.

What type of early childhood language programs work?

- Important that the early childhood second language learning is additive, not subtractive.
- We do not want to reduce the first language, rather add a second. Both languages must be strong.

Increasing Bilingual and Dual Language Programs

Until recently, early childhood bi-lingual was centered on non-English speaking children learning English.

Non-English parents pushed to have their children continue in home language.

Non-English parents across the country have pushed for programs to teach their child a second language.

Why do this in Early Childhood Education?

Learning a language in Early Childhood makes sense considering both what we know about child development and elementary school structures.

The important question is, “does it interfere with program quality?”

Early Childhood program and Elementary School Structures

- In quality early childhood programs, the curriculum is integrated, so that the language is learned throughout the day.
- In most school districts across the country, testing requires schools to focus on English and math in English.
- Testing in English is a concern.

In Early Childhood we learn languages differently

- The second language is not a subject to be learned in early childhood.
- Instead, children are learning to understand the world in two languages.

The Developmental Critical Period

There is a critical time to learn languages. It does not mean that we can not learn later on. It is more difficult and the language is learned differently however.

In infancy, a babies brain is wired to hear all languages. When the sounds of a different language are not heard. The brain no longer recognizes the “foreign” sounds.

Earlier is not generally better, but -

- For most skills that young children learn earlier does not mean better.
- We are tremendously concerned about the loss of childhood with a greater emphasis on testing, reading and waiting.
- With language “learning” earlier is better.

Types of Early Childhood Dual Language Programs

- Cultural and language exploration
- Teacher directed sessions
- Immersion
 - Total immersion
 - Partial immersion
 - Two way immersion
 - Dual Language immersion

The key is quality. Quality early childhood education

Quality language programs are dependent on quality early childhood programs.

The first and second languages must be embedded in a quality program.

Quality Early Childhood Education

- Based on a deep understanding of child development
- Involves an environment in which children learn through play and teacher directed activities
- Experience, material and language rich classrooms
- Parent and community involvement

QUALITY, QUALITY, QUALITY

- Adding a second language to a low quality programs, does not mean quality.
- It is simply a low quality program in two languages.
- All children deserve quality.

Early Language Learners

- **SIMULTANEOUS** – Learning both at the same time
- **SEQUENTIAL** – Learning one language, then the second
- The specific timing from simultaneous to sequential language learning is early, but not a definite time.

Simultaneous language learning

- Second language acquisition is the same as learning one language.
- It is systematic, has the same critical milestones, at approximately the same time.

For Infants and Toddlers

- Simultaneous bilingual acquisition is not a burden on infants' and toddlers' 1st language capacity.
- It does not compromise their competence provided they receive adequate exposure to each language.

Differences in Bilingual Children

- Differences in simultaneous bilingual children most often appear to be due to input and exposure.
- For example, they may have smaller vocabularies. However, when considering the same word in two languages, bilinguals often ahead.

- Vocabulary differences exhibited by bilingual children do not reflect limitations in children's ability to acquire two languages.

Code Mixing

- Simultaneous bilinguals differ from monolinguals in that they code-mix the two languages.
- Code-mixing is a reflection of dual language competence and serves useful communicative functions.

English time on task controversy

- support of home languages facilitates acquisition of English as a second language.
- dual language learning does not compromise minority language students' acquisition of language; to the contrary, it enhances it.

Language and Culture

- Culture and language are imparted to young children from their families and communities.
- When culturally and linguistically diverse children enter a classroom, they bring with them cultural ways of using language.
- Need to understand cultural backgrounds—including cultural expectations for how and when language should be used.

- The cultural influence on language includes rhythms, gestures, patterns of speech and silence.
- Language proficiency fosters cultural knowledge and learning, and at the same time, cultural experiences shape the way children learn and see the world.

Setting the Stage for Learning Two Languages

- Background experiences and personal interests prepare children for knowing how to engage in particular forms of language and literacy activities.

Stages of early childhood second language learning

- Observational and listening period (nonverbal period)
- Telegraphic and formulaic speech
- Productive language use

We need to remember

- As in all learning there is a wide range of differences
- Language learning takes time
- Learning environment most important

- There will be differences because they are learning two languages
- The differences are not signs of problems

Support the whole child

- language development is connected to all developmental domains: physical, social, emotional, and cognitive.
- As children develop language, their cognitive or conceptual abilities are also developed.
- As young children's conceptual knowledge expands, they are motivated to develop more sophisticated language.

- Language development facilitates social development, and preschool children's *social development* predicts long-range outcomes.
- Children learn language through actively interacting with their environment. This includes physical activity and explorations.

Our practice

- while young children seem to pick up language rapidly, they still require intentional support to develop language.
- not enough to (simply) talk to children.
- Young children need exposure to a broad range of learning opportunities that include meaningful, sustained, rich, and varied language.
- Within classrooms, children should be encouraged to use the understandings they already have as they are exposed to new, more elaborate “forms, uses, and content” (Stechuk & Burns 2005).

- Use motherese
 - Slow down
 - Pitch
- Stretching the sounds
- Scaffolding
 - Children need “comprehensible input” of language that they already understand, plus additional language and vocabulary at their next level of development

A Word about Sequential Language Learners

- Important to continue to learn vocabulary and conceptual skills in home language.
- Without this continued development in the home language, they will have greater difficulty developing skills in the second language.
- All children need a rich, expansive, and just challenging enough language environment facilitates language development.

- Language is seen as well as heard.

- Do you want to close the achievement gap?
- Have young children learn two languages