

Dual Language Learners

“Children are competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential. They grow up in families with diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. Every child should feel that he or she belongs, is a valuable contributor to his or her surroundings, and deserves the opportunity to succeed” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 6)

Bilingualism:

- Many children are being raised bilingual – sometimes as a necessity, sometimes as a personal family choice
- There are many **benefits** to being bilingual including:
 - Ability to focus attention on relevant information and ignore distractions
 - Individuals are shown to be more creative
 - Better at planning and solving complex problems
 - Greater access to people and resources
 - Higher employment rates and median incomes

Myths and Facts:

- **Myth:** Learning two languages causes speech and language delays
- **Fact:** No. The majority of children using multiple languages experience no communication delays.
- **Myth:** Children who are language delayed should not be taught more than one language.
- **Fact:** All Canadian children are going to be taught a second language at some point. Children with language delays will have difficulty with acquiring a second language, much like the first. Second language learning does not make the language delay worse.
- **Myth:** Parents should prioritize English with their children since they will need to know it for school.
- **Fact:** Children with a strong base in their first language will have an easier time learning the second language. Children need consistent and repeated exposure by fluent speakers. Retention of the home language is essential for social-emotional development.
- **Myth:** Parents should avoid mixing languages in front of their child because it causes confusion.
- **Fact:** “Code-mixing” is typical for bilinguals. This is often the family’s “home language”.

- **Myth:** Parents should adopt the “one-parent, one-language” or “one-situation, one-language” approach.
- **Fact:** This not possible for most bilingual people. It can be more harmful than helpful as it often impacts the quality and frequency of conversations and interactions.

- **Myth:** The skills taught to a child in English will transfer to their other language.
- **Fact:** Little evidence to show this happens spontaneously in 2-5 year olds. One cannot assume that parents can “do this at home in your language”. Some skills and concepts are not transferable.

References:

Lowry, L. (2015). Bilingualism in Young Children: Separating Fact from Fiction. Hanen Early Language Program. Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). How Does Learning Happen?. Queen’s Printer for Ontario.