

Rainbow of Words

Native language instruction has to be part of the learning process. It's simply because, through native language instruction, children are able to communicate their needs, to acquire concepts, to express themselves, to ask questions, and to acquire English. English is the dominant language in America, but we live in a multicultural, multilingual world. There is tremendous benefit in being not only bilingual but also biliterate. In terms of children's futures--in high school, college, and the job market-- having a second language is a great asset.

(Starting Out Right, p. 132)

Session Objectives

By the end of this session you will:

- Understand the importance of supporting the development of children's first language as well as their development of English as a second language.
- Learn strategies for helping children whose first language is not English to feel secure and comfortable so they can more readily learn English.
- Learn strategies for encouraging language development.
- Learn strategies for encouraging literacy development.
- Learn some ways to link what goes on in the children's homes with what they do in their early childhood care and education setting.
- Learn four activities they can use right away in their program.

Reflective Activity

Think about a time in your life when your words were not understood by others. It may have been because of language differences, hearing difficulties, or other factors. Tell one other person about your experience.

Bilingual Language Development

A Bit of Bilingual History

Many, many, many people around the world are bilingual.

In the United States, it is estimated that there are 176 living languages spoken today (www.ethnologue.com).

In the 2000 Census, 6.3% of United States residents reported being bilingual in English and at least one other language.

In Oregon, 322,331 people age 5 or older report speaking a language other than English, with about half of those people reporting that they spoke English less than very well.

In many places in the world (currently and through out history), bilingualism has been required or necessary.

- ❑ French is the official language of Mali, Africa (a country with 40 living languages),
- ❑ Spanish is the official language of Guatemala (a country with 54 living languages).
- ❑ Two incredible examples include Indonesian where Indonesian is the official language and there are estimated to be 726 living languages and Papua New Guinea, a country that includes 600 islands with 3 official languages (Hiri Motu, Tok Pisin, and English) and a whopping 823 living languages (www.ethnologue.com)!

People who know two languages are sought after in many types of employment (Marketing, Business, Customer Service, Court related services, Social Services for recent immigrant communities).

Speaking more than one language has a positive effect on the way your brain develops and works.

Bilingual Language Development

Step I: Maybe if I keep talking, people will figure out what I'm saying.

When a children who already know a language go to a place where a different language is spoken, the child tends to continue to speak in his/her first language.

Sometimes you may hear adults say something like, "Isn't that cute, he doesn't realize that I don't speak his language."

Young children may not yet know to speak more slowly or to use hand signals.

Step II: Non-Verbal Communication.

Most children learning a second language exhibit a period of what seems like silence, speaking neither their first language or the new language.

They are still communicating with body language, gestures, and so forth.

For some children, this period lasts for only a day or two. For other children, this period may last up to a year.

You may have heard someone say something like, "It was the most amazing thing. He didn't say a word for months and now he won't stop talking."

While children are silent, they are watching and listening, trying to figure out the rules of new language and how it relates to their first language.

Step III: Using formulas or language routines.

If you went to another country what are some things you would want to learn how to say? *Where is the bathroom? How much does this cost?* You may think of this as survival language.

Similarly, when children are learning to speak a second language they typically start with the kinds of phrases (or language formulas) they need to “survive.”

- Hi!
- Good Morning!
- OK?
- How Are ‘Ya?
- How’s it going?
- What’s this?
- I wanna... (may just point at an object).

Step IV: Productive Language

Children’s language becomes “productive” when they begin to use the language formulas together. A formula can be very helpful once children discover that it can be used with other words.

- I want ... lunch ... to go to the bathroom ... a toy ... my mommy, etc.
- Let’s play ... house ... blocks ... on the swing ... together.

By the end of this stage, children’s language has little connection to formulas as they combine words and expressions in an infinite number of ways.

Making “mistakes.”

It is very normal for children to “make mistakes” when they are learning a second language. For instance, they may start a sentence in their first language, but end it with a word in the second language.

Remember that when young children are learning a second language, they are also **still** learning a first language.

When children make mistakes by combining languages, they are making **the same type** of mistakes that children normally make at this age. For example, English-speaking four and five year olds may say things like “I runned.” “That’s mines.” “It’s pinkleish (something that is a bit pink).”

Step V: Using Language For Thinking.

It can take several years before children and adults can “think” in the second language (process information on a conceptual level).

You don’t have to teach children things they already learned in their first language. The child only needs to learn the new words for expressing those ideas. For instance, if a child understood the concepts of big, bigger, biggest, in Spanish, he/she would only need to acquire the English words to identify differences in size.

Encouraging Language Development for Bilingual Children

It can be helpful to think ways to encourage children's language development at the various steps of Bilingual Development. Keep in mind that strategies listed for one step are also likely to be very appropriate at other stages.

Step 1: Children continue to speak their own language.

- Make every effort to understand.**
Even if it is all Greek to you, learn some survival vocabulary in the child's first language.

- Talk With Your Hands**
Use gestures. Point. Use facial expressions. Use your body. Help children understand what you are saying with your non-verbal cues.

- Learning By Doing**
Use songs or rhymes or games that combine physical movement with language. This helps children make an extra, physical connection to the new word(s).

- Get by with a little help from your friends**
Children who are learning to speak English as a second language can support each other in learning English and in coping with the demands of the day.

Keep children who speak the same language together in the same classroom. If that is not possible, arrange for children who speak the same language to spend time together each day.

If you run a family child care home and have one child who speaks a different language, consider recruiting another child who speaks the same languages (the parents of the first child may be able to help).

Take and Use Activity Make a Word List.

Create a word list with common, useful words from the child's native language.

- As the child grows older, you can add to the list. This helps you learn some of the child's language – which is a way of showing your respect for the child's culture.

English	Spanish	Russian
Bathroom	baño (ban -yo)	Tualyet (toi -ee-yet)
Hello	hola (o -la)	Zdravstvuyte (zdrahs -voit-yah)
Tired	sueño (swain -yo)	Ustal (Oo- stahl)
Mother	madre (ma -dray)	Mat' (maa -ts) For kids: Mama
Father	padre (pa -dray)	Otet' (Ah- tea -ets) For kids: Papa
Outside	afuera (ahf- wear -a)	Na Ulezu (nah-oo-litzu)
Thirsty	sed (said)	Ti hotchesh Pit' (Tea ho -chish peetz)
Hungry	hambre (ahm -bray)	Ti galodne (Tea Ga-lowd -knee)
Goodbye	adios (a-dee- ohs)	Do Svidanye (Das-vee- danya)
Water	agua (ah -gwa)	Voda (Vah- dah)
Diaper	pañal (pan- yal)	Also called Diaper
Hot	caliente (cal-ee- in -tay)	Goryacho (Gar- y-ach -o)
Cold	frio (free -o)	Kholodno (Hole-uhd-nuh)
Bottle	biberon(bee -bah- rone)	Butilka(Buh- til -kah)

Take and Use Activity Action Songs and Rhymes

Brainstorm a list of songs and rhymes that combine actions with the corresponding English words (For example: Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes).

Make notes of the songs and rhymes that you learn in the session.

Step 2: Non-verbal Communication

- **Offer a safe haven.**

Language learners often play alone with things like puzzles, Lego's, stringing beads and play dough because it lets them feel competent while minimizing the need for talking.

Playing alone provides a sort of "safe haven" to escape the stresses of not being able to talk with the other children and to be able to rest.

- **Stick with the routine.**

Routines throughout the day (breakfast, washing hands, brushing teeth, circle time, free play, outside choice) let children learn language through observation and experience.

They can pick up non-verbal signals from the provider and other children to know what to expect next.

Step 3: Using Language Routines

It's Child's Play.

Playing with English speaking peers is the best way for non-native speakers to learn the language. In this way, the learning is fun and natural. Children want to communicate!!

You may need to help spark the friendships since the English-speaking children may not draw their silent friends into their play. For example, if children have chairs with their name labels on them that they use for snack times, arrange some chairs ahead of time so that the child learning English is seated next to a friendly, outgoing native English speaker.

Repeat, repeat, repeat!

Keeping it simple and repetitive allows the child to learn a few new words and phrases at a time. ("Do you like cheese? I like cheese. Would you like to try some cheese? Did you like the cheese?"-- can be used often during mealtimes.)

Go nice and slow!

"Doyouwannagotothebathroom?" sounds like one huge, long word for young children who have had limited exposure to English. Talking slowly and with good pronunciation will help children hear the differences between the various sounds and words. You do not need to speak louder than normal or shout.

Sing a song.

Songs are an excellent way to expose young children to the sounds of English. Simple children's songs and nursery rhymes introduce babies and toddlers to the rhythm of a language (itsy bitsy spider, patty cake) and are important for older children too.

For non-English speaking providers, playing cassette tapes of English language songs can help the children become familiar with the language even though the providers themselves may not feel comfortable speaking it.

Start small.

Small group activities are less intimidating than large group for the child learning English as a second language.

Step 4: Productive language (combinations of routines or formulas). **Expand the child's phrases.**

If a child says, "Shoes wet", the adult can make the phrase complete by responding, "Yes, your shoes are wet." This models the correct sentence structure for the child and helps him/her learn additional words in a positive way.

 Build the child's vocabulary.

Using the previous example, if a child says, "Shoes wet," the adult can reply with "Yes, your shoes are wet from the rain." These strategies give the child positive feedback and acknowledge their attempts at communication.

 Keep It Interesting

Children are more likely to talk when they are exploring something interesting or involved in an exciting activity.

The more that learning to speak English looks less like something a child has to do and more like a way to participate in exciting activities, the more motivated a child will be to use his/her developing English skill.

Encouraging Literacy Development

Ideally, children should learn to read first in their native language. If they do, it is easier for them to then learn to read in English. However, because of the diverse backgrounds of children that many providers work with, this is not always possible.

Fortunately, some of the things you can do to help children learning English also develop an appreciation for literacy, and do not require a complete understanding of children's first languages.

- Keep books available and accessible.**

Books are meant to be read and explored. Children need access to books - to explore them on their own and to learn how a book works.

If you have babies or young toddlers, leave out board books, cloth books, or books made from non-toxic plastic.

- Make writing materials available and accessible.**

Set up an area of the room (or a box) with paper (scrap paper, old forms, magazines, etc.) and writing materials (pens, pencils, crayons).

Encourage children to use writing as they play (making a shopping list, taking orders at a restaurant, playing "school").

- Model the use of literacy for the children.**

If children see that you enjoy books and other reading materials, they will be more likely to follow your example. Show children how you need to read or look things up when you have a question or don't know the answer.

- Labeling.**

Label objects with English words and with words from the child's native language. Use one color for the English language words and one color for the native language words.

Soon, the child may begin to recognize common words like "door", "bathroom", "blocks" and other labels throughout the setting. It is important for the labels to be at the child's eye level and with clearly written letters.

Suggestions For Reading To Children Learning English

When you are actually reading to children who are learning English as a second language, you will need to make some accommodations to make the reading experience a meaningful and enjoyable one.

Keep it short.

When reading in English to non-native English speakers, the key is to keep it short! It is hard for children to sit through long stories in a language they don't understand. Choosing short stories helps to keep children engaged during story time.

“Talk the Story.”

If the pictures are good, but the text of a story is too difficult, "talk" the story instead of reading it. Doing this allows the adult to use some words and phrases the child is already familiar with while introducing new ones. This also models book "talking" to the children and may encourage them to do the same when they are not able to understand the text.

Repeat, repeat, repeat.

Most children like to read the same story again and again and again. (How many times have we all read The Very Hungry Caterpillar?) This is especially true for children learning a second language.

Re-reading stories provides familiarity with the pictures and words. It also lets the children feel a sense of “I know what’s coming next.”

Involve Parents.

Take and Use Activity Create a "Family Book"

Provide markers, crayons, pencils and paper for parents to use with their children to make a book in their first language about a cultural event or family story. The cover of the book can be done in construction paper sealed with clear contact paper.

Keep the book in the child care setting to represent the child's language and family.

Another option is to take pictures of the child's family, pets, or other cultural items and label them in the first language.

Be sensitive to feelings of family privacy. Family books created at home may stay at home. Consider making a family book at school. Take pictures of children with their families and create a book to leave in the book area.

The Diversity of Books

When children see that books and reading relates to who they are and supports what they want to do, they will be motivated to learn.

- Include books that show pictures and familiar images from the child's culture. (*An example would be a book with a photo of a mother carrying her child, wrapped in a blanket, on her back. This is a common way to carry children in many Latin American and African countries.*)
- Provide books written in the child's native language. Even if you do not speak that language, it gives the child exposure to the print differences between English and their home language.

If the budget does not accommodate special ordering non-English books, the library offers a selection of books in various languages.

Another option is to take a book that has English words and use sticky labels to insert the words in the child's native language. The parents or other family member could help with translation.

Even if you don't know how to read a book that is written in a different language you can still "talk" the story.

Take and Use Activity

Book Sharing Between Provider and Child.

Select a book the child is familiar with that has bright photographs or illustrations. Find a quiet spot to read with the child one on one. Read the book slowly and with animated gestures and voice.

When you have finished reading, offer the book to the child and encourage him to look at the pictures and "read" or tell you what is taking place. The child may choose to respond in his native language, English or a combination of both. Whatever it may be, listen attentively and respond with a smile, simple phrase or question. Continue until the child has finished telling the story or has lost interest.

Children who are learning to speak English as a second language often need extra encouragement, support and one-on-one teacher time to create a comfortable environment for them to begin verbally expressing themselves in the second language.

Creating Continuity: Making Meaningful Connections to Culture To Support Language and Literacy

Creating a strong foundation in the child's first language is essential when you are beginning to build the second language (*Starting Out Right, pp.130.*) Even if you do not speak the primary language of the child, there are things you can do to support the child's primary language development.

Nurturing Links With The Family

- Encourage the parents to continue speaking the native language in the home with the child.

Did You Know?

It takes four to six years for a child to become fully fluent in a second language. During this time, if children are able to continue learning in their primary language, they will do better in school.

- Invite parents and other family members into the setting to read, sing, and interact with the children in their native language.
- Encourage parents to share cultural traditions, customs, and other stories with the other children and adults to increase cultural awareness.
- Let the child communicate in the language that is most comfortable for them. Do not force the child to speak in one language or the other. Celebrate their attempts to communicate in English, but do not chastise them for continuing to communicate in their native language.

Multi-Cultural Dramatic Play

Through dramatic (or pretend) play, children “practice” and explore their developing skills. Pretend play can be an ideal way for children learning English as a second language to practice their developing language skills.

Rich and varied pretend play is most likely when children see themselves (their culture and language) represented in the play materials available.

- Incorporate items from the child's culture into the dramatic play area. Play food items might include tortillas, rice bowls, various breads, papaya and mangos, tacos, borscht, chopsticks.
- Toys common to the child's culture, as well as from a variety of others, should be available. An example from the Russian culture is *matryoshka* toys. (Nesting dolls in varying sizes.)
- Dress up clothes are another great way to help children feel comfortable and have a sense of pride in their heritage. Traditional Hispanic articles of clothing include colorful shawls, blankets, long skirts for the women, cowboy boots and hat. Ask the parents in your program what type of clothing is traditional in their culture. Parents may even have an old dress, shoes, or hat they would like to donate.
- Place literacy related materials (book, paper, writing utensils) in the dramatic play areas to encourage children to explore literacy.

Closing

Phan, a Hmong-American child care provider, reads books to kids about their Hmong culture. She calls these books "home" books and lets one child a day take a book to share with their family. One day after Phan read the children a picture book, four-year-old Kinh looked up from her space in the circle and said, "I think the people in your books are sooo beautiful."

Your work honors the culture of each child. You provide a caring shelter for children as they learn about themselves and others.

Jean Steiner and Mary Steiner Whelan
For the Love of Children: Daily Affirmations for People Who Care for Children

Professional Action Plan