

What should parents do when their bilingual child appears to have linguistic difficulties?

- Some people, in good will, may suggest that parents should not use their mother tongue. Such advice is incorrect.
- In mixed families, if one of the two parents does not speak the other language, it would be purposeful to learn it, showing this way to the child that the other language is equally important and worth learning.
- When children have difficulty in expressing themselves, we should wonder why this is happening:
 - Is it that they try to speak faster than the level of their linguistic development allows for?
 - Is it that they feel pressured to say something quickly, because they are usually interrupted by others when they speak?
 - Is it that they face some other impediment in their lives which is not language-related?
 - Is it an issue of jealousy between their siblings or peers?

Whatever the case is, it is crucial that the listener does not show unpleasantness or impatience when children are having difficulty in expressing themselves.



Programme Implementation

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What is bilingualism?

Bilingualism is the ability to produce complete sentences in two or more languages. A bilingual person is one who can use two (or more) languages in everyday life (i.e. one language at home and another at school, or one language with the mother and another with the father).

The bilingualism of individuals who belong to two or more linguistic communities often causes discomfort or bewilderment to monolingual people. This could be happening because:

- Often bilingual people 'mix' the two languages to satisfy their communication needs more efficiently.
- For bilingual people not only two (or more) languages coexist on a daily basis, but also diverse cultural elements and multiple thinking angles.

In many cases the term 'bilingualism' is used similarly to the term 'multilingualism'

Does knowledge of the family language help towards the learning of the school language?

According to the principle of language interdependence:

- Languages are not learnt as independent units, but in a relation: what is learnt through the first language is utilised, in some way, by the second language.
- Children's former knowledge, which they bring from home, should be utilised within the school and enriched by the new knowledge and language of the school.

Cummins, J. (2001) *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*. 2nd edition. Los Angeles: California Association for Bilingual Education.

What are the advantages of bilingualism?

Some of the advantages of bilingualism and bilingual education could be the following:

Communication advantages

- Wider range of communication possibilities (family, community, international contacts, employment)
- Writing and reading in two languages

Cultural advantages

- Wider and deeper cultural awareness
- Greater tolerance and less racism

Cognitive advantages

- Development of thought (i.e. creativity, sensitivity in communication)

Personality advantages

- High self-esteem
- Secure sense of identity

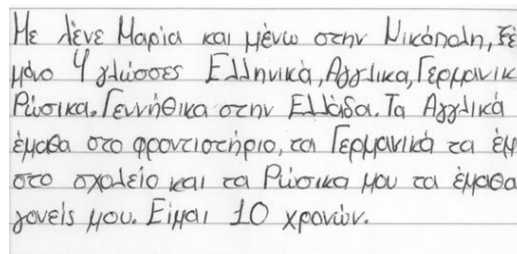
School advantages

- High achievement
- Easiness in acquiring a third language

Financial and employment advantages

- Increased employment opportunities

Baker, C. (2000) *The care and education of young bilinguals*. Multilingual Matters. Chapter 2, p.12.



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What can you do as parents in order to enhance your children's bilingualism?

- Be proud of your cultural heritage and your ability to speak in a language other than Greek. Remember that all of us can be a part of the society within which we live, without hiding or being ashamed of our origins.
- Read books and magazines in your language; be informed and acquainted with other bilingual families.
- In addition, use or create bilingual books (in your language and in Greek). In this endeavour you can cooperate with the teachers of your children. Bilingual books are important as a bridge between the two languages of the child and can assist her/him in understanding the similarities and differences between her/his languages.
- If your child mixes the two languages or refuses to speak in your language, do not be disappointed.

Do not forget that children differ very much from one another in their personality and the rate of their linguistic development. Therefore we advise you not to be alarmed if your child has yet developed linguistically compared to her/his peers.

- Bear in mind that bilingualism, similarly to all linguistic development of the children, changes during the course of our lifetime. The more stable you are in using your language, and so far as your children feel the need to use it, the more their bilingualism will keep evolving.

- Do not forget to be positive towards bilingualism, reminding your children the multiple advantages of bilingualism, but also the need for communicating with their wider family and community.

