



Effective EAL practice in Milton Keynes

Using first language to support learning

A Parent's guide

“One can use the languages of other countries, but one only gets fulfilment in the mother tongue.”

Bengali poem - Gupta

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milton keynes council

Why is bilingualism so important?

- Language helps people to make bridges between different cultures.
- There are benefits of two sets of literatures, traditions, ideas, ways of thinking and behaving.
- Communication will be more natural and expressive, maintaining relationships with parents and grandparents, families and communities
- There will be better learning of new languages and increased success in language qualifications
- As barriers to movement between countries are taken down, bilingual people find it easier to find jobs

How can using first language help my child in school?

- Reading and writing and the learning of vocabulary in first language help the development of the same skills in English. Your child's thinking skills and language development will be improved.
- All of your child's language skills will be recognised
- It will have a positive effect on your child's self-esteem, which will increase her chances of learning
- His peers will become more aware of how language works
- It will show that the school is committed to including your child in the school curriculum

What if my child gets mixed up between two or more languages?

- Research shows that children as young as three can learn up to 3 languages and they learn to separate them successfully as they get older. Initially it may look as if children are mixing up the languages, but in fact this is a stage they are going through to separate them.
- She will learn that her languages are used for different purposes and at different times
- He will understand when academic English needs to be used
- Remember that it is quite normal for languages to draw on each other. The English word "pyjama" really comes from Hindi.

How is my child going to practice English if they speak in first language at home and at school?

- Most of their learning and talking in school will still be in English
- Even if you use first language in the home much of the television they watch will be in English and they will often use English when playing with his friends
- If your child is confident in being able to swap between languages it will become natural, without anxiety
- It will show that the school is committed to including your child in the school curriculum

This is how your child's school might use first language to support learning:



- Making bilingual glossaries and word books
- Using dual language books (written in both English and first language)
- Encouraging your child to write in first language until she is confident to write in English or to plan ideas for English written work
- Giving your child time to think about ideas in the language of his choice
- Making bilingual talking partners or first language “buddies” (friendship pairs)
- Displaying examples of your child's language in the classroom so that he feels that his first language is recognised and valued

How can I help my child learn with first language at home?



- Read books together in either language, but talk about the ideas in both English and first language
- Share English picture books by talking about the pictures in first language. Then read it in English.
- Talk about books your child has been reading in school
- Make a bilingual word book of new words your child learns for each new subject
- Talk about the things that are similar and different in both languages
- Ask your child how she would say something you are talking about in her other language
- Talk about when they use each language and who they use it with
- Make sure that he is proud to be a speaker of more than one language
- **Above all celebrate your child's skill!**

Are there any examples of schools that are already using first language to promote learning?

Junior School in Milton Keynes

- Views home language as a tool for learning
- Uses many resources to celebrate home languages of the children
- Classroom displays promote and celebrate home languages
- Children in EYFS share traditional stories/nursery rhymes in various languages spoken by the children
- All children throughout school are encouraged to use home language to support their understanding of concepts
- Home language talk partners set up in all classes
- Greetings in class/assemblies in different languages
- Staff population reflects the cultural background of the children

Junior School in Milton Keynes

- Encourages parents to discuss key concepts and topics in first language
- Invites parents to come into school to share and celebrate first language through story-telling
- Draws on key words in first language
- Sets up first language talk partners
- Makes bilingual displays
- Runs parent workshops on the importance of using first language for learning
- Encourages children to be proud of their languages and cultures, including running a regular Language Awareness Week

Further copies of this publication are available from The EMA Network:

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