

# TALK, READ AND SING TOGETHER EVERY DAY!

THE BENEFITS OF BEING BILINGUAL — A REVIEW FOR TEACHERS AND OTHER EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAM PROVIDERS

Learning more than one language is an asset to individuals, families, and our entire society. Early childhood teachers can share the benefits of bilingualism with families and their communities, find ways to support children's home languages, and encourage families to keep their language strong. Developing the child's home language provides the foundation for reading and writing, preparing children to be biliterate. Researchers have found many benefits to being bilingual and biliterate. Below are just a few!



## COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Individuals who are bilingual and biliterate switch between two different language systems. Their brains are very active and flexible. Research also shows that, compared to their non-bilingual peers, bilingual people have an easier time:

- understanding math concepts and solving word problems;<sup>1</sup>
- developing strong thinking skills;<sup>2</sup>
- using logic;<sup>3</sup>
- focusing, remembering, and making decisions;<sup>4</sup>
- thinking about language;<sup>5</sup> and
- learning other languages.<sup>6</sup>

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Being bilingual supports children in maintaining strong ties with their family, culture, and community. All of these are key parts of a child's developing identity.<sup>7</sup> Bilingual children are also able to make new friends and create strong relationships using their second language—an important skill in our increasingly diverse society. Research has found that babies raised in bilingual households show better self-control,<sup>8</sup> a key indicator of school success.

## LEARNING

School readiness and success for children who are dual or multi language learners is tied directly to mastery of their home language.<sup>9</sup> Bilingual and multilingual children benefit academically from knowing more than one language in many ways. Because they are able to switch between languages, they develop more flexible approaches to thinking through problems. The ability to read and think in two (or more) different languages promotes higher levels of abstract thought, which is important in learning.<sup>10</sup>

Current research shows that people who use more than one language appear better at blocking out irrelevant information, a benefit that may exist as early as seven months of age.<sup>11</sup> Children who learn to read in their home language have a strong foundation to build upon when they learn a second language. They can easily apply their knowledge about reading to their second language.<sup>12</sup>

## LONG-TERM SUCCESS

One-half to two-thirds of adults around the world speak at least two languages. In today's global society, they have many advantages. Globally, bilingual and biliterate adults have more job opportunities than monolingual adults.<sup>13</sup>

Bilingual and biliterate individuals have the opportunity to participate in the global community in more ways, get information from more places, and learn more about people from other cultures.

You can find more tips like these—as well as videos, information, and more—on Too Small to Fail’s website, [www.talkingisteaching.org](http://www.talkingisteaching.org).

Track your child’s development using the [Milestones Moments Booklet](#). If you have concerns about a child’s development, including their language development, talk to the child’s family about it. Ask them if they have concerns and if they observe the same issues at home. With their permission, conduct a developmental and behavioral screening and encourage them to talk to their primary care provider. For more information on developmental and behavioral screening, visit [Birth to Five: Watch Me Thrive!](#)

For more information on early learning, please visit [Head Start’s National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning](#) and the [Early Head Start National Resource Center](#). For more information on working with young children who are learning more than one language, please visit [Head Start’s National Center for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness](#).

For more information on enhancing the language environment for children with developmental disabilities or delays, please visit the [Center for Early Literacy Learning](#).

## NOTES

1. Zelasko, N., & Antunez, B. (2000). If your child learns in two languages. National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. Retrieved from [http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/uploads/9/IfYourChildLearnsInTwoLangs\\_English.pdf](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/uploads/9/IfYourChildLearnsInTwoLangs_English.pdf)
2. Pandey, A. (2013) What is the role of home language learning and maintenance in supporting successful outcomes in English language learning and literacy? In *Young Dual Language Learners: A Guide for PreK – 3 Leaders* (2014). Editor Karen N. Nemeth. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon Publishing.
3. Castro, D. C., Ayankoya, B., & Kasprzak, C. (2011). *The new voices/Nuevas voces: Guide to cultural and linguistic diversity in early childhood*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
4. Bialystok, E. (2001). *Bilingualism in development: Language, literacy, and cognition*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
5. Castro, D. C., Ayankoya, B., & Kasprzak, C. (2011). *The new voices/Nuevas voces: Guide to cultural and linguistic diversity in early childhood*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
6. Jessner, U. (2008). *Teaching third languages: Findings, trends, and challenges*. Université de Lausanne. doi:10.1017/S0261444807004739
7. Zelasko, N., & Antunez, B. (2000). If your child learns in two languages. National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. Retrieved from [http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/uploads/9/IfYourChildLearnsInTwoLangs\\_English.pdf](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/uploads/9/IfYourChildLearnsInTwoLangs_English.pdf)
8. Kovács, A. M., & Mehler, J. (2009). Cognitive gains in 7-month-old bilingual infants. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 106(16), 6556–6560.
9. Zelasko, N., & Antunez, B. (2000). If your child learns in two languages. National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. Retrieved from [http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/uploads/9/IfYourChildLearnsInTwoLangs\\_English.pdf](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/uploads/9/IfYourChildLearnsInTwoLangs_English.pdf)
10. Diaz, R. (1985). *The intellectual power of bilingualism*. In Southwest Hispanic Research Institute, *Second language learning by young children*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico.
11. Kovács, A. M., & Mehler, J. (2009). Cognitive gains in 7-month-old bilingual infants. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 106(16), 6556–6560.
12. Pérez, M. & Rinaldi, C. (2006). Predicting English word reading skills for Spanish-speaking students in first grade. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 26(4), 338–350.
13. Zelasko, N., & Antunez, B. (2000). If your child learns in two languages. National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. Retrieved from [http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/uploads/9/IfYourChildLearnsInTwoLangs\\_English.pdf](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/uploads/9/IfYourChildLearnsInTwoLangs_English.pdf)

