

The Bilingual School of Monza

Extra Language Support for Second Language learners



Sharing Languages and Cultures, Opening Minds

Information for Parents

ADVICE TO PARENTS OF YOUNG SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

- 1 Make your child feel as secure and happy as possible in the new school environment by preparing him/her in advance about this new experience. Reassure him/her that s/he will be able to use her/his mother tongue and through this the learning of a new language will become easier.
- 2 Continue to speak your home language(s) to your child. The ongoing development of your child's mother tongue is essential. Besides, try to nurture the academic development of your child's mother tongue at home. Keeping informed on what your child is learning at school will help you do this.
- 3 Use every occasion and family daily routines to develop the home language naturally (e.g. doing shopping, going on trips etc).
- 4 Speak to your child about school so that school vocabulary is developed in the home language.
- 5 Read regularly to your child in your language.
- 6 When your child starts to read in his/her second language at school, hear him/her read every day. Talk about the book/story in your mother tongue and explain anything the child does not understand. If you are a fluent speaker of the new language and therefore a good language model for your child, negotiate and agree with your child whether to use the new language when a natural learning/teaching moment occurs.
- 7 If your child can already read and write in his/her mother tongue before entering our school – continue to develop these skills at home. If your child is not yet literate in the L1* talk to your child's language support teacher for ideas on how to get started.
- 8 If you would like to know how your child is progressing in his/her 2nd language but are unable to do so in the home environment – come into school and ask if you can spend some time in the ESL/IAL room/classroom and hear the child in a natural target language environment.
- 9 Make sure your child goes to bed early enough on school days ‘
www.sleepfoundation.org recommends: school-aged children 5-10 years old should have hours 10-11 hours of sleep and children 10-17 years old should have 8.1/2 – 9.1/4 hours of sleep each night).
- 10 Don't put unnecessary pressure on your child. Remember, it takes time to learn a new language. Do not “showcase” your child speaking the new language, especially in front of people who are not part of his/her language experience. Try not to compare your child to other peers.

* L1 is an abbreviation for first language, or mother tongue. Sometimes it is used to refer to speakers who are speaking their mother tongue. Often contrasted with L2 which is an abbreviation for second language, or a language that is not the mother tongue. Sometimes, it is used to refer to speakers who are speaking a second language.

11. The time frame to learn a new language also depends on personality attributes of the individual child (e.g. confidence, self esteem, extrovert, shy)

The E.A.L./I.A.L programme in the Elementary and Middle school assists children whose first language is not English or Italian to become competent enough to participate fully in the mainstream social and academic life of the school.

The programme aims:

1) (For beginners)

- a) To help students settle in, get used to a new school and a new environment and to help them function in the mainstream as quickly and happily as possible.
- b) To equip them with sufficient command of the English/Italian language both spoken and written to allow them to understand and follow the work of the class at their own appropriate level.

2) To make the pupil fluent and accurate in the spoken word (1)

- a) To give the students abundant opportunities for hearing, in a meaningful context, the sound system of the language along with its grammatical structure and vocabulary.
- b) To develop student's communicative competence for language use inside and outside the learning situation.

3) To make the student fluent and accurate in the written word (1)

- a) To enable the students to read in English or Italian with comprehension, fluency, and enjoyment.
- b) To enable the students to write correctly and, at a later stage with creativity and also to plan and edit writing to improve its organisation, expression and accuracy.
- c) To enable the child to deal with the academic language of the curriculum.

4) To promote Additive Bilingualism ie. English/Italian is added on to rather than seen as a replacement for the first language.

(1) Dodson, C.J. Language Teaching and the Bilingual Method.

Questions that Parents of Second Language Students Often Ask

1. When is the best age to learn a second language?

Many people believe that the younger one begins to learn a second language, the easier and better he/she will learn it. Although there are a number of advantages, the research tends to indicate that the most significant ones seem to be at the phonological level. Children demonstrate a degree of variation in their rate of second language acquisition. This is due to a large number of factors, which affect language learning, such as:

- ❖ The student's motivation to learn
- ❖ The student's personality and learning style
- ❖ The type of instructional programme
- ❖ Access and exposure to sound language models.
- ❖ The status of one's own language vs. the second language to be learned

2. Does the learning of more than one language at the same time confuse students?

The human brain can store many languages at the same time in much the same way that a computer can process input. In some countries, children become fluent in three or more languages. Having strong skills in one language enables children to learn other languages more easily.

3. How can your school support the maintenance of mother-tongue of students who speak languages other than Italian and English?

All languages are valued in our school and teachers make a commitment to include them in their lesson planning and day to day practices also by working collaboratively with the child's parents. The school will offer individualised and group support and advise to help parents develop an articulated mother tongue maintenance and development program at home. Whenever possible the school will offer families an after school mother tongue maintenance program.

4. Should 2LLs be required to speak English/Italian at all times in school?

Students in a Bilingual school context should have as many opportunities as possible to be exposed to and communicate in both school languages. Teachers create as many natural and motivating situations where students are encouraged to use their target language as often possible. This is especially important since it is only at school that many students get the chance to practice their new language. It is only natural for bilingual children to speak their own language with peers, especially in their home country. Students are not made to feel that speaking in their mother-tongue language at school is ever wrong. Teachers encourage children to transfer their language and literacy skills across learning contexts.

5. Why do some students seem to have high levels of oral language proficiency but have difficulty using their 2L in the classroom?

There are two kinds of language proficiency – social language and academic language. The ability to use the second language for personal communication is usually more easily acquired than the ability to use the second language for problem solving and learning academic material, especially

since academics involves abstract and complex language structures as well as more extensive development of reading and writing skills.

6. Will there be some students who will simply never learn a new language?

All children can learn a new language given a natural social setting. Of course, different students will learn language at their own individual rates. The more safe and comfortable children feel in the learning environment, the more progress they will make in language learning.

7. Should all students' English/Italian errors be immediately corrected?

Second language learning is a developmental process. It is a set of stages through which learners pass. In this process, mistakes occur, gradually change, and hopefully disappear. Successful language learning depends upon the freedom of the students to make mistakes. By testing out the limits of the new language system, perfection and accuracy frustrates the student and inhibits the natural process. Teachers at the school try to create an atmosphere that allows students to make mistakes and learn from them. We promote accuracy but not at the expense of fluency.

8. What can I, as a parent of an E.AL./I.A.L student, do to help?

Parents of EAL/IAL students should keep informed of their children's progress in their new language. They should also provide continued first language support for both oral and academic/literacy language development.

9. If I speak English or Italian, should I speak to my child in his/her 2L for extra exposure and practice?

Parents of second language learners often ask if they should speak English or Italian with their children at home. Generally this is not a good idea because many parents are not good language models in the new language. (See page 1 point 6) Young children are still developing their mother tongue and research tells us that a child who is competent in his mother tongue has an easier time learning successive languages. Insuring the continued development of the home language is not always so easy. Your child is immersed in English/Italian for several hours of every school day. It is important that you continue to speak your mother tongue with your child to demonstrate to him that you value it. If you make the effort to promote your home language you will have a child who is successful and proficient in 2 languages by the time he leaves middle school. Research also says that parents can express effectively their emotions(affective language) when using their mother tongue. The risks is that when a situation requires affective language use, parents will fall back into using their mother tongue.

Here are some tips for supporting your child's L1 and L2. development.

- **Be language aware**

Talk to your children and take every opportunity to use your home language and teach your children about your culture in your daily interactions with them.

- As much as you can, talk to your child about the topics they are studying at school in your mother tongue. Provide your child with books and videos on subject matter in your language.

- Plan ahead and find out what topics may be coming up in some subject specific areas, for the next school year and collect materials on visits back to your home country or have relatives send them to you.
- Provide your child with a good dictionary in the home language and also a bilingual dictionary if you can manage it, one for use at school and one to keep at home.
- Provide your child with an encyclopaedia in the home language.
- Read stories/poems rhymes to your child in your language.
- Have your child watch films/tv programs in mother tongue and L2
- Correspond with family & peers in the language of the country of origin
- Use technology to access language programs, digital dictionaries, digital stories

Beliefs Guiding E.A.L/ I.A.L teaching in the Bilingual School of Monza

- The E.A.L/ I.A.L programme supports additive bilingualism, i.e. English or Italian is intended not as a replacement for the first language but as an additional language for the student. Research shows that the students levels of language and literacy competency in the first language has a direct impact on their 2nd language learning and acquisition.
- More than one language can be learnt simultaneously. E.A.L/I.A.L students in the elementary receive have instruction in both Italian and English.
- Effective education for second language learners is only possible if every teacher is a language teacher. The school's class teachers and extra language support teachers work together to ensure that the second language learners are successfully integrated into the mainstream life of the school.
- Our school provides ongoing professional teacher development in most areas of Bilingual Education and second language acquisition so that teachers' awareness and competence in teaching second language learners is constantly raised.

July 2013