

# Supporting Bilingual Families in Jersey

## A briefing paper to inform the Knowledge Makes Change Seminar Series

Knowledge Makes Change is provided as part of the Early Childhood Development Programme which is led by the National Children's Bureau in partnership with States of Jersey and Jersey Child Care Trust, informed by the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Early Years and Childhood Partnership and the Jersey Safeguarding Partnership Board. The programme officially started in April 2016 and is funded by UBS Optimus Foundation UK.

### Introduction

A child may be bilingual for numerous reasons, commonly including:

- Having one or both parents speak a different language
- Living in a country with more than one common language
- Moving to a new country with a different language

This briefing paper provides some background information on bilingual children, including the local Jersey context, the key definitions and the developmental and language acquisition processes involved, and will also review some of the emerging evidence on how best to support bilingual children and their families.



### Myth-busting

A bilingual environment is **not** a disadvantage and should **not** inhibit the child's communication.

Learning two languages does **not** mean that the child will become less than fluent in either one.

Bilingualism does **not** cause or contribute to SLC difficulties.

Bilingual children often mix both languages. They are **not** confused. This is a normal part of the acquisition process.

Suppressing one language is unhelpful and will **not** help the child to learn the other quicker.

There is **not** necessarily a 'window of opportunity' whereby a young child can more easily learn a second language.

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Jersey  
Child  
Care  
Trust

## Jersey in numbers:

104,200 people live in Jersey

There are currently approximately 18,000 children in Jersey (18 and under)

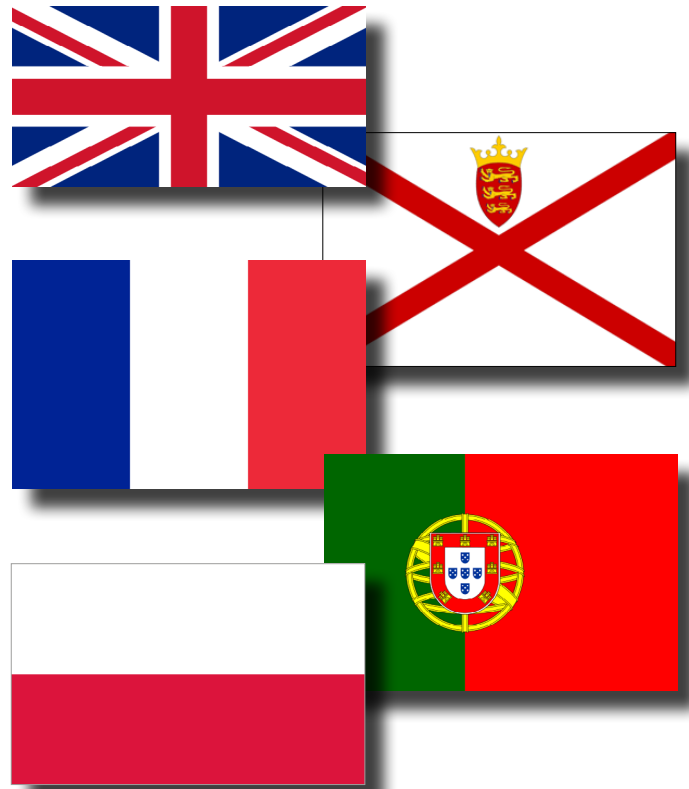
While English and French are the official languages spoken in Jersey, English is most commonly spoken (95%).

There is no figure for % population who speak French, however, 1% identify as French.

Jerriais (or Jersey-French), the traditional language of Jersey, is spoken by around 3%.

Portuguese (Madeiran) is commonly spoken, with a Portuguese population of around 7%.

Polish is spoken by around 3% of the population.



## Key definitions:

**Bilingualism:** The ability to communicate using two (or more) languages. Proficiency in and use of the languages may vary depending on opportunity and exposure.

**Simultaneous acquisition:** A child is exposed to two or more languages before the age of three, therefore learns both alongside one another as part of the same process.

**Sequential acquisition:** A child begins to learn a second language after the first language is well-established (usually after the age of three)

**English as an additional language (EAL):** While often used interchangeably, EAL refers specifically to someone who is already fluent in one language and communicates daily in this tongue, however begins to learn English as an additional language, perhaps as a result of moving to a new country.

**Home language:** the language used most frequently in the home. Evidence suggests parents should use this language when communicating with their children.

**Code switching:** the child switches between both languages within one conversation. This is a normal part of language acquisition for a bilingual child.

## Bilingualism and child development

**Language acquisition:** Psychologists provide us with a number of theories of language acquisition, from the use of positive reinforcement to connect words and behaviours (Skinner), to an inbuilt, universal grammar structure to facilitate language processing (Chomsky). Piaget's discussion on schemas has informed modern theories, which suggest that language development runs hand in hand with cognitive development, with children acquiring words and recognising patterns as they explore the world. When a child is regularly exposed to more than one language in their everyday life, the same cognitive processes will be used, however the child will acquire two languages, leading to bilingualism.

**Attachment:** Communication is essential for a young child to build relationships, therefore it is particularly important that they can communicate with their primary caregiver and key adults around them. Using the home language in everyday parent child interaction maximises the opportunity for attachment and understanding between parent and child.

**Identity & self-esteem:** Language is a central part of building identity, and carries social and cultural significance. When a child has moved from his/her home country, maintaining their first language helps to keep that important link with their home culture and strengthen their sense of personal identity.

## The evidence:

### What works to support bilingual families?

#### Universal Support: Importance of developing Cultural Competence

Because of changing demographics, organisations/agencies providing and coordinating family support need to understand and address a range of cultures, languages and values in the families with whom they partner. This underpins the need and importance of cultural competence within the organisation or setting.

Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. The Cultural Competence Model comprises three key components: (1) cultural knowledge (2) cultural awareness (3) cultural sensitivity. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures and leads to a decrease in miscommunication. Within the cultural competence model, culture is generally defined as, "the integrated pattern of human behaviour that includes thought, communications, actions, beliefs, customs, values and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group" (Cross 1989)

A Culturally Competent organisation: understands, accepts and respects cultural differences; is accessible, appropriate and credible; expands cultural knowledge and resources; adapts their service models/method to accommodate needs; demonstrates inclusiveness; reflects diversity of the community served; values cultural differences; evidences employment and service equity; adopts a participatory model/method; adopts continuous self-assessment; enhances skills and training; communicates with and consults the community; and is welcoming to all (Cross, 1989).

The National Council for Cultural Competence (NCCC) recommends that an organisation should: have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviours, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally; have the capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalise cultural knowledge, and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve; incorporate the above in all aspects of policy making, administration, practice, service delivery and involve systematically consumers, key stakeholders and communities (NCCC, 2009).

For organisations delivering early years services, cultural competence is critical, particularly when supporting bilingual children in the early stages of language acquisition. They must ensure they are fully aware of individual needs of the children and families they serve and are equipped to best support them.

## The evidence:

### What works to support bilingual families?

#### Targeted support: How bilingual practitioners can support early years setting

Smidt (2008) shows how early years practitioners can use interactive styles of learning to focus on the benefit that the many cultures and languages in the classroom can bring to children's learning and development.

Based on the platform 'Early Years Careers' ([www.earlyyears-careers.com](http://www.earlyyears-careers.com)), where professionals from the early years sector share best practice, the skills and attributes which bilingual practitioners can offer the early years setting include:

- **Building parent partnerships** – a bilingual practitioner can bridge the communication gap between practitioners and parents. This is important within the early years for daily feedback, information sharing, sharing concerns and advice and helping the child to settle.
- **Building confidence** – they can communicate with bilingual children to allow them to express themselves and to gain the confidence they need to learn, play and explore.
- **Generating new ideas** – they may have suggestions for improving the support offered to families and children, improving communication skills, improving practice and different ideas brought from their own cultures to make the setting a more welcoming and inviting space.
- **Getting the correct support** – they can more accurately assess children and therefore get the correct support and next steps in place that are needed to promote development.
- **Reaching the wider community** – they may be able to provide advertising in other languages so that the setting can reach out to other families who may like to join the setting.
- **Information sharing** – They may be able to write all letters that go home, advice slips and newsletters in another language so that all parents have the opportunity to benefit.

**The evidence:**  
What works to support bilingual families?

**Specialist support: How Speech and Language Therapists (SLT) can support bilingual children and their families**

Some SLTs may feel that their clinical competence is challenged by the linguistic and cultural differences which confront them. While acknowledging that the principles of assessment and management of speech, language & communication problems remain the same, their application must be adapted.

There is a need to ensure SLTs, and in turn parents, understand how bilingual language development differs from monolingual experience so that mis-diagnosis or non-diagnosis of speech, language and communication difficulties is avoided. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) (2007) recommend that SLTs should inform themselves of the linguistic structure and use of the languages they are likely to encounter in their clinical caseload. Knowledge of the language enables the SLTs to judge that they have obtained accurate linguistic information about the languages spoken by client and family and they will be able to make an informed choice about the resources needed.



**The evidence:**  
What works to support bilingual families?

It is important to stress that bilingualism does not cause or contribute to speech, language and communication difficulties. RCSLT (2006) highlight that there is 'no reason why bilingual children should have a different rate of speech, language and communication issues from a monolingual population'. The main aim of assessing children referred with possible speech, language & communication difficulties from bilingual communities is to draw as full a language profile of the bilingual child as possible. This will help the SLT to differentially diagnose between a language acquisition difficulty affecting all language learning and a difficulty affecting the acquisition of an additional language. SLTs should ensure that they have the appropriate language assessment materials for assessing both/all of the client's languages across the various language systems, e.g. phonology, vocabulary and syntax, as well as fluency and social communication skills.

When an assessment has been conducted in both languages at whatever level, then a therapy programme can be drawn up in English and the home language. Intervention procedures may work through both languages in different ways depending on the nature of the difficulty. It has been shown that vocabulary learning improves when the items are learnt through the home language first.

The way forward for SLTs to achieve good clinical practice with bilingual clients is for investment to be made in the following recommendations: 1) to include more study of bilingualism and comparative linguistics/phonetics in the training syllabus; 2) to recruit more bilingual SLTs from linguistic minority communities; 3) to establish and develop the role of bilingual speech and language therapy co-workers, with nationally accredited training scheme; 4) to develop programmes of action research to monitor and increase the evidence base for our work with bilingual clients; and 5) to further involve users in the development of services.

## Final thoughts....

... Bilingualism should be encouraged and supported! Research shows that bilingual children are better at problem solving, planning, & filtering distractions; perform better on cognitive challenges and are better able to learn further language/s!

## References and resources:

**The following provides a list of useful sources and references if you are interested in reading more about the issues related to bilingual families. This is not in any way exhaustive and is intended only to provide a general overview of the topic.**

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