

Limitless Learning Through Languages
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PARENTS ROLE

The benefits ascribed to learning multiple languages are limitless. Educational neuroscience research conducted worldwide affirms what educators and parents understand intuitively: **that dual language development dramatically increases cognitive capacity for learning and success in life.**

Studies published by neuroscientist, Dr. Laura-Ann Petitto, (2008) state, “children, consistently learning two languages from birth, outperform every other student group on state standardized 3rd grade reading tests” (1). Implicit, in this study, is the parents’ role in building a child’s educational foundation by explicitly teaching primary language at home and in the community.

Parents are a child’s first and most significant teacher. In this capacity, parents eager to embrace their influential role in the learning process often ask *what do I need to do to support my child’s learning?*

Included here are simple activities, rooted in Neuroscience, that **parents can use at home.** These strategies support explicit dual/multiple language learning while mirroring instructional strategies that teachers use in the classroom. The goal for parents in teaching primary language at home is twofold: First, to build a solid foundation of language on which all other learning takes place, and second, to establish an interactive home-school partnership that supports the school’s and family’s lifelong learning goals.

The Education Neuroscience Foundation’s Parent Handbook for Language Learning.

The list of activities, developed by The Education Neuroscience Foundation for Parents, is to support a students’ primary language development in the home and the community. The activities are designed to build a solid foundation in the learners’ first language which support dual language development instruction used in classrooms nationwide. Each activity is scientifically proven to work.

Language development depends on hearing and saying sounds. The sounds of the language spoken at home are the important first sounds your learner hears to develop words, vocabulary, sentences, phrases, and finally, thoughts. The best way to develop fluid and fluent readers is through language. The sounds a child hears maps onto a symbol or letter; and letters form words and phrases. Combine the words with visual images and the child begins to develop cognition and think.

The key to developing strong readers begins with language and language begins with sounds.

LET'S HAVE FUN WITH SOUNDS and SOUND TO SYMBOL MAPPING!

TALK

TALK, TALK, TALK, TALK and more TALK. Encourage Talking! Talk to your child and let your child talk to you! Talk about school, teachers, friends, family, events, holidays, movies, books, ideas. KEEP TALKING!!! LET THEM TALK!!!

LISTEN

Take time to actively and intentionally listen to your child at home, in the car, in the yard, in the store. Listen to your child's stories and conversations. Ask questions about what your child is thinking, seeing, doing, school, siblings, friends, teachers, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. ALL TOPICS!

TELL STORIES

Tell your child stories! Family stories about the past, a holiday or an experience you had, interests your child exhibits. Storytelling develops their identity, culture, history, and imagination. Let them ask questions about the story; who, what, where, why and when questions. See if they can add details to your story.

SING

Children love to sing. Sing songs to your child from family history or songs you heard as a child. Let them sing with you. Songs that give your child a sense of family, rhymes, sing-song, chants, silly sound songs. Hear the sounds of the song. Name the sounds you hear together. Laugh!

READ

Read to your child. Let your child choose a book with pictures. Look at the pictures together, talk about them. Tell them a story about the pictures and read the book. Point to the pictures and ask questions: What is this? Where is the story taking place? Who is in the story? What does the picture tell you? When did this story take place? In the past? In the present? In what season is the story written—winter, summer, spring, fall? What country does the story describe? Make up a new story by looking at the pictures and ask your child to become the character.

DRAW

Draw pictures with your child. When you finish reading a book, looking at pictures, returning from a trip, watching a movie, playing in the yard, taking a walk; pull out paper and pencils or crayons, paint, Play-Doh, or finger paints and ask your child to draw a picture of what they saw in the movie, book, on the trip, etc. Describe their experience through drawing or painting. Make up a new story. Draw it!

SHOP

Take your child shopping, especially to the grocery store. Point out and name the fruits, vegetables, eggs, milk, meat, or any products you see. Ask them to repeat the name after you. Make a list of the items and see how many you both can remember. Talk about the color, size, shape, texture of the food. Let them help you select items and put them in the basket. Describe everything you both see.

PUPPETS

Puppet Stories. You can use your fingers as puppets (little people or characters) and have them talk to one another. Tell a funny story. Have your child tell a story with the puppets. Puppets can be made from socks or old clothes. Give the puppets a name and tell stories through movements and sounds. Hear puppets talk! Have your child talk to the puppets! Puppets can talk to each other.

OBSERVATION WALKS

Take walks with your child. Go to the park, down the street, to the library, visit a friend. On the walk, point out different trees, flowers, sidewalk, grass, houses, apartments, cars, trucks, lights, signs. Ask them to repeat the name of the objects after you. Discuss the purpose of the object, the color, shape, size, speed, direction, and sound that the object makes.

IDENTIFY:

SOUNDS

It is important to develop this skill. Identify the sounds you hear on a walk, or in the car or house. What do you hear? Where is the sound coming from? What does it sound like? Let's make up a story based on the sounds we hear. All brains process sounds in three ways which develop pictures in our minds for reading and recall.

OBJECTS

Object, Time, Place, and Space Identification. What is this object? Name it, repeat it. Have your child name it and repeat it. Identify people, places, and things wherever you go with your child. Ask your child: What do you hear? What do you see? What does it look like? What do you smell? Where are we now? Describe this space. Can you see it in your imagination? What is your imagination? Thinking in pictures in your brain- can you see them? (meta-cognition). Talking about what you are thinking helps young learners think about their thinking.

PLAY GAMES

Play games with your child. If you have a family game—Lotería or Bingo—or any game that you and your child enjoy. You can make up a game. Let's count the spoons, let's find all the doors in the house or apartment, let's count the beans in the bag. You can play imagination games such as "I am thinking of an object and the child has to name the object"; take turns. I am thinking of a name or a color or an object. You guess! This game helps a child learn to predict and infer.

MUSIC and DANCE

Play music that your family loves to hear. Dance, sway, move to the sounds of the music. Put words or sounds to the music, chant, and dance. Movement develops brain connections.

COOK

Children love to cook and make things. Your child can help you prepare simple food for the family. Talk to them about the food being prepared and how to prepare it. Talk about the shapes, colors, taste, texture. Let your child taste-test the food. Describe the ingredients, texture, smell, taste, and preparation. Ask your child to remember what items are used to make this dish. This game helps develop memory and recall.

CHORES

Your child is a great helper. Let them help clean, wash dishes, put dishes on the table, sweep, fold clothes. Talk to them about the task, the importance of what they are doing. Have them tell you the steps they took to accomplish the task. This activity develops memory and enhances behavior with social/emotional skills.

SHARE PHOTOS

Share family pictures or work photos with your child. Talk about who is in the picture, what they are doing, why, where they are when it was taken, does the photo tell a story? Share the story. Let them ask questions. Share your rich history and life with your child. This activity supports language development within a cultural context and the importance of identity.

VOLUNTEER

Teachers need and want you to participate in your child's classroom and education. They need you to be actively involved in helping with instruction, if you are comfortable. You can share songs in your own language, stories, read a book, talk about different customs, foods, music, dance, and rituals. You are an important part of your child's education and their life-long success. Remember, it isn't only in the early years when a child wants you to be present. It is also in the child's later pre-adolescent and teen years. Clue: if a child pushes you away, it is when they need and want you there even more.

Be There!

ALL ABOUT YOU AND THEM

Ask yourself, what are your expectations for your child's future in education. Do you want your child to finish high school? Do you want your child to go to college? Do you want your child to participate in sports, music, art, dance, or other academic programs?

Do you know how to get your child to college? What do you need to know NOW to make your and your child's dreams a reality? It is ok not to know. Just ask!

Learning languages is a life-long process that must be explicitly taught by parents, teachers, and within the community. Brain research tells us learning languages can occur anytime, anywhere at any age. No one is too young or too old to develop multiple languages. The benefits are endless and possibilities are limitless!

Together, we reinvent education!

1)Kovelman, I., Baker, S., & Petitto, L.A. (2008). Age of bilingual language exposure as a new window into bilingual reading development. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 11(2), pages 203-223.