

Raising Multilingual Children



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Definitions

Multilingualism (use of more than one language)

Receptive Language (comprehension)

Expressive Language (speaking)

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Content:

1. Statistics and Definitions
2. Role of parents
3. Overview of possible problems
4. Questions

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Definitions

Pragmatic Language (function)

Articulation (sound production)

Primary and Secondary Language

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You, as a parent, have ALL the necessary skills to assist your children to develop language skills and to become a multilingual speaker

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Multilingualism

The ability to comprehend and/or produce two or more languages in oral, manual or written form with at the very least a functional level of proficiency. Language acquisition can occur at any age.

The timing of language acquisition can vary

Simultaneous – languages learned at the same time (typically in the first years of life)

Sequential – languages learned after the first language has been mastered (typically after 3 years of age)



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Receptive Language



Refers to the understanding of oral language and includes the ability to:

- understand the meaning of spoken words and word relationships
- follow oral instructions,
- understand a range of different spoken sentence and question forms,
- listen to and comprehend stories

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Articulation

Articulation/speech is the ability to produce the sounds of speech.

- It involves the coordination of the lips, cheeks, teeth, tongue etc
- Articulation is developmental and sequential
- Certain sounds are easier to produce than others.
- 4 year old children should be understood by unfamiliar listeners even though there may still be errors

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Expressive Language

Refers to language production and includes the ability to:

- Name/say vocabulary
- use the correct *grammatical structures* in sentences,
- connect ideas together using various grammatical structures
- sequence information to describe an object, tell stories or recount an event.



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Primary and Secondary Language

Primary Language – the language someone learns from birth. Often referred to as 'first language', 'native language', 'heritage language' or 'mother-tongue'. However, a primary language can also be described as the dominant language a person uses in everyday situations.

Secondary Language – are the languages learned subsequently to the primary. However, the primary language is often used as a reference and provides the scaffolding to 'map' the secondary and subsequent language/s.



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Pragmatic Language

Refers to the understanding and use of language within a social context.

- Can interpret meaning created by tone or inflection in spoken language
- Can interpret visual communication signals (facial expression, body language)
- Able to follow unspoken social 'rules' (e.g greetings, waiting to speak, looking at a listener etc)

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Speech and Language Skills

Speech and language skills develop in a typical sequence.

Each child will progress at different rates and may spend varying amounts of time at each level.

Learning more than one language will not impact how early or quickly a child learns how to speak.

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Steps of Language Acquisition

- Step 1. Prelinguistic / Pre-production (comprehension/understanding)
 Stage 2. Early Production – single words
 Stage 3. Speech Emergence – increase in vocabulary and short phrases
 Stage 4. Intermediate Fluency – further increase in vocabulary and longer utterances
 Stage 5. Advanced Fluency – further development



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The Cultural 'Mix' in Wyndham

The current mix of nationalities in Wyndham are as follows:
 (2016 Census)
 Australian (born)
 Indian
 New Zealand
 Philippines
 Chinese
 English

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English and Other Languages

Children who are raised in a home where other languages are spoken SHOULD have an opportunity to practice BOTH/ALL languages!!

Research tells us that development of the primary language provides a solid base for learning and is beneficial to the subsequent development of English and other languages.

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The languages other than English spoken: (2016)

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Mandarin 4.1% | 2. Greek 2.4% |
| 3. Italian 2.3% | 4. Vietnamese 2.3% |
| 5. Cantonese 1.7% | 6. Arabic 1.7% |
| 7. Punjabi 1.2% | 8. Hindi 1.1% |
| 9. Filipino/Tagalog 0.8% | 10. Sinhalese 0.8% |

Unlike some countries Australia does not have one dominant language other than English (e.g. US – Spanish, Canada – French)

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The Cultural 'Mix' in Australia

The 2016 census revealed that **21%** (more than one fifth) of Australians spoke a language other than English at home.

However, in the same year, it was estimated that the number of people who spoke a language other than English in **Greater Melbourne** was **32.3%**

In the **Shire of Wyndham** the number of people who speak a language other than English is estimated to be more than **40%**

These statistics are however constantly changing

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Yet, many parents raise the same concerns.....

1. What can I do to help my child speak our 'mother-tongue'?
2. Will my child be able to speak English the same as other children?
3. Should I stop speaking my first language?
5. Will the use of multiple languages cause delays in either speaking or learning?
6. Will my child be successful at school?

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What age do I start speaking to my child?

The answer is simple – from birth!!

All parents should start speaking to their babies (in their first language) as soon as they arrive! It is this simple interaction from the very beginning that sets the scene for later language development!!!



Parents will often instinctively use simple words and phrases that relate to the 'here and now' when speaking to infants. They will often increase the pitch of their voice and lower the volume.

This enhances the child's understanding!

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What can you do to help your child become a multilingual speaker?

1. Speak to your child using your primary language/s – this will help them to become a proficient speaker in these languages, which in turn will set the scene for becoming a skilled language user
2. Provide your child with different language opportunities – singing, reading books, watching TV shows etc
3. Take your child to various cultural/social events so that they can interact with others using different languages

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If parents are skilled in more than one language this routine can be followed for both or all languages.

Experts believe that typically developing children can begin to learn multiple languages just by listening to them and before they learn to speak.

However, if parents are only skilled in their primary language it is advised that they use this language exclusively. This is true particularly as the child gets older and is learning to speak.

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4. As your child gets older and more proficient, you may consider language school so that they can be immersed in both reading and writing in their other languages.

5. Encourage your child to use their secondary languages when communicating with others – family members, friends, community members etc.



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Just so you know.....

There are over 7000 primary languages world-wide and within these languages there are approximately 800 sounds!

Each language is estimated to use/combine approximately 40 different sounds (phonemes) and these different sounds help us to distinguish each language.

Research has demonstrated that infants/toddlers have an ability to distinguish the difference between sounds. This is true particularly if they are exposed to more than one language.



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One Person, One Language (OPOL)

Some parents choose to use this strategy, particularly when each parent has a different primary language!

Each parent (or grandparent/aunts/uncles etc.) can choose to speak to their baby/child in their preferred language and in this way the child can hear a skilled speaker of that language to help them gain proficiency.

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One Person, One Language (OPOL) cont'd

Typically developing children who are exposed to high quality 2+ languages from birth are likely to develop these languages simultaneously.

It is believed that the development of language in these children is similar to that of monolingual children – those with only one language.

This is dependent on the amount of **exposure** to each language



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Benefits of being a Multilingual Speaker

- Creates healthy family and cultural bonds
- Enables a child to communicate and interact with family members – including those living overseas!
- Some researchers believe that multilingual children have a broader vocabulary and are better at understanding language structures.
- Provides diverse opportunities later in life when selecting careers and employment.

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One Activity, One Language (OAOL)



An alternative to OPOL is using one language during a specific task or activity. For example, during bath-time, a parent may speak to their child in their primary language but during dinner English is spoken. Once again this provides exposure to high quality 2+ languages.

However, it is important to remember that the amount of **exposure** to each language is significant and changing the activity and language will provide different vocabulary and sentence structure!

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Challenges in raising a Multilingual Child

Many people have experienced 'pressure' to only speak English! Parents are often advised to focus on English only and to stop speaking other languages. The reason frequently given is that Australia is a **"predominantly English speaking country"** However, current research indicates that this advice is **incorrect** and that typically developing children who are well versed in their primary language will easily acquire secondary and subsequent languages



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Benefits of being a Multilingual Speaker

- Can provide a child with a sense of cultural identity and belonging to more than one community
- Enhances and enriches their understanding regarding their heritage
- Provides them with the chance to appreciate the music, literature and culture of their family and heritage
- Improves their connection with extended family and cultural community

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Additionally, some parents are **NOT** skilled in English. If these parents remove their primary language, (the language they are **most** skilled at speaking) and only speak English (a language at which they are **not** skilled), then their children are **not learning language from a skilled speaker** and this can have a detrimental impact on their language acquisition overall.

Equally, a parent who is using a language they are not skilled in will **reduce** the amount of speaking they do and lower their child's exposure to a language-rich environment

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In families where the parents are **NOT** skilled English speakers or only have limited English – they should continue to speak their primary language – the language they are most comfortable in. This will ensure that their children learn from a skilled speaker!

Children from these families will do better at learning English when they attend English speaking educational environments early such as Day Care, kindergarten or preschool.



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Challenges in raising a Multilingual Child

To help **prevent** the decrease or loss of primary language parents are encouraged to do the following:

1. Explain the **benefit** of maintaining multiple languages
2. Continue to actively provide **different experiences** in primary and secondary languages
3. Keep the practice **interesting** – attend cultural events
4. Encourage **extended family members** to maintain contact so that opportunities to practice are provided



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Academic Achievement

Research has however, indicated that children who have had **not** had the opportunity to learn some level of English prior to going to school may experience some early delays in learning.

Children who had acquired English vocabulary and who had acquired English well in the first years of school were found to be no different to monolingualistic (English speaking) children in later schooling

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Language Delays in Multilingual Children

Multilingual children are **NOT** at a greater risk to developing language impairment

However, it must be noted that if a child demonstrates a **delay or difficulty** in acquiring their **primary language** it is highly likely that they will experience problems in learning second and subsequent languages.

Some children exhibit a specific and fundamental problem in learning language and will need assistance.

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Challenges in raising a Multilingual Child

As children get older, it may become more difficult for them to maintain their primary language/s

The reasons that this occurs includes the following:

- A **lack of input** of the primary language
- Children are spending **more time in school** where English is the language spoken predominantly
- English is the language **choice of siblings and peers**
- Children may choose to use English predominantly due to the above experiences



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The Silent Period

Some children go through a 'silent period' – a time when they do not speak to others during a second language acquisition.

This frequently occurs when they are in the environment where the new and unfamiliar language is spoken.

Research indicates that during this time a child is actively processing (listening and observing) the new language but is not as yet producing it.





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During this period of time, children should be encouraged to interact with others as it will benefit language development.



Children may continue to communicate in other ways (i.e. gesture, physical movement, demonstration). They will then start to use single words and short phrases as they learn the new language.

Children will pass through this stage at their own pace but for some children it can last for weeks/months

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Do you have any questions

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Equally some children who are acquiring a second/third language may initially lag behind their peers in vocabulary development.

Once again, exposure to a broad range of vocabulary in the languages being learnt will ensure that the child continues to develop vocabulary.



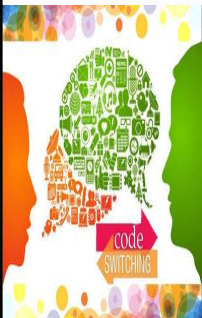
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What are the language skills children need to be successful at learning language??

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Code Switching



Code switching or switching back and forth between 2 or more languages is often viewed by parents and educators as a sign of confusion!

Research has indicated that Code Switching is a sign of increased linguistic and cognitive control!!



Do not be concerned if you observe your child to exhibit this behaviour



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Vocabulary

Children are exposed to new words everyday. Words provide a label for new items, experiences and feelings.

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Vocabulary

Every day vocabulary


- Household items (kitchen, bedroom, etc.)
- Outdoor environment (trees, cars, garage)

Concept Words

- Prepositions (in, on, under, first, second, etc.)
- Adjectives (big, small, blue, red, old, young etc.)
- Verbs (jumping, skipping, walking etc.)

Preschool related vocabulary

- Learning words (listen, watch, wait etc)
- Language Related words (sounds, words, rhymes etc.)



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Remember the fundamental rules:

- follow your child's lead
- Talk about topics that are interesting!

• explore different elements such as words, ideas, emotions, problem-solving and imagination that occur during different activities

A conversation is not simply 'answer & question' activity – it involves commenting, responding, demonstrating etc

An effective conversation can be conducted in 2-3 minutes!!!

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Remember the fundamental rules for Developing Vocabulary:

1. Follow your child's lead – relate words to describe items and events in their experience
2. Ensure that your child understands the words you use
3. Provide your child with an opportunity to use the words in their own language
4. Use a variety of word types – nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs
5. Explore words that mean the same thing or opposites to words already familiar
6. If your child uses 'non-specific' vocabulary then provide the actual word

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Have a conversation about:



- **A simple game or activity** can provide opportunities to introduce or practice language
- **pretend play** (concepts about people, personal pronouns, action words)
- **toys.**
 - Blocks – prepositions, actions, basic concepts
 - Cars – basic concepts, colour, size, actions
 - tea-set – social situations, action words

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Conversation

A conversation, is the opportunity to share a story or an experience using language.



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Have a conversation about

A book you are 'reading' with your child – (NOT reading the text) can provide an opportunity to...

- discuss the images and story
- Explore vocabulary
- Relate the story to personal experiences.

An walk to the park, a visit to the zoo can give you a chance to.....

- talk about what you see and introduce new vocabulary
- how you feel
- Provide a narrative or commentary about the experiences

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Keep the Conversation Going by:

- Using open ended questions (not questions that require yes/no responses)
- Exploring topics that children will find interesting
- Relating topics / questions to a child's life and experiences
- Provide children with an opportunity to express opinions and ideas

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Useful Resources and Websites

- The Australian Parenting Website – the complete Australian parenting resource for newborns to teens
 - <http://raisingchildren.net.au>
- Local Library (Activity sessions)
- Play Centre's and Play Groups
- Kindergarten Teacher directed activities and resources
- www.wellsaidclinic.com.au

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Story Comprehension

Understanding the meaning of a story:

Details: words, sentences, paragraphs
characters

Sequences: beginning (setting), problem,
complication, actions, resolution,

Emotions: feelings



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Reading Together

Remember the fundamental rules of reading together

- "Read" regularly to the children
- Follow the children's lead – read books that are of interest.
- Explore a range of story types – fictional, non-fictional....
- Discuss the story as you go
 - point out various pictures
 - Talk about what is happening
 - Explore the underlying meaning – feelings, problem solving etc
- Read the same book over several times
- Book vs Ipad

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