

## Introduction

At the present time, Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum allows for support for children with additional languages, but the focus remains on learning English, and not maintenance of the child's home language or mother tongue.

Communication and Language is one of the prime areas of children's learning and development in the EYFS. The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage states:

*'For children whose home language is not English, providers must take reasonable steps to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home. Providers must also ensure children have sufficient opportunities to learn and reach a good standard in English language during the EYFS, ensuring children are ready to benefit from the opportunities available to them when they begin Year 1. When assessing communication, language and literacy skills, practitioners must assess children's skills in English. If a child does not have a strong grasp of English Language, practitioners must explore the child's skills in the home language with parents and/or carers, to establish whether there is a cause for concern about language delay.'*<sup>1</sup>

Thus the EYFS endorses the maintenance and support of children's home languages, and Development Matters offers some

guiding strategies for this. However, the focus is on easing a child's transition to English where the desired outcome, certainly in terms of the Early Learning Goals, is that the child's skills in English must be strong enough to enable them to fully access the curriculum by the time they start school. It is important to bear in mind that while this is appropriate for children who have spent at least two years in early education, it may not be the case for a child who has not had this experience. It takes a young child at least two to three years to acquire a new language, so there will continue to be many children who will need bilingual support through Reception and Key Stage 1. The acquisition of a new language cannot be hurried or fast tracked and, no matter how old the child, the practitioner's focus must always be on building on the skills in the child's first language and recognising bilingualism as a learning achievement.

If children in the early years setting are not developing English language skills, their parents may be asked to come into the setting to discuss how their child is speaking at home in their first language. This might be to explore their general language development, engaging parents in how they can support that better at home, or it may be that there is concern about more serious causes for language delay.

Children have a right to maintain the language of their home and community, but it is essential that children have the skills in English

that they will need to access all aspects of the curriculum when they go to school, and later when they enter the world of work. Denying children the right to access to learning English would be discriminatory, setting them at a great disadvantage.

You may be a practitioner in a setting where some children come from homes where English is not the main language spoken. You may be a bilingual practitioner thinking how you can best use your skills in your setting, or you may even be a provider thinking about how you can widen English-speaking children's awareness about language diversity, perhaps introducing them to a second language.

From whatever direction you approach this book, there will be something for you. This book is interactive and will engage you in practical activities that will help your learning and understanding about how babies and young children become bilingual and how you can support them. There are activities that you can use with your co-workers in your team meetings, training sessions, supervisions or reflective practice discussions, as well as activities that you can use with parents in one-to-one sessions or in a bilingual parent group.

Many books for practitioners overlook the connection between children's home language and attachment, but it is vital to make this connection when talking about the care of very young children.

This book is unique as it takes a holistic approach that does not separate language development from other aspects of development, particularly emotional development and attachment.

Our understanding of bilingualism comes from the science of linguistics so there are unavoidable technical terms that you will come across. The Terminology Game is a fun approach to jargon busting, helping you make sense of some of the key terminology used in this book. There is some departure from standard terminology in this book. In order to keep within the relational theme throughout, home language, while it applies to any language learned or spoken at home, in this context it refers to the minority community language only. Community language has been used to refer to languages spoken within minority language communities and the term majority language is interchanged with English.

**Chapter 1** will consider the wider context for bilinguals with regard to relevant legislation and education policy. This is important as it sets the stage for our emerging bilinguals. English is our national language and Britain is a monolingual society with a weak approach to learning other languages. Speakers of other languages often experience discrimination, which may discourage children from wanting to learn their parents' first language. The approach of this book is to understand *bilingualism* (the ability to speak more than one language) within a framework of *bilinguality* (what it means for the individual to possess and live with that ability).

**Chapter 2** will consider the advantages of being able to speak more than one language for the individual, their family and community, as well as how it benefits society as a whole to have adults who speak many of the world's languages. The Bilingualism Quiz will take you through some facts and myths about bilingualism.

**Chapter 3** will look at the importance of attachment relationships for understanding how babies learn language, how babies and toddlers respond to hearing different languages and how they begin to understand and speak two or more languages. You will learn about different approaches that families may take and why it is important to work closely with parents to understand more about the ways in which their child is growing up with more than one language.

**Chapter 4** will build on your existing understanding of the role of the key person in relation to forming attachments with babies and young children and consider the implications for those new to English-speaking settings. The resources contain materials that you can use with parents to reinforce what they are doing, or to help to guide them if they are unsure of what approach to take. There are materials to help you work in partnership with parents to make the most of their babies' and toddlers' potential to become bilingual from an early age.

**Chapter 5** will look at the bilingual development of older children in your care. This will build on the previous chapter and will provide you with additional tools to use with parents, as well as guiding you to consider aspects of your provision, such as activities and resources. There is detailed explanation of the *silent period* that will help you understand this as a cognitive stage in learning a new language as well as its emotional significance. This is especially important to enhance the role of the key person with regard to building relationships with children in their settings who are new to learning English.

**Chapter 6** discusses assessment of bilingual children's language and all-round development using the Development Matters framework of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Early Years Outcomes. Additional resources will help you learn about the stages of learning English as an additional language for children under five years, as well as enabling you to consider important issues for bilingual children when carrying out assessment of children for whom you may have welfare or development concerns.

Finally, **Chapter 7** will discuss how the skills of bilingual practitioners should be valued and utilised in settings. This may apply to settings who employ bilingual assistants to support children learning English as an additional language, or to settings where some staff have additional language skills that can be used

to develop new language experiences for all children. The role of the adult in the setting is discussed, as well as resources.

It is the intention of this book that you will be better prepared to meet the needs of bilingual children and those learning English as an additional language within the framework of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

On purchasing this publication, you will have received an email providing you with access to online activities and resources, which you can use to enhance your, and your team's, skills and understanding of bilingualism, with the aim of developing best practice to suit your community.

## Using the online resources

### *0.1: Stranded!*

In this roleplay activity, you will find out what it might feel like not to be able to speak the same language as others around you.

### *0.2: Terminology game*

When reading about bilingualism, you will come across many terms used in the study of linguistics. This game will introduce these terms in a fun way and help you to think about their use and meaning, as well as stretch your thinking about some of these terms.

### *0.3: Terminology game answers*

This resource explains all the terms used in the above game and acts as a glossary to some of the terms used in this book.

<sup>1</sup> Department for Education (2012) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*. London: DfE, p.6.