Dyslexia and Additional Academic Language Learning

Module 10

Working with Parents and Carers

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Dyslang Module 10 – Working with Parents and Carers
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Aims and objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information and strategies for teachers to help parents to support their dyslexic, multilingual children.

Please note that both parents and carers of children are included in the term ‘parent’ where used in this module.

Learning outcomes

- Describe strategies for communicating with parents of dyslexic, multilingual children
- Understand the importance of valuing the children’s and parents’ first language and culture
- Explain the importance of encouraging parents to engage in confidence-building with their children and list some confidence-building activities
- Appreciate the importance of encouraging parents to read with their children and to use alternatives to reading
- Understand how to help parents to support their children with homework
- Recognise the importance of being familiar with organisations that provide related support and referring parents appropriately
Useful terminology

1. Terms related to language learning and culture

- additive bilingualism - a situation in which a new language is learnt while the home language continues to be developed and the home culture valued. Both languages have high status and the child accesses two cultures and has good self-esteem.
- bilingual(ism) - individuals or groups of people who have developed communicative skills in more than one language. They may be more proficient in one language than another. They may have knowledge of oral and/or written forms.
- bilingual enhancement effect - where bilingual children show greater phonological awareness than monolingual children. This tends to occur when the second language is phonologically simpler than the first one.
- community languages - these are all languages that are in use in a particular country in addition to the official language(s) of the state. Some common community languages in the UK are Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi and Arabic.
- culture broker - a person who mediates between people of different cultural backgrounds to aid understanding and communication and, on occasion, to avoid or reduce conflict.
- English as an Additional Language (EAL) - term used in the UK for pupils who do not have English as a first language. EAL teaching strategies are those strategies used for supporting pupils at different stages of learning English.
- metalinguistic awareness - the ability to reflect on and talk about the use of language.
- monolingual(ism) - having acquired communication skills in only one language.
- multilingual - an individual who has acquired communication skills in 2 or more languages.

**Note 1:** Some people define ‘multilingual’ as someone who can communicate in more than 2 languages in order to distinguish ‘multilingual’ from ‘bilingual’.

**Note 2:** Sometimes a distinction is drawn between multilingual and plurilingual where plurilingual refers to an individual who can speak more than one language, and multilingual refers to the geographic or political areas where there is more than one language in common everyday use. Some individuals in these areas will be plurilingual, others may be monolingual in one or other of the languages in use.

- plurilingual - “The ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages, and experience of several cultures”. (Council of Europe, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001, p. 168)
• **subtractive bilingualism** - a new language is learnt but the home language may be perceived as unimportant or a barrier to learning the new language. This can cause a loss of self-esteem, a lack of a sense of identity, a loss of the home language and likely poorer achievement in the new language and any subsequent ones.

2. Terms related to dyslexia

• **buff-coloured paper** - this is paper which is a pale yellow-brown colour. Printing materials onto buff (cream or other pastel) coloured paper can be helpful for dyslexic people who are often sensitive to the glare of white paper.

• **dyslexia friendly (school)** - a dyslexia friendly school is a school which strives to provide dyslexic children with equal opportunities and celebrates their strengths. Teachers understand about dyslexia and make adjustments to their teaching, making extensive use of multisensory teaching strategies and overlearning.

• **left-justify** - this refers to a piece of text which is aligned to the left. The left-justifying of text is considered dyslexia-friendly.

• **overlays** - coloured overlays are sheets of coloured plastic film which can be placed over a page of text when reading. For some individuals, this reduces the effects of visual stress.

• **Plain English** - writing which is clear and accessible. See The Plain English Campaign for guides on this. (http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/)

• **ragged right edge** - this refers to a piece of text where the right hand side is not justified. A ragged right edge helps with the scanning of text.

• **Special Educational Needs (SEN)** - the term ‘Special Educational Needs’ (SEN) refers to children who have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn or access education than most children of the same age.

• **typeface** - a set of characters of the same design. Dyslexia-friendly typefaces are considered to include Comic Sans, Tahoma, Arial (sans serif) in 12 point or larger with 1.5 spacing.

• **visual disturbance of print** - also known as visual stress, ‘Meares-Irlen Syndrome’ or ‘scotopic sensitivity syndrome’. This is where an individual may experience blurring of print or say that the letters are moving or jumping on the page. They may experience headaches and/or sore or watering eyes. The condition may be alleviated by the use of coloured overlays or tinted glasses. (The exact colour required can be determined by specialists using a piece of equipment called an Intuitive Colorimeter.)
Introduction

There is substantial evidence that children have better attitudes to learning and gain better results when their parents engage positively with school and when children experience parental interest in their work. Parents face a number of real or perceived barriers to participation in their children’s education; these barriers can be harder to break down in the case of the parents of children with special educational needs and parents who have little knowledge of the school’s language of instruction. This module will explore strategies for developing positive parent-school partnerships.
10.1 Communicating with parents of dyslexic, multilingual children

10.1.1 Valuing parents’ input

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for England and Wales (2001, p. 16) states:

“Parents hold key information and have a critical role to play in their children’s education. They have unique strengths, knowledge and experience to contribute to the shared view of a child’s needs and the best ways of supporting them. It is therefore essential that all professionals (schools, LEAs and other agencies) actively seek to work with parents and value the contribution they make. The work of professionals can be more effective when parents are involved and account is taken of their wishes, feelings and perspectives on their children’s development. This is particularly so when a child has special educational needs. All parents of children with special educational needs should be treated as partners.”

It is therefore essential that professionals develop effective communication strategies which facilitate an open, two-way means of communication and help to establish fair and dynamic relationships between staff and parents. Dr Priscilla Clarke (2009) writes about partnerships between early years professionals and parents but her comments are applicable to school staff working with the parents of children at any stage of their schooling:

“Strong partnerships with parents are essential, if children learning English as a second language are to have positive outcomes ... Partnerships with parents are primarily about equity. In supporting families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, (early childhood) professionals take responsibility to ensure fairness and build dynamic relationships that create a sense of belonging for all.” (p. 8)

One important consideration is whether the parents are able to comprehend and respond in the main language of the school. If their knowledge is minimal, they will neither be able to access nor benefit from information presented in this language. As a consequence, unless additional support is provided, they will not be able to share their own knowledge and will be likely to feel excluded and unvalued.

In order to avoid this situation, some schools use an interpreter. This may be a professional interpreter whose services are paid for or it may be a bilingual member of staff who is asked to interpret. In some cases, family or friends perform the role of interpreter. In the next section, the advantages and disadvantages of each type of interpreter will be considered and this will be followed by recommendations on how to use an interpreter effectively.
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10.1.2. The use of interpreters

UK legislation (The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (England, Wales and Scotland), the Human Rights Act 1998 (UK) and the Equality Act 2010 (England, Wales and Scotland)) states that service providers must ensure public access to information and services and the provision of language support (TS4E). It is therefore essential that action is taken to remove barriers to information or services and that an interpreting service is provided when required.

Professional interpreters can be expected to have the language competence required to assist and facilitate communication. They should also adhere to a code of professional ethics which ensures that both impartiality and confidentiality are maintained. However, the cost of

Extension Material 10.1 – Using Interpreters

Before going on to the next section, look at the following statements and decide whether they are true or false:
1. It is all right for children to act as interpreters as long as they have good language skills in both languages.
2. An interpreter may be able to provide useful cultural information.
3. An interpreted meeting should be able to cover as much content as one that doesn’t require interpreting.
4. The interpreter may not need to interpret everything if the parent appears to understand.
5. It is important to maintain eye contact with the parent rather than with the interpreter.

Now go on to the next section and check your answers.
employing an interpreter is relatively high and schools may be reluctant to spend money on this rather than on other equally important services/materials. In addition, there is no guarantee that an agency will send the same interpreter for different visits (although it may be possible if mutually convenient times are discussed during the first visit). Clearly, using the same interpreter would be beneficial as a working relationship would already have been established.

Bilingual staff may have a good day-to-day knowledge of the subject area as they are based in schools and frequently provide support for children with English as an additional language and/or dyslexia. Their services are provided at no additional cost to the school. They may be fluent in the community language but often haven’t received training in interpreting and therefore may have limited skills in this field and yet be expected to interpret on complex and sensitive issues. There is also a danger that they may feel inadequately prepared if they are asked to interpret at short notice and have to fit this extra task into a day which is already extremely busy. It is likely that they will feel under significant pressure when suddenly asked to operate in an unfamiliar register and to use the technical and semi-technical language of education, for example, explaining about attainment targets or mathematical concepts.

In addition, it is likely that bilingual staff may feel close to parents because of their shared language and culture and because of the time they may have spent talking together at the school gate or outside school. They may feel empathy with parents and feel the need to proactively represent the parents’ interests rather than functioning as a neutral intermediary. So there may be a sense of ‘getting caught in the middle’ and feeling torn between their sense of loyalty to the parents and their duty as a professional. There might be occasions where they feel very reluctant to interpret, for example in the situation where a parent wishes to complain about a teacher.

Parents sometimes like to use their families or friends as interpreters as familiarity and trust is already established and they feel that this interpreter is on their side. As far as schools are concerned, this is again a free service. However, these relatives/friends may have insufficient language skills (in one or both of the languages) to cope with complex issues such as special educational needs and dyslexia and may not be able to relay messages accurately. They may not be aware of the need for confidentiality and may find it difficult to remain objective during meetings. In some cases, they may offer their opinion rather than the opinion of the parents.

It is not uncommon for children to be asked to play an interpreting role. Sometimes parents ask their children to interpret because their children’s knowledge of the main language of the school is much better than their own. In other cases, it may be members of staff who ask a child to interpret. However, using a child to interpret should be avoided except in emergencies. The first reason for this is that the parents may not be happy for their child to interpret but may feel embarrassed to object.
In addition, as Aruna Papp (2012) observes, whatever their age: “children often have a personal stake in the information being passed between the service provider and the parent. Children may be embarrassed by the information, not agree with the information or may edit the information giving their own version of the situations.”

For example, a teacher may say something which the child thinks will cause offence to their parents and they then have to make the decision whether to interpret accurately and risk their parents’ anger or instead modify what was said in order to avoid conflict. Another point to consider is the fact that by acting as interpreter, the child is put in a position of power and the parents are put in a position of dependence. This can lead to a shift in the power dynamics of the family and may have a negative effect on family roles and relationships. In some situations, a child may feel reluctant to express their unwillingness to carry out this role. They may feel obliged to interpret but may experience stress and discomfort because their language is not sophisticated enough to convey complicated ideas and messages.

Given the reasons stated above, schools should consider employing the services of professional interpreters for important meetings with parents. The cost of the interpreting service will in all likelihood be much less than the cost in time and resources required to address the consequences of poor interpreting. Where schools feel that their bilingual staff can be relied upon to interpret, they should ensure that staff are comfortable with this role, that they receive training in interpreting and that they are given adequate time to prepare for meetings.

How to use an interpreter effectively

- Always ensure that the language/dialect of the interpreter is compatible with that of the parents; a parent and interpreter may both come from Bangladesh but if one speaks Sylheti and the other speaks a Dhaka dialect, they will struggle to understand each other. There is generally a lack of awareness of different languages and dialects and this can result in Hindi, Urdu or Punjabi speakers being asked to interpret for someone whose first language is Gujarati and can lead to communication difficulties (Alexander et al., 2004).
- Check ethnicity and gender of interpreter where necessary. Ethnicity may be important in cases where the interpreter and parent come from a country where there has been recent unrest or conflict; in some cases a female parent will be more comfortable with a female interpreter but this varies so it is best to ask the parent in advance.
- Meet the interpreter in advance to explain the nature of the meeting and practicalities; discuss any (necessary) specialist terminology that may cause interpreting difficulties.
- Be aware that the term ‘dyslexia’ may have different meanings or even not be known of in different countries. It will therefore be essential that the interpreter and parents receive an explanation of exactly what is meant by dyslexia in your context; bear in mind that the term ‘disability’ has negative connotations in some cultures and should therefore be avoided or defined in a more useful way.
- Provide in advance any documents that may need to be referred to
during the meeting (letters, individual education plans etc).

- Arrange the seating into the ‘triangle layout’ (so that the staff member, interpreter and parents are at equal distances from each other).

- Consider the interpreter as a ‘culture broker’, a person who mediates between people of different cultural backgrounds to aid understanding and communication and, on occasion, to avoid or reduce conflict. (You may be able to find out useful cultural information but remember that the interpreter only represents one person’s views and perceptions.)

- Allow sufficient time for meetings (remember that it is time-consuming for everything to be said twice and for understanding to be checked; understand that interpreted meetings are tiring and it is therefore advisable to include fewer items than you would in a meeting without interpretation).

- Ask the interpreter to interpret everything (without changing anything) even if the parent appears to understand.

- Ensure that the interpreter knows not to answer questions on your behalf.

- Look at the parent(s) and talk in the second person (“What do you think about Luca’s progress?” rather than “Can you ask her what she thinks about Luca’s progress?”).

- Monitor the non verbal language of the parent(s).

- Speak in short, clear sentences and avoid ambiguous language, jargon, idioms or slang.

- Be careful about using humour as, often, jokes do not translate well.

- Where necessary, remind the parent(s) that they need to slow down or pause more often to enable the interpreter to transmit their messages.

- Have frequent summaries or checks to ensure that everyone has understood.

- Always retain written records of all interpreted meetings.

### 10.1.3 Speaking to parents without an interpreter

Although the use of interpreters is strongly recommended for important meetings with parents, there may be situations where you have to communicate directly with parents who have only a limited knowledge of the main language of the school. In these cases, the following guidelines may be useful:

- Plan meetings in advance and think carefully about the vocabulary you are going to employ.

- Use vocabulary that the parents are likely to know and use body language to reinforce your message.

- Avoid using jargon and always remember than many parents have not been to school in this country and are having to try to understand a different system as well as a different language.

- Combine simplified language with a warm manner and frequent smiles (parents will appreciate the fact that you are clearly doing your best to get your message across).

- If you are able to put parents at ease, they will be more likely to take
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in the content of what you are saying

• Do not assume that parents always understand (even if they are nodding) and try to establish a non-threatening environment so that they are not afraid to ask for clarification or request for something to be re-phrased

• Bear in mind that in some countries, teachers are treated with great deference and are considered the expert in their children’s education and parents may be reluctant to speak at all, even less to show that they disagree with the teacher’s opinion

• Include visual aids (such as charts, tables, photos, visual timetables) to help with the communication process

• Take account of the fact that dyslexia runs in families so parents of a dyslexic child may be dyslexic themselves

• As dyslexic people have difficulties processing information quickly, especially when they are in a potentially stressful situation, make sure that you allow parents sufficient time for processing information and formulating questions

10.1.4 Other possibilities for enhancing communication between parents and school

In some areas of the UK, it is possible to buy in the services of Language Support Assistants (LSAs). For example, ‘One Education’ in Manchester offers expertise in over twenty languages. As well as providing in-class support for children, LSAs can assist with parent-teacher meetings, parents’ evenings, home visits, interpreting for First Language Assessments, support with admissions and can also provide advice on home languages, customs and cultures. Their knowledge can be particularly useful when parents speak a first language which is not spoken by any of the staff at the school.

Schools might also consider some of the tools and resources produced by EMAS UK. For example, Two-Can-Talk is a translation programme that enables teachers to type in English. Their words are then translated and spoken in the parent’s home language. The parent’s response is typed on a language specific keyboard and translated into English. Such a tool might be useful for office staff to have brief, initial conversations with parents but there is always the possibility of inaccuracies and the danger that words may be used in the wrong context. Clearly, electronic tools cannot replace the human interpreter when it comes to important meetings about complex issues.

10.1.5 Writing to parents

If information is going to be useful for parents, it is essential that they understand it. Yet research suggests that parents often experience difficulties accessing the information with which they are provided. Mendoza (2003) refers to a readability evaluation which was carried out on 33 sets of paediatric patient education materials for parents. This found that most of the materials considered had readability levels of 9th grade or higher (equivalent to year 10 in the UK) which meant that
they were likely to be inaccessible to parents with lower literacy skills or parents who were non native speakers. Key information may not be understood by parents when technical terms are employed without a clear explanation. Difficulties are likely to be compounded when parents are non native speakers and dyslexic.

**Good practice when writing to parents**

- Use clear language and avoid jargon
- Explain any necessary technical terms
- Use a dyslexia-friendly typeface (Comic Sans, Tahoma, Arial (sans serif) in 12 point or larger with 1.5 spacing)
- Left-justify any text (ragged right edge helps with the scanning of text)
- Use bullet points
- Use short sentences and short paragraphs
- Use graphics to aid understanding
- Use cream or buff-coloured paper (dyslexic people are often sensitive to the glare of white paper)

Please refer to The British Dyslexia Association website for further recommendations. ([http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/about-dyslexia/further-information/dyslexia-style-guide.html](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/about-dyslexia/further-information/dyslexia-style-guide.html))

The Plain English Campaign ([http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/)) has freely available guides on how to write in clear, accessible English.

Wherever possible, use bilingual letters and leaflets to ensure that information is understood. Bilingual staff could use a ‘TalkingPEN’ to record school newsletters and other important information onto talking labels which are stuck onto letters and made accessible to parents who are not literate in their mother tongue. ([https://www.mantralingua.com/uk/home.php](https://www.mantralingua.com/uk/home.php))

The Emas4Success website has a guidance booklet for the parents of newly arrived pupils. This can be adapted for individual schools. It also has links to downloadable standard letters. For example, Dingle Granby Toxteth Education Action Zone has produced letters translated into various community languages on a wide variety of topics including a welcome letter and letters about holiday closure, accidents and illness. ([http://www.emas4success.org/WorkingWithParents/Resources/index.htm](http://www.emas4success.org/WorkingWithParents/Resources/index.htm))

**Extension Material 10.2 - The induction process**

Before you read the next section, think about the induction process for new multilingual learners at your school.

- What are the aims of the process?
- Is there any information which you don’t generally obtain but which might be useful?
- How could the induction process be enhanced?
10.1.6 The induction process

For parents who do not have a reasonable command of the main language of the school, it is highly recommended that an interpreter is present for the induction/enrolment process. This process provides the school with the opportunity to gather important information about the new learner and their family and should be structured around a comprehensive checklist. The school should build up a learner profile with information about the child’s background, the length of time they have been in the country, their previous education (including details of other schools attended abroad or within the same country) and any gaps in their education, the languages they speak at home and whether they can read or write in these languages. In its publication *Minority Ethnic Pupils and Special Educational Needs* (Manchester City Council, 2007), Manchester Children's Services have produced a useful sheet for logging this information. It contains the pupil’s name in the middle of a circle and has different contexts (mosque school, supplementary school, TV, etc.) and relatives around the circle with arrows to insert the language that the child is listening to and the language that they are responding in. (Appendix A.ii)

The induction process provides a chance for the parents to become familiar with the school environment and meet members of staff. *Learning in 2+ Languages* (produced with the support of the Scottish EAL (English as an Additional Language) Coordinating Council (SEALCC) in 2005) also recommends that this is the time to stress to the parents the importance of maintaining and further developing their child’s first language, to make them aware of community-based home language classes for children and to signpost them to adult language classes if it seems appropriate. In addition, parents should be given the chance to go through the school handbook with the interpreter, either at the induction or in a separate session.

Finally, the induction is the best time to discuss the methods of communication to be used between the school and the parents. It is important to note at this stage whether the family has access to a computer and the internet.

10.1.7 General tips for communicating with parents

- Use a variety of communication strategies to ensure that information is getting through (send letters but also pass messages when parents are dropping off or picking up their children)
- Send mobile phone texts to give parents important reminders (for example, teacher training days or early school finish)
- Send copies of letters even when the child is absent
- Keep copies of old communications
- Attach current communications to the noticeboard and door
- Use the school website to pass information
- Encourage parents to spend time in class (to gain an understanding of teaching methods and lesson content)
• Offer parent workshops at different times of day (to allow for parents’ commitments)
• Celebrate the successes! (Don’t contact parents only when there is a problem)
• Pass on positive feedback (invite parents to assemblies to see children being presented with certificates, use a communication book or success/effort board in the entrance hall)
• ‘Talking Homework’ (a sheet for parents of children in the reception class (aged 4-5) that gives basic information about what has been covered in school that week and what will be covered the following week – the idea is that parents discuss these topics with their children, in the language of the classroom or in their home language).
An example of good practice

An EAL (English as an Additional Language) coordinator from a Manchester school describes how staff communicate with parents:

“We have 3 teaching assistants who speak Urdu (our main language group in school). These members of staff provide a crucial link with our Urdu-speaking parents on a day-to-day basis but also at parents’ evenings and at reviews. These members of staff are also helpful when we need items translated. If we need an interpreter for a particular occasion such as a review, we tend to buy in the service at an hourly rate.

We have recently subscribed to an online service called EMASUK. This provides many resources including two-way translations which appear in written form as well as aurally. Parents can communicate with staff using this resource.

In the foundation stage*, different workshops are held to help parents become more familiar with different aspects of school life. These tend to be very popular with all parents, including those for whom English is an additional language.

A mother and toddler group is held in our community building each week. This is run and organised by women from the local community offering them the opportunity to meet other women.

A mosque school is run from our school on four evenings a week.”

*The foundation stage refers to the education of children aged 3-5 in England.

Extension Material 10.3 - Welcoming parents

The school described above shows parents that they are welcomed at the school and that the diversity of the community is valued.

• How do you achieve that in your school?
• Is there anything else you could do to increase parental engagement?
10.2 Bilingualism and different cultures

10.2.1 Valuing bilingualism

Extension Material 10.4 - Advantages of bilingualism

Before reading the next section, think about possible advantages of bilingualism and list them below. Then read the section and add to your list.

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Research suggests that bilingual individuals have a whole range of advantages over their monolingual counterparts. These advantages are believed to include:

- Superior performance on tests of various intellectual skills including the analysis of abstract visual patterns (Hakuta 1990)
- Increased metalinguistic awareness (more knowledge, understanding and critical awareness about language and communication) (Jessner cited in Marsh et al., 2009)
- Skills and knowledge learned in the first language will transfer to the new language and this should make the vocabulary items easier to learn (Hakuta 1990)
- ‘Bilingual enhancement effect’ (Loizou and Stuart (2003) in Mortimore (2012)) when the new language is phonologically simpler than the first
- More creative and flexible thinking (due to having learned two or more words for each object and idea)
- Increased sensitivity (to listener needs, due to having to make decisions about which language to use at which times and to whom) (http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/schoolgate/aboutschool/content/3inwelsh.shtml)
- Greater tolerance of other languages and cultures (due to the wider cultural experience involved in learning 2 or more languages) http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/schoolgate/aboutschool/content/3inwelsh.shtml
- Increased self-esteem (due to confidence in both languages and ability to switch between them) http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/schoolgate/aboutschool/content/3inwelsh.shtml
- Enhanced ability to concentrate more quickly and more efficiently on relevant information and inhibit attention to irrelevant information (Martin-Rhee & Bialystok, 2008)
- Ability to learn third and subsequent languages with relative ease
- Advantage when seeking employment

Please refer to Module 1 for more discussion about these issues.

It is therefore vital to stress to parents the importance of continuing to speak to their child in their own first language(s). Development of their children’s knowledge of their first language will be beneficial when they learn more complicated aspects of the language of the school and additional curricular languages. Continuing to use the first language is also very important for children in terms of developing and maintaining a positive self-image.

In the above-mentioned publication Minority Ethnic Pupils and Special Educational Needs (2007), Manchester Children’s Services produced an information sheet containing advice for schools to give to parents about bilingualism. (Appendix A.vii).

This stressed the important role that parents should play in helping their children to continue to develop their first language by regularly spending time in conversation and discussing books and events. It stated that developing this first language would form the basis for any new languages and would ensure that the child continued to connect well to their family.
and culture. It is essential that staff pass such messages to parents at the earliest possible opportunity. **If they do not do this, it is possible that the information provided by parents may not be entirely accurate.** For example, parents may be reluctant to disclose information about language use if they think that staff are only concerned with information about the child’s English language development or if they suspect that staff disapprove of the use of languages other than English at home.

### 10.2.2 Two types of bilingualism

Schools must value and demonstrate that they value the first language and culture of all their pupils. Teachers should be aware of the difference between ‘additive bilingualism’ and ‘subtractive bilingualism’. ‘Additive bilingualism’ refers to a situation in which a new language is learnt while the home language continues to be developed and the home culture valued. Both languages have high status and the child accesses two cultures and has good self-esteem. In contrast, ‘subtractive bilingualism’ occurs when a new language is learnt but the home language may be perceived as unimportant or a barrier to learning the new language. This can cause a loss of self-esteem, a lack of a sense of identity, a loss of the home language and likely poorer achievement in the new language and subsequent ones. Please refer to Module 1 for further discussion about this topic.
10.2.3 How can schools demonstrate that they value children’s and parent’s first language and culture?

In the school:
- By creating an ethos that welcomes bilingual parents right from the moment of initial contact and enrolment/induction
- By ensuring that school literature is inclusive, has references to different languages and cultures and reflects the full diversity of pupils and their backgrounds
- By having ‘welcome’ notices and dual language posters in the various home languages represented at the school (see Links and further reading)
- By displaying a map with arrows pointing to pupils’ countries of origin and having other displays which include global perspectives
- By organising workshops for developing dual language story bags (see Links and further reading)
- By organising bilingual reading clubs for parents and children with activities conducted in parents’ own languages and discussions facilitated by an interpreter (thus showing the value placed on reading together at home and also helping to develop positive relationships and increased understanding)

In the classroom and/or library:
- By encouraging parent(s) and children to bring in artefacts and objects related to their culture, language and heritage and putting them on display
- By using displays and pictures that reflect the multilingual and multicultural reality of the school and celebrate local cultures and communities
- By inviting parents into class to talk about aspects of their culture (with an interpreter if necessary)
- By making newspapers available in different languages
- By having a range of music in different languages and instruments from different countries
- By displaying dual language books (fiction and non fiction) and dictionaries in the classroom (www.mantralingua.com/uk/home.php)
- By encouraging parents to read dual language books to pupils in their home language
An example of good practice

The Dual Language Showcase: valuing multilingualism and multiculturalism
Thornwood Public School is a school in Toronto, Canada where more than 40 different home languages are represented. The school developed the process of the dual language identity text (Cummins et al., 2005). Identity texts are positive statements which pupils make about themselves and they can be written, spoken, visual, musical, dramatic or a combination of several modes. The first and second grade pupils could not read or write in their home language so they created stories in the language of instruction, English, and made their own illustrations. They then involved parents, older students and bilingual teachers who helped translate the stories into the pupils’ home languages. The school developed the Dual Language Showcase website (http://www.thornwoodps.ca/dual/index.htm) so that the pupils could share their stories over the internet with relatives and friends both in Canada and in their home countries.

Now, the school uses dual language books as a way of helping new pupils to integrate. Pupils are encouraged to write stories in any language. They often choose their stronger language and are thereby able to explore their ideas and feelings.

There is no reason why language teachers could not invite parents in to support the development of dual language texts in the modern foreign language classroom. For example, a teacher could invite French-speaking parents to tell a story in French and the children could write it in their own home language. Or, even more exciting, pupils, bilingual staff and parents could write multilingual books, showcasing all the languages that the pupils were “mastering”.

Re-telling stories in home languages
A teacher at another Canadian school takes her pupils to the library and asks one of them to read a story aloud in English. She then asks other pupils to re-tell the story in their own home language. An observer described the experience:

“I listen amazed as one by one the students retell the story in Urdu, Turkish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Gujarati, Tamil, Korean and Arabic. The other students in the class appear to be equally entranced although neither I nor they understand most of the languages being used. It is captivating to hear the same story repeated in different languages with new or sometimes the same gestures to express a change in action” (Cummins et al., 2005).

This process could also be replicated with the story read aloud in the modern foreign language being studied and re-told in different community languages.
Examples from the Dual Language Showcase

We were at my grandparents’ place.

Nous étions chez mes grands-parents.

Copyright Chow/Thornwood 2001 http://www.thornwoodps.ca/dual/index.htm
10.3 Confidence-building

10.3.1 The importance of confidence-building

If dyslexic children are to succeed, they will need a lot of positive support from their home environment:

“Although the school has a major responsibility for meeting the needs of children with dyslexia, the emotional strength needed to cope with dyslexia and the motivation to succeed can often come from home” (Reid, 2005, p. ix).

Confidence-building is also important for multilingual children who may have only recently moved to the new country and who may be feeling isolated, homesick and confused. For those newly arrived children who are also experiencing dyslexia-related difficulties, the situation may seem particularly bleak.

As a teacher, you can and should communicate a child’s successes to their parents but you should also recognise that school is very hard work and stressful for a dyslexic child and they will inevitably have periods of frustration and despondency. It is therefore essential that home is a place where they feel safe and where they achieve success. Although it is important to practise difficult activities (tying shoelaces, telling the time), this must be done in a positive way with all progress celebrated. Encourage parents to inform you about successes and interests so that they can be celebrated and discussed at school.

10.3.2 Confidence-building activities

Some parents have found it very useful to sit down with their child and to build up a list of their strengths and weaknesses. The child may start by thinking about their weaknesses but with a little prompting will also think of personality traits such as empathy and good listening skills. When asked whether they would rather have a friend who could spell or one who was caring, they begin to realise the strengths that they already possess.

Another idea is for parents to encourage their child to develop an unusual interest and to become an ‘expert’ on it. They can then talk about their knowledge to their classmates who are likely to be impressed, thus having a positive effect on the dyslexic child’s self-esteem and the power dynamics between themselves and their peers.

In addition, parents need to demonstrate to their children that they recognise that, although they may have literacy and other difficulties, their intellectual capacity is unaffected. They can do this by explaining that dyslexia is unrelated to intelligence and that they are not ‘stupid’. By offering frequent praise, by actively listening and by engaging their child in complex discussions, the child will realise that their views are valued and will gain in confidence.
Another way to increase a dyslexic child's confidence is to talk about positive role models, people who have experienced significant difficulties but who have nevertheless become successful.

Sometimes, starting a new hobby can also have a positive impact on a dyslexic child. Performing well as part of a team can be very uplifting and for a multilingual child, it can be a relief to be engaged in an activity that isn’t dependent on language or literacy skills.

Copyright British Dyslexia Association
10.4 Reading and alternatives to reading

10.4.1 Encouraging parents to read with their child

It is vital to stress to parents the importance of continuing to read with their children as they get older. Parents sometimes think that joint reading activities are only necessary when a child cannot read by themselves. Allexsaht-Snider (1991) describes a family literacy project in which bilingual families’ perceptions of joint reading activities changed over time:

“Parents who initially saw the purpose of joint reading activities as improving their children’s decoding skills and fluency in reading aloud, found through participating in reading with their children that another more encompassing purpose was to make reading activities at home meaningful and enjoyable for the children.” (p. 17)

Reading both in the first language and in the language of instruction should have a positive impact on a child’s ability to learn an additional curricular language. It is a good idea to start with books that are at or slightly below the child’s level in order to build up their confidence. Suggest to parents that they establish a regular reading time and encourage the child to choose a book in which they are interested.

Parents can make the book less daunting by discussing its content and introducing some of the difficult words before the child starts to read. When the child gets stuck on a word, the parent should supply the word and encourage the child to read on. This will make the reading process less stressful and will retain the flow of the text. If a child wants to re-read a favourite book, parents should encourage them as repetition will help them learn new words. Stress to parents the importance of praising their child’s reading and showing them that they enjoy listening to the reading. Parents should be urged to discuss the content of books with their children and to ask questions to check for comprehension. They can also encourage their children to predict what is going to happen in a story and to suggest alternative endings.
Paired reading can work very well with children who lack confidence in their reading ability. There are different methods of doing paired reading. One way is for the parent and child to read the text at the same time with the parent adjusting their pace to that of the child. Some children may not be ready for this approach. Another way is for the child to select the book and the parent to start reading. When the child recognises a word or phrase, they make an agreed signal (for example, knocking on the table) and start reading. When they get to a difficult part or want a rest, they make the signal again and the parent takes over. Children find this process fun and unthreatening as they know that they will not have to struggle over difficult passages. Some children may remain quiet for the whole of the first session or only contribute a few words but as they gain in confidence, they will generally read more and more.

Tips to be shared with parents:

- Give the child the opportunity to read in their home language
- Where parents have limited skills in the L2 or foreign language, they can discuss the pictures in L1 but may also consider using audio books and encouraging their children to follow the text
- Make it fun!
- Discuss the choice of book and its likely content
- Where possible, choose books that are clearly laid out with ‘Sans Serif’ fonts
- Choose books on off white paper (or consider coloured overlays if appropriate)
- Select books where the text is divided into manageable chunks and there are lots of pictures
- Discuss characters’ behaviour
- Use puppets
- Use different voices and/or role play the characters
- Involve the grandparents/other family members where possible
Encourage parents to refer to the BDA website for a list of publishers that supply dyslexia friendly books: http://bdadyslexia.org.uk/about-dyslexia/parents/reading-audio-books-and-revision-guides.html

10.4.2 Other ways of enjoying books

It may be useful to refer those parents who use the internet to one or more of the useful links below:

- http://www.audiobookradio.net (free radio station which broadcasts stories, drama, poetry, author interviews)
- http://www_manybooks.net (free e-books available for Kindle, iPad etc in many languages)
- http://www.free-ebooks.net
- http://www.ebookdirectory.com
- http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page (includes Portuguese, German and French e-books)
- http://www.getfreeebooks.com (includes Tamil, Hindi, Marathi)
- http://www.techsupportalert.com/free-books-children lists over 100 sites for free children's books online
- Listening books http://www.listening-books.org.uk ('Listening Books' is a charity which, for a small fee, enables adults and children to access a wide range of audiobooks online. The audiobooks can be downloaded to an iPod or other portable player, be listened to through internet streaming or be received as MP3 CDs by post.)
- The Seeing Ear http://www.seeingear.org (free download of books for dyslexic people and their parents/teachers (resident in UK or EU)
- http://www.dyslexiclikeme.org/ website with information about dyslexic book readers including ClassMate Reader, an audio book player which reads aloud and simultaneously displays and highlights text on its screen.
10.4.3 Story-telling

If a parent cannot read in any language, it is still important that they help their children develop their vocabulary and language skills and this can be achieved by telling their children oral stories in their first language. In this way, children will develop their vocabulary, listening and speaking skills. This should promote the development of linguistic proficiency which will transfer to second and additional languages. Children will also learn a whole range of story-telling conventions including how to introduce characters, how to sequence events and how to build up suspense. They will also maintain their first language and culture.

10.4.4. Alternatives to reading

Parents can also be reminded that valuable learning does not have to be centred around books.

Family activities such as cooking or gardening can be valuable learning experiences and are good for maintaining contact with the language of origin. Taking a series of photographs or making a video are other activities which can stimulate intense thought and discussion in the home language or the classroom language (if the parents’ and child’s language knowledge is sufficient). Visiting museums (many of which are free of charge in the UK) and going on trips are useful for developing children's knowledge of the language of the classroom.

Watching TV programmes, cartoons, movies or documentaries can be useful for learning the language of the classroom or the foreign language (depending on the language of the programme) and can be particularly beneficial where parents are not proficient in these languages. Watching carefully selected TV programmes with a child can also be a positive, active process. It can prompt questions and discussion and engage the child’s curiosity. A child can learn about different people and places all over the world or become engrossed in nature documentaries or science programmes brought to life by a dynamic presenter. The child can be encouraged to comment on programmes and to reflect on what they have seen. Some programmes may inspire a child to continue to research a topic by looking at the internet or borrowing a book from the library. Even when the programme does not act as a stimulus for reading, it is still an important process as it provides new learning, new vocabulary and scope for analytical discussion.
10.5 Helping parents to support their children with homework

It is important to remember that the parents of multilingual, dyslexic children may have been educated in a different country with different teaching methods and homework tasks may need to be explicitly explained. Even for parents who were educated in the UK, methods of teaching have changed significantly and it is important that parents understand the methods that teachers are using.

Teachers must bear in mind that dyslexic children struggle to copy accurately from the board so it is preferable to provide children with a written copy of the homework instructions. Parents can be encouraged to establish contact with another parent who they can telephone if they want clarification about homework tasks. In addition, it must not be overlooked that the parents of dyslexic children may be dyslexic themselves and may not feel confident about supporting their children. It is essential to establish a friendly environment in which parents will be confident enough to approach the teacher for guidance. Teachers might consider producing clear information sheets (using pictures and graphics) on helping parents to support their children’s learning and having them translated into community languages. They should ensure that information is also transmitted verbally so that parents who are not literate in their first language are not excluded.

It is important that parents know how much time should be devoted to homework and that they are encouraged to speak to the teacher if their child is consistently spending a significantly longer (or shorter) time than this. Homework tasks can then be modified accordingly. Remember that homework is designed to reinforce work done in the classroom and teachers should not expect children to complete tasks that they have not been taught.
Parents can be encouraged to break their child’s homework into small manageable chunks and to ensure that their child has regular breaks. Where possible, they should try to relate the current piece of work to previous learning so that the child understands that they are building on something that they already know. It is important that parents establish a positive learning environment for homework activities. This would usually mean a quiet place with no distractions, space to spread out and the necessary equipment to hand. If the homework experience is becoming very negative and the child is getting upset, parents should ask their child to stop and should arrange a meeting with the teacher.

It will be very difficult for parents who have little ability in the main language of instruction of the school to support their child to learn an additional language. However, they may be able to help their child organise their learning if they are given some guidance from the language teacher. For example, a child might benefit from producing a set of picture cards from a photocopied list of vocabulary. The cards could contain cue words in the additional (third) language with translation into the first and/or second languages. The visual images would provide what Margaret Crombie cited in Marsh (2005) describes as “the visual hook to hang the learning on” and would reinforce the presentation and practice that had been done in class. The parent could hold up a picture and encourage their child to say the word in the additional language. Similarly, a parent could support their child to compile lists in different colours to distinguish between masculine and feminine nouns.
10.6 Helping parents to know what support is available

Moira Thomson (2007) mentions confusion, guilt, anger, anxiety and despair as some of the emotions experienced by the parents of dyslexic children. These emotions may be heightened in the case of newly arrived parents trying to cope with a new language and unfamiliar institutions and systems. In order to be able to cope with these feelings, it is essential that parents have the opportunity to talk to other people. Schools therefore have a duty to provide parents with the contact details of organisations that can offer them support. For example, Manchester Parent Partnership Service has a confidential helpline and offers support, advice and information to parents to enable them to participate more fully in the education of their children with Special Educational Needs. The service will provide guidance on how to prepare for a school meeting and will send a member of staff to support the parent if necessary.

Parents should also be given information about local dyslexia associations where they could meet other parents of dyslexic children and learn more about how to support their children. They could also be directed to The British Dyslexia Association website or other websites which provide useful information related to dyslexia. Schools might also consider forming their own group for parents of dyslexic children, enabling parents to share experiences and provide support to each other. Alternatively, neighbouring schools might pool their resources and organise monthly support groups with the venue rotating between schools.

Sometimes parents suspect that their child is experiencing visual disturbance of print when they are reading. They would like to have their child assessed but do not know where to go. In some cases, schools are unable to advise them. It would be very useful if teachers were familiar with the process of assessment and were able to refer parents accordingly.

Newly arrived families should also be provided with information about community organisations which can provide language or cultural support. Community organisations can play an important role in providing information about schools and explaining how they may differ from schools ‘back home’. Parents have the opportunity to meet staff and other parents who have been through the system and can provide practical support and advice. They also enable families to meet other families who speak the same language and share the same culture. This can help families overcome feelings of isolation and establish networks of friends, ultimately having a positive effect on parents’ and children’s well-being. Similarly, if a school is unable to offer its own language classes for parents, it could provide information about classes in the local area. If a parent is able to improve their knowledge of the language of the school, this is likely to be beneficial to their children.
Extension Material 10.5 - Module review

You have now reached the end of this module. Before you move on, think back over the module and note down 3 strategies that you intend to implement in future partnership working with parents.

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Module 10 - Working with Parents and Carers

References


Manchester City Council (2007) *Minority Ethnic Pupils and Special Educational Needs: Guidance and self-evaluation for schools on identification, assessment and strategies for minority ethnic pupils who may also have a special educational need*. Manchester City Council Children’s Services.
http://www.mewan.net/senco/getfile.php?src=60/
EMA+and+SEN+Guidance.pdf [Last accessed 23/12/2013]


Papp, A. Family: Using Children as Interpreters, *Canadian Newcomers* (website)


**Links and further reading**


Booktime http://www.booktime.org.uk/schools/reading-with-your-child/ ‘Reading with your Child’ booklet translated into 26 languages [Last accessed 23/12/2013]


Dingle Granby Toxteth Education Action Zone http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/letters/ [Last accessed 24/12/2013] translated school letters

EMAS UK http://emasuk.wordpress.com/tag/new-arrivals/ Resources and tools to support you to talk to new arrivals or those whose first language is not English [Last accessed 24/12/2013]

Involve Parents Involve Schools, Bilingual Story Bags http://www.involve-migrants-improve-school.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Toolbox_4_Bridge/4.3.pdf [Last accessed 24/12/2013]


London Sig Bilingualism www.londonsigbilingualism.co.uk/  
London Special Interest Group (Bilingualism)  
Website with information about working with interpreters [Last accessed 24/12/2013]

Mantra Lingua https://www.mantralingua.com/uk/home.php  
sound enabling of books, posters, sticky labels, banners using talkingPENS;  
EAL starter pack with welcome booklet cd rom in 18 languages and ‘all about me’ dual language booklet, posters about how school works

Milet http://www.milet.com/index.html  
dual language books, dictionaries [Last accessed 24/12/2013]

Multilingual Family in the UK www.multilingualfamily.co.uk  
website for finding other families who share the same home language [Last accessed 24/12/2013]

Schools Links http://www.schoolslinks.co.uk/resources_dl.htm  
dual language posters [Last accessed 24/12/2013]

The Plain English Campaign http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/ [Last accessed 24/12/2013]