



Research Unit for Multilingualism & Cross-Cultural Communication

Practical advice on developing early biliteracy

Strategies and activities

From the start, make reading a regular part of your family life:

- Fill your home with quality reading materials in your family language(s).
- Aim for a variety of books that are interesting to your child.
- Expose your child to a variety of writing inside and outside the house (signs, lists, newspapers, magazines, notes, letters, and books etc.).
- Read to your children and with your children on a daily basis to familiarise them with reading, print, letters etc.
- Read with them in an interactive way: ask questions, have them identify pictures, ask the child to “read” (i.e. re-tell) the story, point out key words.
- When reading to the child, gently hold his/her finger to follow the words, showing the direction of the text.
- Point to words when you read them. Find words of things that your child likes and emphasize them.
- Let your child see you reading and writing to show that reading and writing are natural ways of communication.

Activities and experiences have to be fun and functional, short and playful.

Start with letter/sound recognition:

- Together with your child identify the first sound in a word and match it with an oversized cardboard or magnetic letter. It is important to pair letters with the sounds they make not their names, since you want to path the way for your child to put them together into words.
- Make a scrapbook of cut-out pictures of things starting with the same sound.

- Teach your child songs and rhymes that start with the same sound.
- Casually but frequently talk about the sounds which words and names start with.
- Identify letters in the environment which correspond to sounds: point them out in books, on packages, on signs etc.
- Do the same with final sounds of words and eventually with sounds in the middle of words. Continue this until your child knows most of the letters of the alphabet in your language.
- Play ‘reading games’: e.g. nominate a letter/sound and together identify as many as possible: in books, at the supermarket, on street signs, on number plates etc.
- Alternatively, start with the child’s favourite and often used words (e.g. ice cream, teddy, doggie etc.) to build a ‘sight’ vocabulary of words that the child recognises (‘reads’) then introduce a phonic approach by breaking these words down into their sound components.

Sounding out words:

- Demonstrate the sounding out of words by first saying the individual sounds of a short word slowly and then increasingly faster until your child can guess the word.
- Encourage your child to do the same for short words of 2 or 3 letters/sounds.
- Write silly sentences and sound the words out together. This way the child easily learns the remaining letters as well. Being silly makes it fun!
- Read easy picture books together demonstrating the sounding out. Later on, let your child do the sounding out of easy short words. Even later, let him/her read the easy words and read the more difficult ones yourself.
- Explain when two letters team up to make one sound, possibly underlining or highlighting them in a different colour to indicate that they belong together. Talk about the differences between sound representation in English and in your language, e.g. [sh] in English and [sch] in German.

Integrate reading of words into play and everyday life, e.g.:

- use labels when playing shop
- write down destinations when playing trains
- make lists of treats to find around the house etc.
- let your child point out words while walking or driving, e.g. on signs, billboards, etc.
- adapt existing games to include reading: e.g. adapt a memory game to match pictures with their names, use flashcards with communication games such as ‘Simon Says’
- play board games with action or challenge cards (cards of the English version of the game can be exchanged for home-made translated ones)
- continue reading to and with your child: let her read the chapter headings, the captions under pictures; take turns reading a paragraph each; let the child read the first paragraph and then you continue.
- ‘*Dictation*’: let your child tell you a story, write it down for him/her and let the child illustrate it. Read it back to them as often as they like! And subsequently have them read it to you.

Further resources for teaching to read:

- Comics: short texts and lots of pictures to help understand the context
- Books with children's riddles and jokes: short reading and motivating
- Computer games that require reading
- Labels around the house, labelling various objects
- Picture books, magazines, catalogues (particularly if targeted to a special interest of the child)

Learning to write:

- support and encourage 'squiggle'-writing, try to identify letters among the squiggles to encourage the child
- *model writing*: together with your child, put names on pictures, write labels for objects around the house or for the toy box: start with a drawing of the child (with you writing the labels), then move towards letting them do the writing. Integrate writing into play.
- Consider using *movable letters* (cardboard, magnetic) for your child to put words together without the burden of handwriting.
- Make books together in all shapes, sizes and styles.
- Give your children reasons to become (readers and) writers: letters to family and friends, wish lists before birthdays, notes to family members to slide under doors, shopping lists etc.

Resources

The Public Libraries Victoria Network <https://www.publiclibrariesvictoria.net.au/lotte-collections> lists resources in Languages other than English held at Victorian public libraries. While no individual titles are listed, you could use these lists to find the libraries most likely to hold titles in your language.

References

These strategies and activities are taken from the following sources:

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