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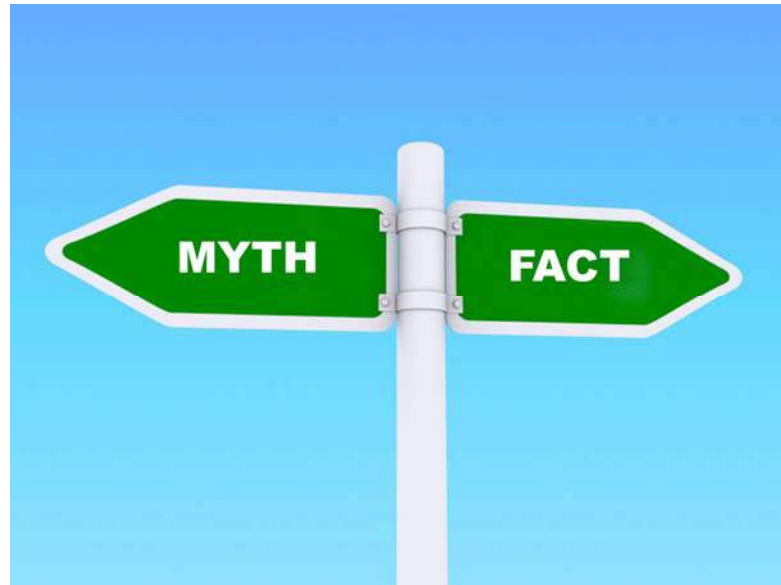
BILINGUALISM AND (BI)LITERACY: MYTHS, FACTS AND CHALLENGES

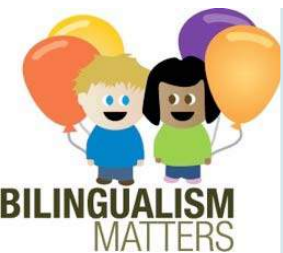
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Dundee, 16 March 2018



A short tour of research





Myths about child language learning

Confusion

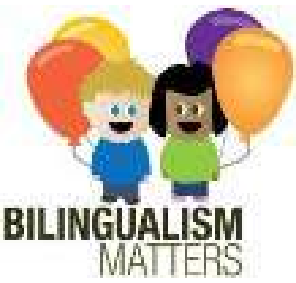


Problems at school



'Useful' and 'not useful' languages





What research shows

- Early perceptual separation of the two languages
- Similar stages and milestones in bilingual and monolingual language development
- Competence and creativity in language mixing

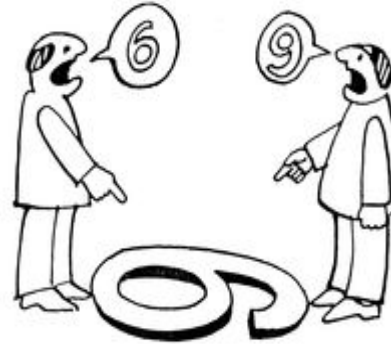


(Byers-Heinlein, Burns, & Werker, 2010; Unsworth et al 2014)



What research shows

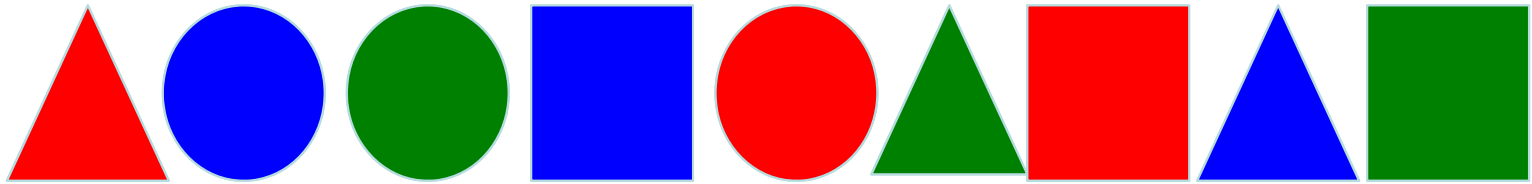
- Earlier awareness of other people's perspectives
- Better focused attention and ability to handle conflicting information
- Better cognitive flexibility in task switching and changing circumstances



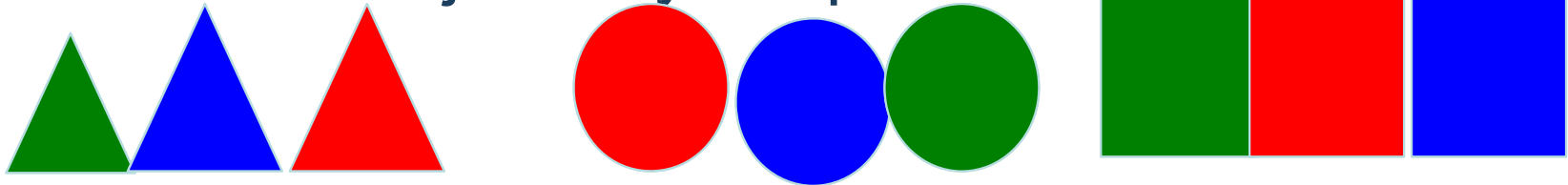
(Kovacs 2009; Prior & Gollan 2011)



An example: task switching



Task A: sort objects by shape



Task B: now sort objects by colour:

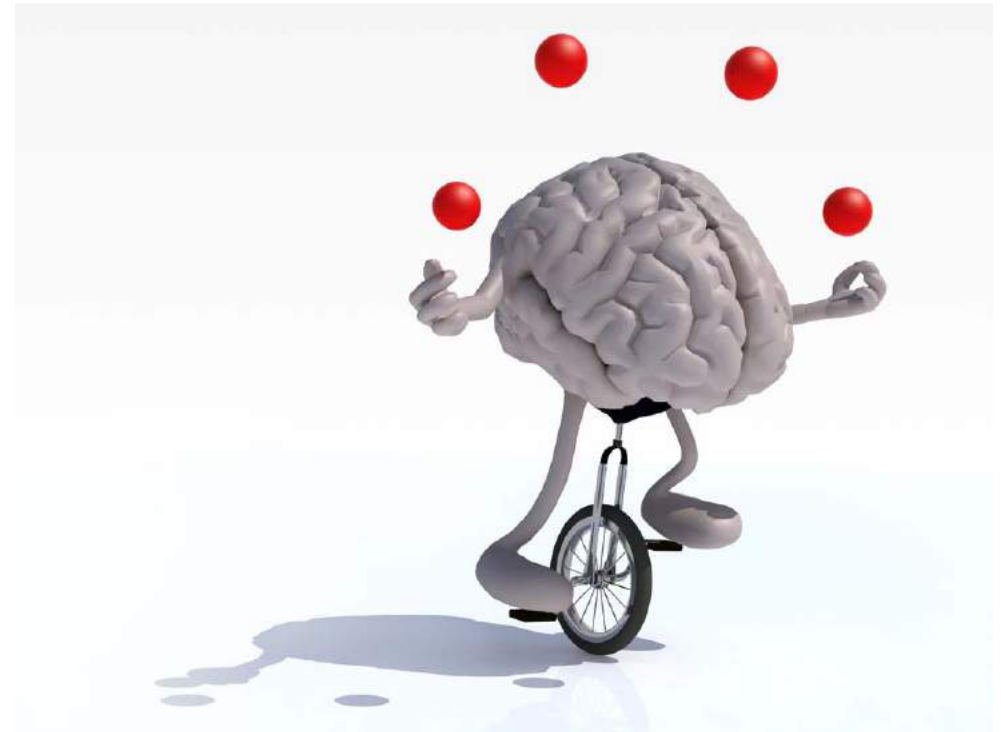


Bilingual children are faster than monolinguals to **refocus attention** and switch to Task B.



It doesn't matter *which* languages

- What matters is the fact of having more than one language in the brain.
- **THERE ARE NO 'USEFUL' OR 'USELESS' LANGUAGES FROM THIS POINT OF VIEW!**



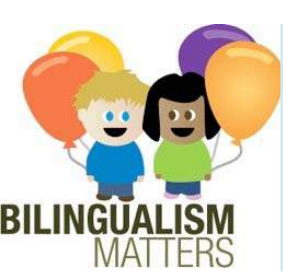


Knowledge *about* language

- Bilinguals tend to have **higher metalinguistic awareness**.



- But what does this mean, exactly?



Aspects of metalinguistic awareness

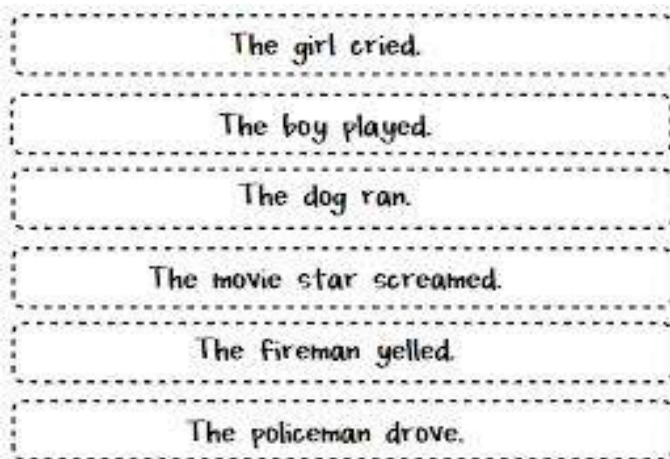
- Awareness of the grammatical structure of language
- Awareness of the arbitrariness of language
- Awareness of the separation between words and meanings



Spontaneous sensitivity to language structure

Bilingual children **'notice'** how language works

WORDS



SOUNDS



SENTENCES

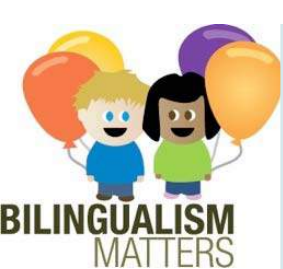


Spontaneous sensitivity to language structure

Because of their natural understanding of language, bilinguals find it **easier to learn other languages.**



They often have a **better understanding of the structure of the majority language.**



Arbitrariness of language

- *Imagine that the names of cats and dogs were changed around. (Child is shown a picture of a cat.) What would this animal's name be? (Answer: dog; bilinguals = monolinguals) What sound would it make? (answer: meow; bilinguals ≠ monolinguals).*
- Bilingual children solve the second problem earlier than monolinguals because they are more likely to understand that *only the names have changed*.

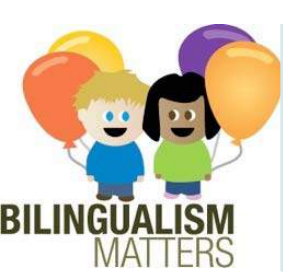
(Bialystok 1988)



Arbitrariness of language

- ‘In this game, the way to say *we* is with *spaghetti*. How would you say, *We are good children?*’
- Bilinguals better than monolinguals at saying: ‘Spaghetti are good children’.

(Ben-Zeev 1977)



Separation of form and meaning

- Bilingual children perform like monolinguals in detecting ungrammaticality:
 - Why dog bark so loudly?
- Bilingual children are better than monolinguals at judging grammaticality in abstraction from meaning:
 - Why is the cat barking so loudly?



Words



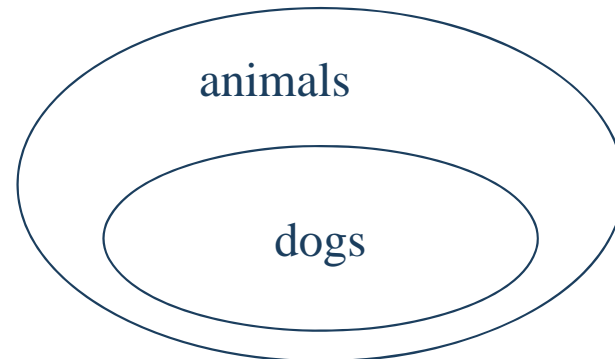
APPLE

MELA

- Two words for the same object within each language

- Two words for the same object across languages...

pug = dog AND animal

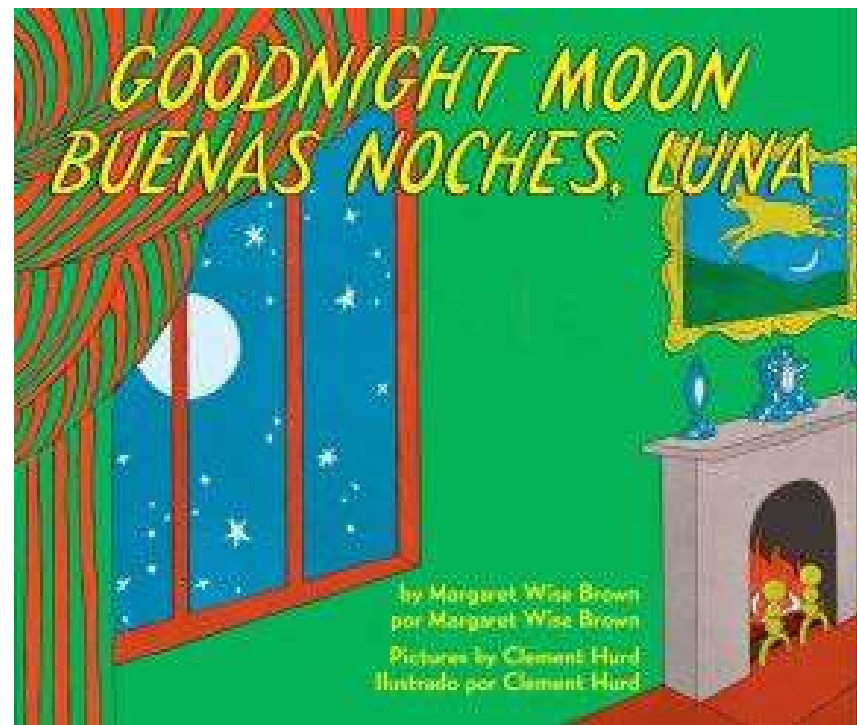


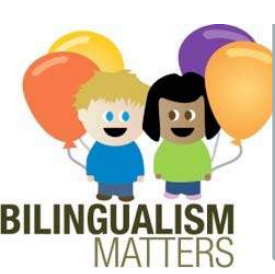


Can bilingualism help literacy?

Two possible ways:

- A general understanding of reading and its basis in a symbolic system of print.
- The potential for transfer of reading principles across languages.





Can bilingualism help literacy?

- Bilingual children tend to be **more precocious readers.**
- Reading skills may transfer across (similar) languages.



(Muysken 2004; Bialystok 1988)



Reading skills and early literacy

- Literacy builds on:
 - oral competence
 - conceptual understanding of the symbolic function of print
 - phonological awareness



Oral competence and vocabulary

- Bilingual children often have more limited vocabularies in each of their languages (although not across languages).
- Significant effects of vocabulary on reading comprehension have been reported in bilinguals, even across languages.
- Larger vocabulary and oral competence = better reading abilities.



Invariance of print

Preschool bilingual children realise sooner than monolinguals that a printed word keeps the same meaning wherever it appears.

::



DOG



HORSE



HORSE

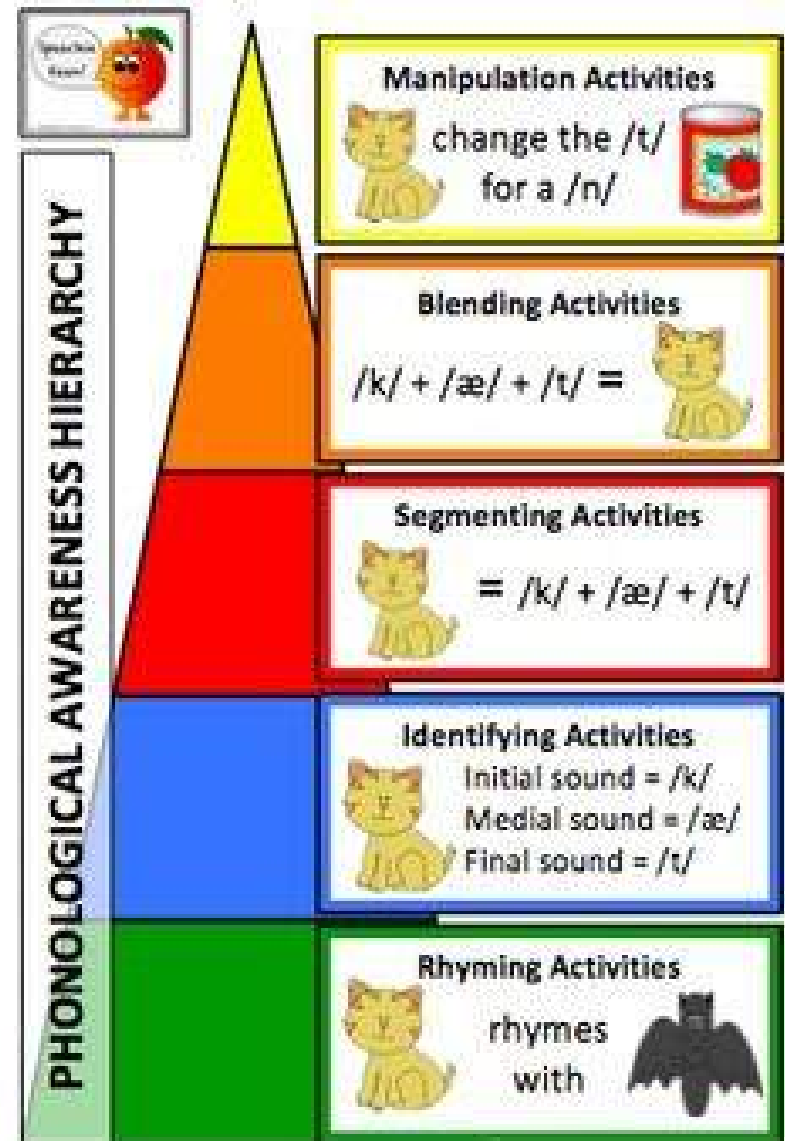
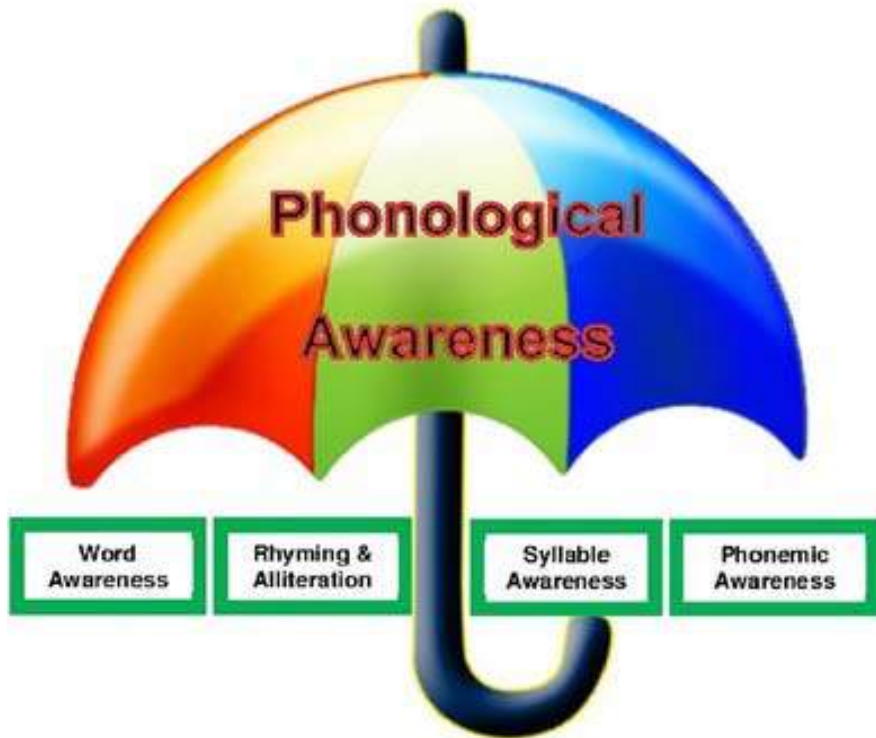


Phonological awareness

- Reading in any writing system requires phonological analysis because **print records spoken language**
- The writing system that a language uses affects children's acquisition of literacy because each system is based on a different set of symbolic relations



Phonological awareness



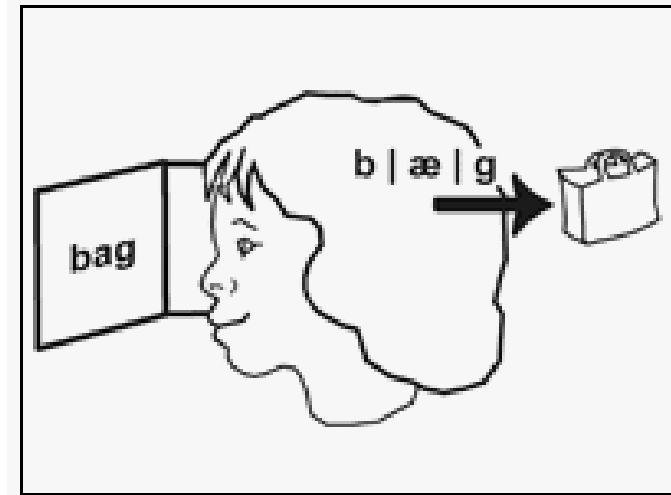


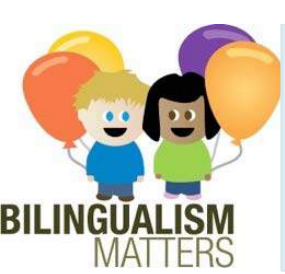
The alphabetic principle

Bilingual children:

- often discover the alphabetic principle (correspondences between graphemes and phonemes) more easily.
- often transfer their understanding of the alphabetic principle from one language to another with a similar system.

Figure 2: The Alphabetic Principle





The Word Size Task

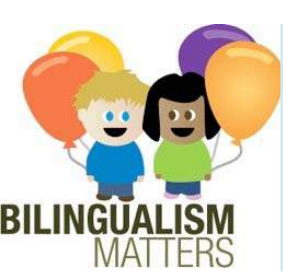
- “Which is the longer word?”

TRAIN



BUTTERFLY





No monolithic effect of bilingualism on early literacy

- The relationship between phonological awareness and reading will depend on the demands created by individual writing systems.
- Bilingual facilitation for early reading depends on the relation between the two languages and writing systems
- No correlation between children's early progress in reading English and Chinese.

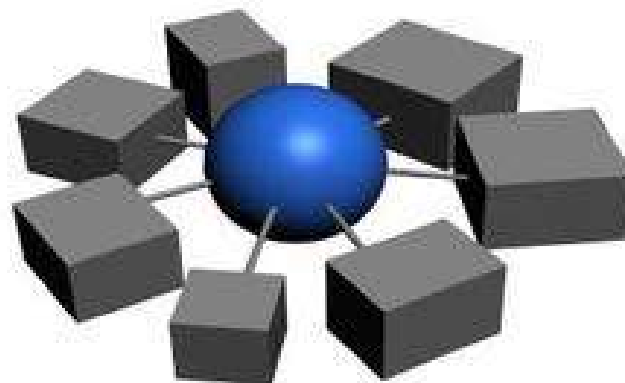
(Luk & Bialystok 2008)



More generally: no automatic benefits of bilingualism for all

The benefits of bilingualism are not always found in all bilinguals: many other factors play a role.

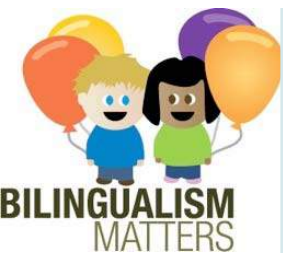
Bilingualism comes in many shapes and colours!





Important implications for...

- Families
- Teachers and policy makers: language learning and teaching in primary schools
- Migrant children and multilingual classrooms and
- Regional minority languages



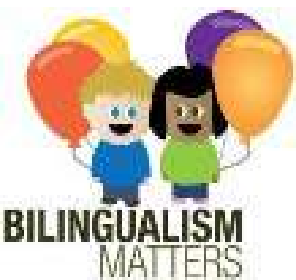
Bilingualism in the family: a commitment

- Enough engaging exposure to both languages
- Patterns of language use
- Variety of speakers (but also books!)
- Positive attitudes in the family and in the community

LANGUAGE A

LANGUAGE B





Language learning at school

Younger not necessarily better unless children get...

Enough input in the second language

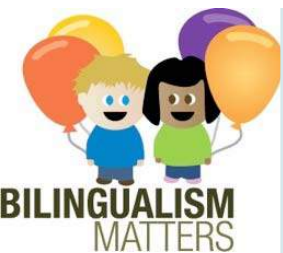


Engagement



Variety of speakers





Language learning in Scottish schools

- Children learn differently at different ages
- One hour a week: is this enough exposure?
- Teachers should be trained on language learning
- Parents should be informed and helped to support their child



**The Scottish
Government**
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Language Learning in Scotland A 1+2 Approach





Enabling bilingualism



Language policy and intervention are often disconnected from the communities of speakers and from research.

What can be done?



Enabling bilingualism



**PROVIDING
ACCESSIBLE AND
ACCURATE
INFORMATION** to
parents and teachers
about benefits and
challenges =
BETTER DECISIONS



Enabling bilingualism



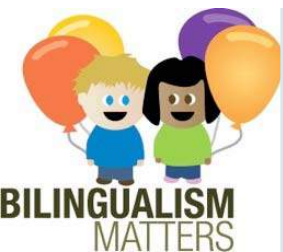
**MAKING
LANGUAGES
'REAL' FOR
CHILDREN AS
PART OF
EVERYDAY LIFE;
ENGAGING
FAMILIES IN THIS**



Enabling bilingualism



**EVALUATE
OUTCOMES IN
SCHOOLS AND
OBTAIN RESEARCH
EVIDENCE ABOUT
WHAT IS OR ISN'T
WORKING**



Bilingualism Matters

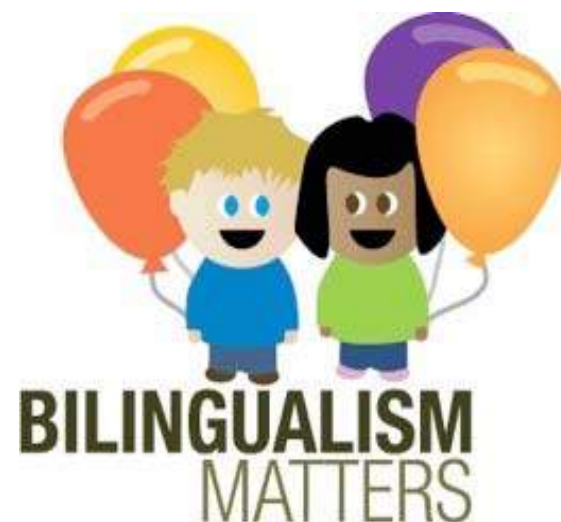
University of Edinburgh Centre of Excellence

Seminars and training for international companies and institutions

Public engagement and policy advice

Regular appearance in the media (on language and multilingualism)

International network in Europe (15 branches), and in North America (3 branches)





Partnerships and collaborations

RSA

21st century enlightenment

PEARSON



 The Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

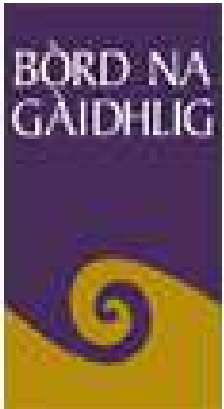
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THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

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SCOTLAND CHINA EDUCATION NETWORK

THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH

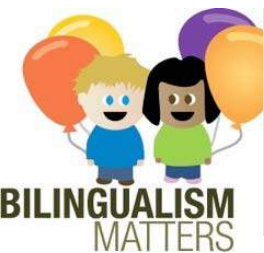
Children in Scotland
every child - every childhood


EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK
EUROSYSTEM



NHS
SCOTLAND

 Scottish Funding Council
Promoting further and higher education



Projects



European Commission



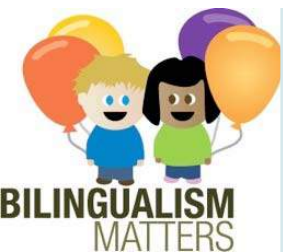
REGIONE AUTONOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme





THANK YOU!

<http://www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk/>

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