

# Bilingualism in a Plurilingual Canada Podcast Series

## Growing Up Bilingual, by Fred Genesee

### Author

Fred Genesee is a Professor in the Psychology Department at McGill University, Montreal. His current research interests include language acquisition in pre-school bilingual children, cross-language adopted children, and the language and academic development of students at-risk in bilingual programs.

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### Summary

Fred Genesee shares some reflections that parents in particular as well as teachers will find useful on the implications and benefits associated with children learning two languages or more early on in childhood.

### Facts

- Many children around the world learn more than one language, and they do this in different ways. Some children learn two, or more, languages from birth; some begin to learn a second language when they go to daycare or pre-school; and an increasing number of children learn a second language in bilingual or immersion programs in school.
- Research has shown that learning two languages from birth is just as normal as learning only one language. Children raised bilingually go through the same milestones at the same age as children learning the same languages monolingually. In other words, learning two languages at the same time does not interfere with or slow down language acquisition if children are acquiring two languages. Much less is known about children who learn three or more languages.
- While learning two languages at the same time is just as natural as learning one, it is not automatic. Children need sufficient and consistent exposure to two languages if they are to acquire full proficiency in both. It has been estimated that children need at least 40-50% exposure to each language to acquire both fully.

#### Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT)

The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers is a non-profit professional association of over 4,000 members.

Through its research, resources and publications, professional development and advocacy activities, the association plays a significant role in increasing awareness, appreciation and understanding of the importance of second and additional language learning and teaching throughout Canada. [www.caslt.org](http://www.caslt.org)

#### Official Language and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI)

The Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute of the University of Ottawa provides instruction in Canada's two official languages provides instruction in Canada's two official languages. Through its research centre, CCERBAL, it is committed to strengthening and promoting education and research in the fields of teaching, evaluation, and language policy and planning. [www.olbi.uottawa.ca](http://www.olbi.uottawa.ca)



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### Podcast Series

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The goal of this initiative is to make current research in second language teaching and learning available to teachers and the general public.

All podcasts from this series can be downloaded from the CASLT and OLBI Web sites.

- Parents and professionals often express concern about raising children with language learning impairment bilingually. However, there is not evidence that such children are at enhanced risk for language difficulties if they learn two languages. Research conducted at McGill University found that children with language impairment who were raised bilingually in English and French were no more impaired than monolingual children with language impairment learning the same languages.
- Parents often wonder if they should use the one-parent/one-language rule when raising children bilingually in order to minimize the chances that their children will become confused if each parent uses both languages. There is no evidence that children learning two languages simultaneously become confused whether their parents use this rule or not. As long as most people in the child's community separate their two languages most of the time, bilingual children will also separate their two languages.
- Bilingual children often mix their two languages in the same sentence or conversation; this is called **code-mixing** or **code-switching**. It is often thought that this is a sign that the child is confused and/or that they are not learning either language properly. However, careful research on child bilingual code-mixing indicates that when children mix their languages they do so in a way that does not violate the grammar of either language.

### Further Reading

Genesee, F., Paradis, J., & Crago, M. (2004). *Dual Language Development and Disorders*. Baltimore: Brookes

Genesee, F. (Jan/Feb 2007). A Short Guide to Raising Children Bilingually. *Multilingual Living Magazine*. [www.biculturalfamily.org](http://www.biculturalfamily.org)

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