

# Bilingualism in a Plurilingual Canada Podcast Series

## Students With Reading Difficulties, by Fred Genesee

### 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)

### 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.

[fred.genesee@mcgill.ca](mailto:fred.genesee@mcgill.ca)

### Summary

Fred Genesee talks about student with reading difficulties and identifies strategies teachers can use to help them overcome such difficulties.

### Facts

- In order to identify students who are at-risk or who are experiencing difficulty learning to read, it is useful to understand reading acquisition in students who do not experience difficulty.
- Research has shown that learning to read is a cumulative or developmental process. It is common to talk about 3 stages: a **pre-literacy stage**; an **early literacy stage** when students are learning to read; and finally a **stage when the focus is on comprehension skills and reading to learn**.
- **Pre-literacy stage**: children become familiar with books and printed language; and they also begin to enjoy the pleasures of written language as their parents read stories with them.
- **Early literacy stage**: the emphasis is on teaching children about words. Critical to success at this stage is phonological awareness, which is the ability to break words up into sounds and to blend individual sounds to create words. Also critical during this stage is the acquisition of the sounds of the letters of the alphabet.
- **Reading text for meaning stage**: here students must be able to decode efficiently so that they can get at the meaning of the text they are reading. Reading for meaning requires advanced vocabulary, good knowledge of grammar, including how connectives create coherence in text and words that link parts of text to one another.



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### Podcast Series

The Bilingualism in a Plurilingual Canada podcast series is an initiative brought to you by the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI) of the University of Ottawa in partnership with the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT).

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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.

- When identifying students who might be at-risk for reading difficulties or when designing interventions for students who are experiencing difficulty, it is useful to think of these general developmental patterns because research has shown that interventions that focus on the specific difficulties or weaknesses that individual students are having learning to read are most effective.
- For students learning to read in a second language, there is a great deal of transfer of skills that are related to reading from the first language to the second language. For example, phonological awareness skills in the first language transfer to the second language, and students who know the sounds or letters in their first language acquire knowledge of letter-sound relationships easily in their second language. This means that when you are working with students learning to read in a second language, you can assess their readiness for reading early on because you can assess readiness skills in the first language. Students with poor readiness skills in the home language will need extra support learning word-related reading skills in the second language to ensure that they acquire decoding skills successfully.
- It is important to monitor student progress to ensure that they are responding successfully to intervention – this is often referred to as “**Response to Intervention**”. Students with persistent problems will need sustained support and ongoing monitoring.

### Further Reading

*A Child Becomes a Reader: Proven Ideas from Research for Parents* (Kindergarten through Grade 3), National Institute for Literacy. Available online: [www.nifl.gov](http://www.nifl.gov)

N. Cloud, F. Genesee, & E. Hamayan. (2008). *Literacy Instruction for English Language Learners: A Teacher's Guide to Research-Based Practices*.

Genesee, F., & Jared, D. (2008). Literacy development in early French immersion programs. *Canadian Psychologist*, 49(2), 140-147.

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