

English as an additional language and my child

What to expect from the University
of Nottingham Childcare Services



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Introduction

Here at Childcare Services we celebrate that we currently have 20 languages in addition to English spoken across the two settings¹. Of these 20 languages spoken, there are 18 used by children and their families attending the settings. In January 2015, 34% of the children in attendance at the Day Nursery had English as an additional language and 80% of children at the Playcentre. You and your families are from a mix of EU and international countries. Across the whole of Childcare Services 20% of children are multilingual.

We recognise that with your child our aim is to match their development and learning needs. Our equitable and inclusive provision means that your child is welcomed, nurtured and supported to achieve the best that they can.

Staff in our provision are experienced in supporting children for whom English is an additional language. As with all children your keyworker will develop an individual development plan to support your child's development with particular attention to their language. This booklet aims to guide you in how children developing English as an additional language will be supported and how you can help them further at home.



¹ Data collected in January 2015 across the whole of Childcare Services

The importance of home languages

Language is important to us all and we use it to communicate our wants and needs, to express our inner thoughts and emotions and to make sense of the world around us. We use it to establish social rules and to maintain our culture. Here at Childcare Services we recognise the importance of your child's first language and how this is part of their family values and culture. We also know that children learn at different rates and learning a language is no exception to this. This is why we place great emphasis on supporting every child in their language development whether they are learning one, two or more languages.

The role of the first language in your child's learning is of great importance. Your child needs to develop a strong foundation in the dominant language which is usually the one used in the home. The home



language or first language is important for both social and cultural understanding and acceptance. It is important that your child can understand what is being spoken around them when in their home and community for them to value and respect their heritages. It helps maintain positive family and community connections. Often children attending our provisions will be returning to their home countries after a number of months or years with us. Therefore it is important for your child to have a good understanding of, and if possible, spoken language in their mother tongue for them to be accepted back into their home community.

We encourage a home language as a foundation for language development, and this will then support the development of English. This is why we encourage you to continue to use your child's home language at home. If home languages are not used you may lose the ability to share thoughts and ideas with your child and inevitably the ability to shape, guide and influence their lives.



Children learning English as an additional language

It is important for everyone to remember that children learning English as an additional language (EAL) are as able as any other children. Many children go through a silent phase however as children usually understand more than they can say, this is just another phase of their learning.

Understanding is always in advance of spoken language and it is important that children do not feel pressured to speak before they feel confident and ready. However, it is essential that adults around them continue to talk with the expectation that children will respond.



Young children are very open to learning new languages. One of the first windows of opportunity for language comes early in life. At six months a baby learns which mouth movements go with sounds, hence the importance of face to face conversations. By the second year of life they are able to make connections with what they hear and see. For example when a child sees a picture and hears the name or word given to it they understand the two are connected. Reciting nursery rhymes, songs and poems and looking at books helps to develop this. Between 24 and 35 months children are able to form mental symbols for objects, people and events. This is

related to their growing use of words and simple sentences and the ability to imagine the thing they hear spoken. It is during the pre-school years that composition and grammar is developed but of course we go on learning new words throughout life.

For your child learning EAL they may mix the two languages initially but will usually 'sort them out' by 2.5 years of age. They will then separate the words used in each language and know which language is used by whom. By the age of seven your child is likely to be able to cope with both languages, using both vocabulary and grammar appropriately for their age.

Multilingualism

Hearing two languages spoken at home is a real advantage for children. If a child hears two languages from birth they will maintain the ability to hear sounds of both and be able to speak each language with the accent of the native tongue. If each parent speaks a different language at home it is helpful for a child to hear the same language consistently from the parent who is the native speaker. E.g. French speaking mother speaks French and the Spanish speaking father speaks Spanish.

If a child is exposed to a second language for the first time after the age of three, they can still acquire the second language easily because by then they know the rules of communication. In three to seven months the child would understand the second language and after two years they would be able to carry on a fluent conversation. Hence one of the reasons we offer French lessons to children aged three and over in Childcare Services!

What we will do to support your child

Firstly we strongly recommend you continue to use your native language or languages at home and let us speak English in the settings initially. As mentioned earlier it is possible for children to learn a language after the age of three and easier if before the age of three. Therefore be aware they will hear the sounds of both languages and may confuse the two at first but they will organise them and begin using them correctly.



There are a number of things we build into our daily practice which are to support your child learning English as an additional language (EAL):

- providing a language-rich environment that respects your child's first language in addition to learning English
- asking you to provide us with key words (phonetically and written correctly) in your child's first language which staff can use for communication and reassurance
- celebrating a diverse range of festivals and providing items around the nursery that your child can identify with (such as dual-language books, dolls that reflect different ethnic origins)

- supporting your child through the use of signs and symbols (to aid non-verbal communication) and participating in the Every Child A Talker programme
- asking you to provide us with details of significant events for your child for our festival and special events year planner so that we can be inclusive
- having a transition programme to nursery which is tailored to the specific needs of your child
- having a pictorial daily timetable on the wall to help your child to understand what happens next
- having a 'unit book' of photographs of all areas of the unit, the toys and equipment, that you can take home to chat to your child about what to expect at nursery
- Staff will communicate with you on a daily basis about your child



During play, planned activities and circle times we engage with your child using various techniques. These include descriptive language, repetitive activities, stories, singing, circle games, hands on experiences. We also use a variety of aids and props

e.g. puppets, talking telephones, picture cards, etc. to support understanding and for your child to use to express their needs and emotions. When your child engages in play experiences they continue to learn. Playing is how your child practices and rehearses what they have learnt whether this is buying fruit at the market, retelling a story they heard or wrapping boxes with paper like a birthday present. Play can be the motivation for children new to English to communicate non-verbally and verbally, practice phrases and familiar words they hear to then develop their language further.

Close observation of play interactions and the language used enables us to decide which aspects of language to plan for and teach in more structured ways. It also determines how the environment will be presented to your child.



Modelling

Modelling is very important to introduce your child to new language structures and vocabulary. Your child needs to hear language before they can rehearse and use it for themselves. It is also important that we encourage without being demanding of your child to use language and model to correct mistakes rather than tell them it's 'wrong'.

Questions

Questions are used to support language development but are used with care. If your child knows the answers and can answer in English it may boost their self-esteem but overuse of closed questions (ones that have a yes/no/right or wrong answer) can limit learning and therefore should be limited. Examples of closed questions are:

“what is this?”

“what colour is that?”

“who is this?”

However, at the early stages of developing language it is necessary to sometimes ask these questions to check your child’s understanding.

Open ended questions are an opportunity for extending language. It is when your child can use their critical thinking skills to put ideas and concepts together. Examples of open ended questions are:

“Why do you think he is crying?”

“What will happen next?”

“Where do you think she went?”



Commentary

Talking to your child whilst playing alongside them, offers a great opportunity to develop their language and understanding of concepts. It also can provide your child with information they may not have known as well as check out if they have understood you.

Camile is behind the shop counter pressing buttons on the till. Anne the adult asks her "can I have some apples please?" Camile passes her the apples "yes those are what I need."

Anne plays with Camile and comments "Oh you're putting bananas on the shelf and look you have put all of the oranges together. After a few more minutes of playing Anne asks Camile "can you give me the basket please" but Camile hands her the bag. Anne says "Oh that's the bag, I don't need that yet. Here's the basket, now I can shop." Camile says "I'm wearing the apron so I the keeper" and Anne replies "you are wearing the apron so yes you are the shop keeper."

Repetition is important and not just in stories and rhymes but also in play for your child. By offering repeat experiences, your child can rehearse what they have learnt and practice their language. By showing an interest in their play and language we encourage them to continue in their attempts to speak. We may as adults 'self-talk' through activities which also supports language use with your child, for example "I'm just putting the washing in the machine and then I will make some tea. You can help me cut the bananas for tea."



Both commentary and self-talk can be very useful in supporting your child's use and understanding of language. However, only in short periods so they do not become intrusive or inhibiting.

Remodelling

Remodelling language provides a positive way of dealing with errors your child will make as they try out a new language. For example:

"I goed to the park" we would recognise their successful communication and repeat back to them "you went to the park...did you go with mummy?"

This corrects the vocabulary and grammar in a positive way while also extending their attempts at communication with asking a question at the end. Your child needs time to reflect and absorb the language around them and we are then ready to respond and initiate conversations and interactions, taking the lead from your child's needs and interests.





Other children

Your child will learn English from their friends as well as adults. Children are often more ready to practice and rehearse their language in play away from adults. We support interactive activities which encourage your child to engage in child-to-child conversations. Your child will be placed in groups of children the same age in order to encourage friendships and develop age appropriate social and language skills.

What you can do to help your child at home

Some of the important things you can do to help your child at home develop their language in English are:

- continue to use your home languages at home
- talk to them about their day, their play and activities in the home language
- build on their interests and curiosities
- praise your child
- read books, sing songs and rhymes in the home language and English if you wish
- encourage friendships with children who speak English and the same home language as them
- get involved with us at Childcare Services

What happens when language is slow to develop?

Children develop at different rates and language development can also vary from one child to another. We monitor your child's progress and therefore early identification for language delay is most beneficial. Where your child has English as an additional language (EAL) we will always discuss with you their language development in their first language. When considering a possible language delay we would then make judgments for both languages.

Some children are just late talkers but others may have a need for additional support. Once an assessment in both languages is made we will discuss with you if there is a need for additional support. This may include one or more of the following depending on the needs of your child:

- planning for further opportunities for your child to practice and use language
- introduce the use of picture cards and symbols to support understanding
- using simple signing to support understanding
- talking to your health visitor for further advice or assessment
- asking the Local Authority Early Years Support worker to visit and observe your child with the aim of offering further advice and assistance
- requesting a speech and language assessment form the Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

Where children are developing two or more languages but the first language is developing as expected, we would allow more time for the second language (English) to develop. Children understand more than they say and therefore may just need more time to develop their confidence to use the language. Close monitoring will still occur and regular discussions with you for continued support of their language development.

Typical Communication and Language Development we will look for in both the child's first language and English:

Baby can....	Vocalises with intonation (changes in tone)
	Babbles sequences of sound (da da da)
6 months	Laughs, chuckles and squeals
	Cries when distressed
	Responds to familiar voice without seeing them (turns head and eyes)
	Beginning to enjoy music and rhymes
	Responds to own name
	Recognises single words in context (milk, teddy)
	Use one or more words with meaning (may be unintelligible to unfamiliar listeners)
	Understands simple instructions (clap hands, come here)
	Gestures to ask for things
	Enjoys games such as peek-a-boo
Toddler can....	Has 20 – 25 words
	Mostly nouns used (mummy, teddy, dog, cup)
18 months	Able to follow simple commands (pass me the ball, bring your shoes)
	Understands at least 2 prepositions (in, on, under)
	Starts using negative (there is not cat)
	Uses plurals
	Starting to combine words
	Responds to commands such as show me your eyes, mouth etc.
	50 plus words
Child can....	Engage in simple conversations
	Use pronouns correctly (you, me)
24 months	Understands at least 3 prepositions (in, on, under)
	Knows main body parts and can indicate these
	Understands sentences with 3 key words (find the white car)
	Has 90-100 words
	Verbs beginning to develop (brush, drop, run)
	Understands most simple questions
	Asks lots of questions
	Knows names of familiar animals
	Uses 4 prepositions understanding meaning when given commands (please sit on the chair)
	Names common objects in books and magazines
Child can....	Can repeat a 4 syllable word (e.g. supermarket, skating, anybody)
	Demonstrates understanding of over/under
36 months	Can tell long stories and sequence events
	Can use language to share, turn take, argue and collaborate
	Readily follows simple commands
	Beginning to describe how others feel
	Speech is understood by strangers

Frequently asked questions

Here are a few questions parents often ask when their child with English as an additional language starts nursery:

- How long does it take before my child begins to speak English?

Every child is different and they will learn at their own pace. However, a child can remain silent for up to six months and during this time they are listening to the language around them, becoming attuned to how the language sounds and making sense of it all.

- How long until my child becomes fluent in English?

Children can become socially fluent in English after one to two years but will take five to seven years to become academically competent in English thus being level with peers for whom English is a first language.

- Will my child become confused learning more than one language at a time?

No, as children become bilingual they increase their ability to access and learn many languages.

- Should we still encourage my child to speak their first language?

Yes, it is vital that children are confident and fluent in their first language in order to transfer skills and concepts over to English.

- Should we speak our first language at home?

Yes, it is important for children to hear their first language spoken at home, in social situations and their local community. Language and culture play a large role in a child's sense of self and should be celebrated.

- My child still isn't speaking English, is something wrong with them?

If a child is not speaking English after six months we will explore this a little further. We may need to assess their language skills in their first language and then work closely with you to support their language development.

If you have any further questions about your child learning English as an additional language your keyworker will be happy to discuss these with you.



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The University of Nottingham has made every effort to ensure that the information in this EAL booklet was accurate when published. Please note however, that the nature of the content means that it is subject to change from time to time and you should therefore consider the information to be guiding rather than definitive.