

Supporting bilingual children in the early years

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QTS Standards

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This section provides support for initial teacher educators, school based mentors and other practitioners to introduce student practitioners to the needs of young bilingual children in the early years. It will also be of interest to trainee teachers. The term 'bilingual children' is used throughout to refer to those children who in their daily lives operate in more than one language; the term does not suggest equal competence or fluency in these languages.

Young 3-5 year old children who are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) and their language learning needs are sometimes overlooked in educational texts, as well as in schools and settings, because it is assumed that young children will 'pick up' English naturally and very quickly. This strand presents an overview of the complexities involved, examines play as a vehicle for learning in general and especially for learning a new language, and highlights the critical role of monolingual and bilingual practitioners.

Many ITE educators find that considering individual learners helps student teachers to begin to understand the processes and complexities of bilingualism and additional language acquisition. Within this strand we introduce vignettes of four different and unique children who are already skilful communicators in their home languages and competent learners at home. Two boys, [Amadur and Mohiuddin](#) who are of British-Bangladeshi background and nearly 5 years old, have just entered a Reception class. [Samia](#) and [Nazma](#), two girls of British-Pakistani background, are 4 years old and attend two different nursery classes. The complexity of early bilingual development is illuminated by a vignette of [Samia 'playing school'](#) at home with her younger brother and one of [Nazma's interactions with a bilingual practitioner](#). These children's experiences highlight the need to consider all learning and development holistically; to acknowledge the inter relationship between children's physical, emotional, social and intellectual learning and development. Real life experiences such as play, relationships and environments shape children's learning. In this strand we focus on the social contexts in which learning occurs and in which bilingualism can be developed, promoted and maintained. The critical role of practitioners, both bilingual and monolingual, in young children's emerging bilingualism is also discussed.

Since September 2008 onwards all early years settings have been part of the [Early Years Foundation Stage](#) (EYFS) and this phase of education covers the learning and development of all children from 0-5 years. The EYFS presents four guiding themes: A Unique Child; Positive Relationship; Enabling Environments; and Learning and Development. Government guidance on best practice in working with bilingual children in the EYFS can be found at <http://nationalstrategiesstandards.dcsf.gov.uk/downloader/a2134b99eff6802ea52dcfaf9e17f08c.pdf>

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First published 21st February 2008

Updated 20th January 2009

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