

Supporting Young Bilingual Children and Their Families.

Film and training pack. The City of Edinburgh Council (2005)

This pack which consists of two videos and associated training resources derives from two action research projects conducted by staff from the City of Edinburgh EAL Service, described earlier in this issue. Both projects form a response from those working with bilingual children, who form 6% of the Edinburgh primary school population, to the phonics-based early intervention programme introduced into Edinburgh schools for all children regardless of their linguistic or cultural background.

The first video entitled *Bilingual Pupils in the Early Years : Steps to Literacy* lasts 19 minutes and 'aims to illustrate good practice with bilingual pupils in the early years : nursery and primary 1'. It is intended primarily for use during professional development with teachers, nursery staff, bilingual support assistants and learning assistants, but would also be a useful resource during initial teacher education.

The video is divided into three sections. The Introduction covers the positive relationship between bilingualism and learning and how this bilingual potential can be promoted through healthy partnerships between home and school. The second section looks at the planning and acquisition of literacy in English in Primary 1 (for learners aged 5-6) and the important role played by home languages. There is a focus on the role and value of bilingual support assistants in class. The third section looks at the organisation and planning of an intensive reading programme for those pupils who are experiencing a literacy lag in Primary 2.

The support materials contain an overview of the content of the video, plus photocopiable resources to be used to stimulate discussion and raise awareness of issues and possible future actions within a range of settings. The activities are short, clear and very flexible and should be a useful adjunct to training resources for the Literacy Hour. Each activity is supported by training notes. Together, the activities could form the basis for whole-school development of a multilingual literacy policy as well as providing useful advice about involving parents, identifying supportive strategies for using a range of languages, engaging and utilising adult and peer support in the classroom and selecting appropriate reading materials. It is the only video resource I know that highlights the role of bilingual support assistants. The bibliography is, however, rather disappointing and could have contained more references to useful resources.

The second video. *It's your help that counts!* (28 minutes), is primarily addressed to the parents and wider families of bilingual children, but will also have

an important place in awareness-raising amongst school staff especially in early years establishments. It fills a gap in training resources by looking at how parents can support their child's home language during everyday activities and how they can play a full part in the life of the school. There are two kinds of activities which go with the video: one section intended for families and the other intended for staff. Both are clear and provide a useful framework for watching and responding to the video. The only drawback is that neither the video nor the materials for parents are available in a community language. It is to be hoped that this serious shortcoming can be remedied by the publishers. Otherwise, those who use the video will need to provide interpreters to support the viewing.

The video covers three key areas: 1) the benefits of bilingual children keeping and developing their home language while they are learning English, and the role parents can play in this process; 2) practical examples of what parents can do, through using the home language, to support their children's development in talking and listening, reading and writing and maths; 3) why parents need to become involved in the life of their children's school and how they can do this. The advice is realistic and manageable. The video has already been used to great effect with parents' groups in Edinburgh and is possibly the best resource I have found for raising awareness amongst teachers of the value of the home language. It is a first class resource for bilingual staff in their liaison role with parents. This extremely useful pack is available from: The City of Edinburgh Council Education Department, 10 Waterloo Place, Edinburgh EH1 3EG, price £25.

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