

The importance of bilingualism

Key principles

- Bilingualism is an asset; and first language has a continuing and significant role in identity, learning and the acquisition of additional languages.*
- Children need to develop strong foundations in their first language as first language skills are transferable to new languages and strengthen children's understanding of language use.*
- Research has shown that encouraging children to become bilingual can contribute to their cognitive flexibility.
(Shutnabb - Kangas 1981) (Milne and Clarke 1993)
- Insistence on an **'English only approach'** in the home may lead to a child being denied opportunities to develop proficiency in either language.*
- First languages are needed to maintain family connections.
(Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke 2000)
- Practitioners have a key role in reassuring parents that maintaining and developing their home language will benefit their children and support their developing skills in English.*

*Supporting children learning English as an additional language. Primary National Strategy, Department for Children, Schools and Families 2007



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