

LANGUAGE LEVEL: B1 INTERMEDIATE

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE LIVING WITH LANGUAGES

Poder hablar más de una lengua ya desde niño es todo un regalo. Ser bilingüe es una ventaja que requiere esfuerzo y constancia, y los padres juegan un papel muy importante. Margaret Bray nos explica su experiencia.



Most of the world's children who grow up speaking two or more languages fluently¹ do so because they have no other choice. Today there are about 200 countries in the world with 116 official languages, but over 6,000 languages

are spoken. Some language experts say there is only one truly monolingual country: Cuba. The majority of all people in the world use two or more languages daily.

SMART KIDS
As more and more people learn foreign languages, more abroad for

work, and many partners² of other nationalities, increasing³ numbers of children are also growing up bilingually. This is because their parents want them to. They usually learn one language at home, and the other in the outside world. This can have clear benefits. Jigy Roche, a professor of language and communication in Munich, says that bilingual children "develop very good maths⁴ and music skills."

In his book *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism*, Colin Baker says that bilingual children know two or more words to express one idea, so "when slightly⁵ different associations are attached to each word, the bilingual child may be able to think more fluently, flexibly, and creatively." He adds that bilingual children generally become more tolerant and patient communicators. Researchers at York University in Toronto have also found that bilinguals learn to read more easily.

CONFUSION?

But many parents worry about possible disadvantages. They are alarmed when they hear their young children mix the two languages. The children are not necessarily confused, however. Young bilingual children typically mix vocabulary and syntax as they un-



I am learning
French
Je suis
l'apprentissage
du français

EXPLAINS

Grammar point:
verbs followed
by prepositions -
Recorded que los
verbos con una
preposición van
seguidos de la
forma -ing.
The parents must
insist on using the
mother tongue.

Bilingual children
are used to using
one or more
languages. I look
forward to hearing
from you soon.

Piece of advice -
En inglés las
palabras advice,
information y news
son todas singulares
y uncountable (no se
pueden contar). Por
esta razón se pide
some information.

no informaciones.
Se dice que the
news is good or bad
aunque se trate de
varias noticias. Si en
cambio queremos
especificar que
vamos a dar
una sola noticia
importante, o un
único consejo,
entonces tenemos
que decir a piece of
advice, a piece of
news o a piece of
information.

derstand and separate the two languages. In actual fact, this creative manipulation and experimentation is what makes them particularly sensitive⁶ users of each language. One real danger of raising children with two (and especially more) languages is that they could become not "bilingual" but "semi-lingual." They might never learn to speak any language perfectly. This can happen when children do not hear or read one language enough, or if they don't have adequate speaking practice or formal education in one main language.

MENTAL BLOCK

The big challenge for parents who want their children to become bilingual is that they have to preserve the mother tongue even after another language - usually the language used in school and with friends - becomes dominant in the child's life. Parents must continue to speak the minority language to their children as they mature emotionally, physically, and intellectually over many years.

Once children enter pre-school, they often stop speaking their mother tongue as they concentrate on the majority language. The parents must insist on using the mother tongue at a time when their children are already trying hard to find their way in society with another language. Afterwards, children might speak either language, depending on the situation. During puberty, children often block off⁷ the parent's language. Later, many older children rediscover and learn to appreciate their mother tongue.

GLOSSARY

- 1FLUENTLY: con fluidez
- 2PARTNER: pareja
- 3INCORPORAING: cada vez más
- 4MATHS: matemáticas
- 5SLIGHTLY: ligeramente
- 6SENSITIVE: sensible
- 7TO BLOCK OFF: apartar, desecher