

Discussion Guide for Module 11: Bilingual Language Development

Module run time: 20 minutes

Estimated time to complete the module with discussion guide: 45-60 minutes

Below are recommended stopping points and suggested questions to use in your group's discussion. Please feel free to follow your group's lead and discuss topics and questions that are of greatest value to the group!

Key points:

- The brain is primed to learn language in the first few years of life. As we age, it becomes harder to learn a second language.
- Language is the product of our experiences. The amount and type of language input determines our language outcomes. This is true whether we're learning one or two languages.
- Bilingual and monolingual children develop language at the same pace.
- Bilingualism is associated with cognitive advantages, such as better flexible thinking skills.

Module synopsis:

Page 1: *Bilingual Language Development*

Page 2: *Acknowledgments*

Page 3: *Learning More Than One Language (Video)*

Page 4: *Types of Bilingualism (Video)*

Page 5: *Language Exposure and Dominance*

Page 6: *Language Exposure and Dominance (Video)*

✦ Recommended stopping point

- Bilinguals learn languages at different ages and in different contexts. How might a child's early language learning experiences influence his learning and development?
- In the video of the mother and daughter playing, the child asks her mom to speak in English. Some parents may be worried when their children want to speak in their dominant language. It's natural for children to want to use the language of their peers. What are some ways parents can encourage children to use both languages?

Page 7: *Sensitive Period*

Page 8: *Language Learning Strategies*

✦ Recommended stopping point

- Compared to monolinguals, bilingual children have a longer **sensitive period** for learning language. A bilingual's brain remains open to learning the sounds of language for longer. Why do you think bilinguals have a longer sensitive period?
- It's harder to learn a new language as we get older, but it is always possible. What other factors might influence how well we learn a new language?
- Monolingual and bilingual children use different strategies for learning words. While monolingual children typically assume that an object has only one name, bilingual

children must learn two names for an object – one in each language. Have you observed bilingual children using different strategies for learning words than monolinguals? Can you think of other word learning strategies that might be useful to bilinguals?

Page 9: *Measuring Bilingual Language Growth*

Page 10: *Milestones in Bilingual Language Acquisition*

Page 11: *Language Mixing (Video)*

Page 12: *Language Mixing*

☞ **Recommended stopping point**

- Bilinguals reach language milestones at the same pace as monolingual children. Were you surprised by this fact? How can you appreciate children's complete language knowledge by considering both of their languages?
- **Code mixing** is when a person uses two or more languages in one sentence or situation. What are some facts about code mixing that you can share with a parent or provider of bilingual children?

Page 13: *The Bilingual Brain (Video)*

Page 14: *Cognitive Flexibility (Video)*

Page 15: *Cognitive Advantages*

☞ **Recommended stopping point**

- In the MEG video, you learned that by 11 months of age, the brain specializes in whatever languages a child regularly hears. How might the quality and quantity of early language experience relate to this finding?
- How did you do on the color naming game to test your cognitive flexibility? If you are monolingual, did you find the first group easier? If you are bilingual, did you find one group easier than the other?
- Compared to monolinguals, bilinguals have better **executive function** skills. These skills include the ability to plan, problem solve, and switch between tasks. How might learning and using two languages promote these skills?
- Monolinguals can improve executive function skills with practice. Think of tasks or games you can use with children to improve these skills.

Page 16: *How to Support Bilingual Language Development (Video)*

Page 17: *Recap*

☞ **Final discussion points**

- Early childhood is an important time to support children's dual language development. What are some ways that you can support a child's language growth? What tips would you give a parent to support a child's language development at home? What about a provider or teacher?
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To learn more about bilingual language development, take a look at these resources:

Administration for Children & Families | Dual Language Learners Toolkit

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/Dual%20Language%20Learners/toolkit>

Harvard Graduate School of Education | Usable Knowledge

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/15/10/bilingualism-life-experience>

ParentMap | Benefits of Bilingualism

<https://www.parentmap.com/article/benefits-of-bilingualism>

Thrive Washington | Talk

<http://lovetalkplay.org/talk/>

ZERO TO THREE | Dual Language Learners in Early Care and Education Settings

<http://bit.ly/2n09Tkq>

We are constantly working to improve our materials. Do you have suggestions about topics to add to this guide? Did your group discuss something we didn't suggest? We'd love to hear from you! Please email your thoughts to us at ilabsout@uw.edu.