

## Stages of Early Bilingual Learning

Adapted from document of the same name by Rose Drury and Leena Robertson for NALDIC on <http://www.naldic.org.uk/ITTSEAL2/teaching/Stagesofearlybilinguallearning.cfm>

These stages describe what may happen for children who are in the early stages of learning English when they enter an early years setting. The quality of the enabling environment is of critical importance at all stages.

1. Continued use of home language*	<p>The children may expect that they will be understood in the setting when they use the language(s) they use at home</p> <p>This stage may not last long although that is dependent also on what messages they receive about the use of languages other than English, ie, are they valued positively?*</p>
2. Silent or non-verbal period	<p>Children may observe and interact non-verbally as they begin to tune into</p> <p>A) the sounds of English and</p> <p>B) how things work in the new context, i.e. the rules and expectations.</p> <p>They may 'rehearse' English silently to themselves and may try out these utterances when on their own.</p> <p>As they gain confidence they may begin to try out the language with others when then they need to communicate something.</p>
3. Repetition and language play; Use of formulaic speech, routines and single words and phrases	<p>Children begin to use 'chunks' of language as ready made phrases in routine situations, eg,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'my turn'</li><li>• 'Mummy come soon'</li></ul>
4. More complex English or productive language use	<p>Children build on and extend the use of single words and chunks of English to produce more complex language.</p> <p>They are beginning to be able to communicate their intent more clearly.</p>

A more detailed explanation is available on the above web page and in the NALDIC (1998) Working Paper 4 – Guidelines on Baseline Assessment for Bilingual Children

## Important!

- Children may not necessarily move from one stage to the next. 'The stages may well overlap, depending on context and expectations.'
- Children may practise the English they have heard in their early years setting at home where they feel more confident and comfortable **before** they do so at the setting.
- Children may feel more confident about using English in some contexts within the setting than in others.
- Children in the early stages of English will often move between their home language(s) and English. This is called '**code-switching**' and will decrease over time as children hear English modelled and as they begin to internalise the language structures and vocabulary.
- Practitioners will need to observe carefully how this varies for each individual child.
- \*Children's home languages need to be encouraged throughout the whole process so that children and families know their emerging bilingualism or multilingualism is celebrated. A strong first language will lead to children learning English more easily.