

# The Importance of Dual Language

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**CORNERS**

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OUTREACH

## The Importance of Dual Language

To understand why dual language learning matters, it is important to understand some of the beliefs the Hispanic community has about dual language that are false. As we try to help the children of our community learn and grow, it is important to face these myths head on. Let's start with the four biggest myths on dual language learning.

### **Myth 1: Parents should only speak English to their children so they will learn English, even if they are not proficient in the language.**

It is actually the complete opposite. Speaking, reading, and writing in their home language will allow a child to become a native language specialist of both languages. It also enables families to actively participate in the child's language learning process, and the parents can become literacy models for their children. Numerous studies have shown that parents that have migrated to the US have noticed that after starting school, their children's abilities in using their home language gradually decline. They may be able to continue to speak the language, but they start losing the ability to read and/or write it. Practicing these skills in their home language enables them to progress their skills in both languages.

### **Myth 2: Teaching a child two different languages in their first years of life will confuse the child and prohibit their ability to speak.**

The truth is we all are born with the ability to learn more than one language. Babies can process the sounds of the different languages and differentiating between them. The brain of a baby specializes in whatever language or languages are present in their environment.

### **Myth 3: The belief that if a child is showing signs of delay on learning one or both languages, stopping the practice of one of the languages will solve the problem.**

The real solution is not to stop one of the languages, but to increase the practice of both. Dual language learners split their time between two or more languages and, therefore, hear fewer words or sentences of each language. This also does not mean that bilingual children are falling behind compared to monolingual children. In the grand scheme of things, they are actually learning more. They just need adequate support that will help nourish both languages.

## Maria's Story

When we first launched our Early Learning program Maria\* showed up to every session and was eager to learn more about how to help her children. She was also very honest about what she didn't know, which allowed for growth. At the third session, when we were talking about ways to improve your child's reading, Maria shared that she had never read to her kids before. She thought because she couldn't read in English that she shouldn't read to them at all, but we encouraged her to do it. The important thing, we told her, is that you have lots of conversations with broad vocabulary, and reading is a great way to do that. When she came to the next session, she was bursting with excitement. She told us her children adored their new story time, and that they've incorporated it into their daily routine.

\*We have changed the main character's name in this story to protect her privacy.

**Myth 4: Mixing words of both languages into one sentence is the reflection of lack of vocabulary in one or both languages.**

Actually, “code switching” is a natural behavior for dual language learners both young and old. All dual language learners know certain words in one language better than the other. Switching between the languages actually shows an expertise in both languages, and it facilitates clearer communication.

Now that we understand a few of the myths about dual language learning, what are we doing to help our families develop better learning habits at home? We have partnered with the Atlanta Speech School to use a parent workshop they developed to effectively teach our communities on the importance of dual language learning and how to properly support their children. Our Early Learning program empowers the community by teaching parents the skills they need to help their children succeed.

Since implementing Early Learning, it has been amazing to see how our community has benefitted already from this information. For example, in one of the sessions, about 50% of the parents admitted they believed that speaking only English with their children was better for helping their child learn, even if they were not proficient in the English language. One of our moms even shared that because she did not speak English, she did not read with her kids even in their home language. In a later session, she shared how she had started reading with her kids!

## What can you do?

There are 3 paths of investment:

- 1. Volunteer**- We need tutors, mentors and parent workshop volunteers. [Sign up today.](#)
- 2. Become a client** – Landscaping covers normal yard maintenance plus projects like new shrubs, flowers, pine straw, sod, sprinklers, retaining walls, drainage, etc. [Request a quote here.](#)
- 3. Become an investor** - Join our [931 Club of recurring donors](#). Commit to donating one penny for each student we tutored last year (or more if you’re willing). Can’t donate monthly? [Make a one-time donation.](#)

Through education and improved job options, together we can break the cycle of poverty and improve lives in our community today and for generations to come. Please join us!