

Dual Language Learners



Primed and Ready to Learn

Cognitive Benefits of Bilingualism

Speaking two or more languages has some obvious advantages. Children who know more than one language can communicate with a wider range of people. It also helps children learn about other cultures and customs. Did you know that there are *cognitive* benefits to learning multiple languages?

Dual language learners outperform monolinguals on tasks that use *cognitive flexibility*. This is a term for skills like task switching, inhibiting impulses, and solving problems. Children learning two languages might be better at games that use these skills. Red Light Green Light is a classic example of this kind of game. These cognitive advantages persist across the lifespan. They improve theory of mind and even delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease in seniors.

Dual language learners' brains get an extra workout. Switching between two languages requires the brain to use inhibition and task-switching skills. It offers natural practice with cognitive flexibility skills.

Remembering and Imitating

Speaking more than one language can also help boost children's memory skills. Researchers showed 18-month-olds a puppet wearing a mitten on its paw. The mitten had a bell inside. The experimenter removed the mitten and shook it to make noise.

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After a 30-minute delay, infants saw another puppet with a mitten on its paw. Bilingual children were more likely to take the mitten off and shake it. These children remembered and imitated what they saw earlier. Monolingual children did not make this connection. Researchers think learning two sets of rules from two languages strengthens children's memory.

Try This:

- **Play games to build children's cognitive flexibility.** No matter how many languages children are learning, games can improve cognitive flexibility skills. Try games where children sort items by a certain feature, like shape, color, or size. Then switch the rule! This gives children practice with task switching and impulse inhibition.
- **Adopt the Planned Language Approach (PLA).** The PLA, especially the Strategies That Support DLLs section, can help you develop strategies to support dual language learners' development in both their languages.

Learn More:

Planned Language Approach

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach>

Benefits of Being Bilingual

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/fcp/docs/benefits-of-being-bilingual.pdf>