Bilingual Montessori

Building Bilingual Elementary Programs

A field guide for school leaders,
classroom guides and second language teachers

Project number: 2021-1-CZ01-KA220-SCH-000027846

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Building Bilingual Elementary Programs

Field Guide

Authors:	Part 1	Marikay McCabe, Lucy Welsted
	Part 2	Aoife Ahern, Kavita Doodnauth
	Part 3	Aoife Ahern, Birgitta Berger, Laura Cassidy, Kavita Doodnauth, Maria Smirnova, Lucie Urbančíková, Lucy Welsted
Editor:		Kavita Doodnauth
Layout and design:		Lucie Urbančíková

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Building Bilingual Elementary Programs

General introduction

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bilingual® Montessori

Building Strong Bilingual Montessori Programs

Key takeaways

- The Bilingual Montessori Project originated with a mission **to support bilingual education** within the Montessori framework.
- **Developmental education** acknowledges that children progress at varying rates across different areas.
- **Language learning** integrated with Montessori principles fosters learner autonomy and personalised development.
- This field guide's purpose is to provide **structured guidance** for implementing holistic multilingual education.

1. General introduction to the Bilingual Montessori project

The professionals building the Bilingual Montessori Project have all forged bilingual school programs that respect student autonomy in different parts of Europe over the last 15 years. We have faced the challenges you may now face in your bilingual schools and classrooms. We have, at times, felt hopeful and delighted by plans, progress and children using a second language with pride. At other times, we have felt puzzled and frustrated by challenges, setbacks, and a lack of support and information. We have wondered whether it was really possible to offer freedom of choice to children developing literacy skills in a second language environment and, at times, even felt a little envy towards monolingual Montessori programs.

As bilinguals ourselves, we know that the ability to use more than one language requires hard work and courage, and we know that being bilingual is surprisingly transformative, opening our minds and hearts to understanding other cultures profoundly. In times of difficulty, guiding children in their second language acquisition while respecting their autonomy as learners is very complicated. At these times we can remind ourselves that we work to educate children to serve a strong global future. All of you who collaborate to create successful bilingual school programs are making a small but valuable contribution to the quest for global stability and well-being.

Seeing the growing need the decision was made to create a community where practical advice and sound knowledge can be shared. Bilingual Montessori co-founders Marikay McCabe and Mirka Vlčková purchased the domain www.bilingualmontessori.com and had the logo designed in December 2019. Our plans were stalled during the global pandemic but when we returned to our website design and our ideas of how to reach our public in the quickly evolving digital landscape, we asked English Language Specialist Lucie Urbančíková to join our brainstorming and planning.

Then we had a stroke of luck: we became aware of an Erasmus+ Grant that aligned with our objectives.

Erasmus + is a European Union funding program that seeks to support and facilitate:

> "…the transnational and international cooperation between organisations in the fields of education, training, youth and sport … It facilitates the circulation of ideas and the transmission of best practices and expertise and the development of digital capabilities thus

> contributing to a high-quality education while strengthening social cohesion." (Part A: General Information about the Erasmus+ Programme | Erasmus+, n.d.)

When we were awarded the grant titled "Building Bilingual Programs in Elementary Schools" in late 2022 our humble effort to begin to fill a need in the bilingual education world, was given a big push forward with the invaluable financing from an Erasmus+ grant. This allowed us to think BIG and involve other educators with complementary expertise. Two school founders, Lucy Welsted and Maria Smirnova joined our team in addition to university professor and second language acquisition specialist Dr. Aoife Ahern. This permitted us to expand our "Bilingual Montessori project" work, to be in conversation with practitioners and to create resources that, we believe, will be helpful to all educators working in schools with a developmental approach to education and a second language program.

Aware that we have been gifted the valuable resource of time, we gathered the combined knowledge and experience of second language acquisition researchers, language specialists, teachers and school leaders to bring you this Field Guide. We sincerely hope it helps readers improve practices in their schools

2. What is a developmental approach to education?

The core contributors to this Field Guide draw upon their expertise in Montessori education, linguistics and teacher training recognising that many of the insights they offer can benefit educators across various pedagogical frameworks. These include schools with child-led and inquiry-based learning models, such as IB (International Baccalaureate) schools, Reggio Emilia-inspired programs, Waldorf schools, and others. Collectively, these schools can be described as embracing a "developmental approach to education."

This term refers to educational practices that adopt a holistic perspective on children and their learning processes, emphasising individual growth and development. Schools with a developmental approach typically prioritise the following principles.

2.1. Key principles of the developmental approach

Holistic development

These schools aim to foster not only academic growth but also the interconnected development of social skills, physical well-being, and self-respect—foundations for becoming responsible members of society.

Child-centred learning

Students are the protagonists of their own learning. The adult serves the role of "guide" in preparing the learning environment and materials. This comes with the recognition that every student develops at their own pace, and possesses unique strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles.

Experiential learning

Students engage in hands-on activities and real-world experiences, allowing them to explore, experiment, and actively participate in their learning.

Freedom and responsibility

Within the boundaries of ground rules and a well-prepared environment, children are granted responsibilities that align with their developmental readiness.

Guided participation

Teachers provide structured support, or scaffolding, to help students tackle tasks slightly beyond their current abilities. This might involve peer learning or offering guidance until students gain confidence and mastery over increasingly complex tasks.

2.2. Constructivist philosophies in education

A developmental approach also aligns with constructivist educational philosophies, which emphasise the role of children in actively constructing their own knowledge. Influential thinkers such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Maria Montessori laid the foundation for this approach in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Dewey and Montessori stand out as thinkers who practised their theories of education and human development in schools. They created "living laboratories": Dewey opened the Lab School at the University of Chicago in 1896 and in 1907 Montessori was made responsible for a small centre in Rome

then went on to give training courses and support the opening of schools all over the world.

2.3. Learner autonomy in education

Another facet of the developmental approach is inspired by the Learner Autonomy movement, which originated in language learning in the 1970s. Initially designed for adult learners, this approach has since been adapted for secondary and middle school students. Key principles include:

- that knowledge from the first language (L1) is essential to learning the target language (TL);
- learners need to make choices and engage in evaluative reflection;
- that learners have 3 interdependent roles:
    - communicators continuously using and gradually developing their TL skills;
    - experimenters gradually understanding the cultural conventions of the TL;
    - intentional learners gradually developing an explicit awareness of metacognitive aspects of language learning. (Dam, 1995, Little, Dam, Legenhausen, 2017, p.2).

The synergy between Montessori pedagogy and Learner Autonomy was first explored by Birgitta Berger after meeting language educator Leni Dam in 2016. Berger "realised that learner autonomy and Montessori pedagogy were a perfect match, both striving for the development of motivated, active and independent learners." (Berger, 2019) Both approaches share a common goal: fostering motivated, active, and independent learners. She successfully introduced this approach into her classroom with elementary students and then began sharing the results with other Montessori educators, some of whom wrote their own articles about the marriage of the two approaches. (Winter, 2020)

3. Why a field guide?

- To share expertise and resources
- To build a body of knowledge and document our work
- To develop our community of practice
- To begin to respond to your questions

We created this "Field Guide" with examples and voices "from the field" as a whole school sourcebook with practical information and inspiration regarding classroom strategies and organisational practices based on what practitioners report. We chose this format because we were inspired by similar books published by other educators (Khan, Dubble, Pendleton, 1999, Senge, 1994)

3.1. Your questions & concerns

Since the beginning of our project, teachers and school leaders have responded to our surveys with questions and comments like the examples given here.

- How do I know if my approach of only speaking English is the most effective (I also speak French)?
- How does the shift from English as a second/foreign language (i.e. meeting native speak norms) to English as a lingua franca (i.e. a tool for intercultural communication) reflect in the classroom?
- How to encourage spontaneous L2 production?
- How to encourage a child to choose work and/or speak in their second language when it's easier for them to do it in their first language?
- How will we assess the language learning progress of the children? What assessment tools will we use?
- Montessori language materials are designed for native speakers and are not appropriate for children learning a second language. Please see Section 1.3
- The materials I have seen in a bilingual Montessori environment are not sufficient for introducing the L2 in a fun way that encourages and sparks a desire to learn more.
- …I find that I need to look for images for some presentations for English language learners … these adaptations take a lot of extra preparation time… There isn't any known shared bank of resources with adaptations for non-native speakers (yet).

3.2. Answers on the Bilingual Montessori website

Since our core purpose is to fill a void of information and community, we created a virtual home for resources and invited you, our community, to join and share experiences to begin building our knowledge library of effective practices. The BM Video library, which you can access via our website or our YouTube channel is a great place to begin looking for answers to your questions.

What can be found on our website:

- BM Community Conversations - a series of talks recorded live with an audience with invited practitioners sharing their expertise and receiving feedback and questions from others present;
- BM Webinars - were a series of 10 webinars that were commissioned to cover in more detail or from a different angle;
- Notes from the Field is - our blog where members of our community share their experiences, reflections, and ongoing questions;
- "Building Bilingual Elementary Programs: A field guide for school leaders, classroom guides and second language teachers" or "BM Field Guide" for short - a place for theoretical and practical information produced by experts.

3.3. The field guide is comprised of 3 parts:

- **Part 1**: **Designing a Bilingual Program** – to guide Administrators, School Leaders and Language Coordinators: those responsible for creating and implementing a second language program.
- **Part 2**: **Understanding Language Learning** – An overview of the theory behind language acquisition and learning intended for classroom guides and assistants who do not have a background in language learning.
- **Part 3**: **Preparing the Bilingual Learning Environment** – a look at specific topics relevant to engaging learners, practical setup of bilingual classrooms including materials, assessment, oral and written literacy and grammar.

We undertook a Case Study Research Project, to formally gather information, from bilingual Montessori schools, on effective practices. The information collected also informed the contents of the Field Guide.

The research was designed to gather comprehensive data from schools by examining three key perspectives to:

- **Administrators** - providing insights from the management and organisational level
- **Classroom guides (teachers)** - offering a perspective from direct instructional experience seen through their Montessori training
- **Language specialists** - offering a perspective from direct instructional experience through their expertise in language acquisition and instruction

The study specifically emphasised the local socio-linguistic context - meaning the language environment and cultural factors unique to each location. This focus was included because the researchers recognised that teaching practices that succeed in one environment might not work in another due to different:

- language backgrounds of students;
- community language use patterns;
- cultural factors;
- local educational needs.

The findings from this research were then incorporated into a Field Guide, suggesting this was a practical, application-focused study meant to inform real-world educational practices.

3.4. Use of this Field Guide

We envision that you will be able to use this book as a reference book to consult when you have a specific question in mind or are looking for a sample document on a particular topic. Maybe you will want to refer to the more technical aspects of language acquisition from Part 2 (see section 2.6. Stages in children's additional language acquisition) in preparation for a meeting with parents. Or maybe you will need to come back to Part 3 "Preparing the bilingual learning environment" at some point when the linguistic profile of the students in your class has shifted, requiring new strategies. Or perhaps you are a school leader who will refer regularly to the whole of Part 1 "Designing a Bilingual Program as your program evolves. These are our ideas, but of course, you will find what suits you.

The Pause and Reflect questions throughout are designed to encourage your deeper engagement with the material and to facilitate the practical application of key concepts in your everyday classroom practice. These reflective prompts are strategically placed throughout the guide to help you connect theoretical ideas and research findings to the context of your school. As an L2 teacher or classroom guide in a 6-12 environment, or a school administratoit is important to pause at these moments, reflect on the questions posed, and consider how you can bring the insights discussed in the text to the children in your school. By taking time to reflect, you will gain a more profound understanding of how to support language development, incorporate diverse learning strategies, and foster an inclusive environment. We encourage you to write down your responses, share your thoughts with colleagues, or use the questions as the basis for professional discussion. This reflective process will not only enrich your practice but will also empower you to be more intentional in your pedagogical decisions, ultimately enhancing the learning experiences of your students.

4. Guideposts for a lonely journey

One of our guiding principles is that schools educating in more than one language are on their own unique journey, which can be lonely. At the heart of multilingual education lies a fundamental understanding: every school teaching in multiple languages embarks on its own distinct journey, and this path can often feel solitary. This book seeks to address that sense of isolation by bringing together practical strategies and experiences from fellow educators across different contexts.

By sharing specific examples of effective practices, each carefully situated within their local environments, we hope to help readers recognise and appreciate the unique characteristics of their own schools and classrooms. These distinct features ultimately shape their educational path forward. While no two journeys are identical, the experiences of others can serve as valuable guideposts, offering inspiration and insight along the way.

Throughout this exploration, it becomes increasingly clear that there cannot be a universal "how-to" manual for multilingual education. Instead, each school must chart its own course, drawing inspiration from others while remaining true to its unique circumstances, student needs, and community context. The richness of these varied experiences creates a tapestry of

approaches, each valuable in its own right and each contributing to our collective understanding of multilingual education.

A friendly feeling towards error …

> *… Cultivate a friendly feeling towards error and treat I as a companion inseparable from our lives, as something having a purpose, which it truly has.*
>
> Maria Montessori
> The Absorbent Mind, 225

This advice is intended as an additional guidepost for educators in multilingual schools that prioritise learner autonomy while addressing specific pedagogical challenges. Our growing knowledge library aims to uncover and share the solutions that teachers have developed with their students. To better understand the structure and teaching strategies of these schools, we have conducted case study interviews with teachers, language specialists, and school leaders. Additionally, experienced practitioners have contributed their insights in writing.

While more dynamic approaches like translanguaging have become widely accepted in recent years, this represents a significant shift from practices just 10–15 years ago. Back then, bilingual education largely relied on strict language separation—by subject, teacher, or schedule. So we assume practices will continue to evolve with new insights and ongoing experience.

There are several models for introducing an additional language, such as immersion, dual language, exploration, or exposure, which are explained in Section 1.3. Schools themselves may be described as bilingual, multilingual, or international, but these terms often lack universally agreed-upon definitions. Each school must define what these terms mean for their unique context and how they are implemented in practice.

5. Notes on Language and Location

Our perspective on multilingual education is shaped by our European perspective and experiences. Across Europe, a distinct pattern emerges in language education: even in communities where multiple languages are readily available and actively used, English consistently is one of the

additional languages offered in schools, and quite often the target language. This preference for English as the target language reflects both global trends and local educational priorities.

This focus on English as the additional language exists within a rich tapestry of linguistic diversity. Many students in these schools bring their heritage languages from home, speaking different languages with their families and in their communities. Rather than viewing this linguistic diversity as a challenge, schools can harness it as an asset, using it to foster a more inclusive and open-minded school community. These varied linguistic backgrounds create opportunities for cultural exchange and deeper understanding among students, staff, and families.

Our discussion of bilingual education therefore primarily examines scenarios where English serves as the target or additional language while acknowledging and celebrating the broader multilingual landscape that exists within school communities. This reflects not just an educational choice, but the reality of how many European schools approach language learning today.

5.1. Language, Gender, and Representation

English, compared to many Romance languages, has the advantage of using more gender-neutral nouns (e.g., "child" or "children"), though its pronoun system remains gendered. To ensure a balanced representation of female and male children in readers' minds when discussing examples from early childhood and elementary classrooms, we deliberately alternate between "she" and "he." This choice is not meant to disregard expanded understandings of gender, including "they" and other non-binary categories, but rather to prioritise the visibility of female students in education. The struggle for gender parity in educational and professional spaces is ongoing, and highlighting female students in our writing is a deliberate step toward addressing this imbalance.

5.2. Bilingual and multilingual

We use these terms interchangeably as we understand bilingual to mean two or more languages, just as multilingual does.

5.3. Montessori education and language learning

This diversity is particularly evident in schools following an educational philosophy similar to that of Maria Montessori. Montessori environments foster

learning by sparking curiosity through carefully designed activities that engage children and encourage intrinsic motivation. However, when the language being acquired at school is unfamiliar to the child, the standard sequence of the curriculum may need adaptation. For instance, students may lack the vocabulary needed to engage with certain materials, requiring thoughtful adjustments to their learning journey.

We continue to gather and share experiences that demonstrate how schools can meet these linguistic needs while staying true to the Montessori philosophy. By respecting the underlying principles of Montessori education, educators can create environments that support language acquisition and nurture the holistic development of each child.

6. Concluding thoughts

This work represents a thorough compilation of our current knowledge and experience in second-language education while acknowledging that it remains a work in progress rather than a final statement. We have approached this task with sincere dedication, aiming to share our insights so that others need not start from scratch or "reinvent the wheel."

What we present here is essentially a snapshot in time - a detailed picture of current understanding and best practices in second language learning as we know them today. We fully recognise that this field is dynamic and ever-evolving. As educators and researchers continue to innovate and discover new approaches, our own understanding and methods will naturally grow and adapt alongside the broader educational community.

This acknowledgement of ongoing learning and development reflects a fundamental truth in education: that our understanding of how best to teach and learn languages continues to deepen and expand. We remain students ourselves in this journey, learning alongside our colleagues as we all work to enhance second language education practices.

Our goal is to provide valuable insights from our experience while maintaining humility about the evolving nature of this field. We see this as part of an ongoing dialogue rather than a definitive conclusion to the conversation about best practices in second language learning.

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Building Bilingual Elementary Programs

A field guide for school leaders,
classroom guides and second language teachers

Part one

Designing a bilingual program

Contents

Bilingual® Montessori

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Building Bilingual Elementary Programs

Part one | **Designing a bilingual program**

Introduction

This first part of the Field Guide is dedicated to practical information for school administrators – Heads of School, Coordinators, i.e., those responsible for designing, implementing and overseeing a school's bilingual program. This includes the formal aspects like setting language learning objectives, policies and assessment as well as the "soft" qualities of any school-based program like intercultural learning and integrating a culture of language learning into the school's identity.

It begins with two case study examples of the development of bilingual programs in two schools in Spain. These are intended to give the reader a sense of the complex reality of building a bilingual program, hopefully to help readers appreciate that in struggles and successes go hand in hand. We begin in Section 1.1 with the foundations of program design – the vision and aspirations and ideas how to check against other parameters such as the socio-linguistic context and a culture in the school that supports our vision. In 1.2 we move to making the vision a reality, looking more in depth at how to evaluate your school's local context and introducing frameworks for measuring proficiency and a look at learning differences. In 1.3. we review the European context with a review of common models and the status of Montessori L2 education. Section 1.4 addresses how to take the vision for the bilingual program and integrate it into the whole school development plan and how to communicate this with the school community. 1.5. "Managing Resources" covers financial resources and our most important resource – those who work in our schools. The ins and outs of international hiring and other challenges that having a school with more than one language can present. The last section, "Overcoming Implementation Challenges" reviews the complexities that can arise and how to cultivate patience and resilience.

Section 1.5, "Managing Resources," covers both financial considerations and human resources, including the challenges of international hiring and managing a multilingual school environment.

The final section, "Overcoming Implementation Challenges," examines common complexities and provides strategies for cultivating patience and resilience throughout the implementation process.

Building Bilingual Elementary Programs

Part one | **Designing a bilingual program**

Authors: Marikay McCabe, Lucy Welsted

Editor: Kavita Doodnauth

Layout and design: Lucie Urbančíková

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Designing a bilingual program

1.a. Case study: development of a bilingual program

Contents

Montessori Córdoba
International School

Key takeaways

- **Immersion** from infancy underpins natural bilingual development within a Montessori framework.
- Ongoing **staff recruitment and training** create a professional community that supports bilingual education.
- **Individualised language plans** and adaptations ensure that late-stage or older enrolments can successfully access the bilingual environment.
- A **cohesive communication policy** fosters a genuine culture of bilingualism among children, parents, and staff.

1. The story of one school's development as a Bilingual Montessori program

Montessori Córdoba International School was conceived when Lucy Welsted recognised that her adopted home lacked an educational option for families who wanted a program that respected individual child development. Her additional interest in language acquisition and bilingual education paved the way for a bilingual Montessori school project. The decision was made to open with two Infant Community programs: one full-day and one half-day.

2. The decision to be bilingual

Lucy Welsted's background in language teaching and bilingual education preceded her discovery of child-centred, respectful education practices. Language education was already her area of expertise before she encountered the Montessori method and philosophy. Additionally, Lucy raised bilingual children in a Spanish/English household, allowing her to observe and research the development of bilingualism in children. The development of her own, late-stage bilingualism through immersion gave Lucy first-hand experience of the processes involved in reaching fluency without formal language learning.

Through these experiences, the realisation emerged that bilingualism was a gift that enabled communication and expanded the mind and consciousness in countless ways adding a new dimension to Lucy's passion for offering children healthy learning environments. So, the question was never whether Lucy should create a bilingual Montessori program but rather how one would be implemented.

The program started with these parameters:

- Immersion in the early years
- Respecting the use of L1
- Learning must be relevant despite being in L2: respect locality and local culture
- International vision (not British)

3. Researching bilingual Montessori practices

The Montessori Córdoba International School started life in 2014 as an Infant Community, which, for licensing reasons, is much easier to open than a Children's House in Spain.

From Lucy's research and personal experience, it was clear that an immersion English program from birth was the best way to support children's bilingualism whilst living in Cordoba's monolingual Spanish culture. Exposure to English, the target second language or L2, is rare outside of the classroom environment so every opportunity to expose the infant's absorbent mind to English would be foremost the responsibility of the educational program. It was quite clear that the medium to long-term objective was for children to reach a level of academic proficiency in English to continue their studies in English.

Finding English-speaking Montessori educators was the next step.

4. The human resources puzzle: creating a professional bilingual community

The school advertised its available positions on the AMI international jobs page, hoping this would encourage qualified English-speaking guides to move to Córdoba and help start the first program. It was not easy to hire an experienced and qualified guide for a new project! Looking back at the lack of resources and experience, it was a big step, but there always has to be a first step.

From Day 1, the new team prioritised the care and well-being of the children and, especially in the first years, tried to avoid comparing their Montessori work to well-established programs. Fortunately, the school found good guides and quickly improved their Montessori work over the first years. Lucy supported the team as best she could, while everyone involved juggled all the balls in the air - that was the feeling of starting a new program.

Although Lucy did not find willing AMI-trained, experienced guides from the start, she chose people with Montessori training, other relevant experience, or the passion and determination to be dedicated to the children and the project's success. As soon as the school budget allowed, the school sponsored the Montessori training for those who were not yet trained.

As is common, financing a new project was the most challenging task. It was essential to guarantee minimum income although the number of children enrolled in the Montessori program was too low to cover overheads. English language classes are always in demand in the local community, so Lucy devised a plan to complement the Montessori program with after-school language classes (We called it the English language school, which operated from 16.30 to 20.30). It was open to all children in the local community. This enabled the full-time employment of an overseas, English-speaking guide who worked part-time in the half-day Infant Community program and part-time in extracurricular language activities. The new school also employed a full-time English-speaking Montessori Guide for the full-day program. This solution proved effective for the first years while the Montessori program built up enrolment sufficient to support itself and its staff structure. In the end, this complimentary activity ran for six years.

Pause and reflect

- How do you reconcile the vision of bilingual immersion with the specific cultural and linguistic context of your own school community?
- In what ways do resource constraints or staffing challenges shape the decisions you make in establishing or enhancing your bilingual Montessori programme?
- How do you integrate children's first language (L1) respectfully whilst still prioritising meaningful second language (L2) exposure?
- What strategies might you employ to ensure that all children, regardless of their entry point or prior linguistic experiences, feel supported and included in a bilingual environment?
- When reflecting on Lucy's journey and your own, what long-term aspirations drive your commitment to building a robust and sustainable bilingual Montessori community?

5. Running extra-curricular classes

Supposing there is a commitment to the quality of all educational endeavours, running any additional program requires leadership and programming. This was also Lucy's experience with the Enrichment program

(specialist classes like music, theatre, etc.), which ran for the first years of the Elementary and Children's House programs at Montessori Córdoba. The administration team in a new school is often reduced and stretched as limited resources are focused on providing the children with the required classroom support of guides and assistants. The extra burden of running extra-curricular services left Lucy lacking sufficient time to focus on preparing the desired quality of any programs. Since the school phased out both the English language school and the Enrichment program, their work has become more cohesive and exhaustive; however, the inclusion of such initiatives had its place when the program was young for the following reasons:

- They provided financial support during the first wobbly years of the new educational project
- They allowed staff to work in different areas when there was not enough work in the Montessori program to warrant full-time contracts for everyone.
- Having the children in an Enrichment program for part of their day in the Montessori programs helped free up time for the guides to build new prepared environments from scratch.
- The extra-curricular language lessons equipped the school with knowledge and resources for language learning that they may not have otherwise prioritised.
- Staff who worked in language teaching became interested in and trained in Montessori, helping to find local candidates with the right profile for the Bilingual Montessori program.

In the second year, Lucy opened two full-day Infant Communities and a Nido; then, in 2016, families and school staff became motivated to ensure the children's future in a bilingual Montessori school by creating a Children's House and an Elementary Program. Why open Children's House and Elementary simultaneously? A local cultural quirk means that rarely do families choose a school for children aged 3 without having the security of knowing that they will continue at least through to the end of Elementary.

After observing that the English immersion program worked well for toddlers who were comfortable in both English and Spanish language contexts, there was no doubt that the Children's House should be an immersion program that followed the Infant Community. This way, the program could take full advantage of the child's incredible capacity to soak up language naturally from their environment at this stage of development.

The school needed to find more bilingual Montessori educators to be models for our children. The school had already contracted the Children's House Guide and Assistant as they had been working in the Infant Community. It was always much more difficult to find 0-3 guides than 3-6 guides!

6. The first years of our bilingual Children's house program

The Children's House was created as a language immersion environment, but the school still faced dilemmas. For example, it soon became clear that the explosion into writing and reading did not follow the course that many guides were led to expect in their diploma training. It is not difficult to understand why: although a child of, say 4 or 5 years old who has been in an English language environment at school may understand and even produce English, their vocabulary is still not as extensive as in their home language.

It was clear that adaptations needed to be made to the standard Montessori language sequences and expectations. The team started to investigate and were fortunate to have employed a lead guide with experience in another international bilingual Montessori school who had great ideas about what we could use to support vocabulary development in the classroom. Still, difficult decisions needed to be made, since extra time for language presentations meant less time for other presentations.

As all curriculum areas fascinate children, it felt frustrating not to have enough time to enjoy the full scope of the classroom materials. Eventually, the school offered a second short work cycle for Children's House after lunch and playtime to compensate for this. They recommended that families with children ages 5+ choose this option, but it was not obligatory. Guides have occasionally recommended that a family take this option, but ultimately, it is a family's decision. The fact that education is not obligatory in Spain until age 6, does affect some parents' attitudes towards this stage in the Spanish context. Interestingly, this means the school occasionally receives later starters with little to no exposure to reading and writing in any language.

In the second year of the Children's House program, the school decided to have the classroom assistant, a qualified Spanish-speaking guide, present the language sequence in Spanish to some late starters who lacked the vocabulary skills to access the sequence in English. The following year, these

children moved to elementary school, where they had full access to Spanish language areas and presentations. As no other children had this profile in Children's House at the time, a dedicate space or time was not devoted to the full preparation of a Spanish language area in the Children's House classroom. The team continue to believe that, as long as a child starts the immersion program before the age of 5, they can spend sufficient time on vocabulary-building presentations to be able to introduce the reading and writing sequence in English. Children who fall outside of this profile now have individualised language targets on their special individualised language plan, which will be discussed later.

All of this said, even children who have had an immersive language experience in Children´s house, will typically enter the elementary program with reduced progression in the language sequence compared to in a monolingual context.

When children move from Children's House to Elementary, they will not as readily access the cosmic curriculum even though their second language is well developed. They need extra support and accommodations for at least the first few years in Elementary. This is something the whole community has had to make peace with. It has helped to remember that being bilingual is also a natural development for a child in an immersion situation, so the environment is not an artificial one, it follows Montessori principles by providing the appropriate support and adaptations each child needs to thrive in their prepared environments.

7. The first years of our bilingual elementary program

The school advertised for, interviewed, and hired an Elementary Guide. Over the first three years, they changed the guides and assistants in this environment as they observed the impact on development and the dynamics of learning two languages. The team needed time to grow to understand the difficulties and find the best solutions while considering not only the development of both languages but also the integral developmental needs of the children. Step by step, they developed a hiring and training policy to support the creation of the envisioned Elementary environments. The stages of observation and learning the team experienced are described here.

The first year of the Elementary program consisted of a mix of children: some proficient in English, some with limited knowledge, and others with no prior exposure. Additionally, the group was small, and the school's finances were constrained, allowing for only one Elementary Guide. They began with an English-speaking guide with some Spanish skills. This phase quickly highlighted the importance of a specific guide's skill profile: It became evident that the role additionally required language skills, experience, and knowledge in working with children with varied language abilities alongside some understanding of second language development.

Realising this, the school decided, despite financial constraints, that the environment needed two adults: one English speaker and one Spanish speaker. The English speaker, in particular, was required to have prior experience and knowledge in second language acquisition. For the next two years, they implemented a co-guide model, with each guide responsible for specific areas of the curriculum. In alignment with local regulations, Spanish language, science, history, and geography were delivered in Spanish, while English language, mathematics, geometry, and complementary subjects were taught in English.

Over time, the staff observed a concerning trend: children naturally gravitated toward adults who spoke their mother tongue. This was understandable but posed challenges to achieving second language objectives and creating a truly integrated curriculum. While Spanish speakers were deeply engaged in the Great Lessons and Cosmic Curriculum, their work choices more often centred on Spanish areas. This preference for their first language extended to the day-to-day support the adults in the environment offer; the Spanish guide was the primary point of contact. As peace education was integrated with daily interactions, this dynamic led to two key pillars (Cosmic and Peace education) of the Montessori Elementary program being predominantly delivered in Spanish. While this was reasonable given the circumstances, it hindered the goal of fostering a level of bilingualism that would allow children to pursue advanced education in English or Spanish should they wish to.

The team faced a critical decision: should they adjust their language objectives or alter their language model? It became clear that adhering to the Montessori principle of allowing children to choose their work would not allow English to develop to the academic level required for their objectives.

Although the temptation to lower their language goals arose, they remained committed to their international vision, and Lucy resolved to rethink their model.

Lucy decided that Elementary lead guides would deliver the entire curriculum in English, supported by assistants who also communicated in English, replicating the immersion model used in the Infant Community and Children's House. A culture of second language (English) use would be fostered throughout the school. This transition gradually aligned with a newly established policy to hire local talent. The school began hiring English speakers already residing in the community, initially as assistants, with plans to sponsor their diploma training.

This vision took approximately three years to materialise. Now, each Elementary classroom has an English-speaking AMI-trained guide settled in Córdoba, supported by English-speaking assistants who are also qualified Spanish primary school teachers. Assistants and children communicate exclusively in English except during Spanish curriculum lessons and follow-up work. As a result, children have become accustomed to working and operating in English within the classroom.

Despite this process of trial and error, what is most evident across the school today is a genuine culture of bilingualism.

Pause and reflect

- How do you balance the desire to offer extra-curricular activities with the need to maintain a high-quality bilingual environment in your Montessori classroom?
- Which specific adaptations or additional resources could you introduce to support children who arrive late to your bilingual programme and may have limited exposure to L2?
- In what ways can you address children's natural tendency to use their mother tongue while still promoting meaningful immersion in the second language?
- When reflecting on staffing and language planning, how do you determine the most effective approach for building a cohesive bilingual culture across all levels of your school?

8. Preparing a culture of bilingualism

The school carefully considered each area of communication, making decisions based on experience and knowledge while emphasising equity and inclusivity for both languages and their speakers.

8.1. Adults communicating with adults

To model bilingualism for children, the school encouraged adults to use the natural language of their relationships but favoured English communication between classroom team members where possible. This increased children's natural exposure to English in their environments. A communication policy was created and integrated into the school's language policy to reflect these communication guidelines.

The team also recognised the value of children observing adults as developing bilinguals. As they develop bilingualism themselves, children are encouraged to persevere in their language-learning journey by seeing adults willing to make mistakes and practise other languages.

8.2. Communication with parents

The primary language of communication with parents is Spanish, reflecting the predominantly monolingual local community. While confident English-speaking parents may use English, they remain a minority. In contexts such as school-gate conversations or written organisational communications, Spanish is prioritised for practical and inclusive reasons:

- Spanish ensures inclusivity.
- Administrative resources are insufficient to translate every communication.
- The families, often very sensitive to their child's daily ups and downs, benefit from clear communication.
- Effective education about Montessori principles should be accessible to all families.
- Although some guides use English with parents, occasional misunderstandings can arise from limited fluency in either language.

8.3. Adults communicating with children

The priority is to communicate with children in English, though exceptions are made under certain conditions:

Wellbeing is the priority: When a child is emotional and needs reassurance or guidance, the priority is understanding. Spanish may be used if the adult knows the language or another Spanish-speaking adult may step in. However, this exception should not become the default response as consistent English usage in daily, real-life situations is necessary for reaching a high level of proficiency.

Children transitioning to our school: During the adaptation period, children new to the school are supported in their preferred language. If possible, we assign a staff member who shares their language to facilitate connections for children whose native language is neither Spanish nor English.

Individual Language Plans: Children with specific language needs or those who have enrolled late in the bilingual program are supported through personalised language strategies detailed in their individual plans.

8.4. Children communicating with children

The school's priority is for children to develop communication skills across languages. The team knew that prohibiting Spanish use would hinder natural skill development, so they designed an approach that fosters English usage without dismissing the benefit of the natural use of Spanish.

While most interactions among children naturally occur in Spanish, strategies to encourage spontaneous peer-to-peer English usage include:

- Facilitating and encouraging enrolment for children from international families with policies to support short-term placements.
- Providing games and activity trays that encourage peer use of English.
- Engineering situations where adults or children with a high level of English start conversations or activities. This sets the language expectation for the conversation or activity without prohibiting the natural tendency towards Spanish.

9. Special circumstances and exceptions

The school recognised the need to adjust language objectives in response to circumstances and individual needs. Initially, children who had not joined by age five could not be expected to achieve the same English proficiency as peers who began earlier. While the ideal bilingual program grows alongside its

children, the school's circumstances required accepting late enrolments to ensure program viability and meet community needs.

9.1. The first years and late new enrolments without second language skills

Lucy anticipated that language objectives should be adjusted for the students enrolling in the elementary during the bilingual program's first years. It would be unrealistic to expect children who had not enrolled in the program until age 5 to reach the same level as children who had enjoyed the benefit of acquiring English while in the Children´s house or the Infant community.

Ideally, a program should grow with its children. That is to say, when a bilingual elementary program starts, it gradually fills with children who move up from Children's House. It is clear, that this is ideal not only for preparing the environment for language skills but also for creating elementary environments for children who have been through Children's House and have acquired other well-developed skills there.

However, the reality for Montessori Córdoba was that they needed to accept students aged 5+ for economic and community reasons. They knew a child entering a Montessori program later than age 4 is still full of potential and would most likely be very happy and successful in the program. The team knew, however, that to properly support these late starters, they needed to adapt their expectations for language use and proficiency and consider how this would affect their relationship with the whole school environment and their access to work in all areas. To give a formal structure to the adaptations designed to support successful work and access to the environment, Lucy decided to create Individualised Language Plan for late starters with no previous English exposure that would identify specific needs and support strategies and would formalise expectations across the community, including the child's family.

9.2. Individualised language plans

The age to be considered "late enrolment" for monolingual Spanish speakers in the bilingual program was set as age 5+, although it is recognised that the benefits to children's all-round development, specifically language development, are increased the earlier they enter the program. This age "limit" guides staff and families as to a child's potential development and their potential need for extra support.

Lucy created the first version of the Individualised Language Plan, which would be used to individualise, track, and share the objectives and progress of children who enrolled 'late' in the bilingual program and children with other educational needs affecting their language development. This document helped to ensure that the expectations of the adults in the child's life, teachers and family alike, were in line and realistic, considering each child's potential and the time they would spend in the school.

The document was designed to adjust objectives over time as progress in second language acquisition became apparent. Language learning is very individual; some children quickly externalise growing language skills, while others internalise their work for many years and then suddenly demonstrate their skills in an explosion of production.

These individualised targets have been useful guides for the team, especially during the first years. Now entering the school's tenth anniversary, the English proficiency level across the school is generally very good; this, in turn, propagates a culture of bilingualism, with spontaneous second language use increasing with time.

At first, children would only choose to speak English to those English-speaking adults in the community voluntarily. Now, staff observe many children employing English or translanguaging to enhance communication with adults and peers in their work and daily lives. In this way, the team observed that a well-established bilingual community enhances language learning. The first years require a lot of conscious effort and overcoming resistance, but all the work and patience pay off; eventually, the culture change is absorbed into the community's identity.

Lucy and the team still have many things they want to improve, and as a developmental program, it should always be that way. Still, they are now enjoying the results of their efforts to establish a bilingual program. It brings real pleasure and hope to see children who have been enrolled in the school since early infancy becoming confident bilinguals. It is so satisfying to know that apart from sharing all the great benefits of a Montessori education, we have opened their door to the world a little wider.

Pause and reflect

- In what ways do you promote the fair presence and use of both languages among staff and children, whilst acknowledging each person's comfort and level of fluency?
- How can you adapt your communication with families to maintain inclusivity, particularly when most parents speak a different home language?
- When considering late enrolments, how do you balance realistic expectations for language acquisition with meaningful integration into the broader bilingual community?
- What ongoing strategies do you employ to monitor and adjust individual language plans, ensuring that each child's needs are met as they grow within a bilingual Montessori setting?

10. Contact information

Montessori Córdoba International School

C. Sansueña, 66, Nte. Sierra

14012 Córdoba

Spain

www.montessoricordoba.com

hello@montessoricordoba.com

Designing a bilingual program

1.b. Case study: trial & error at Madrid Montessori

Contents

madrid montessori
SCHOOL

Key takeaways

- Personal and professional **circumstances** shaped the vision for a small bilingual Montessori environment.
- Children's **differing home languages** revealed the complexities of balancing L1 and L2 for social integration.
- The **"one room schoolhouse"** approach illuminated practical challenges and underscored the value of a nurturing, multiage setting.
- Early emphasis on **English immersion** prompted further exploration of bilingual education models and their limitations.

Trial & error at Madrid Montessori: history of a language policy

When I first sat down to write the "origin" story of this school, I imagined the metaphor of a tree that in its roots represented certain values and people who informed my vision of what early childhood education should be – some are people you know like Maria Montessori, Paula Polk Lillard, Rebeca and Mauricio Wild ... and others you don't know, the constellation of people who are my intellectual and spiritual companions: friends, teachers and mentors.

Following my daughter Olivia's birth in 2003, new friends came into my life—women and men who also had children around the same age, met in a prenatal group and others met in the park. Since several of us did not have family close by in Madrid where we lived, we shared a wide array of experiences and spoke a lot about parenting. Books describing attachment parenting and Non-Violent Communication methods were read and referenced regularly. I believe that these friends, the books we read and discussed, provided the "seeds" of Madrid Montessori School that began to germinate in late 2004-2005.

Phase one: germination 2005 – 2006

Milestones:

- getting the project started;
- discovering the social and educational challenges of a class of children with different L1 and L2s;
- learning about bilingual education models.

Language objectives: Having a balance between the two languages

Instructional model: English immersion

The germination process accelerated when I faced a dual impasse in my life: a juncture of professional and personal uncertainty. Originally from New York where I did my graduate studies at Columbia University, I had been based in Madrid for about 5 years – I first came here to do research for my doctoral dissertation, which was a cultural history of Havana, Cuba. Madrid offered an attractive alternative to Manhattan from which to continue my research and writing. At the time that I was finishing my dissertation, I became pregnant and was offered an interesting position in a Health Policy Unit of the

World Health Organization in Madrid. The position, in many ways was ideal, since it was part-time and allowed me to keep my writing and research self-active while adjusting to motherhood.

In 2005, when Oli was 2, WHO decided to close their office in Madrid. I quickly ruled out the possibility of being an international bureaucrat and while I pursued academic positions in the US, nothing attractive appeared on the horizon. At the same time, I began to look at nurseries and schools in Madrid, and I was shocked by the homogeneity of what was on offer. Being American, I was also surprised that a three-year-old would begin school with a full school day. I began talking to some other, mostly expat mothers, who were also interested in offering their children a school experience in a less institutional setting.

The idea of starting a small school was floating in my mind and offered a solution to the quandary in my professional and personal life. A small nursery school seemed doable since I knew other mothers living in the centre of Madrid who were also looking for educational options in English in a smaller, more nurturing environment.

I began doing research into early childhood education. Once I read more of and about Maria Montessori and the implementation of her insights into human development and education, the choice was simple. If I was going to start a small school for my daughter and other like-minded parents, it would follow the Montessori method. To me, her insights and innovations were commonsensical. Also, since early childhood education was not my field, I appreciated that it was a method that had been around for 100 years, not the most recent fad.

I knew from the beginning that I would hire a Montessori-trained teacher or teachers to be in the classroom and that I would manage the administration. Two fortuitous things happened in early 2006: I was offered a place in a course Creación de empresa offered by the international firm Deloitte and a quick real estate search revealed what seemed like the ideal location for my one room schoolhouse.

The one room schoolhouse

All over the world children have been and continue to be educated in multi-age groups in whatever premises might be available. In the United States, a "one room schoolhouse" was shorthand for basic education for children who lived in rural areas in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the US, one

room schoolhouses also had a recognisable architectural design.

Source: https://www.cmich.edu/images/default-source/academic-affairs-division/clarke-historical-library/explore-the-collection/explore-online/michigan-material-statewide/one-room-schoolhouse/20211008_oneroomschool_image8_0080fd7eb98-6f99-466b-9551-899949a20d38.jpg?Status=Master&sfvrsn=f08333f6_3

Our original premises in the Calle Raimundo Lulio, 10 in Madrid echoed this vernacular in significant ways – three tall "church-like" windows lined the main long rectangular classroom, even the quirky wooden front door with small-paned glass conjured the one room schoolhouse in my mind.

We opened our doors in September 2006 with 13 children (aged 2.5 – 3.5) and two educators – one Montessori-trained monolingual Australian teacher and a bilingual educational psychologist from the Dominican Republic. Our original mission was to offer a friendly, nurturing place for small children to spend a few hours per day outside of their homes in the centre of Madrid.

I had decided that English would be the language used in the school, but I quickly began to doubt that choice when I saw the social dynamics during the first year. The majority of the children were English dominant and as a result, the Spanish-speaking minority was excluded and the group as a whole was not socially integrated. I began having long conversations with the Assistant, who was from the Dominican Republic but had learned her excellent English by attending an American school near where she grew up, and also getting to know a mother who enrolled her daughter and also happened to have a PhD in bilingual education and had worked in bilingual schools in New York City. With their help, I became familiar with the different models of bilingual education and the factors that would influence the choice of one over another.

The socio-linguistic context of Madrid in c. 2005 - 2010

Considerations such as the linguistic profiles of the children and their families and the status of the target language in the society where the school is located were taken on board. In those early years, about 60% of children had an English speaking parent, and the other 40% came from Spanish speaking homes. At the time in Madrid, a very small portion of Spaniards spoke English and the city itself did not feel very international. In other words, the socio-linguistic context of the place was Spanish. All local media was in Spanish and international films (shown on TV) were dubbed and there were only a handful of cinemas that projected films in "versión original" or V.O. with subtitles. Dubbing I now recognise as a strong indicator of a society's "openness" to multiple languages and cultures.

Given the mix of English dominant and Spanish dominant children at that time, I concluded that a dual language model of bilingualism made the most sense for the 2nd school year. Since we were a small group, communication with parents in both languages was possible and the first year the common language among the adults who worked in the school was English.

During the first 2006-07 school year, I was also fortunate to get to know Leonor March, a Spanish mother who had enrolled her elder daughter in the school. Following the birth of her second daughter that winter, she approached me about getting involved in the school. We began to meet regularly and found a natural affinity in vision and temperament. Leonor became an integral part of the troubleshooting and problem-solving that is an inherent part of any one room schoolhouse.

In 2008 she officially became my partner and co-owner of the school.

Pause and reflect

- How might local attitudes and practices around language learning influence the way you introduce or balance multiple languages in your classroom?
- What strategies could you employ to ensure that children with differing home languages support, rather than exclude, one another socially?
- In what ways do you adapt your Montessori environment or presentations to respond to the unique bilingual or multilingual profiles of each child?
- How do you determine whether immersion or a dual-language approach is more fitting for the children and families in your setting?

- When reflecting on your own journey or classroom context, how do professional and personal experiences shape the vision you hold for a bilingual Montessori program?

Phase two: seedling 2007 – 2009

Milestones:

- finding a larger premises; becoming legally recognised
- defining the role of English and Spanish in the school
- better understanding the needs of the children

Language objectives: Two languages and their cultures with a focus on oral language

Instructional model: Dual language. Bilingual Guide switching and Co-Guides

Early in our friendship Leonor told me that it was very important to her that the school continue through elementary. I was happy to take on this new commitment as long as I was not alone. Leonor took on responsibility for our real estate search - we needed a larger space with an independent outdoor area to accommodate an Elementary program, features our original location lacked. I remained responsible for general administration, human resources and parent relationships and we shared responsibility for pedagogical decisions.

We recognized that the decision to offer a bilingual learning environment had created a significant challenge for the school: having two Montessori-trained teachers in a classroom. This is difficult under the best circumstances because it is hard to find two people with complementary styles and the maturity and communication skills to share a demanding job. For us, this was more complicated because there were no Montessori training programs in Spain at the time and the scarcity of such programs in the Spanish-speaking world overall. Our first trained guides came from London.

Teacher profiles, adult-centric adaptations

In a short amount of time, we experimented with several different teachers- some with Montessori training, some with a background in education and the human qualities that we felt fit with the project. The literature I read at the time emphasized the importance of language separation in bilingual education. So we experimented with different colour-coded shelves for

materials in Spanish and English. When we had a bilingual guide who could use both languages with the children we asked her to switch the language she used on alternate days. It would get a bit confusing - for the teacher herself and for these young children, who were generally comfortable with just one of the languages, so we experimented with strategies like her wearing a certain scarf for the Spanish days.

In retrospect, I see these adaptations as adult-centric since I had not made the connection between children's sense of order at this age and how it could affect language development. Expecting 3 and 4-year-old children to switch between languages with the same adult was NOT realistic! The dream at the time would have been to have a two-way immersion model with an English and a Spanish classroom where the children would switch between them. We did not have the space for that so we did the best we could to expose the children to both languages.

Unsurprisingly, we observed that they had a strong preference for their L1 and would connect more with the guide who spoke that language. We did have one bilingual, trained Montessori teacher join us during the second year and what she noticed was that when she invited a Spanish-dominant child to a presentation in English, there might be some resistance, and vice versa, but most importantly and again in retrospect not surprisingly, the children did not tend to take work in their L2 off the shelf independently.

Travelling to explore options

Since it was 2007-08, the internet did not yet offer the extensive resources on every subject we take for granted today, so we brainstormed strategies among ourselves. I visited a bilingual school in Paris, in operation for 20 years, to observe how they implemented bilingualism in their Montessori environments for 3-6-year-olds. The school used a bilingual model with two trained guides in the same classroom – one speaking English and the other speaking French.

From my observations and other research, I learned that bilingual education models incorporate some method of "dividing" the languages for the children. In many traditional schools, this is achieved by teaching different subjects in different languages. However, in a Montessori Children's House, this approach did not seem feasible. Instead, having two trained teachers in the classroom appeared to be an effective strategy to ensure both languages were equally present.

In this Parisian school, parents were asked to choose which language their child would focus on for literacy work first. Since the school only served children up to age six, this choice was often influenced by the language of the elementary school the child would attend next.

Also, in 2007-08, I was figuring out our legal options for opening an Elementary Program. Our interactions with the local educational authorities (Consejería de educación de la Comunidad de Madrid) had not been fruitful. To say there was no interest in doing anything "outside of the box" is an understatement. The regulatory support for not entertaining our query was that in 2005, new legislation had been passed to promote the vision that any new school created would be on a scale much larger than our one room schoolhouse model. So, the formal reason that we could not become a Spanish school was because we were new and small.

We were aware of the international schools in Madrid and as an American, I quickly contacted the Embassy to find out what was necessary in order to have a school recognised in the American educational system. I was told that as a school outside of the US, I could choose to affiliate with any of the 7 accreditation organisations that accredit all private schools. Since I am from the East Coast, the Middle States Association with headquarters in Philadelphia was an easy choice and I visited their office in July 2007. We filed the application to be a "Candidate School" in the fall of that year.

2008-2009: crucial, busy school year

While we continued learning about bilingual education, that year we also:

- pressed forward with our property search
- Leonor enrolled in a 3-6 AMI diploma course
- I travelled to the US to visit Montessori Elementary programs

A key aspect of our mission was to keep our school in the heart of Madrid, but we knew from the outset that finding a suitable new site would be challenging. In reality, the process proved even more complicated than we had anticipated. Zoning issues, a perpetually hot real estate market, and the scarcity of properties within the city that included outdoor spaces significantly slowed our progress.

During this time, our daughters were growing older, and in hindsight, their

needs were likely the main reason we persevered even when prospects seemed bleak. In the fall of 2008, I travelled to the United States to observe Montessori Elementary programs in the New York area. Simultaneously, we began interviewing candidates for the Elementary position, despite not yet having a space to house the program.

As we prepared to make compromises on both space and location, we unexpectedly discovered a charming house in an ideal neighbourhood. In this case, the shifting real estate market worked in our favour: the house had been on the market for some time, and the owners ultimately decided to rent it out. In March 2009, we signed the lease, finally securing a home for our school's future.

Following a frantic renovation and clean-up, we settled into Calle Henares, 13, a quiet cul-de-sac in a residential area of Madrid. With lots of trees and birds chirping one would never know we are a block away from Calle Serrano, one of Madrid's major avenues. We now had two Children's Houses, our own outside play space and a kitchen. Again, the help of a mother in the school was fundamental in setting up our kitchen to serve hot, whole food, organic vegetarian dishes with whole wheat sourdough bread, prepared daily in the school kitchen.

Pause and reflect

- How do local regulations and cultural context influence your decisions about space, staffing, and language models in your Montessori environment?
- What steps can you take to address children's varying language preferences whilst maintaining a cohesive dual language practice?
- How might you remain open and creative in seeking new premises or resources that adequately serve both Montessori and bilingual objectives?
- When considering accreditation and formal recognition, how do you balance administrative demands with your educational vision and the children's best interests?

Phase three: our sapling years 2010 - 2012

Milestones:

- settling into new premises, opening new environments
- starting an elementary program
- defining the role of English and Spanish in the school: focus on literacy
- aligning the profiles of the teachers with the needs of the children

Language objectives: Bilingualism & Biliteracy

Instructional model: Co-guides; Guide, Assistant

As our roots began to take hold, we had a lot of growing to do in those years. They were marked by opening a second 3-6 classroom and doubling enrollment followed by the addition of our Elementary program, and of course, continued development of our Children's House and Bilingual Program. During this time Leonor finished her diploma course and entered as a guide in one of the Children's Houses. All of these efforts culminated in achieving full recognition from the American educational authorities.

In this growth phase, our pedagogical attention shifted from oracy (in isolation) to literacy. By now it was clear that our initial focus on bilingual education was now shifting to consider how to integrate those principles into the Montessori philosophy that places the child and their individual pace at the centre. Additionally, the demographics of the families meant that we still had approximately 40% of children with English as their first language, 35% with Spanish as their L1 and 5% with a third language as their L1.

The role of the "mother tongue" in early childhood education

I understood that L1 was literally their mother's language. This was probably because the children I was observing and categorising on class lists according to their L1, L2 and L3 in order to help teachers understand their linguistic background. In addition to their date of birth, this seemed to be the most relevant information for teachers to be aware of. Since we also had children who had both a Spanish and an English speaking parent I observed that at this young age (in 2011 all were 7 years and under) that even the most bilingual had a slight preference for their mother's language. I then in turn classified their L1 as their mother's language, also noting them as bilingual since their comfort with both languages also needed to be recognised. The children whose mothers spoke a language other than English or Spanish were also an interesting group to reflect on in terms of their linguistic development

which was observed in the school. Of these children, those with a Spanish speaking father showed a clear preference in school for Spanish.

This was an important detail to isolate because in figuring out how to introduce literacy in two languages in a Children's House and wanting to follow their individual, natural inclinations it was clear that we could not introduce both in a programmatic way. Once again, after more trial and error, we discovered that starting with literacy in their L1 and coaching the teachers to observe the signs of when the children became open to the L2, worked well.

> It should be noted here that this is where some confusion arose in distinguishing between the L1 and L2 of the child and not confusing it with the L1 and L2 of the school. As an American school, it seemed clear that the L1 was English and the L2 Spanish and given our success with introducing literacy in the L1 of the child and when they started to consolidate their skills in L1 shift to the L2 we began to imagine a Bilingual Elementary program.

We took the concept of language separation seriously during these years and the adults had a "one person, one language" (OPOL) policy when we were interacting with the children. However, there were exceptions to respect emotional needs, for example, when a child was upset or for the new 3-year-olds who needed to understand the ground rules to feel secure in school.

When interacting with adults, we prioritised clear communication. For instance, our staff meetings were partially bilingual to ensure that everyone could both understand and express themselves effectively. When working with parents, those of us who were bilingual adapted to each family's language preference, switching between Spanish and English as needed. While this language-switching was an excellent mental exercise, it could also be quite tiring, especially for someone like me who did not grow up bilingual.

To foster engagement, we have always encouraged parents to communicate in the language they feel most comfortable with, whether Spanish or English, with translation provided when necessary. We make this policy clear from the very first Open House, ensuring families know they can choose their preferred language from the start.

This practice prompted me to reflect on the role of strict language separation in our school with the children. Intellectually, I understood the theoretical

justification for it. However, observing the children in our environment, I noticed that more than half were already exposed to two or more languages outside of school. Even those who weren't directly exposed still encountered multilingualism as part of their daily reality at school. For instance, even the youngest children were aware that a friend's mother spoke to them in another language, such as Polish, Italian, or Japanese.

This made me question whether children in multilingual settings might develop greater mental flexibility around language compared to children raised in monolingual environments. While this idea might seem self-evident to us in 2025, it certainly was not in 2010. This question, however, proved to be highly productive for me. Returning to it repeatedly led me to a critical insight: context plays a fundamental role in both language acquisition and language learning.

Launching the elementary program

The Elementary Program was launched in September 2010 with 7 children and one AMI trained Guide from the United States. Facing the reality of the expansive Elementary curriculum we realised that the bilingual aspect of that program was going to have to be built over the course of several school years. In its second year, with 13 children we were able to add a multilingual AMI trained Guide who spoke Spanish and English and made advances in the implementation of the comprehensive curriculum. In September 2012 we were thrilled to observe the full complement of 6 – 9 year olds adding a whole new dimension to the program from a Montessori perspective.

From the perspective of integrating bilingual education into a Montessori elementary, the results raised some questions. This was in part due to the manner in which we chose to support the newly trained guides by dividing the curriculum between them by subjects in terms of offering lessons. We did not see this as an endpoint but rather as a way to support them as they gained experience meeting the needs of children of multiple ages and abilities.

Our Children's House program, with a total of 50 children across two classrooms, was consolidating in terms of Montessori practice and the language program. In 2010, the administration and faculty collaboratively developed and clearly articulated the school's first language policy. This policy emphasizes fostering bilingualism through an immersive approach, ensuring balanced exposure to both languages while respecting the

developmental needs of each child. This clarity of vision initially empowered the school to confidently address the unique challenges associated with operating as a bilingual Montessori institution.

AMI Montessori training was arriving in Spain and we were very proud to host a Children's House Assistants Course in English and Spanish in June 2011. The Greek trainer Irene Fafalios offered the course in English and Leonor translated into Spanish. Participants came from all corners of Spain. Having grown up in London, Irene herself was bilingual so we began a long series of conversations about the needs of young bilingual children and she introduced us to another AMI trainer, Guadalupe Borbolla, a Mexican trainer who has a school outside of Mexico City with English as a second language.

Pause and reflect

- How do you determine when it is beneficial to uphold strict language separation, and when flexibility serves the child's emotional and linguistic needs better?
- Which strategies could you adopt to help children recognise and celebrate their own and their peers' multilingual identities, thus promoting a sense of community?
- What observations guide you in deciding how and when to introduce literacy in a child's L1 or L2, and how do you adapt your approach for children with multiple home languages?
- How do you support new or less experienced colleagues in implementing an immersive bilingual model, ensuring both professional growth and continuity for the children?

Phase four: small tree 2013-2015

Milestones:

- Opening Calle Arga, 11 for Elementary (EL)
- Opening first Infant Community (IC) class in Sept 2014
- Addressing fissures in the "Bilingual Dream" with significant changes in the Language Policy, less Spanish, increased English
- Acting beyond the school: host national conference, welcoming students from training courses

- Signed lease contract Calle Genil, 11 in June 2015

Language learning objectives:

- IC objective was exposure to both EN/ES
- CH bilingual with literacy first in L1
- EL instruction was only in EN, but children were free to do work in ES

Instructional model: Bilingual IC, CH and EL; Co-Guides and Guide/Assistant

By 2013-2014 we filled nearly every square meter in Calle Henares, which meant that economically we had arrived at a comfortable place, but as is the case with a successful school this also meant that there was a need to expand to accommodate more children, which was our situation.

Fortunately, our previous extensive real estate search for the current location had created solid relationships with real estate brokers, so we mobilized those contacts in our new search for a second location in the neighbourhood. We were aware of a large property that could accommodate the whole school and had heard that the current tenants would be leaving to relocate to a new, large complex in a suburb, but that move was not going to happen before our need to expand.

One of the agents found another house that was for rent that was about a 10 minute walk from Calle Henares that was the perfect amount of space for our large Elementary classroom, an office, a library and room to continue to grow. Luckily the building had last been used as the offices of a marketing company and therefore the renovations were not very extensive.

In September 2014 we inaugurated our new location at Calle Arga, 11.

Continued tension between the "bilingual dream" and Montessori philosophy.

Children's House continued with the strategy of introducing literacy in the child's L1 and then the L2 and in 2014-15 we opened the first Infant Community, initially with Spanish-speaking guides but with the goal of making it bilingual when we had a trained English speaker.

Although we knew that it would take several years to build we remained committed to creating a fully bilingual program where the children leaving Elementary would be bilingual and biliterate. The challenge of finding trained guides with English was proving difficult and we had to be more flexible with the amount of lessons in Spanish. This of course meant that the children were doing more follow-up work in Spanish and there was less and less English used.

This presented serious pedagogical questions since while we knew this reality was moving us away from our "bilingual dream", from a purely Montessori perspective it seemed more aligned with the philosophy since the Spanish-dominant children, who were now a larger portion of the class, could explore the cosmic curriculum in a more authentic way.

During this time two 3-6 diploma courses, one led by Guadalupe Borbolla in the summers in northern Spain and another in Málaga in southern Spain with another Mexican, Claudia Guerrero as the trainer. As happens around the world the presence of these courses accelerated the rebirth of Montessori education in Spain.

In March 2013 we hosted a national Montessori conference in the school. I had joined the Board of the Spanish Montessori Association and it seemed important to bring the growing number of practitioners together to share experiences. The day was organized into two sessions of "work groups" – those in the morning according to professional responsibilities and in the afternoon specialised topics like "building parent loyalty" and "bilingualism in Montessori environments". In that session, Guadalupe challenged me on whether two languages could have equal status in a Montessori classroom. I listened but I was still holding onto the dream.

In May of that year, I observed for a week in an Upper Elementary classroom at Guadalupe's school, Colegio Montessori de Tepozlán, in Cuernavaca, Mexico so I was able to see an experienced Guide and how that school organized the presence of English in the classrooms with a Bilingual Assistant. In addition to her assistant responsibilities, she also was the reference in the classroom for English and with the support of the Guide had developed materials to support spelling and English grammar. I brought back a suitcase full of Montessori materials in Spanish.

Montessori in Spain

Maria Montessori had based herself in Spain for approximately 20 years from 1916 when she offered one of her early International Courses until 1936 when the outbreak of the Civil War forced her and her family to flee to the Netherlands. She was initially invited to offer her course by Joan Palau Vera who had attended the 1915 course in Rome and visited her Casa de Bambini. He saw the potential of applying her work to his task of building the public school system in the Catalan region of Spain so invited her to offer her course in Barcelona in 1916. They enticed her to

> stay to oversee the opening of many new schools by offering her a Lab School where she could continue her more formal research. Sadly in the early 1920's she had a falling out with a local educational official for her refusal to allow politics into her schools and her lab school was closed. People she had trained continued to open and run schools using her method, but she did not allow her name to be used. In the 1920's there were 30-some schools following her method in Barcelona and the nearby region.

In regards to the School Language Policy and Instructional Model 2014 - 15, our 9th school year marked a consequential shift.

The enrollment growth in Elementary was creating staffing challenges, especially for English speakers. Generally, the school had been lucky enough to attract teachers because of its growing reputation as a place that aspired to high-quality Montessori practice.

I had moved my office to Calle Arga in large part to keep a close eye on the Elementary program since I knew it was experiencing "growing pains." The multilingual Guide had asked to start doing some lessons in Spanish. He explained that, as the children were getting older, he did not feel confident enough in his English for certain topics.

Given the challenges of finding Elementary trained guides with strong English, we had sponsored an American 3-6 Guide who had been with the school to do 6-12 training in Bergamo, Italy that school year. We did have a talented multilingual English Specialist/Assistant for a few years, but we also had to hire a Spanish speaker to be an Assistant. The adults designated to speak English with the children had to be very disciplined and that can be challenging, particularly when there is a colleague who needs to be addressed in Spanish.

This meant that I would often step into the classroom to use their kitchen to get a cup of tea and I would only hear Spanish. We had observed for years that the personalities of bilingual children could play an important role in tipping the amount of English used. Quite literally, a loud extrovert who speaks English influenced the environment the same way as having a child who only spoke English and no Spanish. In other words, there are always moving parts that are beyond our control.

For example, that school year was also the first of our Infant Community with two Spanish-speaking trained guides. Among the 12, mostly not quite speaking children, there was one very social boy with an American mother

who would sing songs in English while working or walking around the classroom.

We had skilled bilingual guides in the Children's Houses who were able to use Spanish more at the beginning of the school year with the new children and know when the child was feeling secure and then shift to English with gestures. We came to think of this strategy as "slow immersion." They were able to use their strong observation skills to know when to introduce literacy presentations in the L2.

After much more observation and discussions about the situation in Elementary, I had become quite concerned that the children were not developing strong academic skills in either language! As an American school, we had to prioritise English and to do that, we had to think of creative ways to minimize the presence of Spanish.

There was a tense parent meeting that was held to announce this decision and detail the plan. As was always the case when we met with parents to discuss the school's language program there was a variety of strong opinions. There were those (mostly Spanish speaking) who were thrilled because from their perspective the school had not been doing enough to promote the use of English. There were some English-speaking parents who were disappointed because they felt their child needed more exposure to Spanish in school. In fact, an American parent, with strong opinions, put me on the spot with somewhat aggressive questions leading me to declare: "Please don't worry, Spanish will not vanish!"

We all chuckled about the rhyme I inadvertently created, diffusing some of the tension. I explained that the plan included incorporating more English-speaking guides, starting with the person training in Bergamo who would be returning for the next school year. This shift in Elementary was coordinated with some tweaks in Children's House, where we were also starting to question the effectiveness of our literacy plan since it was creating unproductive divisions in the Elementary group.

In order to calibrate expectations, I also explained that following this shift in the 2015-16 school year we would have to observe a 3-year cycle to evaluate the results.

The phased approach was employed prioritising an increased number of native English-speaking teachers, the slow immersion approach in the 3-6 classrooms with literacy being introduced in English as well as making English

the academic language in Elementary where all lessons were given in English and the Spanish language and culture lessons the children received were given by a language specialist (a trained Spanish elementary teacher). In other words, the school was no longer bilingual in terms of academic content. We had slowly been removing some materials in Spanish from the classroom, like word problems, geometry cards, nomenclatures and reference books.

In May 2015, I wrote a brief declarative document titled "Beyond Language Policy to Linguistic Identity," which I believe was shared via email. In this document, I outlined the need to transition our instructional model to English immersion and integrate this approach into the school's identity. This shift was prompted by the realisation that our experiment with bilingualism in the elementary program had not achieved the desired outcomes. The first paragraph of the document is included below:

> We have reached the point in our journey as a school that we need to define our linguistic identity. With what we have learned over the years through the different language policies that we have employed attempting in each moment to best meet the needs of the children, we are now at a point where we have serious reasons for questioning the viability of a bilingual model for Elementary, hence it only makes sense to move to a situation where we begin the immersion model from as young an age as possible.

In retrospect, I now see that this was a crucial moment of recognising the limitations of a language policy that lacked a significant effort to include "cultural" components in the school identity and practices. The recognition of the mixed results from our 2008–2014 implementation of a bilingual model was a result of the ongoing tensions between our mandate to offer English as the primary language of instruction and our commitment to Montessori philosophy, which made us resistant to imposing language use.

Pause and reflect

- How might you integrate cultural elements into your language policy so that both linguistic and cultural identities are honoured in the classroom?
- In which situations would you consider adjusting your approach to language use? What criteria would guide these decisions in practice?
- What strategies do you employ when families and staff hold differing views on the balance of languages?

Phase five: mature tree 2016-2018

Milestones:

- Move to one definitive location, Calle Genil, 11
- Shift from bilingual model to English immersion model
- Benefits of increasing EN presence CI and CH and making EN the academic language of EL become apparent
- Squaring what the culture of language learning should look like in our school

Language learning objectives:

Infant community: Two trained Guides OPOL, building vocabulary ES introducing EN

CH: Slow immersion, English target language

Elementary: English target/academic language, Spanish literacy, culture

Instructional model:

Infant community: 2 Guides, one EN speaking, one ES alternating roles of Guide and Assistant

CH: Bilingual Guide, EN speaking assistant, introduce literacy in English, ES materials removed from the environment

Elementary: EN speaking Guide, EN speaking Assistant or Co-Guide, Language Specialist for ES lessons offered in the afternoon work cycle

Our understanding of bilingual education in our school was firmly anchored in our commitment to the holistic development of each child. We did not feel we could overlook the needs of children from Spanish-speaking homes, to be able to express themselves and explore new concepts in their native language. This had left things a bit muddled in the day-to-day with the children, which was why we needed to look beyond the "Language Policy" or the technical details of how the language program was organized and implemented, to the school's linguistic identity, or how the goals were understood and alive in the school.

We were aware that the majority of parents had selected the school because of the Montessori pedagogy although many of them prioritised English as well. We saw the need to mobilise this belief among the parents as an indirect way to motivate the children, to move away from doing things in English "because we have to". Once we began to remind parents to talk to their children

about their desire for them to speak fluent English, for whatever personal reasons the parents might have, we did see a change in the attitude of some children who had been more resistant.

We looked for other ways to stimulate interest in English use through special projects with English-speaking specialists, pen pals, setting up a system where children in Elementary would read to groups in the Children's House.

During this period we were also investigating assessment strategies for English learning and deciding what series of levelled readers to invest in.

In the classrooms, we were seeing the effects of making English the "academic language" and reducing the number of hours and follow-up work in Spanish. While we were pleased with the results, we did continue to have discussions regarding the implications regarding our commitment to the Montessori philosophy.

Epilogue: 2018 - present

Since I stepped away from the day-to-day life of the school in December 2017, I have invited Joanna Stewart, the current Head of School to bring us to the present day. Joanna joined the school in 2010 as a Children's House guide and has since worked in Administration during our accreditation process, then as an Elementary Guide from 2015, moving into this leadership position in August 2023.

Instructional model:

Infant community: 2 guides: one EN speaking, one ES alternating roles of Guide and Assistant or ES Guide and EN assistant who takes on lead role in the afternoon with 2 ½ to 3 year-olds

CH: Bilingual Guide, EN speaking assistant, introduce literacy in English

Elementary: EN speaking Guide, native EN speaking Assistant or Co-Guide, We currently have two Language Specialists providing Spanish as a Second Language (ES) lessons for children in the 6-9 and 9-12 environments during both morning and afternoon work cycles.

Over the years, we have observed an increased receptivity to English among children who have progressed through our Infant Community program, particularly due to the consistent use of the OPOL approach.

However, the pandemic presented significant challenges in maintaining this trajectory for children who were between 3 and 6 years old during that time (born between 2014-2017). Consistent exposure to English, especially structured practice with English phonemes, was severely disrupted due to lockdowns, remote learning limitations, and other constraints. This disruption has had a noticeable impact on literacy development. Among this cohort, we observe that 20% of children have not met the expected reading benchmarks for English by their third year of Elementary.

To address these gaps, we have implemented targeted remedial support in small groups, focusing on phonemic awareness and reading skills. However, this effort has been further complicated by challenges in retaining experienced bilingual Children's House guides. Since 2021, several bilingual American guides have either relocated to the U.S. or transitioned to other professional fields, affecting continuity in our English language instruction.

We remain committed to supporting children in developing strong literacy skills in English and have adapted our strategies to meet their needs effectively. One significant adjustment has been pivoting our hiring practices. Instead of sponsoring guides from the U.S. for work visas, we now prioritize hiring guides with ties to Madrid who possess the essential human qualities to meet the developmental needs of children.

In the elementary program, we recognize that having native English-speaking guides is less critical as long as their English is grammatically correct. This also allows children to experience the diversity of accents in which English is spoken. Currently, our elementary team includes guides and Assistants from India, Spain, and the U.S., reflecting this inclusive approach.

Since 2019, our elementary program has undergone significant changes. Initially, we had one 6-9 environment and one 6-12 environment. However, during the 2020-2021 academic year, COVID restrictions led us to divide the 6-12 group into two smaller groups of 20 children. The bilingual co-guides, who had worked together in the 6-12 environment for five years, each took leadership of one group, continuing to provide instruction and classroom life in English.

Between 2021 and 2024, our upper elementary community grew to a healthy size of 40 children. Once the group reached 27 children, we relocated them to the sunny top floor of our building, where they now enjoy indoor and outdoor terrace spaces, as well as a quiet room. This expansion necessitated

the addition of another Guide and Assistant to the team.

Today, our entire elementary group consists of 87 children: 39 in the 9-12 community (organized into two sub-groups with one main Guide as their reference, sharing a large environment) and 48 in two 6-9 environments. Our team includes:

- 4 guides (3 bilingual native Spanish speakers),
- 1 native Spanish-speaking assistant in 9-12,
- 2 native English-speaking assistants in 6-9,
- 2 part-time English assistants for 9-12 (focusing on English reading and writing workshops),
- 2 L2 Spanish specialists.

The following is an excerpt from school communication to families and staff about languages in the school:

> Madrid Montessori is an international community. Many families are Spanish, although there are a significant number of mixed-nationality families where one (or more) of the languages spoken at home is not Spanish. Some children are exposed only to Spanish at home, some to Spanish and English, while some are exposed to one or more languages that are neither Spanish nor English. Spanish is an important language of informal communication between families and children, although English is spoken and understood throughout the community.
>
> It is an enriching experience for children to hear other languages and to be exposed to different cultures, and Madrid Montessori strives to support its international community.

Communication with and between current parents

> As Madrid Montessori is an American school, all formal communication between the school and families is in English.
>
> And regarding language use in the classroom:
>
> In the Infant Community (18 months to 3 years old), one of the guides is a native English speaker and the other is a native Spanish speaker. At this age, it is especially important that children create an emotional bond with the guides. This is why Spanish, which is the mother tongue of most of the children, is equally present in the classroom as is English.
>
> In the Children's House, most presentations and work are done in English, although the guides can communicate with the youngest children in

Spanish, if needed. If the child's mother tongue is Spanish, the guide may speak in Spanish to help create and strengthen the emotional bond and to facilitate a smoother transition into the environment. Soon after the adaptation period is concluded (after roughly six weeks), the classroom shifts towards a smooth immersion into English.

In Elementary, presentations and work are done in English, although there is a Spanish specialist teacher to support the curriculum established by the local authority (Consejería de Educación) in Spanish language, history, and geography. It is important that children become competent writers and speakers in both languages. By the end of the six-year Elementary cycle, we see our graduates as fully bilingual learners.

Language is a living component in our international community, and the school may occasionally need to implement shifts or slight changes in our language policy if we see a need for it. We regularly revise our language policy and keep track of children's progress in order to prepare them in the best way possible for our programs and for life after Madrid Montessori.

Pause and reflect

- In which ways do you adapt your bilingual environment to address children's emotional needs without compromising linguistic consistency?
- How might you respond to the challenge of maintaining focus on bilingualism as you navigate staff roles and subject divisions in an expanding Montessori elementary programme?
- What strategies support children's mental flexibility and engagement when they are regularly exposed to more than two languages, both at school and at home?

Contact information

Madrid Montessori School

c/ Genil 11, El Viso, 28002 Madrid

Spain

www.madridmontessori.org, *info@madridmontessori.org*

Designing a bilingual program

1.1. Bilingual program design: laying the foundation

Contents

Key takeaways

- **Bilingualism** fosters cognitive, cultural, and social benefits, enhancing problem-solving, empathy, and respect for diversity.
- Clearly **articulate the vision** for bilingual education to motivate stakeholders and highlight its cognitive and cultural benefits.
- **Assess the socio-linguistic landscape** of your school's location to understand how local language attitudes and exposure impact the success of bilingual programs.
- **Align** the school program objectives with community needs and values.

1. Introduction

Schools that aspire to integrate bilingual education must first establish a clear "why" behind their initiative, articulating a vision that unites practical aims with idealistic aspirations. The text below examines how schools define their bilingual programs by investigating socio-linguistic dynamics, community needs and programmatic possibilities. By exploring both the broader intercultural benefits of bilingualism and the pragmatic considerations of staffing, finances and learning environments, it underscores the importance of balancing ambition with context-specific realities. Such an approach fosters shared purpose within the community, ensuring that educators, families and learners remain committed to the vision and equipped to adapt as circumstances evolve.

1. Framing the vision: the why

The inspirational speaker and author Simon Sinek has built his successful career advising individuals and business leaders to focus on *the why* as the key to better communication (Sinek, 2011). Some of us, in the process of defining or articulating the mission of our school, may have looked at his TED Talks, books or website for tools and inspiration.

When defining the vision of a school's bilingual program, WHY? is an important question to ask since it is essential to how you think and speak about this aspect of your school. The school leader has a central role in communicating the reason for offering more than one language and the specific objectives that motivate the school to pursue these goals.

Schools typically decide to include a second language in their curriculum for a combination of practical and idealistic reasons. This Field Guide focuses on schools that have chosen English as their target language. These schools may adopt a second-language model, where the local language remains the primary academic medium, or an immersion model, where English plays a central role in instruction. Whether the goal is to achieve full bilingualism, biliteracy and multicultural competence, or to develop a more functional proficiency in English for leisure and professional purposes, the overarching aim is to equip children with valuable life skills.

It is no surprise that both educators and parents prioritise opportunities that

promote openness, mental flexibility and an appreciation for diversity. These so-called "soft skills" reflect an ethical commitment to preparing children for meaningful engagement in a complex world. Their importance is increasingly recognised, as seen in the prominence given to these skills alongside academic achievement on school websites, in articles and in educational policy discussions.

Moreover, scientific research supports the benefits of growing up with more than one language. Neuroscientific studies have shown that multilingual individuals may enjoy cognitive benefits, such as enhanced problem-solving skills, memory and attention control[1]. These advantages can extend throughout a person's life, enhancing communication skills, cultural sensitivity and interpersonal relationships. Multilingual individuals tend to have the ability to connect with a wider range of people, fostering empathy, understanding and collaboration. Please see subsection 4. References and resources, for additional studies and research about the benefits of speaking multiple languages.

These intentions and ideals are the foundation of each school's vision of what their bilingual program aims to achieve. Converting this vision into reality will be discussed in detail throughout Part 1. This section, however, reflects on socio-linguistic and other structural factors that determine what is possible in any given situation.

1.1. Priorities & Parameters: Balancing aspirational goals with practical considerations

A bilingual program is no small undertaking, it requires planning, determination, stamina and patience. Deciding to try being a bilingual school or to run a pilot program will inevitably lead to moments of frustration, disappointment and perhaps thwarted expectations from some or all constituents in the school community. However, do not be discouraged if your intentions are serious and your motivation apparent. Successful bilingual programs can be created with thoughtful design, realistic goals and careful management of expectations. This section of the field guide has been created to help those responsible for program design and organisation cover all bases and set realistic expectations for progress with all school constituents.

The examination of this process that follows assumes a holistic approach to planning and organisation that mirrors the educational philosophy of this Field

Guide's authors, which considers all aspects of human development. Our ideas and recommendations align with a systemic approach to educational planning that values the perspectives and knowledge of community stakeholders. For ease of explanation, we divide these processes into digestible parts, but it is essential to keep the vision of the whole. Remember that each part, whether a strength in your program or a weakness, will affect the whole culture of learning and community within the school. Because language is a part of identity, the successes or frustrations of your bilingual program can have a far-reaching ripple effect on school life.

Balancing practical considerations with aspirational goals will help ensure that the implementation or transition to a bilingual program is well-planned. Consider several factors as you develop or review your school's program.

- The local school market: what competitors are offering and how will your offering distinguish itself? Where are graduates from your school likely to continue studying?
- The labour market: do you have or can you recruit teachers with the qualifications and linguistic profile?
- Economic capacity: can your school expand the number of classrooms and invest in training and materials the program requires?

Practical considerations are based on the goals you aspire to achieve and in turn, your aspirations may change once you are fully aware of the practical matters. For instance, if your goal is to ensure that children in your monolingual school community achieve biliteracy by the age of 12, you need to plan for extensive exposure to a second language. This requires teachers with strong language skills and a school-wide focus on this objective. However, if the reality is that your teaching team has limited language proficiency in the target language, the children will have limited exposure to the second language; you may need to adjust your aspirational goal. For instance, you might consider aiming for good conversational English skills for children by age 12.

1.2. Translating vision into actionable steps for program development

In order to turn the vision into practical steps for program development, it's important to analyse the specific skills and resources the school community needs to get started. These needs will vary depending on the context of each school. By identifying the gaps between the consensus, knowledge, skills and

resources you currently have and what you need to start the program, you can create an action plan to guide you through the process of ensuring that the program is built on solid foundations.

To create a successful program, it's essential to have:

- commitment (coming from the vision, consensus and incentive)
- capacity (resources)
- competence (skills)
- conceptual understanding (knowledge of language learning).

Conduct an honest assessment of these areas and create an action plan to bridge the gaps between where you are and where you need to be in each area.

A timeline of anticipated program development can be helpful for the community. Having a visual representation of the time required will help staff and families understand the duration of the process. Learning languages takes time (see section 2.7. Stages in children's additional language acquisition), and staff and families may be impatient to see results. It is also important to explain from the outset that language development differs from individual to individual. Some children may start speaking English within a year, while others may take four or five years.

When you explain your language program to the school community, it's important to communicate that its development is an ongoing process. The plans will be adjusted based on the progress and opportunities we observe and evaluate along the way (see sections 1.a. and 1.b., the school case studies that precede this section, to appreciate the development process of two bilingual schools). This responsive approach to program planning and development will be further discussed throughout Part 1 of the Field Guide.

Going through the review and planning process as a team, ideally with parent community representatives, will help avoid misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations. Establishing a shared community project will also help distribute the responsibility and increase the feeling of shared purpose.

1.3. The rationale behind bilingual education

In many places in today's world, the idea of offering a child the opportunity to to speak more than one language sells itself, while in other more solidly

monolingual places, it can still be a stretch to argue for this as an educational priority. School leaders face two key challenges when promoting bilingual education.

- First, they must educate families about the benefits of bilingualism during the initial enrollment phase to attract them to the program.
- Second, they need to reassure parents whose children (often around ages 8-9) appear to be progressing more slowly than their peers in traditional monolingual schools, explaining that this temporary difference is a natural part of the bilingual learning process and that the long-term advantages are worth the investment.

Understanding these challenges highlights why it's essential to clearly articulate the purpose and benefits of your program to families at various stages of their children's educational journey.

Those with experience in child-centred educational programs know that considering each child's individual needs and stage of development is complex and requires planning, flexibility, stamina and a strong vision to sustain the effort. Implementing a bilingual program adds another layer of complexity, so if the school community can embrace a deep sense of purpose, the required effort can be sustained. The good news is that when we thoroughly consider language, it becomes clear that its purpose and impact are far-reaching. This realisation can even be surprising, especially for those of us educated in monolingual communities.

"To have another language is to possess a second soul."

attributed to Charlemagne (8th century),
as referenced in Boroditsky, 2018.

The benefits of bilingual education are multifaceted. Firstly, learning an additional language can greatly impact an individual's cognitive function and perception of the world. Scientific evidence supports the benefits of bilingualism for individuals and understanding these benefits can provide the school community with a unifying goal. When presented with the evidence, stakeholders are better equipped to recognise the significant benefits of introducing a bilingual program. (See Bilingual Montessori webinar #3 "Language Learning and Children's Cognitive Development")

Secondly, it is important to carefully consider the intercultural impact of

multilingualism and align it with the school community's existing values. Making this alignment and the personal benefits visible will incentivise the community to persevere when faced with challenges. Establishing a consensus within the community is crucial and, as far as possible, everyone should commit to moving forward together. The aim is to reach a point where the community can say: "This is where we want to go and we know why. We are all committed to this vision."

1.4. Individual and societal benefits of multilingualism

The benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism are profound. The transformative processes involved significantly impact individuals and their relationship with the world around them. This includes developing the capacity to observe and understand cultural differences and view one's own culture and customs through a new lens.

In addition to these cognitive benefits, our use of language shapes our perception and understanding of the world, going far beyond simply conveying events and actions. Variations in grammar and syntax between languages can reflect how various cultures perceive events and ideas. Cognitive scientist Lera Boroditsky discusses fascinating examples in her well-known TED Talk "How language shapes the way we think".

For example, English speakers tend to emphasise the subject of an action more than Spanish speakers. In studies, when shown a video of someone accidentally breaking a vase:

- English-speaking participants focus more on the person responsible;
- Spanish-speaking participants remember less about the culprit.

This difference is reflected in how each language typically expresses the event:

- English: "He broke the vase";
- Spanish: "El jarrón se rompió" (The vase broke itself).

Other studies demonstrate how bilingual or multilingual people may change their attitudes and perceptions depending on the language they are using. A 1960s study by Susan Ervin-Tripp, which examined Japanese–English bilingual women's responses to questions about their values or life priorities, revealed that bilinguals can have remarkably different personalities depending on the

language spoken. Subsequent research has supported these findings.

Multilinguals generally have access to more than one culture, potentially fostering greater tolerance of differences. They not only share a language with more people, but the shared language can cultivate a sense of kinship, leading to more positive attitudes towards others. The ability to switch between languages and consequently, cultures may allow multilinguals to think critically about the values and practices of their cultures. This can foster a capacity for impartiality and willingness to adopt others' perspectives.

These personal and societal benefits contribute to building respect for difference and an increased capacity for tolerance, understanding and compromise.

Pause and reflect

- How can you clearly articulate the "why" behind your bilingual program to both students and parents given your specific context?
- How do you balance aspirational goals for bilingualism with the practical realities of your school's resources and teacher expertise?
- What strategies can you use to ensure that both the cognitive and intercultural benefits of bilingualism are effectively communicated to the school community?
- How can you foster a shared sense of purpose and commitment within your school community?

2. Understanding context and community

2.1. Delving into the socio-linguistic landscape of a school's location

The decision to introduce a second language in a school is a significant one, influenced by a blend of practical and aspirational factors. This Field Guide focuses on the schools that choose English as the second language, in addition to the local language, although some schools may also offer a third language. Whether a school aims for full bilingualism, biliteracy and multicultural competence or simply wants students to have functional comfort

with English for leisure and professional reasons, the goal is to provide children with additional life skills.

Before a school decides to educate children to be bilingual, it's vital to thoroughly assess its unique context. This careful evaluation is an important step before embarking on the complex journey of implementing a bilingual program. A school should consider its location's socio-linguistic environment and recognise the impact of other structural and sociological factors, as these elements can affect what can be accomplished in a bilingual school program. Let's consider some of these influencing factors that have the potential to shape the success or failure of a program.

2.2. The sociolinguistic landscape of your school and its location

When considering the sociolinguistic environment of your school, ask yourself whether the surrounding area is multilingual or monolingual. Often, we overlook the cultural and linguistic context in which we operate. However, stepping back to objectively analyse the sociolinguistic reality of your school's location can help you better understand your objectives.

Multilingual societies

In multilingual environments, people are generally more receptive to linguistic diversity because:

- they often speak multiple languages;
- they are exposed to language diversity through government policies, advertisements, and various forms of media;
- multilingual societies tend to be multicultural, fostering openness to different languages.

This societal openness toward linguistic diversity typically creates an environment where languages other than the dominant one are more readily embraced and used.

Monolingual societies

In predominantly monolingual environments, openness to linguistic diversity is usually more limited. People in these societies may have little to no exposure to languages beyond their own. While they might interact with individuals who speak other languages, these interactions are often confined to specific

contexts, such as family conversations or visits to culturally specific spaces like restaurants or places of worship.

Even if schools in such areas offer foreign language classes or bilingual programs, students may struggle to acquire the target language due to minimal exposure outside the classroom. That said, the growing popularity of social media and streaming platforms is gradually increasing access to other languages, even in monolingual settings.

Key Considerations

Understanding the linguistic diversity and societal factors that influence language use in your school's location is crucial. The "linguistic landscape" of a place refers to the languages spoken and used across various contexts, such as at home, work, in media, and in social settings. It involves considering whether the environment is monolingual, multilingual, or monolingual but with international influences. This is often described as the "linguistic reality" of the area.

In addition to defining the linguistic reality, consider the societal attitudes toward language. Are people generally "open" or "closed" to linguistic diversity?

The sociolinguistic landscape extends this concept to include the societal factors influencing language use. It examines how different languages are valued and understood across ethnicities, age groups, social classes, and education levels. The following questions can help identify characteristics of the sociolinguistic landscape.

- Do some languages hold more status than others?
- Are certain groups excluded because of language?
- How do these dynamics impact individual and group identities within the school community?

By exploring these questions, you can better understand how the sociolinguistic context shapes language use and inclusion in your school.

Understanding the regulatory parameters of local, national, or international educational standards and the actual way language is used in everyday life will guide school leaders in identifying unique features of their society while designing a program and its expected outcomes. Following a review of these

societal factors school leaders may realise that a specific strategy not previously considered is needed to reach the desired outcomes.

One of the defining characteristics of your school's sociolinguistic landscape is whether it is located in an open or closed language society.

2.3. Exploring the nuances of "open" and "closed" language societies.

Understanding these socio-linguistic characteristics helps you determine whether the people in your community are "open" or "closed" to additional languages. Look for evidence such as whether foreign movies are dubbed into the local language; this indicates a closed language society. On the other hand, multilingual cities like Brussels, Geneva, Bilbao, or Casablanca have many schools with multiple languages of instruction, which signifies a more open language society. The position on the "open-closed" continuum depends on a complex relationship between history, politics, culture and the dominant social attitude towards language and this will influence your bilingual school community dynamics.

To illustrate the importance of the linguistic context, take a moment to compare places like the Netherlands or Sweden, Norway and Denmark where there is an "openness" to learning English because speaking it is collectively seen by society as a necessity, not a burden. While day-to-day life and early education are generally conducted in the local language of the respective countries, children grow up with an openness to English. They know that their parents speak it, they hear it in media before it is introduced in school, usually at age 6 or 7 and the majority learn it without too much strain.

Now compared with other European countries like Italy, France and Spain where traditionally the majority of adults do not speak English or have unpleasant memories of their efforts to learn it, there is generally a more closed societal attitude towards learning English and children internalise this message. These attitudes are slowly changing in these countries with ever-growing numbers of foreign tourists and shifts in media consumption towards streaming services, YouTube and social media use.

Portugal is an interesting counter-example, where in the larger towns and cities it is very easy to find people who speak English and this has been true for decades. What might be the difference? It is hard to say without a thorough study, but one notable difference is that they do not dub movies or television,

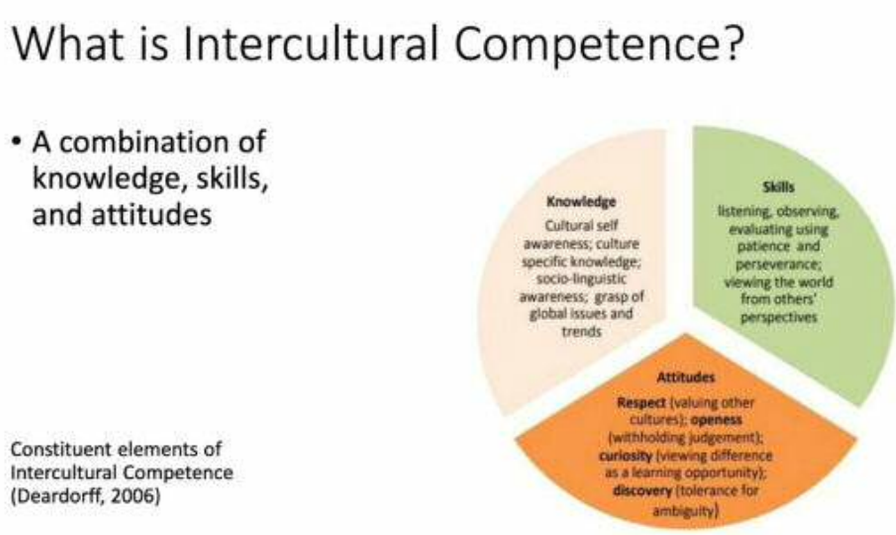
as their Southern European counterparts.

These factors can impact the learning goals of a bilingual program. For example, in a society that speaks only one language, it may be difficult to successfully implement a dual immersion program because it requires a mixture of children who are native speakers of the two target languages. Similarly, a school in a firmly monolingual place, such as a town in central Spain, cannot adopt the program structure of an international school in Brussels, since the multilingual and multicultural context will support the achievement of language learning objectives.

However, a useful strategy in all locations is introducing activities that cultivate "intercultural competence". In Community Conversation #12, Licia Arnaboldi discusses the program she created as the English Coordinator at the Montessori school in Como, Italy. The intention is to draw attention to daily practices or celebrations in the local culture and then introduce how a similar activity is done in another part of the world. The children develop cultural self-awareness in tandem with an appreciation of less familiar customs from other places.

2.4. What is intercultural competence?

In her talk, Licia Arnaboldi described the program of intercultural events that she and her colleagues designed to enhance the L2 program. Below is a graphic she shared to summarise:



The intention is to have school-wide topics that in an age-appropriate manner

encourage:

- cultural self-awareness
- respect for self and others
- openness
- curiosity and discovery
- acceptance of diversity

For example, they have a menus of the world program where each month foods from a different country are introduced in the classroom and in the lunchroom. Children in the 5th year of elementary school are responsible for researching new countries to incorporate and present to their younger and older schoolmates.

The projects also require coordination between the classroom (L1) teachers and the L2 teachers. For example, for "Breakfast in the World" the L1 teacher will present a typical Italian breakfast and food supply chain and the L2 teacher will present breakfast from another country. For more, you can read Licia's Menus of the world post in our blog "Notes from the Field" on the Bilingual Montessori website.

3. Creating a whole school bilingual culture

Creating a strong bilingual school culture is a pillar for any school with more than one language. For the teaching staff, it is the basis for fostering resilience and patience inside the school walls. When people feel they belong to a community with a culture working towards common goals that allow them to express their doubts and worries, share their work, experiment and make mistakes, they are more likely to feel sufficiently understood and motivated to navigate difficulties and overcome setbacks. This internal clarity will become the basis of the teachers feeling confident in their work with the children and speaking to the parents.

Alongside the sociolinguistic landscape of your community, thinking about unique community dynamics and ensuring a shared understanding of the objectives before implementing a bilingual model or making changes to an existing one will help to create a resilient program that can bear the unexpected challenges that will arise.

Community dynamics are influenced by external and internal factors. External

factors include changes in local, national, or global economics; environmental impacts like weather, natural disasters and pandemics; political or legislative changes; socio-cultural shifts; and technological advances. One recent example of an external factor that significantly impacted educational programs is the COVID-19 pandemic. This event caused a major shift in the educational system and continues to have lasting effects on schools and education.

Another example of an external factor is legislative change that may affect the feasibility and design of bilingual school programs in Catalonia is the ongoing socio-political debate about the principal language of instruction: Catalan or Castilian. Both examples involve factors outside an individual school's sphere of influence but impact the feasibility and design of a school's program. These external factors can cause not only structural changes in program design and delivery but also dischord within the community. How a school responds to an external change or disagreement within the community can have important consequences for your school culture.

Internal community development also influences the responsiveness to a change in dynamics such as a change of leadership, administration or other team members; a move to different premises; a change in pedagogical direction; or a change in the size of the school community. These may be managed and controlled changes or a sudden shock. For example, a sudden reduction in class size will possibly affect the program's economic viability and, in turn, the staffing model: this may well influence the language exposure available in each of the school's target languages and the bilingual program's feasibility. While it may have been viable to have one or more language specialists working with a large group of children, a smaller group may only have one teacher available.

The growth of a school community also affects community dynamics: a new program can open with less than twenty community members and grow to hundreds in a few years. Growth inevitably requires development in the structure that supports the community. Meeting a small community's needs can be managed more directly by a smaller staff team, whereas a larger community requires an expanded team to define and maintain relationships and positive communication. In turn, a larger staff team requires attention to its own community dynamics.

While growth is most often gradual and more manageable, occurring over time, external factors like a pandemic can shake things up very quickly. The

key to building a more resilient community that can cope with change is to work continuously and carefully define your community values and clearly envision the school's purpose and limitations from the outset. Read more about team charters in section 1.6. Overcoming implementation challenges.

3.1. Aligning program objectives with the school community's needs and values

To define and prioritise our community's needs and values, we need to reflect on our purpose and mission as a school, especially as a bilingual school. Each school will have slightly different values and educational priorities. However, if you have yet to work on this, the best place to start is by asking, "What do we want for our children?"

Once you have clearly defined your values and educational priorities and have considered their implications for your program, you can think about the needs that arise from these values and priorities. Some needs are practical considerations, such as what knowledge and skills children need to successfully transition to the next educational level in your community if your school's program ends with Elementary. Other needs will be related to the particular dynamics of your school community, such as parents needing regular information about the compliance of the program's educational objectives to those of the local educational authority.

The school's values and list of needs, some of which will be non-negotiables, should be widely known throughout the community. This will serve as a valuable foundation when dealing with changing community dynamics and the associated challenges related to decision-making and program feasibility.

They are a useful guidepost when you face uncertainty or resistance to the program from different community members. During the program creation or beginnings, it may be helpful to have a community meeting to brainstorm and discuss the benefits of being bilingual. A list of benefits of bilingual education or bilingualism can be recorded and you can see which ones resonate most with the people present. After hosting a few of these conversations with parents and teachers, the school leadership team can meet and discuss how insights from these meetings can be incorporated into the school's mission statement for a coherent vision.

It will become apparent that not everyone has considered these matters or that through these meetings, they realise they value a different type of education. In such cases, the most healthy remedy may be for a family to move on to another school. For example, a situation might arise where a

parent loses confidence in the school because they do not see their child using the target language in line with their expectations. One-to-one meetings can discern if their expectations are consistent with the schools.

Learning a language is unique to each individual and their child's pace may differ from their peers. While some parents have patience and faith in the process and can allow their child the time they need, other parents do not. What they want for their children might not align with the school's stated program outcomes. As a school leader, be clear and confident about the school's program objectives and the commitment you have to its vision. Accept that this will not suit every family. Those of us with experience in schools know that with the right resources, we can work with any child; however, what we provide may not always suit the goals or aspirations of all parents.

Pause and reflect

- How does the sociolinguistic landscape of your school's location influence your approach to bilingual education?
- In what ways can you foster an "open" attitude towards additional languages within your classroom?
- Reflecting on the local community's attitudes towards bilingualism:
- Which strengths of the community can you build on?
- What potential challenges might you encounter in achieving your intended language learning outcomes?
- How might you address these challenges?

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Designing a bilingual program

1.2. From vision to practice: developing sustainable language

Contents

Key takeaways

- A **clear vision and local linguistic context** are crucial for defining bilingual program goals and models.
- **Involving the school community** in setting language goals fosters alignment with students' future aspirations.
- The **CEFR** provides global standards and "can-do statements" for measuring language proficiency in young learners.
- **BICS** (social communication) develops faster than **CALP** (academic language), which requires more years to master.

1. Introduction

This section highlights the importance of a clear vision for 6-12 bilingual or multilingual programs, considering local linguistic contexts, and engaging the school community in setting language goals. Through practical tools like the School language profile survey, it demonstrates how to tailor instruction to meet students' diverse needs and support both academic and social language development. The section also covers internationally recognised frameworks, such as the CEFR and ACTFL, and explores the distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Finally, it addresses language delays and learning differences, providing strategies for supporting all learners in the classroom.

1. Building on vision and context

Once the school leadership has worked through the issues presented in section 1.1. "Laying the Foundations: the way", a clear vision of what they want their bilingual program to achieve should emerge - which languages will be offered and what it means to be a school with more than one language. This opens many opportunities to recognise and value the diversity of the school community which compliments or may enrich the school's overall mission. The local linguistic context, i.e., being in a monolingual or multilingual location can also affect what is possible to achieve.

1.1. Case study illustration

Relationship between the linguistic reality of school's location and instructional model, language learning objectives

In the course of doing research on the experiences of different schools, there is one example that clearly illustrates the significance of linguistic context. Montessori Palau Figueres is located in northern Spain just 30 kilometers from the French border. The first language of the region where it is located is Catalan and everyone also knows Spanish. This means that the school has a dual language model where the guide switches between Catalan and Spanish every two weeks, and there are Language Specialists who offer some hours of English and French lessons each week.

In their lives outside of school, the children attending this school are exposed

to Catalan and Spanish and depending on their parents, perhaps French and English as well. In shops and other daily activities, the main language would be Catalan, but the multilingual residents also switch easily. In other words, the multilingual location supports the school's language objectives in an organic way that is not possible in most locations.

The two case studies on "Developing a bilingual program" presented at the beginning of Part 1 illustrate how two other schools in Spain, one in the small southern city of Córdoba and the other in Madrid have chosen an immersion model to achieve their goal of academic proficiency in English. In monolingual Córdoba, immersion was the first choice because the majority of children are only exposed to English in school. While in more international Madrid, the school implemented a bilingual model only to discover that it was not effective in reaching its goals, in part due to the dominance of Spanish in life outside of the school.

Engaging the teachers with the profile needed to meet your objectives is also an important element in developing a program. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 1.5. Managing resources. New schools can, in advance, define the profile of the teachers they need to meet their objectives but as the two case studies illustrate, recruiting teachers with the training, skills and human qualities that would be ideal for a school is often complicated by location, the school budget and other factors. It is therefore likely that new and existing schools are to some extent working with teachers who fit the ideal criteria to varying degrees.

The stakeholders responsible for defining the school's mission and path to achieve its goals should meet and review information provided by the School language profile survey. Following this review meeting the school administration should be able to answer the questions listed here.

- What are community aspirations /realities for studying in secondary, university?
- What are the most common linguistic profile/s of children?
- What are the languages your program would like to offer? (L1, L2, L3)
- School language profile - what are the strengths that will help us meet our goals, what are the areas that need extra support?

A good practice implemented at the bilingual Montessori schools we have researched, concerning these issues, is to work with the children's families to

identify which objectives are appropriate for each pupil. These objectives depend on the families' (ideally in consensus with the children's) plans or intentions for the next stage of education. Specifically, children whose families want them to attend an international school where they'll be educated through English (or another additional language), would benefit from achieving relatively high dominance in academic language. These children will need to be fully literate in English and able to understand both spoken and written content in the language from across the whole curriculum: science, arts, geography, history, etc. The students and their will need to participate in the process of setting learning goals to build up all the skills necessary for the next stage of their education.

With that information, a school will be able to think carefully about defining specific learning objectives and choose the instructional model to best meet those objectives. Tools and strategies for defining learning objectives will be discussed in this section, while instructional models are reviewed in section 1.3. Montessori Language Learning: European Perspectives. With that in place, an administrator can then draft or revise the school language policy outlining the strategies.

So, as in many aspects of managing a school, to develop a strong second language program one must have:

- a plan – to know where you are going;
- keen observation skills – to see what is working well and what is not;
- prudent decision-making — to adjust the plan only when truly necessary;
- strong communication skills – to keep constituents informed and committed.

1.2. A school's culture of language learning

This is a little-discussed, yet vital component, of building a successful second language program. It is an intangible aspect of how these objectives and related values are understood and embraced by the school's constituents. For schools, like the one in the above-mentioned case study, where the linguistic character of the place naturally supports and compliments the school's multilingual objectives a shared culture of language learning is present in a more organic way, while in contrast to a school like Cordoba International Montessori (the subject of Case Study 1A) due to its monolingual location has to be more intentional about tending its school's bilingual

culture. At a whole school level as well as in the individual classrooms.

One of their elementary teachers Laura Cassidy, who is also a BM collaborator, said during our Online Companion Course "Teachers need to view language as a tool for communication, not a subject to be taught" (L. Cassidy (personal communication, November 5, 2024)

1.3. School language profile survey

Whether you are involved in the creation of a new program or a review of an existing one, evidence gathered by completing the school language profile offers indispensable knowledge regarding the parameters that a given school is working within. In other words, the external and internal factors mentioned in 1.1. Bilingual Program Design: Laying the foundation. The survey shares valuable perspectives useful to those defining the direction of a project, contributing to consensus building and offering an overview of the linguistic reality of the families in the school and the place itself.

This self-reflection tool was developed by Marikay McCabe in 2019 when she started working with schools. It is also available in Spanish. The intention is to provide a simple overview of the baseline situation of the school in terms of what is possible and what is desired. It has the secondary purpose of giving data relevant to internal communication issues among the adults in the school that may be caused by not having one common language.

Once the survey has been completed by those involved in decision-making for the language program, it will help identify:

- strengths (we have a good grasp of the "landscape");
- areas for improvement (there is always something);
- points of friction (usually competing interests or misunderstandings);
- unmet needs among the constituents that impede meeting language learning objectives.

It could also be used for an existing program:

- to review the faculty's perception of language learning objectives as a jumping-off point for a discussion about the same;
- to identify needs in the school's language program and prioritise them.

Questions to help you analyse the information and better understand your school's program:

- What are the school's strengths that support language learning?
- Does the local linguistic context support your learning objectives?
- Does the model of instruction align with your objectives?
- Does the language learning model align with your objectives and the local context, i.e., what language/s are students likely to continue their education when leaving your school?
- Do all constituent groups understand the language learning objectives?
- Do families know ways that they can support second language learning outside of school?
- Do families and faculty understand that academic proficiency in a second language is a minimum 7-8 year process?
- What are unmet needs among different constituents?
    - Can they be met within the scope of the school's program?
    - What could be changed/adapted to meet these needs?
- Are there competing interests between different constituents?
- Could they be a result of a lack of information?

2. Defining common terminology

Bi-multilingualism

"Bilingualism is the ability to understand and use (two or more) languages in certain contexts and for certain purposes." (Carder, 2021)

In recent years in Europe, there has been a tendency to speak about multilingualism in terms of speakers themselves and schools that educate them to make it more explicit that one may speak more than two languages. Depending on one's preference, the two terms can be used interchangeably and the convention of linking them in the word "bi-multilingual" has become common practice among professionals. Within this Field Guide when we use "bilingual" it is with the understanding that we mean two or more.

Section 1.3. Montessori Language Learning: European Perspectives examines, in-depth, different instructional models, but here is a quick overview of what

this can look like in practice:

- subjects divided between two languages of instruction;
- students can study the same subjects in two languages;
- an immersion experience of the second language and the first language takes the status of a foreign language in school, i.e. one-way immersion programs.

Home language, first language, L1, L2, dominant language, target language, academic language …

These are some of the specialised terms that it is important to understand as we delve deeper into the elements that are necessary for designing a school-based second language program.

Below are the definitions that Dr. Eowyn Crisfield shared in the webinar she prepared for Bilingual Montessori.

L1 and L2 are terms that researchers use to differentiate when and where a person has acquired a language. In the school context, they generally refer to a child's first language acquired from birth at home (L1) and the additional language that is being acquired in the school (L2).

Target language refers to the language (the L2 for most of the students) that the school offers in addition to the local language. In the context of our focus in this Field Guide, the target language in 95% of the schools we looked at was English.

Academic language refers to the oral, written, auditory, and visual language proficiency required to learn effectively in schools and academic programs—i.e., it's the language used in classroom lessons, books, tests, and assignments. In schools that employ an immersion model, the target language is also the academic language.

Dominant language can be used in schools to discuss a learner's preference for a language and can be used in discussing their multilingual development, as this may shift in time.

More on this in section 2.2. Role of language in identity formation and cultural grounding.

2.1. Types of bilingualism

- **Bilingualism** is fluency in or use of two languages (Oxford Languages, 2023).
- **Simultaneous bilinguals** are children who acquire two languages before the age of 3.
- **Sequential bilinguals** are children who learn a second language after the first language is well established.

Societal attitudes towards bilingualism

In 1985, a Montessori school called InterCultura opened outside of Chicago, offering Spanish, French, and Japanese immersion programs for children aged 3 to 6 years old (Rosanova, 1991). The school was founded by a multilingual family who valued the richness of multilingual experiences. However, they faced harsh criticism from "experts" who argued that the school should be closed, claiming that immersing children in a second language at such a young age was "damaging" to their development (Rosanova, 1997).

It is important to note that 40 to 50 years ago, it was common for researchers and educators to view bilingualism as problematic. There was a widespread belief that monolinguals were more intelligent than bilinguals (Baker, 2001). Because myths about bilingualism persist it is good to have on hand reliable information like Françoise Grosjean's Myths about bilingualism.

As outlined in section 1.3. Montessori Language Learning: European Perspectives, much has changed in Europe over the last 25 years. At a funding and policy level, the European Union has played a significant role in promoting multilingual education. On a pragmatic level, globalisation and the dominance of English as a global language in professional communication and media, along with a steady rise in international tourism, have driven an increasing need for multilingual competence. All of this has directly contributed to the increase in the number of multilingual schools.

2.2. Second language acquisition & learning

It is also important to have a basic understanding of the process of second language acquisition. The following Bilingual Montessori Community Conversation #4 "Second Language Acquisition: An Introduction for Teachers in Elementary" with Birgitta Berger offers an introduction.

Once you understand the process of language development at different stages in childhood and have plenty of ideas for developing and delivering a program that caters to the elementary child's needs and interests, then you can map out an idea of how a typical student at your school will develop their second language skills through the elementary years. Remember that this development will have to be supported by the feasibility of your program (see practical considerations in section 1.1. Laying the foundation: the Why) and will need to be aligned with your community values and needs too. After determining your school's language learning goals, you will have to consider the individual exceptions that may require varying levels of support. Not every school can structure its infant or early childhood program according to its preferences, and even when a school has that capability, it is not uncommon for children to join the program at any age. You cannot ensure that an elementary child's second language development will build upon a specific previous second language learning foundation.

A good language policy should have program implementation guidelines and a plan for providing extra support for children with different language profiles will help manage the complexity of skills and aspirations. As was cautioned in Case Study 1.b. Trial & Error at Madrid Montessori, a language policy is absolutely necessary, but for success, there needs to be attention to other elements like widespread acceptance and assimilation of the culture of bilingualism in the school community. The documents listed below (see the appendix of section 1.4. How to run a bilingual program) offer an example of a school language policy and a student learning profile and plan:

- Montessori Cordoba International School's Language Policy;
- Montessori Cordoba International School's Individualised Language Profile and Plan.

Both resources are discussed in the Bilingual Montessori webinar #7, "My School Journey: Taking Steps in Developing a Bilingual program" (minutes 28.44-36.00).

The following is a short guide of helpful questions to consider which have been addressed in the BM Video Library.

Nurturing early language exposure and proficiency in young learners

- Webinar #9, "ESL in the Early Years" by Denise Fernandes
- Community Conversation #6, "Specialised Language Activities in the 3-6 Classroom" by Florencia Ugalde
- Community Conversation #7, "Research-Based Practices for Spontaneous L2 Production in 3-6" by Danielle DesLauriers
- Community Conversation #13, "Empowering Young Readers in Children's House: Tools and Strategies" by Denise Fernandes

Balancing social interaction skills with academic language proficiency

- Community Conversation #2 "Approaches to Montessori English Immersion - One School's Experience" with Joanna Stewart
- Community Conversation #3 "Strategies to Support an Immersive L2 Experience in a Montessori 6-12" with Laura Cassidy
- Community Conversation #17 "Combining Montessori Philosophy and Second Language Enrichment" with Mariann Manhertz

Recognising the diverse linguistic potential of students

These differences can be child-external variables such as the age of onset and length of exposure to the second language, or child-internal variables such as language aptitude, cognition, personality, motivation and social factors.

- Community Conversation #7, "Research-Based Practices for Spontaneous L2 Production in 3-6," by Danielle DesLauriers

In addition, please keep in mind that even when you have clearly designed and shared program goals and are transparent about the level of individual support that the school can provide, you will still find diverse linguistic aspirations of students and families. Here are some common situations:

- Yours is the only bilingual program in the area, so parents take little notice of actual outcomes when they sign up and expect a one-size-fits-all service.
- Families, unfamiliar with the second language development process, may have unrealistic expectations of the program and their child's progress.

Pause and reflect

- How does the linguistic context of your school guide your approach to bilingual education in the 6-12 classroom?
- In what ways do you actively engage families in setting language learning goals for their children?
- How do you ensure that the school's language policy aligns with both the community's needs and students' future educational aspirations?
- What strategies do you use to assess and address the diverse language development profiles of your students?

3. Frameworks for identifying objectives

3.1. Internationally recognised standards

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a useful system for measuring language competence in an internationally recognised manner. This scheme was developed by the Council of Europe (CoE) to promote plurilingualism in the European Union and was first published in 2001 and was updated in 2020. It involves a system for self-evaluation as well as a level certifying exam system which are integrated into the Cambridge materials making them a helpful supplementary tool if a school links to language learning outcomes to CEFR standards.

In conjunction with the CEFR the CoE also developed the European Language Passport (ELP) intended to support learners to appreciate and measure their competence in languages. Since these were intended to be developed by individual learners, "can-do statements" were elaborated for self-assessment.

The original self-assessment grids were developed for adults and you can view the English one here. These grids have what the CoE called "descriptors", or indicators of the standards, which were made more accessible with the "can-do statements." The project of adapting these tables and statements for young learners was undertaken in the early 2010s. Young learners were divided into two groups: 7-11 years and 11-15 years. (see section 2.7 Assessment: making the process and progress of learning visible)

During this process levels were broken down into sub-levels such as pre-A1 to

offer a more realistic view of where a young child may be in their early time of beginning to use an additional language. A sample of "can-do statements" for young learners measuring pre-A1, A1 and A2 levels of English is shown in this overview for young learners. This chart and many other materials for younger learners were created by Cambridge English as they have taken advantage of these adapted CEFR standards to create exams for children, known as Starters, Movers and Flyers corresponding to pre-A1, A1 and A2 levels.

Many schools are finding it useful to have these external indicators to be able to be more precise about objectives in their communication with faculty and parents. Additionally, more schools, including Montessori schools, are offering preparation for the Cambridge exams designed for younger learners.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) also has developed similar guidelines for measuring proficiency and their own can-do statements. They also have developed a Reading Proficiency Test (RPT) that is currently available in the following languages: Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), English, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

This table based on the CEFR framework gives a quick orientation to how time would be needed for learners to reach different levels. This should help manage expectations with teachers and parents regarding language goals.

Language level (CEFR)	Number of hours of explicit language instruction	Approximate number of years with two hours of instruction per week	Total number of years for a complete beginner
A0-A1	70	0,5	0,5
A1-A2	150	1,5	2
A2-B1	300	3	5
B1-B2	200	2	7
B2-C1	200	2	9
C1-C2	200	2	11

The total number of years varies from community to community and from individual to individual according to many factors including:

- whether the target language is already known by the individual/in the community;

- how many languages the individual/community already uses;
- how the target language is used in the wider community;
- how motivated learners are;
- how many opportunities learners have for practice;
- natural individual aptitudes.

While this table is only a broad guide it can prove useful in managing expectations. For example, if you start a bilingual program, with two hours of language instruction per week, in a community where the target language is rarely used, children who start the program at age 6 are unlikely to progress further than a B1 level, although a B2 is possible with extra instruction. In turn, reaching these objectives will depend on individual differences.

3.2. Types of proficiency

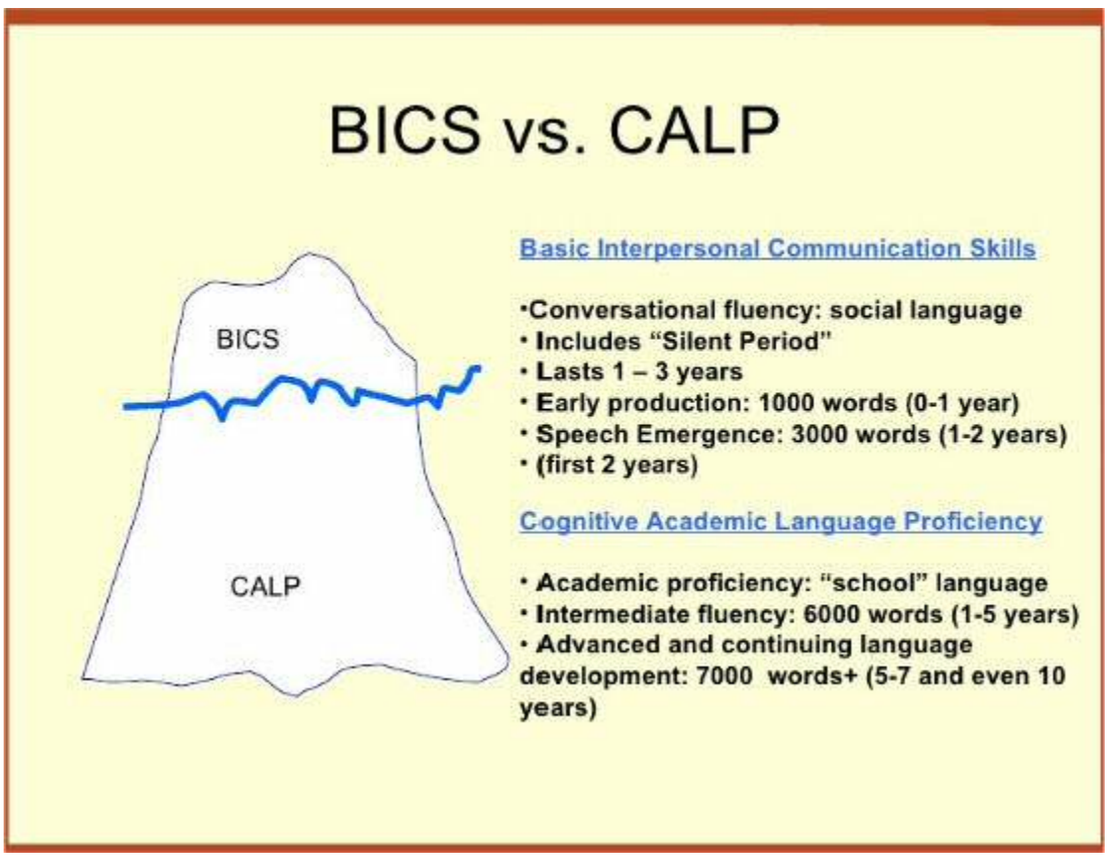
Jim Cummins, a scholar of second language learning, named a distinction of two main types of proficiency known as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) which is often referred to as the "iceberg theory".

As explained in this graphic, BICS is the period of 1-3 years that a learner takes to develop social communication skills in a new language. This includes the "silent period" when the learner is understanding but not yet producing the new language. As discussed in Part 2, section 2.6. Stages in children's additional language acquisition, it is important for adults to be aware of this phase of second language acquisition as it can make both teachers and parents frustrated if they are not informed that this is a part of the process of a child learning a new language.

However, to achieve academic competence many more years, 7 - 8 or up to 10 are needed. Again, it is essential that parents and teachers appreciate this long-term commitment. CALP can be defined as a student's ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school including academic language.

BICS (Basic interpersonal communication skills) refers to conversational fluency – the ability to talk about objects or experiences in face-to-face and familiar contexts. CALP (Cognitive academic language proficiency) is the oral and written language needed to succeed in school subjects.

The image below further illustrates the difference between the two:



Here, you can listen to Jim Cummins explain these categories and how he came to recognise the distinction and how a (especially if they are charming and/or extroverted) child's BICS skills can camouflage other issues that a child might be facing. Educators familiar with international English medium schools note that a similar thing can happen with bi-multilingual learners who can confuse teachers since they speak really well, yet struggle to consolidate spelling and reading comprehension. In these cases, they recommend "Using an "intervention approach to reach specific strategies that help the child get over their hurdles is very effective and can often be done in brief "mini-lessons" and guided practice sessions." (Schofield & McGeary, 2016)

Bilingual education scholar Colin Baker identifies a key limitation to this model, that is relevant to those working in schools:

> …it only paints a two-stage idea. The idea of a larger number of dimensions of language competences may be expressed more exactly. Children and adults may move forward on language dimensions in terms of sliding scales rather than in big jumps. (Baker, 2001. emphasis added)

Identifying intermediate points on the "sliding scale" of proficiency that would include basic to intermediate levels of literacy skills. These can be considered "functional or pragmatic English" skills and schools that are aspiring to an A2 level at 12 years.

4. Learning differences

Teachers who work within a developmental approach to education understand that children progress at varying rates across unique areas of development. With the aid of both formal guidelines and informal benchmarks of "typical" development, experienced teachers are often able to identify signs that a child's development in one or more areas may differ from age-appropriate expectations. While government guidelines may provide broad recommendations on when to intervene and suggest that parents seek a diagnostic evaluation, the responsibility often falls on schools to establish their own protocols. Here are two examples from the Madrid Montessori School, profiled in case study 1.b., Protocol for Children who Need Help and Speech Language Therapy checklist from the same school.

Ideally, these protocols are developed collaboratively with specialists—such as psychologists, and physical, occupational, and speech therapists—who have expertise in the relevant age group and whose perspectives on child development align with the school's educational philosophy and vision. This collaborative approach ensures a more tailored and effective response to the child's needs.

Some delays can affect a child's physical, cognitive, communication, social, emotional, or behavioural skills. In a school context, the youngest children's (0-1) motor delays are often the most "visible" when a child lacks strength and coordination.

In children aged 1-2 years, common developmental delays that may be observed in a school or daycare setting include speech and language delays, motor skill challenges, and social or emotional difficulties. These children may show a limited vocabulary or struggle to form simple words and sentences, making communication with peers or teachers challenging. Motor delays may manifest as difficulty walking, climbing, or using fine motor skills to grasp objects or engage in activities like stacking blocks. Social and

emotional delays might include trouble interacting with other children, limited eye contact, or challenges in expressing emotions appropriately. Generally, one of these difficulties might be more pronounced; they usually don't occur in isolation. In recent years there has been an increase in clinics that bring together psychologists, language, physical and occupational therapists who seek to understand a child's holistic development and then can recommend varied interventions with different specialists to address the challenges.

4.1. Language delays in young children

Language delays in children aged 1-2 years can manifest as slower-than-expected development in understanding and using words. Typically, by 12 months, children may begin to say simple words like "mama" or "dada," and by 18-24 months, they might have a vocabulary of 50-100 words and start combining two words into simple phrases. Signs of a delay include limited or no words by 18 months, difficulty following simple instructions, or lack of gestures like pointing or waving to communicate. These delays can stem from various factors, such as hearing issues, developmental disorders, or limited exposure to language-rich interactions.

While early detection of developmental delays is widely acknowledged as critical, its practical implementation depends heavily on the availability of trained professionals, established protocols, and the parents' openness to feedback. In a school context, addressing these concerns with parents requires a highly sensitive approach. This is particularly challenging when the child is the parents' first or when the family is living an expatriated life, potentially limiting their exposure to children of a similar age for comparison.

Without this frame of reference, parents may struggle to recognise developmental difficulties in their child. Moreover, fear of what a potential delay could imply for their child's future may lead to resistance or reluctance to engage with recommendations, even when these are well-intentioned. Establishing trust and providing supportive, non-alarming communication is essential in navigating these delicate conversations. It can also be helpful to have a school psychologist who has also observed the child be the one who communicates the concerns to parents.

When recommending a referral to an external professional it is preferable to have a list of reliable options available and also to give the parents a letter from the psychologist or the head of school itemising the concerns observed

that have led to the recommendation for evaluation.

Language delays in 3-4 year-old children often become more noticeable in a school setting where communication is integral to social interaction and learning. In a bilingual school interpreting these difficulties can be challenging for the less experienced teacher. Delays can manifest as difficulty forming complete sentences, trouble understanding or following instructions, or reliance on gestures rather than words to communicate. These children might also experience frustration when unable to express themselves effectively, particularly in group activities or peer interactions, so disruptive behaviour can be a sign of language impairment.

Teachers in bilingual schools need to be especially well-informed about language development. One excellent public access resource for teachers and parents is "Bilingual in the Early Years: What the Science Says" (Beyer-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). They note that researchers have found that "Bilingual children are not more likely than monolingual children to have difficulties with language, to show delays in learning, or to be diagnosed with a language disorder" (Paradis et al., 2010; Petitto & Holowka, 2002, as cited in Beyer-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). However, they can give the impression that they have less vocabulary than monolingual peers because they typically know fewer words in each language.

Here is an example to illustrate the concept:

> … if a Spanish/English bilingual toddler knows 50 Spanish words and 50 English words, she will probably not appear to be as good at communicating when compared to her monolingual cousin who knows 90 English words. However, assuming 10 of the toddler's Spanish words are also known in English, then the toddler has a conceptual vocabulary of 90 words, which matches that of her cousin. Even so, knowing 50 vs. 90 English words could result in noticeably different communication abilities, but these differences are likely to become less noticeable with time. (Beyer-Heinlein, Lew-Williams, 2013, p.8)

When an experienced early childhood teacher has had a "living laboratory" to observe bilingual development including sequential bilinguals becoming competent in the target language over many years she can spot signs of concern in children's development, but teachers early in their careers will need more guidance. Even so, the most experienced educator may have

trouble distinguishing between a language difficulty that will resolve itself in time and one that will become an actual delay.

4.2. Dyslexias

In Montessori classrooms there is the reality that literacy work begins earlier (before 6 years) than in other educational settings, therefore concerns may appear before it is common in the public school system and paediatricians may not know how to respond. In fact, in some places, healthcare professionals will not evaluate a child for dyslexia before age 7.

In addition to delayed speech development, other early signs of reading difficulties like not retaining phonological awareness of specific sounds and comprehension issues can be a sign of issues with the child's working memory, which a skilled language therapist can support. However, receiving an actual diagnosis often does not happen.

There is general agreement that dyslexia is a learning disability caused by language-processing difficulties, but there is no agreement regarding its causes. Some believe that it is due to a neurobiological impairment; others think it is socially constructed. There is a Youtube channel called "dystalk" that has a series of short videos about topics such as Strategies to help children with Dyslexia and Reading Difficulties. The aesthetic is somewhat dated but they do provide helpful orientation for a newcomer to these questions. The website Understood.org also has excellent information on language processing disorders that is up-to-date.

In a section of a book titled "Language Learner Autonomy and Inclusion" the authors write, "One of the biggest problems dyslexics have to cope with is the threat to their self-esteem, which is all too often seriously undermined in the early years of schooling, especially if their difficulties with spelling are mistaken for a cognitive deficit" (Little, Dam, Legenhausen, 2017). The negative effects on self-esteem can be exacerbated since, for a variety of reasons, it can take a long time for a child to receive a diagnosis.

For Montessori trained guides who want to integrate more direct support in their classrooms for children with diagnosed learning differences, there is Montessori Medical Partnership for Inclusion. Their mission is to bridge gaps between medical and educational science by offering online training courses for teachers, and school leaders in addition to support for families.

Pause and reflect

- How can I effectively integrate CEFR standards into the school language profile to ensure measurable language progress for each student in the school?
- In what ways can I support students who are excelling in BICS but may be struggling with CALP, particularly in academic contexts?
- How can I recognise and address language delays in bilingual children,?
- What approaches can I take to manage parental expectations regarding language acquisition, particularly when students may require more time to reach academic language proficiency?
- How can I collaborate with specialists to support students with learning differences, ensuring a holistic approach to their language development in a Montessori setting?

5. References and resources

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ACTFL. (2024). ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES 2024. https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/Resources-Publications/ACTFL_Proficiency_Guidelines_2024.pdf

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Understood.org for current information on language processing disorders

School Language Profile Survey

Multilingual education or introduction of a second language is a complex undertaking and requires careful leadership.
This survey created by Marikay McCabe is a tool designed to help school leaders in guiding this process.

Learning Objectives

- Second language learning objectives at our school are:

  _____

  _____

  _____

- Learning objectives for the local language(s) are:

  _____

  _____

  _____

  _____

- Our school's strengths in terms of second language learning are:

  _____

  _____

  _____

  _____

- We would you like to improve the following areas:

  _____

  _____

  _____

  _____

  _____

Instruction

- Our school's model for second language instruction is :

  ☐ Enrichment ☐ One-way Immersion ☐ Dual language ☐ 90/10 model ☐ 50/50

  ☐ Multiple immersion ☐ Other/not sure: Please describe what second language instruction looks like in your school.

  _____

- Exposure to L2 at our school begins in:

  ☐ Infant community ☐ Children's house ☐ Elementary ☐ Adolescents

- Brief descriptions of the teaching model and how does it changes at the different levels:

  Infant Community _____

  _____

  Children's House _____

  _____

  Elementary (distinguish between lower and upper elementary if appropriate)

  _____

  _____

  Adolescents _____

  _____

- Literacy is taught:

  ☐ in L2/L1 at the same time ☐ L1 → L2 ☐ L2 → L1 ☐ only in L2

- Teaching Model:

  ☐ Guide/ Assistant ☐ Co-Guides

- Do you use a one person one language model? _____

- Do guides and assistants switch between the two langauges? _____

Constituents language profile

Students

- _____ % of our students are only exposed to L2 only at school
- _____ % of our students speak L2 at home
- _____ % of our students speak **neither** L1 or L2 at home
- _____% of students who are functionally bilingual, i.e. social proficiency in L1 and L2

Families

- _____ % of the families are monoligual

  _____ % of the families speak only the local language

  _____ % of the families speak the only other languages
- _____ % of the families are multilingual

- Formal school communication with the families is:

  ☐ in L1

  ☐ in L2

  ☐ both L1 and L2

- We offer accommodations to the parents who do not speak the target language of the school (i.e., translation in teacher meetings, bilingual written communication)

  ☐ no ☐ yes (specify) _____

- Our ideas for possible changes that could be made to improve communication with families:

_____

_____

_____

Faculty language profile

- _____ % of faculty speak both the L1 and L2
- _____ % of faculty have specialized training in language acquisition? (i.e. TEFL)
- Our school has language specialists to provide additional support in L1.

  ☐ no ☐ yes (include name/s) _____

- Our school has language specialists to provide additional support in L2.

  ☐ no ☐ yes (include name/s) _____

Admin/ Support Staff

- _____ % of Admin Staff that speak L1 & L2
- _____ % of Support Staff that speak L1 & L2
- Communication issues that we face in our school because of not having one common language for all adults.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Designing a bilingual program

1.3. Montessori language learning: European perspectives

Contents

Key takeaways

- **Bilingual education** is widespread in Europe, with a significant increase since 2005.
- **Multilingualism** has a long history in Europe, but political shifts in the 18th and 19th centuries often led to the suppression of regional dialects in schools.
- Montessori schools in Europe adopt **various bilingual models**, depending on local needs and educational objectives.
- **L2 education** in Montessori classrooms **requires adaptation**, as there is no universal curriculum for bilingual education.

1. Introduction

Bilingual education in Europe has evolved significantly over the years, with increasing emphasis on multilingualism as a core component of educational policy and practice. The promotion of language learning has been shaped by historical and political factors, such as the suppression of regional dialects in the 19th and 20th centuries and the subsequent reintroduction of minority languages in education following political changes. The European Union has played a pivotal role in supporting these efforts, advocating for linguistic diversity through programs like Erasmus+ and Creative Europe. In this context, Montessori schools in Europe have adopted a variety of bilingual education models, ranging from immersion approaches to dual language and multiple immersion programs, to support the linguistic development of children in a diverse educational landscape. This overview explores common bilingual models in European Montessori schools, alongside the challenges and innovative solutions faced by educators in integrating second language instruction within the Montessori framework.

1. Bilingual education in Europe

According to the Eurydice Report, 83.8% of all primary (elementary) aged students were learning one or more foreign languages in 2014, up from 67.3% in 2005 (European Commission/Eurydice, 2017, p. 62). Likewise, the first European survey on language competences showed that, "in 2012 42% of 15 year-old pupils tested had attained 'independent user' level (B1/B2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) in their first foreign language." (Executive Summary, 2012, 5)

Scholars have pointed out that multilingualism dates back millennia in many parts of Europe. However, in more recent history, particularly from the late 18th century, language became a central concept in nationalist geopolitical ideology, emphasising less fluidity and increased homogeneity. (Cummins, 1996, p. 212).

As a result, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when public education was established in many European countries, linguistic homogeneity in schools became an extension of building nationalist identity. This led to the outright suppression of regional dialects in countries such as France and Italy. Schools

were the main arena where language politics were enacted and enforced.

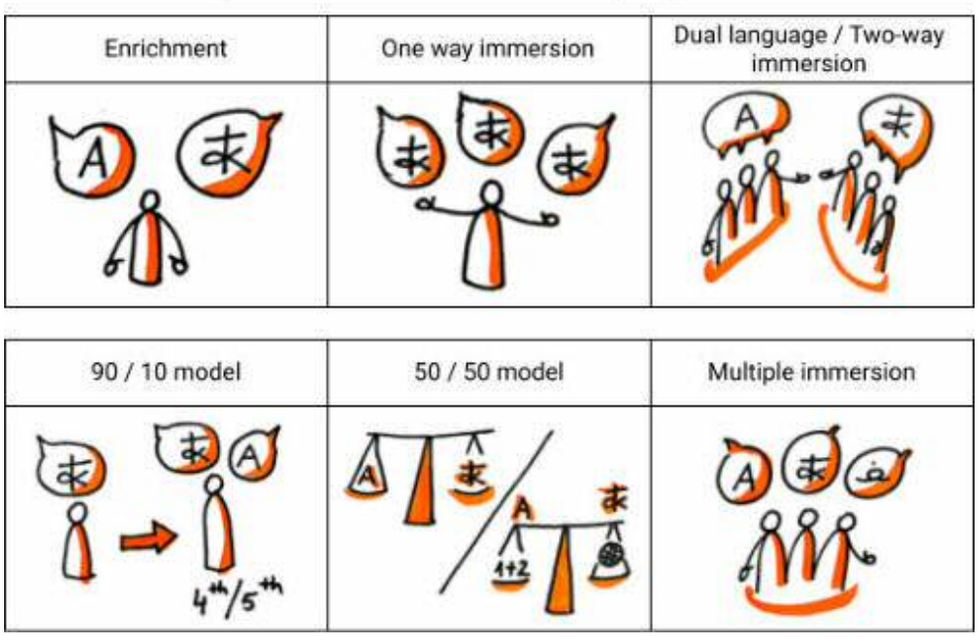
Throughout the 20th century, many instances of language suppression followed, when politically feasible, by recuperation. For example, the first bilingual primary school was established in Wales in 1939 and by 1990, 24% of schools were bilingual. In Spain, following the death of Francisco Franco in 1975, immersion programs were established in schools in the Catalan and Basque regions formally reintroducing these languages to younger generations. The European Union has also provided additional policy and financial support for these efforts, endorsing regional and minority languages and plurilingualism as strengths of the region (Eurydice, 2019, p. 11).

Since the early 2000s, the EU has made serious efforts to promote linguistic and cultural diversity with programs such as Erasmus + and Creative Europe. Many different models of bilingual education have been implemented across the European continent, with a large body of literature documenting various approaches. For those interested in an overview of the situation in Europe the various EU documents cited here can be a good place to begin.

2. Models common in European Montessori schools

Given the focus of our project, we offer more detail on models commonly used in European Montessori schools.

Figure 1: Modes of second language education



Notes about terms in the Figure 1.

- Enrichment model is another term for Exposure or 1-2 hours / week
- One-way Immersion same as immersion
- Dual language/two-way immersion: two languages should have equal weight and social status, approximately 50% of students are native speakers of each language
- 90/10 model this model has 90% target language and 10% L1
    - The 60/40 model is another example where in early years there is 100% immersion and then in elementary the percentage of L2 goes down and L1 goes up
- A 50/50 model is where student time in each language is divided or subjects are divided according to L1 and L2
- Multiple immersion is used in situations where a heritage language is being recuperated, while there is also a local language for instruction and a third language

Example: in Spain's Basque Country there are schools with:

- Immersion in Basque as the L2 or target language
- Academic instruction in Spanish as L1
- 8 hours / week in English as L3

Other models, not mentioned in the chart but important to mention, are intended to recuperate heritage languages that can be full immersion in that language.

2.1. School model vs Instructional model

The school model refers to the languages, their respective objectives and the organisational model that best represents how the school is meeting these goals. In the table below you will find examples from the schools featured in our Case Study Research Project.

Table 1: School languages, objectives, model

L1 & Objective	L2 & Objective CEFR scale	L3+ & Objective	Model
French / academic proficiency	English: basic user A1-A2		Bilingual
Spanish / vernacular	English: academic proficiency C1		Immersion Bilingual
Czech /academic proficiency	English: Basic or independent user A2-B1		Bilingual
Catalan/Spanish academic proficiency	English A2	French exposure	Multilingual: dual language immersion

> Definition of terms used in this table:
>
> - Basic User = A1/A2, Independent User = B1/B2
>
> Spanish vernacular indicates that it is the local language that is used among many children as the social language, while they receive lessons in Spanish language and culture.

The instructional model concept refers to the logistical details (i.e., types and profiles of teachers, physical spaces) of how languages are offered to the learners. This concept is very similar to the implementation model but allows for different arrangements by educational level and classroom within the same school.

Table 2: Instructional models in Montessori schools

Model	Organisation	Outcomes
Dual Language	OPOL Co-teachers Lead teacher/Assistant	Fosters bilingualism and biliteracy. Academic proficiency in both Strong appreciation of multiple cultures
Two way or dual language immersion	Separate classrooms for each language Learners move between them	Fosters bilingualism and biliteracy. Academic proficiency in both Strong appreciation of multiple cultures
Schedule for L1, L2+	Lead teacher + Language Specialist/s Co-teachers	Varied degrees of bilingualism Varied degrees of biliteracy Varied appreciation of multiple cultures – depends on school culture and teachers
Immersion **Target language = academic language**	OPOL Co-teachers Lead teacher/Assistant	Varied degrees of bilingualism Varied degrees of biliteracy Varied appreciation of multiple cultures – depends on school culture and teachers
Target language classroom	Language Specialist Bilingual Assistant	Learning outcomes vary significantly depending if it voluntary or compulsory The school's program and objectives The skill of the teachers
L2 Corner	Language Specialist Bilingual Assistant	Learning outcomes vary significantly depending if it voluntary or compulsory The school's program and objectives The skill of the teachers
L2 Lessons	Language Specialist Bilingual Guide Bilingual Assistant	Learning outcomes vary significantly depending if it voluntary or compulsory The school's program and objectives The skill of the teachers
Exposure **L2 is made available** **1-2 hours / week**	Language Specialist Bilingual Assistant	Awareness of other languages Simple vocabulary
In person + digital support	Use of digital platforms to support language learning in the classroom or at home	Learning outcomes vary significantly depending if it voluntary or compulsory The school's program and objectives

Table 3: Instructional roles

Job title	Profile
Guide	Montessori trained teacher as Head Teacher
	Responsible for academic language
Co-Guides	Two Montessori trained teachers
	Dividing responsibilities by langauge
Language Specialist	Teacher with language instruction training
	Teacher with conventional training
	Native speaker of the language, no specialised training
Assistant/L2 specialist or **Bilingual Assistant**	Bilingual teacher with language instruction training
	Bilingual teacher with conventional training
	Bilingual, no specialised training

3. Montessori and L2 education

"Montessori is for the native speakers."

This comment made by one English-speaking guide in Paris in 2022 triggered productive confusion. Was she talking about the fact that English was relegated to the margins in her classroom where the children received the majority of their presentations in French?

When asked for clarification she explained that what she meant is that it was created as a monolingual curriculum and to date there is no parallel curriculum or other guidance for offering a second language in a Montessori environment.

She is absolutely right, there is no clear guidance on how to do this while respecting Montessori principles. During research for this grant, many experienced practitioners have been interviewed and offered beautiful examples of "adaptations" or unique techniques they have used to

> meet the needs of their children who are moving through a Montessori program in a second language.

Bilingual Montessori schools must define what "bilingualism" means within the context of their program's adopted objectives and models. The current trend in Europe is either an immersion or a second/foreign language model. Contemporary schools choose an immersion model if they aspire to academic proficiency in a target language.

3.1. Challenges faced by L2 teachers

Echoing the Parisian Guide's comment, in a study of an early childhood immersion program for 3-6 year-olds in a Warsaw Montessori school the researcher noted:

> "There is no curriculum handbook written for the preschool immersion program, which matches also the mandated Polish curriculum. Teachers are mostly using the Polish Montessori curriculum Odkryjmy Montessori Raz Jeszcze (Czekalska, Gaj, Lauba, Matczak, Piecusial, Sosnowska, 2009) but translate all the instructions to English individually. They also often adapt and develop appropriate materials for language learning, which are coherent with the demands of state-mandated curriculum, Montessori education and immersion program." (Wysmulek, 2011, 216)

This situation creates uncertainty and extra work for teachers responsible for the target language. Many schools and educators have developed their own Montessori Second Language Curriculum and/or introduced objectives into their digital planning and record-keeping platforms so the teachers responsible for the target language have orientation. The majority of Language Specialists working in Montessori schools have teacher training in language instruction with no background in Montessori education. This can lead to misunderstandings among the adults and less than optimal engagement by learners. While steps to bridge these gaps have been taken, there is still plenty of work to be done, specifically in developing specialised training for these professionals.

When faced with the same challenges of offering a second language that the children are only exposed to in school, many Montessori-trained guides turn to the materials and their sequence outlined in their language album. With no other guidance, this is a logical thing to do, however, errors can arise

since L1 and L2 learners have different needs.

First and foremost is the learner's need for oral language development and enrichment of vocabulary in the target language. There are details in Part 3 on how this can be achieved. The Montessori approach to language, originally developed with the native language/mother tongue in mind, assumes that A child is acquiring the vocabulary in their daily life in and outside of school.

3.2. Orthodox and pragmatic interpretations

In the 1980s one AMI Montessori teacher trainer also told the InterCultura school that not teaching children to read in their native language was a "basic violation of Montessori principles." (Rosanova, 1997, p. 4). In a purely technical sense, this is true and current discussions of Mother Tongue Education support this view. (Nyaga, 2024)

However, Rosanova was aware that Maria Montessori was a pragmatist who lived in India from 1939 – 1947 with her son Mario. Upon the request of their hosts, the leaders of the Theosophical Society, and other prominent Indians the Montessoris established "English medium schools" (i.e., English as the medium of instruction) to engage multilingual children, choosing what we would call an immersion model. (Kramer, 1983, 341-359)

Instead of searching for a universal "right" or "wrong" solution, Montessori practitioners should accept that an ideal vision will always be subject to diverse realities. This perspective recognizes that schools can develop effective programs within their unique circumstances, as there is no single path to creating a successful bilingual learning environment.

Pause and reflect

- How do we define "bilingualism" within our school context?
- How does this definition influence the goals and structure of language instruction in my Montessori practice?
- Reflecting on the challenges of implementing second language education, how can I collaborate with language specialists or co-teachers to bridge gaps and enhance the bilingual learning experience for my students?

- Considering the diverse language models used in Europe, which aspects of these models could be adapted to support the bilingual needs of children in my classroom?
- How can I ensure that my approach remains aligned with Montessori principles?

4. References and resources

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Designing a bilingual program

1.4. How to run a bilingual program

Contents

Key takeaways

- A **clear vision** for the bilingual program engages the entire school community from the outset, ensuring shared ownership.
- **Aligning the bilingual approach** with the school's broader mission through strategic planning fosters coherence in both language learning and holistic child development.
- A systemic, adaptable **school development plan** strengthens teamwork, and fosters a sustainable bilingual program.
- Transparent, positive **communication** with all community members underpins a responsive, people-centred approach to bilingual education.

1. Introduction: how to run a bilingual program

It would be difficult to single-handedly design, manage and implement a bilingual school program. For this reason, taking time and investing energy in sharing the vision and onboarding your school community for the journey is essential for success. Section 1.1 discusses the importance of clarifying why your school wishes to become bilingual while considering the school community's needs and values. This is the vision of the project, and one of the first steps of running a program within a community is sharing and onboarding the community members to this vision, which we can call the process of aligning the community with the vision.

1. Aligning the community with the vision

The work of aligning the community with the vision ensures that everyone within the school community understands, supports, and works toward their shared goal or set of aspirations (the vision). It involves creating a sense of collective purpose and unity around the vision so that the community can work together to support the development of the bilingual program.

The following is a breakdown of the whole process:

Defining the vision

- The vision is a clear, inspiring statement of what the community hopes to achieve with its Bilingual Program.
- It serves as a guiding light for decisions, actions, and priorities.

Communicating the vision

- Share the vision in clear, engaging ways that resonate with and are easily understood by all community members
- Strengthen support for our vision by deepening the community's understanding of bilingual education principles.

Finding common ground

- Identify how the vision aligns with the community's current values, needs and aspirations.
- Ensure everyone feels included and that their input matters.

Building commitment

- Encourage individuals and groups to take ownership of the vision and see their respective roles in achieving it.
- Promote consensus through participation, collaboration, and shared leadership.

Setting goals and actions

- Break the vision into actionable steps and priorities that guide the community's efforts.
- Ensure these steps reflect your school team's shared capacity and competence at any given time.

Creating a feedback loop

- Regularly engage the community to evaluate progress, adjust strategies, and reaffirm commitment to the vision.
- Celebrating successes along the way to maintain enthusiasm and alignment.

When a community is aligned with its vision, there is clarity, cooperation, and momentum toward shared goals. This alignment groundwork helps community leadership maintain a sense of belonging and purpose among its members. It is never too early to begin this process with parents or job applicants. From the first point of contact, they should be aware that bilingualism is an essential part of the school's mission. Then as they settle into the community, a family or employee will learn more about what being bilingual looks like in your community and their role in realising the established objectives. This element of school life requires constant attention and care and will never be an item permanently "done" on your to-do list.

1.1. Who is our community and where do we start aligning with the vision?

Sharing the vision

The transition to a bilingual program typically stems from an educational vision, which may originate from an individual or a group of individuals, as illustrated in the case studies at the beginning of this field guide section.

Identifying key stakeholders

Identifying who to engage with during the alignment process is important; the mind jumps quickly to teachers and families, but communication and early involvement of all key community members can prevent future misunderstandings and mismatched expectations. The primary decision-makers for program change may include school leadership, owners, boards of governors, or shareholders. Most often, even when the decision to become a bilingual program is made by a board or owner, separate from school leadership, the design and implementation of the program will likely become the responsibility of the leadership team.

In some cases, school leaders may need to assess their personal alignment with the vision. If doubts remain regarding the value of initiating a bilingual program, even after thorough research into its benefits, it may be prudent to reconsider moving forward. Running a bilingual program will not merely add to a school leader's responsibilities; its implementation and impact will become a central focus of their role. This challenge is particularly pronounced for leaders who are not bilingual themselves. While school leaders need not be fluent in the school's target languages, their visible effort to learn these languages sets an important example of the bilingual culture they aim to create. Furthermore, being bilingual, whether in the school's target language or another, can provide valuable insight into language acquisition processes, both for children and adults, which is an enormous asset in leading such an initiative.

Key stakeholders to engage

The following groups within the school community should be considered in the onboarding and alignment process:

- Faculty
- Non-faculty staff
- Board of Governors/School owners
- Parents
- Students
- Local educational authorities
- Accreditation bodies
- Leadership team

Ensuring these key groups within the community are aligned with the vision cultivates a cohesive community culture and establishes a strong foundation for the program's long-term success and the support needed to overcome implementation challenges, which is covered further in section 1.6, Overcoming implementation challenges.

1.2. Ensuring your bilingual program aligns with the whole school vision

This field guide is designed to support schools adopting a holistic approach to child education and development. Considering how your bilingual program's organisation and implementation influence the child's comprehensive development is good practice. The objectives of the bilingual program should align with the school's broader educational vision to ensure coherence and integrity within the school culture. Here is one possible framework for holistic approaches to education that may be suitable for schools to use quickly. The five dimensions of teaching and learning (Clifford and Williams, 2012) provide a helpful framework for evaluating the impact that introducing a second language can have on school culture and a child's identity. By exploring these dimensions as a team and developing guiding questions for each, educators can, with intention, plan and prepare a language program that builds both the positive development of each child's sense of self and the school culture.

Use the table below to consider how the five dimensions influence program implementation and impact learner development and school culture:

Five dimensions of teaching and learning	Guiding questions (examples)	Bilingual program objectives related to this dimension of learning	Program adaptations to support this dimension of learning
1. Organic development (physical)	How does the organisation of space impact the child's language development and their perception of the languages present?		
2. Psychodynamic development (emotional)	In what ways does language use support or hinder community members in expressing or interpreting the feelings of others? How can we make appropriate adaptations for this? How is the connection to adults in the prepared environment influenced by language use and proficiency?		

3. Affiliative development (cultural)	How is a community member's sense of belonging affected by the language used in the environment?
4. Procedural development (cognitive)	How does the language environment influence the construction of knowledge? How do we need to support the construction of knowledge in additional languages?
5. Existential development (spiritual)	How is constructing a personal narrative (Who am I? What is my purpose?) influenced by the language used in the environment?

It may be the case that ideas for program adaptation that arise from this study can't be rolled out immediately but as long as the community is mindful of the questions, it can decide on its priorities and design its bilingual program according to these. Focus can develop over time; one year may be spent concentrating on supporting cognitive development and the next on supporting the creation of a strong personal narrative. Step by step, it's possible to implement a bilingual school program that respects every dimension of a child's learning. This holistic approach ensures that all areas of a child's personal development are supported, creating a well-rounded and inclusive learning environment.

2. School development plans to support the growth of your bilingual program

Mid to long-term plans, whether referred to as a School Development Plan, Strategic Plan, Future Design, or another title, are useful for guiding the growth and development of any educational project. Small or newer educational initiatives often start as the vision of a single individual, and it is common for such plans to reside primarily in that person's mind in the early stages of school development. While this may be understandable in the unpredictable and demanding early stages of a school community's life, as programming becomes more complex, your school development plan will help keep the community aligned with the vision and manage individual expectations over time. This clarity is invaluable for leadership to generate the support and momentum they need to maintain a strong educational community.

Ideally, this plan should be developed collaboratively with other community groups within the school. Teaching staff, faculty, the board, leadership, administration, families and students can all lend insight to the plan. Including people at the planning stage builds consensus towards the actions and decisions leadership may need to take. Often school leaders feel the pull of dispersed demands from different collectives within the community, for example the shareholders are concerned with financial stability and teachers demand more resources for planning and delivering the bilingual program, the leadership team may make a staffing change based on their observations or further learning about bilingual education while families may be resistant to change whilst simultaneously claiming to want to see better evidence of language learning. There is a danger that all these community pressures can compromise the integrity of the original vision: the school development plan can help a school leader stay on track in these moments, especially if they had input and consensus from the community in creating the plan. It is natural for individuals to be influenced by their immediate needs, and the challenge for leadership lies in keeping the community as a whole focused and united toward common long-term goals, like developing a bilingual program.

When developing your own long-term plan, it is important to reflect on all areas of your work and community. Many frameworks are available to guide this process; for instance, Montessori Córdoba, profiled in case study 1a, used the NEASC framework.

The first step is to assess your current position and define your desired position in all program areas. Consider the gaps that need to be closed and how each proposed development might influence other aspects of the plan: this exercise is part of what is called systemic planning.

Next, prioritisation is key. While it is tempting to implement all your ideas at once, focusing on a few priorities at a time ensures diligent and manageable progress. Once you've agreed on your plans for the next few years, it is advisable to position them within the broader context of the school's mission and vision, ensuring that all developments are aligned with the school's overarching goals. Here are two examples:

2.1. Example 1: Strengthening community ties and expanding language learning opportunities

Objective: The community has decided to improve its ties with the local community and expand opportunities for language learning outside the school grounds.

Framing with a mission statement: In alignment with our mission, "In order for our children to develop the necessary skills to make a positive contribution to society," we will focus on expanding opportunities for participation in local community projects, prioritising multilingual community members or projects.

Plan: To achieve this, we will encourage our Elementary students to engage with local support groups and charities. This will involve creating structured opportunities for students to reach out and become involved in addressing local community issues, thereby fostering their sense of civic responsibility and community engagement. Where possible, prioritising multilingual community members or projects.

Other impacts: Teachers or students will need time to identify and contact appropriate local community groups. For example, time will be dedicated in the classroom to developing these plans as part of the weekly community meeting time. The impact on the community group or project we support should also be considered.

2.2. Example 2: Enhancing the working environment for adults

Objective: The community has decided to improve the working environment for the adults in the school.

Framing with a mission statement: To align with our mission, "To develop a happy, purposeful school community," we will focus on improving the prepared environment for adults within the school.

Plan: To achieve this, we will:

- Invest in enhanced resources for staff, including a more welcoming staff room and extra support with supervision times to support the administrative tasks related to running a bilingual program.
- Ensure that all teachers have a minimum of one hour of planning time each day to ensure a balanced, productive work environment and time to

develop language support materials.

Other impacts: This initiative must be identified and accounted for in the following school budget. The school leader requires time to organise the work to improve the staff room. An extra assistant will be hired for supervision to ensure teachers have planning time, this will also need to be reflected in the school budget.

Pause and reflect

- In what ways do you embed the school's bilingual vision into your daily routines and interactions, ensuring the entire community works towards common goals?
- What strategy do you use to balance the diverse priorities of parents, teachers, and leadership, while staying true to your school's bilingual mission?
- How do you balance immediate classroom requirements with the long-term objectives outlined in your school development plan, ensuring both consistency and adaptability?
- In what ways can you refine communication methods to foster unity around the bilingual vision, especially in times of change or when new priorities emerge?

3. The systemic approach to educational planning

Like plants that thrive through complex interactions with soil, water, and sunlight, effective school planning requires that educators carefully observe and adapt to their changing community's needs. In the context of educational planning, this requires attention to the interplay of physical infrastructure, funding, trust, and pedagogical foundations. By mapping out a school development plan within a cycle of evaluation and review, no area requiring attention is overlooked even in changing circumstances, regardless of their urgency. This holistic vision of the school's needs and state of being can be termed the "schoolscape" or ecosystem.

The planning cycle can take various forms, such as a defined three-year plan

or an ongoing cycle of regular reviews. Annual updates reflecting progress, adjustments, and unforeseen challenges - like the shift to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic or the prolonged illness of a language specialist - are vital for maintaining an agile and responsive school environment. This flexibility is helpful for bilingual programs, where the language environment can be impacted by changes in students or staff.

Systemic planning provides school leaders with a dynamic framework for work and intervention, enabling them to move beyond the reactive "putting out fires" approach that often emerges in the absence of a structured plan. Unlike traditional mid to long-term planning, which typically involves rigid objectives and limited flexibility, systemic planning allows for regular reflection and adjustments based on evidence of success and the evolving needs of a complex, human-centred system. This approach acknowledges that development and change are non-linear processes influenced by a variety of internal and external factors within the school ecosystem. A core principle of systemic planning is its adaptability to unforeseen circumstances, encouraging a reflective and problem-solving mindset to address unexpected challenges successfully.

Systemic planning is particularly useful for bilingual programs, where the intersection of various factors can produce unanticipated outcomes. Acknowledging these complexities and embracing continuous observation and adaptation is part of managing changing community dynamics. You may encounter some resistance to this approach from those in the community accustomed to linear development models. This may result, for example, in parent pushback when an organisational change is made based on observations or data collection. Ultimately, learning about and employing a systematic plan lends structure and confidence to your actions as it offers a more relevant, dynamic and resilient framework for school growth and evolution.

3.1. Time and professional development

Acknowledge the challenges and dedication required from the team to implement and manage a bilingual program, including the demands on their time and the need for professional development.

Recognising the commitment each staff member brings to their role and the challenges they face helps them feel seen, understood, and appreciated,

which is essential for maintaining motivation and feeling valued in their work.

Managing time

Being part of a bilingual community means that things take longer. It's important to account for the extra time needed to create materials and communicate in multiple languages, both internally and externally.

Teachers may require additional planning hours to develop multilingual resources and classroom language support materials. Administrative tasks, such as managing communication in multiple languages, may demand extra staffing. Internal policies and procedures should be accessible to all staff members. Documents written in a person's additional languages will often require careful proofreading. We are fortunate today that tools which support translation and proofreading are constantly improving. However, meetings conducted in multiple languages may take longer and parent tutorials or conferences may require translator support.

The time commitment for these tasks is substantial and has to be carefully planned and acknowledged. Unless the school has willing volunteers within the community, these responsibilities will likely require financing additional personnel hours or reallocating existing staff duties, such as playtime supervision.

The school must be transparent about its intentions to address these needs, even if financial restraints prevent it from doing so now. Leaders should consider the economic implications of these added time demands and their impact on the overall viability of the bilingual program.

Supporting professional development

A professional development review cycle, often referred to as an appraisal cycle, is a valuable tool for school leadership to support and acknowledge staff during the transitions and challenges of implementing a bilingual program. This process involves regularly gathering feedback from staff about their successes, celebrating achievements, identifying challenges, and collaboratively planning for growth. By recognising difficulties as a natural part of progress, this approach helps staff feel seen, valued, and supported in their roles.

An engaging professional development program encourages continuous

growth for all staff members. It creates opportunities for open dialogue about professional aspirations, celebrates achievements, and motivates proactive contributions to program development and creative classroom practices. Additionally, it prevents staff from falling into monotonous routines by encouraging a growth mindset. A (professional) development culture benefits the entire community, reflects the school's commitment to holistic growth and helps to support an environment where both individuals and the community can thrive.

Traditional hierarchical structures often tie professional development to appraisal systems, where rewards (frequently financial) are based on achieving standardised goals. While maintaining clear organisational objectives is important, a holistic professional development program shifts the focus from merely meeting targets to empowering people on their personal development journey. This approach recognises the unique strengths, skills, and potential of each staff member, emphasising individual and collective growth over standardisation. For those interested in exploring alternative organisational models, Reinventing Organisations by Frederic Laloux offers valuable insights.

In a people-centred professional community, supported by a development program, each individual's contributions are considered integral to the ecosystem. Belonging to a community means that a person's efforts positively influence the collective while in return, the community supports their individual growth. No two teachers bring the same skills or perspectives, and in a school community, it's not the sole responsibility of each individual to meet every program need. If we apply these ideas and view the school as a whole ecosystem of individuals who support each other to work with and towards the vision, then forming part of that ecosystem is more likely to feel like a mutually rewarding choice.

3.2. Practical steps for professional development

- **self-assessment**: Allocate time for educators to reflect on their work and assess their own practice. This process helps teachers identify areas for growth and recognise accomplishments.
- **Individual meetings**: Follow self-assessments with one-to-one discussions to review reflections and collaboratively set the year's personal and professional growth objectives. This individualised approach allows teachers

to define manageable goals and feel a sense of progress within a supportive framework.

- **Support plans**: Collaborate with teachers to determine external resources or support needed to achieve their goals. Often, educators already have a clear sense of where they'd like to improve, and offering practical support can make these aspirations achievable.
- **Ongoing check-ins**: Use the agreed-upon objectives as a basis for check-ins throughout the year, ensuring that growth remains a shared focus.

For new teachers, this structured approach helps manage the overwhelm they can feel in their roles by focusing on incremental, achievable steps. This practice fosters a sense of accomplishment and builds a supportive community where each person's growth and stage of development is acknowledged and respected.

Valuing all contributions

In a bilingual organisation, especially in areas where the required language skills are scarce, a school community can channel a lot of their energy and resources into finding staff with the required skills. However, staff who don't yet possess these skills can still enrich the environment with many cultural and linguistic contributions. Staff need to feel valued for their unique skills, whatever their language abilities. Improving language proficiency is an important focus in a bilingual setting, but all contributions should be acknowledged and appreciated.

Tools and resources for self-assessment

Developing or adapting self-evaluation tools for your program is an important step. Resources like the Montessori Assessment Playbook can be particularly helpful for Montessori schools, as it includes self-evaluation tools for leadership, teachers, and assistants. These tools can be adapted to include criteria particular to bilingual programs. Additionally, remember that working in multiple languages affects expectations for teaching and learning, so evaluation criteria should reflect these unique demands.

3.3. Empowering educators to refine the bilingual program for their classrooms

Empowering educators to engage in reflective practices and refine program implementation for their own classrooms encourages proactive contributions to the improvement of educational programs. In the previous section, we discussed some practices that help create an environment where adults feel they are part of a learning culture. This includes recognising that errors are essential to learning and development and encouraging a growth mindset. To enable educators to make independent decisions and devise innovative solutions to classroom challenges, they must first feel secure. A sense of safety enhances one's ability to take risks and explore new approaches confidently.

Teachers possess the most immediate and nuanced insights into the effectiveness of a bilingual program at any given moment. However, implementing a bilingual program can introduce an additional layer of complexity in the evaluation of students' learning development.

3.4. Building a foundation for reflective practice through observation and assessment techniques

The first thing to consider is whether your staff members are knowledgeable about assessment practices, and if so, encourage them to share their experiences. The next consideration, especially in child-centred education programs, is the teaching team's willingness to participate in assessment practices. This may require an open dialogue to address differing perspectives on the role and value of assessment in their classrooms. Imposing assessment practices without reaching a consensus about their value may result in resistance or disengagement from teachers. Invest the time to build consensus around the place of assessment as a reflective tool for supporting program adaptation and individualisation. Detailed information about the objectives and methodologies of various assessment types can be found in section 2.7., Assessment: making the process and progress of learning visible and section

3.8. Assessment in L2 Learning

Once a shared understanding of reflective practice through observation and assessment has been established, teachers may need support to build these practices into their work. Two important skills for assessing the effectiveness of a bilingual program in the classroom are some level of proficiency in the target language and an understanding of the language acquisition process.

If the classroom teacher lacks these skills, steps need to be taken to address the situation; otherwise, it can lead to anxiety. If an outside specialist imparts content related to the target language, ensuring the right conditions for coordination with the regular class teacher is necessary so that all the adults involved in the learning environment understand any adjustments that should be made to the program.

3.5. Supporting skill development

Enhancing language proficiency and deepening knowledge of the language acquisition process are time intensive undertakings. However, school leadership can take steps to accelerate this learning process by integrating targeted skill development into professional development initiatives. Leaders should first highlight the relevance and benefits of acquiring these skills, ensuring that staff see them as meaningful and achievable goals.

In the interim, schools can assess the skills already present within the staff team and encourage collaboration among colleagues to share expertise. Building a collaborative staff culture not only addresses immediate needs but also strengthens the overall capacity of the teaching team. Alternatively, schools can seek assistance from an educational consultant who understands the implications of bilingual programming and can help implement such changes.

3.6. Making learning and progress visible

As we know, language development is not always immediately apparent. To help children, and, by extension, the broader community of adults, recognise and celebrate their progress, it is worth spending some time considering how to make their language learning visible. Here are some ideas:

Portfolios

Consistently collecting samples of students' language learning can provide a clear record of their development over time. Creating individual portfolios that include a variety of work, such as writing samples, offers a tangible way to track and reflect on progress. Advancing through a levelled reading sequence can also serve as a visible indicator of growth, providing children and their families with milestones to celebrate.

Assessment

While some child-centred educational programs avoid traditional exams, others may include state mandated testing or use other forms of assessment to gather data for program improvement. Regardless of the approach, some form of assessment helps learners recognise and appreciate their progress. Carefully designed assessments that align with the program's values and goals can foster a sense of achievement and motivate further learning. Using self-assessment practices, sometimes referred to as assessment as learning, can be complementary to educational methods focussed on increasing children's ownership and autonomy of their learning.

Highlighting Progress Towards Independence in Language Use

As children progress in their language learning journey, drawing attention to their increasing independence can help them recognise their own progress. Some learners may rely on tools like writing frames and vocabulary mats and then move over to simple dictionary support or reach a point where they can independently organise and structure their written work. When children achieve greater independence in language use, acknowledge and celebrate their progress with them.

Pause and reflect

- How do you incorporate a cyclical, evidence-based planning process in your classroom or school to avoid the reactive "putting out fires" approach?
- In what ways can you promote a healthy balance between time for creating bilingual resources and broader professional responsibilities within your teaching team?
- How do you encourage a reflective, growth-oriented staff culture that values both individual contributions and the collective development of your bilingual program?
- How can you support ongoing skill development for teachers with varying levels of language proficiency, ensuring they feel confident and capable in delivering a robust bilingual program?

4. Sharing language learning objectives and criteria

Incorporating language and content objectives when sharing learning goals ensures that students understand the integrated content of their lessons. For example, when introducing a concept, combine the content with relevant language objectives:

- Content and language goal example: "I am learning to use `less than,' `equal to,' and `greater than' to compare groups or numbers." Another strategy is integrating activities which share work on content while showcasing language learning. For instance:
- Sharing work activity example: "We will explain the parts of a plant to our classmates, from the roots to the leaves."

4.1. Communicating plans and objectives with stakeholders

Communication with families

Clear and ongoing communication is key for building strong relationships between schools and families, particularly in communities experiencing complex changes, such as implementing a bilingual program. Transparent and consistent communication promotes mutual understanding and supports creating a cohesive environment for children between school and home.

Forms of communication

Communication between schools and families can take both formal and informal forms:

Formal communication

- Emails
- Scheduled meetings or tutorials
- Handbooks and other written resources
- Sharing assessment, evaluation, and record-keeping data
- School website

Informal communication

- Conversations at school events
- Chats during drop-off and pick-up times
- Quick organisational messages

- Social media interactions
- Daily greetings

Formal and informal communication play their role in ensuring that families feel informed, valued, and included.

4.2. Developing a communication strategy

A communication strategy helps establish support from families and builds trust. Schools should identify the most suitable channels for each type of communication and share this information with parents. Setting clear expectations regarding communication methods and timelines helps to manage expectations and lowers anxiety in the community. Consistency helps families stay committed to the long-term goal of helping their children become bilingual.

Thoughtful language in communication

Choosing your words carefully when communicating with the community is important to help them understand and accept possible changes in the developing bilingual program. For instance, instead of saying, "Our bilingual program will be supported by one native English-speaking teacher and one Spanish-speaking teacher who will provide your child with 50/50 language instruction," you could emphasise a personalised approach:

- "Based on our observations of your child's language development, we will provide the support necessary to ensure their progress in both school languages."

This approach highlights individual attention and reassures families of the program's flexibility to meet their child's needs.

The value of positive communication

Positive and purposeful communication between schools and families can:

- Enhance understanding of different perspectives.
- Strengthen trust and collaboration.
- Supports children's growth by aligning school and home environments.
- Reinforces a shared sense of purpose between educators and families.

By placing importance on communication as a means of collaboration,

schools can create a connected and supportive community that benefits both the students and the bilingual program.

Communication within the school staff team

To create a safe space for transformative conversation within your staff team, create an organisational learning culture in which:

- Errors are recognised as intrinsic to learning and development
- Multiple perspectives are welcome
- Each member has a voice and influence
- Each person is valued: strengths and differences are celebrated
- A growth mindset is encouraged

As discussed earlier in this chapter, achieving consensus is important when implementing a bilingual program. Supporting the staff engaged in this process will help to sustain their commitment and enthusiasm. Effective communication within the team can take various forms, all contributing to a culture of dialogue and collaboration:

Formal communication

- Emails
- Communication network tools
- Organised meetings (e.g., whole team, level team, class team, one-to-one discussions)
- Training or brainstorming sessions
- Handbooks and school policies
- Professional development initiatives

Informal communication

- Conversations around the school
- Check-ins
- Quick organisational updates
- Staff events
- Daily greetings

Pause and reflect

- Which communication methods have you found most effective in keeping families updated, engaged, and confident in the bilingual program's progress?
- How do you cultivate a supportive, collaborative atmosphere among staff, where differing viewpoints and ongoing learning sustain a strong bilingual culture?
- In what ways do you schedule and prioritise team meetings so that there is enough time for creating materials, language planning, and classroom consistency remain balanced?
- How do you ensure that existing or new school policies align with your language-learning values, maintaining clarity and coherence across classes, families, and the wider community?

5. References and resources

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Montessori Córdoba
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Individual Language Profile and Plan

Student Name:
DOB:

Home language/s	
(L1/L2)and description of their use	
Experience of Instructional Languages	
English	
Spanish (if not home language)	

Academic Background	

Current Level (CH or Elementary):	
English Language	
Curricular or planning modifications (during Children's House only for 5+ year olds or 4-year-olds if early readers in L1)	
Listening	
Reading	
Writing	
Speaking	

Spanish Language	
Curricular or planning modifications (during Children's House only for 5+ year olds or 4-year-olds if early readers in L1)	
Listening	
Reading	
Writing	
Speaking	

Montessori Córdoba
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Academic Future Plans (after discussion with families in E2):

Target at end of Elementary education BICS (social use) or CALP (academic use):

Individualised Language Targets for 8+-year-olds: Only the equivalent Trinity GESE or Starters, Movers, and Flyers exams suit children. The level exam references are for orientation purposes only; many children will have a level higher than Trinity GESE 7/B2.1/B2.2 in E6. Only set targets for the current school year after Autumn evaluations.

School Year	**CEFR Target level**			**Autumn Review**	**End-of-Year Review**
	MIN.	GENERAL TARGET	Individual Target		
E3	A0 Trinity GESE 1 Cambridge Starters	A2.2 Trinity GESE 4 Cambridge KET			
				Teacher name:	Teacher name:
E4	A1 Trinity GESE 2 Cambridge Movers	B1.1 Trinity GESE 5			
				Teacher name:	Teacher name:
E5	A2.1 Trinity GESE 3 Cambridge Flyers	B1.2/B2.1 Trinity GESE 6 Cambridge PET			
				Teacher name:	Teacher name:
E6	A2.2 Trinity GESE 4 Cambridge KET	B2.1/B2.2 Trinity GESE 7 Cambridge FCE			
				Teacher name:	Teacher name:

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Language Policy

Introduction

Montessori Cordoba International School is an English Immersion Programme for 0–6-year-olds and a Bilingual English and Spanish Programme for 6-12-year-olds. Part of our mission is to offer the children a global, international vision of the world and for them to grow knowing that they are part of a global community. For this reason, supporting our children to be bilingual and preparing an environment where the community feels comfortable in multilingual situations is one of our guiding principles.

As most of our students have Spanish as a first language the following objectives apply to these children. In the case of children who have other language profiles, adaptations are made according to an individual language profile/plan (See SEN policy).

Language Use around School

Our teaching faculty (guides and assistants) are all bilingual English and Spanish speakers, staff meetings are held in English unless we have a speaker who does not have confidence in their ability to communicate clearly in English. A few members of staff may need additional support in staff meetings when using either language if topics use complex or specialised vocabulary. This support usually occurs naturally with other staff members translating.

Admin staff use Spanish or English depending on the fluency of the person they are communicating with.

Communications to families on a whole school level are usually in Spanish so that they can be understood by all parents. We have considered reverting to English but when we have sent an English communication, we have received some complaints and also a curious refusal in some cases, to learn how to use online translating services. This may be something we will trial again in upcoming years. Class communications to families are generally sent in English and Spanish, although as each Guide knows their own class community there may be groups in which communicating in English only is fine.

Communications between school staff are usually in English, especially between teaching faculty. Communications with non-teaching staff are often in Spanish.

Our record keeping tool, **Transparent Classroom,** is set by each user to be in a selection of languages including Spanish or English, however it does not translate written observations or trackers which are individually written to the user's language.

The **language profile of teaching faculty** is that guides are fluent English speakers or Spanish speakers with sufficient English knowledge to use English with confidence and clarity in all communications with children. This is variable; Infant Community Guides may have a lower level than Elementary Guides for example. Assistants in Infant Community and Children's House have the same profile as the guides, whilst in Elementary it is important that the assistants are fluent Spanish speakers and preferably Spanish Primary school teachers. This enables us to support children correctly in their Spanish academic development.

Language objectives in the Infant Community

During their time in the Infant Community children are provided a language rich environment in English. All presentations and their daily routine are managed with Guides and Assistants speaking English. When children

transition to Children's House they are comfortable with English as a day-to-day medium of communication, they understand everyday vocabulary and instructions, and know songs and some favourite stories in English. In most cases children can also produce English words or short phrases when they transition to Children's House although this is in large part dependent on their general stage of language development.

Language objectives in Children's House

During their time in Children's House children continue to be provided with a language rich environment in English. All presentations and their daily routine are managed with Guides and Assistants speaking English. Their vocabulary continues to expand, and production of English usually enters a stage, at sometime between 3 and 5 years of age, which enables conversations with guides and assistants to take place in English, however there may be exceptions still. In Children's House children follow the pink, blue and green series in the sequence shown in annex 1, this sequence has been adapted from the AMI sequence to better support second language learners.. It is desirable for children to be working on the green series before entering the second plane of development. Children who are ready start on levelled reading work from Raz Kids and also may access the Elementary I levelled reading system. Unlike monolingual Montessori programmes we do not start grammar work in Children's House as we spend more time developing oral language

Exceptions to use of English in 0-6 environments

Until children reach a level of English comprehension that allows them to access the following, guides and assistants may use Spanish when:

- during settling-in period when children are anxious and insecure in their new environment
- when dealing with situations where social and/or emotional support or guidance is the priority
- when giving a key instruction where misinterpretation could be a danger to child or to others
- when a child has a language plan which indicates otherwise

Language objectives in Elementary

Elementary children receive part of their instruction in Spanish. However, 90% of the instruction and interactions with students still happen in English. Spanish is only used to deliver Spanish language, Spanish history, and Spanish geography (As required by local law).

English

Children finishing their Elementary education with us should have a level of proficiency in English which enables them to continue their academic education in English. This objective only applies to children whose home language is not English if they start their education here by or before age 5. Children with this language profile who enrol later than this have individualised English language objectives which are recorded and adjusted each year on their individualised language plan.

Spanish

Children finishing their Elementary education with us should have a level of proficiency in Spanish which enables them to continue their academic education in Spanish. This objective only applies to children whose home language is not Spanish if they start their education here by or before age 5. Children with this language profile who enrol later than this have individualised Spanish language objectives which are recorded and adjusted each year on their individualised language plan.

Whilst bilingual academic proficiency is our preferred outcome, many children have an individual language profile and expectations must be shared with families. That said, we also recognise that language development and ability in young children is highly individual, and it is very difficult to predict children's improvement any further than a year in advance. Whist one child may be very slow in producing English and then suddenly produce rich, varied vocabulary and structures; another child may use words freely but improve very slowly. We use admissions meetings, new student meetings with guides and ongoing tutorials to support parents in understanding the complexity of language learning in an immersion environment. In these moments and some specific workshops on developing bilingualism we explain the difference between children who are explicitly taught English in a constructive way (EAL teaching and support) and those who absorb the language from their environment.

Overview of Elementary English work

This section gives an overview of the 4 key skills and how our Elementary environments are prepared to foster development in each

Listening and speaking

Listening and speaking English are acquired through our immersion program and are not explicitly taught to all through ESL instruction sessions. Support is given in specific presentations to those with an individual language plan who require extra support, either due to late starting or another reason.
The Montessori Elementary classroom allows many opportunities throughout the day for speaking in English. We recognise that children will improve listening skills before their speaking skills. One of the challenges of the language profile of Montessori Cordoba is that Spanish is the most common shared language, so whilst children's conversation with guides and assistants is usually in English, when children work with others without the guide or assistant it is natural for their conversation to be in Spanish. This means we need to encourage opportunities for conversation in English among peers. Guides provide extra materials on the shelves for structured vocabulary and conversation practice which children can choose as part of their English language work.
Assemblies and circle times also provide opportunities for children to listen and respond in English. In groups with higher-level, more confident English speakers it is a good idea for those children to contribute first as it provides a natural language model for others and sets the tone for an English conversation. Children often translate or provide missing vocabulary if their classmate struggles at some point.
When it is considered helpful, guides provide some sentence structure support to help children participate in conversation. This may involve practicing beforehand with the teacher individually or in a group, having access to a prompt card or having the structure written on a flipboard/whiteboard.
We recognise that having other English language models in the classroom apart from the guide and assistant provides more opportunities for children to practice their speaking and listening skills. Montessori Córdoba aims to attract children whose first language is not Spanish through admissions and some special considerations aimed at stimulating the enrolment of children whose first language is not Spanish.

Reading

At Montessori Cordoba we are aware that extra time and attention is needed to develop literacy skills of children whose home language is not English. In order to develop to a level where reading in English would be freely chosen, most children need to understand that reading in English is an obligatory activity in their work guides/journals.
We have three progressive reading schemes in Elementary at Montessori Cordoba. The lower-level books are levelled readers with engage literacy. These are generally used with children in Elementary I. We also use the Talisman Series are used in Elementary II with children who need extra support with reading and spelling. Talisman is high interest - low

level and are useful in supporting older children with a low English level, usually due to late entry to our programme. Once children are ready, they move to novels that are organised by accelerated readers scores starting from 3.0. This allows children choice in the books they choose to read while ensuring that the books they choose are appropriate to their level.

When preparing our environments for developing reading skills we recognise the importance of developing fluidity, comprehension, and analysis. For children who are using levelled readers, small group readings happen three times a week in each class - twice with an adult (which encourages English only conversation about the book) and at least once with a peer. During these sessions, children take turns reading and together they ask questions based on the Bloom's taxonomy reading questions (see resources on Drive) to ensure children are using all their higher order thinking skills in the discussion. Children often choose to do follow up work from their books including making their own books, comic strips of the story or a piece of artwork.

Older students with a higher reading level have a weekly literature circle. They work in groups to choose a title that appeals to them. They agree on how many chapters to read for the next meeting, and they work together to assign each member of the group a role. Roles include: summariser, question maker, illustrator, word detective. Children are responsible for reading the agreed part of the book and producing the work based on their role and bringing it to the following meeting. Children meet once a week and have a discussion based on the work they have done in their different roles. They finish the meeting by assigning new roles and agreeing how much they will read for the next meeting. Literature circles are effective for encouraging comprehension and analysis while also promoting autonomy and motivation.

We acknowledge that fostering a love of reading is also an important part of the role of the guide. One way we do this is by giving children the freedom to read in the library when they want to. Books are available in L1 and L2. After lunch each day children also spend time silent reading which supports children in developing a good reading habit and also experience the pleasure of reading as a relaxing individual activity. The love of reading is also fostered by read aloud. Guides in each class read to their class every day in English while children relax and listen to the story. This allows for extra exposure to English and also stimulates discussion around comprehension and plot analysis.

<u>Writing</u>

In the Elementary classrooms reading and writing skills are essential for students to be able to engage in cosmic education and the creation of big works. Guides use a variety of materials to support writing skills in all areas of the curriculum. E.g., providing writing frames for science experiments, reports etc. These writing frames scaffold writing skills and are gradually removed as the children´s level progresses.

The mechanics of writing are taught through the mechanics of writing sequence. The skills learned in these presentations are practised independently and then incorporated into writers' workshop presentations. In Elementary I, writing practice is incorporated into writing reports, investigations, planning events, science reports. In Elementary II these writing opportunities continue, but with an additional weekly writers' workshop. These workshops cover different genres ranging from poetry to newspaper reports to creative writing. Guides follow their own sequence to cover these genres and make the most of opportunities to teach them as they arise in the classroom (e.g, letter writing is taught when the children wish to write a letter to the director about changing school menu). These workshops are influenced by the ideas of Ros Wilson who designed Big Writing. She recognised that children need to talk lots about an idea before writing about it. Writers' workshops are structured so children spend time in the first work cycle discussing what they will write and then the second work cycle actually writing it. Success criteria for each child´s piece of writing is based on their individual ability. Writing is then self-assessed by the child against their success criteria. (See resources in Drive)

Follow up work is expected to be completed in English when a child has received the presentation in English, unless the child has an individualised language profile/plan which indicates otherwise.

Additional areas for literacy development

Grammar

At Montessori Cordoba each guide follows the grammar series in their album which covers word study, parts of speech and sentence analysis (See resources in Drive for sequence order). We find the grammar symbols engaging and supportive of children learning L2.

Spelling

In the transition from Children´s House to Elementary some children will continue with the pink, blue green series as detailed in the section above. This allows children to build on and consolidate their learning of the phonics series from children's house. While we acknowledge that this is appropriate for children moving to a new stage of classroom, we also have learned that there reaches a point when it is not beneficial for older children to continue with these presentations as it can affect their self-esteem to appear to be working on younger materials and also the level of repetition required can be tedious for children on the second plane of development. The guide should use their best judgement to determine when and if this transition is required.

In elementary we use a spelling system based on ´Words their Way´ methodology. The children work with different words each week at their individualised level, and this is an obligatory activity in their work journals/guides. They can practise spelling the words the way they prefer - games, colouring, write, copy, check. At least once a week they have a dictation with an adult to see if they are ready to move to the next list. Children can ask for a dictation sooner than weekly if they believe they are ready to move to the next word list. In addition to the ´Words their way´ words children also have three sight words on their list taken from the standardised lists of 500 most common words (see resources in Drive)

ESL support

At Montessori Cordoba we are aware of both the benefits and challenges of learning in a bilingual Montessori environment. We acknowledge that the guide should be aware of the differing needs of EAL learners, and that extra input is required to support children to succeed in their second language. At Montessori Córdoba we support children by:

- Using additional materials created by the guides to enhance vocabulary in L2. These activities are sequential and can be used by a child independently or with a peer.
- Using EAL textbook or online EAL resources to support the teaching of basic sentence structures and grammar points.
- Providing additional presentation and materials on EAL grammar such as tenses so that children have the opportunity to incorporate these skills into their use of English.
- Using additional materials, created by the guides, to support conversation between students in L2.
- If a child enters the environment with little or no English that child receives daily input from the guide or assistant to support initial transition. These children are also encouraged to attend additional English classes outside of the school.

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Assessment guidelines

Children's House

In Children's house assessment in the development of reading and writing is ongoing, a child's progress and objectives are reflected in the guide's observations and record-keeping.

Elementary

Internal assessment of literacy skills is done at the start and end of each academic year to ensure student progression and a consistent approach between faculty.

Listening and Speaking

Listening and speaking skills are assessed by the guide through informal observation and note taking. Guides will assess constantly the levels of their students and create opportunities to support them in the classroom. For example, a child may speak well but consistently use the past tense incorrectly. On observation of this the guide will do a presentation on the past tense and provide the child with opportunities to work with past tense verbs. This supports the incorporating of the past tense into the child's English-speaking skills.

Spelling

At the beginning of each school year students' spelling is assessed using a standardised spelling assessment dictation according to a child's age and stage. This is used to determine the phonological awareness and knowledge of sight words. This allows the guide to start them working with the correct spelling list.

Reading

The reading level of each child in Elementary is assessed at the start of the school year. This allows teachers to assess levels and see progression. Children are assessed using the Raz Kids assessment texts which provide an accelerated reader score. This allows guides to individually match each child to their correct levelled reader level or accelerated reader novels. Once the correct level has been identified each of these reading systems allows children choice within their level. When a teacher believes a child is ready to move up a level, they should use the assessment text to check.

Writing

Writing assessment is ongoing. During writing tasks feedback is only given on the success criteria of the tasks. If guides observe during these activities repeated spelling, handwriting or punctuation errors they are noted by the guides and a specific presentation is given in a different moment to teach these skills. This is to ensure children feel confident in their writing skills; over correction can affect their writing confidence. In Elementary II each writing task is self-assessed using agreed success criteria for each task.

ESL level

Children in Elementary are assessed at the start of each academic year for their ESL level. This is used to inform the long-term language objectives for the child and these objectives are shared with the families in the December tutorials,

so they have a realistic expectation of their child's progress. Our classroom guides are also TEFL teachers and use their own knowledge and resources to assess these levels.

Overview of Elementary Spanish work

Our Spanish coordinator creates and implements a curriculum based on the local requirements in the areas of Spanish Language, Spanish Geography and Spanish History.

We have a full curriculum document which isolated the parts of the curriculum which are not covered in the Montessori curriculum. So, for example children will not cover land formations in Spanish as they will have worked on this in English.

This year our Spanish coordinator will create a new Spanish language policy and programme.

The Spanish coordinator spends one hour each day in each Elementary environment doing presentations from the Spanish curriculum. These may use Montessori materials where appropriate and may also use other support materials. Children with Spanish as a first language initiate their formal lessons in Spanish literacy when their English literacy skills are consolidated, util that time their work in Spanish is oral and may include read aloud from the Spanish coordinator followed by comprehension questions. There is a Spanish language area in the communal space between the two EI classrooms where the Spanish language materials are stored. Work can be done in this area or taken into the classrooms to work with. Assistants support the children's Follow Up work in Spanish and also record observations from this follow up work with the coordinator so that these observations of needs maybe included in the coordinators planning.

Assessment of Spanish Language Development

The Spanish language coordinator is responsible for ongoing assessment of Spanish, these include an initial evaluation (Editor: EOS) at the start of each academic year for each child. From these initial assessments each child is set individual objectives for the year.

Assessment and record keeping

In previous years individual language plans have been kept by guides in folders in paper format and record keeping was done on Montessori Compass. This year, we are changing to Transparent Classroom and we are exploring the possibility of storing assessment information on this platform.

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Annex 1

Bird eye view of Children's House Language Sequence at MC compared to AMI monolingual sequence

	AMI	Montessori Cordoba
Oral Language	Naming objects in the environment Vocabulary for the Sensorial Materials Classified Cards Vocabulary for Social Relations Classified Cards: Things that go Together Classified Cards: Biological Classification Classified Cards: Life Cycles Storytelling Reading Books Poems Conversation News Period Bulletin Board Orientation Game Question Game Oral Grammar Games Cultural Folders	Object-Picture Matching Sequencing Cards Vocabulary for Social Relations Classified Cards: Things that go together Classified Cards: Life Cycles Storytelling Reading Books Conversation
Writing	Sound Games Sandpaper Letters Sandpaper Phonograms Moveable Alphabet Metal Insets Map Making Sand Tray Chalkboards Handwriting on Paper Sorting Sandpaper Letters Handwriting Charts Book Making	Sound Games ("I spy") Sandpaper Letters Red Group Sandpaper Letters Yellow Group Sandpaper Letters Purple Group Sandpaper Letters Orange Group Sandpaper Letters Black Group Sandpaper Letters White Group Beginning Sound Sorting Red Group Beginning Sound Sorting Yellow Group Beginning Sound Sorting Purple Group Beginning Sound Sorting Orange Group Beginning Sound Sorting Black Group Beginning Sound Sorting White Group Moveable Alphabet Metal Insets Sand Tray Chalkboards Handwriting on Paper Handwriting Charts Book Making Small Moveable Alphabet

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Reading	*Phonetic Reading:* Object Box 1 Phonetic Reading Cards Phonetic Commands	*Pink Series:* First Lesson on Reading Alphabet Line CVC 3-part-cards

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	Phonetic Booklets Rhyming Words *Phonograms:* Object Box 2 Phonogram Booklets Phonogram Cards Phonogram Commands Research Spelling Dictionary/Personal Dictionary Puzzle Words *Reading Classification:* Labelling the environment Cards with Labels Definition Stages *Reading Analysis:* Stage 1 Stage 2 Stage 3 Interpretive Reading	Phonetic Object-Word Matching Phonetic Picture-word matching Sight Words - 1st set Phonetic Phrases Phonetic Short Sentences Phonetic Long Sentences Phonetic Books *Blue Series:* Consonant Blends Object-word matching Consonant Blends Picture-word matching Sight words - 2 set Consonant Blends Short Sentences Consonant Blends Long Sentences *Green Series:* Green Sandpaper Letters Phonogram Picture-word matching Phonogram Object-word matching Phonogram Short Sentences Phonogram Long Sentences *Levelled Reading*: Sight Words Level aa Level A Level B Level C
Grammar	*Functions of Words* Articles Adjectives The Logical Adjective Game The Detective Game Conjunctions Prepositions Verbs Adverbs The Logical Adverb Game Continuation of commands The Symbol and Phrase Game *Word Study* Generic Presentation Compound Words Suffixes Prefixes Word Families Adjectives	Children start on the grammar sequence in Elementary

Designing a bilingual program

1.5. Managing resources

Contents

Key takeaways

- A **reliable financial plan** secures essential resources for a bilingual program and prevents budgetary shortfalls.
- Clarifying **language objectives and staff responsibilities** drives effective recruitment and team-building decisions.
- Assessing and prioritising **candidates' skill sets**, helps create a well-rounded team.
- Working with the staff you have, while **adapting objectives** accordingly, establishes a realistic, supportive environment.
- **Long-term, responsive strategies** foster a cohesive bilingual culture for everyone involved.

Introduction

This section of the field guide focuses on the crucial aspects of managing resources and human resources within bilingual programs in Montessori schools. It highlights the importance of creating a realistic financial plan, managing multilingual materials and time effectively, and addressing common staffing challenges. The text discusses how schools can make strategic decisions based on their resources, goals, and local context to ensure long-term success. Additionally, it covers the complexities of finding qualified staff for bilingual programs, considering various factors such as language proficiency, experience, and location. The guide also offers insights into how schools can adapt their approach to staff development and resource management, particularly when transitioning into bilingual education or dealing with staffing shortages. Ultimately, it provides practical strategies for building a sustainable bilingual program that meets the evolving needs of students and staff.

1. Managing resources

Managing resources is key to the success of any bilingual program. In the last section of this guide, we discussed the creation of clear objectives and organisational and educational strategies. Here, we briefly outline how to create a realistic financial plan, manage materials and time, and examine, in detail, a very common difficulty: addressing staffing challenges. By considering our available human and material resources and planning to fill the gaps between what we have and what we need, schools can plan for long-term success while adapting to the changing needs of their bilingual community.

Financial plan

All projects need to have a solid financial plan. While it is great to have inspiring ideas and clear goals that benefit children and the community, everything can fall apart without a reliable financial plan. Considering educational programs' tight budgets, developing optimistic and pessimistic projections is wise. If only one version is possible, it should be the pessimistic one. Tight budgets rarely allow for a buffer or reserve fund, making it important to have a "tentatively" solid financial plan. Securing designated

funds for your bilingual program is recommended. Otherwise, the economic impact of running a bilingual program versus a monolingual one will affect the entire school budget, whether privately or publicly funded. In the foundation of your financial plan for a bilingual program, consider what additional expenses need to be factored in:

Materials

A multilingual program necessitates multilingual materials. These include classroom materials, library books, resources for community members who do not share a common language, as well as marketing and communication materials. While some materials, such as library books or classroom language learning resources, are purchased outright, others require a substantial amount of time to produce.

Time

As mentioned in section 1.4, Running a bilingual program, it is important to consider the time required to create materials and communicate internally and externally. Additional administration hours are necessary for communication in multiple languages, and additional planning time may be necessary, too. Both can affect the school budget. This brings us to human resources, which we cover in detail in the following section.

2. The human resource puzzle

Every school faces challenges with staffing, whether bilingual or not. Do we have the right mix of experience and energy? Can we afford to hire the best candidates? Which profile fits our needs? Or, when options are limited, which candidate has the fewest gaps in their skill set?

Finding qualified staff in Montessori education is often difficult, even without adding language requirements. The language program introduces an extra layer to the staffing challenge for bilingual schools.

Each school's solution will depend on its goals, situation, resources, and location. That is why this guide does not offer a specific solution. Instead, it helps you create a strategy that works for your school.

As we have examined earlier in this part of the field guide, the first step for a

new school is to set clear goals for the language program. Do you want children to have basic conversational skills in their second language by age 12, or will they need strong academic skills to support future education?

When you have set your language objectives and taken time to understand the linguistic context of your local community, you can plan the resources needed to help them meet these objectives. The most important resource in any language program is people—teachers, assistants, or others who speak the target language. Depending on your objectives and the exposure to the target language your students will have outside of school, you might choose to hire:

- A classroom assistant who uses only the second language in class.
- A language specialist to provide dedicated language lessons.
- A teacher who is fluent in the target language.
- A teacher with intermediate skills in the target language.
- Or a combination of these roles.

Searching for new candidates

You can use a variety of methods to find candidates for your available positions, such as:

- Specialist publications (online or print).
- Job forums related to your field.
- General job boards.
- Professional networking websites.
- Local publications.
- Your school's social media or networks.
- Word of mouth.

The number and quality of candidates available will depend on your school's location and situation. In the next sections, we will explore strategies for handling different scenarios.

Assuming you have some candidates to interview, focus on how to approach the selection process effectively.

2.1. Creating a candidate profile, job description, and selection process

Creating a candidate profile for your vacancy is an important first step. However, you may not always receive applications from people who meet every requirement. In such cases, prioritise which skills, experience, qualifications, and attributes are most important for the role. This decision will depend on your school's specific environment and the current team. For example, if your team is young, enthusiastic, and recently qualified, it could prove valuable to prioritise a candidate with more experience, even if their language skills are not as strong as another applicant's.

Importantly, language skills are just one part of the candidate's profile and may not always be the most important factor, especially in fields, like ours, where qualified candidates are in short supply. Sometimes, it is necessary to adjust language objectives to fit the strengths of the current team - or the team you can realistically build (see Working with the team you have).

2.2. Assessing candidates' language skills

When a language requirement is a priority in hiring, the applicant's actual language abilities must be carefully evaluated. Candidates often have different ideas about what "intermediate" or "fluent" means. For example, someone might have passed an advanced language exam 20 years ago but rarely used the language since. Another candidate might have lived in a country where the language is spoken for five years but never taken a formal exam. Even two people who have spent similar lengths of time in a country might have very different language skills, depending on their experiences and natural aptitudes.

For these reasons, it is important to assess candidates' language levels yourself during the interview process:

- Advanced or fluent level: If you need a high level of proficiency, application forms, documents, and interviews should be conducted in the target language. If you, as the school leader, do not have the required language skills, make sure to involve someone who does in the interview process.
- Intermediate level: For this level, it may be enough to conduct part of the interview or a short separate discussion in the target language. The rest of the interview can happen in your local language to better evaluate the

candidate's other skills and attributes.

Remember, you are assessing the whole person and how they will fit into your team. Candidates with intermediate language skills may struggle to fully express their character and knowledge in the target language. This is to be expected and should be taken into account when making your decision. Also, remember that knowing a language is not the same as possessing the ability to teach a second language or the skill to adapt your linguistic output for second-language learners.

2.3. International candidates

You may consider hiring international candidates if your school has specific language requirements. If you take this route, it's important to understand the work visa requirements in your country. While candidates are responsible for meeting legal obligations, employers are often involved in the paperwork. As an ethical practice, ensure clarity early on, at the application stage, about who will cover any associated fees. Confirm these details before advertising the position to avoid wasting either party's time.

Your ability to attract international candidates will depend on several factors:

- Pay and conditions.
- Your location.
- The school's culture.
- A clear job description.
- Transparent hiring processes and policies.
- Support structures for relocation.
- The interview procedure.

Relocating to another country is a significant commitment. Schools should acknowledge this and provide the necessary support to help candidates settle in. While school support is critical for a smooth transition, some factors are beyond the school's control. Candidates may find the local area unsuitable for their needs and move on, which can affect staff retention and the long-term stability of your faculty. To address this challenge, you might consider developing a strategy to train local candidates to meet your school's needs. Montessori Córdoba International School successfully adopted this approach:

- Realising that hiring international candidates involves many unpredictable variables, often leading them to leave after a year or two. We want staff who will stay mid- to long-term and grow with our school's culture.
- Identifying skilled English teachers in the local area who were seeking a shift from teacher-led language classes to a more enriching educational role.
- Creating a budget and a plan to train local candidates as Montessori Guides.
- Carefully selecting candidates, first placing them in assistant roles to assess their suitability.
- Offering contracts with loyalty clauses and funded their AMI diploma while they continued as assistants.

3. Working with the team you have

Schools that decide to transition into bilingual programs after they are already established - or those in areas where it is hard to find candidates with the desired language skills - often need to adapt their vision to the reality of their current team. In such cases, the focus should shift to what kind of bilingual program can be built with the available resources.

Start by examining the language knowledge that current teaching staff have. If your teachers don't have a strong enough command of the language to confidently deliver core curricular content you can think of other creative strategies to maximise the children's exposure to the target language, such as using the language to:

- Lead organised play activities.
- Offer extra-curricular activities.
- Deliver parts of the complementary curriculum.
- Participate in school life (e.g., informal interactions around school).
- Support Going Out activities.
- Communicate with the wider community.
- Arrange trips to areas or countries where the language is spoken.
- Guide parents on how to create opportunities for language use at home.
- Invite speakers to give presentations or run workshops.
- Use the language during specific times of the day, such as mealtimes.

Children are often motivated when they see adults learning alongside them. Staff should be honest about their efforts and challenges in using the target language (see section 3.1, Developing a Culture of Language Learning).

Adjust your language objectives to reflect your available skills and resources and communicate these adjustments to families. While some staff and families may find this developmental approach to planning uncomfortable, setting unrealistic objectives only leads to frustration and feelings of failure.

Just as teachers design lessons and activities that ensure children can succeed, school leaders must set realistic language objectives based on the current team and available resources. This approach allows the school to grow in a way that is sustainable and supportive for everyone involved.

This is a long-term plan

Second language development is a gradual process, see Part 2: Understanding Language Learning, and the support children need to learn a second language changes as they progress. A school starting a new bilingual program will have a different language profile, with many students being beginners, compared to a school that has been running a bilingual program for five or more years, where most of the students in the Elementary phase may have intermediate skills.

As students' language abilities improve over time, the resources required to support them will change. In addition to individual differences between children, the overall progress of language skills across the school will also require different resources. This ongoing evolution of a bilingual program makes it difficult to create a fixed list of needs from an external perspective.

School leaders must be ready for these changing needs and feel confident communicating that such changes are part of building and developing a bilingual program. Only after the school has gone through a full cycle with its students will resources and needs become more predictable and manageable.

4. Additional considerations

Strategic plans to solve your HR puzzle are often mid to long-term. They may require waiting for school expansion to create new roles, or for a staff member who meets many requirements but does not have the optimal language skills to move on naturally or for the school to find a role better suited to their skills.

These plans should be approached with sensitivity, as staff will not perform at their best if they feel unappreciated. Language proficiency, in particular, can be a sensitive topic. Asking staff to work in or improve their second language may bring up personal issues related to culture, identity, education, opportunities, and perceived ability.

Working successfully in a school community requires strong communication skills. If staff feel that a second language is being imposed on them, it can lead to resistance and misunderstandings. However, these challenges can be managed with thoughtful planning and clear communication (see section 1.4, Running a bilingual program).

Pause and reflect

- In what ways do you adapt your financial plan to accommodate both expected and unforeseen expenses, while preserving your bilingual objectives?
- How can you adjust your language objectives to align with both the available resources and the evolving needs of your students over time?
- How do you ensure clear and supportive communication with your colleagues about the challenges and adjustments in delivering a bilingual program?
- What has been your best achievement so far in solving the human resource puzzle? What can you learn from it?
- What steps can you take to support the professional development of your team, while considering the diverse language backgrounds and skill levels within your classroom?

5. References

Welsted, Lucy. The Human Resources Puzzle: Advice for Finding and Retaining the Teachers. Bilingual Montessori Community Conversations, YouTube, 11 Jan. 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZVlZriGkFk&list=PLCSKXXOmwZFWzrKbrqn7mUvhtkNVCWIJm&index=15&t=4s.

Designing a bilingual program

1.6. Overcoming implementation challenges

Contents

Key takeaways

- Successful bilingual program implementation requires **careful planning, collaboration, and the commitment** of all team members.
- **Anticipating potential hurdles** through tools like SWOT analysis helps proactively address risks and create actionable solutions.
- Cultivating **resilience and patience** in staff and families is essential for navigating the gradual process of language acquisition.
- **Aligning** the bilingual program **with the school's core values** through a collaborative team charter ensures shared ownership and long-term success.

Introduction

Implementing a bilingual school program is a complex and collaborative endeavour that demands thoughtful planning, dedicated teamwork, and strategic action. As schools transition to bilingual education, it is essential to recognise the inherent challenges and set realistic expectations while fostering a sense of shared purpose among all involved. The process of developing a bilingual program requires careful attention to communication, commitment, and the integration of diverse perspectives to ensure long-term success. This guide offers practical insights, from managing staff challenges to utilising the Lippet-Knoster model for change management, alongside strategies for fostering community support and resilience. By anticipating potential hurdles and creating a flexible, inclusive action plan, schools can navigate the intricacies of bilingual education and cultivate a positive, sustainable learning environment for both educators and students.

1. Navigating the complexities of bilingual program implementation

Implementing a bilingual school program is a multifaceted process that requires careful planning, collaboration, and the collective efforts of the entire team. Dedication and coordination are essential to creating a program that nurtures confident bilingual speakers. Recognising the complexity of the process helps set realistic expectations and fosters a shared sense of purpose among all participants.

When challenges arise, reflecting on the experiences of other schools that have successfully implemented similar programs can provide valuable insights. Learning from their approaches and strategies can guide your efforts and offer practical solutions. The Bilingual Montessori video library is an excellent resource to support your team throughout this process.

School leaders often feel isolated in decision-making and may struggle to balance the demands of a new program alongside other priorities. Actively seeking support from local bilingual school networks or experienced mentors can offer valuable guidance and reassurance, helping leaders navigate these challenges effectively and confidently.

Commitment to any project is secured when individuals feel personally invested in both the process and its outcomes. Recognising and respecting the contributions of each team member fosters a sense of collaboration and shared purpose, helping educators work together toward a unified vision.

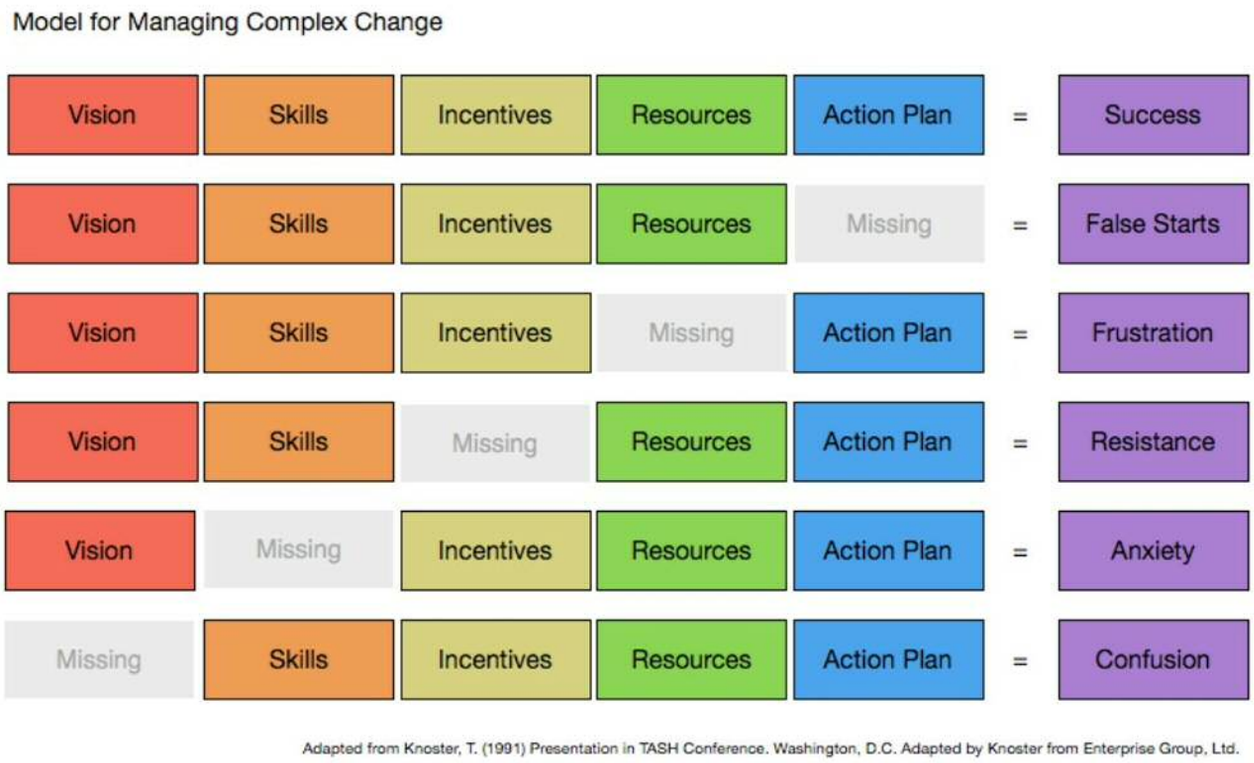
Inclusive and open communication are crucial to building this commitment. People are more likely to engage with a process or outcome when they feel connected to it. Leadership should prioritise involving all staff members in different aspects of program development, utilising their strengths and knowledge, and creating regular opportunities for open dialogue. This ensures everyone feels their role is valued and integral to the program's success.

Managing complex changes often feels like juggling multiple priorities. Designing an effective educational program is challenging enough, but adding bilingual objectives and self-directed learning practices can make it even more demanding.

During difficult moments, remind yourself and your team that success is achievable. If others have done it, so can you. The Lippet-Knoster model for managing complex change, is a helpful tool for navigating challenges. This model outlines the key components necessary for successful change:

- **Vision**: A clear, shared understanding of the desired outcome.
- **Incentives**: The source of motivation to make the effort.
- **Skills**: The knowledge and ability to succeed in the task.
- **Resources**: The tools needed to manage and execute the task.
- **Consensus**: Alignment with and internalisation of the components.
- **Action plan**: A guide that drives action and growth.

The model emphasises how the absence of any one component can lead to negative outcomes such as confusion, resistance, anxiety, frustration, or lack of progress.



Source: https://www.k-state.edu/hr/docs/Knoster%20Model%20for%20Managing%20Complex%20Change.pdf

When the school community's needs and doubts feel overwhelming, this framework can help identify which areas need attention. For example, suppose a teacher or group of teachers resists adopting the bilingual model. In that case, the model can help diagnose what might be missing—such as vision, incentives, or resources—and suggest where to focus additional support, training, or organisational adjustments to build their enthusiasm and momentum.

Acknowledge the complexity of this work as part of your efforts to secure commitment. To avoid promising an easy transition or quick results, as this can lead to future challenges, such as disappointed staff members, frustrated parents, and difficult conversations.

Leadership and administration equipped with tools to analyse and evaluate difficulties - and a solid yet flexible action plan - are better positioned to anticipate setbacks and confidently respond to hurdles. This preparedness inspires trust and provides the stability your community needs from its leaders.

2. Common bilingual education challenges and their solutions

Staffing challenges

- Challenge: Difficulty finding bilingual staff with the required pedagogical training or dealing with staff absences.
- Possible solutions: Provide cross-training for existing staff, offer professional development opportunities, and build a network of substitute teachers familiar with the program.

Communication barriers

- Challenge: Language difficulties among staff, parents, or the wider school community.
- Possible solutions: Use translation services, bilingual communication tools, and organise workshops to foster mutual understanding and effective communication strategies.

Misaligned expectations

- Challenge: Differing priorities between staff, parents, or school leaders regarding the bilingual program's goals or outcomes.
- Possible solutions: Set clear, realistic expectations from the outset, provide regular updates, and facilitate open communication to align everyone's vision for the program.

Impatience with language acquisition

- Challenge: Adults may expect rapid second-language acquisition, which conflicts with the Montessori approach.
- Possible solutions: Provide education on the natural, gradual process of language development and emphasise the importance of a patient, long-term approach.

Low parent engagement

- Challenge: Parents may not engage in parent education programs, which are key to supporting the bilingual model.
- Possible solutions: Offer flexible and accessible formats for parent education, such as online sessions or bite-sized content, and demonstrate the positive impact on children's learning.

Sustainability of multilingual staff

- Challenge: Declining enrolment may make it financially unfeasible to maintain multilingual staff.
- Possible solutions: Seek alternative funding through grants or partnerships and emphasise the bilingual program as a unique selling point to attract more families.

Lack of motivation and engagement in second language

- Challenge: Children may not be motivated to use or engage with the second language.
- Possible solutions: Integrate the second language into engaging, real-world contexts and activities that appeal to children's interests, using games, songs, and hands-on materials.

3. Anticipating and addressing potential hurdles and setbacks

In any complex implementation, hurdles and setbacks are inevitable. Preparing a contingency plan in advance is not just good practice but a valuable way to reduce stress when challenges arise. Taking time—ideally as a team—to identify potential difficulties can help the school respond effectively and with greater confidence.

3.1. SWOT analysis for a bilingual Montessori program

One effective method for this preparation is conducting a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). This classic business tool can be quickly brainstormed as a team activity, helping identify areas of risk and opportunity while leveraging existing strengths to mitigate challenges. Here's a generic example, it's better to be more specific when creating one for your particular setting:

Strengths

- Experienced Montessori-trained educators with a strong understanding of child-centred learning.
- Supportive school community, enthusiastic about the bilingual program.
- Existing resources, such as bilingual materials and culturally diverse classrooms.

Weaknesses

- Limited number of staff fluent in the target second language.
- Insufficient training for some teachers in second language teaching and learning.
- High workload for staff, making additional program responsibilities challenging to manage.

Opportunities

- Growing demand for bilingual education in the local area, which can attract new enrolments.
- Availability of grants or funding opportunities for language and cultural programs.
- Potential for collaboration with other bilingual schools or language specialists in the local area.

Threats

- Staff turnover or difficulty hiring qualified bilingual Montessori educators.
- Parental concerns about the pace of second-language acquisition.
- Economic factors that could lead to budget constraints, limiting program resources.

This analysis allows the team to focus on leveraging strengths and opportunities while addressing weaknesses and preparing strategies to mitigate threats. For instance:

- To address limited bilingual staff (weakness), the school could explore professional development courses or seek partnerships with local universities or language schools (opportunity).
- To mitigate concerns about staff turnover (threat), creating a teacher retention plan that includes professional development opportunities, competitive salaries or extra holidays, and fostering a positive and supportive working environment.

A SWOT analysis like this should be tailored to the specificities of your context and serve as a foundation for proactive planning.

4. Cultivating resilience and patience in navigating program development

Creating a strong school culture for the team is the basis for supporting resilience and patience inside the school walls. When people feel they belong to a community with a culture that allows them to express their doubts and worries, share their work, experiment and make mistakes, they are more likely to feel sufficiently understood and motivated to navigate difficulties and overcome setbacks.

Successful bilingual programs require all stakeholders to understand the basic stages of language development. This knowledge helps build patience and resilience by establishing realistic expectations for progress.

Teaching staff should also study language acquisition and its relationship to child development (see section 2.3.Learning vs acquiring a second language), be able to facilitate second language learning in all four modes of communication (see section 2.4. The modes of communication and their development in child's second languages) and understand how and why we assess language development (see sections 2.7. Assessment: making process and progress of learning visible and 3.8. Assessment in L2 learning). This includes teaching staff who are not directly responsible for teaching a second language. Understanding the basic objectives their colleagues are responsible for will strengthen collaborations around the school.

Creating or sourcing materials to help families at the school understand their children's language development and offering a parent education program are also strong tools for strengthening the family-school partnership. Maintaining good communication schedules helps keep the community focused on the vision and informed about progress and plan adaptations.

Teachers require space, time and support to adjust to change like anyone else. Transitioning from a monolingual to a bilingual program can make existing staff members who do not feel confident about their language skills feel threatened, undervalued, or embarrassed, even if they are not directly responsible for that particular learning area. School leadership should establish a clear internal language policy (see section 1.2 Defining Language Learning Outcomes: the What) that outlines the language expectations for different staff members in specific contexts.

Additionally, it's important to pay special attention to inclusion in multilingual staff teams. Can all staff access shared information if meetings are conducted in a specific language? If not, what measures will be taken to include them? Adjusting meeting schedules or holding parallel meetings in different languages may be necessary. How will staff communicate if they do not share a common language? And should this be taken into consideration during the hiring process? Careful consideration of these matters helps all staff members feel secure and valued during the change process.

Aim to create a culture of language learning throughout the school (See section 3.1 Developing a culture of L2 learning). Encourage authenticity in your staff team; the first step is always for leadership to be open and honest about their own learning curve. Highlight the successes and efforts of any staff member in improving any language skills. Foster an atmosphere where making mistakes is part of the process and where it is safe for people to practice the languages they are learning. You can apply many strategies from section 3.1 of this guide, which discusses strategies for creating a language learning culture in the classroom to your adult environment.

Avoid creating tensions between speakers of one language and another, the first step is not valuing one language over another. It may not be ethical to pay speakers of one language more than speakers of another, for example, despite possible difficulties in attracting candidates with sought-after language skills. Ask yourself how to navigate this issue sensitively; division does not cultivate resilience.

Patience is tested in language development, as a lot is happening beneath the surface that isn't immediately apparent. Language learners, especially those who learn a language later in life, often describe the process as anything but smooth. Patience and motivation may wane occasionally and feelings of increased confidence are often followed by periods of frustration and perceived stagnation. While children who acquire a second language at a young age generally manage to avoid these feelings, it's not uncommon for the adults in their lives to project their own frustrations onto the process.

Section 2.1. Setting the stage: language acquisition & development in the second part of this guide can help to understand why learning a language isn’t a linear process, nor is it always overt. To aid language learners and their families in overcoming periods of frustration, share examples of success stories,

reassure them by referring back to the stages of language development and encourage them to trust in the process. To do this convincingly, teachers and school leaders must be knowledgeable. Using this field guide is a positive step in that direction.

5. Exploring the benefits of bilingualism together and aligning them with the school community values

In the first part of this Guide, we explored the benefits of being bilingual. Creating a team charter to activate the vision of becoming a bilingual school is a good strategy to motivate everyone to support the vision of establishing a bilingual program. When creating the statements that comprise the charter, connect the benefits with the school's values. For instance, many schools have a mission or vision statement that emphasises preparing students for life in a globalised world or getting them ready to face future challenges:

The existing mission statement: "Preparing children to live in a globalised world."

The program's stated benefit of bilingualism: "Develop a global perspective and feel more comfortable in multilingual situations."

Bilingual program team charter: "To prepare for life in a globalised world, our students will participate in our bilingual program to develop intercultural attitudes and feel comfortable in multilingual contexts."

The most effective team charters are created through collaboration and buy-in from community members. Staff who participate in brainstorming and writing charter statements develop a better understanding of the program's purpose and feel a stronger sense of ownership and accountability for its success. Their involvement brings diverse perspectives and expertise to the charter while having a grounding and realistic influence on its intentions.

Team charters can include program aspirations and intentions, and clarify the purpose that team members rally behind. Importantly the charter provides guidance when challenges arise so including statements regarding respectful communication and steps for resolution is key. The charter expresses how the team wants to work together to achieve its goals. Online team charter templates offer diverse examples of what is possible. A charter is a working

document and should be revisited over time.

The collaborative process strengthens team cohesion, builds trust, and allows potential misunderstandings or differences in perspective to be identified and addressed early. When team members help craft the charter's language, they better understand how to implement it effectively and can communicate its goals more clearly to others. By aligning the community's existing values with achievable expectations for the bilingual program, the charter presents a natural and logical path forward for the community.

Pause and reflect

- How can you incorporate the principles of collaboration and shared purpose in your classroom?
- How do your bilingual initiatives align with your school's values?
- In what ways can you foster resilience and patience in both your students and colleagues as you navigate the complexities of bilingual language development?
- How do you address misaligned expectations with parents and staff regarding bilingual education?
- Reflecting on the SWOT analysis tool, what strengths can you leverage in your classroom to support the bilingual program?
- What solutions come to mind when addressing the threats identified in the SWOT analysis?

6. References and resources

References

Knoster, Thomas. The Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change. 1991. https://www.k-state.edu/hr/docs/Knoster%20Model%20for%20Managing%20Complex%20Change.pdf

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"Team Charter | Learning and Development." University of Cambridge, Learning and Development Resources, www.ppd.admin.cam.ac.uk/leadership-development/team-charter. Accessed 12 Jan. 2025.

Resources

Abbas, Tahir. "Lippitt-Knoster Model for Complex Change – Explained." Change Management Insight, 27 Feb. 2024, www.changemanagementinsight.com/lippitt-knoster-model-for-complex-change/.

The Bilingual Montessori resources that are very helpful for addressing all these possible setbacks:

- this Field guide
- The Bilingual Montessori video library
- community
- course offerings