

Newsletter Issue 3, March 2025

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Visit: acu.edu.au/advancing-literacy



Research opportunities

A PhD scholarship is available for an international or domestic student to join Dr. Signy Wegener on an ARC-funded DECRA Fellowship. The project is titled: 'Bridging the decoding-vocabulary gap during children's reading' and will focus on how children adjust their initial mispronunciations as they learn to read irregular words.

[Read more about it here.](#) Anyone interested in applying should [contact Dr. Wegener first via email.](#)

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY MULTILINGUAL CHILD?

BY DR. VALERIA RIGOBON AND PROF. RAUNO PARRILA

More than one-fifth of Australians report speaking a language other than English at home. But when it comes time to start school, it's common for parents to worry about raising a child to be bilingual or multilingual. They may wonder, am I harming my child's English development if I speak another language at home?

The short answer is no. Research shows speaking more than one language doesn't hinder a child's academic progress – in fact, it can even help.

[Read the article here.](#)

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THE ADVANCING LITERACY CONFERENCE 2025

In March, Dr. Wes Hoover was the guest speaker at two events in Sydney and Ballarat featuring workshops by the Australian Centre for the Advancement of Literacy academics. The Sydney event was co-sponsored by Sydney Catholic Schools and SPELD NSW. The workshops focused on the cognitive foundations of reading, and literacy assessments and instruction in Tier 1 and Tier 2.



How can I support my multilingual child?*

By Dr. Valeria Rigobon & Prof. Rauno Parrila

More than one-fifth of Australians report speaking a language other than English at home. But when it comes time to start school, it's common for parents to worry about raising a child to be bilingual or multilingual. They may wonder, am I harming my child's English development if I speak another language at home? The short answer is no. Research shows speaking more than one language doesn't hinder a child's academic progress – in fact, it can even help.

What does the research say?

Up until the 1980s, some studies incorrectly suggested early exposure to more than one language could harm a child's academic achievement. But these findings have since been widely criticised because many of the children in the studies came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (and so were already disadvantaged in terms of their schooling).

More recent Australian research has found when socioeconomic status is accounted for, multilingual children are “indistinguishable from their monolingual peers” in literacy and numeracy by the time they are eleven years old. This is provided they have adequate English vocabulary skills by the time they finish Year 2.

Some studies show multilingual students even surpass monolingual children in different academic areas. This includes English reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation as well as numeracy. Research suggests multilingual students' enhanced mental flexibility from switching between languages may explain their higher academic performance later in school, but this is not yet confirmed.

Research shows children can learn multiple languages at the same time, starting from infancy. This means you don't have to wait for a child to become fluent in one before you start learning another. Similarly, a child does not have to be a highly skilled English speaker to start to learn to read in English. They can develop their spoken and written/reading language skills at the same time.

A common misconception is multilingual children may “confuse” words between languages, but this is not the case. They actually learn quite quickly whom they can communicate with in each language, and switch between languages without much effort. For example, my niece Aurora is four and is already fluent in Hungarian, Spanish and Ukrainian. There are videos of Aurora speaking Spanish with her Venezuelan father and grandmother, turning to respond to her grandfather in Hungarian, and switching to Ukrainian to speak with her mother, all in one conversation.

How can I help my child learn multiple languages?

Research shows it is important a child receives lots of exposure to each language through meaningful interactions with people who speak those languages. There is no clear definition of the amount needed, but it should be regular – for example, everyday talk with parents or visits or phone calls with grandparents who share the home language.

Also, if you're worried your child isn't getting enough English exposure outside school, do not abandon your home language. Instead, create other English opportunities, such as in playgroups, daycare, sports teams or other out-of-school activities.

Ultimately, the best thing parents can do to support their children's multilingual learning is build a community filled with native speakers of English and the home language(s).

Staying consistently connected to this community of people who value each language, especially after children start school, will also support a child's motivation to keep growing in each language.

*This article was published originally in *The Conversation*. 25 February 2025.

MYTH: “Don't children get confused if they grow up hearing and reading in more than one language?”

FACTS:

- No; from birth, children's brains can distinguish between different languages and the speakers of those different languages.
- If a child shows signs of a speech delay, then it will usually show in every language being learned, not just one.
- Mixing languages (aka code switching) is natural and common, not a sign of confusion or a language delay.

[Read more about multilingualism here.](#)



Dr. Wes Hoover speaking at the Advancing Literacy Conference, Sydney