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**Small Children, Languages and Myths**

**By Emma Rath**

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Our children are growing up bilingual in the French part of Canada - Québec. "That's fine", says everyone. "Even though they'll probably start speaking later because they're learning two languages at once, they'll catch up."

Well actually, this well-entrenched idea that bilingual children are slower to acquire language, is actually a myth!

We were surprised and delighted to learn that research is finding that bilingual children do NOT acquire language later than monolingual children. Our first child participated in a language study on babies carried out at McGill University of Montréal, Québec, Canada. There it was explained to us that research is finding that the difference in language acquisition of one child compared to another is very large. Some children speak sooner, some speak later. And the range of language acquisition of bilingual children is just as large as the range for monolingual children, statistically speaking.

Although these research results are relatively recent, I was able to find an article on the internet about it, written by Professor Fred Genesee of McGill University at <http://www.earlychildhood.com/Articles/index.cfm?FuseAction=Article&A=38>, confirming what we had been told verbally. In addition, instead of seeing bilingualism as the minority exception to the rule, Professor Genesee suggests that there many be as many children growing up bilingually as there are growing up monolingually.

So rest assured that the myths are wrong and the following are true:

- Bilingual children do NOT have delayed language acquisition.
- Learning more than one language at a time is NOT difficult for small children.
- Bilingual children DO master both languages just as well as one.

More and more parents are convinced of the benefits of exposing their small children to foreign languages. This has resulted in the recent explosion of videos, books, music and computer software aimed at babies and preschoolers, that expose them to another language. For example, free computer games on the <http://www.kiddiesgames.com> website allow babies and preschoolers from an English-speaking environment to learn and practice French and Spanish.

The most obvious benefit, and one that is confirmed by research, is that exposing infants to a foreign language can help them master that foreign language later on. In the well-documented but very accessible book on baby brain development "What's Going On In There?", the author Lise Eliot explains that babies are born being able to hear the sounds of every language in the world. However, this ability is subject to the "use it or lose it" phenomenon. If the baby is not exposed to foreign sounds, she will lose the ability to distinguish those sounds. For example, on page 368, she reports:

«Infants' ability to discriminate foreign speech sounds begins to wane as early as six months of age. By this age, English-learning babies have already lost some of their ability, still present at four months, to discriminate certain German or Swedish vowels. Foreign vowels are the first sort of phoneme to go. Then, by ten or twelve months, out goes the ability to discriminate foreign consonants, like /r/'s and /l/'s for Japanese babies or Hindi consonants for English-learning infants.»

Another benefit of exposing children to another language that is starting to be recognized, is that of increasing their proficiency in their primary language. It may be that the brain exercise of sorting out multiple languages gives that brain a deeper proficiency in language and grammar overall.

So the next time your infant has the opportunity to be exposed to a foreign language in a suitably fun setting (which is how all activities should be presented to infants, isn't it?), then jump at the chance!

The author of this article, Emma Rath, produces free online and purchasable download baby and preschooler software, available at <http://www.kiddiesgames.com>.

### **Three Planning Myths**

**By Denise O'Berry**

Are you — like 70% of business owners — working without a plan? Here are three myths that need to be dispelled about strategic planning for small business.

1. It has to be formal — Not so. The value of a strategic plan for your small business is in putting the ideas on paper, creating action steps that will get you where you want to go and implementing those action steps.

2. I'm too small — Not so. Even a one-person business can benefit from a strategic plan. A strategic plan can help you make decisions about time management and budget. Use your strategic plan to help you determine whether to attend an event or advertise in a publication. It's a check and balance tool.

3. A strategic plan is like a ball and chain — Not so. It's your plan. Too many business owners feel like once it's on paper, it can't be changed. Wrong! It should be an active document that gets reviewed and updated at least monthly, if not weekly. You're the business owner, you wrote it, you know what's happening in your market — adjust as necessary.

Denise O'Berry helps small business owners take action to grow their business. Find out more at

Three Planning Myths

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