

The Home/School Connection:
Collaborating to Promote Best Practice in World Language Education, K-8
Issue 20

Parental questions about second language learning

Dear Parents,

In this issue of *Home/School Connection* we will discuss how to deal with the challenges that may arise when your child studies a second language. We will also answer questions you may have and explore how to support your child's language learning even if you do not speak that language.

Parental Questions

Why does my child not understand what is said in the second language class?

It is likely your child does understand *some* of what is said in class, but is voicing his/her frustration with not understanding *every* word that is said. For many children, this is a new and sometimes uncomfortable experience. Most second language teachers do not expect the children to understand every word, but instead get the gist of what is said.

Share these reminders with your child when he/she is feeling frustrated or lost in the second language class:

- Watch the teacher for cues such as actions, gestures, and pictures to help with the meaning.
- Watch your peers to see how they react to the teacher's directions.
- Listen for words that are similar to English.

- Listen for words you already know and use those words to help you figure out the ones you do not understand.
- Raise your hand and ask your teacher for help.
- You will understand more and more as the year progresses, so try to be patient.

If your child continues to feel frustrated in class, set up a meeting with the second language teacher. Your child's teacher will have many ideas for how to help your child feel more comfortable and successful in the second language class.

Why does my child not want to speak the second language at home?

Getting your child to speak in the second language can often be about asking the right questions or giving the right prompts. Instead of saying to your child "Say something in French," ask specific questions about the learning your child is doing in the second language class. Below is a list of conversation starters to help your child feel comfortable speaking the second language in front of you:

- What new words did you learn today?
- What are some things you talked about in class?
- Teach me a song you learned in class.
- Teach me a poem you learned in class.
- Have you read or learned any stories? Teach them to me.
- Teach me how to answer the question "How are you?"

Many second language teachers send home newsletters with the vocabulary your child is studying. As your child learns the new vocabulary, encourage him/her to teach it to you. This will not only help you learn the language, but it will also help your child master it. Contact your child's second language teacher to learn about other resources that are available.

Why can't my child translate into English the papers brought home or what is learned in class?

Remember that your child is in a second language class, not a translation class. This may be different from your language experience. Most second language teachers do not go back and forth between English and the second language. Translating is likely a skill your child is not learning. Instead of having your child translate into English so you will understand, celebrate your child's knowledge of the second language, even if you do not understand all of the words.

How can I help my child if I do not speak the language?

Showing your child that you value learning a language is one of the best ways to support your child's language learning.

Look for opportunities within your community for your child to practice the second language. Use the conversation starters to practice the language at home. Your child's second language class is likely full of songs, poems, stories and games. Practice these at home together as a family.

It is never too late to begin learning another language, so learn the language with your child. In Issue 21 of *Home/School Connection* we will explore how to learn a language as an adult and how your child can help.

Conclusion

As with any new learning, there are questions and challenges. Working through those challenges together will help your child feel more comfortable learning the second language. It also demonstrates that you value and support learning a second language. You are helping your child develop a 21st century skill that is vital to being a global citizen.

NNELL can assist teachers, parents and administrators with learning and advocacy efforts. Contact your State Representative today. We would love to hear from you!

This issue of Home/School Connection was written by Tammy Dann. It is full of tips and resources that can be found at www.nnell.org. Teachers may reproduce it and send it home in their students' backpacks. Send suggestions/comments to Tammy Dann, NNELL's Early Language Advocate: trdann@q.com