

What Educators Need to Know About Bilingual Children Interpreting and Translating!

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Bilingual children have special abilities and talents. One of these talents is the ability to interpret and translate.

What is interpretation/translation?

It is the ability to restate a message given in one language in another language.

- **Interpretation** is the ability to restate a spoken message in another language.
- **Translation** is the ability to restate a written message in another language.

Who interprets/translates and why?

In immigrant communities, bilingual children are often called upon to interpret/translate for family and community members who, in some situations, may not yet feel comfortable using the language of wider communication.

Where do they interpret/translate?

Children interpret in many situations, for example:

- Shops
- Bank
- School
- Hospital or clinic
- Police station
- Social security office
- Home:
 - With the neighbors
 - Listening to the radio
 - Watching television
 - Talking on the telephone
 - Reading documents
 - Filling out forms



Being able to interpret/translate is a special gift and requires many skills.

Young people who interpret/translate not only have the ability to speak two languages, but are also developing the abilities to:

- *process complex information in two languages*
- *express complex ideas*
- *recall words quickly*
- *use the structures of both languages to communicate meaning*
- *listen carefully and understand*
- *convey a message accurately*
- *convey the intention of the speaker*
- *be sensitive towards meaning*
- *understand and mediate between cultures*
- *transfer meaning across different cultures*
- *manage social relations*
- *help overcome misunderstandings*
- *be sensitive to different social situations*
- *negotiate*
- *adapt to different situations*
- *solve problems*
- *take initiative*
- *self-evaluate*



The ability to interpret/translate can lead to an exciting professional career.

Some people study to be interpreters specializing in the spoken form. Some people study to be translators specializing in the written form. Some people choose to train as both interpreters and translators.

Community Interpreters

Interpreting for social services, school districts, and community organizations.

Conference Interpreters

Interpreting for international academic conferences, business meetings, political leaders, and presidents.

Court Interpreters

Interpreting for plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses in courts of law.

Medical Interpreters

Interpreting for doctors, nurses, and patients in hospitals and clinics.

Telephone Interpreters

Interpreting in all situations on the telephone where two parties do not share the same language of communication.

Translators

Translators translate written texts such as:

- **medical/scientific documents**
- **textbooks**

- *literature*
- *non-fiction*
- *film and media*
- *government/legal documents*

How Educators Can Develop Children's Interpretation and Translation Skills

- Encourage the school to develop and credit these special abilities as part of the language curriculum and in gifted programs.
- Encourage children to use all the languages they know as much as possible.
- Provide books, dictionaries, magazines, and films in all the languages they know.
- Encourage children to experiment with languages through language games and language problems.
- Provide tasks such as interpreting/translating speeches, songs, poems, stories, dubbing TV programs, or making subtitles for films.
- Allow time for discussion and reflection on given tasks.
- Create opportunities for children to practice interpreting and translating in friendly and non-stressful environments.



Do not put children in situations:

- Beyond their capabilities
- That are potentially conflictual or embarrassing
- Where the responsibilities are too great for children to handle

"Translation provides an easy avenue to enhance linguistic awareness and pride in bilingualism, particularly for minority bilingual children whose home language is not valued by the majority culture."

References

Malakoff, M., & Hakuta, K. (1991). Translation skills and metalinguistic awareness in bilinguals. In E. Bialystok (Ed.), *Language processing and language awareness in bilingual children* (pp. 141-166). New York: Oxford University Press.

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