

Cambridge University research at St Jérôme CoE bilingual primary school

What does being at a bilingual school mean for how children learn languages?
How does it change how they see themselves?

More and more people in the UK speak more than one language. And learning languages is an important part of going to school. Teachers and researchers both want to understand the advantages and challenges of going to a bilingual school. A team of researchers from the University of Cambridge who are inspired by St Jérôme's bilingual curriculum visited the school to find out more.

The researchers have looked at two questions so far: Is children's progress with English the same as for children who go to other schools? And how does a bilingual curriculum change how children see themselves and think about their identity as language learners?

To answer the first question, the researchers used English-language tests which have been widely used - we know how children of different ages in monolingual schools normally do in these tests. These tests looked at key skills like vocabulary, grammar, and skills which are important for beginning reading, like rhyming. We found that children at St Jérôme did the same in these tests as children at other schools which don't have a bilingual curriculum. So it seems that learning French does not have a negative effect on learning English at school.

To answer the second question, the researchers listened to children talk about their experience of language learning in school. The children were beginning to see language learning as part of who they are, and could imagine that in the future they would be bilingual or even multilingual. This was for children who only speak English at home, as well as children who speak another language or languages at home. This means that children are more likely to feel positively about learning languages. And there is even other recent research that suggests that there is a link between multilingual identity and school attainment in general.

Of course, a very big plus of a bilingual curriculum is learning the language itself! Children at St Jérôme have the amazing opportunity of learning French, and there are lots of good impacts of learning languages - in education, for jobs, and for well-being.

The research team: Prof Napoleon Katsos, Dr Lisa-Maria Müller, Dr Özge Öztürk and Dr Elspeth Wilson worked at the Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, University of Cambridge. Dr Karen Forbes, Dr Jenny Gibson, Ms Julie Reynolds are from the Faculty of Education. The team is part of the Cambridge Bilingualism Network, which was set up by researchers at the University of Cambridge who work with people of all ages and backgrounds who speak more than one language. Please visit <https://sites.google.com/site/cambiling/> For any questions about this research, please contact Prof Napoleon Katsos, nk248@cam.ac.uk

Full article about this research:

Katsos, N., Gibson, J., Lorge, I., Mueller, L-M., Ozturk, O., Reynolds, J., Wilson, E., & Forbes, K. (2021). Language Skills and Identity in Bilingual Education: A case study of a bilingual primary school in England. *Cambridge Occasional Papers in Linguistics*, 13(2): 35-62, available from: https://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/files/copil_13_2_katsos_et_al.pdf