

The background of the slide is a vibrant, abstract pattern of interlocking geometric shapes, primarily squares and rectangles, in various colors including shades of blue, green, yellow, orange, pink, and purple. These shapes are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, resembling a complex mosaic or a 3D architectural design.

# **ONE PARENT, MANY LANGUAGES: 12 STRATEGIES FOR RAISING A BILINGUAL CHILD AS A SOLO PARENT**

**Sophie Wertheimer, PhD, Evaluation and research consultant  
QUESCREN Education and Vitality Forum, November 7, 2025**

---

# LAND AND LANGUAGE ACKNOWLEDGMENT

- I am based in Tiohtià: ke - Mooniyang – Montréal.
- I am thankful to the Kanien'keha:ka Nation, who is now the keeper of these lands and waters, for the privilege I have of living and working here.
- I understand the privilege of engaging with two languages that are officially recognized and supported.
- Many of Canada's Indigenous languages have disappeared or are threatened with disappearance. I recognize the work of the language keepers, teachers, learners and advocates who are resiliently working to keep them alive, and to allow them to thrive.
- I strive to be an ally by educating myself and supporting Indigenous language preservation and celebration.



---

# WHO AM I?

- I grew up bilingual (EN/FR) in Montreal, to parents who shared with me their love of language.
  - I lived in Alberta and Ontario for 15 years before coming back to Montreal.
  - I work as a consultant doing applied qualitative research for community-based organizations.
  - I am fascinated and passionate about language (learning them, learning about them, celebrating and teaching them); I conduct “hobby research” on bilingualism in Canada.
  - I was fortunate to become a solo parent and I am now raising a beautiful, fascinating and sometimes frustrating toddler. I am also excited to be raising him as (hopefully) a bilingual and lover of languages.
-

---

# OBJECTIVES

- Present some thoughts, ideas and questions that have emerged as I navigate the experience of parenting and teaching my child to use language(s).
- Share tangible strategies that I have gleaned from academic and popular discourse, discussions with other parents, and my own experiences, which are helping me to raise a bilingual child.
- The twelve strategies are organized around four themes:
  - Parental mindset
  - Childcare and education
  - Socialization
  - Media consumption



---

# SOLO PARENTING AND LANGUAGE

- Research and academic discourse tend to be premised on the notion that children grow up with a father and a mother, who are entirely responsible for language acquisition.
    - This is a heteronormative and Western-centric understanding of the family;
    - It does not reflect the realities of many (most) children.
  - This is captured in the OPOL (One parent / One language) approach – though contested, it still underlines a lot of what is suggested in the popular parenting sphere.
  - Other aspects of linguistic development are understudied, including the impact of code-mixing from the same parent.
  - As a person who is raising a child solo (but with a multilingual village), where does my family fit within this broader picture?
-

---

# PARENTAL MINDSET

## #1 - Taking a harmonious approach to bilingualism.

Impact belief – I have a very important role to play in my child's acquisition of language...

- BUT I am busy and I already have a lot of pressure on my shoulders;
- AND I want to avoid situations of conflict with my child.

The notion of “harmonious bilingualism” offers a space to be intentional and proactive, without adding stress to what is a complex process (raising a human).

---





---

# PARENTAL MINDSET

## #2 - Encouraging linguistic and cultural curiosity.

Positioning language learning within a broader context of appreciating and celebrating languages and cultures:

- Encouraging linguistic curiosity;
- Demonstrating through example, linguistic risk-taking;
- Countering linguistic insecurity.



---

# PARENTAL MINDSET

## #3 - Taking a long view of “success.”

Accepting that it's a process, that things ebb and flow, and that there might be changes and “regressions.”

- Mix of “simultaneous” and “sequential” bilingualism;
- An evolving family language policy begins with staying open and trying new things:
  - For example, right now I'm using the “adult repetition strategy,” but I need to diversify my plan to ensure my child speaks, in addition to understanding;
  - I am starting to apply the “time and place” approach more actively.





---

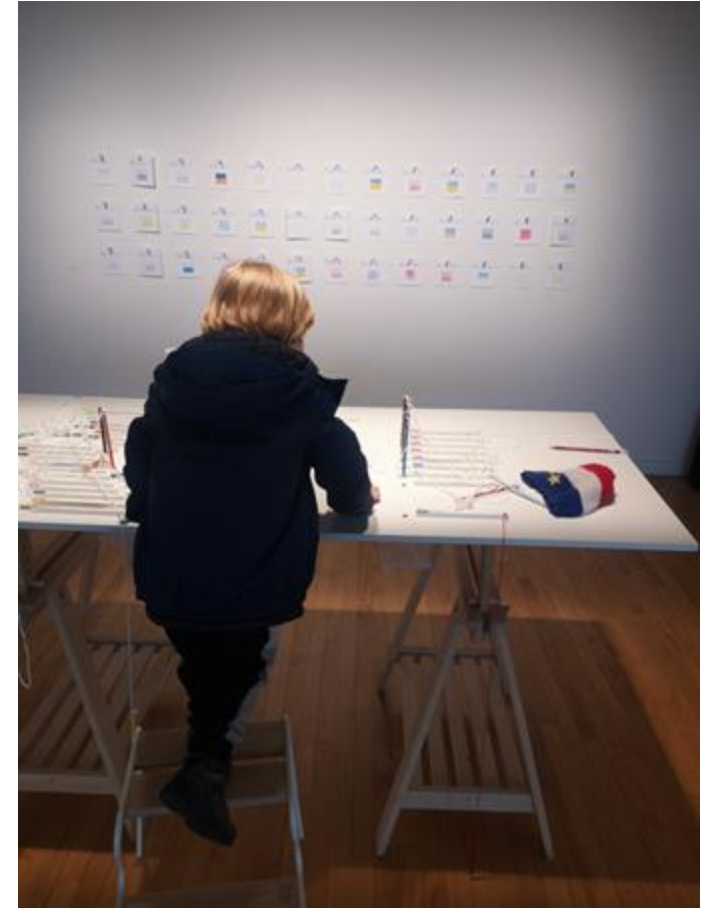
# CHILDCARE AND EDUCATION

## #4 - Being very intentional about childcare.

- Considering daycare options based on language exposure.
- Finding opportunities to expose your child to another important adult or caregiver, who can speak to them in the desired language.

## #5 - Exploring and selecting educational options.

- Choosing a school based on, amongst other things, language criteria.



---

# SOCIALIZATION

“I always say ***you need a multilingual village to raise a multilingual child***, therefore, find people in your community, among your friends, find peers, other adults, and maybe family members for your children who speak all the languages you want them to acquire and learn.” (Limacher-Riebold, 2019)

## #6 - Encouraging bilingual friendships and opportunities for multilingual interaction.

- Supporting the formation of friendships and interactions in different languages (for example, by going to play in different neighborhoods).
- Drawing from my own social network to expose my child to different languages.



# SOCIALIZATION

## #7 - Seeking activities that are bilingual and multicultural, or in different languages.

- Bilingual activities (ex. at the library and cultural centers, Bach before Bedtime, bilingual sports);
- Going to the St-Patrick's day parade, PAAL events, county fairs, etc.;
- Visiting museums.

## #8 - Choosing travel destinations that can help us immerse in different languages.

- Many opportunities for language exposure, in Canada, Quebec and internationally.





# MEDIA CONSUMPTION

## #9 - Harnessing the power of the screen !

- Though screens need to be used with caution, and screen-time alone will not enable the acquisition of a new language, a careful selection of programming can support language exposure, in complement with other strategies.



Shaping young bilinguals:

Ananas from *Téléfrançais* on TVO, available via the RetroOntario website

*Chez Hélène*, on the CBC  
<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/1.3592612>

# MEDIA CONSUMPTION

## #10 - Harnessing the power of music

- Music is another powerful tool to help in the acquisition of language.
- Playing music in different languages;
- Encouraging music and instrument learning;
- Using nursery rhymes and children's songs.

**Focus :** Comment travailler autour des comptines ?



- ❖ **Quelle que soit la langue des comptines, on y retrouve des thèmes récurrents** qui unissent parents et enfants : l'endormissement de l'enfant, la nourriture, la séparation, le corps, les animaux. À une comptine peut donc répondre une autre, dans une autre langue, qui évoque le même sujet. Expliciter alors ce que raconte la comptine peut amener certains parents ou professionnel-le-s à proposer des comptines sur le même thème dans d'autres langues.
- ❖ **Choisir des comptines dans diverses langues chantées sur une même mélodie**, connue de tous, pour faire du lien et construire du sens d'une langue à l'autre. Exemple : *Frère Jacques* que l'on retrouve dans une trentaine de langues, avec le même air... mais parfois des significations très variées !
- ❖ **Jouer autour de la répétition des mots** en associant un geste à un mot récurrent de la comptine : à chaque fois que l'on chante ce mot, les enfants réalisent le geste correspondant, ce qui favorisera la mémorisation et la distinction des sons.
- ❖ **Intégrer des mots-clés dans d'autres langues au sein de comptines connues en français**. Utiliser par exemple les comptines d'accueil pour y intégrer les « Bonjour » récoltés par votre affichage plurilingue : « Par la fenêtre ouverte, salam, hello, par la fenêtre ouverte, Ni hao le jour ».
- ❖ **Réaliser un livret collectant les comptines** chantées dans la structure lors de ces animations (écriture originale, prononciation, traduction et illustrations).
- ❖ **Apprendre collectivement les différentes chansons** et les enregistrer avec le matériel à disposition.  
Réaliser un CD de comptines de la structure.

C'était super de pouvoir échanger avec des collègues de langues différentes pour pouvoir enrichir mon répertoire et transmettre de nouvelles chansons aux enfants. Assistante Maternelle, Montreuil.





---

# MEDIA CONSUMPTION

## #11 - Books, livres, precious books!

- Taking advantage of access to books in different languages in public libraries.
  - Attending Heure du conte / Storytime.
  - Asking for books as presents, in specific languages.
  - Seeking out bilingual books and books about bilingualism.
  - Building a small library of Indigenous books.
- 

– Bien sûr! Toi, par exemple, tu comprends quand Grampy te parle en anglais, mais tu comprends aussi quand je te parle en français. Tu comprends donc deux langues! On appelle ça être bilingue. C'est un merveilleux trésor culturel qui t'offre l'opportunité de parler à beaucoup de gens.



– Dans notre pays, le Canada, il y a des gens qui parlent toutes sortes de langues différentes! En plus du français et de l'anglais, on y retrouve du mandarin, de l'espagnol, de l'arabe, du mi'qmaq et beaucoup d'autres.

- 30 -

A. Armstrong



**Anton, the Shark**  
**Anton, le requin**

Aiden, Jakob, Jood, Jouheina, Lenya, Paul, Malika, Precious & Tala, Aiden, Jakob, Jood, Jouheina, Lenya, Paul, Malika, Precious & Tala

# PARENTAL MINDSET

## #12 - Staying open!

- Seeking, reading, listening, attending.
- Learning from other parents.
- Learning with and from your child!



---

# REFERENCES

- Byers-Heinlein, K. & Lew-Williams, C. (2013). Bilingualism in the Early Years: What the Science Says. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 7.
  - De Houwer, A. (2020). Harmonious Bilingualism: Well-being for families in bilingual settings. In S. Eisenclas & A. Schalley (eds), *Handbook of Social and Affective Factors in Home Language Maintenance and Development*. Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter.
  - Kirsch, C. (January 2012). Ideologies, struggles and contradictions: an account of mothers raising their children bilingually in Luxembourgish and English in Great Britain. In *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 15(1), pp. 95-112.
  - Limacher-Riebold, U. (May 29, 2019). *Single parents can raise a bilingual child*. Available at <https://multilingual-families.com/single-parents-can-raise-a-bilingual-child/>
  - Omane, P. O., et al. (2025). Exploring the nature of multilingual input to infants in multiple caregiver families in an African city: The case of Accra (Ghana). *Cognitive Development*, 74.
-

---

# LIST OF RESSOURCES

- Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages: <https://commissionforindigenousslanguages.ca/>
  - Native Montréal Autochtone: <https://nativemontreal.com/en/language>
  - Dr. Lorna Wanosts'a7 Williams' keynote lecture at the Planning Institute of British Columbia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2NzhzwrQIQ>
  - Bilingualism Matters - University of Edinburgh: <https://www.bilingualism-matters.org/>
  - HabilNet – The Harmonious Bilingualism Network: <https://www.habilnet.org/>
  - Bilingual Picture Books: <https://www.bilingual-picturebooks.org/en>
  - Bilingual Superkids: <https://bilingualsuperkids.podia.com/ultimate-checklist>
  - DuLaLa: <https://dulala.fr/>
  - Les livres bilingues et antisexistes de Diloé: <https://www.facebook.com/livres.bilingues>
-

---

Thank you! / Merci !

Please don't hesitate to contact me:

Sophie Wertheimer

[sophiewerth@gmail.com](mailto:sophiewerth@gmail.com)

