



## Doing what comes naturally - give them the gift of a second language

Estonian-born **MARIA GAVRILOVA** urges us to take advantage of our area's multi-cultural riches by providing our children with the opportunity to learn another language while they are very young.

The idea of sending your child to say a French or Spanish nursery (rather than taking just a lesson or two a week) may be virtually unheard of here, but in many countries it is common practice. Up to the age of 6 or 7 (the so-called sensitive period in foreign language acquisition) everybody has the ability to acquire a good spoken knowledge of a second language. And the good news is that it will not affect the 'quality' of the majority language.

In fact, it provides the advantage of opening up an understanding of the richness of linguistics and being receptive to all future language learning.

It took me many, many years, an English degree and years of living here to finally become fluent in English after I first started lessons, aged 8. In contrast, my daughter who is only four and a half is already fluent in Russian and English. She has learnt

operating in the Russian language. AZBUKA Russian nursery school is the first part of a bilingual Russian-English education programme. Many children are from bilingual families. Having an enjoyment of the environment around you (being interested in what you see) is the first condition of wanting and needing to speak the language. The second condition is that it is a child's environment and not just an adult environment. The nursery school operates in Russian and we try hard to provide a creative programme developing all areas of learning for our kids - role play, theatre, puppets shows, storytelling, music, arts and crafts are all there. We don't learn Russian - we enjoy playing and therefore learn in Russian.

It is important to recognise that the majority language (in this case English) will become dominant in due course and therefore the minority language (Russian) will

need special emphasis at a pre-school age by way of language immersion.

My daughter's

current level of bilingualism would never have been achieved if we had sent her to an English nursery at the age of 2 or 3.

Every time I mention our Russian language nursery school, I get a standard response: 'So is there a big Russian community in London?'

Well maybe there is, but it misses the point that the nursery is open to all as a method of acquiring a second language. The school is not just for the Russian community. A second-language nursery school is also the easiest way to acquire a foreign language for



Getting to know you in Russian

your child if you are NOT a native speaker.

Have you ever thought about it? Have you ever thought about opening your child to two worlds instead of one? And each language is the world in itself. There's no concept of rich and poor in languages - they are all different and affluent in their own way. No language is ever totally 'translatable' and each culture is fully understood only through its own language.

We all need bilingual education opportunities, not just 'immigrants' like me. Our children will be adults in a global economy - think about it.

It took me many, many years, an English degree and years of living here to finally become fluent in English after I first started lessons, aged 8. In contrast, my daughter who is only four and a half is already fluent in Russian and English.

Russian through play in a Russian language environment (pre-school nursery) and she has learnt English through communicating with her English father and through her everyday environment.

When she was born in 2000, we knew as parents that we wanted to raise her bilingually and we wanted the best solution. Almost instantly I knew that I was facing a serious problem.

The solution I found was dramatic - to open a bilingual language club, soon followed by a specialist Russian nursery

### contact

If anyone from different language background is interested in bilingual education and language immersion programmes please contact:

**AZBUKA Language Club** (and nursery school) on 0781 001 3042 or e-mail [bilingualkids2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bilingualkids2000@yahoo.co.uk)  
We also run a language club, dealing with bilingualism in general, trying to provide information on bilingualism and bilingual education to other people. We are keen to hear from all bilingual professionals or enthusiasts!

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