

Languages Week

At **Thomas Coram Children's Centre, London Borough of Camden**, one week in the year is designated as Languages Week in order to celebrate the varied home languages spoken by children and families in the community.

There are currently 18 different community languages, and over 50 per cent of children speak a language other than English at home. Hearing their home language spoken and valued in the centre promotes a child's self-esteem and sense of security.

The week also helps to develop closer relationships between practitioners, parents and children; and everyone gains more understanding about different languages and cultures.

Parents who are uncertain of the importance of maintaining a strong first language, whilst acquiring English as a second language, are reassured. Parents are likewise reassured that speaking, playing and reading to children in their home language is the right thing to do.

Language Week is promoted through the regular newsletter, by key workers inviting parents personally and a display showing activities from previous years. A workshop for parents is also run to encourage participation.

Parents are invited into the centre to take part in activities – to cook, talk and play, read stories or sing songs and rhymes using their home languages.

The schools library service and a local bookshop are invited to bring resources into the centre.

Parents can then look at a display of books appropriate for young children and have the chance to discuss the importance of reading regularly. Books are available for purchase.



“I think it has been really helpful to know a few words from other languages, to help those children who don't speak English, to give them more confidence and to help them settle.”

Thomas Coram's own evaluation has shown that 59 per cent of parents have been encouraged to participate in Languages Week. The event has been successful in encouraging fathers' participation. This success might be due to all the staff heavily promoting and planning the week. The fact that parents could participate in a wide range of activities, choosing something that they felt most comfortable with, might also be a factor.

Parents are generally welcome to visit the centre to take part in activities but this special week, giving a focus to language development and book sharing, gives a strong boost to parental participation, confidence and relationship building.

All parents are actively encouraged to borrow story and factual books from the centre on a regular basis. Dual language texts, in community languages, are available in a range of core stories. These enable and encourage the reading of stories in both the home language and English so that a child can make sense of the text in their first language and develop their English skills at the same time.

One mother came in and read to the children during languages week. She read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* in both English and Japanese and sang Japanese songs with the children. The children were mesmerised and joined in with the actions.



“She was very excited. It was really good to see how keen the children were to be involved.”

