


Chapter 8

Moving Toward Unity Collaboration Among Families, Educators, and Clinicians to Foster Bilingual Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the critical role of interdisciplinary collaboration in promoting bilingualism, particularly among children with diverse developmental profiles. Emphasizing the integration of movement-based strategies the chapter explores how embodied experiences enhance language acquisition and cognitive growth. Drawing from embodied cognition theory and evidence-based practices, it highlights how families, educators, and clinicians can co-construct meaningful, culturally responsive, and inclusive learning environments. The work underscores the affective, social, and linguistic benefits of physical engagement and presents case studies where triadic partnerships led to measurable language gains. While acknowledging barriers such as resource inequities and differing expectations, the book advocates for systemic support, professional development, and innovative technologies to strengthen collaborative practices. Ultimately, it offers a compelling vision of bilingual development as a shared, movement-rich journey shaped by unified, context-sensitive support.

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of movement-based strategies into bilingual development—particularly for children with atypical developmental profiles like Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), Specific Language Impairment (SLI), and dyslexia—can be viewed through the critical lens of motor-language coupling. Research emphasizes that gesture and fine motor coordination are not simply adjuncts to language but are fundamentally intertwined with linguistic development. This is especially evident in children with language delays, who often exhibit parallel delays in motor planning and execution. According to Iverson and Braddock (2011), motor development lays the groundwork for communicative intention; for example, the ability to reach or point is not just a physical act, but a foundational step in joint attention and symbolic communication. Children with SLI or DLD frequently display less sophisticated use of gestures and poorer hand-object interactions, which may hinder their social-pragmatic language skills. These findings support the premise that motor experiences are not merely correlative but causally linked to language outcomes, especially in the early years when brain systems governing speech and movement are co-developing.

This perspective is further strengthened by embodied cognition theory, which posits that cognitive processes are deeply rooted in the body's interactions with the world. In practical terms, this means that engaging children in gesture-rich, movement-based activities—such as acting out stories, using hand motions during vocabulary learning, or mimicking actions related to target words—can amplify language encoding and retrieval. These strategies not only improve lexical access but also support working memory, a key component often impaired in children with language-based learning difficulties.

When these interventions are applied in bilingual contexts, they offer a dual benefit: reinforcing vocabulary in both languages while simultaneously supporting underlying cognitive and motor systems. For example, Vergara et al. (2025) found that bilingual preschoolers with DLD significantly improved their vocabulary and emotional regulation through embodied interventions that paired physical actions with linguistic input. Thus, movement becomes not just a pedagogical tool, but a neurologically integrative intervention—particularly valuable for children navigating the complexities of dual-language acquisition and atypical neurodevelopment.

Research by Paradis et al., (2009) challenges the assumption that bilingualism imposes an additional cognitive burden on children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI). Their findings suggest that bilingual children with SLI are capable of acquiring complex grammatical structures—such as object pronouns in French and English—at levels comparable to monolingual peers with SLI. This supports the domain-specific hypothesis, which argues that SLI primarily affects linguistic

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