MULTILINGUALISM FOR ALL:
WHAT ABOUT AT-RISK LEARNERS?

Fred Genesee
McGill University
ECIS COPEHHAGEN

MARCH 2017

INTRODUCTION

- Unique human capacity for language learning

- What about children with diminished language learning capacity—specific language impairment, Down Syndrome?

- What about children with other learning learning challenges?

THE NEED FOR MULTILINGUALISM

"The point is that my daughter has to speak 3, sometimes 4 languages simultaneously....

My concern is:
- How to not overload the child's brain ....
- How to not cause a delay in her vocabulary development...
- Should we separate one language from another in terms of a territory or a time of use?
- Should we all switch to English while helping her to work on her homework?
- Is there a such thing as a right or an optimal way raising a multilingual child? ....

.... questions, questions, and more questions"
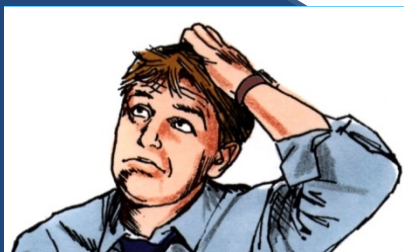
QUESTIONS FROM A FATHER

4

"…. I am a psychologist working in English schools in a very French environment ….My knowledge of the problematic was leading me to believe that adding yet another language on a child having difficulty mastering his mother tongue could be putting too much pressure and setting the child up for failure."
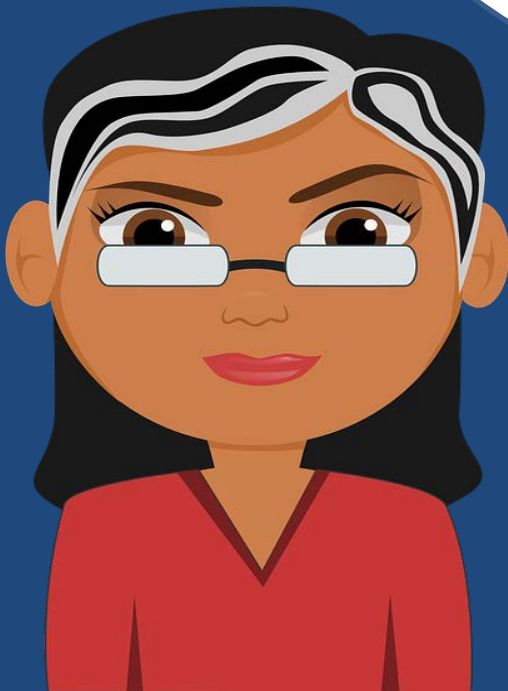
CONCERNS from a
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

THE ISSUES

- **A question of fairness**

- **Ethical issues:**
  - Should at-risk student be excluded from these benefits?
  - Are we prepared to include them?

- **Pedagogical issues:**
  - Can we identify at-risk dual language students?
  - Are some forms of dual language education more suitable?
  - Provision of support services; nature of those services
 - Competence of teachers to provide support

MY GOAL

1) To review research relevant to the question of young children's capacity to acquire more than one language: ⇨ what children can do

2) Tips on deciding who to include and how to support them

TYPICALLY-DEVELOPING INFANTS & TODDLERS

are neuro-cognitively prepared to learn more than one language

&

*are not confused by dual language input*
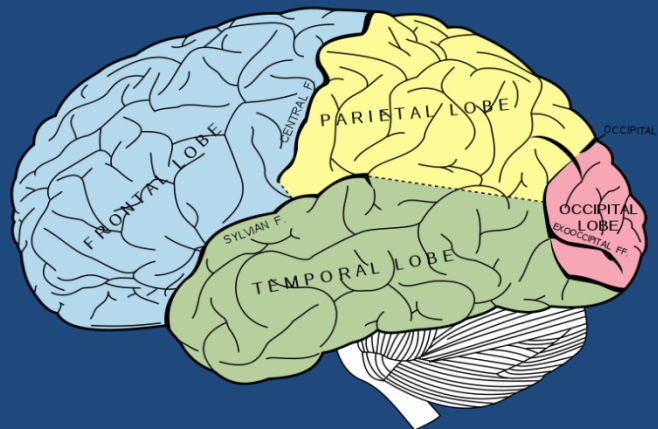
THE EVIDENCE

- They differentiate between their input languages and a foreign language within days of birth

- They prefer to listen to input languages over unfamiliar languages at birth

- They acquire grammars that are specific and appropriate for each language

- They use each language differentially and appropriately with speakers of each language

- They avoid grammatical errors when they code-mix

PRE-SCHOOL BILINGUALS

MONOLINGUAL MILESTONES

| word segmentation (7 mths) | babbling (10-12 m) | first words (12mths) | vocabulary spurt (18mths) | word comb. (24mths) | grammar/ communicat'n (beyond) |
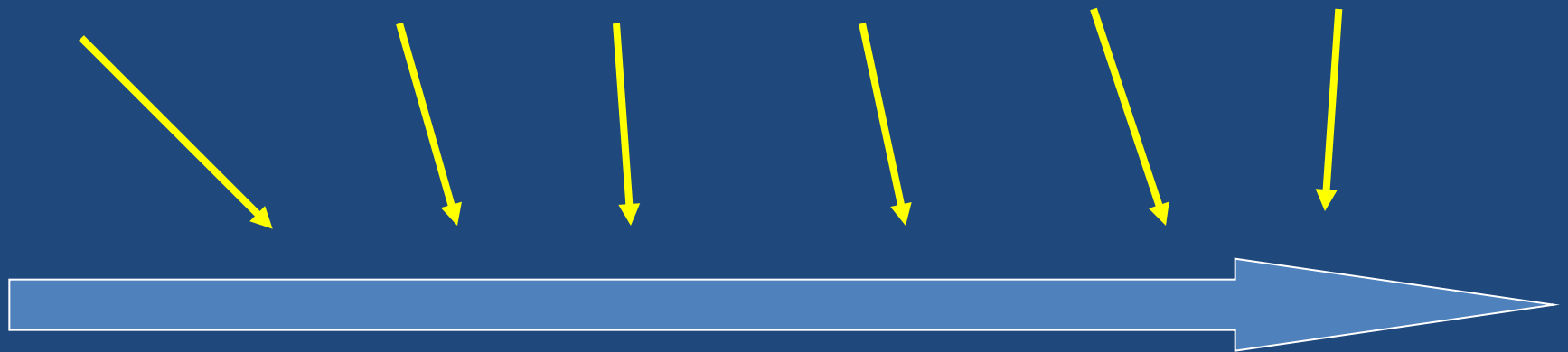
MILESTONES FOR BILINGUALS ARE THE SAME

Genesee & Nicoladis (2006)

BILINGUAL CHILDREN ARE DIFFERENT FROM MONOLINGUALS
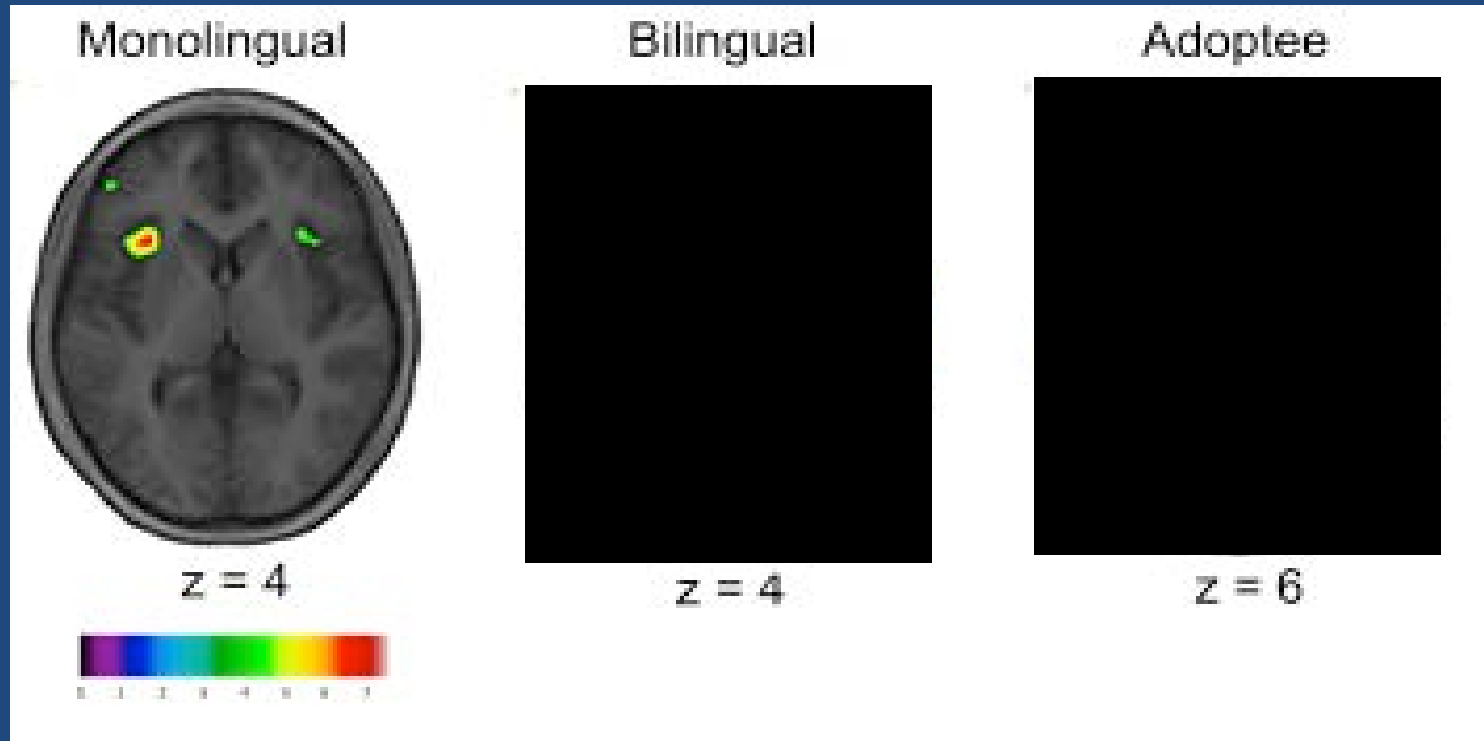
Differences usually reflect:

o different learning environments: amount of input, who provides the input, consistency of input

o specific properties of the input languages (similarity in sounds, words, grammar, discourse)

o use of bilingual-specific learning strategies

EVIDENCE OF FLEXIBLE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

- Use facial cues specific to each language to separate the languages

- Use prosodic features of each language to determine word order constraints in each language

- acquire alternate labels for same concepts (violate mutual exclusivity constraint)

NEURO-COGNITIVE PROCESSING of a SECOND LANGUAGE

LEFT

RIGHT

Monolingual	Bilingual	Adoptee
z = 4	z = 4	z = 6

L anterior insula & L frontal operculum= WORKING MEMORY

a) <u>weak</u> activation L insula
b) strong activation of temporal regions in both hemispheres

same pattern as bilinguals

NEURO-COGNITIVE PROCESSING of a SECOND LANGUAGE

LEFT

Monolingual — z = 4
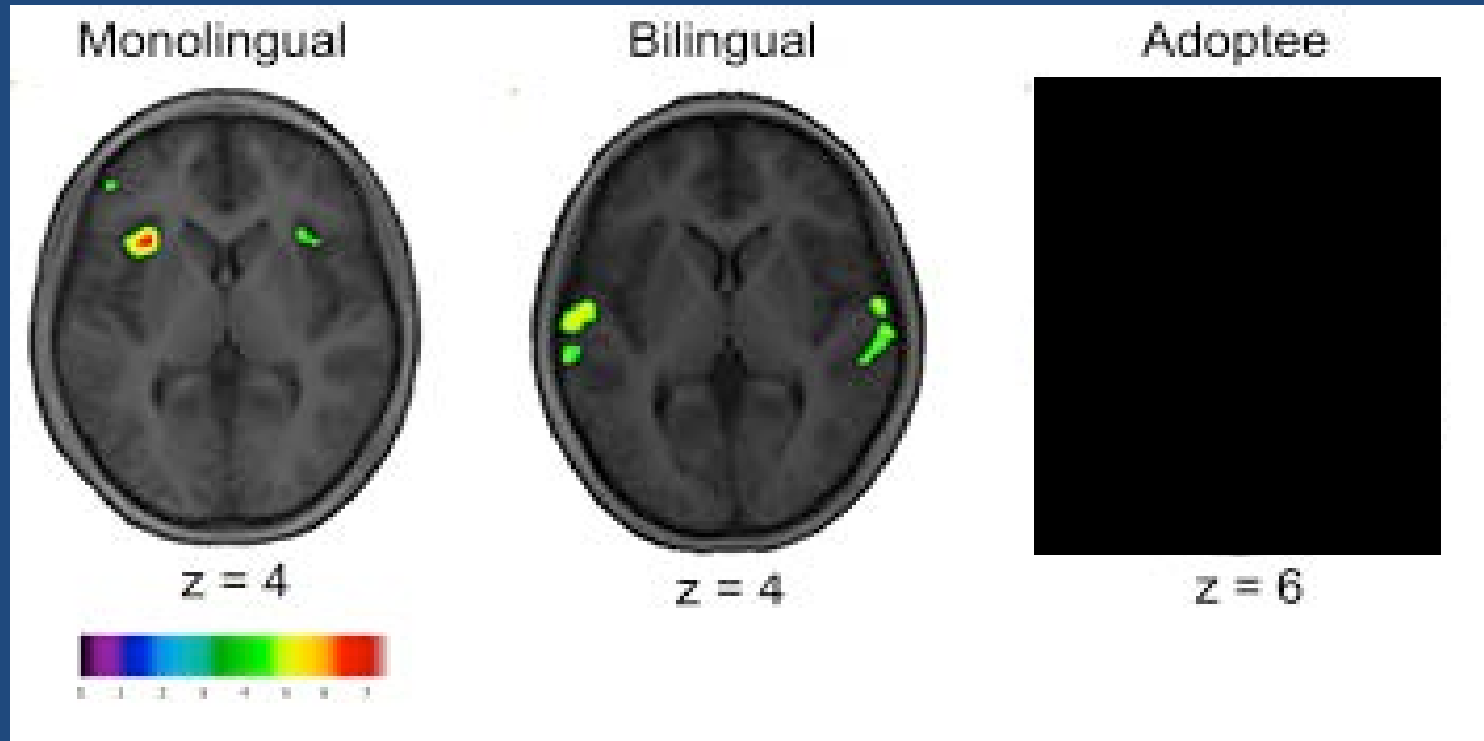
Bilingual — z = 4

Adoptee — z = 6

RIGHT

L anterior insula & L frontal operculum= WORKING MEMORY

a) <u>weak</u> activation L insula
b) strong activation of temporal regions in both hemispheres

same pattern as bilinguals

NEURO-COGNITIVE PROCESSING of a SECOND LANGUAGE

LEFT ... RIGHT

Monolingual z = 4 | Bilingual z = 4 | Adoptee z = 6

L anterior insula & L frontal operculum= WORKING MEMORY

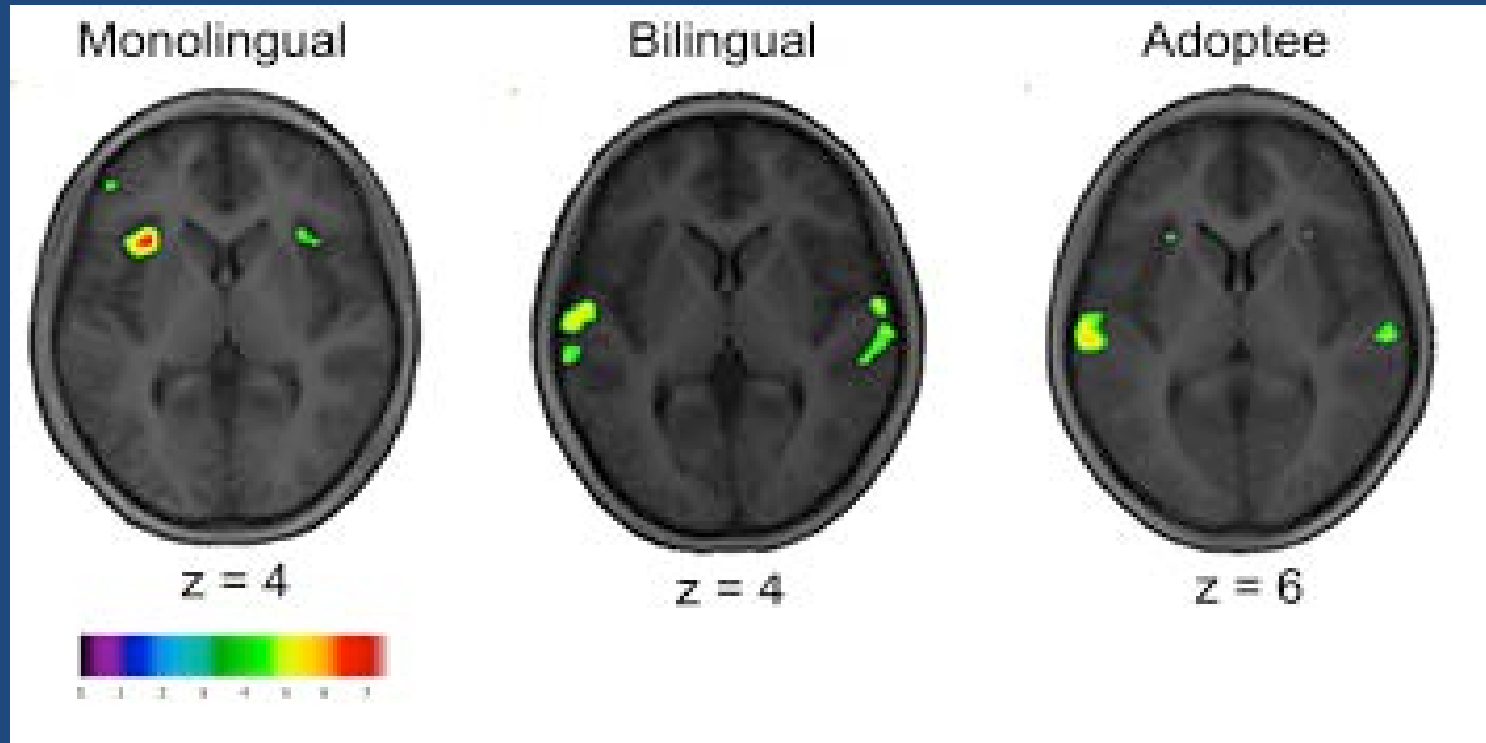a) <u>weak</u> activation L insula
b) strong activation of temporal regions in both hemispheres
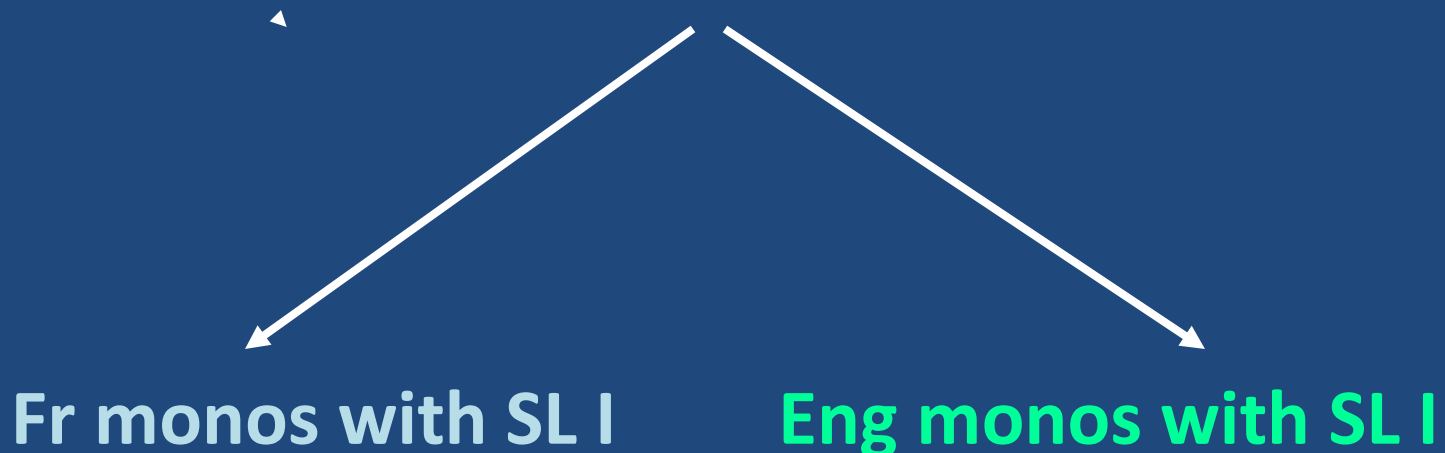
same pattern as bilinguals

CHILDREN with DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

- Specific language impairment
- Down Syndrome
- Autism Spectrum Disorder

FRENCH-ENGLISH BILINGUALS with SPECIFIC LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT (SLI)

Paradis, Crago, Genesee & Rice (2003)

bilinguals with SLI*
(8-years old)

Fr monos with SL I   **Eng monos with SL I**

RESULTS

a) <u>Severity of impairment</u>:

bilingual children = monolingual children

(in English & French)

b) <u>Patterns of impairment</u>:

bilingual children = monolingual children

(in English & French)

SPANISH-ENGLISH CHILDREN WITH LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT
(Gutierrez-Clellen & Wagner, 2006)

BILINGUAL CHILDREN

typically-
developing
(Eng. Dominant)

typically-
developing
(Sp. Dominant)

impaired
development
(Eng. Dominant)

ENGLISH-L1 CHILDREN

Mono
Typically-
Developing

Mono
impaired
development

**NO
DIFF**
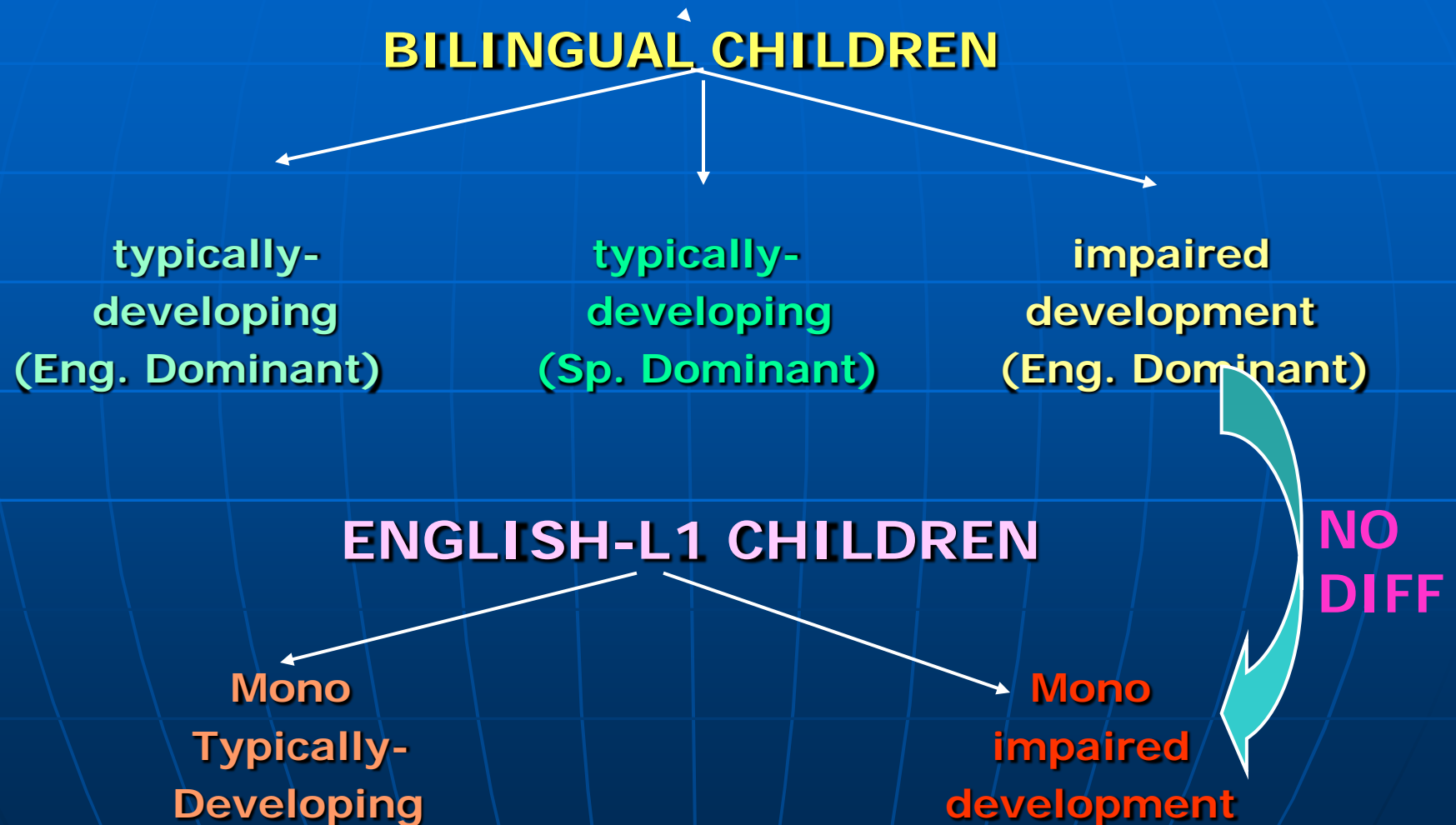
CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME

(Kay-Raining Bird, Cleave, Trudeau, Thordardottir,
Sutton, & Thorpe, 2005)

Bilingual Children

Typically Developing

**Down
Syndrome**

**NO
DIFF.**

Monolingual Children

Typically Developing

**Down
Syndrome**

20
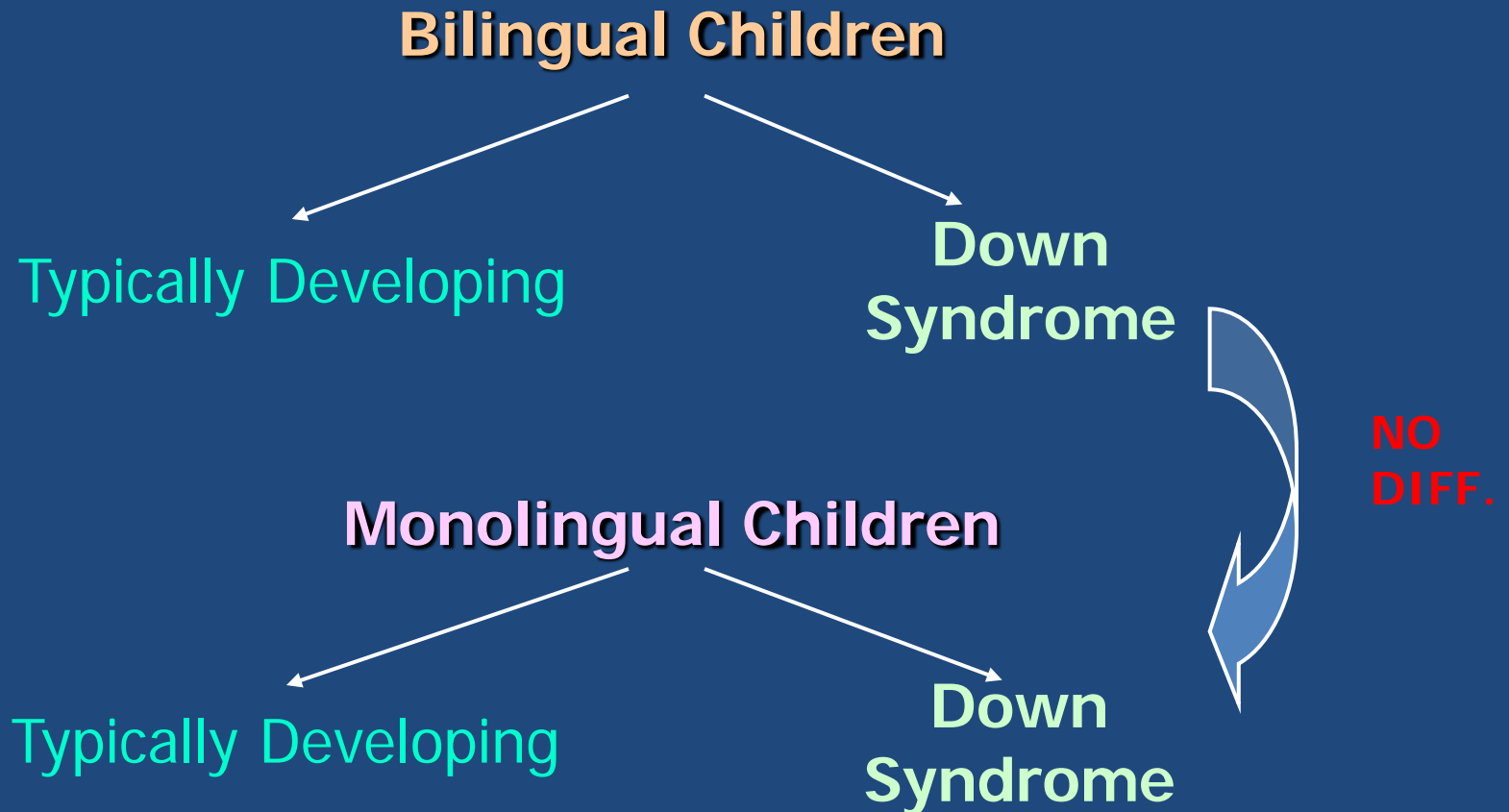
CHILDREN WITH
AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Marinova-Todd, S.H., & Mirenda, P. (in press). *Language and communication abilities of bilingual children with ASD.* In J. Patterson & B. L. Rodriguez (Eds.), *Multilingual perspectives on child language disorders*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

bilingual children with ASD = mono children with ASD

CAVEAT!

ALL CHILDREN ARE DIFFERENT

EACH CHILD SHOULD BE
CONSIDERED INDIVIDUALLY

AT-RISK LEARNERS IN SCHOOL

o low socio-economic status

o low academic ability

o poor L1 abilities

o minority ethnic group

o special education students (SPED)

AT-RISK   **AT-RISK**
dual language students = monolingual students

IDENTIFYING STUDENTS FOR INCLUSION IN DUAL LANGUAGE PROGRAM

- Assume that students with challenges we have discussed can benefit from participation in a dual language program.

- If a learner has a learning challenge that has not been examined systematically in research, extra care must be taken to determine whether he/she will benefit from dual language instruction.

- **In all cases**, the following issues should be considered prior to the learner's admission to the program and should be considered when making a decision to admit or not:

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

LANGUAGE HISTORY

LEARNER'S NEEDS

OTHER FACTORS

SCHOOL RESOURCES

INTENSITY of CHALLENGES

PARENT'S ROLE

SUPPORT TIPS - 1

1) **differentiate-differentiate-differentiate** according to specific individual needs

2) profile student's needs ASAP

3) use RtI approach to monitor progress

4) meaningful, engaging & focused instruction
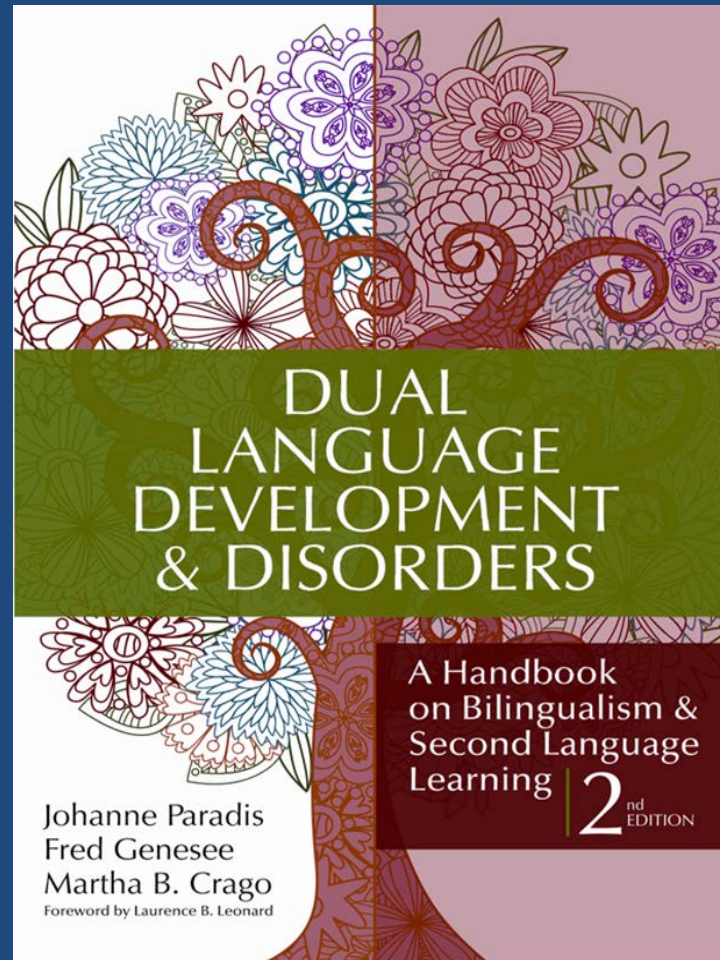
5) teach perseverance

SUPPORT TIPS - 2

6) start with general instructional strategies & assume that monolingual strategies will benefit at-risk learners

7) modify support to reflect students' L2 and cultural backgrounds (and their specific learning needs)

8) greater need requires more intensive and extended support

SUPPORT TIPS - 3

9) language-related impairments occur in both languages; support both languages; focus on common   features and teach differences explicitly

10) draw on strengths in L1 to support L2 development, and vice versa

11) engage and train parents to support their children, where necessary

thank you

fred.genesee@mcgill.ca

DUAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT & DISORDERS

A Handbook on Bilingualism & Second Language Learning 2nd EDITION

Johanne Paradis
Fred Genesee
Martha B. Crago
Foreword by Laurence B. Leonard

thank you

fred.genesee@mcgill.ca

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Fortune, T.W. (with M.R. Menke). (2010). *Struggling learners and language immersion education*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Advanced Studies on Language Acquisition.

Genesee, F., Savage, R., Erdos, E., & Haigh, C. (2013). Identification of reading difficulties in students schooled in a second language. In Gathercole, V. (Ed.). Bilinguals and Assessment: State Of The Art Guide To Issues And Solutions From Around The World (pp. 10-35). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Hambly, C., & Fombonne, E. (2012). The impact of bilingual environments on language development in children with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 42*, 1342-1352.

Paradis, J., Genesee, F., & Crago, M. (2011). *Dual Language Development and Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism and Second Language Learning* (2nd Edit.). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

Raining Bird, E., Genesee, F., & Verhoeven, L. (2016). Bilingualism in children with developmental disorders. *Journal of Communication Disorders. 3: 1-14.*