

# Fast Facts - Assumptions About Learning in a New Language

**Assumption:** It doesn't take long for students to perform well academically in English.

**FACT:** It can take approximately two years to develop social language and from five to nine years to develop the academic language needed to read textbooks and perform academic work.

**Assumption:** All school systems are the same and all schools use the same teaching techniques.

**FACT:** Teaching styles and practices vary greatly from country to country. In Canadian schools, play, field trips, cooperative learning groups and other interactive strategies are considered valuable and important ways to learn.

**Assumption:** All students should have homework every day.

**FACT:** In Canada, giving homework is related to our understandings about the ability of learners to focus. Therefore, young learners typically only receive minimal, if any, homework, while older learners may have up to one hour of homework per day. HOWEVER, it is important to remember:

- Learning a language – being immersed in it all day – is exhausting. A good way to relax from this is to read or talk in the home language. Reading in the home language supports reading in English.
- ESL students who are assigned one hour of homework will typically take two to three hours to complete the work in their new language.
- Reading at home or orally interacting with a parent is considered very effective homework because it develops language and thinking.

**Assumption:** Reading is not homework.

**FACT:** Research has shown that daily reading at home strengthens the vocabulary and the development of reading comprehension. Discussion of the reading with a caregiver makes the reader even stronger.

**Assumption:** Tutors doing work for learners is acceptable.

**FACT:** Some students are lucky enough to have the help of a tutor. However, in time the student has to be able to cope alone and is accountable for what s/he can do independently. The best tutors understand this and help the learner toward that independence by working **with** the learner, but never doing work **for** the learner.

**Assumption:** Older brothers and sisters are able to interpret and translate information accurately.

**FACT:** Translating information from the home language to English and back is not at all easy. It is not just translating words, but also includes an understanding of the school system and how things work. It is also difficult to translate the language of schooling here when your home language does not necessarily have the equivalent constructs.

**Assumption:** My child will graduate from school "on time" regardless of age on arrival in Canada.

**FACT:** As it takes from two to nine years to become fluent in a second language, older students are not always able to graduate by the age of eighteen or nineteen. Much depends on each student's level of English competency at the time of arrival in Canada. Older learners can, however, still complete high school and even go on to university at an older age. Starting university in your twenties or thirties is quite normal in Canada.

**Assumption:** All students are university bound. In fact, university is the only acceptable option after high school.

**FACT:** Only about 20% of students in British Columbia continue to college or university. Many pursue a wide variety of other options that also lead to a happy and successful life.