

The Bilingual Family Newsletter



News and Views for Intercultural People

Editor: Marjukka Grover

2001, Vol 18 No.2

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EDITORIAL

New parents reading this issue may think that we give confusing advice on how to raise children bilingually.

Danielle Huber praises her own multilingual childhood in Tunisia. The family spoke Italian, Arabic and French mixing them happily as they went along. Languages changed even in mid sentence and nobody was confused. My own advice for a Norwegian mother of small children, who works full time is to stick to the *one person – one language* method as far as possible. Yet, Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert, who has done research on trilingualism, says that it does not necessarily work with a family exposed to three languages. In her opinion parents should learn all three languages, so that communication in the family can be flexible.

There is not one correct method to raise children bilingually. Every situation is different, every family is different and every child is different. However, research shows that the *one person – one language* rule works well with small children – and when the second language in the family is a **real** minority language. Imagine a family with an Icelandic father, an American mother and two small children living in a small town in America. The children see the father only in the evenings and weekends. If the father decides that he can't speak Icelandic when non-Icelandic people are present, the time the children hear the language is very limited. On the other hand, the strict language rules may not be that necessary for an English mother living in Finland, where half the television programmes are in English.

So – look at your own situation carefully and use your common sense. I am sure you will find a method which is right for you.

Marjukka Grover

WHO CARES ABOUT THE PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY CHALLENGED?

Georges Duquette



Introduction

I am the father of a physically and mentally challenged son. A few years ago, a speech pathologist recommended that my son receive his speech language therapy and follow-up education program in English even though his family environment and mother tongue were French. The recommendation was supported by colleagues employed in a well-reputed medical institution of a large urban centre, as well as by the local school board.

At the time, I was completing my doctoral studies in second/foreign language education in a large American university and I was the Research Assistant of the Director of a graduate level program in bilingual education. The speech language pathologist's recommendation did not make sense to me. The research findings in bilingual and second language education at the time indicated that when the mother tongue is a minority language professionals should reinforce that first

language to provide a solid basis for future language development. If this principle held true for the average child, why would it not be especially true for children with special needs?

I challenged the speech pathologist's recommendation and was surprised to find substantial resistance but few counter arguments to the evidence I had brought forward. Only the school board, which had initially objected to my intervention, made a right about turn. I discussed this

“To ask a child with special needs, who has not yet begun verbal communication, to follow an educational program in a language foreign to the one used in the home, is fundamentally absurd.”

matter with the Chair of Audiology and Speech Pathology Department at the university where I was enrolled as a graduate student. He pointed out that he did not have expertise in that area and he urged me to continue in my efforts to clarify the issue. He earned my respect by recognizing the limits of his expertise and by his openness to considering new research findings

Special needs

Physically and mentally challenged children and adults are challenged in more ways than one. Because they have little power over their own destiny and because

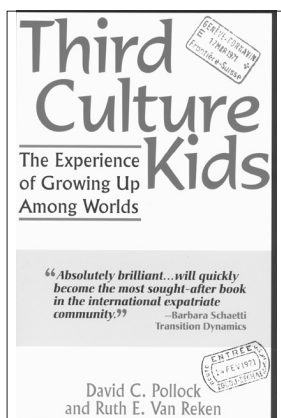
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other persons or groups make decisions for them, their personal needs are often neglected or marginalized. They are judged and labelled according to their 'handicap' or valued according to their potential and personal qualities. In the same manner, their personal needs can be easily dismissed or disregarded. In this sense, the physically and mentally challenged can be considered as members of a minority group population.

One of the advocates for the physically and mentally challenged over the last decades was Wolf Wolfensberger (1988; 1987). He argued that these people, regardless of their handicaps, should be recognized as adults and not children. Yet, despite the great strides made in Canada to respect and meet the needs of its physically and mentally challenged population, in the Divorce Act mentally challenged adults are still treated as children. The attitude is factually and morally wrong! It deprives a segment of the population of a human dignity and access to the same rights and privileges which other adults can claim.

When the physically and mentally challenged are from a minority language background, or have a mother tongue that is culturally and linguistically different from that of the majority, then the challenge is that much greater. If a child has special needs, it is vitally important that she or he be given every opportunity to develop an underlying proficiency based on the roots and experience of that first language. To ask a child with special needs, who has not yet begun verbal communication, to follow an educational program in a language foreign to the one used in the home, is fundamentally absurd.



This book fully examines the legacy of transition and change shared by those who have grown up globally. Pbk 1-85788-295-4, £12.99/ US\$18.95 from Nicholas Brealey Publishing, Tel:+44-(0)20-7430-0224/ e-mail: orders@nbrealey-books.com

I remember meeting with a group of speech pathologists to discuss these questions. They were interested in the topic and open to what I had to say, but there was one area that remained unclear for them— that the mother tongue was the language spoken most often in the home. This is a very popular belief. However, in a minority language environment, parents and other family members (especially teenagers) will often use the majority language in the home because it is socially dominant. That is not to say that the second, majority language, has now become the mother tongue. To determine the child's mother tongue, one should know:

- The first language of the child
- The first language of the caretaker person with whom the child first established emotional bonds
- The language of the deepest emotions (surface emotions are often expressed in the majority language).

Problems with professional interventions

In the last two decades our societies have recognized the importance of providing special education services to children with demonstrated needs and special needs. We have trained highly skilled professionals in fields such as special education, speech pathology and language therapy. Educators and the general public have generally applauded this major effort. Unfortunately, most of the training; the case studies, the language backgrounds of professionals, and the services provided, have been intended for monolingual speakers of the majority language. The result has been that linguistically different or minority language families whose children have a mother tongue other than English have been receiving services in a language that is not their first one. This is especially serious in the case of families who have physically and mentally challenged children or adults.

Some professionals think that physically and mentally challenged children and adults from minority language homes are doubly handicapped. The reality is that it is most often the professional's handicap, not the child's, that should be the major cause for concern!

We live in a world that is still dominated by **one language** perspectives and solutions – even though our world has become much different than it was some fifty years ago. Multilinguals now outnumber monolinguals (Baker, 2000). Even though the research findings over the past twenty years has revolutionized the way we should approach multilingual populations, these approaches are not always reflected in educational and other professional training programs.

Of course, we cannot reasonably expect an entire profession to be instantly retrained; to develop an expertise in multilingual education; to have native-like fluency in the child's first language; to develop and administer culturally authentic and externally valid assessment materials. However, it is reasonable to expect that professions begin to prepare their professionals so that, initially at least, they can recognize the limits of their own expertise and refer the minority language/culture customers to specialized, culture sensitive, multilanguage assessment and development centres, or to professionals who are most competent in the field.

Today, we find professionals who claim expertise in areas in which they have none. Most would recognize that the personal opinion of a professional is not necessarily a professional opinion. This is a major problem because families often depend upon their specialists for professional advice and when the advice

“Unfortunately, most of the training, the case studies, the language backgrounds of professionals, and the services provided have been intended for monolingual speakers of the majority language.”

provided is not based upon research evidence, but upon personal views and values, then their children's future is being jeopardized. Families of physically and mentally challenged children and adults must be vigilant and recognize that the specialized status of a professional is often defined and limited to the research evidence supporting that profession.

Some recommendations

The establishment of culture sensitive, multilanguage assessment and development centres would go a long way in informing families and the professions of the very real needs of non majority language families. They would serve the demonstrated needs and special needs of linguistically different and minority language populations. These centres could provide advice to families and professionals and meet other needs that cannot be met by members of specific professions.

Although linguistically different and minority language parents are sometimes hesitant to get involved, it is important that they work closely with school board officials to make sure that they are

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NEWS FROM THE USA:

Whither Bush?

James Crawford

What approach to language policy can we expect from President George W. Bush? The early signs are confusing, just like the politician himself. As a self-described 'compassionate conservative', Bush campaigned from the Center. Since taking office, he has governed largely from the Right.

Elected – many would say, *selected* – in the narrowest and most disputed presidential vote in U.S. history, Bush reflects the contradictions of his constituents. Rarely have Americans been so closely divided over politics. This is especially true on 'cultural' questions like abortion, gun ownership, and religiosity in public life.

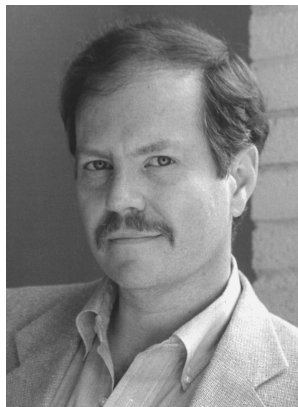
Language is not far behind. Voters in two states – Arizona and Utah – passed English-only initiatives last November. Simultaneously, however, both Bush and Democratic candidate Al Gore made a point of campaigning in Spanish. It was broken Spanish, to be sure, but the gesture carried powerful symbolism for Latino voters. English-speaking voters, by contrast, seemed to pay little attention.

Our politics of language are clearly in flux. Conservatives who catered openly to anti-immigrant fervor in the mid-1990s have now become cautious. According to the 2000 census, the Hispanic population increased by 58 percent over the previous decade – overtaking African-Americans as the largest U.S. minority group – while Asian Americans increased by 46%. Supporting English-only bills, once a no-cost proposition, becomes risky with a rapid increase in language-minority voters in states like California, Florida, Illinois, and New York.

As governor of Texas, Bush was one of the few Republicans in recent years who worked hard and successfully to attract support from Mexican Americans. Not only did he attend *Cinco de Mayo* festivals, appear with mariachi bands, and wear sombreros. He also spoke out against efforts to outlaw bilingual education and declare English the official U.S. language.

Whether Bush as president plans to stand by these policies, or whether he has given them much thought, is unknown. He has yet to address them in any explicit way. Indirectly, however, his proposals to increase 'flexibility and accountability' in federal aid to public schools could have a devastating impact on the Title VII, the Bilingual Education Act.

Like a number of 'categorical' programs in education, Title VII targets federal dollars to meet specific needs rather than relying on states to pursue these goals. Since 1968, it has awarded direct, competitive grants to school districts, with the aim of developing innovative approaches to teaching limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. The federal role has been crucial, not only in



helping to design new pedagogies, but also in promoting research, providing support services, and training professionals to teach and administer bilingual classrooms. It is unlikely that, without Title VII, the field of bilingual education could have matured in the United States.

The Bush education plan would eliminate Title VII, along with other categorical aid programs, which would be turned into 'block grants' to the states – that is, into subsidies with few strings attached. In exchange, state governments would be 'held accountable for results.' For example, LEP students would be expected to acquire enough English to be reassigned to mainstream classrooms within three years, or states could lose a portion of their federal funding.

The three-year 'performance standard,' which has no foundation in research, would probably discourage many schools from fostering the development of students' native language. Other likely casualties of the Bush plan include the dissemination of research on bilingualism, Ph.D. fellowship programs and perhaps most damaging, scholarships for the training of bilingual teachers. Final Congressional action on the proposal is expected this summer.

Meanwhile, President Bush is feeling pressure to reverse a language policy directive of his predecessor. Issued late in the Clinton administration, this 'executive order' requires recipients of federal grants and contracts, as well as federal government agencies themselves, to take reasonable steps to ease access to their programs for persons whose English is limited. Several Republican representatives have denounced the policy as a dangerous venture into 'official multilingualism.' Immigrant advocates say that cancelling the Clinton order would be a step backward 'towards intolerance and exclusion, lost lives and lost opportunities.'

George W. Bush likes to describe himself as 'a uniter, not a divider.' Yet thus far as president, he has done little to justify that reputation. Language policy is one area where, by fulfilling the promise, he could still surprise and disappoint his critics.

James Crawford's latest book is *At War with Diversity: U.S. Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety* (Multilingual Matters, 2000). For further information, visit his web site at: http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jw_crawford/.

COMMUNICATION IN MULTILINGUAL STYLE

Danielle Huber

I am in a holiday resort in Tunisia with my little boy when a young and pretty German mother approaches me: *'I heard you speak English and French to your son, but I heard him speak German to my children, have I heard it properly?'*

'Yes, that is right. You have.' I smile. *'Where do you come from, I mean, are you British or French?'*

As usual, I avoid that question. *'English is our family language, French the language I have in common with my son. My husband is German, we live in Frankfurt.'* I smile again. She is a bit puzzled but continues. *'But aren't three languages too much?'*

I glance over at Samuel. He is playing with her little boy and explains something seemingly complicated. Remembering the lady's question, I smile once more and

"There was no rule. Whatever the listeners would understand faster, whichever language conveyed the message accurately, whichever was funnier, we used."

suggest *'Why don't you ask him?'* But she does not seem to want to talk to him. She insists: *'Is it not psychologically damaging for a child, to be brought up with three languages. I mean... you do seem to speak French, English and just now, you used a German word in your sentence. I am sorry to tell you that, but all that seems a little inconsistent to me. I am not sure this is very good for him, don't you think it can be damaging?'*

She had probably read all the wonderful theories 'one parent-one language' and thought that this is the only way. Now, she probably thinks that I am offended as at this point I stir the conversation away. We talk about raising children first, then we talk about work, move on to socialising, she shares stories, I share stories...I listen, I empathise, I understand, I smile. If anything can be done about preconceived ideas, it has to be done gently.

When I feel we have a rapport, I pop the question: *'Do you think I am psychologically damaged?'* There is a silence. She laughs: *'Why...no! I think you are very aware!'* I like her. She may not be well informed but at least she is honest. And then I answer her

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questions because now is the time.

I told her I was born in Tunisia. I spoke Arabic with people in the street. Mum and Dad were born in Tunisia also and spoke Arabic fluently, but also Italian which they had learnt from their Italian parents. Mum and Dad attended French school and thus, they were fluent in the three languages. We lived at home, a large 'tribe' of 30 and all spoke the three languages fluently. We used humour all the time and story telling is a very important part of our Mediterranean culture. Everyone wanted to communicate and everyone did in three languages, at all times! Lunches and dinners were always noisy. Stories were told in Italian more often, but depending on the story, the conversation, the event, it was told in one of the three languages – or partly in one language, partly in another. Sometimes a sentence was said in French/ Arabic/ Italian. Yet, the same sentence in another situation would have been told only in one language. There was no rule. Whatever the listeners would understand faster, whichever language conveyed the message accurately, whichever was funnier, we used. Yet we were always able to separate the three languages when we were in the presence of people who could not understand the 'family', like at school (French) or outside (Arabic) or with our visiting family (Italian). The aim was to **communicate**.

'So you are not English, does it not bother you to speak English, a 'foreign' language to your son?' Asks my new friend.

English is no 'foreign language' to me. After ten years spent in the UK, English has become my main language. I was raised in several countries and did not grow up in France, but I attended French school and always spoke French. Despite this, it took quite some effort to speak French to Samuel before it could become a habit. Today we live in Germany, we speak mainly English at home, German outside, Italian with my family, and Samuel starts at the French school in September. Samuel and I 'switched' language several times in his three years of life and if anyone thinks Samuel is damaged in any way, I suggest they talk to him!

In my large family of 30 I don't know of anyone who suffered psychological damage, stammer, speech delays or any other problems related to the fact that our parents spoke three languages to us.

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Who said raising children bilingually is easy?

I have some questions – or dilemmas – that I would be delighted to receive some advice on!!

We very strictly stick to the one person one language rule (not difficult since the children's Dad doesn't speak Norwegian at all). I speak nothing but Norwegian with Emilia (2 years 1 month) and Sebastian (3 months), but with English surrounding them all the time, (English-speaking nanny, English-speaking friends, etc) it is by far their superior language.

Although English is one step ahead at all times, I do get the feeling now that both languages are progressing. Currently this means Emilia is now forming sentences in



Sebastian and Emilia

English but only speaks Norwegian in the form of individual words. I know a lot of people give up at this point, but I am determined not to. Still I do find the whole thing much more demanding than I expected. If one more person comes up to me to say 'isn't it great that they get two languages for free' I think I'll scream!!!

Some typical dilemmas:

A. Emilia comes home telling me what has happened in the day... eg *'Emilia wee-wee in potty'*. The jury's out... do I pretend I don't understand English and ignore her (heart breaking!)... or do I answer as if I have understood – but in Norwegian?

B. We have an English child over, and I need to read a book to them. Which language to choose? Norwegian to please her, or English which they both understand? Or do I translate each page simultaneously (I do this now, in spite of the time it takes)?

C. Emilia is given a sweet by her English speaking Granny. I can't say *'Say thank you, Emilia'*. Instead I have to say *'Si takk, Emilia'*, which my darling two-year-old is meant to internalise, and then translate to *'Thank you'*. Is it fair and realistic to expect her to do this?

And of course, the fact that other people unconsciously disapprove – no matter how much I explain that I do need to speak Norwegian with my children **all** the time for it to work. Most people seem to think that I could at least make an exception when they are around. They don't seem to realise that it's all those little moments that make up a day!

“Still I do find the whole thing much more demanding than I expected.”

Yes, we do try to compensate with books, videos, etc and there are a few Norwegian mums in London who are meeting up monthly to provide a Norwegian play environment for the kids. We are also considering getting a Norwegian au pair at a later date. It does mean though, that I seriously have to consider whether I should give up full time work, or at least work part time. As it is, the Norwegian influence is far too minor!! I guess most of this will improve in time, when Emilia has a wider knowledge of both languages – meanwhile we'll just keep going. (I have already mentally prepared myself for the inevitable *'why can't you speak like other mums, mummy'*...).

Karina

Full time working mum to Emilia (25 months) and Sebastian (nearly 3 months), London.

Your letter is VERY familiar; we all go through these doubts, fears and dilemmas. I warn you, there will be different ones in each stage of your children's development. But don't despair. There is a lot you can do to solve the problems.

Bilingualism is like teaching kids to play the piano – if you want them to learn it well, you have to give them time to learn and opportunity to practice. Since you are a working mum (and your husband doesn't speak Norwegian) the time your children hear Norwegian is obviously very limited. Children are just as lazy as adults – they will take the easy option and speak the language which comes into their head first. Because your children are in English speaking surroundings during the day, you are already experiencing what 'stay home' mums or dads complain of when the children start school.

The obvious thing to do is, as you say, increase the time the children hear and have to speak Norwegian. If you are unable to stay at home, or work part time, perhaps you could look for a Norwegian au-pair. I also feel that in your situation, to start with you have to be quite consistent and always speak Norwegian to your children. Once they have mastered the language 'the one parent - one language' rule can be relaxed a bit. Some people may not agree with this method, but if the other language in a family is a real minority language, like Norwegian (or Finnish in my case) the children have little opportunity to hear it anywhere else, except at home and when visiting the family in Norway.

You can't force the children to speak Norwegian, but you can try different tricks like pretending you had not heard what they said (but don't insist) – and praising them when they do speak the language. However in the situation A, I would not ignore your daughter. Listen, laugh and cry with her when she tells you about outside home experiences – then answer her in Norwegian. That transition time is difficult – by bending a bit there you will be much closer to her at other times.

In Situation B, again be flexible. I used to speak English and read English stories when our son's friends were in the house – but when I spoke direct to my own children I always switched into Finnish. I also tried to teach the friends some simple Finnish like 'hei hei' (bye bye). The same children – now adults – still say 'hei hei' when they leave our house.

C. It is a very good mental exercise for your daughter to translate Norwegian into English when she speaks to her English Grandmother. We adults forget that children have enormous mental capacity.

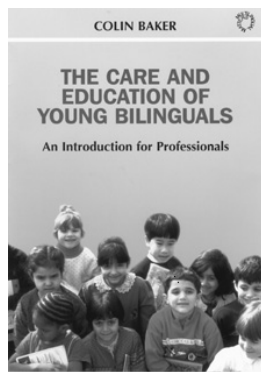
With regards to other people disapproving, I always explained to my new friends why I spoke Finnish to my children. If they couldn't take it they were not my real friends.

Have you thought of starting a Saturday School with your friends? It provides support and a formal learning environment for reading and writing in Norwegian and therefore increases the value of the language.

Bilingualism is hard work, but well worth the effort. My sons are now 22 and 24 and both speak, read and write in Finnish – and love Finland and Finnish culture. They also find foreign language learning easy.

Marjukka Grover

BOOK REVIEW



This book offers a wealth of practical advice and information on every conceivable topic in connection with the raising of bilingual children. It is written by Colin Baker, who himself, has three bilingual children. It is apparent that he is not a detached academic author; he offers expert knowledge, much of it coming from his own experiences. The book is extremely comprehensive, and is especially of value to the busy working professional who has regular contact with bilingual families. It is an ideal first introduction and each topic has detailed information on literature for further reading. The reader will benefit by gaining a clearer insight into bilinguals in general and bilingual children in particular. I would strongly recommend that this book be on the book shelves of every school Staff Room and read by all Speech Therapists, Psychologists, Doctors, Counsellors, Special Needs Teachers and other professionals who are in contact with children brought up with two or more languages. As for parents, I am sure that all of us will find a certain chapter and think that the book was written just for us!

I personally found plenty of literature on how to raise children bilingually in their early years. The first chapters of this book cover these topics. However, when the crucial time comes for these children to enter school, this literature seems to dry up or is far too academic and detached from the reader. What type of school should we send our bilingual child to? What should we be looking for when choosing a school for our children? Which language do we wish our

children to be educated in? Which language should homework be done in? Which language should we speak at home? Should we send our children to a monolingual school, or a bilingual school? Parents ask all of these questions with bilingual children and this book offers expert advice. There is an excellent, explicit table listing different styles of bilingual education and is especially of value to parents pondering on their child's future education. It can also help in forming any questions they may have for the teaching staff and advises what to look out for when visiting schools. I only wish this book had been available when our children became of school age. This chapter answers all those questions... and more!

The next chapter 'The bilingual classroom', for me was of particular interest. The experience and knowledge of the writer is invaluable and nothing appears to have been overlooked on the topic of educating bilingual and multilingual children.

From there, the book deals with children and special needs. It helps to identify and offers advice for those children who perhaps have learning problems and how to tackle this within a bilingual environment – a very interesting chapter for Special Needs Teachers and Speech Therapists. All too often well meaning people offer the wrong advice!

The book then moves onto the subjects of Racism, Immigrants and refugee children, who all have their individual needs in society today. It also discusses the politics surrounding children today.

Finally, there is an excellent Glossary followed by a bibliography comprehensively listing everything there is to be read on bilinguals.

This is a wonderful, user friendly book, and I would highly recommend it.

Janice Weiss

(2 German/English bilingual boys aged 11 years and 13 years.)

The Care and Education of Young Bilinguals: An Introduction for Professionals by Colin Baker
Pbk 1-85359-465-2, £9.95 / US\$15.95
200p, published in 2000 by Multilingual Matters.

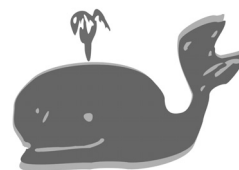
HUMOUR, HUMOUR, HUMOUR

Prince of Whale

A French family with four children had recently moved to Great Britain. Sylvain, the father, was trying to explain to Timothée (9 years old) why, a long time ago, the oldest son of the King of France was called le Dauphin (dauphin = dolphin, but in this case is not a literal translation). To make his point, Sylvain tried to compare this to the English Royal family, saying that in England the next in line to the throne was called the Prince of something, i.e. Prince Charles being the Prince of Wales. 'Ah oui', said Timothée, 'La baleine!' (Baleine = whale)

It just goes to show how having two languages can open up our world!

Amanda Rebol, Chantilly, France.





Mother using two minority languages – confusing?

I have a 14-month-old daughter. My mother tongue is Serbian and my husband's is Arabic. We want our daughter to learn our languages to enable her to communicate with our families and widen her cultural horizons. I have studied languages and am fully aware how they can enrich our lives and bring plenty of joy. We live in the UK and, though we try to minimise using English at home, we still use it very often when our English-speaking friends are around. My husband and I communicate in Arabic when alone.

I look after our daughter, so she is exposed to Serbian more than to Arabic, although I find myself switching between these two languages spontaneously when talking to her. She has started saying first words, some of them are in Arabic, some in Serbian. When she sees a picture of a fish and says 'houta' (in Arabic), I find myself just continuing to talk about the fish in Arabic. I tried at the beginning to adopt the famous *one parent-one language* approach, but found that it does not really work with us. When the three of us are together it is easier for me to join my husband playing with Nadia in Arabic than switching to my language. Also, I want her to adopt Arabic in her early age because the pronunciation is very difficult to acquire later. Because I spend more time with Nadia, I feel that the responsibility for teaching her both languages lies with me. She loves books and I read some of the books in Serbian and some of them in Arabic. Nadia obviously relates to pictures and very often she chooses a book for reading. It makes me think whether by deciding which book to bring to me for reading she chooses the language too. Is she is going to be confused by me talking to her in two languages? Please help me on this road full of ups and downs.

Ljiljana (pronounced Liliana)

Contact details removed

P.S. Your BFN is excellent!

It's very positive that you want your daughter to learn your languages alongside English. She obviously enjoys communicating and is already trying out her first Arabic and Serbian words.

The *one-parent-one-language* approach is often recommended to bilingual families, but I think it is not ideal for a trilingual family. Parents often speak the country language or the other parental language on a daily basis. As you speak English in the community and Arabic with your husband you are showing how you use each language for a reason. You choose a language to suit the situation and switch languages effortlessly. Trilingual children do the same. They need reassurance that each parent understands and speaks a good part of all three languages, as they are expected to do so.

"They need reassurance that each parent understands and speaks a good part of all three languages, as they are expected to do so."

Within the family eating together or playing with the child, it can seem unnatural with two or three languages and one parent can feel excluded. You can try having defined times or places where as a family you choose one language – for example Arabic at the dinner table.

Regarding your concern about Nadia's Arabic pronunciation, I am sure Nadia already has an understanding of Arabic phonetics from informal verbal interaction with her father. One enjoyable way to encourage her could be listening to Arabic music or songs at home. But you should not be responsible for both languages. If possible ask your Arabic-speaking family and friends to help out too.

I recommend that you concentrate on speaking Serbian now, because in a few years she may prefer Arabic (the language you speak as a couple) or English (the language of the country). If you plan to stay in England long-term you could take her to English-language playgroups to prepare her for school. Being at home with Nadia gives you an opportunity to practice both Serbian and English.

Living with three languages can be complicated, especially where books are concerned. With pre-school children you are doing all the reading, so it is up to you to decide which language you feel comfortable with. In my family we have a collection of English, French and German books, but my children usually choose books by their illustrations or characters.

I prefer my language (English) as I feel I teach the language through reading and it feels right. However, it can be hard work to simultaneously translate books and the story can lose its original charm.

If you choose to read books in their original language, bear in mind that most books will be in English from the library or school. Ask other family members or friends to do reading sessions in each language if you feel she is missing out. The most important thing is that you both enjoy reading together. Trilingual children soon learn that the same story can be told in three different languages! Nadia is certainly lucky to have such parents as role models and will one day appreciate all the efforts you are making to help her be multilingual.

Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert

Member of the BFN Editorial Board

Note: For studies related to trilingual children there is a new book which gives advice on bringing up children multilingually: **Raising Multilingual Children** by Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa, published 2001, ISBN 0-89789-750-1. There is a website related to the book - www.multifaceta.com

Bilingualism and mathematics?

Do bilinguals manage to do mental arithmetic in both languages or only in the dominant language?

We moved back to France six months ago and although my children aged 8 1/2 and 6 years old already spoke good French the majority of maths they have done has been in English. Both children know their number bonds in English and my eldest child has learnt her tables in English. Will there come a time when they will do mental arithmetic in French and if so how long will it take?

Nicoletta Bourjade, Bernin, Isère, France.

First, when bilinguals are asked what language they use for mental arithmetic, they sometimes answer Partly in Maths¹. That is, maths has a language of its own – symbols (e.g. 5+5, 3x4, 43). The thinking may therefore partly occur in symbols as well as in French or English.

Second, there are bilinguals who almost always switch to their Maths dominant¹ language. People dominant in Welsh (who speak Welsh fluently on a daily basis) but were taught Maths in English often use English when expressing numbers or calculations (e.g. in shops).

READING MATTERS

“Learning to read starts the day a child is born. Listening and speaking is a necessary

preparation for learning to read.

The vocabulary and language structures acquired in learning to talk are an essential foundations for reading. As soon as the child becomes aware of toys, it is time for the child to have some simple books to play with. As early as possible, the child needs concept of a book and to value books in the home. Early in life a child can learn that a book has pictures and objects that are later understood as words. As parents move through the child’s first year, it is time to start nursery rhymes and relay pithy sayings. By the time the child has reached the end of the first year, consider starting to read simple books to him or her. Children may not understand every word in the book. They will often understand the story line. They are learning that books are fun and that reading is a pleasure”

From **A Parents’ and Teachers’ Guide to Bilingualism** by Colin Baker, Pbk 1-85359-455-5, £9.95/ US\$15.95



Because Miss Harris says so!

I read the question about languages for homework in Vol.18. No.1, 2001 with interest because I too was very unsure of how to help my now seven-year-old English/German speaking daughter with her homework in her British school. I must confess that Colin Baker’s answer is helpful but only to a degree. It is true that mathematical concepts once understood can be reproduced in any language – although here too, especially small children like to practice at home in exactly the same way they have been taught at school. My five-year-old is currently going through the stage of taking the teacher’s word as gospel and argues that no, she’s not been asked to subtract, but to take away. Because Miss Harris said and Miss Harris is right! This is a minor difficulty compared to the all-important help with reading, spelling and writing. There is no mechanism by which you can help a child to read English text, sound out English words and use English sounds to dictate spellings other than in English.

I would like to reassure everyone that this is not really a problem. The children know that their parents speak English to other English people and they easily extend this system to ‘English’ schoolwork. We often read the girls’ school books together in English and then discuss the content in German. The older one might ask me in German how to spell an English word, I give her the spelling in English and we then revert back to German. Sounds confusing, I know, but as often the reality is smoother than the theory.

Erika Baker, Ightham, England.

Third, a few bilinguals say they can calculate in either language – depending on the language in which the question was asked. However, most bilinguals tend to use one language, irrespective of the initial language of the conversation. This can change over time. If people are taught number work in one language and later the other language becomes very dominant, they tend to switch languages for number work.

Fourth, some people are so dominant in one language that they prefer all maths operations in that language and almost never switch to maths in the other language.

So, in conclusion, the answer is that it depends on (1) the language of maths education, (2) on daily practice and experience (e.g. in shops) and (3) on language dominance, which can change over time.

Also, the maths teacher will answer – it doesn’t matter which language – so long as it leads to correct answers and fluent maths thinking.

Colin Baker

Professor of Education, University of Wales Bangor and a member of the BFN Editorial Board

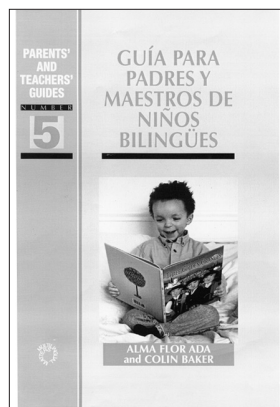
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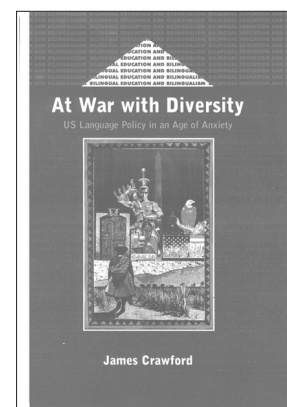
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COMMUNICATION...from page 4

So, when I hear parents of bi-lingual children ask questions with a worried look, all I want to say is *‘first convey the love of communicating to your children, then speak whatever you want or can.’* We mustn’t underestimate our children, they are geniuses. I always think about the rest of the world, the big world out there – Africa, China, India (15 languages, 4000 dialects), etc. where people learn up to eight languages from birth... I have never yet heard of a study that demonstrates that the majority of the people on this earth are damaged for learning many languages simultaneously and randomly!



This is an adapted Spanish Language version of *A Parents’s and Teachers’ Guide to Bilingualism* Pbk 1-85359-511-x, June 2001, 248pp Price £12.95/ US\$19.95



This collection of essays analyses the sources of the anti-bilingual movement in USA, its changing directions, and its impact on education policy. Pbk 1-85359-505-5, 2000, 143pp Price£9.95 / US\$15.95

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Name, address, languages spoken in the family, children's birth dates and specification of the types of families with whom you would like to get in touch.



WHO CARES.... Continued from page two

sensitive to the needs of non-English speaking families and that schools can provide the appropriate counseling and educational services needed. Educators should ensure that the school routines, values and skills taught are consistent with (or at least respectful of) those which already exist in the home.

Linguistically different and minority language families who have a physically and mentally challenged child or adult need a good support system. Such groups and associations must be well informed about the needs of their culturally and linguistically different parent members. These parents should work together to establish the necessary political and legal foundations so that the needs of their families may be met on the same bases as needs of other families.

Universities, which offer graduate level university programs in linguistically different and minority language education, should create courses in such areas as program development, testing and evaluation. These courses should be made available to graduates from other professions.

These needs are real. For physically and mentally challenged children and adults, receiving the proper advice and services can mean the difference between success and failure in the development of a communication system.

Conclusion

Most would agree that it is an advantage to adapt to the majority language society that surrounds us. However, we know from the evidence that to deny a culturally and linguistically different child or adult the right to her or his mother tongue and home culture – to basic human dignity, to equal human rights and privileges – is to perpetuate basic social inequities. The quality of a person's future is further challenged unless steps are taken to address this question.

Georges Duquette

Professor, School of Education, Laurentian University, Ontario, Canada.

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