

# the bilingual family newsletter

news and views for intercultural people

editors: sami grover and marjukka grover

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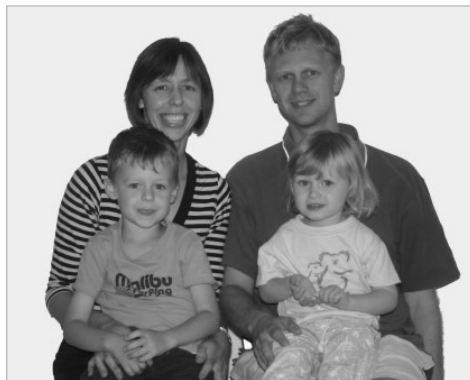
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## editorial

### Signing as Bilingual Language Aid?

Sydelle Holmgaard



I am an Australian, married to a Dane, living in Denmark. When our son Oliver was born it seemed natural for us to follow the *One-Parent-One-Language* (OPOL) approach, with me speaking English to him, while my husband and everyone else used Danish. I knew that his initial language could be delayed, but was surprised by how many people claimed that Oliver would be completely confused by the process. I was determined that he would learn both Danish and English... but in a pain free way!

As a speech pathologist I was prepared to give him plenty of language stimulation; however, I had also seen how delayed language can affect children's behaviour. I began to consider the option of using some sign language with him. I have successfully used simple keyword signing with children with delayed language. They find gestures easy to learn, and the reduced frustration and increased power for both themselves and their parents often helps their spoken language develop. I was also inspired by a book called *Babysigns*, by Linda P. Acredolo and Susan W. Goodwyn. This book presents the results of two

psychologists who have taught parents to use signs and gestures with their babies, to assist communication before they talk and help stimulate the babies communication development. Acredolo and Goodwyn suggest that all children benefit from the use of sign language, that it acts as a bridge to spoken language and stimulates intellectual development. I also felt that if both my husband and I used the same simple gestures or signs, this might help Oliver make the link that an object such as a ball can have two names, one in Daddy's language and one in Mummy's.

I decided to follow Acredolo and Goodwyn's advice by starting with the five signs: hat, bird, flower, fish and more. They suggest that these are some of the easiest and most useful signs to learn. To these five signs I also added six more: eat, drink, finished, car, ball and book. I chose the first three because they help at meal and snack time and the last three because they were Oliver's favourite things. I spoke to Oliver as I normally would but any time I said one of the above eleven words, I accompanied the word with the sign or gesture. In this way, only the keyword in the sentence was signed. I also played games to present the signs to him and to help him learn the signs. I chose to use the sign system of Makaton as I was familiar with this through my work. Makaton is a simple signing system often used with children with speech, language or intellectual delay. Acredolo and Goodwyn have their own sign system, but they do say that any gestures or variations can be used.

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In the last episode of the *BFN*, Sydelle Holmgaard asked for information on signing as a tool for teaching spoken language to bilingual children. She wanted to know whether her use of signs may have helped avoid a delay in speaking which sometimes occurs with bilingual children. It turned out that there was very little research on this subject. We thought, therefore, that it might be interesting to hear a little more about Sydelle's experiences. Perhaps it might even prompt some research from our academic readers...

This kind of information exchange is what the *BFN* is all about. We aim to not only provide the latest in research on bilingualism, but also to give real world examples and experiences of parents and teachers who are out there working with and bringing up bi- and multilingual children. This quarter's issue is a perfect example - Sydelle Holmgaard and Suzanne Barron-Hauwert share their personal experiences as parents, Karima Almazroui gives us some insight from a teacher's perspective, whilst Iman Laversuch and Carol Benson highlight some important research from the academic and medical worlds.

We hope that this mix of research and practice provides inspiration, guidance and entertainment to academics, teachers and parents alike. So, as we move into the New Year, whether you are concerned with the theory, the practice, or both, please keep your articles coming. Without them the *BFN* would be a dull read indeed.

Sami Grover

## Signing as Bilingual Language Aid *Continued from Page 1*

My husband agreed to use sign language with Oliver but, in reality, he rarely signed with him. We began signing when Oliver was 10-months-old. He used some of the gestures, especially book, car, fish, more and finish. He began to say 'bye-bye', 'boo' (peek-a-boo) and 'Far' (Dad in Danish) at 12 months of age, and at 13 months he produced the words 'more', 'again', 'ball', 'bird', 'woof', 'moo', and 'mum'. It is interesting to note that many of these words are, in fact, the signs he had learnt. By 14 months of age he was saying over 25 words consistently. It was therefore a short period that he used the signs alone and he soon stopped signing altogether. Did signing help his speech acquisition, or was it all the other language stimulation techniques, or is he just good at acquiring language? It is impossible to know, but the signing was certainly useful for me before he began to speak.

All of Oliver's first words were English; except 'again', which was said 'igen' as in Danish. At 15 months of age, he began to produce Danish words. These were generally words that he already used in English.

I was far more relaxed when my daughter Amalia arrived. After all, she was a girl, and girls tend to have fewer problems than boys with speech and language acquisition. Oliver was two years and two months at the time and combining four to six words

in sentences, although mixing Danish and English. We were not concerned by his code switching, as he simply had so much to say and spoke quickly. He also showed that he was aware of the two languages, and at times asked 'What does Mummy call that, Daddy calls it...'

I chose to use the same signs with Amalia, but did not begin signing with her until she was 12 -13 months of age. I was also less consistent with her and did not have as many activities centred around the signs. It is much harder to dedicate time to child

*It is much harder to dedicate time to child number two, especially when child number one is a two-year-old! Oliver was not interested in using signing with his little sister, he wanted her to talk.*

number two, especially when child number one is a two-year-old! Oliver was not interested in using signing with his little sister, he wanted her to talk. My husband did not see the need to sign this time either! In contrast to Oliver, Amalia only used the sign 'fish' spontaneously, and occasionally used 'more' or 'finish', if I had just used the sign with her. Amalia's first words at 12

months of age were 'Far' (Dad in Danish), 'duck', 'boo' and 'ba' (for bath). Over the next few months Amalia acquired a few new words, but she was 17-months-old before her speech took off.

Given that Amalia's speech was slower to develop than Oliver's, it is surprising that she did not use more signs. There are three possible reasons for this, the most obvious being my inconsistent use of the signs. I was often talking to Oliver, or putting shoes on him, while talking to Amalia, so she was not consistently exposed to the signs in the way Oliver was. Secondly, Amalia imitates everything that her brother does, and the fact that he did not sign may have reduced her interest. Thirdly, the signs may not have been right for Amalia. Her early words were not related to the signs I had used, at 13 months her new words were 'out' to go outside, 'wa' to go for a walk, and 'up' to be picked up. It is possible that the words I was signing were simply not of interest. The signs for 'eat', 'drink', 'more' and 'finish' had been useful with Oliver as he was a fussy eater and it was hard to know whether he wanted to eat. Amalia, in contrast, ate until she was full and then pushed the plate away. If she was hungry she went to the pantry... no signs were needed!

Her pattern of first words also differed from Oliver's in that many of them were Danish. Amalia was exposed to a lot more Danish than Oliver had been in his first 12

## Mother Tongues First: ID21 - Carol Benson



Many of us read this newsletter because we are interested in our children's bi- or multilingual upbringing. Even if we may not feel so privileged when difficulties arise, the field of bilingual education categorises our situations as "elite bilingualism", ostensibly because we have at least some degree of choice when it comes to languages as well as to language-related practices at home, in school or in the community.

Even with the challenges we experience, we may be much more fortunate than we realize. In many parts of the world, people are forced to send their children to schools that do not speak their languages or value their cultures. These school systems set up certain children to fail, while others succeed simply because their families speak languages of power.

In Mozambique, for example, the language of schooling has, until recently, been Portuguese, spoken as a mother tongue by less than 5% of the population. While language is not the only factor, it is easy to see why so many Mozambican children start school with bright eyes, only to repeat grades or drop out. Lessons are simply not in a language they understand.

While there are clearly big differences between our situations, many of the pedagogical principles are the same, especially the concept of Mother Tongue(s) First for literacy and learning, a concept that helps children to succeed academically while learning additional languages. This and other principles are discussed in a recent issue of *id21 Insights Education* from the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, in which I had the opportunity to be involved. Under the leadership of Katy Webley of *Save the Children UK* and the expert editorship of Louise Daniel and Sandra Baxter, a group of us working in the field put together a set of short articles on children's right to learn in their own languages, with examples from a number of multilingual

countries. Our goal is to make readers more aware of the issues involved when inequity, discrimination and conflict are inevitably intertwined with ethnicity, language and culture.

Webley's introductory essay describes the challenges as well as the benefits of putting the mother tongue first. Then there is an article by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, longtime champion of language rights, explaining why people's own languages should be protected and developed. The articles that follow provide interesting examples of progressive policy and practice in Bolivia, India, South Africa and Vietnam. There is also information about bilingual schooling models, links between mother tongue use and girls' school participation, and how cost-benefit analysis favours bilingual education.

*If you would like to receive a copy of the publication, you may send your postal address to: [id21@ids.ac.uk](mailto:id21@ids.ac.uk)*

*A PDF version is available at: <http://www.id21.org/insights>*



months of life. Amalia came with Oliver and I to playgroup and various activities from when she was born. When we are at playgroup and with other Danes I use Danish with the children so they don't feel different, and so other people don't feel excluded. In addition, Oliver generally uses Danish when playing with Amalia.

Amalia is now 2 and she has good Danish skills. She, like Oliver, loves to chat and is combining 4-5 words in sentences. Her spoken English skills are more limited. She is able to sit with me and name a variety of pictures in books, and uses English to talk about books that we have read in English. She generally uses Danish in play and conversation, with English limited to the odd word or phrase.

Oliver is now 4 years old, with great skills in both languages. He does put the occasional Danish word into an English sentence or vice versa, but that seems to occur when he does not know or can't think of the word in the language he is speaking. His use of spoken English does fluctuate, however. We try to visit Australia once a year. He speaks Danish for the first week, then when my parents complain that they can't understand him he shouts, in Danish, 'I am speaking English'. After a few weeks he does switch to fluent English. When we return to Denmark he uses English for the first few days, and then switches back to Danish, though he usually continues to use English with me for the first few months, then slowly switches to more Danish. It is 4 months since our last trip and he is still using English most of the time with me.

In conclusion, I feel that my use of sign may have helped Oliver's early language development. He used the signs for a short period of time, and many of his first words were the same as the signs he had used. His language development was not delayed despite the exposure to two languages. My use of signing did not seem to have much impact on Amalia, she only used three of the signs, and her early words were not related to the signs. Whether this was because I did not use the signs consistently with her, or because the signs were not useful words for Amalia it is impossible to know. Her speech and language development, although not as rapid as Oliver's from 12-16 months, was still within normal limits. For me personally, the use of signs also made me feel that the children were exposed to another method of communication, and that this could assist the development of their communication skills. The use of signing can, perhaps, help bilingual children acquire speech as rapidly as their monolingual peers.

#### Reference

Acredolo, L. P. and Goodwyn, S. W. (1996), *Baby Signs*, Contemporary Books.

## Notes from the OPOL Family



### On the Road Again...

#### Suzanne Barron-Hauwert

*Suzanne and Jacques are an English/French couple with three more-or-less bilingual children (Marc, 9, Nina, 6 and Gabriel, 3). They have lived as a family in Budapest, Cairo, Zurich, France, England, Malaysia and now the USA. They try to stick to the OPOL approach.*

By the time you read this our family will be living on a new continent. Jacques has been transferred from Kuala Lumpur to Chicago. This is our sixth country move in ten years. When we got the news in March I told the children immediately, not wanting them to overhear conversations without being involved. Marc said he would be sad to leave his best friend Adam, a Malaysian-French boy, but was excited to explore America. Nina said she wanted to make some new friends and try cheerleading. She's also happy to be closer to Europe and spend more holidays with her cousins. Gabriel didn't really understand but got the message that he would have to say goodbye to his school and friends. We have all been very happy in multilingual Malaysia, so my initial reaction was 'Oh no!', but after a while I reasoned that most of my friends would move on sooner or later too. Sometimes it is truly painful to leave and it can be hard to find the willpower to resettle somewhere else.

One of the main topics of conversation amongst expats is the length of posting and where the family will go next. In most cases we simply don't know. Usually it's between 2 and 5 years, but we can be sent home with only a few weeks notice. Families with strong links with their home country often suffer from homesickness but others are so used to being expatriate they can't imagine returning to life in their country again. Interestingly, the mixed families we meet, like us, often enjoy living in a third country where neither person has to fit in with the partner's culture.

The instability can drive you mad though. Children can be wary of making new friends. Nina had French twin girl friends who returned to

France in 2005 and although we tried to keep in touch she missed them deeply. The following school year she refused to get close to anyone.

So what do you do when you hear you will move? We spent a whole Sunday afternoon on the internet browsing all the options for schools and eventually came down to two – the *Lycee Francais de Chicago*, which is similar to where the children are now, and the *Ecole Franco-Americaine de Chicago*, a French-English bilingual school. These days getting three kids into a good school, when you don't actually live there yet, is optimistic to say the least. Luckily there were places in both schools for Marc and Nina. After much discussion we went for the bilingual school. Gabriel will go to local kindergarten until he is five.

We had made a major decision to put Marc and Nina in the *Lycee Francais de Kuala Lumpur* three years ago, because their French was becoming passive and would have probably died out in Malaysia, but now Marc and Nina speak, read and write in French well, and their English is slipping. I talked to some teacher friends and they all agreed the bilingual school was a good option. They will have some links with American kids while still keeping the French going for future studies or if we move to France. The curriculum is 13 hours French and 18 hours English, and they start an hour earlier than American kids. I think they can cope and it will be good to reinforce subjects such as maths in both languages.

Once the school was sorted, and we knew we had to live nearby, we had fun with GoogleEarth.com. This free website gives a wonderful view of the world from satellite. Marc quickly navigated us to America, Chicago and then the school address. We zoomed over Chicago, spotting parks, a zoo, the lake and the skyscraper where Papa's office will be. This helped the children visualise their new life.

Next was the packing up of the house, this time done by professionals who efficiently cardboard and bubble-wrapped everything in sight in three days flat! We had a goodbye party for about fifty families which started with an English tea and went on all day to an evening potluck get-together. We cried and hugged goodbye to our closest friends and made plans to meet up in summers in France or England, and then off we flew to spend the summer with family while the shipment sailed half-way around the world to America.

<http://opol-family.blogspot.com/>  
*Suzanne Barron-Hauwert's blog with the history of the OPOL family and how it all started....*

## AZBUKA - Russian language immersion nursery, school and club



If anyone is interested in joint projects with AZBUKA for *any other* minority languages please contact us:

Contact details removed

## When the Unthinkable Occurs: Bilingualism and Aphasia

Dr I.M. Laversuch

*Dr Laversuch is a lecturer of English at the University of Cologne in Germany.*

Skateboarding, rollerblading, downhill skiing, mountain biking - every year, the world over, countless fun-loving young people suffer accidental head traumas severe enough to damage the areas of their brain responsible for the production and comprehension of language. The technical term for the disturbance of linguistic abilities due to either the bleeding or blockage of the vital blood vessels responsible for servicing the brain is aphasia.

Luckily, thanks to years of international research, many of these young aphasic patients will benefit from the tremendous medical advances which have been made. Despite these innovations, there is still a tendency to treat bilingual patients with aphasia in much the same way as monolingual aphasics. However, there is much to indicate that bilinguals with aphasia face unique challenges on their road to recovery.

For example, it has been noted that bilinguals who suffer severe brain damage switch from one language to another. However, as many *BFN* readers will recognize, switching is a common characteristic of most healthy bilingual speech. There is, however, one critical difference. Unlike healthy bilinguals who may, for example, switch from one language to another out of respect for a monolingual speaker present, bilingual aphasics are very often unable to control their switching and as a result their speech may be marked by a confused mixture of languages. Alternatively, it has also been found that some bilingual aphasics may find themselves completely unable to switch back and forth between their languages even after they have been asked to do so.

Another hallmark of healthy bilingual speech which may be negatively affected by aphasia is translation. While some sufferers are suddenly completely unable to translate from one language to another, others involuntarily and spontaneously translate. The famous linguist, Roman Jakobson, reported, for instance, that for nearly 30 minutes after injuring his head in a car accident, he compulsively translated every sentence into each of his four different languages! Because of the difficulty in deciphering whether a patient's linguistic behaviour is normal or abnormal for him/her, the information which family members can provide about the patient's behaviors before the injury

can be of critical importance in helping the medical staff make the correct initial diagnosis regarding the extent and degree of brain damage.

Such information can also be of critical importance later on when assessing the pattern of the patient's recovery process. Among bilingual aphasics it has been noted that their different languages may be affected to different degrees in different ways. In the best possible case, of course, the bilingual will recover complete linguistic proficiency in each of his/her languages in all areas of language production (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Unfortunately, this does not always happen. In some cases, the languages are recovered serially or successively. In still other instances, the languages may return antagonistically, where steps forward in one language are accompanied with steps backward in another language. There have even been cases in which bilingual patients exhibit selective aphasic symptoms where only one of their languages is negatively affected and the others are left seemingly unharmed.

*Every year, countless fun-loving young people suffer accidental head traumas severe enough to damage the areas of their brain responsible for the production of language.*

Given these different recovery patterns, it is imperative that bilingual patients be regularly assessed and treated in each of their languages by medical personnel trained in responding to the unique needs of the multilingual/multicultural patient and his/her family. Unfortunately, in most hospitals, the presence of such specialized staff is still the exception not the rule. Even when such services exist, they are usually limited to the majority languages represented in the surrounding population. Family members must therefore insist on getting the medical care they deserve in the languages they need.

To help the attending medical staff optimize the effectiveness of the resulting treatment plan devised, it is important that they be given as much information as possible about the patient before the injury. According to François Grosjean, an

## Call For Articles

Many thanks to all of you who have recently sent in articles. Please keep them coming. The *BFN* relies on the creativity and hard work of its readers. Everything that appears in these pages is written by parents, teachers, children and academics that share an interest in bilingualism, multilingualism, multiculturalism and language learning.

If there are areas that you feel the newsletter should cover in more detail, why not write to us and let us know? Better yet, why not write an article for us? If you have experiences you would like to share, or if you disagree with advice given in these pages, we want to hear from you. We also welcome queries about all aspects of intercultural/multilingual living. We will do our best to get queries answered by experts with specific expertise relating to your situation.

Unfortunately the *BFN* does not make a profit at present, so we are unable to pay for contributions. However, we do provide authors of articles with extra copies of the issue in which their article appears.

We usually ask that articles are kept to between 1500 and 2000 words, with letters and shorter opinion pieces being around 500-1000 words. We reserve the right to edit contributions for length and content. Articles should be accompanied by a few good images, preferably sent as high-resolution digital files. If you would like to discuss a potential contribution, please contact:

[info@multilingual-matters.com](mailto:info@multilingual-matters.com)





After a serious accident, linguist Roman Jakobson compulsively translated every sentence into four different languages.

expert in polyglott aphasia who is not only a multilingual himself but also the parent of multilingual children, there are several standard questions which medical staff will routinely need answers to:

- Which languages did the patient know before injury?
- How well did s/he know them and for what, with whom, and under what circumstances did s/he use them?
- When the patient spoke, did s/he translate often or switch back and forth between languages frequently or easily?
- Did the patient exhibit certain characteristic “mistakes” which may have been related to one language interfering with another?

In the absence of these and other vital pieces of information, precious time can be lost, and key symptoms can be missed or misinterpreted.

Understandably, of course, many family members are completely unprepared to answer such questions after the shock of learning that their loved one has been in a serious accident. To help prepare parents for the unthinkable, an increasing number of concerned child-safety experts advocate keeping a journal of some sort which includes potentially critical documents like updated photographs and basic vital statistics such as blood type, medical and food allergies, vaccinations, illnesses, and medications. Why not add to these some details regarding your child’s unique language profile? In addition to answering questions like those above, you could also include a section on your child’s special linguistic abilities and preferences like their passion for writing poetry in Spanish, their obsession for reciting the lyrics of their favorite Turkish German rap star; their excitement over reading Swedish murder mysteries; their insistence on listening to you sing a Hungarian lullaby every evening before you kiss them good night.

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## In the News: Bilinguals Enjoy Exam Advantages

A study of secondary school pupils in London has shown positive benefits for encouraging pupils to learn heritage languages. According to the report, published by *CiLT – the National Centre for Languages*, pupils who are encouraged to learn their native language as well as English perform better in exams than monolingual students.

The document, entitled *Positively Plurilingual*, features an introduction from television newscaster Trevor McDonald, who argues that the education system should be making the most of language learning and its associated benefits:

*“We know that children are capable of acquiring more than one language and that doing so brings a range of educational benefits, including cognitive advantages, enhanced communication skills and an openness to different cultural perspectives.”*

The report highlights innovative programmes by schools across the country, including an East London school that adopts a “language of the month”, so pupils can experience a little of all the 44 languages spoken at the school. Other examples include schools in Peterborough that offer Italian, Urdu and Punjabi, or Dorset schools that have teamed up with London schools to provide distance learning in Bengali for their students.

The report comes in the wake of low enrollment figures for modern language exams in schools across the country. The slump in figures followed a decision to scrap compulsory language lessons after the age of 14.

*CiLT* is a registered charity in the UK with the stated aim of “promoting a greater national capability in languages amongst all sectors of the UK population.” It is the Government’s recognised centre of expertise on languages. It plays a key role in managing national initiatives in support of language capability as well as offering a wide range of services for teachers, learners, researchers, users and providers of language services and the business community.

Recent events organised by *CiLT* have included *Languages 14-19: Feel the Future!* - a conference highlighting the latest innovations in language teaching and learning, as well as the *Polish Connection* - a one-day seminar looking at the increased demand for Polish language skills in UK schools. *CiLT*’s website features news updates on the latest issues relating to language and language learning.

**Sources:**  
[www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)  
[www.cilt.org.uk](http://www.cilt.org.uk)

## BFN Website Archive Now Searchable

Way back in issue 22:3 we reported that we had launched an online archive of *BFN* backissues exclusively available to subscribers. We have since been working hard on compiling a comprehensive list of all main articles and queries featured in the 23 years of the *BFN*’s existence. This information is now included on the website next to the PDF of each issue, allowing users to easily assess whether a particular issue will be useful to them before downloading. The archive also features a search button for locating articles on particular subjects.

Some people have reported problems opening the individual files. If you have trouble opening a PDF, try saving the file first to your computer, before opening it as normal.

If you are an existing subscriber, you should have received a letter with this issue reminding you of your username and password. If you have not received this, or if you misplace it in the future, please contact us, quoting your subscription delivery address, and we will send you a reminder. For

obvious reasons we ask that you do not pass on your username and password to third parties, the newsletter cannot exist without the continued support of its subscribers.

The site also features secure online ordering for subscriptions. Existing subscribers can renew by ordering a new subscription to the same delivery address, and we will match up your order with your existing subscription to make sure no duplicate issues are sent. An online sample is also available as a PDF for visitors to the site who are not subscribers.

Readers wishing to support the *BFN* can help by linking from their website to the *BFN* site, as this will improve our standing on search engines such as *Google*.

We hope that this archive will prove a useful and accessible resource for parents, teachers and academics alike. Please do let us know if you have any problems accessing the online issues.

[www.bilingualfamilynewsletter.com](http://www.bilingualfamilynewsletter.com)

## Helping a Literacy Deprived Child

Karima M. Almazroui, PhD.



Karima M. Almazroui is Assistant professor at the United Arab Emirates University, College of Education.

Adel, aged 10, has lived with his parents in the United States for more than two years while his father is working on a Ph.D. Adel is an Arabic monolingual student who pursued his Arabic studies in an Arabic school in the USA where I teach. In class, Adel was not interested in reading any kind of literature. I found that he was so distracted and confused by the vocabulary I used during instruction that I had to ask him the same question several times in various different ways. His previous teacher thought that Adel was simply not making an effort to understand and they spoke with his mother at a teacher-parent conference. The mother claimed, sadly, that it was difficult in the US to get Arabic books, magazines, and children's stories in Arabic. Adel was not allowed to watch TV at home because his parents believed he would learn bad behavior and language from the western programs.

When Adel was transferred to my classroom I decided to be his mother's friend to gain her trust. I knew that Adel's only problem was that he was deprived of literature of any kind and was not exposed to various sources of knowledge. As a

result, even his Arabic vocabulary dropped. I believe that the best way to learn language is to use it. Adel needed to read, write, and to use the language in different contexts. Adel needed to read different kinds of literature and to be able to choose what to read. I used various strategies and activities to teach Adel. The New Vocabulary Learning Card was what he liked most, and worked best for him. Before explaining the card, the reader may want to know that after long discussions with his parents, Adel is now enrolled in an American school in addition to his weekend Arabic school, and is allowed to

*The best way to know what children know about reading and words is by exposing them to literature, different kinds of books and materials, and to let them live the language experience... reading.*

watch TV with guidance. He is even allowed to buy comic books such as *Archie* and *Goosebumps*.

Vocabulary development is a lifetime job. However, in terms of reading instruction, this task can be divided into three basic stages. First is the oral stage that develops in the preschool or kindergarten years. Second is the basic recognition of vocabulary that develops when beginning to read. Third is the expansion of the oral and reading vocabularies that takes place

at higher-grade levels and through adulthood (Raskin, 1978). An accurate diagnosis of what the child knows is important to know where to start. There are diverse ways to detect the child's knowledge of vocabulary, such as flashcards, writing, reading aloud, and oral vocabulary tests. The best way to know what children know about reading and words is by exposing them to literature, different kinds of books and materials, and to let them live the language experience where they can enjoy and relate to reading. If you are a teacher working with a child that suffers from vocabulary insufficiency or was literacy deprived, here are some recommendations that worked with Adel and may work in your classroom. They could also be adapted by parents for use at home:

- The teacher explains each new or difficult vocabulary word and suggests synonyms while reading. The students can be asked to propose more synonyms or antonyms so the entire class will develop a deep concept of these new or difficult words.
- The teacher uses a picture dictionary to help explain new words. The students can be asked to create their own picture dictionary and to refer to it when needed.
- The teacher places a picture in front of the student and asks them to describe it (Ekwall, 1985).
- The teacher starts a struggling student with stories below his age level so she can locate the student's actual reading level.
- The teacher discusses the vocabulary with the struggling student daily. If the teacher has no time to do this in the classroom, vocabulary homework can be assigned.

### In the News: Researchers Find Neural Signature of Bilingualism

New research claims to have found areas of the brain that indicate bilingual activity in an individual. Using *NIRS*, an optical imaging technology normally used for detecting breast tumors or blood flow in the heart, the researchers were able to identify a significant difference in the brain's activity when bilinguals were switching between their languages, as opposed to using one language at a time.

The researchers, from Dartmouth College, looked at changes in the oxygen level in the brain in 10 bilinguals who had spoken English and Spanish since birth, and 10 English-only monolinguals as they processed various language tasks. Interestingly, the study showed very similar results – increased activity in

the language area of the left hemisphere of the brain – in all subjects when they were speaking in only one language. However, when the bilingual subjects were processing both of their languages simultaneously, and switching rapidly between the two, they showed a significant increase in activity in the equivalent area in the right hemisphere of the brain.

Laura-Ann Pettito, one of the authors of the study, said the research contradicted fears, traditionally held by many (and familiar to *BFN* readers), that bilingualism might negatively impact the brain. On the contrary, Pettito claimed the study shows that bilinguals realise more of the brain's potential for language processing than monolinguals do

which, she claimed, was “a very good thing”.

She went on to suggest that the research had implications for the potential of all language users to maximise the brain's natural language abilities, and that perhaps we should all be making more use of this:

*“...we may find it is the monolingual that is not taking full advantage of the neural landscape for language and cognitive processing that nature could have potentially made available.”*

Sources:

[www.medcompare.com](http://www.medcompare.com)  
[www.dartmouth.edu](http://www.dartmouth.edu)



One particularly interesting game which helps to increase the student's vocabulary, basic sight words, and gives the teacher a precise idea of the student's level is known as *Word Center*. The teacher writes familiar words appropriate to the student's vocabulary level on cards in bold and large print. These word cards can be placed in a box or envelope or displayed in front of the student. The cards can be used for many activities:

- The student identifies the noun words.
- The student makes single sentences from three words.
- The student finds the shortest word and the longest word.
- The student finds new words and adds them to the picture dictionary book.
- The student chooses twelve words and finds a way of sorting them. The words can be sorted according to their color, size, meaning, phonics, etc (Raskin, 1978).

All of the methods described above may be extremely useful in helping a literacy deprived child. However, the technique that worked most effectively with Adel is known as the *New Vocabulary Learning Card* which is described in detail below.

### New Vocabulary Learning Card

The *New Vocabulary Learning Card* is an extremely useful and effective way of improving students' understanding and retention of new vocabulary. Most reading lessons will have new vocabulary words for the students to understand and to memorize, and it is normal for teachers to ask the students to go home, read and memorize these words. However, this technique does not always work. Students need to fully comprehend the new vocabulary word, recognize the word's synonyms and antonyms, use this new word in context, and visualize the word, which is where the *New Vocabulary Learning Card* can help.

After explaining a reading lesson, the teacher gives each student a card and asks him or her to complete it with one of the new words that they have just learned. The teacher then explains how to use these words and asks them to draw a picture depicting the meaning of the word on the back of the card. The teacher can then photocopy this card so that each student will have a card for all of the new words they have learned (See Figure 1).

When several reading lessons are done, students can be tested on what they have learned from these cards. I tried *New Vocabulary Learning Cards* with my fifth graders and they liked the idea of being tested on things that they had written themselves.

Advantages of using these cards:

- Students can visualise the word to make it more memorable.
- Students will think hard to find different synonyms and antonyms for the same word. This exercise will deepen the meaning of the word.
- All the students will compose, write, and think about the reading lesson.
- These cards can be done at home, so the teacher can save time.
- These cards are easy to apply and modify as early as the first grade.

*From my point of view, his confidence affected his social behavior as well. Adel is no longer the shy boy who sits in the back of the classroom; he laughs, asks questions, and enjoys learning.*

The main reason that a teacher or caregiver wants the child to know more vocabulary is to help him communicate better. To get the benefit of the new vocabulary children have to use it. We should listen to them without interruption, encourage them to write without worrying too much about

The New Vocabulary Learning Card

Name: .....

The New Word: .....

Synonyms: 1-..... 2-..... 3-.....

Antonyms: 1-..... 2-..... 3-.....

Word Work:  
.....  
.....

Don't Forget To Draw the Word on the Back of the Card

Fig. 1: *The New Vocabulary Learning Card*

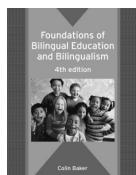
getting every word spelled conventionally, and introduce them to reading as diverse a range of literature as possible. This approach seems to be paying off with Adel. He now knows how to employ new vocabulary words in oral and written language with confidence. Adel claims that he recalls the new vocabulary faster because he can remember how the word was used and drawn. He became confident in writing and willing to play with language. From my point of view, his confidence affected his social behavior as well. Adel is no longer the shy boy who sits in the back of the classroom; he laughs, asks questions, and enjoys learning.

#### References:

- Ekwall, E. (1985). *Locating and correcting reading difficulties*. Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co.
- Raskin, B. (1978). *The reading idea book*. Palo Alto, CA: Education Today Company, Inc.

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*Colin Baker holds a Personal Chair of the University of Wales, and teaches in the School of Education at the University of Wales, Bangor. He is a member of the Welsh Language Board - One of Europe's premier Language Planning organisations.*

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**When the Unthinkable Occurs**

*Continued from Page 5*

Once you start this scrapbook, be sure to let others who are regularly responsible for taking care of your child know where it is kept, in case an emergency occurs and you are away. If all goes well, this scrapbook of vital memories will become a treasured family heirloom recording the highlights of your child's life. In case, however, your child happens to be one of the millions worldwide who suffers a severe brain injury, this scrapbook can quite literally become a life-line.

**Recommended Reading**

Most books on the this topic are rather complicated, however, for professionals who may work with aphasia patients, the following recommendation can be made:

Menn, L., O'Connor, M., Obler, L., Holland, A. *Non-fluent Aphasia in a Multilingual World.* John Benjamins Publishing Company. Philadelphia and Amsterdam, 1995.

This book includes a helpful glossary of linguistic and medical terminology.



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