

# The Bilingual Family Newsletter



News and Views for Intercultural People

Editors: Marjukka Grover & Sami Grover

2003, Vol 20 number 2

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## EDITORIAL

In terms of international politics it would be fair to say that the events of the first part of this year have not been the happiest. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the current political conflicts (and we all hold our own opinions), it is important to remember that there are countless people working in their own ways to increase our capacity for understanding, tolerance and harmony between peoples, communities, nations and cultures on a human scale. Jim Cummins is certainly someone who has made an impressive contribution to this effort. His work has shaped our understanding of language and his commitment to promoting language rights throughout the world has undoubtedly furthered the idea of language and culture as an invaluable asset, not just for minority groups, but for all of us.

In recent issues we have published a number of items looking at tri- and multilingualism as opposed to bilingualism. In this issue we continue this theme with the results from Helen Le Merle's survey of trilingual families' strategies for juggling three languages. Many *BFN* readers contributed to this survey, proving once again that the newsletter represents not just a medium for presenting articles and research, but also a catalyst for a two-way flow of information between families, researchers, teachers and interested individuals.

Please do keep your letters, queries and articles coming.

Wishing you all a peaceful second half of 2003.

Sami Grover

## AN ADVOCATE FOR TOLERANCE

### A Biography of Jim Cummins

by Colin Baker



**Jim Cummins has been one of the leading advocates for bilingualism and bilingual education for nearly three decades. His writings have been extremely influential in shaping our understanding, not just of bilingualism, but of languages in general and their role in society. Here Colin Baker, another prominent advocate of bilingualism, looks at the events that led Jim to become such a forthright spokesperson for language rights.**

On the 3rd July 1949, an Irishman was born in Dublin to a middle-class family, with a banking official father, a devoutly religious mother and two brothers. Although neither parents nor grandparents spoke Irish with any fluency, the middle-born son, James Patrick Cummins, would within three decades become one of the world's greatest experts on minority languages.

The psyche of the Irish people is bound up with a turbulent religious, economic

and political history. The colonialism of the English led to repression and domination; famines and poverty led to massive emigration. Close to half of all the people born in Ireland since 1820 have emigrated. Many emigrated to the US and Canada to seek fame and fortune: Jim Cummins was one of the most successful.

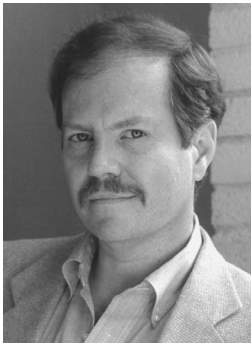
With immigration goes the possibilities of assimilation or integration into a new country, but also the threat of rejection, ridicule and racism. For most immigrants there is instant powerlessness, immediate disparity of status and the expectation of being subordinate to longer-term residents. But immigration is ambivalent. With emigration and immigration also go fresh expectations and new optimism. There is the prospect of a fresh beginning, the chance of a prosperous future and the dream of a fuller enjoyment, equity and empowerment. For Jim Cummins, immigration became not only a personal experience but also a topic for an influential academic contribution.

Emigration and immigration are often bound up with the languages of the old and new country. Immigrants are faced with internal decisions and external pressures to lose or retain heritage languages and learn the language of the receiving country. The possibilities of bilingualism are often threatened by the subtractive pushes of majority language speakers towards accepting the domination of their language.

The Irish language is an important emblem for many Irish emigrants

*Continued on Page 5*

## NEWS FROM THE USA: Numbers Game by James Crawford



Five years after California passed Proposition 227, dismantling most bilingual education in the state, what has been the impact on student achievement? No one can say with certainty because no controlled scientific studies have yet focused on this question. Nevertheless, raw test scores are routinely invoked by those who hope to vindicate the move. Such claims are unscientific at best but that has not stopped them from being circulated by journalists – who seem to find these numbers irresistible.

In 2000, for example, the *New York Times* cited ‘striking rates’ of improvement for English language learners on a standardized achievement test. It hailed the results as ‘a tentative affirmation of the vision of Ron K. Unz,’ the sponsor of Proposition 227. What the *Times* neglected to note was that year-to-year gains were striking for *all* groups of California students – rich and poor, white and minority, English-proficient and limited-English-proficient – as teachers became more familiar with the test.

The newspaper also ignored a relevant study by Professor Kenji Hakuta and colleagues at Stanford University. This analysis determined that patterns of achievement were virtually identical in schools that had retained bilingual education under the new law, those that had eliminated it, and those that had never offered it.

Soon the *Los Angeles Times* showcased still more encouraging news about Proposition 227. On a new California English Language Development Test (CELDT), it reported, ‘students in immersion programs were nearly three times as likely to score in the advanced or early advanced categories as students in bilingual programs.’

This sounded rather conclusive. Once again, however, a crucial bit of context was missing: the English immersion students were three times more likely than bilingual

students *to start out* as advanced or early advanced in English. The test results said nothing about the relative outcomes of the two programs.

Recently, the release of a second year of CELDT scores set off yet another rush to judgement. As reported by numerous media outlets, the percentage of English learners reaching the ‘advanced’ and ‘early advanced’ levels nearly tripled between 2001 and 2002 – from 11% to 32%. California’s top education official called the results ‘very exciting for our state.’ The *San Francisco Chronicle* described them as ‘measurable evidence’ that Proposition 227 ‘seems to be working.’

Quite impressive, except for one small detail. This was an apples-and-oranges comparison. When tested in 2002, the students had received an additional year of English instruction. No wonder this same group scored higher than they did in 2001! Even so, their gains were hardly cause for celebration. Only 11% moved up from beginning English – the lowest of five levels – while just 7% reached the highest category. Meanwhile, more than two-thirds of the students scored below advanced or early advanced after at least one year – and in most cases, several years – in California schools (see table below).

This is a far cry from what Proposition 227 promised. In the most effective sound-bite of the campaign, Ron Unz condemned bilingual education for its ‘95% annual failure rate’ in teaching English. Thereupon the voters adopted his proposal to mandate all-English immersion programs ‘not normally intended to exceed one year.’

It would now seem fair to ask: what is the annual rate of English acquisition under Proposition 227? According to the California Department of Education, just 7.8% percent of English language learners were ‘redesignated’ as fully English proficient in 2002. That compares with 7.0% in 1998, the year before the initiative took effect. In other words, the rate is virtually unchanged. Despite the current focus on ‘standards and accountability,’ this is one set of numbers that U.S. news media have chosen to overlook.

**James Crawford’s latest book is *At War with Diversity: U.S. Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety* (Multilingual Matters, 2000). visit his web site at: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepage/s/jwcrawford/>**

## Trilingual Families’ Language Strategies

Helen Le Merle

### Introduction

This article is based on the responses I received to a questionnaire sent out to trilingual families around the world. Altogether, I received more than 30 replies to my adverts in *The BFN* and the *Belgian Childbirth Trust magazine* as well as an e-mail advert on the Bilingual Families Internet mailing list (biling-fam). I selected 20 families, with altogether 26 children aged from 2 to 6 years old, whose replies were the most detailed. Such parental reports give an invaluable indication of how trilingual families actually deal with incorporating three languages in their lives. As Quay (2001) points out, three languages ‘can never be equally distributed as could occur in bilingual situations’, therefore parents of trilinguals have to find a strategy for balancing the input in all three languages to suit their individual situation.

18 languages are represented in the survey, with families living in 11 different countries all over the world. The children in the survey were split into two subdivisions, from 2-4 and 4-6 years of age inclusive, in order to establish any issues that may be age-related.

### Language Strategies

One issue that may be age-related is the language approach the parents adopt in interaction with their child. For example, do parents of younger children follow the *One Parent – One Language* approach (OPOL) more than parents of older children? And how strict are trilingual families when it comes to speaking only their own mother tongue to their children? Obviously, when dealing with more languages than there are parents, external sources in the form of carers (nannies, au-pairs) or day-care are indispensable if the parents wish to follow the OPOL approach. In my survey, just over half the families used the OPOL approach more or less consistently, while the rest of the families had at least one parent who would use more than one language.

However, as only 5 of the 40 parents stated they had more than one mother tongue themselves, it seems that the established theory of speaking one’s mother tongue only to the child is not as widely adhered to as one might think. In practice, a large number of parents also include non-mother tongue languages in interaction with their children. In this connection, Elizabeth Lanza of the University of Oslo claims the most important thing for parents is to do what seems natural to them (Lanza, 1997).

**California English Language Development Test Results for 862,004 Students Who Took the Test in 2 Consecutive Years (Percentage Scoring at 5 Levels of English Proficiency)**

Source: California Dept. Of Education

	Advanced	Early Advanced	Intermediate	Early Intermediate	Beginning
2001	1	10	41	30	19
2002	8	24	40	21	8
Change	+7	+14	-1	-9	-11

It is interesting to see that more than two thirds of families with children between 2 and 4 years of age use OPOL, in contrast to only one third of parents of 4 to 6-year olds. Mothers seemed to be slightly more inclined to use more than one language than the fathers, perhaps because mothers are more often responsible for the care of children under school age than fathers, and more strongly feel the need to adapt their strategy.

### Strategy changes

From these figures, one can assume that as the child matures, parents allow themselves more flexibility in their language strategies, and find it necessary to communicate with their offspring using more of their linguistic palette. The survey showed that half of the 20 families have changed how they use the languages within the family, where a parent would either start speaking more than one

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*“As family circumstances change over time... there seems to be a tendency to allow for more flexibility in the language strategy as the children grow older.”*

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language to the child, or start using one of the family's other languages to the child instead. The reasons for this are diverse, e.g. moving to another country, changes in minority language input available within the family, or starting nursery school or day-care.

Focusing on the 15 families who have two parental languages and a third language from the community, the leap from the youngest group to the oldest group often coincides with increased contact with the local (or majority) language. As these children start nursery school, kindergarten, or spend more time playing with children speaking the majority language, parents may need to include this language in the home in order to facilitate communication between the child's 'external universe' and the 'home universe'.

In the youngest group of children (2-4 years old) living in a community using a different language to the parents, only 40% of the families had changed their language strategy, whereas from the older age group (4-6 years old) more than half the families had experienced a switch in language pattern within the family. Although the reasons behind such strategy changes the languages involved remain extremely diversified, very often children from the oldest

group would receive more exposure from the local language, and bring it home, so to speak.

### Conclusion

As you can see, the strategies followed by these trilingual families are varied and at times contradictory. Some parents rely heavily on support from third parties to continue the OPOL approach, while others 'go it alone' with the aid of traditional tools (video films, books etc) or by giving the child exposure to several languages themselves, although these may not be that parent's mother tongue.

As family circumstances change over time, what with moving between countries, or shift in the amount of exposure the child receives to a language, there seems to be a tendency to allow for more flexibility in the language strategy as the children grow older. Parents of trilingual children need to adapt the language distribution according to all these changing factors.

On reading through the questionnaires, it has been very encouraging to see such a degree of motivation, psychological insight and linguistic awareness among parents of young trilinguals from all corners of the globe. I would like to thank all those BFN readers who participated in the survey, and hope to be able to publish more of the results in due course. In agreement with Lanza, I would like to see the end of the myth where languages are somehow absorbed automatically by young children with no effort involved from neither child nor parent. Raising children trilingually is a challenge, and further knowledge of how trilingual families handle this situation may help other parents find the right balance between the languages and maintain it.

### Recommended reading:

Lanza, E. (1992) Can bilingual two-year-olds code-switch? *Journal of Child Language* 19, 1992, p. 663.

Lanza, E. (1997) *Language Mixing in Infant Bilingualism: A Sociolinguistic Perspective*. Oxford Clarendon Press, UK

Quay, S. (2001) Managing linguistic boundaries in early trilingual development. In J. Cenoz and F. Genesee (eds) *Trends in Bilingual Acquisition*, (pp.149-200). John Benjamin: Amsterdam.

### List of countries

Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, England, France, Israel, Switzerland, Tahiti, USA

### List of languages

Arabic, Cantonese, Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Indonesian, Japanese, Mandarin, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish, Serbian, Tahitian, Turkish



### It is all worth it after all!

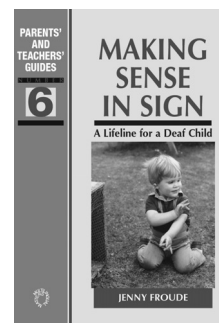
It is with great regret that, after sixteen years, I will not be renewing my subscription. Our children are now sixteen and thirteen and your Newsletter has served us well!!! In fact it has been a bible for measuring our ups and downs in teaching our children German and English.

As our children have, up until now, always attended monolingual German schools, I often felt alone and had to deal with very unsympathetic teachers. Your newsletter and recommended books gave me confidence and support. They now attend the John F. Kennedy School (a bilingual American/German school) here in Berlin which is to be recommended to all bilingual families living in this city.

It is hard work, but it is worth it and to all new families setting out on this new experience I strongly advise them to keep at it. Don't allow others, especially teachers, to dissuade you or compare your children to monolingual children in the same class.

Keep up your excellent work and I will continue to recommend you whenever I can. I will miss you.

**Janice Weiss, plus Nicholas and Alexander**



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**Queries**

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## Bilingualism and Dyslexia

My daughter, Rebecca, 7 years, was assessed for and found to be dyslexic last summer. Rebecca is bilingual. Her father is German and I am English. As she attends a British independent school near Barcelona, we are currently dealing with her dyslexia in English. (I am giving her extra tuition at home.) Had Rebecca not been a dyslexia sufferer, I would have liked to start reading and writing with her in German this year. (I have degree level knowledge of German.) However, I now believe that it is wiser not to introduce another written language at this stage.

As the German language and culture play a very important role in our family and as Rebecca's spoken German is not far behind her monolingual German peers, I do think that it is important and beneficial for Rebecca if she does learn to read and write German too. I am wondering how and when we could introduce her to the written German word.

Although I do not instinctively feel that Rebecca's bilingualism has caused or exacerbates her dyslexia, it would be interesting to hear an expert opinion on the relationship between the two.

*Cathryn Fixemer, Barcelona*

This enquiry is a challenging one for two reasons. Firstly, the situation Cathryn describes is not very common (or at least not often recognised), and there is very little published research about bilingual children who have the problems associated with dyslexia. Secondly, the situation is complex, and there are many factors that might influence the family's decisions.

On the first point, there is a good deal of evidence on how monolingual children respond when they have difficulties associated with dyslexia and are learning to read and write in their first language. Those who are monolingual in English will encounter slightly different kinds of problems from those who are monolingual in German. This is because German has a more transparent orthography than English, i.e. the same letter consistently represents the same sounds in German whereas in English one letter or cluster of letters may represent a

number of different sounds. (Think, for example, of *though*, *through*, *tough* and *bough*.) Since it seems to be sound-letter relationships that pose particular challenges to readers with dyslexia, that means that English is an especially difficult language for them to learn to read.

The good news is that when we learn how to work out basic sounds in our head in one language, that skill seems to transfer quite well to learning in another language – even if it has different sounds. So Rebecca's hard work on reading and writing in English should help her whenever she does start on those tasks in German.

Cathryn says that Rebecca's spoken German is not far behind that of her monolingual German peers. One consideration must be that, as school work plays an ever greater role in her linguistic and intellectual development, the stimulus of reading and studying will mainly be for her vocabulary and thinking powers in English. We learn a lot of language from the books and print materials that we read. Until she starts learning to read and write in German, she will not have that stimulus, and it will be more difficult for her to maintain her position in oral language development alongside her German-speaking peers.

From Cathryn's account the great asset that Rebecca has at present is the mirror image of the challenge that led to this question: she has a fully bilingual background, and both English and German play a truly important part in the life of the family. The best signal to her parents as to when and how to introduce Rebecca to reading and writing in German is her own wishes. She will see German print around her at home and will indicate whether she is curious to read it. Her parents may write to some members of the family and friends in German, and she may wish to add something to the card or letter. When she tackles these tasks at their simplest level, her reactions will indicate whether she finds them difficult and upsetting. Perhaps she will find them surprisingly easy (because German orthography is transparent – though she may not put it exactly like that). Perhaps she will find them confusing because she is still puzzled about half-learned rules of English that do not apply. I would not suggest that her expressed wishes can be the only guide, but close observation of her reactions will tell her parents and teachers when she is ready to take on the new challenge.

**Tony Cline, University of Luton**

*Cathryn would like to hear from anyone with similar experiences. She can be emailed on: [fixemer@bsab.com](mailto:fixemer@bsab.com)*

## Bilingualism & Toys

I am a freelance interpreter/translator Spanish/English and have a monolingual English speaking husband. My son, his wife and daughters live within walking distance of where I live. They are 11, 5 and 2 years old. I have already started teaching the 11 year old some phrases in Spanish and she is very receptive to the language. However, the two smaller ones seem reluctant to pick up much of the Spanish that I try to teach them. My husband thinks it is perhaps due to their young age. But, I am convinced that this is the proper time to begin their second language acquisition.

**My question is: Do you know of any language aids, toys or tools that would assist me in this endeavor, as I do not want to miss the opportunity to teach them Spanish question I did not teach my three children the Spanish that I know and I have always regretted this.**

*Rosemary A. Timmons,  
Universal, Indiana*

I commend your good intentions. Many people are convinced of the benefits of developing a second language in children, however the endeavor is not an easy one when a bilingual environment is not readily available.

Much has been written about the advantages of younger children over older children and adults when it comes to learning a foreign language. However, there is no conclusive study. The only thing that seems conclusive is that younger children are better at pronunciation. When studies compared these young children with older children and adults in terms of gains in vocabulary and grammar, the older children had the advantage. The reasons why younger children seem to be more at ease when learning another language are developmental: more relaxed ego boundaries, less inhibitions, and most importantly, the fact that communication demands of younger children are much more limited, so even the smallest amount of language they can sport looks like a lot.

Since I do not know what kind of approach you are following in teaching the language to these three children, I will have to guess. Whichever it is, however, it seems to be working for the 11-year-old. This girl, given her already extensive school experience, is probably used to learning from formal lessons, and understands the dialectics of memorising, repeating, inferencing, guessing etc. In other words, she is intellectually more mature than the others, which puts her in a better position to learn, even a foreign language. That is not to say that the 5 and 2 year olds are

not learning anything. It might be –particularly in the case of the 2-year-old– that they have not been given enough opportunity to demonstrate or perform what they have learned.

You might be able to get a better response from the little ones if you used a listening comprehension approach rather than an oral performance one. In other words, the little ones might understand more than it seems like, but they are not showing this understanding by performing in the language. If they were given the opportunity to show understanding by pointing, acting out, drawing, ... but not necessarily producing any language, the grandmother would be surprised. Younger children respond better to complete immersion approaches, such as dancing to a song, moving to funny, whimsical commands of the ‘Simon says’ type etc.

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*“Younger children respond better to complete immersion approaches, such as dancing to a song, moving to funny, whimsical commands of the ‘Simon says’ type...”*

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I would recommend you read exclusively in Spanish to your grand daughters. Spanish books are relatively easy to obtain. The stories will interest the children and the illustrations will facilitate comprehension. Most importantly, setting a special time and activity for Spanish will make the children anticipate the experience.

Additional tools I would recommend are:

- Music, a lot of music: Songs by Jose Luis Orozco ([www.joseluisorozco.com](http://www.joseluisorozco.com)) such as those in “Diez Deditos” are ideal.
- Movies in Spanish: It is possible to find almost every Disney movie in Spanish. Also, many DVD discs offer Spanish versions.
- Educational videos such as Muzzy ([www.earlyadvantage.com](http://www.earlyadvantage.com)).
- Talking toys will spike the interest of the youngest, such as the LittleLinguist ([www.neurosmith.com](http://www.neurosmith.com)), or Language Little dolls ([www.languageittles.com](http://www.languageittles.com)).
- A list of toys that teach languages, offered by Amazon.com:  
[http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/guides/guide-display/-/INGU9KW17T0D0/ref=cm\\_bg\\_dp\\_1\\_1/002-2628905-5444032](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/guides/guide-display/-/INGU9KW17T0D0/ref=cm_bg_dp_1_1/002-2628905-5444032)

*Continued on Page 8*

## **An Advocate for Tolerance...**

*Continued from page 1*

representing a people who are proud of their roots.

Jim Cummins encountered Irish as a Dublin schoolboy at the age of four with Irish language learning lessons that were part of the regular school programme for all children. At seven, he first encountered bilingual education when he spent a successful year at an Irish Gaelscoil. Ahead of the Dual Language movement in the US, the school taught 80% through the medium of Irish and 20% through the medium of English. The children in the school were mostly from English-speaking homes and the parents warmly supported the school’s mission in Irish language revitalisation. Jim Cummins picked up Irish fairly easily and found that learning content through a second language was effective and efficient. An advocate for bilingual education was born in the experience of one year of elementary schooling.

As a student, Jim Cummins showed the academic capacity to synthesise, memorise, and easily connect new knowledge from a variety of disciplines. Jim graduated in 1970 with a first class honours BA degree. His great potential was evident in the award of a ‘*summa cum laude*’ (literally, ‘with the highest praise’) degree – but perhaps not to himself.

The seeds of emigration found germination in a chance encounter with one of the founding fathers of bilingualism and bilingual education. Jim Cummins recounts an incident that enthused his applying for a graduate programme in North America. While taking a one-year Postgraduate Applied Psychology Diploma in Dublin, Jim went to hear Wally Lambert speak in Dublin about the newly founded and successful French immersion programmes in Canada. This was Jim’s first encounter with bilingual education as an academic topic. He instantly became intrigued.

At the end of the talk, with the press waiting impatiently for an interview with Lambert, a conversation occurred which changed the direction of a young graduate’s career. In an unrushed, helpful and positive manner, Wally spent time encouraging Jim in the idea of doing a PhD in North America. This advice made a persuasive impression.

At the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Jim spent three years (1971-74) working on the relationship between bilingualism and cognition, and on bilingual education.

Apart from the successful PhD thesis, Jim Cummins worked with Metro Gulutsan to

produce two papers (1974 and 1975), and this marked Jim’s arrival on the publishing scene, particularly in the area of bilingualism and thinking. Such publications were written at a pivotal time in Canadian history. In the early 1970s, Canada was vigorously discussing its two solitudes, the place of French and English within the language and cultural mosaic of Canada, and the possibilities of bilingualism and biculturalism. Also in these early days, immigrant languages such as Ukrainian and Hebrew, plus the native Canadian languages, were beginning to be recognised as worthy of academic study and were becoming part of public discourse. Into the debate stepped a modest, quiet and highly talented Irishman. Unsuspecting of his future or the contribution he would make, Jim Cummins began to change the language and the direction of the debate in ways that are now firmly ingrained, largely accepted and internationally acclaimed.

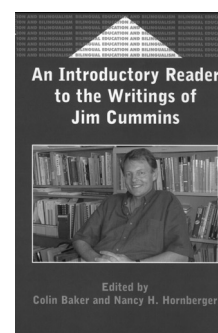
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*Jim Cummins began to change the language and the direction of the debate in ways that are now firmly ingrained, largely accepted and internationally acclaimed.*

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During this two-year period, Jim Cummins also discussed issues related to bilingual education with Irish revivalists, people who were strongly committed to affirmative action to revive the Irish language.

*Continued on Page 6*



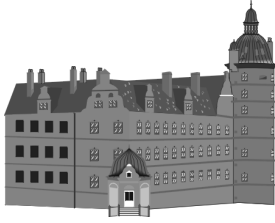
*An Introductory Reader to the Writings of Jim Cummins*

**Colin Baker & Nancy H. Hornberger (eds),**

Multilingual Matters, 2001  
**£19.95/ US\$29.95/ CAN\$39.95**  
 1-85359475-x



## Thoughts on Language



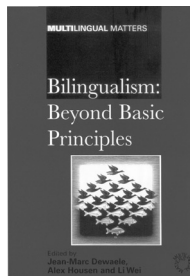
– Être dans le monde et ne parler qu'une langue est semblable à une personne qui habite une immense maison et qui ne reste que dans une chambre.  
(auteur inconnu).

– Being in the world and speaking one language is similar to someone living in a mansion and staying in one room"  
(author unknown).

– Wer nur eine Sprache in dieser Welt kann, ist wie jemand, der ein einziges Zimmer in einem grossen Haus bewohnt  
(autor unbekannt).

– Una persona que sabe hablar solamente un idioma en este mundo es como una persona que vive solamente en una cuartilo de una casa grande  
(autor desconocido).

– Yhden kielen puhuminen maailmassa on aivan kuin käyttäisi vain yhtä kartanon lukuisista huoneista  
(tunteamaton kirjailija).



### *BILINGUALISM: BEYOND BASIC PRINCIPLES:*

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## An Advocate for Tolerance... *Continued from Page 5*

In Alberta, at the invitation of the provincial francophone community organisation, Cummins participated in a series of panel presentations in remote, traditionally francophone communities. These presentations were designed to inform both francophone and anglophone parents of the educational benefits of dual language programmes in which both French and English first language students could participate. At that time, due to the small numbers of students in these communities, a bilingual programme would be instituted only if both groups agreed to participate.

Jim Cummins' research during this period included investigating special needs education for bilingual children – a theme that has run through his career and produced an influential book in 1984 entitled *Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy*. During this period, Cummins learnt that working with communities, face to face, was important and carried high impact. No cloistered academic, he acquired the confidence to work with a wide spectrum of people: parents and politicians, administrators and activists, students and school staff. He found he could talk spontaneously with a depth of instant thinking that allowed effective answers. Emerging from psychology as his primary discipline, he was also accumulating a width of knowledge and understanding that could address a variety of interdisciplinary issues. Drawing solely from neither psychology nor sociology, linguistics nor politics, education nor modern languages, he can synthesise and integrate all these perspectives to communicate with communities and organizations, teachers and policy makers, academics and parents.

Also during this 1976 to 1978 period, Jim Cummins became involved with the Canadian 'Parents for French' movement. This has been an effective pressure group of parents campaigning for immersion education across Canada. For Jim, this was also community-based work from which he learnt that change and evolution in bilingual systems need the empowerment of the community and collaboration with parents and pivotal educationalists. During this time he wrote a short '*Parent's Guide to French Immersion*' which received a large distribution in Canada and outside.

While at the University of Alberta for the Study of Mental Retardation, Jim Cummins negotiated access to a plentiful reservoir of data from psychological assessments of children in a local school

board. Out of this wealth of data, Jim uncovered considerable discrimination against bilingual children in the tests and assessments. He also found that most teachers and psychologists were unaware of either the extent or nature of this discrimination. In looking through more than 400 teacher referral forms and psychological assessments, Jim noticed that children often seemed to have attained fluency in English very rapidly, but this fluency was not matched by their performance either in the classroom or on formal tests. On this basis, he formulated a distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) that has become part of the language of bilingualism and bilingual education ever since.

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*"[He has fed...] their wish to deliver a more tolerant and equitable education that moves language from being a problem, even beyond being a right, to being a resource of importance to the individual and to communities and whole societies."*

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In 1978, Jim became a Visiting Professor at the Modern Language Centre, Department of Curriculum, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. As full Professor in the Modern Language Centre, there are few academics in Canada of such international distinction and eminency.

Reflections on his own children's encounter with bilingual education has helped Jim to analyse the current pedagogical issues of immersion education. For example, is the introduction of English language and literacy at grade 4 for native English-speaking students in French immersion rather late? Is there too much concentration on correct grammar and correcting mistakes in French language teaching? Are there dogmas of immersion education that have become so strongly embedded in a successful system that there is currently a lack of instructional imagination or a progressive pedagogy? The experiences of his children in bilingual education have been a catalyst for posing such questions.

A brief glance at Jim Cummins' *curriculum vitae* shows that his publication outlets have been wide: books and journals, monographs and booklets, tests and curriculum programs, book chapters and book forewords, book

reviews and popular articles in magazines. The sense of audience is far wider than that achieved by the typical academic, including parents, policy makers, politicians and the general public. This requires empathy with the audience, an ability to be non-threatening while also carrying a clear message adapted to the audience yet without losing sight of central themes.

It is probable that his experience of a very narrow form of pre-ecumenical Irish Catholic education in the 1950s and 1960s which taught dogma, intolerance of non-Catholic doctrine, and involved hypocrisy in religious and educational practice, led to a lifetime's reaction where

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*“Where minority languages and minority language education are studied throughout the world, Jim Cummins is a household name.”*

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tolerance of alternative beliefs, respecting the rights of those with different beliefs, avoiding intellectually stultifying dogmas, and bringing honesty and not hypocrisy to both policy and practice are foundational.

The great majority of authors, academics, researchers, organizations and administrations have accepted and used Jim Cummins' cross disciplinary, prolific and influential ideas.

Any real evaluation of Jim Cummins' contribution has to accept that terms such as BICS and CALP are part of the professional language of many minority language teachers. His arguments about early exiting from bilingual education, language thresholds, and the number of years it takes to acquire sufficient language proficiency to cope in the curriculum, have made their way into the working vocabularies of countless thousands of teachers. Here is someone who has fed hungry classroom teachers, hungry for reasons to support their preference for bilingual education and bilingualism, their wish to deliver a more tolerant and equitable education that moves language from being a problem, even beyond being a right, to being a resource of importance to the individual, to communities and whole societies.

Third, no evaluation of Jim Cummins, even an interim one such as this, can avoid the internationalism of his work and influence. Beginning from the strengths of a comparative perspective deriving from his early experiences in research and advocacy with Irish speakers in Ireland and with

Francophone, Anglophone, and Ukrainian communities in Canada, he has gone on to visit and consult with multilingual communities around the world. Where minority languages and minority language education are studied throughout the world, Jim Cummins is a household name. His considerable intellectual prowess means that he is a catalyst for change, an authority that lends credibility, but also infuses new ideas. Respect for his work is joined with admiration for his commitment. By gentle influence and not dogmatic preaching, he delivers an understanding of the international experience of bilingualism that ensures generalization of his message across continents.

Asked if he was Irish or Canadian or a hyphenated version of those two, he replied that he was fully Irish and fully Canadian.

Jim Cummins: born and schooled in Ireland; educated and enlightened in Canada; an advocate for tolerance, equity and justice for minority peoples throughout the world.

**This is an abridged version of an article that first appeared in *An Introductory Reader to the Writings of Jim Cummins*. Please see advert on page 5 for further details.**

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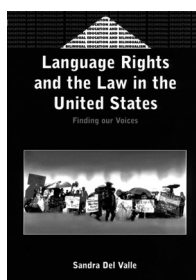
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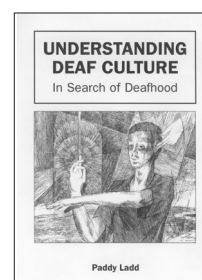
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Vol. 20, No.2, 2003

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## CONTACTS

If you wish your name and address to be included in the contact section, please send us the following information:

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.

### Great Britain

Cecilia Giordano      020 8870 4624  
 Email: todosacantar@hotmail.com  
*South west London. Todos a Cantar! Songs, stories and games for the little ones. Babies and toddlers (5 months to 3 years).*

Latin American Language Services      020 8286 1817  
 Email: info@lals.co.uk  
*Surbiton, Surrey. LALS are running very dynamic Spanish courses. Please get in touch for more details.*

Irma Lenehan-Heger      01772 338939  
 Email: irma@lenehan.fsnet.co.uk  
*Are there any families with small Dutch children out there in Preston/NW England? I have two girls, Jitske aged 2 and 8 months and Sanne, 7 months. We would love to hear from you.*

### Austria

Mag. Rosario Quevedo-Pereyra de Pribyl      0676 923 6901  
 Email: gerald.noni@utanet.at  
*Peruvian/ Austrian family with a young baby (8 months) would like too to meet other families in Vienna or nearby (Germany, Switzerland also) who haven the same language combination.*

## GLOSSARY:

**Primary Language:** The Language in which bilingual/ multilingual speakers are most fluent, or which they prefer to use. This is not necessarily the language learnt first in life.

**Primary Bilingualism:** Where two languages have been learnt 'naturally' (not via school teaching for example).

## Bilingualism and Toys...

*Continued from Page 5*

- —Also, check several web pages containing many teaching ideas. A few good ones are:  
[www.miscositas.com](http://www.miscositas.com)  
[www.internen.es](http://www.internen.es)  
[www.anacleta.homestead.com](http://www.anacleta.homestead.com)  
[www.bilingual-supplies.co.uk](http://www.bilingual-supplies.co.uk)  
[www.elhuevodechocolate.com](http://www.elhuevodechocolate.com)  
[www.first-school.ws/sp](http://www.first-school.ws/sp)  
[www.suenosdecolores.com](http://www.suenosdecolores.com)

Lastly, but not least, it would be a good idea to try to locate Spanish-speaking children in your area. The need to communicate with peers is the most powerful incentive for children to learn a language.

The process of learning a language is a long one, and if we are dealing with young children, it may take some time to show results. Even when learning our first language we go through a "silent period". With perseverance —and the appropriate educational tools—those children will have received from their grandmother the best inheritance ever.

## Manuela Bueno-Gonzales