

# the bilingual family newsletter

news and views for intercultural people

editors: sami grover and marjukka grover

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## editorial

In this issue we look at a number of cases in which language learners relocate *during* their language development process. Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa's family has had to adapt and develop its language strategies after a move to Ecuador. Whilst their drive for a multilingual household remains unchanged, they have had to adapt to a shift in balance between languages, brought about by their new environment.

Silvine Faure's article explores the theory behind successful second language learning. Whilst pure theory may be intimidating to some, Laura illustrates how these theories may work in practice through the story of Dorcas, a native English speaker who relocated to Argentina at an early age.

Meanwhile, Iman Makeba-Laversuch explores the challenging issues faced surrounding international adoption. She illustrates that whilst multilingualism can have profoundly beneficial effects, it may not always be wise to pursue it regardless of the consequences.

These articles are an important reminder that any multilingual family needs to remain flexible and pragmatic. Whilst it might be tempting to view bi/multilingualism as a goal in itself, it may be more useful to look at it as a tool or a means - the ultimate goal being a fulfilled and happy individual in a comfortable family/social environment - whatever languages are used.

Sami Grover

## RETHINKING FAMILY LANGUAGE GOALS

Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa



Last Spring we moved to Ecuador from Switzerland where we had lived for five-and-a-half-years. This move impacted the dynamics of our multilingual surroundings and changed the level of support for two of our four family languages. At the same time, our combination of the *Ten Key Factors*<sup>1</sup> changed related to the opportunity we have and strategy we apply towards raising our multilingual children. Like the thousands of other families who changed countries last year, we have had to re-think our *Family Language Goals*; a hard but a necessary exercise all the same.

I speak to my three children (6, 8, and 11 years old) in English, and my husband speaks to them in Spanish. When we lived in Geneva, they attended the German School in German, and all their extra curricular activities were in French. Each of their four languages had clear parameters and nearly equal input, resulting in verbal fluency in all four languages, and literacy skills in the older two children.

Now that we have moved to Ecuador we have found that both German and French are at a disadvantage. Although the children attend the German School in Quito

and are in the "DK" or German parallel, their opportunity for using German is greatly reduced due to the surroundings. As a consequence, we are re-considering the German element of their education.

### *Language Environments and Opportunity*

At the German School of Geneva, the children had nearly all-German classmates, whereas the German School of Quito has a 90-10 mix of Ecuadorians to Germans. The children in the German section of the school are a combination of many second or third generation German families or are from mixed Ecuadorian-German marriages. Many of these parents speak a mixture of Spanish-German to their children, or in the cases where the father is the German speaker, they speak no German at home at all. Though the teachers are good at maintaining German as the classroom language, my children have little German language support elsewhere; the playground, sports clubs, and all out-of-school activities are in Spanish. Quality language input is at a minimum and secondary contact with the German language through the media is greatly reduced. For example, in Geneva there was a lot of German television, movies and visual stimulation of books and labels, which are non-existent in Ecuador.

French was also far more prevalent in Geneva, as nearly all of our friends spoke French and the children's after school activities were in that language. My daughter still dreams periodically in French, and she sings in French often, but realistically there is little chance of it thriving until she starts lessons in French at

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## Rethinking Language Goals

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the German School in Quito two years from now, or unless we take her to extra classes.

Both German and French have lost their “live” value as contact with native speakers and the opportunity for use is limited. What is our *Family Language Goal* now? It might be easy to throw up our hands and say “Oh well, it was nice while it lasted!” but the catch is that all three children love both German and French, and feel close to both languages. My elder son (8) found the difficulty of coming “home” to Ecuador lessened by being in the German School; he felt more comfortable with the Germans than with the Ecuadorians, even though he was born here in Quito. If we choose to maintain German and French, how can we give quality time to these minority languages?

### Re-thinking Family Language Goals

Neither my husband nor I are German; we originally chose the German School because my husband is an alumni and he loved his education, and the system has a good worldwide reputation. Contrary to appearances, there are many options available to us, and we are in the midst of weighing the benefits of each. Do we hire a nanny to increase the German exposure? Do we change schools, or at least put them in the Spanish section of the German School as opposed to leaving them in the German parallel? Do we try and keep up with the increasing demand of age-appropriate German ourselves as parents and non-native speakers? For the time being we have opted for a combined

approach: My husband and I are both picking up the books again to try and be of more help, we are inviting native-German friends over as frequently as possible to enhance quality language input at an age-appropriate level, and we are taking the two younger children to extra German tutorials to ensure their school work is up to standards.

### Social Integration as the Deciding Factor

*It might be easy to throw up our hands and say “Oh well, it was nice while it lasted!” but the catch is that all three children [...] feel close to both languages.*

As we considered the options open to us, a key point became clear: our children are more comfortable being in the German section of school than they would be in the Spanish section. This is primarily because they have never studied in Spanish until this move; though fluent orally and literate, they have little recollection of living in a Spanish-speaking environment. Natalie was four when we left Quito, Gabriel just two and Mateo 7 months old. As the months pass they are quickly integrating into what should rightly be called their “home” culture, but this is more adaptive than natural. They already enjoy German humour, food, music and the structure of their classes; now they are learning to feel

equally comfortable in Ecuador. On the other hand, the children are not like the other kids in the German section, as they are not German at all. Should we insist they remain in a cultural environment which is borrowed from a school system, or should we try and move them into their rightful cultural heritage, but one to which they are just now adapting?

These questions invite on-going reflection, and time, along with the children’s integration skills will help shape our decisions. If there is a lesson in this, this move has shown us that *Family Language Goals* are dynamic and need to be reassessed with frequency, change of country, and with each child individually.

Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa is professor of cognitive science at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito in Ecuador. She has been a teacher, counsellor, and researcher for the past 12 years. She is the author of *The Multilingual Mind: Issues Discussed By, For and About People Living with Many Languages* (Praeger, 2003), and serves on the *BFN* Editorial Board. Tracey is currently co-authoring a book based on her work as founder and project director for Switzerland’s first children’s museum on the environment and sustainable development from 1999-2003 ([www.planetexploration.com](http://www.planetexploration.com)).

Tracey gives interactive workshops on foreign language development and learning potential to teachers, parents and multinational companies around the world. She can be contacted at:

Contact details removed

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> 1. Timing 2. Opportunity 3. Motivation 4. Aptitude 5. Strategy 6. Consistency 7. Relationship between the languages 8. Siblings 9. Gender 10. Hand-Use as a reflection of cerebral dominance. Page 13 *Raising Multilingual Children*, Bergin & Garvey, 2000.

# letters



To the editor!

Reading the Query written by Astrid Griffiths (*One Parent - Which Language?* BFN 21:2) I immediately felt a lot of sympathy. As an Italian married to a German, I have often felt restricted in my spontaneous and free use of Italian due to the feeling that I did not want to offend any relative or friend by making them feel outsiders. Many times sensible reasons have prevailed over emotional ones! Yet I do not regret these choices - my son, Thomas (10 years old) has a reasonable level of bilingualism and, I think, a fair amount of love and interest for both cultures.

Nevertheless, I would like to share my experience as far as our husbands are concerned. Despite the fact that I also find it unnatural to speak a language other than Italian when alone with Thomas, when the three of us are together our common language is German. Even if my husband is fluent, it would require too much concentration for us to hold relaxed conversations in Italian. This pattern has now been successfully established but (and this is a big but) all the rest of the time when Thomas and I are together we enjoy speaking Italian. We discuss a diverse range of topics when he shows interest, which is not always.

I have never tried to lecture Thomas in Italian. It is the natural, emotional and instinctive tie which has always come first; the language has been a tool, not a contextless target.

In Astrid’s case, personally, I would not avoid speaking Norwegian to the children when your husband is present, if your remarks do not involve your husband directly. What about the often repeated

phrases like “Would you please sit down?”, “Would you like some water?” etc. I think it would not detract from your happy and confidential relationship if your husband was to hear all this sort of talk in Norwegian.

You could discuss the events of the day in English, as these are also of importance to your husband - in time your children will learn whether to relate the latest success or mishap at school in detailed English, or whether to tell you in Norwegian that a shoe is worn out or they need new pencils. By then your husband will have learnt that the matters being dealt with in Norwegian are ‘boring’ (at least from his point of view) and will no longer feel excluded. Meanwhile, you will have kept the healthy emotional tie to your children. I can support these statements from personal experience!

I wish you all well.

Barbara Siebner, Germany

# What Makes a Successful Second Language Learner?

Silvine Faure

As globalisation causes frontiers to become increasingly blurred, people are becoming more aware of the benefits of knowing more than one language. In some countries, bilingualism - or even multilingualism - is something natural. In other countries, such as Argentina, parents want their children to start learning a foreign language as soon as possible. It is worth considering that bilingual education in English and Spanish is a long-standing tradition in Argentina. The present economic crisis makes it even more desirable to know English, as it is the most widely spoken language in the western world. Having a good knowledge of English can mean both professional and economic growth, thus widening the scope of one's possibilities towards self-realisation.

But, what makes a successful second language learner? It goes without saying that, as human beings, we are all capable of learning languages. But learners differ greatly in the degree of proficiency they reach in their second languages. Even learners immersed in the same learning situation will show radical differences in their ultimate attainment.

Some factors that linguists point out as accounting for these differences are:

- Motivation.
- Opportunities for learning.
- Acculturation.

(Littlewood, p. 53-62)

Motivation can be *integrative* and *instrumental*, most learners have a mixture of both types. Motivation is affected by feelings towards the second language community. Early studies of bilingualism showed how the children of poor immigrant families could not reach high levels of proficiency in their second languages. These children belonged to a minority community with low socioeconomic status. No proper learning takes place in such a stressing situation. The "Affective Filter Hypothesis" proposed by Krashen, asserts that language learning occurs when the individual feels relaxed and comfortable (Lightbown & Spada, p. 28).

Opportunities for learning are also of utmost importance. It is crucial for the learner to have access to situations where the second language is used for real communication – something that teachers struggle to create in their classrooms.

Finally, acculturation is vital. Successful learners are interested in getting closer to the second language speaking community. Ideally, both cultures should be complementary forces that aid the learner's

development, not competing ones. Culture shock can be overcome by a high level of motivation and through positive feelings towards the target-language community. This optimal situation leads to "bicultural" individuals, but the acculturation process is variable. Individuals can become "assimilated" to the host culture. Other individuals can be labeled as "traditional", resisting acculturation. Learners who have both lost contact with their original cultural practices, whilst also resisting acculturation to the host country are known as "anomic".

Bilingualism can be approached through many dichotomies. We have already mentioned *bicultural vs. anomic*. Another is *additive vs. subtractive*. In the first, the learner acquires a second language while keeping his/her cultural identity. This is believed to have positive effects on cognitive development. In subtractive bilingualism the second language is imposed and development of the first is discouraged, leaving children half way in the development of both languages, with dramatic consequences on cognition.

We can also mention *compound vs. coordinate* bilingualism. Compound bilinguals learn both languages in the same context. This determines two linguistic systems and a single set of mental representations and meanings. Coordinate bilinguals learn both languages separately, developing two linguistic systems, each one attached to its corresponding set of mental representations and meanings. ("The Oxford Companion to the English Language", p. 127)

It will be clearer to understand the previous theory by referring to a particular case. Factors such as intelligence and aptitude have been deliberately omitted, as they only seem to play a primary role in formal learning situations, which is not this case.

Dorcas is a perfect bilingual in English and Spanish. She comes from the Falkland Islands. Both her parents spoke English as their mother tongue. At the age of six, Dorcas was sent to Argentina to live with a foster family and study in a bilingual school. The belief behind her parents' decision was that it would be for her own good. Learning Spanish was convenient for work, study or even health care, since Argentina was the nearest access to the continent and Britain seemed too remote an alternative.

In Argentina she was warmly welcomed by her foster family and by her schoolmates.

*Continued on page 4*

## NEWS FROM THE USA



### NABE names James Crawford as its new Executive Director

Sadly, our popular News From The USA feature will be discontinued for the time being as the author, James Crawford, has just been appointed as the new chief executive of the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE). Whilst this is a sad loss for the BFN, it is, we believe, a huge gain for bilingual education in the US and beyond.

A former journalist, Crawford previously served as Washington editor of *Education Week*. As an independent writer since 1987, he has specialised in language and education policy. His latest book is *Educating English Learners: Language Diversity in the Classroom* (2004), the 5th edition of a widely used text in teacher-training courses.

As a long-time advocate for language-minority students, Crawford has dedicated much of his career to protecting the rights of children to a quality education. He is strongly committed to building NABE as the premier organisation representing the needs of English language learner students and educators in the US, while ensuring that NABE's growth results in a greater influence and impact on all aspects of education for these children.

"NABE welcomes Jim as its new executive director, and looks forward to what will surely be great success in our efforts under his leadership," said NABE resident Josefina Tinajero.

Working closely with the NABE board of directors, Crawford will give special priority to strengthening NABE's financial and membership base, enhancing public understanding of bilingual education, and addressing issues that concern educators of English language learners, including high-stakes testing, arbitrary account ability mechanisms, and English-only policies.

Multilingual Matters and the BFN would like to thank James for his untiring commitment to bilingual education, and we look forward to seeing NABE go from strength to strength in its important work.

## International Conference Learning English Through Picture Books

19th-21st November 2004

International Youth Library,  
Schloss Blutenburg, Munich,  
Germany

Picture books are part of children's early literacy experience. If integrated into early English language teaching, they contribute both to language acquisition and to children's broader educational development.

Enthusiasts and experts for using authentic picture books to teach English to children will be meeting to focus on methodology, recent research, aspects of writing, illustrating and publishing, and to share findings and expertise with participants. This conference, the first in this developing field, is taking place in one of Germany's most beautiful venues, surrounded by Europe's biggest collection of children's literature. The programme is framed by a reception given by the British Council with the opening of the Magic Pencil Exhibition and a dinner set in a traditional Bavarian inn with live jazz.

[www.picturebooks.org](http://www.picturebooks.org)

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## Successful Second Language...

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The latter were fascinated and she recalls being petted by the elder students. She developed a positive attitude towards the Spanish speaking community. Her level of motivation, both integrative and instrumental, was high. The environment was friendly and she felt a strong need to learn Spanish. This positive environment allowed her to overcome the initial "culture shock" which was certainly a factor. It is beyond doubt that British and Latin people are opposites in many respects. Being kissed was the first thing she had to get used to. She also recalls being scared by one of the teachers, who seemed to shout all the time. She realises now that this teacher was doing her best to be demonstrative, but she was not used to such manifestations of friendliness. Soon she got used to our somewhat explosive way of showing affection and she began to accept, and even incorporate it.

*Most of the time [Dorcas']  
behaviour lies somewhere in  
between both cultures: her  
mother finds her too  
extroverted, while her  
children think that nothing  
can make her lose control.*

She does not remember "learning" the language. She simply picked it up. She remembers the teacher letting her go out to buy biscuits in a shop opposite, watching her from a distance. The teacher did the most sensible thing: she favoured situations that required her to speak Spanish, thus enhancing her instrumental motivation.

Her language acquisition progressed rapidly during the first year. But when she returned in the second year, she was sent to a strict boarding school. She found it hard to adapt. She felt homesick and was frequently ill. This was a dramatic drawback to her developing Spanish. Not only could she make no progress at all, but she also started sliding backwards. Considering how the "Affective Filter" can have a direct impact on language learning, we can certainly infer that hers was high.

After that, she was sent to her former bilingual school again, where she received instruction in both languages, consolidating her own cultural identity while incorporating a new one. Her cultural background was reinforced through the status that English had within the school curriculum. There was no threat in incorporating another culture.

Nowadays, she rarely says where she comes from, and it is impossible to find out from her accent. Nevertheless, English has always remained her stronger language and she absolutely enjoys being able to speak it at length. This dominance is evident only in stressing situations, where her Spanish sounds become affected by the English sound system.

From the previous case, we can infer that Dorcas' instrumental and integrative motivation to learn Spanish was high. She was immersed in a situation where knowledge of Spanish was essential; her positive feelings towards our community aroused the need to be accepted. There was no room for subtractive bilingualism, since her cultural identity was reinforced. She developed a balanced form of acculturation. Nowadays, she adopts different patterns of interaction depending on whom she is addressing. Most of the time her behaviour lies somewhere in between both cultures: her mother finds her too extroverted, while her children think that nothing can make her lose control. Her bilingualism is coordinate, as she didn't learn both languages in the same context. This is reflected in situations where she lacks the Spanish words for an idea she wants to convey. It suggests that both languages and sets of meanings are stored separately and connections are not so readily accessible sometimes. Her bilingualism is also endogenous, since her second language was the most widely used in our community.

It is clear that the degree of proficiency a learner reaches in a second language is affected by many variables. In the case discussed, if one of the variables had been different, this would have been reflected in the ultimate attainment. Affective factors seem to rank highest among the variables that can foster or hinder language acquisition. In the situation described, the learner was not compelled to learn, she did it at her own pace; there was no anxiety involved, there was no fear of mistakes. Of course, there was no formal instruction either, but teachers can reflect on the importance of creating low anxiety classrooms to get the most of students; even when we cannot equate formal instruction with the situation described.

Most importantly, it is crucial to reinforce cultural identity, only in this way will the child benefit from the enriching experience that contact with another culture can offer.

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# Queries



## Q: Trilingualism & Catalan

I'm a Catalan national living in England. My mother tongue is Catalan even though my parents always spoke to each other in Spanish, and to me in Catalan until the age of 10 or so. We now communicate mainly in Spanish (with a lot of mixing of Catalan words and expressions within the same sentence). I can say I am bilingual, even though my dominant language and the one I feel more at ease with is definitely Catalan.

My wife, on the other hand, is German. I can understand and speak a bit of German,

but that's about it! We communicate in English and all of our relatives live abroad. Natalie has a few German-speaking friends in the UK, but I only know of someone who speaks Catalan in Birmingham! We have access to Catalan and German TV and radio channels, and obviously books and music, etc.

Our baby is due within the next couple of weeks and we intend to raise it trilingual (or even quadrilingual!). I know the basics, i.e. I will always talk to the child in Catalan and my wife in German.

We might move to Catalonia within the next few years, as my wife cannot stand the British weather any longer. If so, our child will have to learn a fourth language, as Spanish is present everywhere (due to massive amounts of Spanish immigrants) and, even though not official in Catalonia at the same level as Catalan is, one cannot live 'properly' in Catalonia without knowing both languages!

I have also heard about 'contact time' etc. What sort of advice could you give us to ensure that, in these difficult circumstances, whilst in the UK, relatives abroad, my language, my wife's language etc, our baby will grow up to be trilingual.

**Toni Fernandez, UK**

It's great that you are thinking about how you can best prepare for all the languages in your household before your baby arrives and you are certainly on the right track. Trilingualism and quadrilingualism is possible as many of the families I interviewed for my book described. However, as parents you may have to work hard to support each language and give your child enough input for him or her to use it confidently.

Looking at your situation the baby will be closely attached to its mother in the first few years and so her language, German, will be the strongest or dominant one. The baby will probably pick up some English too, from local friends, the community where you live and from listening to you talking together. English will be a language which is functional and used for a purpose, whereas German and Catalan will have an emotional value for the baby. Your language, Catalan, needs lots of input from you in the early years as the baby needs to hear a language before it can produce sounds from it.

I would recommend initially following the 'one-parent – one-language' strategy where each of you speaks only your language when directly addressing the child. This you can support with reading, singing, music and trips to visit family. If your wife needs more German locally she

could try to find other German-speaking mothers in the area and form a playgroup. Don't worry if the baby doesn't speak Catalan straight away, my studies have shown a typical pattern of the mother's language appearing first in the first two years, with the father's language coming in strongly around age three or four, when the mother-tongue is established. Usually by around age two and a half or three years children know who speaks which language and you can relax the 'one-parent – one-language' strategy and mix languages if you prefer.

If you do move to Catalonia in a few years the child would be approaching nursery or even school age and therefore it would be good to support your language with the school to give a balance of parental languages. Paternal languages often lack input and need extra input. Regarding the child's acquisition of Spanish I think it will be a natural transition because you have many children in the same situation in Catalonia. Also because there is support from the paternal grandparents and the community your child can see a reason for making the effort to speak Spanish. Spanish would become, like English, a functional language for school and community. You will have to work harder keeping German strong at this stage and possibly put English on hold for a while.

It sounds like your extended family can help out a lot. I recommend taking long 'language baths' that is, staying in a country for as long as you can (either Germany or Catalonia) for 'immersion' in one language to reinforce the cultural and family ties it has for the child. When the child is older he or she can even go to stay alone with family to really feel at home there. Explain your strategy and ask them for help in 'teaching' and supporting their language.

As parents you are very good role-models; being bilingual yourself you show that it is a natural state and is something you believe in. This is very important in the early years. Don't listen to criticism from teachers, doctors or family members who try to persuade you that two or even three languages are too many! They are often monolingual and have little experience with multilingual children.

My book *Language Strategies for Bilingual Families* includes chapters on 'Getting Started' and 'Trilingual Families' that show how other families cope with multilingualism and young children. You may find these useful.

**Suzanne Barron-Hauwert**

## LANGUAGE STRATEGIES FOR BILINGUAL FAMILIES

### The one-parent – one-language Approach



**Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert**

*Suzanne has written a superbly accessible account of the challenges of family life with several languages. Her recommendations are substantiated by extensive research. I would warmly recommend this book as the 21st Century guide to parents of multilingual children.*

Helen Le Merle

This book looks at how families can support and increase bilingualism through planned strategies. One such strategy is the *one person – one language* approach, where each parent speaks his or her language. Over a hundred families from around the world were questioned and thirty families were interviewed in-depth about how they pass on their language in bilingual or trilingual families.

Pbk ISBN 1-85359-714-7  
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# International Adoption and Bilingualism

## Dr. des I.M. Laversuch

In the not too distant past, parents who adopted children from abroad were encouraged to break all ties with their child's country of origin. In an effort to comply, some parents would conceal any sign of their child's adoption. The rationale was that such information would thwart the child's ability to form emotional bonds with his/her new homeland. Subsequent research revealed, however, that just the opposite may have been the case. Many overseas adoptees reported going through a painful period of disorientation as they became increasingly aware of the differences between themselves and the world they were raised in.

After discovering the truth, many international adoptees struggled to learn as much as they could about their country of birth. Often, this process involved learning the language of their birth parents. For many, this foreign language learning was incredibly empowering. For many others, however, not having had the chance to learn the language as children was profoundly frustrating. An inability to speak their birth parents' native language made the process of tracking down important information about their childhood difficult and it also hampered their ability to make emotional connections with the people of their birth country. Some adoptees reported suffering a kind of double rootlessness: estranged from the

country they were raised in and alienated from the country they were born in.

Many modern adoptive parents are going about raising their children with a completely different approach. Rather than hiding the details of their child's past, many are choosing to welcome the traditions of their child's birth culture.

*It is ironic, of course, that the very act which parents may offer in a symbol of acceptance may be interpreted as exactly the opposite by the child it was intended to help.*

Some parents even learn the language of the child's country of origin and/or provide child care in their first/native tongue. However, it is important that parents recognise that this may not always be the wisest strategy.

In some cases the use of the first language may dredge up memories of separation, neglect, and abuse. Whilst not all children

who have been adopted cross-nationally have such a painful past behind them, many have. This is frequently the case among children who have been in institutional care. It is not unusual to find these children suffering from *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*. PTSD is an anxiety based, psychological reaction to severe trauma. The symptoms include a wide range of reactions from panic attacks to extreme emotional detachment which may not always be immediately apparent. In fact, they can often appear several years after the original trauma. Clinical experience has demonstrated that even the most innocuous of stimuli can serve as a psychological trigger. Examples include the odour of a special detergent, the feel of an unusual fabric or the sound of a particular language.

According to Dr. B. Gindis, a child psychologist specialising in transnational adoption, in cases where children have undergone severe abuse and/or neglect, confronting them with their first language can set off a cascade of PTSD symptoms such as withdrawal, anger, sadness, or even aggression. While this does not always occur, parents must remind themselves that their adopted child's memories (negative or positive) will not magically disappear. Well-meaning parents who are tempted to use their child's first/native language to

## The Happy Way to Teach and to Learn French

### Severine Greenland



I have always wanted to teach French to young children. Why? Simply because I have a passion for my mother tongue and I love children. I thought it would be easy. Having children myself, I have lots of books and tapes in French. I soon realised it was going to be a lot more difficult than I thought!

At the end of 2001 I met someone who was teaching French in primary schools using "La Jolie Ronde - French for Children". When I saw the materials I was thrilled. It was just what I had been looking for. A few weeks later I became a *La Jolie Ronde* Licensee and started teaching in two local schools. I am now running a successful business, which has

grown over the past two years. I can honestly say it is the best job I have ever had.

*La Jolie Ronde* was founded in 1983 by Madame Colette Hallam. It is recognised by the French Government and is an active member of the Association of Language Learning and the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) in the UK. The programme has been awarded the QCA/CILT Early Language Learning badge.

*La Jolie Ronde's* programme is oral based. It can be used in schools or pre-schools as part of the curriculum or organised as an optional activity. Children can start at any age from 3 to 11 and learn through activities suited to their stage of development, such as finger rhymes, games, songs, role-plays etc. All the skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing are introduced in a progressive way. Children have their own work-book which acts as a record of achievement and a CD to listen to at home to reinforce what they have learnt in class.

I have been teaching *La Jolie Ronde* for two years now and am thoroughly enjoying

it. I am my own boss and yet there is always someone at Head Office to give me advice and support. What I enjoy most is to be able to sing French songs, play games and dance with the little ones and give children the idea that learning French is fun!

If you are a fluent French speaker, you enjoy working with children and you want to be your own boss, why not run your own business teaching French? *La Jolie Ronde* teachers are needed all over the UK.

If you would like your child to attend *La Jolie Ronde* classes or if you think your school or pre-school would be interested in *La Jolie Ronde* either as part of the curriculum or as an optional activity, contact

Contact details removed

I think *La Jolie Ronde* is a brilliant course and I would like every child in the country to have the opportunity to "learn French the happy way"! If you are a fluent French speaker why not give it a go? We need you.

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ease their adjustment may actually thwart it. The very act which parents may offer in a symbol of acceptance may be interpreted as exactly the opposite by the child it was intended to help. Even in cases where PTSD can be ruled out, some children may interpret their parents' "insistence" upon speaking his/her first/native language as a means of singling them out as being an outsider to the family unit.

Having said this, incorporating the adopted child's first language into the home can also be an overwhelmingly positive experience. As several transcountry adoptees and the professionals who work with them have reported, the willingness to use a child's native/first language can show the family's readiness to embrace the cultural heritage of the adoptee. It can serve as a powerful acknowledgement of the fact that a key ingredient of any successful adoption is reciprocity. After all, adopted children have to make a lot of adjustments in a relatively short period. Using the child's first/native language can also be a wonderful opportunity for the family as a whole to learn more about their expanding cultural roots. Given the challenges involved, however, adoptive parents are strongly encouraged to consult the expertise of professionals.

But what about bringing the cross-nationally adopted child into a home which is already bilingual? Such a case was recently described in the *BFN* (Vol 20:3) regarding an English/Thai couple whose adopted son was not only being raised in both parental languages but was also being introduced to a third language, Wolof, after the family's relocation to Gambia. According to the letter, the family's experiences were wonderfully positive. Were this family's experiences the exception or the rule? As most of us are aware, the emotional, intellectual, and social benefits of bilingualism are well-established. However, the effects of bilingualism on international adoptees are less clear.

One could take the position that these children face enough challenges already. This is compounded by the fact that many crossnational adoptees are developmentally behind as a result of inadequate immunisation, malnutrition or sensory

deprivation. Exposing these children to a bilingual household would only be a further impediment. On the other hand, one could argue that precisely *because* these children are in need, they can benefit enormously from the stimulation which multilingualism can provide. The key lies in the careful observation of each individual child. It is critically important to keep in mind that any significant language production and comprehension problems that children exhibit will not disappear the moment they become proficient in the language(s) of the family. For this reason, parents are encouraged once again to work with specialists who are familiar with multilingualism.

But don't transnationally adopted children automatically become bilingual when they become integrated into their new families? The answer seems to be both "yes" and "no". It is true that most children who were already able to communicate in their

*In our search for answers, as parents and professionals committed to championing language rights and cultural diversity, we must resist the temptation of accepting pat or easy answers.*

first/native language before their adoption do quickly learn the language of their new home, making them basically bilingual. However, according to many expert opinions, this bilingualism is usually temporary and "subtractive" in nature. That means as these children learn their second language, their competency with their first/native language declines. This "linguistic attrition" can occur at a startling rate. Within a few years, it is not unusual to find that many have "lost" or forgotten their first language completely. Amazingly, this language attrition appears to be not only behavioural but also neurological. In the brain scans of adoptees who were once bilingual it is almost as if the first language simply erases the second! Several theories have been advanced about why and if this actually happens, but as yet, no definitive answer has been found.

A review of the literature on multiple language use and international adoption is scanty at best. Most studies have been small-scale, and/or anecdotal. We simply do not know what happens, positive or negative, in terms of the mental, physical, and emotional development of such cross-national adoptees. What are the effects of raising international adoptees

who are already multilingual in a monolingual environment? Are their experiences the same as initially monolingual foreign adoptees who are raised in bilingual homes? How does the age of the child at the point of adoption influence second language acquisition or first/native attrition? What are the experiences of families which have several adopted children from diverse linguistic backgrounds? And how do they differ from families with adopted children from the same linguistic background? In our search for answers, as parents and professionals committed to championing language rights and cultural diversity, we must resist the temptation of accepting pat or easy answers. We must continually challenge ourselves and others to ask the difficult questions. Only then, can we truly respect and protect the special needs and talents of the children it is our privilege to protect.

### Recommended Reading

Alpers, Myra. *The International Adoption Handbook: How to Make Overseas Adoption Work for You*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1997.

Bartholet, Elizabeth. *Family Bonds: Adoption and the Politics of Parenting*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1993.

Bascom, Barbara and Carole McKelvey. *The Complete Guide to Foreign Adoption: What to Expect and How to Prepare for Your New Child*. London: Pocket Books, 1997.

Eldridge, Sherrie. *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish their Adopted Parents Knew*. New York: Dell Press, 1999.

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**UK**

**Lisa Filosa**      Contact details removed

To anyone who is currently resident in Oxfordshire and raising bilingual children in English and Italian. My son, Samuel (November 02), and I would love to meet you, especially if you have children of of a similar age or, as in my case, only one parent speaks Italian.

**Takako & Nicholas Tidmarsh**

**email:**      Contact details removed

Family speaking English, French and Japanese, with young son (October 98) Would like to contact other bi/multilingual families with similar aged children. Anyone from French Speaking country who wants to exchange children's books, videos etc with us? Or simply wants to be friends with Malcolm and us.

**Andrea Gauvin**      Contact details removed

We live in Gromsby and are speaking French and German at home (my husband Laurent is French and I'm German) and English at school, work, etc. We have 2 sons: Clement (June 99) and Antoine (October 01). I would like to get in touch with families who are(or were) in the same situation , that means, two languages at home and a 3rd at school.

**GLOSSARY**

**Paired Reading:** Where parents share reading at home with their children, often with direction from the school, and sometimes using a reading scheme.

**Parallel Teaching:** Where bilingual children are taught by two teachers working together as a team, each using a different language. For example, a second language teacher and the class teacher planning together but teaching independantly.

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