

the bilingual family newsletter

MULTILINGUAL
MATTERS

news and views for intercultural people

editors: sami grover and marjukka grover

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editorial

A recurring theme in the articles that we receive for the *BFN* is that of self-esteem. It seems that one of the key factors in supporting bi/multilingualism is helping children to see the value of their family languages and cultures. In this issue Marjukka describes strategies for supporting a child's multicultural identity. She also shows how, as children get older and challenges develop, it is vital that parents are understanding of the confusing world that teenagers can find themselves in.

Creating a healthy language environment at home is not enough. The outside world must also be contended with. Cathy's article identifies a number of specific factors at home, in school, and in the wider environment that can influence success in obtaining bilingualism. Meanwhile, Marlene and Carole's contributions, and the *CILT* report, are all examples of how the institutions and people around us can play a role, both positive and/or negative, in shaping a child's worldview.

Communication is key. Family members should feel able to articulate their needs to each other, and families should also be able to articulate their needs to the outside world. We may not stop every miscommunication between parents or siblings, or every case of misunderstanding or misinformation from the people around us, but we can certainly do our bit to empower ourselves and those around us to feel confident in our own identities.

Sami Grover

The Benefit of Hindsight: The Changing Challenges of Bilingual Children Marjukka Grover



An early BFN editorial meeting gets out of hand.

Most parents will face some difficulties raising children bilingually. In my experience of bringing up two bilingual children, I have noticed how the challenges of living with multiple languages change through the different stages of childhood, and our strategies for coping must therefore also remain flexible.

Every parent knows how much influence they have when a child is still cared for at home full-time. It is probably at this time (if the minority language parent is the main carer) that the child hears the minority language the most. When that child grows and starts interacting with the outside world the majority language and culture will automatically become an increasing influence. It is vital to set long term goals at this stage if the child's minority language and cultural identity are to develop too.

It is common nowadays for mothers to return to work after maternity leave and the child is placed in a nursery or with a child-minder. It may be wise to think about how important full-time employment is for the minority language parent. Is it possible

for the parent to stay at home, or to only work part-time? If the return to full-time work is unavoidable, is it possible to find a minority language-speaking child minder?

When the child joins a majority language nursery or playgroup the parents will get some idea of how powerful the majority language input can be. However, it is not until formal schooling starts that the full force of this process becomes apparent. Some families are lucky to live near an International School, but most children will enter into the local majority-language school system and may become embarrassed to speak a language that other children don't understand. They may start to insist that the parents speak in the majority language only. Their friends will also start visiting the home, thereby limiting the time when the minority language parent is able to speak his/her language without switching. The following are some important strategies that I have found helpful in overcoming such challenges.

1. Talk to the school. Get teachers to understand the importance of bilingualism in the child's life. If the opportunity arises, minority language parents could give a talk about their country in class. Younger children are not yet embarrassed about mum or dad coming to school. I used to make ginger bread houses for my children's classes every Christmas.

2. Keep speaking the minority language. Keep up levels of input in the minority language, even if the child refuses to speak it.

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Benefit of Hindsight...

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Praise the child's ability and help him/her realise what an asset bilingualism can be. I also used methods like pretending not to understand, or reminding my children that they ought to speak Finnish with me. However, parents shouldn't force the issue. When children come home eager to talk about their day, communication is the main thing – not the choice of language. Even if children are using the majority language, the parent can carry on using their own language, gently steering the children back to this also.

3. Value all family languages and cultures. Parents shouldn't see each other's languages or cultures as being in conflict, but rather as complementing each other. Adjusting to a new country takes time, and most people go through a stage when they are very critical of the new culture. However, both parents should try to see each other's cultural differences as positive. Cultural harmony is an important factor in successful bilingual upbringing.

4. Give the children's friends a taste of the minority culture. If the children see that both parents are proud of the minority culture, half the battle is won. We used to celebrate Finnish Independence Day and Midsummer's Day by having a party. I also served Finnish food to my children's friends, and taught them simple Finnish like *'kiitos'* (thank you). I met one of them recently, now a young police officer. He remembered the gingerbread house I took to school every Christmas and asked for the recipe for *'kaalilaatikko'* (cabbage stew).

5. Reinforce the minority language. It is the *minority* language, not the majority one, which is in danger of not developing. Teach the child to read and write in the minority language as this will give the child an independent means to develop the language later. My own children learned to read simple sentences first in Finnish just before starting school. Sami, my younger son (and now the editor of the BFN) had

some problems at first as he tried to spell English words the Finnish way, i.e. phonetically, but the problem soon disappeared. Minority language schools and Saturday Schools are also valuable for teaching children to read and write. Our local Finnish Saturday School prepared our children to take a Finnish exam which we made sure was formally recognised in their school-leaving report, despite not being part of the mainstream curriculum.

We often refer to children as being "half" this and "half" that. This can be hurtful as "half" suggests that they are somehow less English, French etc. than their peers.

6. Let children experience the other culture first-hand. During holidays in the other home country, it may be possible to enter the children into a local school for a while. Many families attest to how successful this kind of "language bath" can be. When our boys were eight and ten they stayed in Finland with my parents from Christmas through to Easter, attending the local primary school. That winter happened to be the coldest in Finland for 100 years. It was hard to send them off to school on those cold, dark winter mornings, knowing that I soon had to leave them behind. However, the experiment worked well. Both Tommi and Sami learned to read and write in Finnish, and my parents got to know their grandsons better. Most of all the boys learned what it is like to be able to ski, skate, play ice-hockey – simply, what it is like to be a Finnish boy!

Just when parents sigh with relief that their children have learned to speak the minority language, they enter the murky

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world of the teenager. Teenagers will question everything and often seem to reject their parents' values and beliefs. They may therefore reject the minority language to prove their independence. There is just no point in forcing a teenager to speak the minority language, but that doesn't mean that parents should stop speaking the language themselves.

Identity is probably a more important issue than language for teenagers. This is the time when a young person starts to work out how he/she sees himself and is seen by the outside world. We often refer to children from intercultural families as being "half" this and "half" that. This can be hurtful however, as "half" suggests that they are somehow less English, French etc. than their peers. It is better to describe a child as having *both* one and the other language or cultural identity – "he/she is French *and* English". We all have multiple identities (a mother, a nurse, a swimmer) and, in the same way, we can have two (or more) cultural identities without one somehow compromising the other(s).

It is not, however, always easy to fully belong to several cultures at the same time and some bilingual teenagers may experience identity crises. My elder son, Tommi, went through a definite period of not knowing where he belonged. We were puzzled, and slightly worried, about his sudden change of appearance and

BBC Worldwide Offers Something Special



The *Something Special* BBC TV series is now available to parents and schools in a new range of DVDs and videos published by BBC Worldwide. The series has been awarded two RTS Educational Television awards and was commended by judges for "portraying children with learning and communication difficulties as heroes."

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Makaton is an internationally recognised communication programme. Each country uses a different form of Sign Language, and the signs used with the Makaton programme in the UK are from British Sign Language (BSL). These videos and DVDs are therefore only appropriate for people using, or wishing to use, BSL and/or Makaton based on BSL. The popular CBeebies presenter Justin Fletcher

introduces the programmes and also plays the role of the colourful and wacky Mr Tumble.

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behaviour. It was only later that I realised he had gone through an identity crisis. In Tommi's case he was too proud of Finland and irritated with everything English. Later on, in his article about bicultural identity (BFN Vol. 14:2, 1997), he admitted that there were times when he wished to have been born into an ordinary, monolingual family in Finland "who didn't try bringing up 'circus freak' children".

Being bicultural is not simply a case of adding two cultures together; it is more like two overlapping circles. One circle is the majority culture, the other is the minority culture, and the overlapping area is where the two form a unique culture of their own. Most teenagers will want to fit into their peer group – the majority teenage culture – and it is only when they become young adults that they start to value their own individualism. One of my Finnish friend's adult children for example, who were not brought up bilingually, are now learning Finnish and using the Finnish spelling of their names.

There are now many exchange schemes between universities and colleges in different parts of the world. Spending a year in the "other" home country gives bilinguals new possibilities to strengthen the minority language. Tommi spent his second college year at Helsinki University and found it an enriching experience. But a word of warning; because Tommi was fluent, he wanted to take courses in Finnish and was advised by his tutor to do so. It hadn't occurred him that absorbing academic information might be much more difficult for him than conversation. He had to work extra hard on English courses in the spring term to make up the failed courses in Finnish. However, the year in Finland was generally very successful. Again he wrote about his experience in the BFN (Vol.16:1, 1999):

"I gained a much more rounded picture of Finland Having experienced the menial everyday aspects of a culture and recognising a country's bad points are just as important to a realistic feeling of identity as the ability to sing the national anthem and celebrate the culture's achievements".

I suspect that most parents raising their children bilingually go through periods when they think that life would be much simpler with just one language and culture. But being brought up with two or more languages and cultures can help young adults to appreciate the vast range of cultural and linguistic differences around the globe. This can be an asset in the modern world. As I have so often said, raising our two sons bilingually was extremely hard work but, without doubt, it was well worth the effort.

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Notes from the OPOL Family



Catching Up On Catechism

Suzanne and Jacques are an English/French couple with three more-or-less bilingual children (Marc, 8, Nina, 6 and Gabriel, 2 years). They now live in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Marc and Nina attend the Lycee Francais there. They try to stick to the OPOL approach.

There are three main religious festivals in Malaysia; Deepavali for Hindus, Hari Raya for Muslims (which follows the Ramadan fast) and Chinese New Year. We have just finished the first two which were in the same week this year. The school always puts on a show and the children dress-up in the costume of that religion. It's fun for them to wear the Malaysian batik sarongs, Indian salwar kameez or Chinese silk cheongsams.

We are busy getting ready for Deepavali and talking about the differences between Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists and their places of worship:

'Which one am I?' Nina asks.
'You're Christian,' I reply 'and we go to Churches.'
'What do people wear for Christian Day?' 'Well, we celebrate our Christianity at Christmas and Easter, and you wear your best clothes.'
'No! Christmas is Santa and Easter is chocolate!' Nina replies with certainty.
'I don't believe in Santa this year,' says Marc, nearly nine. 'So I don't believe there is a God either.'

I realise the time has come for me to define my religion and teach them something. Jacques and I are not particularly religious, although we both attended Sunday schools and youth groups for years. We agree theologically, except for a few issues.

It all sounds so different in another language; even the Lord's Prayer, which I know by heart, is unrecognizable in French. Not knowing the rituals of a church is daunting. It's embarrassing to be the only one standing while they are all

kneeling, or the one saying 'Amen' in the wrong places. We are occasional church-goers, for weddings, Christmas and Easter, but in some ways we don't really belong anywhere.

My grandmother's death early this year sparked an interest in religion, with the inevitable questions: 'Is she with the angels?', 'Can you talk to her?' and so on. It comforted us to feel she was in a better place.

In May we christened Gabriel into the French Catholic church after two years of indecision. Marc was christened Church of England near my parents' house as a baby. Nina in a Catholic church near Jacques' parents in France at age sixteen months. As for poor Gabriel, we really could not decide which way to go. We eventually picked France for the chance to have it in our 'local' church, in a village where we own a house, signifying roots and community spirit for us. We carefully picked God-parents, choosing one English and one French-speaker, hoping that the children would see both perspectives.

But the realisation that our children needed more guidance on religion brought me to enrol them in catechism classes here in KL. I picked the French Catholic community, as most of my fellow *mamans* from school go so they would be with classmates.

It's as if Marc is preparing for priesthood exams. Cramming on saints and discussing the existence of Creation: 'Who came first - God or Dinosaurs?' and Nina is asking me to make a shrine to Mary in the corner of her room. It's very different to my Methodist Sunday mornings.

I attended my first French Mass here with trepidation last week. I didn't know the order of service and the children were gazing around absently as I searched for the right hymn or reading. Familiar words like 'St. Mark' drifted in every now and then but it was a little like being in a French Oral exam at school where you are expected to answer when you didn't understand the question. All I could do was to follow the person in front so I knew when to sit, stand or kneel. I even messed up on the Sign of the Cross, which Nina corrected me on. It taught me a lesson, I need to brush up on *my* catechism so I can have some idea what's going on.

I am hoping my kids will one day feel at home in Christian churches (Protestant or Catholic), Buddhist temples, Hindu shrines and Muslim mosques. I hope their parents' indecision on which way to go has not come too late and they can still open their minds to the idea that there is a God somewhere. And my New Year's Resolution for 2006: to learn the Lord's Prayer in French!



Swimming Between Cultures

My 5-year-old daughter recently decided she wanted to learn to swim. There was a long waiting list in the local swimming pool (in Walsall, England) so I booked her on a course in France (my home) during our holidays. During this time she pretty much learned to swim and returned to England a very proud little girl. According to the teacher she could be swimming within two lessons. Once back in England she was very keen to continue lessons. Immediately, during the first lesson, the differences in instruction emerged:

- they used the shallow pool
- they used armbands, not belts
- they did crawl and backstroke, not breaststroke

My daughter swam without armbands and got a certificate but, when I suggest I could do some breaststroke with her, the teachers started shouting at me. They said I would confuse her and that I should stop teaching her breaststroke.

Some questions immediately come to mind: Why are *they* confusing her? Why don't they acknowledge the fact that she can swim, even if it is in a different style? And what will the French teacher say next summer?

Reflecting on this, it shows yet another aspect of belonging to two places. People refuse point blank to understand that it is part of our life; they just take it as swimming, whereas for us it is something she learnt in 'the other country'... another life experience. It also makes us realise the gap our daughter is facing, aged 5, having to learn to conform to two different systems.

My partner (English) got in touch with the ladies. He emphasized that it was *them* confusing her, not the other way round, and then moved onto ' Shall we stop the lessons then? She could learn in France...' I don't know what worked better, the loss of business or his Englishness but they are now sweetness and light with us! I would be very interested to hear from other readers with similar, or differing, experiences.

Carole Paquis, Walsall, England

Oral Competence and OPOL: Factors Affecting Success

Cathy Benson-Cohen



I grew up in England and studied French at university. Subsequently, I married a Frenchman and have lived in France for nearly 20 years. I became fascinated with the subject of childhood bilingualism as I saw my own children becoming bilingual. Myriam (13) and David (11) have been raised according to the *one parent-one language* (OPOL) strategy and are both balanced bilinguals.

We are lucky to live near an international school which my children have attended since they were six. About a quarter of the curriculum is taught in English from primary to the end of secondary school. To be admitted to the English section a child must have native or near-native skills as (s)he is expected to follow classes in English as if they were in an English-speaking country. The school also has German, Italian, Japanese, Polish and Spanish sections with similar requirements. Over the years I have known many bilingual families and have often been intrigued as to why certain children attain high levels of oral competence in both languages whilst others do not. My children's school has given me a unique opportunity to study this question in a certain type of child i.e. one that is growing up in a privileged environment which promotes bilingualism.

For the past two years I have worked with 39 seven- to eight-year-old French-English bilingual children. The children may be classified as elite bilinguals, coming from upper middle class backgrounds, with over 90% of their parents having at least a first degree. These parents are highly supportive of their bilingualism, providing them with a rich linguistic environment (e.g. extensive interaction, books, DVDs, trips to English-speaking countries). I divided the 39 children into a number of typologies, depending on their language background. I will concentrate here on children brought up from birth in France according to the *OPOL* strategy and I will look at the factors affecting their oral competency.

How did I isolate the factors affecting oral competency in the chosen group? Firstly, I prepared two questionnaires, one completed by each set of parents, and one which I gave orally to each child. I then examined the relationship between each child's language experiences and their level of oral competence and identified four major factors which interact and seem to determine the level of oral competence in this group of children:

- amount of exposure to each language
- interaction patterns within the family
- motivation for using each language
- a child's rank in relation to siblings

I will look at each of these in turn.

Amount of exposure to each language

Numerous studies on monolingual children have shown that in order to build their linguistic systems, children need to accumulate a critical mass of language data from their environment. To speak two languages with age-appropriate competence, children need to acquire this data in *each* language. However, even if a young child has obtained this critical mass of data, if exposure to one language suddenly drops, fluency in that language is gradually lost. Research has shown that children need to be exposed to each language for at least 40% of the time for bilingual development to remain fairly balanced (Pearson *et al.*, 1997).

Research has shown that children need to be exposed to each language for at least 40% of the time for bilingual development to remain fairly balanced.

During the term, the children in my study spend more time in contact with French, as it is used to teach 75% of their curriculum. It is, of course, also the language of the wider community. At home, if each parent speaks his or her own language to the child, the amount of exposure to each language will depend firstly on which parent speaks which language and secondly on whether both parents work. The ideal scenario, and one which is clearly not possible for all families, is that the English speaking parent be at home when the child is home (e.g. holidays, after

school). If the English speaking parent works full-time, and if the child has a French-speaking childminder, English input will be lower and French will probably be the more dominant language.

Interaction patterns within the family

The *BFN* has regularly highlighted research findings showing that parents following the *OPOL* approach consistently seem to facilitate their children's acquisition of balanced bilingualism (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004; Döpke, 1992; Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2001) and, in my study, the parents of children in *OPOL* families are generally very consistent in their language choices. However, it is also important that *the child* addresses each parent in the appropriate language. This is not always the case. In several cases, even if the parents maintained a strict *OPOL* strategy, the child's language strategies began to evolve once (s)he attended French nursery school. Once a child starts nursery, it appears that gradually more and more French is used to the English-speaking parent (who in all cases in this study is a competent French speaker). It is understandable that the child finds it easier to talk in French about events that happened in the French-speaking environment. However, once the child starts using French regularly to the English-speaking parent, they are less likely to push themselves in English. Of course most families reported that they have been obliged on occasion to gently remind their child to use English to the English-speaking parent. It is unrealistic to assume that family members will adhere to *OPOL* 100% of the time as a certain amount of code switching is natural.

I have concentrated here on the parents but of course other people, such as grandparents or childminders who have prolonged daily contact with the child also have a very important role to play.

Motivation for using each language

Motivation is clearly important for language learning. The children in my study have an advantage in this respect as their parents have endeavoured to ensure significant input from both languages. This is not only within the immediate family, but also with extended family, with friends from France and from English-speaking countries and, of course, at school. They are encouraged by the knowledge that their friends come from a similar sociolinguistic and sociocultural environment. Interestingly, several parents reported that while their child had been at a French nursery school, since (s)he had felt different from his/her monolingual French peers, (s)he sometimes expressed negative feelings

towards English and, as a result, the child was reluctant to use English.

Child's rank in relation to siblings

General guides on raising bilingual children often remark that while parents can put pressure on their children to observe the *OPOL* strategy when interacting with them, it is harder to control the language that siblings use with each other (e.g. Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson, 1999). Younger children tend to follow the lead of their elder sibling(s) and my research shows that, more often than not, French becomes dominant between siblings once two or more of them attend French nursery. In the few cases

It is unrealistic to assume that family members will adhere to OPOL 100% of the time as a certain amount of code switching is natural.

where siblings did maintain English between themselves, their competence was given an additional boost.

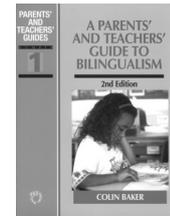
So what can we say about the factors that influence the level of oral competence? In my study, the children who attain the highest levels of balanced bilingualism are those whose parents adhere to a consistent *OPOL* approach, who have not only received a similar amount of input in their two languages from birth onwards, but have also used their two languages productively in more or less equal measure. The more opportunities the children have to use both their languages in meaningful situations with a range of speakers of different ages, the more motivated they will be to maintain and develop them.

While these results cannot be generalised to bilingual children in different environments or age groups, they nevertheless give some indication of how certain factors interact. So far, I have only looked at young children. Are these factors equally important for older children? Which other factors will affect the balance of their bilingualism? I suspect that parents are less able to influence their children's contact with each language as they get more independent and this may affect their language balance.

Cathy Benson-Cohen is studying for a PhD entitled Language background, language strategies and metalinguistic awareness in French-English bilingual children.

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Spotlight on the Editorial Board: YAMAMOTO Masayo



Name: YAMAMOTO Masayo (In Japan we write our family name first and the given name second, so my 'first' name is Masayo).

Partner's name: James SWAN

Country of origin: Japan

Partner's country of origin: USA

Country of residence: Japan

Children: We have two children: Pamela, 29; and James (we call him JY for short, to distinguish from his father), 24. After graduating from college in California, Pam has been a paramedic/firefighter in Oakland, CA, and is now moving on to medical school to be a doctor. She speaks English and Japanese as her native languages and Spanish as her third. JY is an archaeology grad student in Tokyo. Like Pam, he speaks Japanese and English; he also has some knowledge of French, Spanish, and ancient Greek.

Family languages: Ever since my husband and I first met, English has been our sole language. We also raised our children in English, knowing that they would need as much English input as possible if they were to be bilingual. Both children basically learned Japanese through grandparents, friends and through school.

What first got you interested in languages? I became interested in English when I first studied it at school. I can't say exactly why I got interested in it, but I suppose it seemed exotic to me. Sign languages have also always fascinated me. When I was a grad student in Hawai'i, I had a chance to study American sign language, and two years ago I also studied Japanese sign language. It is too bad that I have little chance to use them.

How did you meet your husband? We met for the first time at a wedding reception. My husband, a guest of the groom, was so late that he nearly missed the party. I teased him for this and, according to him, this cocky attitude is what made me a married woman today. He obviously didn't realize that he would suffer from this later in his married life!

Can you describe the language strategies used in your family? We simply established English as the family's primary language. It seems that our children saw

this as perfectly natural. Pamela spent two years in Hawai'i and then went to a very small English-speaking school for about three years after our return to Japan. Her English was solidified through these experiences. JY, on the other hand, has never lived outside of Japan. Since both my husband and I worked, Pamela often had to look after her brother. They spent quite a lot of time together and, although from time to time they also used the local Japanese dialect, they generally used English between them - I think this was one of the secrets of our success.

How have you and your husband's families reacted to your children's bilingual upbringing? It seems that neither side of our families were bothered. When we spent time with my late parents, who could not speak English, we spoke Japanese with them. When we were alone among ourselves, we spoke in English.

How do your children relate to their dual heritage? As far as I know, it seems that they appreciate their bicultural background. When they were school children, we know that they sometimes had to cope with teasing. Both of them, however, are outgoing kids and made many friends. I believe this helped them.

Japanese children who have lived in an English-speaking country often purposely pronounce English in a Japanese way, so that they can avoid sticking out, which can lead to bullying. One time I wondered if JY also had such problems and how he dealt with them. He told me that when he spoke English in class he would pronounce it naturally. Sometimes he would get cheers from his friends. However, he would just make v-for-victory signs and posture as if he had won a contest. This humorous gesture and attitude was obviously well taken. I am sure that our children paid a price to get these problem-solving skills, but I am also pretty certain that they got them because they are basically proud of their heritage.

What are the best/worst things about being in an intercultural relationship? The best thing is that it's simply fun. We often enjoy bilingual jokes and share our knowledge from the different linguistic/cultural backgrounds. We also enjoy being in between, partaking of both cultures, but not being tied down to either. The worst thing was all the immigration hassles that we had to go through in our early days. We also still sometimes get finger-pointing by strangers, which is hard to get used to. Other than that, we are totally satisfied with our life-style.

If you could give one piece of advice to young intercultural parents, what would it be? Just enjoy being in a bilingual/bicultural environment yourselves, and then your children will follow you!

Letters



I am a Cuban-American, mother of 4 ½ year old twins, who I am bringing up bilingual and bicultural (Spanish/English). My husband is American and we live in New Jersey, USA. I have been reading the *BFN* since before my twins were born and I am fully bilingual myself. We use the *OPOL* approach, since my husband only speaks English. In the US, bilingual upbringing is not as common or as valued as in other countries, however, with the help of the *BFN*, books, and a makeshift support system, we have been very successful. My children are fully bilingual and truly the bi-product of *OPOL*.

My Cuban parents passed away two years before my children were born and, in a way, this event gave me the inspiration, commitment and determination to pass on their gift.

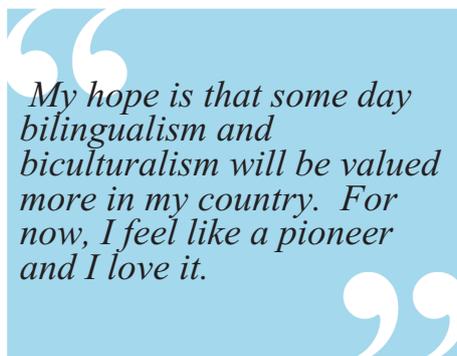
My approach begins with the vision of bilingual/bicultural children (Hispanic/American with heavy Cuban influence) and I try to make sure that their schooling, activities, and experiences (for the most part) align with my vision. I have always spoken to them in Spanish, while my husband has only spoken to them in English. To those readers considering the *OPOL* approach, it works as long as you are consistent and determined. Just as I have received inspiration from the many parents/families within the *BFN* network, I would like to help other families that are facing challenges or have doubts. It is no doubt an uphill battle, especially in my world, where people look at me funny as I only speak to the children in Spanish and simultaneously switch to English with "strangers". I meet up with other Hispanics and they are surprised that my children speak Spanish so well (what a shame, I think to myself, that these people do not have the passion to promote their culture and heritage). I have had many people tell me how difficult it will be because "pretty soon the children will reject Spanish". I am constantly amazed at how much negative energy there is. However, there are also the times when I

receive praise and reinforcement from others and also from family.

Here are some of the strategies that have worked so well for us. First and foremost, my husband and I are agreed that we both want the children to be bilingual. We both know that their future success lies in being bilingual as the US will be much more globalised by the time they get jobs. I stick strictly to *OPOL* (it is non-negotiable) and I try and make contact with every Hispanic person that I can in our chores, routines, shopping so that we can have more interactions in Spanish. The children attend English preschool two mornings a week and Spanish preschool one morning a week. We have a wonderful Hispanic nanny (Ian) who most importantly shares the same values and vision (this has been a huge part of our success) for the children. She also only speaks Spanish to the kids. I also try to get every storybook and video in both English and Spanish (we have quite an extensive collection of books as you can imagine). I do not allow them to watch TV so that we focus more on experiences, play, and Spanish/English interactivity. Both Ian and I cook Hispanic for the kids at home. We “pilgrimage” to Florida (Miami) to visit my aunts every year so the children can experience my Cuban heritage. I recount to them numerous stories and experiences from my childhood.

For all of my efforts, I want to share with the readers that my greatest sense of reward is the joy I feel as a parent. I

constantly feel that I am doing the right thing – despite what others may think or say. I am so proud of the children when they get praised for switching from one language to the other “seamlessly”. Every day I see and hear my parents giving me positive acknowledgement for passing on their legacy. At the end of the day – it is my duty to do that – my duty to them, to myself and to my kids.



To every reader out there, keep inspiring me, for there are days that I need it more than others. My hope is that some day bilingualism and biculturalism will be valued more in my country. For now, I feel like a pioneer and I love it.

I welcome hearing from others with similar situations. I can be reached at

Contact details removed

Call For Articles

The *BFN* relies on the creativity and hard work of its readers. All of the articles, anecdotes, queries and news items which appear in the *BFN* are written by academics, teachers, parents and children that share an interest in, and a passion for, languages and language learning.

Perhaps there are areas that you feel the *BFN* should cover in more detail, or you have experiences you would like to share? Or maybe you disagree with advice given in the *BFN*? Whatever your views, we welcome thoughtful, lively and informed contributions on all aspects of bi/multilingual/cultural living. We also welcome queries about language development, language rights, intercultural communication etc. and we try our hardest to get answers from appropriate experts in the field.

The Newsletter does not make a profit, so we are unable to pay our contributors, but authors of articles will receive a few extra copies of the issue in which their piece features to share with family and friends.

We usually ask that articles are kept to between 1500-2000 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

In The News: British Schools Overlooking Migrant Pupils' Language Skills

A survey published by the National Centre for Languages, known as CILT, has shown that school children in Britain speak at least 300 separate languages. However, this incredible resource is being overlooked, as many schools concentrate on English and a handful of European languages.

Unsurprisingly, London is the most linguistically diverse area of the country, but other, more traditionally monolingual areas are seeing an increase in non-native speaker pupils, including the children of migrant workers and asylum seekers. Areas such as Wrexham, in North Wales, for example, now have over 25 languages spoken in their schools, despite the fact that there were very few non-native speakers only 5 years ago.

The report points out that these languages are potentially very valuable to the future of Britain as it seeks to improve business links with numerous countries around the world. Languages such as Urdu, Turkish, Chinese, Bengali and Arabic are singled out in particular as strategically important languages in terms of trade and

international relations. Isabella Moor, CILT's director, spelled out what a waste the lack of support for these languages represents:

“This summer business leaders drew attention to our country's need for capability in a wide range of languages. Yet 9% of our secondary school children and over 10% of primary children already speak another language at home, and many more have one in their family background.”

Whilst the survey does make the business case for greater support of languages, it also argues that the potential benefits are much broader than simple economic advantage:

“These [benefits] include increased interest in the wider world, greater confidence in communicating in a range of different contexts, and a willingness to engage with people and ideas from elsewhere in the world. These are personal qualities of value in themselves...”

Many schools may claim that they do not have the resources to devote to teaching a broad range of different home languages to pupils with a range of competency levels but, the *CILT* argues, this does not mean they cannot help to support these languages. Many children continue to learn their community languages in classes provided through other organisations, such as community groups. Therefore the report calls, on schools to put more effort and resources into liaising with home tutors and community language classes and developing partnerships and networks with complementary schools, with language teachers in other mainstream schools in the same area, and between teachers of different languages in the same school.

Above all, the survey says it seeks to stimulate debate about the place of community languages in our society, and to encourage education providers to seek ways to help learners see their bilingualism as an asset.

Link: www.cilt.org.uk

The editors, with the help of the International Editorial Board, are happy to answer any queries you may have on bilingualism /biculturalism. We reserve the right to edit any letters published.

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Multilingual Matters

Frankfurt Lodge, Clevedon Hall, Victoria Road
 Clevedon, England. BS21 7HH
 Tel: + 44-(0)1275-876519; Fax:+44-(0)1275-871673
 E-mail: sami@multilingual-matters.com
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Two Language or More

The National Education Agency and the Rinkeby Institute of Multilingual Research (Sweden) have published a very informative 28 page booklet "Two Language or More" in Swedish, Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian, English, Finnish, Somali, Spanish and Turkish. Price 10 Swedish Kronor (Swedish

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