

# The Bilingual Family Newsletter



News and Views for Intercultural People

Editors: Marjukka Grover & Sami Grover

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## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the final 2003 issue of the *Bilingual Family Newsletter*. In this issue Garrett Duncan candidly describes not only the ups, but also the downs, of bringing a child up bilingually. As Garrett argues, much of the literature is so keen to dispel the overly negative and all too prevalent myths about bilingualism, that it can be easy to ignore the frustrations and difficulties that may arise. It is vitally important that parents have realistic expectations about the work that may be involved in bringing children up with multiple languages.

Christina Banfi and Gabriela Bianco describe the process involved in designing educational materials for Argentinian Sign Language users. Deaf communities around the world have suffered terribly from lack of recognition of their native languages, often being forced to adopt the oral and written languages of the majority community. It is so encouraging to finally see Sign Languages being recognized and catered for in education, moves which can only help Deaf minority communities around the world to flourish, both within their own communities, and within the wider majority society.

We also feature a moving plea for help from a Native American mother desperate to preserve the traditional language of her Oneida Nation. Mike Rosanova's reply is a valuable insight into the Montessori method of immersion education, a method which can hopefully contribute to this valuable preservation effort.

Wishing you all a very happy holiday season from everyone at Multilingual Matters.

Sami Grover

## BILINGUALISM: BENEFITS AND FRUSTRATIONS Garrett Duncan



My wife and I thought it important that we understand how our children would learn about language. Tyson, our first son, was about 18 months old when we really thought about teaching him to speak two languages. Tyson's mom, Par, was born in Punjab, India. Par is fluent in both Punjabi and English and Tyson's dad, Garrett, who was born and raised in California, is fluent in English and is learning Punjabi. Garrett can understand and speak Punjabi fairly well and is able to read and write it with some success. Tyson has been spoken and read to from pre-birth (reading out loud near Par) in both languages in approximately equal amounts. Learning two languages at the same time has been referred to as simultaneous learning (Rosenberg, 1996). The American Psychological Association (APA) defines a simultaneous bilingual as "...one who is exposed to both languages from birth" (APA Encyclopedia).

At 18 months Tyson wasn't yet speaking. He was active, coordinated, and obviously bright, so why wasn't he communicating with language yet? Other kids his age spoke just fine. We asked around and read about language acquisition in infants and toddlers and learned that Tyson may take a while to speak, as is often the case with children simultaneously learning two or more languages. We were curious about this so Par and I read more. We wanted to understand how children

acquire language and how simultaneous learning factored into the process.

We found several research articles about simultaneous language acquisition debunking bilingualism myths. For example, the APA recently stated (May 1997) that bilingual children understand written languages sooner than monolinguals. Also, recently, a psychologist at a prominent Louisiana university noted that "...there are no negative consequences for children who speak two languages". His research on bilingualism revealed no support for the assumption that there are negative effects, for example, on children who learn another language at home and English in school. Children who learn a second language, or are simultaneously taught two languages that supplement each other, have the greatest benefit (Rider, 1998).

*"...[the] ability of bilingual kids to filter out distractions and switch back and forth among tasks gives them an advantage."*

Recently the *Los Angeles Times* examined current research on bilingualism (October 2002). The article, entitled *The Evidence Speaks Well of Bilingualism's Effect on Kids*, discussed the idea that bilinguals learn that names are arbitrary and they deal well with abstraction earlier than monolinguals (Flynn).

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Please send us material which you think might be of interest to our readers. Remember the Newsletter is for you, but above all, by you!



## Trilingualism and Cultural Identity

Regarding the very interesting article *Trilingualism and the Parents' Role* by Helen Le Merle, I would like to share my experience and express some reflections.

As an Italian, married to a German, we have tried to raise our now nine year old son bilingually. We lived in Germany until Thomas was six and a half, then moved to England just in time for Thomas to start the first year of the German School in London.

Looking back, Thomas started speaking late and in the very beginning only Italian. This was reinforced in his first infancy by the fact that my husband found it easier to also speak Italian. It was not until Thomas was visited by a German doctor at the age of four that we discovered he could hardly answer in fluent German to his various questions.

We decided we should improve his German, with Dad speaking only German from then on. The Italian contribution was assured by an Italian Church we regularly attended. Until Thomas started school I often had mixed feelings about his two languages: on the one hand I was proud of his Italian, on the other I felt sorry for him when it was clear that he was linguistically behind his monolingual German friends. A Turkish

mother I met by chance gave me great comfort by telling me not to worry about Thomas's capability of learning German, in her experience children would make a big leap when entering school.

Thomas started the German School in England at the age of six and a half. It was this turning point that was responsible for the dramatic linguistic (and perhaps even psychological) pattern-change: Thomas's awareness of German grew stronger, together with his willingness to keep up with the newly encountered peer group. Whereas his German competence steadily increased, in a parallel way his Italian decreased, and on the top of it English stepped into his life, silently in the beginning and joyfully later on.

At first, contacts with Italian families ceased due to our new way of life. However, Thomas was soon offered the opportunity to attend an Italian club led by a young Italian. The club had originally been meant for children of Italian communities, but it had evolved into a club for mostly English speaking children. This turned out to be a true help: it was there that Thomas was initiated in Italian literacy as well as being confronted with a real, yet relaxed, atmosphere of a predominately English speaking class.

By the second year of primary school Thomas's German had improved noticeably, although perhaps it always remained slightly under the level of a German monolingual child and his Italian remained stable, even if it did not make any big leaps. The great wonder happened with English, yet, it was not so much his linguistic ability which happily boomed, as his enthusiastic attitude towards a third culture. English football mesmerised the eight year old and his desire to be part of the English children's community grew stronger.

We moved back to Germany after two years. Thomas copes very well now with the German assignments at school: his command is solid and confident. His Italian linguistic ability is satisfying, although he finds it difficult to express himself entirely in Italian.

To conclude my experience, I would like to cite a 'statement' Thomas made on reporting a joyful event that occurred at school. During a break, one child (whose father is English) congratulated Thomas on being a good 'goalkeeper', thereby using the English word. Smiling, I replied I took for granted that he remembered what it means only to hear stunned and highly delighted – (in German AND speaking Italian):

"Ma mamma, certo! Io sono inglese!"  
– For sure Mum, I am English!

I think our trilingual education has succeeded.

Barbara Siebner, Kiel

## Bilingualism: Benefits & Frustrations ...from page 1



Bilingual children also learn to ignore "misleading information" (Bialystok). In general, bilingual kids can easily switch between tasks and rules as the rules change (Diamond). This skill could assist Tyson in speaking two languages, school work, and the dreaded curse of multi-tasking, which appears to be part of modern culture. According to Diamond, the heightened ability of bilingual kids to filter out distractions and switch back and forth among tasks gives them an advantage.

Another researcher (Diaz, 1983) concluded that the greater the child's command in each language, the greater cognitive flexibility and heightened concept formation occurred. Researchers, including Diaz, are uncertain why this occurs, but several theorise that this is probably due to the following: when a child has two different languages they have two different frames of reference with which to compare new information. In other words, the child has two ways of looking at the world, facilitated by the different languages.

What about the way Tyson will develop into an adult socially, aside from his school experience? Recently a geography professor at a major California university remarked that too many of his students didn't know where places of importance to Americans were located. For example, when asked where Bosnia, Indonesia, and the Persian Gulf were located, students would have difficulty locating them on a world map. Those who are geographically ignorant will have trouble making sense of the world. He wrote, "When they [students] hear of wild currency fluctuations in southeast Asia, revolutions and famine in Africa, devastating hurricanes in Central America, or geopolitical realignments in eastern Europe, it is as if those events occur in some *terra incognita*, apart and isolated from their communities and therefore irrelevant" (Larson, 1999). Students of today will be the world leaders of tomorrow and every child will have to interact with a global way of life that didn't exist a few decades ago. Just realizing there are two different ways to



### Trilingualism in Family, School and Community Charlotte Hoffman & Johannes Ytsma

Countries in Africa, America, Asia and Europe provide the sociolinguistic contexts described in this volume. They involve settings where three or more languages are spoken and where speakers are trilingual. With focus on family, school and the wider community, the book illustrates personal, social, cultural and political factors contributing to the acquisition and maintenance of trilingualism and highlights a rich pattern of trilingual language use.

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£24.95/ US\$39.95/ CAN\$49.95



see an issue may be a powerful tool for a young person making their way through life.

In our case, Tyson will be able to talk with his grandparents (who are thrilled to speak to their grandchildren in their native tongue) and with other relatives and family friends. At social functions with other Punjabi speakers, Tyson will have an easier time communicating with his peers and elders who are more comfortable speaking Punjabi. It is likely that he will have an easier time in school and may understand or accept global events better than if he was exposed to only English and American culture. So what's the downside?

As previously mentioned, researchers during the last few decades have attempted to debunk widespread thinking that teaching children two languages was detrimental. Many statements are made in recent academic and popular literature regarding children only benefiting from

*"Students of today will be the world leaders of tomorrow and every child will have to interact with a global way of life that didn't exist a few decades ago."*

simultaneous bilingualism. From our perspective we'll certainly do it again with our second child, but there are a few points on which to be cautioned.

As we read papers about raising bilingual children, nowhere did we uncover discussions about children and parents having frustrations due to the effects of simultaneous learning. Authors spent their time promoting the benefits of bilingualism from the perspective of life after obtaining bilingual skills. None of the papers discussed the sometimes difficult road of getting to bilingualism. Monolingual children also have frustrations as they acquire language skills, but as previously mentioned, many children we know were speaking prior to 18 months. While all children who haven't mastered language may feel frustrations by not being understood, it may be greater for those, like our son Tyson, who have dealt with it longer or more often due to the additional challenges of simultaneously learning two languages.

We know both male and female children, taught one language, who were talking at a younger age than our son. Some parents may be defensive when asked, "Isn't she/he talking yet?"

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## NEWS FROM THE USA: No Child Left Untested

James Crawford



Politically speaking, bilingual educators have been a remarkably cohesive group in the US. Forced to contend with harassment by English-only ideologues, tight budgets, and neglect of minority students, they have presented a united front in every policy battle – until now. Fissures are beginning to emerge over the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB).

The new law is shaking up American schools as never before. Plenty of politicians and pundits believe that the result is long overdue. So do many education advocates, who argue that 'holding schools accountable for results' ensures equal opportunities for poor and minority students. This logic proved appealing to both parties in Congress, as the political stars came into alignment for a major 'reform' initiative. President Bush saw a chance to demonstrate his 'compassionate conservatism', while Democrats seized a rare opportunity to increase funding for education. The legislation moved swiftly, with limited input from those who actually work in schools.

Many educators are increasingly alarmed by the outcome. Under NCLB, schools are required to increase achievement test scores each year until 2014 – when all children must be 'proficient' in core subjects. The targets apply not only to students overall, but also to eight subgroups including racial minorities, economically disadvantaged, the mentally disabled, and English language learners. Severe sanctions are in store for schools that come up short.

Last fall brought the first dishonor roll of 'failing schools'. In Florida, nearly 90% failed to make the grade – in no small part because of low scores among *Limited-English-proficient* (LEP) students, the great majority of whom were tested in English. Penalties were light in the first year. Failing schools merely had to notify parents of their option to transfer their children elsewhere, at the school's expense. In later years, unless scores improve, the consequences will escalate to loss of funding and removal of staff.

Rates of 'failure' differ enormously between states because there are no national standards, nor is there any independent determination of whether the targets are achievable. As a teacher wrote in the *Washington Post*, 'It's hard to tell whether

this law is more a product of arrogance or ignorance, but either way it's shaping up to be a spectacular train wreck ...'

One of the most enthusiastic cheerleaders for NCLB has been the *National Association for Bilingual Education* (NABE) which has argued that, in the past, English language learners were easy to ignore because, in the absence of meaningful instruments for measuring their achievement, LEP children tended to be exempted from standardized testing programs. As a result, English learners were often victimized by low expectations. The solution, NABE says, is to hold these students to the same high standards as all other students.

No doubt this view is well intentioned. It is also delusional. Leaving aside assessment validity, a gaping flaw in this argument, what does it accomplish to punish schools for failing to meet expectations that are – at least in the short term – impossible? If LEP students could score at national norms on tests administered in English, they would no longer be LEP. Including them in accountability schemes will surely get them more attention, but hardly of the kind they need.

What NCLB will accomplish is to create a climate of anxiety in schools. Teachers and administrators fear, for good reason, that their careers will be adversely affected by factors that are beyond their control, such as having 'too many' poor, minority, LEP, and other low-scoring children on their rolls. The law erects a bureaucratic structure designed to exert pressure, and to ascribe blame, downward from state agencies to local school districts to principals to teachers and, ultimately, to students themselves.

Lobbyists and policy analysts in Washington have trouble focusing on such detail. Bilingual educators do not. Everywhere I travel I hear grumbling, especially about the focus on driving up test scores and the impact that has on children. This year some friends of mine reluctantly removed their daughter from a bilingual school. Thanks to NCLB, its once impressive 'gifted and talented' program had been reduced to little more than a cram course to prepare for achievement tests. Not only was the curriculum impoverished; the stress became intolerable. When my friends' seven-year-old became nauseated every morning before school, they knew it was time to act.

Some day policymakers will get the message, too. Unfortunately, a great deal more damage may be done before they themselves are held accountable.

For further information on the No Child Left Behind Act and related issues, visit James Crawford's Language Policy Web Site at:

HTTP:  
//ourworld.compuServe.com/homepages/jwcra  
wford/





## RE: Are We Doomed To Failure? – in Letters: BFN 2003, Vol. 20 No.1

Dear Sarah,

You are not doomed to failure! You can speak Greek with your children. If you forgot to bring videos, cassettes etc. when moving, write to the Grandparents. Ask them to send books which you can read as a bed-time story. Sure, it is not your native tongue, but you will improve your Greek in the process. It is not necessary to observe a strict "one-parent-one-language regime."

I am German and studied English at university. My English husband is fluent in German and has lived in Germany since 1975. We have four daughters: Stefanie, 19, Melanie 17, Andrea 16, and Bettina 13 ½. Initially they were all equally fluent in English and German but, after they started school, their use of English declined – Andrea developed a strong German accent at the age of three. By the time they were 13, they had all stopped using English with us. For some time I tried to balance things out by speaking English to them. I was also grateful when "Granny London" sent videos, tapes and books. My daughters also had native speaker classes in Darmstadt, not far from where we lived. They were taught to read and write English and had the chance to meet children from England and the US.

In 1995, however, we moved from Langen to a small village 30 kms away. While Langen and Darmstadt have international atmospheres, Weilbach is provincial and English speakers are few. The children stopped going to the native speaker class as it was too far to travel. My husband also started using more German with the children. He explained that they did not understand his English and that he was still in favour of bilingual upbringing but was not fanatical (perhaps, also implying that I was obsessed with it? – this sounds similar to your letter). I also had little support from my own parents and our environment, so I stopped using English.

Now, all my daughters are in their teens, in spite of the limitations explained above, their English survived. They may not have the same standard as a native speaker, but a higher standard than most German people. Their early childhood learning provided them with a sound basis which they can always develop further.

If you are enthusiastic about bilingualism – keep up the good work and speak Greek!

Constanze Taylor,  
Weilbach, Germany

## Tales Without Sound: Designing Materials for Argentinian Sign Language

Cristina Banfi & Gabriela Bianco



A recent resolution passed by the Linguistic Society of America provides us with one of the clearest statements available about the status of Sign Languages:

"...sign languages [...] are full-fledged languages with all the structural characteristics and range of expression of spoken languages. [...] These languages are not merely a set of informal gestures, nor are they a signed version of any particular spoken language." (LSA, 2001)

This text summarises the understanding linguists now have of Sign Languages but, among the general public, misconceptions still abound. Until the 1960s, the general view was that Sign languages were not languages as such, but merely a kind of mimed code or set of pictographic expressions used by those who could not speak.

We now know that Sign Languages are four-dimensional languages with a fully-developed grammar that use hand movement and different parts of the body. Sign Languages are languages created and developed spontaneously by Deaf communities around the world. Each country or region has its own Sign Language, which, as is the case with oral languages, may present variations within different communities in each country.

Sign language is, ideally, the native language of Deaf people. In the same way as hearing children learn oral language, Deaf children pick up the Sign Language they are exposed to at great speed and ease, allowing them to develop emotional stability and a sense of belonging to a linguistic and cultural group. Note that we

say 'ideally', because for a child to acquire Sign Language naturally s/he needs to be exposed to it, a situation which is not instantiated in the case of most Deaf children who are born to hearing parents.

The oralist tradition, which was dominant for many years, attempted to assimilate Deaf people into the majority community, emphasising lip-reading and other mechanisms that did not allow Deaf people to develop a language of their own. This situation is a clear infringement of the linguistic rights of the Deaf.

### Sign Language in Argentina

The National Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, the first institution of its kind in Latin America, was founded in 1885. The first teachers, who came from Italy, followed the guiding principles of the Milan Congress of 1880. Deaf teachers were no longer allowed to teach at special needs schools, and oral language was upheld as the main pedagogical aim, discarding Sign Language. This led to the gradual disappearance of Deaf people in various trades and professions in Europe.

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*"Until the 1960s, the general view was that Sign languages were not languages [...] merely a kind of mimed code or set of pictographic expressions used by those who could not speak."*

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The Italian teachers, despite vehemently defending the dogma of oralism, supported their spoken language with emphatic gestures that the children used as inspiration to create what was, initially, a reduced code of communication. This code was gradually developed and became Argentine Sign Language. Children used it among themselves as a manual code that neither parents nor teachers could understand fully. The differences between the language used in class and the language of 'leisure' widened the gap between children and parents, between children and teachers, and between parents and teachers. The child was gradually excluded from the right to training and education in a language accessible to his/her sensory possibilities. The main aim became the achievement of a level of oral language 'as close as possible to that of the speaker'. The curriculum of these schools became clearly different from that of the mainstream school. A catastrophe was in



the making: whole generations of Deaf people would come out of school functionally illiterate and with low expectations of social development.

All is not lost, however. The predominance of the spoken word has now been replaced by an awareness of the need for these children to acquire Sign Language at an early stage, and then spoken language, becoming educated and integrated bilingual adults. Schools have started adopting bilingual education programmes for their Deaf students. The principle is that Sign Language is the first language, and the majority oral or written language should be considered a second language.

A group of people within the *Asociación Civil de Artes y Señas* (ADAS), a recently founded non-profit association, have set out to develop teaching materials for Deaf children. Basing the work on previously unrecorded experiences, the decision was made to produce a video of stories in LSA with printed supporting material. The material will provide children with exposure to LSA and give them access to some of the cultural and literary traditions of the wider community. It will help children develop their linguistic and communicative skills in LSA. Finally, it



will provide teachers and parents with activities they can use to further develop the children's LSA skills.

Deaf children (and adults) have very limited access to literature. This is not unique to Argentina. Since the 1950s large numbers of talking books have been available for the blind but, comparatively, signing books for the Deaf are a much more recent development and far fewer in number. This means that Deaf children, their teachers and parents rarely have access to children's literature in the way hearing children do. Pedagogical material designed for these children and their teachers is currently non-existent in Argentina. The tales in this collection, narrated in LSA, will function as a strong and creative bridge between two cultures ensuring access to participation, education and the strengthening of dignity for all.

A guiding principle of this project is variety: variety in the type of story chosen, in the narrators used (age, gender, narration style, etc.) and variety in the presentation of the story.

The first stage is the choice of the stories to be included. This choice of story was done following the general criterion of variety mentioned above, but also the linguistic potential of the story. The stories had to be translated into LSA and the language used was analysed and graded. Language activities for different levels of language proficiency and ages were designed. A script was produced and the stories and printed materials were piloted by one narrator with Deaf children.

Now this initial stage is over, we have to move into the final stages of production. We need to work with narrators who are confident users of LSA and have experience in narrating stories and working with children. We also have to refine the tasks on the basis of the results obtained from the piloting experience. There are also technical considerations in the area of video production and publication of the support material that have to be taken into account.

Throughout, but especially in these last two areas, particular attention has to be paid to the fact that the language in question is of visual-spatial modality, and that information needs to be conveyed as clearly as possible.

## Conclusions

**For Children:** This video of tales and support material of activities will prove a valuable tool for the cultural, linguistic and emotional development of Deaf children. It will give them access to literature, cultural notions of the majority community, and it will provide them with an opportunity to systematically explore LSA and its functions.

**For Teachers:** Teachers teaching on bilingual education programmes deserve resources specifically designed with this context in mind. Teachers of the Deaf in Argentina do not currently have access to linguistic models or appropriate pedagogical materials in Sign Language to facilitate their daily classroom work. This material will go some way to filling that void.

**For Parents:** All parents need to play an active role in the education of their children. Parents can support their children in all the options of development offered by the school and share significant instances of growth. Parents of Deaf children should have access to the means necessary to achieve these aims. We hope they will be able to enjoy these stories with their children!

References on page 8



### Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search Of Deafhood Paddy Ladd (University of Bristol)

"...enlightening, insightful and deeply reflective."

Harlan Lane (Northeastern University)

Presents a 'Traveller's Guide' to Deaf Culture. Both within and outside Deaf communities there is a need for an account of the new concept of Deaf culture which enables readers to assess its place alongside work on other minority cultures and multilingual discourses. The book aims to assess the concepts of culture on their own terms and apply these to Deaf communities. The author illustrates the pitfalls which have been created by the medical concept of 'deafness' and contrasts this with his new concept of 'Deafhood', a process by which every Deaf child, family and adult implicitly explains their existence in the world to themselves and each other.

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## HUMOUR, HUMOUR



### False Friends, Dirty Shops

The many "false friends" in English and French can be the source of embarrassing moments.

My daughter had just learned to read (in French) when we made a trip to England and took advantage of the sales. Proud to show off her reading skills, she asked in a loud voice why the shop was dirty! (*Sale* is the French word for dirty).

Paula Charouset, Englien-les Bains





## A Montessori School to Revive Native American Culture

I am an Oneida Mom and my husband is an Onondaga chief here in upstate New York. Our community, like many other Native American Nations, is struggling to keep our traditional language. We're looking at the Montessori approach for creating an immersion school beginning with 3-6 year olds, though ideally we'd like to also have a class for children 18 months to 2 and a half years of age.

We are in great need of guidance on how to best use our limited number of speakers. We have only about six fluent speakers who are in their 70's or older. Then there are several community leaders who are not fluent, but do have extensive knowledge of ceremonial language since this is where are language is used the most in the community.

Most of the community doesn't believe a full immersion class is possible. I strongly feel we need to do the best we can with the resources we now have, because it's only moving further out of our reach.

Tonya Shenandoah,  
Oneida Nation Territory

I agree with you about the infant/toddler level. The infant/toddler level training is important because it prepares children to make the most out of the 3-6 level environment. Also, because some children need extra time to mature, a toddler level program is a good idea. It gives the "not quite ready" three year olds a place to go within the walls of your school. This saves such children from the feeling that they just didn't have what it takes. Although the toddlers are introduced to self-paced project work and the rudiments of social life, the range of experiences is much simpler than the range of work in the very rich 3-6 environment, which is filled with over two hundred hands-on project materials in seven different curriculum areas. If you have a Montessori toddler environment, with children who are not quite ready, you can "regress" for a while, fading back to more comfortable levels of challenge.

But, given limited resources and your ambitions, you'll need to place your higher priority on 3-6 level training. This is where most of the critical action is in terms of second language acquisition. Average vocabulary size for a two year old is only about 120 words. Average vocabulary size for a first-grader is over 6000. There's a lot happening between the ages of 3 and 6. If you have to choose

between a toddler program and a 3-6 program, make your choice for 3-6.

In a perfect world, the teachers would be native speakers of Onondaga who themselves spoke Onondaga as children. They would know all the nursery rhymes, children's games and all the other ins and outs of the culture of childhood in the Onondaga tradition. The distinctive features of neurological development in early childhood affect the way that children perceive and understand the world; there really is a culture of childhood which emerges, distinct from the culture of Onondaga adults, though deeply linked with it.

If your program succeeds, the children for whom you care may someday become teachers for the generations which follow them. But, meantime, you need to make do with the resources available, trusting in the potential of your children today. Moses stood on Mt. Horeb and looked into the Promised Land, knowing that his people would not be able to enter there until the generation that had fled through the desert (even Moses himself) had all passed away; and Moses understood that, and accepted that, and was grateful. Montessori put it this way: "A true revolution begins with the grandmas." Everything takes time. Nothing is perfect. The biggest mistake is to sigh and shrug and say, "Why, oh why?" The challenge instead is to assess the situation realistically, shrug again and say, "Why not?"

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*"...there really is a culture of childhood which emerges, distinct from the culture of Onondaga adults, though deeply linked with it."*

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Take heart from the example of Hebrew, a language which has survived for centuries as a primarily ceremonial, religious tongue. Jesus himself, an elegant interpreter of ancient Hebrew traditions, was not a native speaker of Hebrew but of Aramaic. He was a simple carpenter, not an exalted professor with a luxuriously funded research staff. Hebrew was a "dead language" for a long time; but today in Israel there are paperboys and lawyers, nurses and farmers all speaking, writing and thinking in a native Hebrew which Jesus would have admired. How did that ever happen? And what does it mean for Onondaga?

First you need to find the right people to succeed as Montessori teachers. It is these people, not the children, who must sit at the feet of the Onondaga elders, combing their memories of childhood, noting all words, expressions and body language which they bring to the surface. Candidates for teacher training will be very special. The marks of a good candidate are these: (1) a high natural propensity for order; and (2) a confident radiance in the presence of children, a great deal of warmth and a solid trust in the goodness and abiding common sense of the little ones.

The second qualification is obvious to anyone who has lived very long among children.

Children themselves are highly skeptical of insincerity and doubt; they can smell it out at a hundred paces. But the first qualification demands some explanation. The Montessori classroom for preschoolers and Kindergartners is chock-full of hands-on project materials. Each one of those materials must be complete in itself so that little children can easily manage them, rather than losing concentration and interest and their natural tendency toward self-regulation. The Montessori teacher makes free choice possible for children by creating a well-ordered, child-friendly environment.

In traditional education, a teacher can get by with minimal preparation, jumping from topic to topic as she entertains and directs the children. The teacher leads drills in the name of a method called "direct instruction". But Montessori is *not* "direct instruction". Montessori is 'direct experience'. The experience itself must make sense to the child; this is especially critical during that initial period of second language immersion when the words themselves simply *don't*.

The Montessori teacher cannot get by with minimal preparation because the children themselves will become overwhelmed and disabled by such lack of order. The kind of lovely calm one sees in a Montessori school, with satisfied children dedicating themselves to interesting, fulfilling work, is not possible without high levels of diligence on the part of the teachers. An effective Montessori teacher will be devoting a good 70% of her time to the preparation of hands-on project materials and other preparations of the children's environment. When the children's hearts and minds are calm, the second language begins to drift in on a tide of satisfaction and fulfillment.

The American Montessori Society accredits intensive teacher training programs. It might be good if your teachers study the Montessori project materials, practice them while working as assistants in an established, well functioning Montessori school, and then share each of the areas of project materials with the elders, the fluent speakers of Onondaga, asking them to describe back to you what you're doing with the materials and how the children are reacting. You could spend a whole year mastering the Onondaga of the Montessori environment before you begin a classroom of your own.

You'll need to come out and visit us at InterCultura to see what our children have accomplished with Japanese, Spanish and English during their early childhood and elementary years. The teachers in particular need to spend some time with us. It will take a while before they really believe that what they are being asked to accomplish can actually be done. Their vision for your school will be hesitant and confused until they see bilingualism emerging before them, directly 'from the mouths of babes'.

Mike

*M. J. Rosanova, Ph.D., and his wife, Doris, founded InterCultura Foreign Language Immersion Montessori in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1985. Target languages include Spanish, English and Japanese. The school website is [www.intercultura.org](http://www.intercultura.org)*



## READING MATTERS

*There's heavy black outline around things separated from their names. My lame vocabularies consisted of the usual variety of staples – bread, cheese, table, coat, meat – as well as a more idiosyncratic store [...] I'd learned the words for rock strata, infinity, and evolution – but not for bank account or landlord. I could carry my own in a discussion of volcanoes, glaciers, or clouds in Greek or English, but didn't know what was meant by a "cocktail" or a "Kleenex."*

An extract from *Fugitive Pieces* by Anne Michaels. The narrator is Jakob Beer, a Holocaust survivor who is brought up in Greece and then the US by the scientist/humanist Athos Roussos. This extract describes the language barrier that Jakob faced on moving to the US. Bloomsbury; ISBN: 0747534969

### Bilingualism: Benefits and Frustrations... from page 1

Luckily our son was bright and physically active, thus those same people (and us) knew he was fine and would talk when good and ready. Because he was late to talk, yet was physically capable of exploring and had a lot of curiosity, there were noticeable frustration in his inability to communicate his needs. For example, his frustration would surface when he would be pointing to something up high on a shelf that he wanted but couldn't describe. We would go around a few times as he got more and more frustrated until we finally figured out what it was that he wanted.

Herein may be the main drawback to teaching children to be simultaneously bilingual. They have twice as much to process at a stage in life when they desperately want to communicate. This means that they have two languages to sort out when people are talking to them and twice as much information to process when deciding how to state their desires. Realise that the frustrations your child feels may transfer to you and others while attempting to communicate with the child. These frustrations can surface at anytime, such as when Tyson tried to tell us what he wanted to eat. At 18 month of age, these frustrations lessened because our son was able to make himself understood in one of his languages with words such as: yes, no, eggs, bread, water, milk, juice, etc. We read books about sign language for infants and toddlers and concluded that this was simply an additional language. However, we did use a few simple non-verbal signs for more food or more water, etc., which were helpful. The period where our son was most frustrated lasted approximately six months (one year

to 18 months of age). Now, at over two-years of age, he has the mental and physical abilities to form enough words in both languages to communicate his needs.

We are certainly pleased that he is now able to respond and communicate in two languages. He perfectly understands his grandparents' Punjabi and here and there replies in the same language, which pleases them tremendously. He understands and speaks English fine. In English he was capable of complex, compound sentences at less than two-years of age. It is amazing what he sometimes says. We attribute his impressive command of both languages to simultaneous bilingualism, because he practiced talking in both languages, and to the fact that Tyson's entire family always spoke to him in a nurturing but sophisticated manner. In other words, we didn't always use baby talk on him. We spoke to him, in both Punjabi and English. Tyson is thrilled when he is able to communicate in an articulate manner; one can see that it increases his

*"Realise that the frustrations your child feels may transfer to you and others while attempting to communicate with the child."*

self-confidence and social experiences.

A friend who has two children who also speak Punjabi and English noticed another point on which to be cautioned. At one point his daughters only knew Punjabi names of common items such as milk, chair, table and at times had difficulty as they entered school being understood by their teachers who spoke only English. This caused frustrations in his daughters and, most likely, their teachers. Therefore, by the time children reach school or daycare, it may be helpful if they know names for common items they will often encounter in the majority language. There lies another tricky aspect of bilingualism, teaching both ways to identify an item. We found strategies to improve our teaching and Tyson's understanding. For example, when reading to him we often say "This is an elephant. Daddy says elephant and Nanaji (Par's father) says hathi (Punjabi for elephant)." This way Tyson will eventually get both ways to identify an item. It seems to be working. Tyson understands English sentence structure well. He is a bit away from understanding Punjabi sentence structure where the verb comes last but we are confident he will sort this out. We also plan to have him attend Punjabi language

class that is usually taught at a Sikh temple called a Gurudwara, when he is ready.

Hopefully this article will help other parents make decisions about whether to raise a bilingual child by simultaneous techniques or by introducing a second language at some point. If parents are comfortable with knowing there may be a few months where communication is difficult, possibly more difficult than for monolingual children, we would recommend teaching a child more than one language. It appears there are many benefits and the few drawbacks are short term.

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

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