

the bilingual family newsletter

MULTILINGUAL
MATTERS

news and views for intercultural people

editors: sami grover and marjukka grover

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editorial

As Suzanne attests in her latest OPOL diary, the age of the internet is well and truly upon us. (Of course, the astute will have noticed it's been on us for quite some time now!) Yet for some reason, the world is not awash with websites catering specifically to bi- and multilingual families - the wonderful *Bilingual/Bicultural Family Network* (www.biculturalfamily.org/) being a notable exception.

This issue does contain news about two exciting websites that our readers may want to check out - *Lingoo.eu*, an online community for arranging cultural exchanges - and *Hip-Chicas.com*, a commercial online 'virtual world' aimed at bilingual tweens.

With more and more sites beginning to slowly appear - we at the *BFN* often wonder how long our print-focused medium will remain in demand. And every time we wonder, we receive another wonderful article like Jake Willis' account of non-native bilingualism, or we hear about the linguistic juggling involved for an international family like the Finnish/French Roybin family in Amsterdam.

So for now, we're realising that there are still enough of us out there who crave a printed read from time-to-time. But in order to supply that we need articles - so please keep your stories, anecdotes, queries and concerns flowing. And tell us about your favorite websites too! We'll be here as long as you are.

Sami Grover

Non-native bilingualism: taking the plunge

Jake Willis

My wife Isabel and I are both British and have always communicated in English. After a period living overseas, we have lived for the past 5 years in a remote coastal village in north-west Scotland where English is the majority language. Despite being therefore essentially a



The Willis family

monolingual couple, before the birth of our first child in 2006, we had decided that we wanted her to grow up bilingual in order to gain metalinguistic skills and greater cultural openness. We read widely around the subject of language acquisition, finding a brief reference to the Saunders' experience in Australia particularly useful in cementing our decision (in Cunningham-Andersson and Andersson, 2004). The fact that we found precious few other examples of successful non-native bilingualism made us realise that we were making a quite unusual decision.

Besides conferring the now well-known advantages of bilingualism to our future child, the principal reason for bringing

another language into our family was that I had been given a similar opportunity as a child and feel that I benefited greatly from the experience. In the 1970s, my parents moved from London to Brussels. Age three, they placed me in French-language education, where I stayed until the age of 17. After school, working as a forester in Asia and Latin America helped me to develop varying degrees of competence in some 10 European and Asian languages. These include the widespread Spanish but also the less immediately useful single-island oral language Sibuyanon (from the Philippines). Working alongside British people from monolingual backgrounds helped me to see how my bilingual background allowed me to learn languages like a sponge and much faster than my colleagues. I wanted my daughter to have this same opportunity and to develop a similar ease around new languages and multicultural situations.

After deciding to introduce a second language to our home, the most difficult decision was deciding which one. We had already concluded that *OPOL* (*one-parent, one-language*) was our preferred method for introducing bilingualism. But which language did I want to use with my daughter and with any subsequent children? It was a difficult decision as I knew it would be hard to change languages later and it had to be a language that felt natural to me when speaking to my children.

In north-west Scotland, a significant minority speak Scots Gaelic, a Celtic language that pre-dates the arrival of

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Non-native Bilingualism

Continued from page one

English. However, my own grasp of Gaelic was not sufficient to have made this a good choice. I know one English-speaking father who was successful in bringing up his children bilingually by adopting Gaelic, but he was able to reach a state of fluency by living in one of Scotland's predominantly Gaelic-speaking island communities. I concluded that I would need to at least be fluent in whatever language I decided to use.

The obvious choice would have been French, which I speak to near-native standard thanks to my schooling in Belgium. However, in the end, I decided to go with Spanish because it is more likely that we will live in Spanish-speaking rather than French-speaking countries in the future and, importantly for me, because Spanish is a language I learnt while working in communities in Latin America, spending evenings and weekends around families and children. As a result, I thought I would be more comfortable using my fluent Spanish with children than my near-native French. I did not, however, realise then how much I would need to work to fill the gaps in my vocabulary, a process that is still ongoing with help from Spanish friends, the internet and the bilingual dictionary. Fortunately, my wife has a good understanding of Spanish which meant she would not be excluded.

The convoluted thought process described above took place while we were still just two English speakers with a baby on the way and was therefore completely theoretical. After Iona was actually born, reality hit home and the idea of launching into speaking to my daughter in a second

language made me feel so self-conscious that, for most of her first year, I resolutely stuck to speaking my native English. Trying to deal with sleeplessness, work pressures and the life change of a first baby, I found myself unable to take the bilingual plunge. I started wondering if it might somehow affect our father-daughter relationship down the line; asking myself hard questions about whether my Spanish was up to the task; wondering how the shopkeeper in the village or the neighbours would react to hearing me speak to her in Spanish when we both knew she could understand English; worrying that it might exclude friends and extended family if my daughter and I used a private language; even worrying that native Spanish speakers

Working alongside British people from monolingual backgrounds helped me to see how my bilingual background allowed me to learn languages like a sponge ...

that we met would be critical of me appropriating their language...

I think had we lived in a larger city with community support such as Spanish-speaking friends and baby-toddler groups, it might have been easier to make the first step. In the end, I had just about given up on the bilingual project, unable to get over my self-consciousness, when we went to visit Honduran friends for several weeks. I tentatively started mixing English and Spanish when speaking to Iona and gradually moved into Spanish. When we came home, I continued using Spanish. Within a few weeks, it seemed fairly natural.

After that, as they say, I never looked back. It has made all the difference. My fears have mostly proven completely groundless. Naturally, one or two people have said "won't you confuse the poor child" or "isn't that quite an odd thing to do". But for the majority, the bilingualism has been a talking point. People want to know more. Tourists who overhear me in the local shop walk out discussing the funny language they heard "I think he was speaking Gaelic to the little girl." "No, no, it was definitely Polish".

The other dimension for me personally is that I have come to realise how many people in a supposedly monolingual society like Scotland have some connection to bilingualism within their

friends or family, be it the local Gaelic or another European language that they are keen to share with us as soon as they realise Iona is growing up bilingual.

But what about Iona, who is after all the focus of all this? At two-and-a-half, she is fully aware and proud of speaking two languages. She will actively choose to use individual Spanish words in English sentence constructions and does so more when we are on holiday and she has more time with me. At the outset, whenever I used a new Spanish word, I used to give Iona the English equivalent but, from my own experience, I should really have known this was completely unnecessary – she just picked up the meaning after hearing the Spanish word a few times in context; now she can formulate her own questions. She just says "what does mummy call that?" or "what is a ciudad?".

She is able to translate between English and Spanish in both directions and has memorised whole Spanish songs, much to our surprise. We try to mix English and Spanish DVDs, music CDs and books, and I have learnt new songs to share with her. Arguably, the main weakness in our approach is that she rarely hears me or anyone else having Spanish language conversation, which means she is not able to develop conversation skills and appropriate grammar in her second language. This has changed recently with the fortunate arrival of a Spanish doctor and young family in our small village, which can only have a positive impact on her second language. The other weakness was that I did not have a strategy for monolingual friends and extended family so some people felt excluded, until I realised that I should just repeat myself in English where others needed to hear what I was saying to Iona.

The textbooks suggest that Iona will grow up as a 'passive bilingual' unless we move to a community where Spanish is the majority language. My impression so far is that her bilingualism is not so much passive as latent and that it would express itself into active bilingualism within a couple of weeks of full immersion in a Spanish-speaking environment. Regardless of the degree to which she can speak Spanish, the key point for Isabel, and for me, is that the slightly unusual choice we have made has not apparently slowed her acquisition of English and it has not been detrimental to my relationship with Iona.

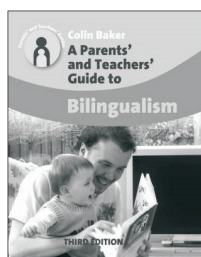
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HipChicas.com –

A Multilingual Online World with a Mission

From Facebook to Twitter to Second Life, the online world is not short of ways to interact socially with other web users – and many of these may provide opportunities for bi/multilingual interaction or language learning. But with those opportunities also come concerns – particularly when children and young adults are concerned.

An increasing number of websites, however, are creating content and applications that are appropriate for a younger audience. *HipChicas.com* is a newly launched subscription-based 'virtual world' aimed at the 10-12 year-old age group. Users are able to follow a fictional band called HipChicas as they tour the Americas – interacting with other users in English, Spanish, Portuguese or French.

The website was inspired by culturally relevant bilingual pre-school cartoons like *Dora the Explorer* or *Maya & Miguel* and aims to offer similarly positive, inspirational and educational content as children grow older.



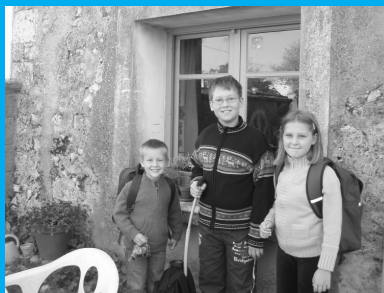
In its launch materials, the company describes HipChicas as:

"a highly differentiated site that is positioned as the alternative to existing tween girl content, currently marred by valueless hyper-consumption and what it calls 'bling-bling morals'. The HipChicas.com multicultural, socially-conscious and fun characters will serve as enriching role models to which tween girls can relate."

Indeed – the site claims to be about much more than bilingual content or cultural relevancy - the HIP in HipChicas stands for Help Improve the Planet. Users and their parents will be introduced to companies and organizations working for social and environmental sustainability, and a percentage of profits will be donated to environmental charities.

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Notes from the OPOL Family



AZERTY or QWERTY?

Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert

With a newly installed wifi system at home the children can use a spare computer downstairs. I hope that having more access to the internet might inspire them to read and write more in English. But we discover that having two languages can sometimes complicate computer literacy. Marc and Nina ask for email accounts, and I register them with the same free email provider as me. But no, they don't want the English-language version, they want the French one. So we sign on with the French language network. We need to create a username. Marc follows the French pattern, where surnames come first, and chooses 'hauwaertmarc', while Nina goes for the other way round 'ninahauwaert'. Secret passwords are the next step. Marc chooses an English word, saying that no French person would guess it. Nina picks her rabbit's birthday. I tap the passwords in and ask them to re-type them. There's a brief glitch as Nina retypes French 'mai' instead of my English 'May'. 'Does it matter?' says bilingual Nina, 'It's the same word.' The computer disagrees with her and says no.

I sit with them as they write their first email, but the instructions in the French email inbox are totally unfamiliar for me, *supprimer*, *brouillon*....the only word I recognize is *poubelle* (trash). I feel out of my depth since it barely resembles my email inbox. We struggle along setting up the address book. Marc dictates an address saying *jeanlucarrobayahoo.fr*, which makes no sense to me and I write Jean Luc Arroba twice until I realize that *arroba* means the @ sign in French. We try to compose a brief message to my dad in England. Then we hit another problem. They use AZERTY keyboards at school, but we have a QWERTY one at home.

Marc and Nina are painfully slow with the QWERTY one, desperately searching for the full-stop,

exclamation and question marks, which have mysteriously 'moved' and shouting, 'Mummy, there's no A on your computer!' Their typing skills are so horribly bad even my spellchecker goes on strike and asks if I want to install a French one. Left to their own devices they prefer phonetic spellings or text abbreviations. My dad nearly got 'How R U? Im OK. Skool gud.' After a frustrating half hour composing an email they tell me that emailing is boring, and I should set up Skype so they can chat to Grandpa via the computer. Even if emails are not for them, they can surf and flick from site to site with speed. I admire them googling sets of keywords in French and English, comfortable and confident in either linguistic zone.

Mummy-talk

Jacques and I were brought up in villages and our childhoods were very simple. You either played in your own garden with your siblings or popped round to play with other kids. You could stay for tea and no-one would bother, and you went home when it was getting late. But thirty years on all that has changed and playing with other kids is timetabled, along with the other after-school activities. You therefore need to 'network' other class mothers and work out what day their children are free. I have had to do a crash course in 'second-language-mummy-talk' to get by.

The French mothers don't know anything about me (they are very curious) and on the first official get-together I have to go through the whole thing in French.... where I am from, where we live now, how many kids we have, which class and teacher, why I put kids in French school, what my husband does and even where we are going for the next holiday. When I have got through all that there is the confidential mummy chat....what do you really think about the teacher and have you heard about so-and-so who had an affair.... After emerging from the home of a French neighbor, who offered me a coffee when I arrived to pick up Gabriel and interrogated me for 40 minutes, I felt like I was 16 again and taking my oral exam in French. I just need a certificate in 'mummy-talk' now!

We are an English/French family with three more-or-less bilingual children (Marc, 12, Nina, 10 & Gabriel, 6). We live in France, and try to stick to the one-parent-one-language approach. For more anecdotes and previous 'Notes from the OPOL Family' go to my blog:

<http://opol-family.blogspot.com/>

LINGOO – the language exchange for children

Anne Goldstein

Lingoo – the language exchange for children, is a project that was conceived and developed by husband and wife Peter and Anne Goldstein and is the realisation of an idea based on our personal experiences of bringing up a bilingual family and living and working, during a ten year period, in London, Milan and then Paris. The project started with the name *Lingoo* and has taken nearly two years of hard work to develop and launch.

Over the years, friends from all over Europe were always asking us for help in finding an exchange family to develop their child's language skills. This became one of the services our family regularly provided to our extended network of friends and associates.



The Goldstein family

A change of career direction, some time on our hands and the desire to start up our own business gave us the opportunity to explore the idea. Anne, who is French, had worked both as a teacher and translator. Peter, who is English, had worked most of his career in professional publishing and spent the last few years working on internet projects. We were convinced that we had the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to launch the project.

The more we looked, the more we were sure that the options for parents seeking a language holiday for their children were still quite traditional and institutionalised. We couldn't find any other services that were utilising all of the benefits of the internet and giving some real choice back to parents seeking a more personalised solution. Our first job was to carefully explore the current options for families seeking to improve their child's language learning and confidence by staying with a foreign speaking family and practicing their language in the country where it is spoken. So what are the options?

Town Twinning

The benefits of a partnership between two towns are vast; a well organised town

twinning involves the whole community: clubs, organisations, individuals and families alike. Primarily they break down barriers of fear and cultural misunderstanding to bring a better appreciation of respective cultures. Children experience a foreign language and culture without leaving the familiarity of a group they feel comfortable with.

School Linking and Exchanges

These have a positive impact and they don't have to cost the earth. They rely on good will from parents who want to give their children a chance to experience a different way of learning. But schools in the UK, one of our key markets, were facing a new challenge. Beginning in October 2008 school foreign exchanges have been disrupted by new government regulations that demand that everyone, including parents, who come into contact with under 16s must register with the government's new *Independent Safeguarding Authority* (ISA). Exchanges are being screened more closely than ever before and this increase of red tape might put parents off rather than reassure them. It might prove more difficult, in the future, for teachers to find families willing to volunteer. The new regulations will certainly increase their paperwork load.

Home-Stay and Paid-Stay Holidays

Living with a new family for a little while often has a number of advantages. It teaches children to accept differences and develop coping abilities. From a linguistic point of view when a child is immersed in a country's language and culture, and they practice a language every day, they often develop that language skill more rapidly than if in the classroom.

Summer Camps

Associating outdoor activities, learning a language and summer holidays has been a long tradition. The advantage being is that children have a supervised programme. Unfortunately, the benefits in language learning are not optimised as the impetus is firmly focused on activities; children spend a lot of their time together which limits their interaction with people outside the camps.

Private Language Schools

There is an array of privately own companies offering tailor-made courses, used to reinforce and consolidate work done at school, often a short-term answer to a punctual problem as a private tutor can be a costly solution. Well structured, tailor-made, one-to-one programmes will

help confused children to make sense of material taught in the classroom and give them a confidence boost prior to exams.

Our research confirmed that going through an agent to organise personal introductions between families has been the pattern for a very long time. Indeed there were not any alternatives on offer, and unless you knew a friendly expatriate who was willing to put you in touch with a family, the only way was to use an agency. By delegating the organisation process, parents saved time, but employing a third party came at a cost, which is often very high. We also found that quite a few of these organisations were often a little uncaring in how they match up children and families, and some were obviously just in a matching game and showed little interest in how child and family would mix during their stay.

The more we looked, the more we were convinced that the options for parents seeking a language holiday for their children were still quite traditional and institutionalised.

It became clear to us that nothing much had changed, even though it's been 15 years since the internet became a mass medium and the way we communicate has changed beyond recognition. Thus our project to utilise the power of the internet within a traditional service started to take shape.

We now use it to network, to create new communities of like-minded people and it is rapidly becoming our new social arena. Due to the recent rise of social sites, the Internet is changing how language exchanges between families are organised. Going through an agency or traditional structure is no longer compulsory and families may now take a more direct approach. The creation of a community of like-minded people who wish to improve the language skills of their children through exchanges is now a reality.

The process has proven to be successful, with several weighty advantages:

- It gives control back to parents who can drive the process of choosing the ideal family.

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INTERVIEW with an international family - The Roybins



Family Roybin

Alexandre, who was born in Belgium, is 7 1/2 years old and Nicolas, born in Germany, is 6 years old. Their mother is Finnish and uses her mother tongue to talk to them, and they have a French father. French is spoken at home when the whole family is together. Both boys went to Kindergarten in Germany for several years where they learnt German. This was, at the time, the strongest language for the older son Alexandre, and he even reached the fluency level of a native German child.

In the middle of 2007, the family moved from Germany to Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. Both Alexandre and Nicolas attend the French School of Amsterdam, where almost all courses take place in French. They communicate with their (school) friends in French, even if most of them have a multicultural background. Both children are learning Dutch at school (a couple of hours per week) and Alexandre is learning English too. They also come into contact with the Dutch language during sporting activities like swimming and football.

How well do the boys speak French, Finnish, Dutch, German?

They both speak French at the level of a French child living in France, and they speak fluent Finnish but it's obvious to hear that they aren't native Finnish speakers as they speak Finnish with a French accent. They can no longer speak German, although some words come back to them when they hear the language. They have a very basic knowledge of spoken Dutch, limited to a couple of words. But they understand much more than they can speak. In their sporting activities, they get along by imitating other children.

Which is the strongest language for Alexandre, and for Nicolas?

French is by far the strongest language for both Alexandre and Nicolas, which is mainly a result of their schooling, and the

fact that French is the language spoken in the household.

How quickly did the boys' German language 'disappear'?

That's hard to say precisely, but during a trip to Germany only a few months after having moved, we could already notice that their ability to speak German had disappeared. During that trip to Germany, Alexandre and Nicolas spent a day in the same Kindergarten they used to attend. We were told by the teachers that they did not speak any German during that day.

Why do you think the boys have not learned much Dutch?

It's probably because they don't feel the need to learn it while all their friends are French speakers. They spend most of the day either in a French or Finnish speaking environment.

What languages do they read and write in?

Alexandre can read and write in French and read in Finnish. Learning to read and write in Finnish is relatively easy as Finnish is a phonetic language. Nicolas has not yet learnt writing and reading at school but he can already read some French by copying what his older brother is doing.

What action have you taken as parents to encourage the boys' multilingualism?

Even though both of us shared French as a language, it was decided right from the birth of our first child that we would always talk to the children in our own language. We read a lot of stories to them, either in French or in Finnish, and we have many films in both languages. We visit both Finland and France several times a year and both sets of grandparents visit us at least a couple of times a year. To visit Finland and to have the Finnish grandparents come and stay is particularly important to give them useful *language baths*, since Finnish is not their school language and therefore they don't hear it or have a chance to use it as much as French. Learning fluent Dutch has not been an issue, as we knew from the start that we will spend a limited amount of time here. The same goes for German. At the moment they have to deal with three languages, four for Alexandre who started learning English at school this year, which we think is enough for the time being.

Does the multilingualism cause any problems or challenges?

No it doesn't, even though we have had to accept some 'disadvantages' - for instance

the fact that they could have a bit of delay in learning one or other of their two languages. Alexandre started in the German Kindergarten at the age of two, just when he was starting to speak Finnish and French. Dealing with different languages became easier for him when he started in the French school at around the age of five. We have both seen bilingualism as a unique chance for them to bring open-mindedness, and the possibility to learn new languages more quickly in the future.

What kind of advice would you give to parents who have the same opportunity to bring their children up multilingually?

Raise your children in your mother tongue and don't give up, even if you notice that they reject it or never use it. You give them



Nicolas and Alexandre

the chance to keep in touch with their roots, their culture, and their families in the future. The language and what it implies is one of the strongest assets of a culture.

However, one of the parents may have to accept the fact that one of the two languages will become the stronger one. For us, it was important that our boys start in the French schooling system as we will probably continue to move from one country to another, and there are French schools all over the world. It is only natural that French becomes the dominant language for them, but as a mother, it does not bother me at all. At home, both French and Finnish traditions are respected and that seems to work fine.

What motivated you as parents to follow this path?

In our opinion, it is important for a child's identity that both parents speak their own language. As a mother, I don't expect Alexandre and Nicolas to speak perfect Finnish. The most important thing is that they get on with that language, and understand it while visiting our relatives in Finland.

Queries



BILINGUAL MONTESSORI PROGRAMMES

Dear Mike Rosanova

I just came across your profile under the Italian Language meetup groups, and I noticed you founded a bilingual Montessori school! Is that Italian-English bilingual? If so, I would be very interested in learning more about it. My daughter is being raised Italian-English bilingual and I am a big fan of Montessori.

Thanks!

We did have an Italian-English program for three years. I was chief cook and bottle washer in those days, including teaching. I did my Montessori certification specifically for that program. Alas and alack, the program never prospered for lack of interest. The Italian-American moms who were the most obvious target audience were mostly stay-at-home moms who preferred an occasional morning program rather than working moms who needed consistent day-to-day coverage. Consistent day-to-day participation is something which translates into predictability for the child and a solid basis for understanding the well-structured Montessori environment and the target-language being used there. The low level of commitment led not only to financial strains for the school, but to trivial results with the children. We had remarkably better results with Japanese where nearly every child was with us on a day-care schedule, even though the obstacles to acquiring Japanese are much greater than the challenges in acquiring Italian.

If I were you, I'd sign my child up for any competent, that is, any fully accredited Montessori program using something other

than English as the language of instruction. My own two children I placed respectively in French and Japanese rather than Spanish because Spanish and Italian are so closely related that it's easy to settle for a mish-mash inter-lingua.

At home I spoke only Italian with them when they were small. I read to them constantly, cooked with them, used Italian on walks to the park and in every other way. When they were infants, I changed their diapers in Italian, telling them what I was doing; and I sang to them in Italian in the rocking chair, rocking them to sleep. All the while, however, I knew full well that I was just dad, just another adult; I understood that my kids needed other children and they needed an environment that mediated meaningful verbal and non-verbal exchanges between my kids and other kids. In other words, I knew that they needed Montessori in something other than English.

If you can't find the right Italian-language environment, it's wiser to pick a competent Montessori environment where your child can become bilingual in English and just about anything else. It doesn't matter what. A child who succeeds in becoming functionally bilingual early in life will have vastly greater odds of acquiring Italian later in childhood or adolescence than a child who remains monolingual throughout early childhood.

In the twenty years that I ran our school, I saw this again and again. Well educated parents from Poland, China and elsewhere would place their children in programs offered in a third language, knowing perfectly well that the program would not directly teach Polish, Chinese or whatever other language they were really after. They were doing what ultimately would most benefit their children, and give their children the best chance of eventual success in the language they really cared about.

If your child becomes functionally bilingual in Japanese and English before the age of 6, he will be vastly more likely to speak Italian at some point in the future. The critical question isn't "Italian vs. Swahili"; the critical question is "monolingual during early childhood vs. functionally bilingual early in life".

This isn't just my prejudice or, as many people who heard me in the old days thought, the ravings of a salesman. The neurological research clearly demonstrates that the Broca's area in the frontal cortex and the Wernicke's area in the temporal cortex are both radically different in the brains of early childhood bilinguals and in the brains of those who

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Tell me how you talk/ Raconte moi ta langue

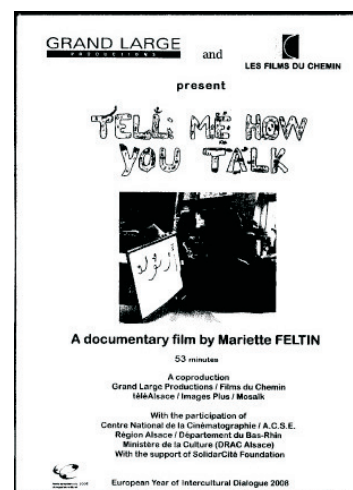
A Documentary film (with English subtitles) by Mariette Feltin

53 minutes, European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008

In a small village in Alsace, two teachers invite the parents of their pupils to come on Saturday mornings to present their languages and cultures.

In the Education Department of the University of Strasbourg (IUMF of Alsace) two researchers challenge the reluctance of schools to open up to the linguistics and cultural diversity of their pupils and in particular those who speak migrant languages. The film shows one of them relaying the school project to her students, encouraging them to value and support multilingualism in their classroom.

The film shows how children, parents, teachers, students and researchers can contribute to a radical change of attitude. It tells the story of all these people and how they relate to their languages.



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humour



Bilingualism is important - but it doesn't have to be serious. Send us your anecdotes, language mix-ups and funny sayings - we love to hear about the lighter side of multicultural living - info@multilingual-matters.com

Bilingual Montessori...

Continued from page six

somehow manage to become bilingual later in life. This is the reason why children who acquire bilingual abilities of a high level early in life lack a foreign accent and also face far fewer challenges with grammar.

So if you treasure the gift of a second language for your child, consider a third, but only in a well structured, fully accredited Montessori environment with trained and experienced Montessori teachers (at least three to five years of experience) who are native speakers of the target language. Do not choose a program full of fantasy play and whimsical curriculum choices: at the age of three or four your child is a concrete thinker who depends on predictability to understand; whimsical fantasy programs may look like fun, but they are intensely abstract and absolutely the opposite of what your child needs for language acquisition, to say nothing about independence and peer-interaction skills, that is, social and emotional savvy.

Sorry for carrying on; but in twenty years of observing, thinking and writing in a specialty area, a person gains some sense of what tends to work.

Mike Rosanova

LOOKING FOR BI-/MULTILINGUAL FAMILIES

I am a doctoral student in Bilingual Education at New York University and the mother of two multilingual children. As many parents raising multilingual children, I am concerned about their language development and hope that they will become fluent in all their languages. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

This concern led me to the topic of my dissertation research. In this study, I am interested in finding out some of the reasons why some children speak their parents' languages fluently, while others only understand them.

I am looking for participants to fill out an online questionnaire about their family's environment, language use, and social networks. The only requirements for participation is that your family decided to raise your children using more than one language at home and that at least one of them is between 3 and 5 years old.

Please email: ssg273@nyu.edu for more information.

Lingoo...

Continued from page four

- Once the two families are in contact they can quickly establish that both have similar life-style values.
- Children and parents can discuss directly their preferences such as diet, location, and perhaps religious considerations.
- Through this dialogue mutual trust is established before a final decision is taken.
- Because the parents organise the trip themselves it is much more economical. Organised structures often make a 50% mark up on these types of holidays.
- If at the end of the process things don't work out, then parents can easily go back to search within the community again.

Just like house exchange, the idea of organising your child's language holiday directly with another family will appeal to some parents and not to others. However for those ready to take the plunge the sense of personal control of knowing exactly where and with whom their child is going to stay, is paramount.

LINGOO

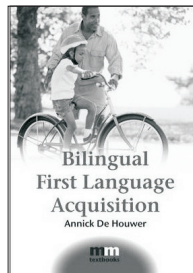
Lingoo is a community website, dedicated to improving language learning for school children, primarily through language exchange holidays or by paying to stay with a host family. Initially focusing on French and English, the site will soon extend to include Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and German.

Lingoo allows parents to get in contact with like-minded families who have children of the same age with the same interests and values. Families meet, get to know each other and are then able to organise language exchange holidays for their children directly without the need for an expensive agent. The site is secure and all of our families have followed a registration process with a clear protocol governing identification and security.

Lingoo also appeals to families who are interested in welcoming students from abroad into their homes as paying guests. By being a host family through *Lingoo*, you will be able to select a child from a like-minded family abroad and get to know them before their visit. Your role will be to help them to understand about your culture, in the process, you and your family will gain greater knowledge about theirs. An enjoyable activity that fits perfectly with family life.

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HipChicas...

Continued from page three

In the fickle world of online technology, time will tell whether HipChicas will succeed in its mission to provide children with a safe, relevant and inspirational place to interact online. With an advisory board that includes Emmy-Award winning animation producer Sherry Gunther alongside former HBO President and Time-Warner Cable COO John K. Billock, TriBeCa Film Festival Founder and New York Times' best selling children's book author Craig Hatkoff, City University of New York's Borough of Manhattan Community College President Dr. Antonio Perez, as well as former World Bank Advisor on Women's Micro Loans Maria Sanchez-Smith – it seems like the chances are good that HipChicas will be a success on all fronts.

Sami Grover

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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Russian speaking families in the West Midlands, UK

A Russian/English family with a little boy (2.5 years old) would like to meet other Russian speaking families with young children that live in the West Midlands, preferably in the Birmingham/Worcester area. We live in Bromsgrove and speak mainly Russian at home. We would be happy to organise a Russian playgroup if there were other families that would be interested in joining.

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