

Teaching Japanese-English Bilingual Children to Read English at Home

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Introduction

This paper may be of interest to the members of several sectors of the university community in Japan, those who are interested in the teaching of reading, teachers whose families regularly use Japanese and another language at home, and all those interested in bilingualism.

This paper is a general introduction to the topic of teaching bilingual children, who attend Japanese public schools, to read in English at home. The discussion of the development of biliteracy in this situation has barely begun. This article does not present an objective review of the literature in this field, there is not much, nor does it describe new research, researching what children do at home is no easy matter. It is a position paper which expresses the writer's beliefs which are based on years of reading about teaching children to read and years of doing it. It will likely be a thought provoking read and perhaps parents will find some of the ideas useful and encouraging.

Abstract

Parents of young bilingual children who attend Japanese primary schools sometimes find it difficult to help their children learn to read the minority language, English, at home. Children whose early bilingual development in the spoken medium occurred more or less simultaneously, successfully, and within the usual time frame for monolingual development do not always learn to read in English in comparable fashion or with the same ease. There may be a period for some children in which the ability to read independently in Japanese, the majority language, far outstrips English reading proficiency. In frustration over their children's apparent failure to become biliterate, parents sometimes cause their children to feel the failure very personally and thus create a serious problem, debilitating reading anxiety, where perhaps none previously existed. This problem will likely be aggravated if parents use teaching methods which do not take full advantage of their children's existing language resources, and are not informed by lessons learned from the children's development of speaking abilities in two languages.

Biliteracy

George Saunders, in his practical and parent-friendly book *Bilingual Children: From Birth to Teens* (1989), expresses the concerns about the development of biliteracy which many parents feel as their bilingual children start their school careers: a balance in abilities and interests in two languages may not be maintained as children learn to read and write the school language with steadily increasing proficiency.

Some parents may resign themselves to the apparently inevitable dominance of the majority language and at home use of the minority language may slip into a period of benevolent neglect; other parents may try to maintain use of the minority language and begin a reading programme in an attempt to catch up and re-establish an approximate balance in the two languages. While the latter response may seem preferable to doing nothing, it is important to consider whether struggling to achieve a balance in skills for young children who were previously considered satisfactorily bilingual by their families is a reasonable target and what sort of reading instruction is best suited to at home support of beginning minority language readers.

Saunders believes it is important psychologically for bilingual children to understand early that both their languages can be used for all functions in the world outside their own family. If Saunders is right, it is very important that young bilingual children be introduced to the wonders of the outside world, especially their other home country, through a variety of experiences with various styles of the written language. Children should not be encouraged to assume that the minority language exists mainly as a means of communication

in their own families and only importantly as the spoken word. And so, rather than a balance of proficiencies, parents might do better to encourage a balance of awareness of the uses of the two languages. Children should be encouraged to assume written and spoken forms of both languages will play useful roles in their lives; they should expect that they will be able communicators; and of course, they should have the desire to communicate in both their languages. Encouraging balances in assumptions, expectations, and attitudes will likely serve the long term interests of two language families better than struggling with youngsters to establish equivalent skills in all areas of both languages.

Saunders thinks it is especially important for children to be biliterate when most of the communication in one of the languages is with just one parent. In other words if the minority language is used very little outside the family, as it is for most bilingual families in Japan, reading and writing with young children is the most efficient and most interesting way to make their minority language in all its applications come alive. Furthermore, reading and writing together can help create a close relationship with the parent who represents the minority culture by providing a lot of interesting and fun things to talk about.

Harding and Riley in their book, *The Bilingual Family* (1986), which has become standard recommended reading for parents raising bilingual children, agree that biliteracy is an important means of maintaining the strength of the minority language, in both linguistic and cultural senses, as the majority language plays an increasingly dominant role in a child's life.

It is important to keep in mind that these arguments for the early development of biliteracy with bilingual children are not necessarily proposals for teaching children to read in two languages at the same time. However, the arguments do have pedagogical implications: reading the minority language should have wide-ranging applications; it should enhance the relationship between the child and the parent-teacher; it should expand cultural awareness; and most importantly, the child should feel successful because a problematic sense of failure may have unfortunate linguistic and cultural consequences which could negatively shape the child's own identity as a member of a bilingual family.

The general impression given in much of the literature on bilingualism is that biliteracy can be achieved more or less naturally and without tears by children who have been raised speaking two languages (Andersson,1981; Skutnabb-Kangas,1981;Harding and Riley,1986;Saunders,1989;Williams and Snipper, 1990). However true this may be in the cases reported, the languages referred to are not usually English and Japanese and naturally does not mean effortlessly. Furthermore, Appel and Muksken (1987) say many of the conclusions about biliteracy are based on a few subjective anecdotal reports. There is a great deal we have yet to discover about the development of biliteracy in bilingual children.

There are few detailed reliable accounts of the simultaneous achievement of biliteracy by children who learned to speak their two languages more or less simultaneously. Accounts of children who learned a second language after the first was established (successive bilingualism) indicate strong correlations between reading proficiencies in their two languages according to Cummins (1991) in his comprehensive review of the research. Cummins reports that the transfer of reading skills from the first to the second language seems to depend to some extent on the similarity of the writing systems and although there is a transfer of reading skills from Japanese to English for Japanese native-speaking children studying in local schools abroad the transfer is less than is usual when the writing systems are similar. However, there is general agreement that literate students learn to read their second language more easily than children who speak but do not read their first language (Williams and Snipper,1990; Mills and Mills,1993; Mayor,1994).

Although there is no indication in the literature that bilingual children have more trouble becoming biliterate than monolingual children have learning to read, particularly if they are literate in one language before they start to learn to read their second language, in the case of Japanese-English bilinguals the difference in the writing systems may have to be taken into account when reading instruction is planned. Some children may learn to read both languages at about the same time but there is probably no cause for parents to panic if reading proficiency in each language appears to be developing differently, especially if the development seems to occur naturally.

Japanese First, English Second

There are several reasons some bilingual children in Japan may quite naturally learn to read in English later than they learn to read in Japanese. Children do not have as many experiences which promote literacy in the minority language. Children do not see many signs in English on the neighbourhood streets, on food packages in the kitchen, in titles on television programs, or on the labels on their belongings. After children start kindergarten they become more aware that almost all of the helpful signs are in Japanese. Children not only have fewer chances to get used to written English words occurring repeatedly and usefully around them but they may come to understand that English is a language with a less useful written form. Even when parents try hard to provide various natural and

enjoyable early English reading and writing experiences, children may find it efficient and logical to read first in the language which appears to have the greatest utility in the wider world, the majority language.

Children often reply to any demanding parental request with the plaintive query, " Why? Why do I have to? " Children need to understand why they have to do things that are initially less pleasant than familiar, readily available alternatives. Parents need to convince their children that the use of two languages is a logical, necessary, and attractive part of family life. Refusal to speak the minority language, at least temporarily, is not unusual (Harding and Riley,1986; Arnberg,1987) and it would not be surprising if some children felt the same way about reading especially since by the time they are asked to read children enjoy some control over their own lives.

If a perfectly adequate means of communication, written Japanese, is already available children may wonder why it should be necessary to add another which seems to have fewer applications. Children can refuse to read, or rather choose not to read on the quiet, without the same sorts of confrontations and communication breakdowns that accompany refusals to speak the minority language. If written language does not play a direct, key role in parent-child communication refusal to read causes few problems. And so, minority language reading may be easily postponed. Unfortunately though, if reading is put off too long the biliterate potential can be diminished: it could be given up as a lost cause, assigned in the teen years to second language reading status, or a high pressure, catch-up reading campaign may be put together in a panic.

In any case, Saville and Troike (1971) believe it may be a good idea to first establish literacy in the dominant language, the language most familiar to the child, which for many children will be the majority language. Mayor (1994) thinks initial literacy is best acquired by choosing to teach first the language with the closest sound-letter correspondence. She thinks it is fortunate if the language with the most accessible script is also the dominant language. Thus, for many Japanese-English bilinguals in Japan a sensible choice might be to learn to read Japanese before English.

Many parents teach their children to read hiragana first because it seems much easier than teaching their children to read in English. And except for the children who seem to teach themselves to read English, it is true. The Japanese phonetic hiragana writing system allows more children at younger ages to develop and to demonstrate both reading and writing abilities at target-like levels. There is a consistent correspondence between the written symbols on a page and the sounds of the spoken language as the words are read aloud. It is a relatively easy matter for connections to be made between the spoken language the child is familiar with and written script, a practice which is believed to be very effective in reading instruction (Britton,1993; Meek,1992; Wells and Chang-Wells,1992). The child can enjoy a sense of control over the written script and from the earliest stages engage successfully in reading and writing experiments. These opportunities may foster the development of a range of reading strategies (Goodman and Burke,1980; Weaver, 1988). Although it is not certain that these theories about the development of English literacy apply to Japanese reading development perhaps they offer some insight. By the time youngsters start to deal with Kanji at school the ideographic characters appear in a context of familiar hiragana which allows various reading strategies to be used to focus attention on the meaning of whole texts and thus rote memorization writing practice for Kanji is nicely balanced and reinforced. If English words are learned by memorizing word lists it does not help most children become good readers.

The opportunity for early development of Japanese reading may be an advantage for some children. Children may be ready to begin to read independently in English after their Japanese reading proficiency has been established to the point where the reader no longer pays attention to the written symbols unit by unit but is able to attend to the meaning of the text and has developed a set of reading strategies which could help the child make sense of English texts as well. English reading instruction could then emphasize reading for meaning rather than phonics and word recognition from the beginning.

If children learn to read English and Japanese at the same time, or they are otherwise encouraged to rely on their initial Japanese reading experiences, some children may expect, and be expected to, depend heavily on a comparatively inadequate strategy for reading English, sounding out words by learning sound-letter correspondences. Frank Smith (1985:160) presents a convincing and detailed argument that English phonics is " a cumbersome and unreliable system for any child but especially for children finding it hard to make sense of reading." Ken Goodman (1993) argues that even though phonics is an intrinsic part of reading English, teaching sound-letter relationships is not a good method of teaching beginning readers. English phonics problems for fluent Japanese readers could interfere with the transfer of higher level reading skills and positive attitudes about reading.

Children who become anxious because of early failures may shut out later attempts to teach them to read. Even if the proponents of teaching phonics are right and beginning readers do need a lot of explicit instruction in the correspondences between sounds and written English symbols, the contrasts with written Japanese may seem overwhelming to some bilingual children.

The method, as well as the timing, of teaching Japanese-English bilingual children to read English must be considered carefully.

Approaches to Reading Instruction

The educators who urge teachers to support beginning readers in their efforts to make sense of written language in whole authentic texts are known as Whole Language advocates. The other camp is called Phonics First or Reading Skills. The long bitter debate between Whole Language and Reading Skills proponents over English first language reading instruction could make parents of bilingual children in Japan anxious about teaching at home, particularly since the teaching of phonics is at the center of the controversy. Phonics first, basal reader, and reading skill programmes appear to be convenient, clearly structured packages which can bring school system validity into home instruction. But read Smith (1985), Weaver (1988), and Goodman (1993) for examples of the best arguments for the whole language case. Chall (1983) and Beard (1993) contain persuasive discussions which support phonics and skills-centered reading schemes. Each side, not surprisingly, is able to cite supporting research and explain how the other side's research is flawed.

Constance Weaver (1988) in her book, *Reading Process and Practice*, explains the whole language philosophy of teaching reading. Weaver believes if children listen to and see natural written language that makes sense in their own worlds of experiences, knowledge, and feelings they will be able to formulate hypotheses about the language and learn without direct instruction about the bits and pieces. H. H. Stern (1983: 183) describes the impossibility of reconstructing the perfection of language from analysed bits as the "humpty-dumpty effect." Whole language teachers are convinced that it is essential to keep language whole whether it is written or spoken so that the complexities of language processing can operate in concert. Language is thought to be a natural whole which becomes something less and different if taken apart.

The whole language approach to reading instruction aims to involve children deeply and often in reading and writing activities from the earliest stages. Creativity takes priority over correctness. Reading and writing should be useful, meaningful, fun, and natural parts of events that occur in a child's life. Weaver (1988:44) says, "children are expected to learn to read and write as they learned to talk—gradually, naturally, with a minimum of direct instruction, and with encouragement rather than the discouragement of constant corrections."

The reading teachers who disagree with whole language assumptions about the reading process believe as Oakhill (1993:72) says, "Unfortunately, the majority of children don't just pick up the rules of written language. They need explicit and persistent help if they are to crack the code which, in an alphabetic system, relates letters or small groups of letters to the sounds of spoken language."

Phonics and the associated skills methods (e.g. sight word learning, Dr. Seuss-type pattern reading, the use of basal readers as the main text, linguistic analysis and language skills exercises) focus the reader's attention on pronouncing, spelling, memorizing, and using words in vocabulary and grammar skill-building exercises presented in isolation or in graded texts with controls for vocabulary and grammatical structures. The skills approaches assume there are prerequisites which must be learned before children are ready to read in order to learn other things.

Heilman, Blair and Rupley (1986:112) explain, "Learning to read is an extension of language skills that the child has already developed. Yet reading calls for several skills and concepts that are different from those previously learned, such as reading left to right; understanding the concepts of word, letter, etc.; visual discrimination of letters and word forms; and auditory discrimination of speech sounds within words. Failure to make adequate progress in these areas can slow or disrupt the developmental process of reading."

Ken Goodman (1993), a leader in reading research, might agree that learning to read is an extension of already existing language skills but he says that it is important to understand that written language is learned in the same way spoken language is learned. Goodman says children "learn language in the context of its use... They're very good at learning language when it's in authentic, meaningful context. They're not very good at learning abstractions out of context" (1993: 109).

On both sides of the debate there is virtually unanimous agreement that reading comprehension skills do not necessarily follow the acquisition of decoding skills (e.g. Weaver, 1988; Chall, 1983; Oakhill, 1993; Heilman, Blair and Rupley 1986). Whatever teaching method parents use at home they must be able to accurately, continuously assess both the learning process and their children's feelings in order to respond appropriately. This means that parents must be aware of a variety of techniques if they hope to help children who are having difficulties understanding written texts. But, a single approach or philosophy which could serve as a

framework for experimentation with various techniques would certainly help parents persevere.

Some aspects of the reading debate involve political conflicts, rivalry between philosophically opposed education cultures, and the logistics and dynamics of mass education and big classes. The only important question for parents teaching their own children at home is whether one approach is better for their family than another at helping their own children learn to read, particularly children who seem to need a lot of support. And in this case, is one approach better suited than others for bilingual children learning to read English at home while attending Japanese primary schools?

An effective approach would have to add to good family life style rather than add extra burdens; it would have to take into account probable earlier literacy in Japanese; and it would have to make connections with spoken communication in the family and the ways it developed. The Whole Language philosophy would satisfy these needs and, in all likelihood, family environments which have helped children speak two languages happily probably are characterized by whole language-like practices.

A Biliterate Environment

Reading instruction needs a literate, in the case of two languages-biliterate,environment in which to flourish. Families who have successfully nurtured bilingualism in their homes may find that the attitudes, behaviour, and systems which promoted talk in two languages will help their children become good readers. David Crystal (1986) explains that a programme of reading instruction which does not take into account previous language learning may confuse many children. It can be like a familiar game being played in a new place with an inexplicable change in rules which makes previously skillful players inept.

Some of the characteristics of a literate environment which probably resemble the features of family life style that help children become speakers of two languages include: a close relationship between spoken and written language activities and the child's world, family interest in reading both languages, the same sort of language separation which the family is accustomed to for speaking, lots of family-friendly language activities, plenty of time spent reading together in both languages with no attention drawn to any differences in the child's performances, and special times set aside for family communication.

Bilingual families are also accustomed to using the two languages in varying proportions according to family needs, the common sense dictates of the situation, and their long range goals. They are accustomed to differences in the development of the two spoken languages: differences in various aspects of speaking and listening proficiencies, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and attitudes about language use. Parents come to realize that each child develops in unique ways. They know the pace of development is not constant and that persistence and patience are virtues. Parents learn not to make demands that the child's performance in the minority language mirror the use of the majority language. These experiences with the learning of the spoken language will help parents raise good readers.

Many families who are raising their children bilingually do not have to create a literate environment especially for reading instruction. The literate environment is already in place, having gradually become a natural part of family life since picture book reading became a regular bedtime feature, names were scrawled on Christmas cards, messages exchanged via the family notice board, and advertisements written about the family theatrical troupe's performance of Little Red Riding Hood.

Reading good stories aloud is the central activity in the literate environment. The value of reading aloud to children is universally acclaimed (Maguire, 1985; Trelease, 1984; Heath, 1983). Gordon Wells (1986) in an extensive long-term research project found that reading aloud to pre-school children was the most important literacy experience and that being read aloud to often in the pre-school years was a good predictor of children's language skills, study skills, and overall academic achievement in their final year of primary school.

Reading aloud need not be reserved for bedtime nor limited to early childhood; reading aloud can be a feature of family mealtimes and any other family get together even when the children are adolescents. The best times to read both languages together are when the reading partners are able to bring the stories to life and into the family's life by talking about the stories. This is the bridge between early spoken family communication and the world of written language.

Bruner (1994) believes that children learn to talk because their parents speak to them in ways which allow, and more importantly encourage, the extension of current language resources into new contexts. Other educators are convinced that Bruner is right and that parents can use their teaching talk to show children how to interact with written texts.

Thus, parents would nurture the development of biliteracy the same way they support the use of two spoken languages: by collaborating with their children in a learning process which brings about, and then as Britton (1993) explains, continuously extends the whole family's linguistic and cultural development. Vgotsky (1994) warns that the purpose of the parent-child collaboration is not to test what the child already knows, nor to try to impose approximations of adult abilities, but to awaken and then nurture the child's own processes of growth. Wells and Chang-Wells (1992: 80) describe teaching as behaviour that intends "to facilitate the active construction of knowledge by the learner."

A good approach to teaching reading at home depends on good two-way communication. The primary means of the collaborative development of literacy is talk. Britton (1993:305) describes the talk that allows children to learn how to talk interactively the "pre-history of the written word." Britton compares the ideal relationship between a reader and the writer of a story to the bonds between parents and children as they cooperate in language learning.

Talk about texts is an important element in learning to read (Weaver, 1988; Stephens, 1990; Wells and Chang-Wells, 1992). Talk about texts should encourage abstract thinking which enables children to search for possible meanings by testing hypotheses, by making comparisons with other experiences, by questioning the writer's intentions and by predicting outcomes. The parent should foster explorations rather than query the obvious and respect the child's own ideas. This talk with children is all about thinking. Mutual understanding depends on explicitness, logic, and respect for each other's views which means parents need to do a lot of very careful listening. Three studies of bilingual children in remedial reading programmes will make it clear how important it is to talk to and to listen to children.

Worried About Reading

The summaries of observations made during reading tutorials conducted by this writer for three bilingual children who were having problems reading English describe interesting examples of some of the causes and manifestations of reading anxiety. These three cases, considered together, provide some food for thought because the children, Ken and Lisa and Yuji (pseudonyms), learned to read in very different ways; their reading difficulties reveal strengths and shortcomings of their learning experiences; and the most important assumptions about their reading abilities made by the children and their parents were not based on good family communication. These three children are representative of certain other bilingual children who were tutored by this writer: their families were unhappy with the children's ability to read the minority language; the children were so worried about reading English their chances of becoming good readers had been placed in jeopardy; but the children were usually able to become better English readers with their parents' support.

Ken-Phonics Is Not Enough

Ken, age 7.4 in second grade at a Japanese primary school, spoke mainly English, the first language of his mother, at home. Ken's mother brought him for remedial reading lessons because she was worried that Ken was going to be put in ESL classes in an international school when the family moved to Manila in a year's time. Ken's spoken language skills were excellent but she had not begun to seriously try to teach him to read English until she bought a phonics learn to read programme when he was about age 6.6. She was satisfied with his Japanese reading ability and everyday Ken read library books. His English reading ability seemed very poor in comparison.

During the first several tutorial sessions Ken's mother found it very difficult to remain an observer and to follow the suggestions of the tutor. She supplied her son with answers whenever he hesitated, she urged him to go ahead at a steady pace, she reacted negatively to the boy's occasional questions as well as to obvious errors, and sometimes she interfered with the tutor's efforts to talk to Ken by saying something of this nature: "He should know that. He knows it in Japanese." She had such rigid expectations of what her son should be able to do that she wasn't able to simply let Ken read so she could figure what he could do, what he couldn't do, and then what she could do to support his English reading development.

Ken was given a variety of opportunities in the tutorials to read stories of different types and different levels of difficulty. After listening to a story Ken could demonstrate that he had understood it but after reading a passage aloud without picture cues he could not begin to retell the story satisfactorily. His answers to questions showed he had a very sketchy understanding of what he had read. However, part of the problem at this stage could have been Ken's recent reluctance to speak English. His mother believed the reading problems were the cause of that setback.

A typical running record of Ken reading a basal reader from his home reading course in the first month of his twice a week hourly sessions showed that he was misreading many words: his error rate was 1:3 ; his self correction rate was 1:4. (ie. one word corrected for every four words misread.)

The low accuracy rate accounted for Ken's poor understanding of the meaning of the whole text. In fact, his self corrections were not content words which conveyed the unique meaning of the story but very high frequency words which he had likely stumbled over because there was little sense in his oral reading. When he corrected himself he re-read one word; he never went back in the text to repeat a sentence or even the word or two before the error. He asked the tutor for help only with a few unusually long words. His mistakes did not fit in with the meaning of the text and they rarely made grammatical sense.

His performance was not so surprising. Ken was still at the early stage of formal reading instruction and it is usual for children to progress in different ability areas at different rates at Ken's age. Many children Ken's age are not ready to learn about reading without instruction because they are still in the process of developing the range of reading strategies they need to extend their reading skills just by reading. Ken and his mother made comparisons with Ken's Japanese reading skills and with his ability to speak both languages and incorrectly concluded that he was hopelessly behind in his English reading.

Careful analysis of Ken's reading of texts and a set of other tests revealed that there were plenty of reasons to be optimistic about his future as a reader. Ken had learned a lot about reading and the sounds of letters from the phonics lessons. That is how he was able to read aloud. He was very good at getting the sound of the first letter of words correct and very often the last letter. He knew the consonant sounds but he had trouble with vowels in the middle of words and he had more trouble putting the sounds together to make words, even those which were in his spoken vocabulary. Ken's errors were often quite close to the correct word. For example, he might say " kind" with a short i sound instead of a sound like the name of the letter or "bit" for bite.

His word by word readings did not allow the meaning of the text to shape his reading. The things Ken had learned about reading were not untrue, nor was his knowledge useless. However, it was not enough and it did not include the most important things about reading. Ken had no idea how to search for meaning, as he was doing with his Japanese texts, and sadly, in English Ken was getting no sense of the wholeness of the language he was reading.

Even though he did not monitor his reading for meaning there was a lot of other evidence he understood many written language concepts. He could identify all the letters of the alphabet and he knew the sound equivalents in isolation. He could identify words and sentences and he knew direction, capitalization, and most punctuation conventions. He could read about two-thirds of the words in a text correctly. He corrected some errors himself. He could read some of his errors correctly on word lists, especially commonly occurring words.

A further indication that Ken could extract a lot of visual information from the text was his written vocabulary and ability to write a story. For example, after listening to a story Ken wrote, " Glffo vanishing beco He was skade daive and Glfford was fried The Davy so Glffod Gren ears, Gren eyes Gern tale. " (The Griffle vanished because he was scared. Davy and the Griffle were friends. Then Davy saw the Griffle's green ears, green eyes and green tail.) This composition shows so much learning accomplished as well as learning in progress but it seems pathetic if compared unsympathetically with Ken's Japanese writing.

The remedial reading programme for Ken began with a series of tasks which built confidence by making clear all the useful things Ken already knew about reading. Mother and son worked through tasks which demonstrated the usefulness of reading strategies other than their main strategy of sounding out a text word by word: for example, strategies which make connections between the spoken language and the written text at levels higher than sounds of letters; strategies which draw attention to the grammatical structure of whole sentences and the larger meanings of the text; the use of picture and punctuation cues; and they did tasks which connected these new strategies with each other and with a sounding out at the letter and letter cluster level. They learned that there were a lot of ways which help extract and confirm meaning. They learned that a little decoding and a little guessing was productive when you paid attention to meaning beyond the word level.

Ken had to learn to monitor his own reading with a repertoire of strategies and to take more time to include more of the text when he made self-corrections. He had to learn to apply logic and his store of knowledge about the world and English. He learned by experience that useful reading strategies can be applied to different texts and that strategies tend to grow more useful through use. Ken had already likely learned a lot of this by reading Japanese stories.

Ken's old phonics programme and basal readers were put away and he got involved in many language activities in which he could

play a creative role because he was working with language he understood and enjoyed. Tasks which connected reading, speaking, listening, writing, and drawing helped keep the child working at appropriate but increasingly difficult levels by allowing for an uneven development of skills and by facilitating the parent's observation and interpretation of the child's progress.

Lisa-Learn By Doing and By Thinking

Lisa had many of the experiences which were recommended for Ken. Her mother, a former primary school teacher from Australia, was confident that she could help Lisa learn English language skills even though Lisa's school language would be Japanese, the first language of the father. She started reading aloud to her daughter within weeks of her birth and without using any planned reading instruction Lisa was biliterate, as well as bilingual, by about age six.

Lisa's mother requested tutorial instruction because at about age 10.7, when she was in the fifth grade, Lisa stopped reading aloud to her mother and also became reluctant to listen to her mother read aloud. Perhaps since reading aloud was the core of the English language activities, the other family language activities (writing letters, drawing, playing games, making audio and video tapes) became somewhat of a chore and gradually Lisa's younger brother was influenced by his sister's attitude.

It was easy to confirm by means of silent reading and read aloud tasks that Lisa was a very good reader. She could read as well as above average English monolingual readers her age. Lisa could not explain why she no longer wanted to read English stories to her mother but after several months of successful reading experiences and getting to know mother and daughter it was possible to account for her problem with a reasonable degree of confidence.

Lisa had made the transition from books with lots of pictures to books with fewer pictures smoothly. She had made another transition at about age eight to longer, more complex stories with well developed characters, intricate plots, and sophisticated philosophical frameworks happily. But the next transition did not work. They had started to read exciting, melodramatic books which came in a series and seemed to have a teenage ethos even though the intended readers were nine to eleven year old girls.

For Lisa the transition from reading materials for seven and eight year olds to books for nine to eleven year old children seemed not gradual but abrupt. As she started reading books written mainly for girls who lived in the USA or the UK she met an increasing number of unfamiliar words which she could not read. She also met more words in contexts she did not understand because of the cultural differences between characters' lives in countries she had never lived in and her own life in Japan. For example, the girls in her books invited four or five friends for Friday night sleep-overs, they telephoned cute boys in higher grades, and sarcasm was a key factor in a lot of their humour.

More than just a change in genre is involved, assumptions are made by writers that their readers now have near adult-like reading ability. When Lisa became confused with the new stories she was aware that she was not reading with understanding. If she came to a word she did not know, she stopped, looked at it, thought, but since she had lost sense of the context she had no idea what to do about reading the word. Lisa had never been taught phonics or any other reading decoding skills. She had no conscious awareness of how she solved reading problems. The holistic approach to reading which had seemed so successful left Lisa feeling unable to cope. Lisa had come to the conclusion that she was a poor reader and it was not easy to persuade her otherwise.

Lisa did all of her reading with her mother. She had been too dependent on her mother for help because she had never read alone silently or aloud for sustained periods. They shared stories by taking turns reading aloud with mother doing an estimated three quarters of the reading.

Her mother had always been there to offer help which was not deliberately instructive. She had simply wanted to keep the reading going because she was caught up in the fun of reading a good story. Lisa did not consciously learn ways to read difficult words which could be applied later to different texts. Just at the time there were too many unknown words in the stories her mother seemed less tolerant. She expected a lot from Lisa. She was proud of Lisa's reading ability and she did not understand why Lisa would suddenly start having problems after years of success.

For Lisa, at a sensitive age, the reading problem was compounded by social and cultural factors. If Lisa had continued to read aloud to her mother she would have to risk her mother's disappointment in her apparently declining reading ability and in her failure to meet the standards of the girls her own age who were the characters in the books her mother enjoyed. The imagination that had served her well in fairy tale picture books, animal adventures, and in stories about universal childhood phenomena was not good enough for

these stories.

Much of the context of the new books was part of an unfamiliar culture but that is true about a lot of the reading good readers do. The excitement of reading comes from learning about and then becoming a part of worlds previously unknown. But Lisa thought the characters in the stories were her peers. After all, hadn't her parents always told her how lucky she was to belong to two countries?

It was recommended that they continue with the successful holistic approach they had enjoyed for years. But Lisa was also ready to benefit from an analytical approach to reading instruction and there were good opportunities for this child, who might someday attend school Down Under, to learn about language by using language textbooks used in Australian schools in short confidence building sessions. Lisa needed to feel she was learning something about language (not as culturally charged as the language she had been reading) that kids her age were learning in her other homeland. She was ready to learn not just by doing but also by thinking, by thinking about language and the reading process.

Daily reading aloud remained the centre of their language activities but the mother did all of the reading with Lisa, unless of course, Lisa asked to read. Mom started to give the books a cultural screening and she thought about what background knowledge her daughter needed for the stories. Instead of reading aloud to her mother Lisa started to do lots of private, silent reading. Lisa needed the private reading to sort out the meanings of written texts at her own pace.

Lisa began to keep a private diary. She needed to use language to be herself. It would not be surprising if she wrote in both her languages. They also started a mother-daughter journal so the use of English for family communication could confirm and strengthen the mother-daughter bond, not threaten it as Lisa had felt was happening in their old read-aloud sessions.

Yuji-Not Enough Time, Not Enough Support

Yuji, a twelve year old boy, home in Japan after five years of education at his neighbourhood church school in England, had a very busy study schedule that left little time for English study and he had few opportunities to use English naturally. His parents, whose first language is Japanese, were worried because Yuji and his nine year old brother seemed to have forgotten much of their English in the fourteen months they had been back in Japan. The parents were so disappointed because they had had such a struggle with language themselves but they believed their English language skills had not slipped much. The boys' English that Mom and Dad had so envied had apparently vanished without a trace. In fact, on the few occasions when they were with English speakers the children, even though they were scolded, would not utter a single word of English.

They believed it was natural that the boys' spoken language ability had been lost. They were puzzled that although Yuji was reading well enough to keep up with his Japanese classmates his English reading had apparently slipped along with his spoken ability because he read aloud to them increasingly reluctantly, haltingly, and poorly from the collection of school textbooks for Yuji's grade level that they had shipped home. They were hoping English reading lessons would help Yuji save at least a little English but that lessons would not be worthwhile for his younger brother.

It is harder to argue the ineffectiveness of lessons than the reverse with keen parents. Yuji's parents realised that an ad hoc series of once or twice a week hourly lessons after school would not likely have much of an influence on Yuji. The lessons would be hard to schedule. Yuji would be tired. It was uncertain how Yuji would feel about lessons. Would he have a sense of purpose? But they thought reading skills exercises and some graded readers would add the necessary continuity and discipline. They were probably right but would that be sufficient?

In any case, why give all the responsibility to an outside tutor? What did they expect the tutor to do that they couldn't do just as well themselves? Yuji was not a beginning reader and he did not have any learning or reading problems. His life had changed and he had made the transition successfully. His Mom and Dad were demanding that he do something, without giving him any support, that did not fit in with his current life. Their negative attitudes did not give due credit to Yuji's success. Perhaps, Yuji felt the unpleasant read aloud sessions were attempts to undermine his efforts to adjust academically and socially to school life in Japan? The use of British school texts may have made it seem to Yuji as if his parents wanted, on his behalf, their cake and to eat it as well.

The whole family, not just the parents, had to make some decisions together about English. Were they going to study it, use it, or both? Who was going to do it? Why only Yuji? Why was English important to them now? Could they put that skill on the shelf until they next needed it? They could answer all these questions and come up with a plan if they decided to bring English back into their

lives. But it wouldn't mean much if it was a plan that fell to bits within a few months or worse yet, made their lives miserable.

The family decided to do some drastic rescheduling and recreate some of the English immersion life style they had enjoyed in the U.K. They made sure they could all be together for three English nights every week from seven in the evening. No exceptions were made. They spent quite a lot of money and bought a compact boxed set of reading materials for them all to use that covered a wide range of reading levels in its three hundred independent, short reading passages. Each text was accompanied by a set of comprehension and teaching questions and there were also one hundred and fifty separate language skill lessons, all with answers. They also bought a half dozen English games. For the cost of sending the children to an hour a week lesson for less than a year they acquired a wealth of language material that could be used flexibly.

Family discussions had resulted in a consensus that made it clear what they wanted to do, why, and how. They were going to be learning together but mainly having fun. The materials were to be the resources for competitions, reading aloud, drawing, skits, talking, guessing games, studying a topic in depth by getting information from other sources too, writing letters, and any other bright ideas they could come up with as they went along. In short, they were going to use the reading skill building materials within a whole language approach framework. The aim was to make the use of English a natural and happy part of family life. The priority was to read, never just for the sake of reading, but for meaning. In that way it was hoped that the boys would understand that reading in English was useful in Japan as well as in England. The parents told the boys that they would visit the UK again or invite one of their old friends to visit them in Japan. They started writing to friends in England.

Most importantly, the parents promised themselves to be as forgiving with the boys' English language skills as they were with their own.

Set Priorities, Stay Flexible

Families truly committed to their children's education stay involved in the process personally. Parents care more about their children than the learning targets. No matter the apparent degree of success at any one point in time, the parental commitment is for the long term, an ideal condition for teaching, in sharp contrast to the brief role individual teachers play in children's lives. Ken, Lisa and Yuji became better English readers because of their parents' support. The children learned that they did not have to perform in exactly the same ways in both their languages as a sort of duty thrust upon them by fate.

It is most important that people who find themselves in predicaments over reading the minority language realise that children like Ken, Lisa and Yuji are not failing but rather are in the process of learning. And in the course of learning something successfully the child may have become confused about other things. More of the original teaching practice or demands that the child work hard and reach high standards will not necessarily help the child learn strategies to clear up the confusion. It is possible, especially when a child can be given individual instruction, to try and monitor the effects of various ways of teaching which aim to make it clearer to the child why reading is useful and how to do it.

Information about other teaching approaches is relatively easy to come by. For most parents it will be difficult to find the time every day and even more difficult to muster the patience which is necessary to observe their own child's progress objectively enough and long enough to discover what the child needs to know when until the child is firmly established as an independent reader.

Parent-teachers need insights into their own children's learning more than they need a reading curriculum designed for monolingual children learning a majority language. For bilingual children the achievement of biliteracy is probably closely tied to self-esteem, self-identity, and to the parent-child relationships. If a child seems to be at risk in learning to read the minority language the wisest approach to teaching reading is one which reduces the likelihood of anxiety by beginning with the child's needs, by focusing on process, by providing the child with a range of ways to get meaning from written texts and by involving child and parent in lots of reading, writing and talking.

Conclusion: Biliteracy and Anxiety

Some English-Japanese bilingual children may not be able to read English very well by the time they are in the first few years at Japanese primary schools even though they may speak English fluently and read Japanese happily and proficiently. Parents, who had been satisfied with their children's use of the spoken languages, sometimes use phonics-based or language skills programmes of reading instruction to try to close the gap between English and Japanese reading abilities.

However, at least until there is a body of reliable research on children in this situation, it may be wiser for parents to assume the gap is a natural development which does not mean that their children will not be fully biliterate someday. The family policies and practices which were successful with the spoken language probably can be relied on to support children as they learn to read their two languages. If parents change their old successful patterns of communication and rely exclusively on formal language lessons they may make their children anxious about reading and ironically create a real reading problem where perhaps none existed.

It is probable that many of the parents with successful bilingual policies encourage learning in ways similar to the practices of whole language teaching. Parents who are concerned about English reading will find whole language literature full of good advice on creating and sustaining language-rich homes. Within frameworks of whole language principles and practices, phonics and other skills work could be introduced for children who seem to flourish on that style; in mini-lessons as the need arises; or for the enrichment of children who already read well.

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