RUMACC
Raising Children in More than One Language

Enhancing the language experience in the community and at school

Dr Averil Grieve
Linguistics & Applied Linguistics
School of Languages & Linguistics
The University of Melbourne
agrieve@unimelb.edu.au
Bilingual education myths

- Bilingualism is the source of underachievement in school! **FALSE**
- Bilingual children speak later than monolingual children! **FALSE**
- Majority language acquisition is impaired by bilingualism! **FALSE**
- Bilingual children are more intelligent than monolinguals! **FALSE**
What language(s) would I like my child to speak?

- Bilingual
  - Bilingual school (same languages)
  - Bilingual school (different languages)
- Monolingual
  - Monolingual school
  - Monolingual school
  - Monolingual school
  - Monolingual school

"We are our choices."
(Jean-Paul Sartre)
Language development 0-5yrs

- Parents primary source of language (e.g. vocabulary, pronunciation)
- Language development continues throughout our entire life span

*Babies babble,*
*Children prattle,*
*Adults create Haiku*

- Early language appears at more-or-less the same age and in a similar way, regardless of the cultural, linguistic and social setting
Bilingual playgroup

• The natural step from a parents’ group. Typically for 0-3 year olds

• Bilingual impact:
  – Community building
  – Creation of friendships in the minority language
  – Cultural and linguistic features of play in the minority language

• Two options:
  – Find an existing playgroup in your specific language
  – Start your own playgroup
Bilingual childcare / kindergarten

- Has clear separation of language use (e.g. one educator – one language)

- Provides a safe, warm environment

- Provides quality interactions that are in tune with the developmental stages of the child

- Bilingual impact depends on friends, no. days attending, favourite educator etc.

- Benefit of low levels of pressure, ‘fun’ element and routines

Froebel, 96 Barkley St, Fitzroy North VIC
“Keine Angst vor der Sprache aufbauen.”

(2-3 year old room educator)
What language(s) would I like my child to speak?

- **Bilingual**
  - Bilingual childcare / kindergarten
  - Bilingual school (same languages)
  - Bilingual school (different languages)
  - Monolingual school

- **Monolingual**
  - Monolingual childcare / kindergarten
  - Monolingual school
  - Bilingual school
  - Monolingual school
Ready for school (5 year olds)

• Active vocabulary of 500-1000 words
  Passive vocabulary of 8000+ words

• Most of grammatical forms of language
  (e.g. questions, negative statements,
  dependent clauses, compound sentences)

• Can talk about objects / events outside
  immediate context

• Can vary language according to situation (e.g. baby talk to babies, polite
  language to grandparents)

• Start of emergent literacy and metalinguistic awareness
  (ESPECIALLY bilingual children).
Language learning at school

• 3000 words / year added throughout schooling

• Central importance of peers and teachers in language development

• Attainment of literacy:
  – Removes focus from here and now
  – Increases individualization of language use
  – Promotes understanding of register/dialect
  – Provides exposure to complex grammatical structures
  – Opens child to a range of world views

• Increased awareness of rule-governed nature of language, e.g. *Where did the King hide his armies?* – *In his sleevies!*

• Development of extended discourse and de-contextualised language
A possible bilingual advantage

- Bilingual children generally more able to look at language from a distance, which prepares them better for learning to read and write:
  
  - Differences in writing systems (left to right, top to bottom)
  
  - Arbitrary nature of sound – object relations (e.g. ‘Tisch’, ‘table’, ‘Table’, …)
  
  - Arbitrary nature of word – object relations (e.g. ‘raupe’ and ‘caterpillar’)


Monolingual education for bilinguals

- Language of classroom = majority language (e.g. English)

- Assimilation of minority language speakers, resulting in loss of minority language (regardless of how well spoken)

- Minority language as a foreign language may be detrimental for children who already speak the language fluently.

- Risk of stagnation of minority language development for children who are already bilingual.

Children likely to need extra-curricular language support to remain bilingual
Ultimately, I think that Saturday language schools offer fantastic opportunities for many families, especially those who do not speak a minority language at home. They provide consistent exposure to the language, albeit minimal. Yet, there are also many reasons why such a school would not work for many families. The worst possible scenario is if Saturday language school causes a child to resent the language since he or she is stuck in a classroom on Saturday while other kids are out having fun. Ultimately, each family will have to decide on their own based on the quality of the school, their children's personalities and whether or not they are willing to dedicate part of their weekend to a language school.

http://www.multilingualliving.com/2010/05/15/saturday-language-schools-really-beneficial/
What would you do?

What other activities can you think of to promote bilingualism if your child attends a non-immersion mainstream school?
Weighing up options

- Immersion schooling
- Positive attitude / identity
- Nannys, au pairs, tutors
- clubs, church groups, events, telephone
- Foreign language at school
- Multiple extended trips to Germany
- Sat school
- DVDS in German

Foreign language at school

Positive attitude / identity

Immersion schooling

Weighing up options
Immersion schooling for all children
Find it or found it?

Deutsche Schule Melbourne
Two-way early immersion (e.g. DSM)

Minority Language □ Majority Language

Prep  Grade 1  Grade 2  Grade 3  Grade 4  Grade 5  Grade 6

50/50 immersion

(Lindholm-Leary & Howard, 2008; Genesee, 2008)
It’s personal …

- **Subjective values**
  (e.g. importance of cognitive, social, cultural benefits)

- **Subjective situations**
  (e.g. heritage, one parent-one language, ‘mother’/‘father’ tongue, animosity, place of residence)

- **Subjective goals**
  (e.g. balanced bilingual, ‘kitchen’ language, repatriation, university, …)
Conclusion

- Language acquisition is a life-long process

- Schooling has a very large impact on language development of BOTH monolingual and bilingual children

- You need to make sometimes complex decisions concerning the weighting of languages and schooling, esp. the minority language.

- A firm information base is needed but the decisions you make concerning bilingualism is an inherently subjective/personal decision (i.e. no right or wrong).