

# Bringing up Bilingual Kids

A talk by **Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert**  
In association with the **Accents Association**

1<sup>st</sup> December 2009

- 10.00 Coffee/ Time to browse books/journals on bilingualism
- 10.10 Welcome and introduction to talk by Kathryn Dobson (Accents)
- 10.20 Talk on Bilingual Families:
- Introduction to child bilingualism.
  - The extended family and bilingualism.
  - Children moving to a second-language country.
  - Common issues of English/French bilingual children.
- 11.30 Small Group Discussion/Exercises
- Positive and Negative Aspects of Bilingual Families
  - Support & maintenance of bilingualism
- 11.40 Feedback from Group Discussion and Exercises.
- 12.00 End of Session
- 12.30 Lunch at the Seppings Café (pre-booked)

\*\*\*\*\*

**Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert** is British and married to a Frenchman. The family lives in the Poitou-Charentes region with their three more-or-less bilingual children, aged 12, 10 and 6. Suzanne has a Masters in Education and teaches English as a second language. She also independently researches family bilingualism and multilingualism. Suzanne is on the Editorial board of *The Bilingual Family Newsletter* and writes a quarterly column: 'Notes from the OPOL Family' and writes about bilingualism/language for *The Connexion* newspaper. Suzanne is the author of *Language Strategies for Bilingual Families – the one parent-one language approach* (Multilingual Matters, 2004) and is currently working on a book about siblings and bilingualism.

For more information on Suzanne & links for bilingual families:

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

Email: [bilingsiblings@yahoo.com](mailto:bilingsiblings@yahoo.com)

**Kathryn Dobson** is a mother of three girls aged 12, 10 and 8 and the founder of **Accents**. Having moved to France 7 years ago with her job, she soon realised the importance of maintaining English whilst the children settled into their French school, and Accents was born. Using experienced UK teachers and the latest resources, Accents English literacy classes ensure that children maintain their fluency in all aspects (written and spoken) of their maternal English at the same level as their peers in the UK. In addition, Accents runs language activities for younger children and Francophones.

For more information on Accents: [www.accents-asso.fr](http://www.accents-asso.fr).

## Talk on Bilingual Families:

What is a bilingual family?

- Two parents with different first languages each speaking their own language to their children.
- A family living in second language country.
- A family living in bilingual/multilingual country.
- Parents who choose to speak another language to their children or enroll their children in second-language schooling.

Bilingual children

- Usually categorized from the age 2 ½ onwards.
- *Simultaneous* – Children acquire two languages at the same time, usually from birth.
- *Sequential* – Children who acquire a second language after mastering their first one.
- *Verbal* Bilinguals – Children who can speak two languages
- *Literate* Bilinguals – Children who can read and write two languages.
- *Passive* – When a child understands a language but does not speak it.
- *Active* – When a child can speak a language to the right person in context.
- Studies show that babies are receptive to languages in the womb. Babies learn quickly to differentiate sounds. The ability wears off with age, although adults can still learn languages.
- Bilingual children usually have a higher cognitive reasoning (i.e. they understand the idea that an object can have more than one name.)

Strategies bilingual families use

- (1) *One parent-one language* (OPOL – ML) majority-language is strongest.
- (2) *One parent-one language* (OPOL – mL) minority-language is supported.
- (3) *Minority-Language at Home* (mL@H).
- (4) *Trilingual or multilingual.*
- (5) *Mixed* strategy.
- (6) *Time and Place* strategy.
- (7) *Artificial or Non-Native* strategy.

The extended family & bilingualism

- Siblings usually have a 'preferred' language. They often choose to use one language between themselves or mix language, giving more or less input and practice.
- Older siblings can 'teach' a language and influence younger children in language use.
- Grandparents can help reinforce language and culture through songs, poems and stories.

- *Language Baths* (holidays of 3 or more weeks, spent in the country of minority language can increase active language use.
- Cousins and close friends can provide a reason for speaking a language, and a model of how children behave from that culture.

#### Children moving to a second-language country

- To survive they need to be able to switch languages and even identities rapidly.
- Each language and culture closely tied to a place or community.
- Children brought up in a country where the exterior language of the country and school is different to the home language can experience a double life.
- Over time children can feel more comfortable with the country language than their home one. The issue is how to maintain use of minority language.
- Networking and sharing resources with other bilingual families.

#### Common issues of English/French bilingual children

1. Accents and gestures: sounding and looking 'right'
2. Transferring reading and writing skills across the two languages.
3. Writing rules and differences: *attaché*/joined up writing
4. When to teach English reading and writing
5. French homework: *Poesies* and *dictées*...
6. Maths in French
7. French at home (library books, television, dvds...)
8. Friends – English or French speakers?
9. Your child helping other Anglophone children at school.
10. Getting the right balance for active literate bilingual kids.