

The most important factors in raising a bilingual child

Everyone is born to have the ability to master two or more languages. Many kids can only speak one language and miss the best time to become bilinguals or multi-linguals. Many parents do not realize that their kids have great potential to develop bilingually or multilingually. Remember, language is a tool for communication. Exchanging ideas, teaching, learning, working, shopping, starting relationships and doing business all need languages. The increasing globalization makes it necessary to raise a bilingual child or multi-lingual child. What are the most important factors in raising a bilingual child?

Schiefele(1991) claimed that interest always happened under some particular situations. And it had close relationship with specific topics, people or activities. Ainley(1998) thought that interest represented a typical way, which people try to understand the uncertain or puzzling phenomenon with the purpose or goals. Liu Xianguo(2004) acclaimed that interest was such kind of intention activity which urged people to strive to understand the world and obtain the scientific and cultural knowledge, at the same time, to pursue the truth constantly. It is always accompanied by strong emotions. Combining previous and his past research, Hidi(2006) defined interest as unique motivation variables, which occurred between the people and the things attracted them, along with the high attention and positive emotions. We should give top priority to the interest if we want to raise a bilingual child.

According to Colin Baker's *a parent's and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism*, the most important factor in raising a bilingual child is to make their language development a pleasure, a positive and enjoyable experience. From my own experience, Colin Baker's study does make sense, especially when the kids are very small. I have raised two bilingual kids. One is 8 years old, the other is 3. When my first son Jacky was 2 years old, I took my big son Jacky to the parks to learn different things in English. I prepared his favorite food and fruit such as potato chips, peanuts, oranges and so on. Jacky was on my bicycle. He wanted me to ride my bike as quickly as possible. So we had an English-speaking game. The more loudly and correctly he spoke, the faster I would ride my bike. When seeing the tree, my son was asked to follow me after I said the word "tree". When I pointed to the river, he would be happy to say "river" after I said this word. Of course, I would also praise him immediately if he made any progress. Besides, he would get the gifts I prepared for him. So for Jacky, learning English was a pleasure. He enjoyed going out to the park and practiced English with me.

Of course, parents also have difficulties in developing the proficiency of their kids in two languages. They surely will meet a number of problems, a competition against monolinguals probably work against themselves. The process of being a bilingual is full of ups and downs. However, if we follow the right theory and use the theory in practice, a child can speak fluently, even read and write very well in two languages. The child has been aware that bilingualism has much to do with stress and constant correction. Meanwhile, bilingualism has great enjoyment and excitement.

The ARCS motivation model proposed by John M. Keller, a professor of psychology at the University of South Florida in the USA claimed that satisfaction affected kids' learning motivation. It means that when the learning results are equal to the learning expectations, the kids will feel

happy and satisfied. Satisfaction is an important factor to keep kids' enthusiasm for learning. As parents, we paid great attention to Jacky's sense of satisfaction when he learned English. When Jacky was 4 years old, my wife and I began to train his reading ability. I bought some cards for Jacky to learn 26 letters. Jacky was obviously not interested in the letter, which was a little stressful. Jacky did not like the letters. After a week, he still could not recognize all the letters. What's worse, He lost the interest in doing this job. After discussion, we bought some new cards in which the letters are just pictures. For example, the letter "F" is an axe, "O" is an egg. By doing so, the letters were more attractive to Jacky. He soon liked them and used letters to make words later.

John M. Keller claimed in his study that confidence is the great obligation for the parents to not only try their best to help children to build a faith that they can finish different tasks independently and experience the feeling of success in the learning process, but also let the kids have the expectation about learning. According to his study, paying attention to children's attitude towards their two languages is of great significance. As their parents, we are supposed to give them compliments and encouragement constantly so that they will have enough motivation to overcome more difficulties and face more challenges in the process of being bilingual. No matter how small steps forward in children's bilingual development, we can give them a beautiful smile, a quiet "wonderful", or a small gift. For instance, when a child has translated for a teammate to make new friends with others, or quickly and correctly switched languages before others so they can grasp the meaning, do not forget to show your enjoyment. Plenty of praise and encouragement are crucial to keep learning and refining our skills. When the child speaks a minority language, parents should play a key role in motivating and encouraging the child to speak more. When the children have learned that bilingualism is associated with joy, challenges, success, they will be willing to extend their two languages. Of course, as parents, it is crucial to encourage them continuously. For instance, we have story-telling time for my two kids at 9:00 every night. All the family members listen to their stories and give them scores. So, Jacky and Bruce (my second son) are competing with each other. After seeing their performance, everyone will applaud for them and give them some compliments and suggestions. Just as Baker mentioned in the book called *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, we should not hesitate to show our delight or admiration for them by doing things such as the occasional touch on the face, a quiet 'wonderful', a kiss or a sweet smile after seeing the children's progress. Children need encouragement and pleasure to carry on learning and challenging.

When most people around the child do not speak the minority language, the kid may be discouraged in the school, in the restaurant or in the supermarket for minority language usage, parents often have a key role to play in fostering the children's favor of that minority language. We should attach more importance to that minority language not the majority language, especially when our kids are very small. We do not need to worry about the majority language because the child can read the majority language in the newspaper, communicate with others in the majority language, for example. For this reason, the minority language should be given more attention and be encouraged to use more often .

Another most important factor in raising a bilingual child that we should remember is the language that surrounds language. John M. Keller claimed relevance will affects kids' motivation to learn a second language . Once the children's attention was stimulated, what we care next is that how to keep children's attention. Here building the intimate relationship between how parents teach

and what children would like to learn seems very critical. In other words, parents must work hard to let the kids feel and understand what they learn is just what they want. Only in this way, can children show great inspiration for their study and simultaneously, maintain their learning attention and interest. Once the good learning habit is formed, can the virtuous cycle of learning be done and finally it is beneficial for the students to go much forward in their learning journey. Just like gardeners, parents are unable to make the language seeds grow automatically. We are supposed to offer certain conditions which enables the seeds to grow very well such as rich fertilizers, enough sunshine, adequate water as well as careful tending. Language growth in children not just requires parents' patience and persistence such as correcting language mistakes continuously, getting the child to repeat sentences, which have almost no effect, even a negative effect on language growth. The role of parents is to provide pleasant environments for language growth.

Besides encouragement and care, the language gardener also needs to plan, to prepare the soil, to water, fertilize and sometimes weed. Take Jacky and Bruce as an example, my wife and I always speak the minority language with them. Bruce also talks with his brother in English. We encouraged them to watch English animated movies and bought many English books for them to read. We go to the bookstore twice a week where kids can read any book they like. Before they sleep, my wife tells them a story every night. We never try to control the growth of language, but it's our duty to help maximize those conditions that are open to influence.

From the day a baby is born, its parents will take to it. Any noise the child is making, including coughing, burping, sneezing and whimpering will be built into a conversation. They talk at length only when the baby is free to reply. When it is being fed, and has its mouth full, they will usually keep silent or talk very little.

As the baby grows older and becomes more interested in what is going on around it, the parents will speak more loudly, with more varied intonation, and frequently repeat sentences. We will play games with the child, involving frequent repetition of sounds, words or sentences, to improve the child's communicative skills. After about six months, when the child has started babbling, the parents won't respond to every noise which is made by the child, but only to those which sound more like language.

Followers of the innateness theory of language acquisition use as one of their arguments that adult speech is so chaotic that it would be impossible for a child to work out any rules from it. However, in fact, adults adopt their speech when talking to babies and young children, making it much easier for them to pick out words and structures. This special adapted speech is called motherese, and it has several features which distinguished from normal adult speech. Shorter sentences are used, with simplified grammar and meaning. The meanings are mainly concrete, talking about what the child can see around him, and a limited range of sentence patterns is used. Sentence frames such as Where's —? Or That's a — are used more often, and question forms are such more frequent than in normal speech. Speech is slower, and spoken at a higher pitch than normal, with a wider range of intonation. There is a great deal of repetition, and special words may be used. For instance, many words are shortened or have -ie added on the end, giving forms as doggie, sweetie, choccie (for chocolate) and biccie (for biscuit). Other words use the same syllable repeated twice, and in English vowel sounds which use rounded lips are frequently used, as in choo-choo (meaning 'train') and woof-woof (meaning 'dog').

Thus, the language which a child hears from birth isn't complex and confusing as the language which adults use amongst themselves. This is one reason why it is better for parents to play with their children and talk to them as much as possible than simply to keep the children quiet by letting them watch television for long periods of time, the television doesn't speak motherese. This simplified language is very important in enabling the child to make sense of what he hears around him and work out rules for his own language use.

After studying different theories, we have known that children can only concentrate on the interesting things. And they have more interest in pictures for its rich color and lively look. The children's attention span is very limited. So they always want some new things or methods to keep their interest. To teach children a second language successfully, teachers need special skills and strategies which are different from those for adults and adolescents. We should always pay attention to their age features and limitations. Here are some suggestions for parents in raising a bilingual child.

(1) We should repeat some difficult concepts more times than adolescents. Meanwhile, we had better try to use some examples or familiar objects to explain the concepts. In this way, children can get more clear cognition. For example, if we want to teach a new word "ZOO", we had better mention some animals and playing equipments that can remind children's memory and interest. While this kind of method isn't suitable for adolescents and adults. They have better reminiscence and imitation ability.

(2) We should try to use some lively words or games for children to practice. All the children hate boring exercise and practice, which will kill their interest, motivation and creation. It is a big challenge for teachers to overcome this difficulty. Teachers should change their methods and try to build a relaxing atmosphere for children and lead children to learn while playing.

(3) Learning activities had better involve exercises of location, ordering and classification. Children always prefer to compete with each other and imitate in the form of adults.

(4) Try to develop a rich and stimulating environment for the children because of their age factor. They can learn better when they are active and enjoy the activities.

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