

### **Multilingualism**

Most missionary children are to some extent multilingual; some grow up experiencing such familiarity with different languages that they become fluent in each of them. Around the world multilingualism is the norm, as more than half of the world's population is able to use at least two languages with reasonable ease. This comes as a surprise to monolingual people who think that such ability is rare!

The widespread distribution of multilingualism shows that it has real practical advantages. Multilingual people need the different languages in different contexts in their lives. This may be because the parents are in a cross-cultural marriage and the two languages are needed to communicate with the extended families. For others the need to be bilingual may stem from the use of an official language of education that is different to the one used at home. Related to this is the desire of minority language groups to guard their cultural and linguistic heritage; as with bilingual Breton-French or Scottish Gaelic-English speakers. In addition to these obvious practical needs, there is also evidence that the language processing part of the brain receives extra stimulation and exercise, enhancing thinking skills. (\*See the reference to research from University College London after this article) There is no evidence that it is psychologically or educationally harmful in any way, despite biased research that suggested this in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

There is a very small minority of people who could be considered "balanced bilinguals" who apparently seem to have no preference of language and equal levels of fluency. However, even in this group, most of them will have a bias to one or the other. The bias could depend on context e.g. one language for technical discussions and the other for more informal times. The choice of language may also depend on who they are talking to, usually with a preference for one language per person, even if the other person could easily communicate with them in both. Most multilingual people though have a marked preference for one language, but can still shift easily into the other(s). The preferred language may change with time e.g. home mother tongue while very young, but more at ease with the educational language as they get older.

What issues affect us as a mission community?

- Unless we are working in countries where our mother tongue is a widespread, or even dominant, language we want our children to have both their mother tongue and the host culture language. To do this exposure to the language needs to begin as soon as possible. With very young children this can be through play and/or pre-school/nursery attendance. For school age children, this can come from a national school where parents are happy with the standards and ethos there. If the national schools are used then the mother tongue has to be actively taught at home to keep the academic language levels up to standard for re-entry. If the children are home schooled or attend an international or MK school there should be lessons in the host language and opportunities to learn about the host culture. Along with this any reasonable social mixing should be encouraged to provide the necessary context for the language. It is not unusual for very young children to learn a good standard of the host language only to lose it later on because of a lack of ongoing opportunity to learn and use it.
- Many of our families are based around cross-cultural marriages. In this case, the ideal is for each parent to speak the mother tongue with the children all of the time while they are very young. This should be continued even as they get older, but can be modified if visitors who don't speak the language are present. It is common for children to mix the two languages as they learn and parents should not worry unless it becomes a persistent problem hindering communication. It is also common for a child to answer both parents in one language, especially if the surrounding language reinforces the child's preference.
- The most common reason for multilingualism is education. Anglophone families face this when they use national schools or overseas French/other language schools. The September 2003 edition of Educare has the Lawrence family's account of this – please ask us if you don't have this one and we can send it on to you. It is even more common though that non-Anglophone families have to face sending their children to an English language MK or international school. Although this seems like a huge challenge, the encouraging thing is that many families have done this and have succeeded in achieving good mother tongue skills as well. **What are the keys to success?**

1. Don't be tempted to drop the mother tongue in favour of English when preparing the children for school. It will make communication with your children more difficult and will negatively affect your relationship with them. It is better to let them spend time with Anglophones, preferably in the "natural" context of pre-school playgroups, informal play or at Sunday school. If older children are to go to school then some English tuition may be a help.
2. Don't try to teach literacy in the two languages at the same time. It is best to spend a couple of years establishing the basic principles of literacy in one language before starting the other. Although some parents have managed to develop literacy in two languages at the same time, it is more usual that confusion between the two can occur for prolonged periods affecting confidence and academic performance. This does not mean that all books in one of the languages should be put away and that natural curiosity about words in the second language should be stifled, but it does mean that an active programme of literacy in both languages at the same time should be avoided. In most cases it is best to teach the mother tongue first before sending the children to school for English literacy. With European languages the mother tongue can be successfully learned afterwards, but this mother tongue first principle seems to be even more important for Koreans. It seems that trying to add the Korean on afterwards is particularly difficult and that it feels more like an added extra to the children involved who are already reading and writing in English. Chinese literacy is different in that there are so many characters to memorise, and its development has to come side by side with English. Even with Chinese though it is best to start literacy before English to avoid trying to tag it on afterwards.
3. The level of mother tongue proficiency needs to be developed through a proper academic course of study. This normally involves daily input from 1 to 2 hours and should include language and history, with other subjects as appropriate if they are needed for re-entry. These extra study hours can prove to be a real burden for children, so it is worth working out arrangements with the school to help accommodate this. With younger children, long homework assignments can be avoided and some time can be allowed within the timetable. In higher school years this study could replace one or more of the English language options. Usually MK schools are willing to consider making such arrangements and many are also welcoming non-Anglophone staff to help in this process. Good books, magazines, DVD/videos, CDs and IT resources are all useful too, but should not be used as a substitute. Academic language required for further years of school or for higher education is different to the conversational and more informal language used in many of these resources. There is also a difference between reading a good book, even a classic, at home without full understanding and analysing that same book at school in literature study.

*\* According to research at University College London being bilingual produces changes in the anatomy of the brain. The findings showed that people who speak two languages have more grey matter in the language region of the brain. The earlier they learned the languages, the larger the grey area. The degree of grey matter enlargement is correlated to the proficiency of languages attained. Learning another language after 35 years old also alters the brain but the change is not as pronounced as in early learners. It reinforces the idea that it is easier to learn early rather than late because the brain is more capable of adjusting or accommodating new languages by changing structurally. This ability decreases with time. The research is based on structural brain imaging comparing the amount of grey matter in 25 monolinguals, 25 early bilinguals and 33 late bilinguals who acquired the second language between the ages of 10 and 15. All of the subjects were native English speakers of comparable age and education.*

**EXPERIENCES?** Do you have experience of multilingualism that you would like to let us and others know about? Your experience could help others – either giving keys to success or pitfalls to avoid. If you would like to write to us individually about your situation or with your thoughts we would welcome that too. Write to us at [SteveGill@mkea.freemove.co.uk](mailto:SteveGill@mkea.freemove.co.uk)

### References

Andersson; Growing up with Two Languages, a Practical Guide 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition; Routledge publishers; ISBN 0 415 33332 6  
 Baker; A Parents' & Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition; Multilingual Matters publishers; ISBN 1 85359 455 5  
 Harding-Esch & Riley; The Bilingual Family 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition; Cambridge University Press; ISBN 0 521 00464 0  
 Tokuhama-Espinosa; Raising Multilingual Children: Foreign Language Acquisition and Children; Greenwood press; ISBN 0 897897 501

All of these are available from Amazon, other internet suppliers or from ordinary bookshops. If this is an issue to you, it would be a good move to get at least one of these or another similar book. If there are others that you would recommend, just let us and others know about them via Educare.

PLUS

Bowers J. (Ed) Raising Resilient MKs; pages 305 – 322 contain 3 articles on linguistic issues. Available by mail order only from ACSI

Blomberg & Brooks (Ed) Fitted Pieces; pages 582 – 599 contain 3 articles, 2 of them the same as in Raising Resilient MKs. Available by mail order only from SHARE

Also there are plenty of web sites – just try a search on bilingualism with Google or similar search engine.

## **Responses to the last edition on boarding**

### **From a missionary couple**

I would like to respond to your very thought provoking article on boarding schools and their place in 21<sup>st</sup> Century... I should add that I am a product of boarding school myself from the age of 11yrs and my two sons 18yrs and 16yrs have attended boarding schools since the age of 9yrs and 7yrs respectively. I'm in full agreement with the Biblical viewpoint that the normal place for a child to grow and develop is with their natural parents. The option of sending our two sons to boarding school was only considered after 2 years of home schooling left serious gaps in their social development and other options were exhausted. However we are in no doubt that despite the pain of separation our family has been doubly blessed by our willingness to place our children into our Father's hands...

A fundamental question we were forced to ask was, "*Who owns the children in our care?*" In my opinion children are always a gift from God, and He always remains the rightful owner. At the heart of our faith we have a Heavenly father who gave His only son to a world that would ultimately reject and crucify him...Jn3:16 If that were not all the man chosen to be the father of the Jewish nation is asked to take his son, Isaac, whom he loved, and go to the region of Moriah...Gen22:2. His grandson, forgetting the lessons of his grandfather, seeks to pamper and spoil one of his sons and pays dearly for it...Gen43:36 In what must have rated as one of the most remarkable twists in history Joseph turns out to be of more benefit to mankind than all the other sons put together...Gen46:3

Just in case mothers are thinking, "that's all very well for a father to think that way!", I invite you to take a look at a woman who desperately wanted children and was unable to do so, namely Hannah...1Sa1:10. You would think that once her barrenness was broken she would never let her offspring out of her sight! Yet we find the reverse is true. In 1Sa1:22 Hannah was willing to place this precious child in the hands of Eli who was not exactly commended for his child rearing skills, but what result came from this open handed attitude towards this gift from God? I firmly believe God has better plans for our children than we do as parents and I for one am not going to deliberately stand in his way because of some misplaced belief that I can do the job better than He can.

### **Why our sons go to boarding school.**

When God called you to your field of service did your family just tag on behind or were they part of that call? What a question!

Being true ambassadors for Christ and His kingdom we very quickly have to learn what it means to trust Him in all circumstances. I knew His hand was on my life prompting me to a life of service overseas soon after I was married. So, my wife and I reasoned that the best thing would be for us not to have children as it may be too difficult or dangerous for a family. Ten years later no door had opened and we really felt we must have misheard the Lord's call. After our second son was 4 months old, suddenly everything fell into place and doors opened for us in a remarkable way. Surely there was no denying these small boys were part of that call.

Not everyone is called to the field that has a suitable school close by, and not everyone can turn their hand to that of teaching. Yet I believe it is the parent's role to prepare their offspring for adulthood, which involves far more than can be obtained from the study of books. Since all children are a gift from God, He must have a purpose and destiny for them that is beyond most parents' dreams.

We felt led to be in a country where no local school was suitable for their education. This meant our children were 'home-schooled' for two years. Despite the excellent educational materials there was virtually no social interaction between our boys and their peers and we had to face the possibility of returning home for sending them to a suitable boarding school. The first option didn't make sense and the second seemed too hard to bear – until I remembered whose children they are.

I thought about how Jacob must have felt when Joseph, the boy he had doted on, didn't return home one day. He naturally thought the worst. Even though he clearly knew God was moving in his own life, he found it hard

to trust God with his own son. As we know, God did greater things in the life of Joseph than all the other brothers put together, who remained under their father's care. I knew then that despite the pain of separation God would use others to mould the lives of my two sons in a way altogether better than I could achieve on my own.

Now, for two thirds of the year (during term time) our two boys are growing and developing under the care of people called of God to minister in this way within an MK boarding school. When the boys return to us for their holidays our lives with them are richer by far than when they were with us all the time. We thank God that His plan for them is perfect and for giving us the grace to trust Him with the most precious people in our lives.

I leave you with a quote from Martin Luther, "*I have held many things in my hands and lost them all, but whatever I place in God's hands, that I will always possess.*"

**Dave and Becky have worked now for several years in East Asia.**

### **From a Boarding School**

I felt that your treatment of boarding was very fair. Here at Hebron we have published a booklet called 'Preparation for boarding' - I shall send you a copy for your interest. I often say to parents, 'boarding is not right for every child - and sometimes for only some children in the same family'. However, I also believe that it is the best choice for many. We emphasise a Christian family atmosphere and this is one reason why Hebron remains both small (370 students aged 5 to 19 years) and offers Primary through to Secondary so that siblings can study together.

My parents worked in West Africa for 20 years (in secular jobs) and, from the age of 5 to 18, I went to boarding school in Scotland (and loved it!). For me it was the thrill of travel, the camaraderie of fellow pupils (I was an only child) and the pleasure of sport and extra-curricular activities which made the experience so satisfying. I also felt that the times at home were all the sweeter - heightened by the absences - and that I came to appreciate my parents more and all the sacrifices they were making. I don't pretend that there were not times of homesickness and a desire for the 'greener grass' but I believe that in most schools, even for day children, there will be times of distress and unhappiness. The two schools I attended (Drumley House in Ayr and Fettes College in Edinburgh) had strong Christian Unions, caring staff and sensitivity to the needs of the young. I was fortunate indeed.

My family and I came to Hebron in 2000 and one thing that struck us forcibly was that without the boarding provision of a Christian school such as this there would be many fewer Christian workers on the field. We strive to involve parents as much as possible and many visit twice a year for our Drama Festival in October and Parents' Week in April. The October half-term break sees over 200 of us - parents, students, staff - on the beach together at Kovalam. 'Hebron on holiday' is a truly unique and wondrous occasion! Better 'phone and internet communications have done wonders for enhancing family contact (although occasionally the speed of these communications can prolong homesickness and accentuate 'issues' which otherwise quickly blow over). Many of our parents and their children (both business and Christian worker families) choose Hebron for the variety of extra-curricular activities we offer. Many who live in the big cities in India (with their crowds, pollution, club scene, etc.) see a setting such as ours as a definite choice for the best. Even my middle child (Naomi) chose to board when we moved here (staff children usually live with their parents) - surely a good advert for boarding!

### **Alasdair Reid is the current Headmaster at Hebron School in Southern India**

There were a number of other responses; in fact the greatest number of responses yet, showing how important this issue is to many people.

One of the responses came from a group hoping to establish a boarding school in one of the sending countries to help children educated overseas in the re-entry experience. This concept is being worked out already in two schools in Korea which are providing both an appropriate education and a cultural "stepping stone" back into Korea for Korean MKs. These schools are the Global Village in Busan and Handong International School near Pohang.

Another response demonstrated a growing trend. This is the family to family arrangement of boarding so that children can benefit from the broader educational opportunities in bigger cities by living with another family with the same organisation or with the extended family or friends. We are aware of a number of other examples of the same practice and it was good to have this option highlighted to be mentioned here.

If you would like to add your own comments, we would be very happy to receive them.

## Resources available

**Interact** – a quarterly magazine produced by Interaction. (Interaction was founded some years ago in response to the needs of third culture children around the world by the late Dave Pollock) The subscription cost is USD18.95 per year (no electronic distribution). Their contact details to subscribe are P.O. Box 863, Wheaton, Illinois, IL 60189, USA. Phone (719) 531 6182. Fax (719) 531 6182 E-mail [interact@tckinteract.net](mailto:interact@tckinteract.net). Website [www.interactionintl.org](http://www.interactionintl.org)  
If you haven't subscribed yet, it's well worth considering. The articles are relevant and cover many of the issues addressed in Educare, but with 20 pages of print each time there is more detail and information.

### Special Needs

We have already recommended the LDA which publishes books on both sides of the Atlantic. If you have children in your class or family with special needs and haven't yet tried the LDA for resources, investigate them on [www.LDAlearning.com](http://www.LDAlearning.com)  
They have some excellent resources in their "How to" series including

How to teach and manage ADHD

How to understand and support Dyspraxia

How to identify and support Speech and Language Difficulties

How to support and teach children on the Autistic Spectrum

How to identify and support children with Dyslexia

How to Develop Numeracy in children with Dyslexia

How to support and teach children with Special Needs

These resources could also be very useful if you suspect that a child has learning difficulties but are unsure of diagnosis or how to proceed. Don't rush into a positive or negative diagnosis of learning difficulties yourself unless you are special needs trained as the guides will not substitute for proper professional advice. Their materials can however prove very useful tools in helping the ordinary class teacher or home educator cope with special needs alongside that expert guidance.

The LDA also have a wide range of other guides and other teaching materials.

The following 3 items are available by contacting us at [SteveGill@mkea.freereserve.co.uk](mailto:SteveGill@mkea.freereserve.co.uk)

1. Going Home "Re-entry for Younger Children" by Carole Steedman. A workbook and parent's guide to re-entry 'Pre-Field Orientation for Children' (Ed. Steve Bryant) - a resource file of ideas and activities to help prepare children of all ages to go to the new host country

Both are excellent resources that the authors wish to share with the international NGO charity community

For both guides on one CD contact us. The cost is the price of the CD (GBP1 USD2 or €1.50) + postage

2. "Ecclesiastical Bourofaye" is one young man's journey through living in Senegal and re-entry into the UK expressed in poetry. The anthology is available from us for GBP2 (€3 or USD4) + postage

3. Documents on Korean education, education in Hong Kong, how to compare international schools and school profiles in SE Asia available (free) from us on request

Any other correspondence or possible articles for Educare are welcomed.

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