

HOPES AND DESIRES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING:
CONVERSATIONS WITH BILINGUAL FAMILIES

by

LYNN ALEXANDRA THOMAS

B.A. (Hons), The University of British Columbia, 1984
M.Ed. The University of British Columbia, 1994

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

March 1999

© Lynn Alexandra Thomas, 1999

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction
~~Department of~~ _____

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date March 16 / 99

ABSTRACT

Children learn language in the family. They also learn about the ways in which language can be used to communicate needs, share ideas, express cultural identity and negotiate and reinforce group membership. In bilingual and minority language families children also learn about the existence of different languages, of different ways of talking about the same object and expressing the same ideas, and the appropriate time and place to use each language. The place of language in the development of cultural identity and group membership is particularly important for people who speak more than one language and feel attachments to more than one culture.

This study explores what it is to be a bilingual parent of young children. Parents who were themselves bilingual were asked about their own experiences with language, and their experiences with raising their children. The dissertation is organized around the themes of language learning in the family, in the community, and within the context of school.

This study has resulted in a broad range of findings, among which are: that raising children to be bilingual is a deliberate act requiring considerable, conscious effort on the part of parents, that parents who have a mentor, someone they know who has successfully raised bilingual children, are more likely to persist with their efforts despite difficulties, and that close religious, cultural or familial ties to other speakers of the minority language are positive influences on both parents and children. Another important finding is that parents are greatly encouraged by meeting health and/or educational professionals who are positive and informative about bilingualism in young children.

Conversation is the methodology for this study because it allows the participants and the researcher to work together toward a greater understanding of the topic under study. Through conversations with other interested people I was able to invite them into my questions. Sharing stories of language, and reflecting on what these stories mean and how they have affected and continue to affect us, opens the possibilities for a much greater understanding of what it means to speak more than one language in this society, and how that will affect our children.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One	
Conversation as Research/Research as Conversation.....	9
Conversation as a research methodology.....	16
From conversation to text.....	29
The participants.....	30
Mother tongues speaking.....	42
Chapter Two	
The Kitchen Conversations.....	44
Research on child language acquisition.....	55
Children and bilingualism.....	74
Family strategies for language acquisition.....	81
Chapter Three	
Conversing in the Community.....	91
Chapter Four	
Talking about School.....	122
From home to school for minority language speakers.....	130

Hispanic students in the United States.....	131
Learning from bilingual families.....	133
Chapter Five	
Storytime, Lullabytime.....	151
Reflecting on bilingualism.....	160
Epilogue.....	177
References.....	180
Appendix I	
Translations from French.....	195
Appendix II	
Ethics review form.....	198
Letter to participants.....	199

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must begin by extending my sincere thanks to the participant families who so generously contributed to this research project. Their gifts of time and honesty permitted this study to take place, and allowed me to follow a dream. I am extremely grateful. I include my own family in my gratitude, as they not only participated in the research, but supported and encouraged me throughout the writing of it. Merci Michel, Amalie et Madeleine.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Kenneth Reeder, for his faith in my project and his encouraging words, as well as his guidance, editorial assistance and thoughtful suggestions throughout this long journey. It has been a great pleasure to work with someone who is both an inspiring scholar and a caring human being, and I have learned a great deal from our many conversations.

I could not have completed this project without the assistance of Dr. Elizabeth Sparks, who freely shared of her broad knowledge of qualitative research, and helped us all come to a greater understanding of phenomenologic and hermeneutic approaches to researching human lived experience. Her close reading of the text and constant questioning of the choice of language were invaluable. I have benefited a great deal from her enthusiasm for the project as well as her constant support and encouragement.

Dr. Jim Anderson was instrumental in bringing this project to completion. I am greatly appreciative of his willingness to join the committee, as well as the interest he has shown in the project and his very careful readings of the drafts. I continue to enjoy our discussions, and I am grateful for the helpful advice and opportunities for working and learning that I have received.

I am very grateful for the support of colleagues in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. I have been enriched by everyone I have been fortunate enough to come to know, particularly my fellow students in the Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction.

I owe a tremendous debt to Lynn Fels, a brilliant scholar, an inspired teacher, an editor extraordinaire, and a very special friend. Thank you.

I would also like to thank Dr. John Willinsky for the opportunity to participate in four years of challenging collaborations.

Hopes and Desires for Language Learning:

Conversations with Bilingual Families

Introduction

The murmurings of language begin in the family, as communication starts to take place between parent(s) and child some time between conception and birth, and expands in ever widening ripples and ever increasing depths as the relationship between them grows and deepens. Communication happens, in part, through language, and families, parents and children, come to know themselves, each other, and the world beyond through the exchange of words.

Language (is) the mother
the father
the child
the home
the family
the community
the world

Quand c'est la fin de semaine et j'ai passé toute la journée à Vancouver avec des amis anglophones, je rêve en anglais le soir! Mais pour moi, j'ai toujours parlé en français avec mes enfants depuis le premier jour de leur vie, alors pour moi la langue avec mes enfants, ce n'est pas naturel de parler anglais. Mais si c'est spontané, peut-être quand je suis fâché. Ça arrive peut être une fois par mois [que je parle en anglais avec

mes enfants], mais quand ça arrive ce n'est pas naturelle, ce n'est pas la langue habituelle que j'utilise avec mes enfants.

.....

Je trouve ça très important, les changements qui arrivent, les étapes différentes qu'on fait, nous, dans notre famille, en comparaison avec vous, qui sont dans une situation semblable. Je trouve que la langue qu'on parle fait une différence à ce qui on est, et je suis d'accord avec toi dans un sens; oui, c'est plus naturel de parler en français avec mes enfants parce que moi aussi je l'ai toujours fait, et j'aime le sentiment d'intimité qu'on a quand on parle français en famille. Mais, dans un autre sens, c'est plus naturel de parler en anglais parce que moi, j'ai grandi en anglais et mes souvenirs d'enfance sont en anglais¹.

conversation with family C²

If language represents the means to articulate one's "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1971), then what does it mean to be a speaker of two or more languages? Does this then imply multiple beings and multiple worlds? How can we explore these multiplicities in ways that are authentic and meaningful to both researcher and researched? What of those who then face the opportunity of teaching language(s) to their children? How do people come to make decisions regarding the use of language(s) in the family, and

¹ Throughout this paper I have used regular type when writing the words of the families who participated and italics when writing my own words to allow the reader to follow the flow of the conversation. Similarly, my personal journal entries are also in italics.

² I have included this conversation in French without translation because that was the language in which it took place. Imagine the implications of carrying on conversations with people in a language they do not

the linguistic expectations for their young children? What are the challenges, the frustrations, the fears, the pleasures, the hopes and desires of the bilingual parent³ in conversation with his or her child(ren)? In view of the dynamic and constantly evolving nature of both language and parental/child relationships, is there a way to examine bilingualism and parenthood, in order to describe the essence of the experience? Through conversations with a number of parents who are themselves speakers of at least two languages I have come to a deeper understanding of what it is to be faced with the potential of raising a child/children to be bilingual, and how parents see and understand the process.

Language is one of the essential qualities of being human. It is the way we communicate with the world around us and the people in it. "When we study language we are approaching what some might call the human essence, the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to humans" (Chomsky, 1968, p. 100.) Parents are often fascinated with the way their children learn language and the ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Where there is more than one possibility about which language, or how many languages a child might learn, how we can help them and why we would do so become questions of great importance.

understand, which is what I am possibly doing now, with you, the reader. Please turn to Appendix I for a translation as I would not like to exclude you from the conversation.

³ The word bilingual can mean many things, from a working knowledge of two languages to complete fluency in all aspects of those languages. For the purposes of this study a bilingual parent is one who is fluent enough in more than one language to be comfortable carrying on conversations in either language with their child(ren) on topics of interest and importance to both.

This study came out of personal lived experience as a language learner, a parent, and a teacher of languages to other people's children. The idea to study bilingual families was directly inspired by spontaneous conversations with parents of young children who were interested in bilingualism due to personal experience, and desirous of discussing it with other parents. Many studies have been undertaken of young children who are growing up with two languages in some form or another (DeHouwer, 1990; Dopke, 1992; Goodz, 1994; Pan, 1994 & Yamamoto, 1995) but few address the concerns of the parents of those children. Lanza (1988) has studied the language parents use with their young children who are acquiring two languages simultaneously, but she does not question the parent participants in her study about the way they interact with their children, or why they chosen to speak the way they do. Similarly, there are studies of bilingual adults, many of which focus on people who are in danger of losing a language, or who may have already lost one (Grosjean, 1982; Landry & Allard, 1992; Seliger & Vago, 1991), but none of those focus on parents of children who are currently learning language in the home.

This study seeks to complement the research into the learning and teaching of languages by investigating language learning in the family in an attempt to come to a greater understanding of what it is to be a bilingual parent of a young child. The research is informed by qualitative approaches to increasing understanding of personal experience, including phenomenology, hermeneutics, and narrative. Each of these approaches informs the work in

different but complementary ways which will be described more fully in the first chapter. Conversation became the means by which I was able to explore the topic of study. By this I mean conversation in its broadest sense, including spontaneous conversations I had with people I met in the course of daily life, conversations I carried on with myself in a journal, conversations in society that are carried out in popular media, such as newspapers and books, as well as planned conversations I carried out with participants who agreed to be tape recorded. The conversations inspire, direct and inform the research. The research finds itself in the space between, where conversants meet and understanding flourishes (Aoki, 1991).

There are many studies about language learning that concentrate on the conceptualization, categorization or theory behind such learning. Yet as learners, users and teachers of language, there is very little that is written about personal experience with language within the family. This study encourages the participants to examine who we are: bilingual parents, and to become fully aware of all of the complexities, tensions and possibilities that this entails. In addition, this work offers an opportunity for those people who work with families, both in the education and health professions, to learn about bilingualism from the perspectives of those who are living the experience.

The initial chapter in this work describes the method I found myself surrounded by as the conversations, both planned and spontaneous, were taking place. I describe conversation as a research methodology in theory,

informed by hermeneutics in the works of Gadamer (1989), and as is explored in the works of Carson (1986), Gudmundsdottir (1996), Gurevitch (1995), Greene (1991) and Peterat (1986). I also describe my experience in practice as I struggle to remain true to my original ideals of ethical research. I have included samples of conversations that were both planned and tape recorded, as well as spontaneous, and I describe the contribution of spontaneous conversation to the research.

I then take up the ideas present in the emerging understandings outlined above and place them within the context of home, community and school: the spaces people inhabit as they live their lives. The particular places I have chosen to group the themes around are rooms in the house connected with the family, the child and the learning that takes place in the home, namely the kitchen and the bedroom, and the places in the community set aside for children, namely, playgrounds, community centres and schools. The second chapter, entitled "Kitchen Conversations," includes excerpts from conversations that relate to new beginnings, and the private life of the family, including conversations around planning and dreaming for children before they are born, and living with the complexities and challenges afterward.

Conversations about extended family, friends and neighbours bring us out from the home into the community, so the second chapter is called "Conversing in the Community." This section includes excerpts from conversations where the influence of people other than family members are

discussed. I have included here some conversations which took place in such public spaces as parks and community centres to illustrate the important aspect chance encounters had for this study, and how spontaneous conversations also inform the researcher, and act as catalysts, reinforcements and reaffirmations, and therefore need to be included.

The community chapter connects to the next, the section on schools, entitled School Talk, through the recurring theme of the important influence professionals in education can have over the actions and decisions of parents in this society. I look at the role of school in family life, both actual school experiences, and potential, as parents of very young children look to a future which includes school.

The chapter which follows connects to the above through the theme of family literacy, and is entitled Storytime, Lullabytime. Here parents describe their experiences with literacy in the family language, with the idea of bedtime stories in our minds as the conversations return to the themes of home and the family at the close of the day. The children have finally gone to sleep, allowing parents a moment to reflect on their actions and the consequences which follow, their hopes and desires for their children which are challenged and re-affirmed on a daily basis. Participants discuss why bilingualism is important to them, and what they anticipate for the future. Finally, I pull together the various themes I have been exploring with the participants of the study and describe my own coming to understand this very

important part of my life, both as a parent and a teacher of children who live in bilingual families.

Chapter One

Research as conversation/ conversation as research

To reveal in all its purity the space in which discursive events are deployed is not to undertake to re-establish it in an isolation that nothing could overcome; it is not to close it upon itself; it is to leave oneself free to describe the interplay of relations within it and outside it. (Foucault 1972, p. 29)

Is that French you're speaking with your kids? Are you from France?
Well, no, I'm from Vancouver, but my husband is from Quebec and so we speak French with the girls.

Is that right? Well, that's just like us! My mother is from Holland, and she taught us a few words when we were little. You know, like foods and things. She didn't really teach us to speak the language though, just a few words. I hardly remember any of them now. Let's see ...

And does your mother teach your children? To speak Dutch?

Well no, I mean, we all speak English now.

personal journal, February, 1996

What happens to all the languages brought here, to Vancouver, by immigrants from all corners of the globe to this officially bilingual,

multicultural country? Do we as educators see them as the wonderfully rich resource that they are? As a language educator, I think about the politics behind the implementation of language policies in education, the power relations between languages in the classroom: the "right" language to use, the "right" way to talk within the institution of school. I also think about my students, many of whom come to school with a broad knowledge of communicating in another language and culture, and wonder if we, as teachers, celebrate this knowledge and encourage its continuation. As a parent, I watch my own children learn to find a place for themselves in society that does not always celebrate diversity, difference, and knowledge brought from home. Living in multilingual Vancouver, married to a French Canadian, raising two bilingual children, studying educational policy and practice, I am face to face with language(s) in society, yet there is so much that I don't understand. Perhaps it is because, in our concern to teach all children English so that they will be able to take advantage of every opportunity⁴, we have only recently begun to listen to the stories of people who once possessed other languages but now do not. Hearing these stories of language might help explain what happens to the rich resource of tongues that one generation of Canadians possesses and the next does not, and why. In our schools and other official institutions many voices are silent, their lives and experiences inaudible. But in the real world, the private world, these voices do exist, the stories of language are there, waiting, ready to be told. In comfortable

⁴ See Delpit, (1995) for a discussion on the importance of offering opportunities to children of minority

community, in casual exchanges, in conversation, the stories come pouring out.

I am sitting on a bench at the swimming pool watching my four-year-old daughter splash her way through a preschool group lesson, my younger daughter, still slightly scab-covered with the remains of chicken pox, on my lap. A woman sitting next to us, another mother of a swimmer, towel in her hands, tries to talk to her, asking her name, age, and gently teasing her about the thumb in her mouth in excellent but accented English. My daughter is sulky, envious of the swimmers, and refuses to answer, leaning into my body, sucking hard on her thumb. I reprove her softly in French, the language of my family, and the woman exclaims "Oh, you speak French, and your children too! Me, I speak Spanish; we're from Peru, we just arrived here 6 months ago. My daughter (gesturing toward the pool) still speaks Spanish with us, but sometimes we wonder, should we use English with her? She found it so hard at first, to make friends you know, but now she loves to speak English, she learns so much from the television, but me, I miss hearing Spanish around me...." And the story goes on, within the give and take of conversation the individual situations, the thoughts, worries and concerns, the hopes and dreams come out and are shared between two people, two parents of young children, two speakers of two languages, both wanting the best for their children, both wanting

languages and cultures by teaching them to succeed in the majority language and culture.

to hold on to a language other than English in the family. We have learned from each other in this exchange, what it is to be an immigrant with a second language, trying to fit in, yet keep a place for oneself where one can be at home in a foreign land, and what it is to be a Canadian and speak one's second language with one's children in an attempt to keep a spouse's language alive in the family.

personal journal, April, 1995

For this study I have asked people about their experiences with language(s), their stories about learning to communicate with the world. Although everyone I've met has a story to relate, I have centred my study on people who speak two or more languages and who are parents of children aged four or five and under. The generational aspect of this arrangement appeals to me because language is first learned in the family, and I believe we as educators need to learn more about how family language learning happens, particularly when the languages involved are other than the one used by the majority of the community. I have focused the study on parents of very young children because I think there are fundamental decisions that bilingual parents begin to consider when their children are born- what language(s) to use with them, how to use them, and why. These decisions are always based on an understanding of language that comes from lived experience, and this subject is most often forefront in people's minds at the time when their children are babies and the parents are actively involved in

helping them acquire a language or languages. Such a preoccupation with deciding which language(s) to use with children and on what basis would explain the many spontaneous conversations that I have already had with friends and total strangers on the topic of language use in the family.

A further reason to focus this study on the family rather than on individuals has been suggested by Dennis Sumara. Sumara (1996) writes about the importance of understanding that the location of self in individual human beings, rather than within a social unit such as the family, is very much a Western concept, and one that needs to be re-examined. In order to study "the self" it is important to understand the ways in which it is constructed as part of larger social interactions. Sumara acknowledges the important contributions of Bruner (1986) in this area and writes:

Bruner concludes that it is within social groupings such as family units that individuals situate and distribute memories and interpretations of past present and projected senses of self. One cannot learn much about the individual's "private" self without knowing about the way in which that self is publicly constituted and re-constituted. Furthermore, these recursive explorations of "self," as known in relation to "others," typically occur within rituals and daily routines which often include narrations of past events. (p. 135)

Once the idea to explore people's understanding of language based on lived experience takes hold, the research quest begins. The questions are there: what is it about people's experiences with language(s) that leads them

to make decisions about what they will pass on to their child(ren) in terms of language itself as well as attitudes and understandings about language? The participants are there; almost everybody I have met has a story about language. But how to frame such a project within the traditions of research? How can I research people's stories without entering into an exploitative relationship with my subjects by taking ownership of something that is not mine? How can I invite people to share stories about language(s) with me in such a way that they retain ownership, that they are not "othered", and that they remain part of the collaborative process of coming to a shared understanding that is an essential part of interpretive inquiry? hooks (1990) reminds us that:

Often this speech about the "Other" annihilates, erases: "no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speak subject, and you are now at the centre of my talk." Stop. (p. 151-152)

The problem of ownership and voice in research can grow to overwhelm the study, and make it impossible to move on. Glesne & Peshkin (1992) write of the ethical dilemmas facing researchers who have concerns about exploiting research participants in ways described by hooks above. An

important place for the researcher to begin is to understand that they are themselves a part of the research, and to be honest about the role that they play. As Michelle Fine (1994) has stated, researchers cannot attempt to be neutral because they simply are not:

As researchers we need to position ourselves as no longer transparent, but as classed, gendered, raced and sexual subjects who construct our own locations, narrate these locations, and negotiate our stances with relations of domination. (p. 76)

Glesne & Peshkin discuss how acting with respect and professionalism, and informing the world about a situation that exists is ethical, although the potential for exploitation is always present. Grumet (1987) helps us to identify what is needed:

So if telling a story requires giving oneself away, then we are obligated to devise a method of receiving stories that mediates the space between the self that tells, the self that told and the self that listens: a method that returns a story to the teller that is both hers and not hers, that contains her self in good company. (p. 322)

This is what I strive for in the conversations, in a joint seeking of knowledge and understanding through the shared experience of talking and listening together.

Conversation as a research methodology

Researchers such as Carson (1986), Gudmundsdottir (1996), Gurevitch (1995) Greene (1991) and Peterat (1986) have turned to conversation and dialogue as a means for learning from personal experience. Greene writes that: "It is dialogue that allows the negotiation of meanings through which the self in relation to other selves and to one's cultural communities is constituted" (p. 7). In an article entitled "Closing the gap between research and practice: Conversation as a mode of doing research," Carson looks at four studies in education where conversation was used as a means to research how theorists and practitioners can come to a greater understanding of the connections between theory and practice, leading to improvements in the classroom. Carson writes that by using conversation to research curriculum we are helped to understand that "theorists and inquirers do not begin their research from scratch. People partake in a continually evolving conversation which has begun long before their arrival and which now continues with their participation (p. 75)." However, Carson does not see the conversation itself as the sum total of the research:

The potential that conversation has as a mode of curriculum research will depend on whether or not it is regarded merely as an effective technique for data gathering or as hermeneutic reflection with a practical intent. (p. 81)

The origins of the word *converse* provide an interesting link to the research approach because it evolved from the Old French *converser*, meaning to live or dwell, which in turn was borrowed from Latin *conversari*, which means to associate with or keep company with. Thus, in 1340, *conversation* could mean living together, or a manner of behaving as a group (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971, pp. 545-546). Those of us who are living with children, whether we are parents, educators or members of the health profession, are associates in our efforts to assist them in reaching their fullest potential. It is essential that we continue to converse, to keep company with others who are part of the journey, and to share understandings so that they will deepen and broaden with each exchange.

Hermeneutic reflection informs conversation as a research methodology in an important way. Hermeneutic inquiry is based on the philosophical theory that, as researchers, we cannot obtain objective knowledge through research, only come to a greater understanding of a phenomenon through our engagement with a context, be it text or dialogue. Bleicher (1980), states that "hermeneutics can be loosely defined as the theory or philosophy of the interpretation of meaning ..." (p. 1). Bruns (1992) frames hermeneutic inquiry in terms of questions: "Hermeneutics is made up of a family of questions about what happens in the understanding of anything, not just of texts but of how things are" (p. 179).

In social science research hermeneutic inquiry has been greatly influenced by the work of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer,

particularly through his book Truth and Method, which was first published in German in 1960. Gadamer (1989) is a strong advocate of learning through conversation and dialogue, basing his work on the Socratic dialogues of Plato, but carrying the concept much further, as in the following quotation:

As the art of conducting a conversation, dialectic is also the art of seeing things in the unity of the aspect-- i.e. it is the art of forming concepts through working out the common meaning. What characterizes a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid form of statements that demand to be set down in writing, is precisely this: that in dialogue spoken language-- in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross- purposes and seeing each other's point-- performs the communication of meaning that, with respect to the written tradition is the task of hermeneutics. (p. 368)

Gadamer sees conversation as " a process of coming to an understanding" (p. 385) wherein "the questioner becomes the one who is questioned and the hermeneutic occurrence is realized in the dialectic of the question" (p. 462). In his interpretation, conversation becomes a means for conducting research that invites the participation of all parties to explore their understanding of the subject at hand through dialogue, leading to a collaborative increase in knowledge for all. "To understand what a person says is, as we saw, to come to an understanding about the subject matter, not to get inside another person and relive his (sic) experiences" (Gadamer, 1989. p. 383). Carson (1986) also writes about the potential of conversation in

conducting research in a way that reduces the risk of the researcher claiming the stories of the researched:

Doing research in the conversational mode changes the relationship between persons who have been hitherto labeled as "researcher" and "practitioner." While it is unlikely to totally abolish the distinction between them, conversational research does offer the possibility of developing a community of co-operative investigation into significant educational questions. (p. 83)

Narrative inquiry plays an important role in this study in that the participants took up the opportunity to tell stories of their experiences as bilingual people and as parents of bilingual children in the course of the conversations. The place of narrative in research has received a considerable amount of attention in recent years (Bateson, 1989; Carter, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Gudmundsdottir, 1991; Grumet, 1988; Mishler, 1986; Pinar, 1988; Van Manen, 1990; and Witherall & Noddings, 1991.) I have included a look at narrative research based on the view that

humans are story-telling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2)

Storytelling is central to this research project in that participants share stories of their past lives, of their childhoods and their families as they explore their personal experience of knowing and speaking language(s) in society. The following quotation from Knoblauch & Brannon (1988) describes the aims of

storytelling in educational research, and its importance to phenomenological studies:

The telling aims not at selectivity or simplification but at richness of texture and intentional complexity. The telling does not seek to highlight problems and solutions, or causes and effects, or stimuli and responses, or rights and wrongs, or heroes and villains, but seeks instead to depict, to evoke, what phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Gadamer have called "the lifeworld"-- that palpable, sensual, kaleidoscopic, mysterious reality that constitutes our material rather than merely intellectual existence. (pp. 24-25)

Life histories are usually presented chronologically, beginning with childhood, with the recounting of events followed by retrospective interpretation: "Most people, when asked to describe their life histories divide them into chapters that are partly conventional, representing stages of maturation" (Bateson, 1989, p. 75). This is not always the case, however, as Julie Cruikshank discovered in her research on how the building of the Alaska highway affected the lives of three Yukon women and their families (1990). Here the interview subjects told their life stories through parables and metaphor in anything but chronological order. In her introduction Cruikshank describes how difficult it was for her to come to the realization that these women's ways of telling their life stories was completely appropriate and very illuminating (pp. 2-3). Bateson (1989) writes:

"Storytelling is fundamental to the human search for meaning, whether we tell tales of the creation of the earth or of our own early choices" (p.34).

The advantage of researching lived experience through conversation is that participants will be part of a dialogue, and the stories will emerge naturally, as a part of the conversational flow. A disadvantage is that the stories are not likely to be recounted chronologically, and will most likely be "chopped up" or incomplete as the conversation changes direction. I would like to use this potential problem to my advantage and attempt to determine the importance of various themes and ideas through comparing the way certain themes are quickly and easily abandoned while others reappear and are repeated, despite the turns in the conversation.

This study is greatly informed by the research into hermeneutic and narrative inquiry in its attention to the experience of listening to the telling of the story, and the understanding inherent in researching conversation, that any one conversation is a part of a greater hermeneutic whole that has begun before the study, and continues long afterward. However, this particular research is clearly grounded in the study of the lived experience of bilingual people with families. Reflection follows as an essential part of the research: "a true reflection on lived experience is a thoughtful, reflective grasping of what it is that renders this or that particular experience its special significance" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 32). Through reflection we revisit the story, as well as our interpretation of it in order to develop a new interpretation based on our greater understanding, which comes as a result of our conversing and

reflecting. Bontekoe (1996) describes this circular, hermeneutic nature of human understanding in his book Dimensions of the Hermeneutic Circle:

All human understanding, by virtue of its occurring in time, is hermeneutically circular. Because ... we are located always at some moment in space during some moment in time, information becomes available to us only serially. ... Understanding occurs only when we recognize the significance of the various items that we notice--which is to say, when we recognize the way in which those items relate to each other. Understanding, then, is essentially an integrative activity. (p. 2)

Throughout this research I seek to reach a series of moments of understanding of what it is to be a bilingual parent, based on participating in and reflecting on conversations with people who face similar challenges, questions and decisions to my own. In this reflective approach I am informed by phenomenology in the sense that I am looking to describe the phenomenon of what it is to be a bilingual parent. This study strives to describe the daily life experiences of bilingualism within families from the parents' perspectives. Turning to Van Manen (1990) I find much that is phenomenological about this research.

Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld-- the world as we immediately experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize or theorize about it. Phenomenology aims to come to a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. (p.37)

Following the above theoretical discussion of research through conversation informed by phenomenology, hermeneutics and narrative, here is a more in depth look at how one might approach the wealth of information revealed in conversations with participants.

Listening and conversing with others in order to be able to know what it is another has experienced is impossible, as Risser (1995) writes: "The hermeneutic standpoint has nothing to do with establishing correct meaning, as if this stood firm or possessed a firmness that could be reached" (p. 123). Gallagher (1992) states that: "original meaning is unobtainable and the best we can do is to stretch the limits of language to break upon fresh insight" (p.10). However, both participants in a conversation can come away with an enriched understanding of each other's experience as a result of the exchange, as well as a new and enriched understanding of their own situation as a result of the shared experience of the conversation. A researcher can pull together central themes and patterns which arise out of these collectively developed understandings, and begin to build a larger narrative out of individual ones. This is, indeed, what transpired during the course of this project. Gadamer (1989) describes how the meaning emerges through the dynamics of language in use, as we come to understand through the act of conversing, communicating with another human being:

Conversation is thus language on the move (kinesis), a movement of discourse in which word and idea first become what they are. Meaning

emerges within the dialogue, within the kinesis of living language, in such a way that it inevitably transforms itself. (p. 490)

Conversation as a research methodology is connected in these ways to hermeneutic, phenomenological and narrative inquiry. The important thing to me was the way that conversation, with other participants, and with myself in my personal journal, allowed all of us to explore the lived experience in a way that has led to a deeper understanding of what it is to be a bilingual parent.

Although many participants did ask for advice on bringing up children to be fluent in two or more languages in the course of the conversations it was far from my intent to want to impose ideas on others about the best method for achieving bilingualism in children. There are no definitive or "correct" answers to the questions faced by parents, such as "Is it a good thing to be bilingual?", "Can I be sure that my child will be bi- or multilingual into adulthood?" and "How should I go about attempting this?" The answers to these questions are subjective and personal, and do not form the focus of this study. What is central is that the dialogue begins, that the participants come to realize that their stories are interesting and important, and that their own knowledge about what is right for their child is valid for their family. The opportunity to discuss such issues through the context of this research has been a way for participants to learn that their situation is not uncommon, and that there are possibilities for obtaining the information and support they may be looking for. It is important is that we begin to explore avenues for

including the personal experiences of people in this country who speak two or more languages, and their hopes and desires for their children, in the dialogue about language that is constantly taking place in our schools and society.

I began this study by looking for ways to understand research that were fundamentally influenced by the notion of equal partnerships. I found that other researchers had similar concerns, and one way to re-envision researching people's knowledge, understanding, experience, and stories is to invite them to take an active role, to take ownership of the data, and work together as a team, so that the study becomes meaningful for all participants. If the wisdom of each participant is acknowledged, if we respect the words and ideas and experience as we respect the person, we learn through the exchange of knowledge and understandings, through which greater knowledge and understandings are revealed and (re) constructed. I quote Mishler (1986):

the research interview is no longer seen as a tool only for "information gathering." It is a site where partners meet and converse, and through their conversations they jointly construct meaning. (p. 29)

Also Gudmundsdottir (1996):

The interview is a form of conversation. Someone asks a question and another person responds. ... Through their cooperation in the research process, researchers and informants jointly put the pieces together into a meaningful whole, something that makes sense to both with each

participant having left his or her mark on the process and the product.

(p. 294)

Informed by my greater understanding of the process of researching human lived experience, I began. However, I shortly encountered new doubts about ethical ways of conducting studies with human subjects. As soon as you pull out your tape recorder, something happens to the relationship. Even before- as soon as you describe your research intentions, ask permission to quote, haul out the forms on official letterhead to sign, something happens. It's not that people aren't willing to take part, they really want to help, but they had certain assumptions and expectations about how research takes place. The parents in this study handed everything over to me, despite my very best efforts to be open and honest and let the participants lead the way. Much as I tried to let the conversation take a natural course, I still found myself thinking furiously "What am I going to say next?" At the same time, the co-participants were concerned that I was "getting" what I needed for my research: "What do you need to know? Is this what you want me to say? What was the question again?" For example, one participant didn't respond at all to my opening line: "Tell me about your experiences with language." I rephrased it a few times, and asked similar questions to get the conversation started: "Is there anything significant about language that you remember from when you were young? What kinds of things were you thinking of when your children began to speak?" When I paused he responded to each question with a brief sentence, and then asked, "Is that all?" Oh, no.

Quite often there were long pauses in the conversations: I was expecting the participants to elaborate, perhaps ask me a question; they were expecting me to take charge of the conversations. Very few asked any questions at all about my own experiences with language and my children. This was the biggest difference between the spontaneous conversations I had had with many people, and the audiotaped conversations. The participants saw themselves as respondents to my needs as a researcher, not as members of a conversational group. Should I have expected anything else?

No matter what you do, a planned conversation in front of a tape recorder is not the same as a spontaneous one. It simply cannot be and it would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. So what are we doing when we use conversation as a research methodology? Are we simply deluding ourselves that it is possible? All planned conversations are prepared in the sense that the participants have thought about what they are going to say to a certain extent. One participant even began her conversation with me in that way: "When I thought about meeting with you today, I began to consider..." (conversation with family B). So how is conversation as a research methodology different from open-ended interviews where the researcher reflects on what he or she would like to know, asks questions, listens to the answers and writes them down? To be honest, I have to admit that in practice, studies using conversation as a methodology can turn out a bit like that.

The real difference is not in what actually happens, but in the intention of those participating in the research. If they are intending to have a conversation, not an interview, there are certain expectations about everybody's role, about what is allowed and what is not acceptable behaviour. For example, in a conversation, I, the researcher, am allowed to talk about my personal self. I might or might not do that, depending on the subject under discussion, but I am allowed to. In this way I can share my own experiences as a parent of bilingual children, for example, as a way of joining in the conversation on a more or less equal basis. During the conversation itself, we are two or more parents discussing our children. It is after the conversation that our roles really differ: the other participants go away and perhaps reflect a little, maybe talk over some of the ideas with a partner, parent or friend. I go away, reflect, transcribe, reflect some more and eventually write a dissertation.

Does that make a difference? Are honourable intentions about doing research, though certainly a good place to start, enough? What is important here, the process of research, or the final product? If intent is the important aspect, then do names matter? That is, does what we call the people we work with: participant, subject, informant; and what we call the data gathering process: interview or conversation, make a big difference? I have to answer mostly yes, but sometimes no. There are times when the words we use become labels of convenience, to manipulate as we see fit. However, beginning with thoughtful, intentional choices of words to describe a process

that has great potential for exploitation is the first step in following through with inclusive, participatory research.

Despite the risks, I believe that we who have taken this position as researcher through our studies at the graduate level, have an obligation to carry out research-- to search for new ways of making meaning of our lives and those who are connected to us through classrooms, schools and homes. At the same time, we also have an obligation to strive to continually question our ethics, to examine our motives and actions, and to strive to work with people in ways that are inclusive, thoughtful and respectful.

Thus we educate ourselves to the reality of our existence, to its limits and possibilities, to the tensions between our personal views and societal impositions and norms. (Krall, 1988, p. 47)

From conversation to text

The conversations are one aspect of the study. After I recorded them I transformed them into written text in the form of transcriptions, and began to read and write this text into ways that would help me write about my coming to understand bilingual parenting. Merleau-Ponty (1964) has written about the difficulties of representing the spoken word as written text:

It is said that the exact recording of a conversation which had seemed brilliant later gives the impression of indigence. The presence of those who were speaking, the gestures, the physiognomies, and the feeling of an event are all lacking in the recording. Henceforth the conversation

no longer exists: it is flattened out in the unique dimension of sound and all the more deceptive because this wholly auditory medium is that of a text read. (p. 57)

There are several other difficulties associated with representing spoken words with written text. We have expectations about what text should look like, and we do not speak in those ways. To read a transcription of what someone has said seems unfair somehow, as they probably would not have written their words in that way. In addition, once the words appear on the page, I, the narrator of this text, am free to take apart the paragraphs and sentences and put them back together in ways that fit my narration. I am aware that I have done this, and in doing so, that I may have changed the stories of the participants in ways that they might not have chosen to themselves. I have not done this intentionally, and have tried to remain true to the original intent of each speaker, while presenting the words in ways that make sense to the whole of this work. At the same time, this re-reading and rewriting the conversations/texts allows the conversations to continue within this text, and with each reader, which serves to deepen and enrich the meaning of the conversational exchanges.

The Participants

The participants for this study were approached when they indicated an interest in my research questions around bilingual families and language learning. I met many people through my children's activities such as day care,

preschool, swimming lessons, and later, kindergarten. Other acquaintances were introduced by mutual friends, or referred by teachers, and in one case, a family doctor. The basis for participation was that at least one of the parents be bilingual, and that there be preschool aged (3-4 years old), or younger children in the family. All of the participating families are dual parent families, although this was a result of chance rather than original design. The potential for bilingualism, the age of the children, and an interest in taking part were my main criteria for selection of participants, and I welcomed a diversity of language backgrounds. Twelve families took part in the data collection, not including my own.

At the beginning of the conversations the participants were asked to talk about their experience with language; growing up and living as bilingual people in Vancouver or elsewhere: "Can you tell me about your experiences with language or languages?" I encouraged them to talk about what was important to them, to recall significant incidents, and to describe how they felt about being bilingual. At a certain point in the conversation we would start to talk about our children, and about their language learning. This topic always came up spontaneously, usually by the other participants, who asked for advice about language learning in the home, about options for schooling, or inquired about my own children's progress. At times I asked whether the issue of language was ever discussed before the children were born, how they felt about the decisions they had made and were continuing to make, what they felt pleased about, and what they wished they could change. Always, I

tried to allow the participants to lead the conversations into topics that were of interest to them. The participants were free to question me about my own life as a language learner, as a parent of two bilingual children, and as a researcher of language learning in families. Most conversations were scheduled for forty-five minutes, but nearly all went on for much longer, some for two hours. All except one of the conversations were taped. The exception was at the request of the participant, who did agree that I take notes during the conversation.

The original plan was to have several conversations with each family. I had intended to record the conversations, transcribe them, and give the transcriptions back to the participants. I had thought that we would look over the transcriptions together, and that subsequent conversations would take up where the previous ones left off. This did not occur. All of the families were very interested in the project and were generous with their time during the first conversation. Some, but not all, were interested in seeing transcriptions of the conversation, but there was no real interest in continuing the conversations at a second or third meeting. I am not entirely sure why this was so, particularly because I believe that the parents who participated in the study continue to be interested in the topic, and quite possibly continue to carry on conversations about the language learning of their children with other people. It is possible that they thought that they had fulfilled the requirements for participation in the study with a single taped conversation, and that they could not spare more time to help me with my project. I could

have made it a requirement from the beginning that participants agree to several taped conversations in order to take part, but I felt that was a great deal to ask of busy people (these are parents!) whom I did not know well. I chose to follow the lead of the participants and not to insist that we continue to meet and record our conversations simply in order to fit within the confines of my initial proposal.

In all cases but one, (two if you include myself), the participants spoke English as a second language, having learned another language at home, either in Canada, or in their country of origin. The exception spoke English as a child and learned French as a young adult, as I did. It is interesting to note that this person was the child of immigrant parents who spoke different first languages (Dutch and Russian) and used English as their mode of communication. This participant says that his early English was imperfect and heavily accented, and describes being treated as an immigrant and ESL learner when he first went to school.

In eight of the twelve participating families the parents do not speak the same first language, and of those, all except one use English as the home language, regardless of the languages spoken by the parents. The exceptional family uses French as the home language, which is the first language of the mother, and the second of the father. In my own case, my family also uses French, which is the first language of my husband, as the primary language in the family. My own first language is English. All of the people who speak the same language as their partner came to Canada as a couple from the same

country. The others came to English Canada at varying ages. I carried out conversations with nine mothers, two couples and one father, although both parents were always invited to participate in the conversational exchanges. Let me introduce them to you.

Family A is made up of a mother, who speaks Greek as her first language, as well as fluent English, a father, whose first language is English and who is partly of First Nations ancestry, and a daughter, aged two years, six months at the time of the conversation, who speaks mostly English but who understands and uses a few Greek words. The language used in the home is almost exclusively English although they live next door to the maternal grandmother, who is fluent in English but more comfortable in Greek. The grandmother runs a daycare centre in her home and the granddaughter spends quite a lot of time there along with the other children in care. The mother is studying to be a homeopathic doctor and the father is a fisherman and artist. They live in East Vancouver. I conversed with the mother.

Family B consists of a mother, whose first language is Spanish, second language is Hebrew, and third language is English. The father speaks Spanish and English and they have one child, a boy aged four years, who speaks Spanish, is learning English, and knows a few words in Hebrew. The parents emigrated from Chile seven years ago and speak exclusively Spanish with each other and with their son. They do not have other family members living in the same city. The mother worked in a day care centre and is now a

student, while the father is employed as a professional. They live in student housing on a university campus. I conversed with the mother.

Family C consists of a mother who is from Quebec and speaks French as a first language, English as a second, and some German, a father who grew up in Vancouver with European immigrant parents (who spoke Russian and Dutch as first languages respectively, but English with each other and their children), and who speaks English with French as a second language, and three children. The children, two daughters aged seven and five years, and a son aged eighteen months, all speak French as a first language, although the girls are fluent in English. The little boy understands only French. The parents speak almost exclusively French with each other and their children. They know very few French-speaking people in their community. The family lived in Quebec for several years and moved to British Columbia five years ago. They live in Squamish where both parents are teachers. The paternal grandmother, who speaks Russian as a first language, lives an hour or so away in Vancouver and they see her frequently. She speaks only English with her grandchildren but is very supportive of the parents' desire for the children to be bilingual. The family travels to Quebec on occasion and receives frequent visits from maternal relatives. Both parents participated in the conversation.

Family D lives in Victoria. The mother spoke German as a first language but rarely speaks it now. Her preferred language is English and she learned

French as a young adult. The father moved to Vancouver from Montreal in his early twenties speaking only French. He has since become fluent in English. They have two children, both boys, who are three years and four months old respectively. The older child understands both French and English and spoke only French until quite recently. His English is now stronger and his language of choice much of the time. He has learned many German words, songs and poems with his maternal grandmother, whom he sees regularly, often without his parents. She speaks German with him. The family speaks both French and English in the home and mostly English in the community, although they are becoming involved with a French-language preschool. They travel regularly to Montreal and the father's relatives also visit from time to time. The parents both have graduate degrees and the mother works part-time from her home office. The mother and I conversed.

The mother in **Family E** also speaks German as a first language. She came to Canada as a baby and spoke only German until she went to school. She continues to speak German with her parents. The father comes from a German-speaking background but did not learn it as a child. They have two children, a son aged four years and a daughter aged six months at the time of the conversation. The parents speak only English with their children and each other. They live in a suburb of the same city as both maternal and paternal grandparents and see them frequently. All of the grandparents speak only English with the children. Both parents have university degrees and the

mother, a teacher, is working part time. The father works full time but is able to spend a lot of time with his children. The mother and I conversed.

Family F has a Greek background, with both parents growing up in Canada in Greek families. The mother speaks mainly English although she understands Greek and can "get by." The father's first language is Greek and he is quite comfortable using it in a family setting. There are three children, a son aged five, a daughter aged three, and another son, aged six months. The older boy spent a year or so in Greece at the age of one to two, and so learned to speak Greek first. He now speaks mainly in English although he continues to understand Greek and will speak it at times. The daughter refuses to speak Greek with her father although she understands it quite well and enjoys singing songs in Greek. The parents speak English together, and the mother speaks English with the children while the father speaks Greek. The parents both have graduate degrees and are involved in education as a profession. At the time of the interview they were living in the same city with the maternal grandparents with whom they speak a mixture of Greek and English. They had just begun to be involved in the Greek community through a Greek language after school program to which they were sending their oldest child. The father and I conversed.

Family G consists of a mother and father, both of whom speak Ismaili as a first language and English as a second, although there are dialectical variations to their first language. Both parents were of East Indian descent, born and

brought up in Uganda, Africa. They both learned English at school, and thereafter, the mother began to speak only English with her parents, although she says that they do not speak English fluently. The parents came to Canada separately as young adults and met and married here. Their parents have followed them so there is now a large extended family living in the same city. They have two children, a son aged five years and a daughter who is two. The parents understand each other's dialect but prefer to speak English together, although they try to encourage their children to learn Ismaili. The son understands the language well but refuses to speak it. He is cared for by his grandparents while his parents work and so hears the two dialects regularly but so far answers only in English. The daughter appears to be interested in speaking both languages. Both parents have a university education. The mother and I conversed.

The parents in **Family H** are both from Hong Kong and emigrated to Canada together before the birth of their children, two girls aged seven and five years. Both parents speak Cantonese, although both the maternal and paternal grandparents come from mainland China and speak different dialects. The mother learned her parents' dialect and still speaks it with her mother who struggles with Cantonese. The father understands the dialect of his parents but never learned to speak it. The parents both began learning English at school but the mother still feels she is not completely fluent. They speak Cantonese together and with their daughters, and are teaching them to read and write Chinese characters. The girls are fluent in English and are learning

French at a French Immersion school. The parents are both trained in social work but have had to take other jobs here in Canada, although the father is pursuing graduate studies in his field. The mother and I spoke together.

Family I consists of a mother whose first language is Cantonese and second language is English, a father who speaks English, is learning a little Cantonese, but whose family background is German, and one daughter, aged two years and eight months, with another child expected. The mother came to Canada as an adolescent and learned English here in school. The daughter speaks mainly Cantonese although she understands English when her father talks with her. The parents also speak English together. They are professionals who are both working and the child is cared for mainly by her maternal grandparents who speak Cantonese with her. The child does not see her paternal relatives as frequently as they live in a distant city. The mother and I conversed together.

Family I is a family of three, the mother who is fluent in a minority language in China, Mandarin and English, the father, who speaks only English, and a daughter, aged three years, who speaks Mandarin, and understands and speaks some English. The mother came to Canada as an adult, but was an English teacher in China and was fluent in the language when she arrived. The father speaks English to his daughter, and the mother speaks Mandarin to her, while the parents speak English together. The parents are both working professionals and the child is cared for by a Mandarin-speaking baby-

sitter, who was deliberately chosen for her language ability. The mother does not have any extended family in the same city, but there are paternal family members whom they see regularly. I spoke with the mother.

Family K is made up of a mother whose first language is Japanese, a father whose first language is French, and a daughter aged two years and ten months, who speaks Japanese, French and English equally well. The parents speak English together as they do not speak each other's native languages, and each speaks her or his first language with the child. Both parents came to Vancouver, where they still live, as young adults, and learned to speak English here. They are both working professionals but have arranged their schedules so that they both take care of their daughter, although the mother spends more time with her. Neither has family members living in the same city, but they do have close friends who speak the same native languages, and do receive visits from family from time to time. All four of us met and carried out a conversation together.

Family L are relatively recent immigrants from the former Czechoslovakia. The mother speaks Slovak and Russian as well as English, and the father speaks seven languages fluently, namely Slovak, Russian, German, French, Hungarian, Spanish and English. They have two daughters, one aged five and the other nearly two years old at the time of the study. The older daughter speaks Slovak, English, (she is fluent after one year at preschool), and is

learning French at a French Immersion school. The younger daughter understands and speaks only Slovak, which is the family language. The family lives in East Vancouver, and the mother is home with the children while the father works as a professional. They do not have family living here. The mother and I conversed.

My own family is not offered the luxury of anonymity, but is required to participate, identified and in full view, in my personal journal entries. I am aware of the position that this places my children in, particularly as they are too young to realize the full implications of my actions but I have chosen to go ahead in a way that I believe to be respectful and honest. It is also respectful and honest to the research and dissemination to include my own reflections as parent. Grumet (1988), when writing about including her own family in her research writes:

...by crossing the boundary between what I cherished in my family life and this work I do in the public world, I felt that I had desecrated the privacy and utter specificity of my relation to my children. At the same time, I believed, and still believe, that by withholding information about that relation from the public discourse of educational theory we deny our own experience and our own knowledge. (p. xvi)

Mother tongues speaking

It was not by design that more mothers than fathers took part in this study. I made a point of inviting families to participate: both parents as well as their children. There seemed to be an assumption on the part of many people that the mother would take on the role of communicator about young children with a comparative stranger. The one father I spoke with alone for the study initially put me off several times, apologizing for his wife's unavailability. When I finally asked if he would be willing to converse with me without her, he was surprised at the idea, although he did accept.

There are obvious connections between mothers and small children in all societies, and there have been several interesting studies on the social bonding which takes place between mother and infant and the linguistic development which arises from it (see Chapter 2, page 75.) Yet, it is still interesting to me that we use the term "mother tongue" rather than "family tongue." In my own family my husband and I were very concerned that our children grow up to be bilingual. As a result of our research, reflections and conversations, we decided on a family language, French, that is not my first language. That is, it is not the mother tongue of the mother in our family. Initially, the choice was very successful. It was not a problem for me to speak another language with my infant children. As they have grown, and become more expert communicators, the situation has changed somewhat. I am not sure how much the changes are related to the fact that the language I am beginning to use more and more with my children, English, is because it is my mother tongue, or that it is the majority language of the community we

live in. The dynamics of this shift in language of communication will be explained more fully in later chapters of this work.

Consider the situation represented by the participants of this research. In four out of the thirteen participating families (including my own) the parents speak the same first language (not English), and they are teaching it to their children. In the other nine families the parents speak different first languages. Of these nine, five are using the first language of the father with the children, and only two families are using the first language of the mother. Of the remaining two families, one is using both the first language of the mother and the father, and the other is using a language that is not the first language of either of the parents.

Moments of living, moments of language, interconnecting across time and place, within bodies/minds/families

beginning in the beginning
child
parent
family
home
hearth
kitchen

Chapter Two

The Kitchen Conversations

...language is the possibility of making meaning of and in the world.
(Courts, 1991, p.7)

Picture the setting: the kitchen table at 8 am on a week day morning.

I am placing bowls of cereal and glasses of orange juice on the table. Snippets of talk in different languages fill the air as my husband flips the dial on the radio in an attempt to find a local station that might give some information about the possible CUPE strike which would close the schools. My older daughter walks into the room dressed in shorts and a t shirt with bare feet.

We have just heard the radio announcer say that it is 4°C outside and the forecast is for rain.

Amalie, qu'est-ce que tu portes? Il fait froid dehors!

I can't find my bellbottoms. Ils sont dans le lavage. Regarde en bas.

Ils n'y a pas de nouvelles, ça doit être correct pour aujourd'hui. Mama, je ne les trouve pas. J'ai une réunion ce soir, je serai en retard.

Madeleine, viens manger. Why do we have to have this cereal? I hate this cereal. Why can't we have Cheerios? Il faut que je pars, oublie-pas le cours de piano cet apres-midi. Madeleine, fais un effort. Mom! I can't find them. Look on the... Regardes sur le rack à linge. Tiens, Madeleine, veux-tu du jus d'orange? Merci maman. Voila les Cheerios. Can I see

what the prizes are, sur la boîte? I want to pour it myself. Ooops, I did a dégât, maman. Ça va, je vais chercher un linge. Try to be a bit more careful. Amalie, veux-tu autre chose à manger? Mmhm, un rôti, with peanut butter. Qu'est-ce que tu veux dans ton lunch, une pomme ou une banane? Une banane, s'il vous plaît. Mom, can I get a... Hey, that's mine! No it isn't! Mom! Les enfants, vite, c'est le temps de partir. Don't hit your sister!

The new day begins in the kitchen, the gathering place of the family. What does it mean to be a bilingual parent in the privacy of the home, within the family, where the blendings of languages and cultures may not be so smooth as they appear to the outside world? Here we discuss the situation within the family, the daily joys and tensions that face parents who have the possibility of raising bilingual children, and who are faced with the implications of this in all of their interactions with their children.

I am standing behind a table of home-baked goods, taking my turn at a fund-raising bazaar for my children's daycare. The woman standing beside me, another parent, speaks excellent English but with what I am sure is a French Canadian accent. I seldom see her at the daycare because it is the child's father, from whom she is separated I now learn, who brings him in each morning. My children come rushing up, demanding cookies, speaking in French as usual. "Oh," says the woman, "Your children speak French. I wish my son could." She

switches into French to explain that she used to speak French with her son but when she and her husband, who is anglophone, were in the process of separating the little boy, aged 3 at the time, refused speak French. "Absolument, completement, pas un mot," she says sadly. She began using English with him to keep the communication going, "I couldn't live not talking with my son at all." Now at age 5, he no longer even understands French. "I really thought it would be temporary, that we would one day go back to using my language, French, once everything was straightened out. I grew up in Montreal where practically everyone I knew was bilingual, I didn't think about how it might be out here in Vancouver." Another mother, another story, this time a situation where a parent felt she had to choose a specific language in order to communicate with her son. While she spoke with some regret for the fact that her son does not speak French, this woman's strong conviction that she had done the right thing at the time came through her words. The realization that her experience of living in the bilingual city of Montreal led her to an expectation that bilingualism would "happen" to her son as well came about as a result of the conversation. The act of conversing allowed both of us to understand more fully what it is to live with a certain expectation, and then be nudged toward the realization of how unrealistic it might be. This is not a "research subject." This is a human being, confiding in me, another human being, because she sees that we share many

similarities and interests: we are both mothers of young children, and speakers of the French language. We both learn from this exchange, and we build connections and community by sharing our knowledge. As a researcher, I believe that there is much to be learned by others as well, but I must present this knowledge in ways that are respectful and true to the original exchange. It is a challenge.

personal journal, December, 1995

In our conversations for this study we talked about the participants' own memories of using language in their families, whether it was one or two languages, and how that affected their daily lives. Here are some extracts of those conversations. Here a parent speaks about her early experiences in Canada, learning a new language and culture through working with young children. She discusses the problems associated with learning "children's English" rather than adult, academic English, but states that her experiences were still positive for her.

It was interesting too when I, let's go into the conversation mode, when I came to Canada the first year I worked in a daycare centre. I had a degree in Argentina, it's a Kindergarten teacher degree. Although it's a combination of Early Childhood and Kindergarten. Like I can work with children from 6 months old till 5 years old, right. So I worked in a daycare and so I learned all this language. I mean I was learning with the children. It was a great setting for me to be in my first year because I was, they were teaching the children how to speak and I was learning

with them. But I also learned to speak like the children speak and when I came to university and I had to say things in a more academic or mature adult way, I didn't have the words, I had the children's words. But I got a lot of that culture there too, like the songs and rhymes and stuff like that, I got in that setting too. It was good.

conversation with family B

The parent with whom I spoke in the following conversation grew up in Canada speaking both Greek and English. He states that this was a typical situation for the children of his neighbourhood in Toronto. Although the languages were different, he talks about the sense of community that existed among the diverse group of immigrants because of the similarities that they did share in learning to adapt to a new culture and way of life. The parent mentions the role of the bilingual child as intermediary in the immigrant family, and describes the sense of trust that can develop as a result of this role as positive.

So in the neighbourhood where you grew up that was fairly typical to have a different language at home.

Yes.

Like to be bilingual, to be a translator for parents and things like that.

That wasn't unusual.

No no. Because all of my friends came from bilingual families, either Chinese, Japanese, Indo-Canadian, Italian, Greek Macedonia, Yugoslavian, whatever. French sometimes too. Yeah. When I think there was someone who I knew whose parents spoke very little English, they spoke French. But they were just beginning to learn English. So they were also in that situation also. But it was a natural thing and I think it made it easier for people to comprehend their situation and it created a better sense of community than having a situation where there were, you know, English only speaking people as compared to people who were bilingual in some way because then there was more of an understanding of not only the cultural dynamic of taking on Canadian culture as well as your own, but at the same time there was also the dynamic of you know children being the intermediary to the outside world. So there was this trust there. So that was a good feeling also, I thought.

conversation with family F

This parent was very matter of fact about the need for her to speak three languages on a daily basis as part of her regular routine, an idea that many Canadians would find astonishing:

So but for you it was quite ordinary then to speak one language with your mother, another language with your friends and another language at school and that was it, a very ordinary thing to do. Everybody did it ...

Oh yes, that's true.

conversation with family H

The next parent who speaks grew up speaking only English, although his parents were both immigrants from Europe who learned English as adults. He himself learned a second language as an adult (not the language of either of his parents), and here he talks about how he always wanted his children to be able to speak two languages, how fortunate he feels that his partner is francophone and that therefore his children are bilingual, and his pride in their abilities. We talked about the day to day difficulties of raising bilingual children, which sometimes restrict our abilities to do what we believe is best for our children's linguistic development; in this case to always speak in French.

Je pense que je voulais toujours que mes enfants soient capable de parler une autre langue et vue que j'aime tellement le français, j'aurai aimé ça. Avec Suzanne⁵ c'est devenu encore plus important, alors on l'a toujours fait [parlé français.] Maintenant c'est devenu naturel. Je ne sais pas si j'étais avec une anglophone si je serai capable de faire ça. Surement pas. Alors, j'aime bien cela [le fait que mes enfants parlent français] and j'en suis fier aussi.

Tu ne trouves pas que c'est difficile de parler tout le temps en français?

⁵ The names of the participants have been changed in order to ensure confidentiality.

C'est très naturel maintenant, alors je n'y pense même plus.

Je suis curieuse parce que je suis très en accord avec la théorie, avec l'idée en arrière le pratique de parler français, c'est à dire, d'avoir une langue familiale, de donner le plus de chance possible à la langue minoritaire. Mais, en pratique, j'ai de la difficulté des fois de toujours parler en français avec les enfants. Des fois, quand on se promène en auto par exemple, et il y a beaucoup de trafic, les enfants se chicannent en arrière, on est en retard pour quelque chose, et une des filles me pose une question compliquée comme: "Comment est-ce que la lune reste dans le ciel?" Là, j'ai de la difficulté à répondre en français, dans un bon français, avec un langage à leur niveau. Je n'ai pas imaginé des situations comme ça. Quand les enfants étaient des bébés ce n'était pas un problème du tout, c'est juste depuis qu'elles sont un peu plus vieille. Ce n'est pas parce que j'ai beaucoup de difficulté avec la langue, ou que je n'aime pas la parler. Je trouve que je m'exprime bien en français, et c'est un plaisir de le faire. Mais quand je suis stressée, les choses compliquées sort plus facilement en anglais. Est-ce que ça arrive à d'autre monde?

conversation with family C

The following conversation was with a mother who is not teaching her native language to her daughter. While the mother indicates a certain disappointment with the fact that the child is not fluent in Greek she is able

to continue to discuss the issue in a lighthearted way, which leaves possibilities open for future language learning.

I don't think in Greek so I don't speak Greek to her. It seems really unnatural for me to speak Greek to her, and I wish she did pick it up. My mom, when we moved back here (to Vancouver) I was hoping that my mom would start speaking to her, but she doesn't either. She started speaking to her in English and I said to her "Speak to her in Greek." All her friends and all the family get on my case: "Well you haven't taught her Greek, she doesn't know Greek." And I say, "Speak to her grandmother who, it's her first language." So she's picked up some words but when she hears people talking with an accent she calls it "Alatha talk"-- Alatha, which is Greece. She goes, "That person's talking Alatha talk." And I'll say, "Well you talk Alatha talk," and she'll say (puts on a Greek accent) "Come to the downstairs." (laughs). And I'll say, "You got it, you know Greek!" (laughs) And she'll say, "I know Greek, I know Greek."

conversation with family A

Grandparents and other extended family members play an important role in family dynamics, particularly around issues of language and cultural identity when the parents come from two different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

I found that there's actually a problem when the grandparents come, that he (the father) needs to explain to his parents. Cause at first I wasn't sure how they feel about the language, like the language issue, like how they would feel we've raised a child in Cantonese. I remember first I asked him like when Gillian was just a baby and even a few weeks old when they came to visit. Cause I'm starting to sing to her in Cantonese. So I asked him, I thought they would think it was kind of weird. But I just said well it's our preference to raise her in Cantonese because she will learn how to speak English. I think at first maybe they didn't really quite accept it fully. I guess they would never imagine a grandchild who would just speak Cantonese first and, you know. But now they may be getting it. But I think there's at first some family pressure too, like what to do.

Do you think it was the idea that she would be bilingual or was it the fact that the language was Cantonese?

Yeah, well that's interesting point, I never really asked them. But I think because they live in, like a smaller town in Winnipeg they're not exposed to people that speak Cantonese that much. Maybe they're more exposed to people that speak Ukrainian or something. You know, in Vancouver you see so many people that speak Cantonese. So Cantonese is so foreign to them and so to have a grandchild that speaks such a foreign language, it's really kind of hard on them. Yeah. Now

they see that she actually can speak both languages. I think they are a little bit more reassured that they can communicate with her.

conversation with family I

The tensions between parents and children ebb and flow but are always there in some form, as long as the parents continue to demand the extra effort of their children to maintain the "bi", the double learning, in their linguistic progress.

Well when after he started speaking English, he didn't really want to speak Greek anymore because he wanted to learn English better so he could communicate with his friends easier. So but we still speak to him in Greek most of the time, although it's getting harder. But what I saw was that he didn't really forget the language, it was there embedded somewhere in his conscious, in his consciousness. But at the same time we send him to Greek school now in the afternoons two days a week. And now he speaks Greek on his own without any coaching.

conversation with family F

Well, we would really like them to continue to speak their first language, to read and write it, but we realize that it is up to us. The school will never teach Slovak! But it's hard sometimes. We have books and tapes from home but she, Maria, doesn't want to hear them in Slovak. She doesn't want us to read them in Slovak and she won't

listen to the tapes. So what can you do? You can't force her. Maybe it's not so important here in Canada.

conversation with family L

Research on child language acquisition

The amount of research that has been done in the area of child language acquisition has increased enormously in recent years, as Erneling (1993), Locke (1993), and Moerk (1992) have noted. A part of this trend is the increasing interest in the dual language acquisition of bilingual children, often in the form of case studies (DeHouwer, 1990; Dopke, 1992; Fantini, 1985; Goodz, 1994; Meisel, 1990; Pan, 1995; Saunders, 1982, 1988; Taeschner, 1983; and Yamamoto, 1995). The research indicates strong parental influence, often of the mother, but not always, on the language learning of the child. Yet, as Whitehurst has pointed out in the foreword to Moerk (1992): "most diary studies have focused exclusively on the child" (p. vii.) Even the research which is described as "family studies" or "parent/child interaction studies" (such as Dopke, 1992; Goodz, 1994; Pan, 1995; and Yamamoto, 1995) focus very strongly on the output of the child in relation to what the parent says or does. These studies are fascinating and informative, but lack in depth descriptions and examples of parental influence on the language learning of the children. One exception to this trend is a study of bilingual Welsh/English-speaking mothers and their children by Harrison, Bellin & Piette (1981), where the mothers were interviewed to determine whether they were teaching Welsh to their children, and why (or why not) they were doing so. The findings to

this study were, briefly, that mothers who felt strong support and encouragement for teaching the Welsh language from their spouse and the community as a whole were most likely to do so, whereas mothers who did not feel this support did not help their children to acquire Welsh as well as English. In general, researchers appear to make many assumptions about why parents would attempt to raise their children bilingually, but with few exceptions, such as Harrison, Bellin & Piette (1981), rarely discuss the topic with the parents themselves.

The distinct feature of this research is that the family is at the centre of the study. I have elected to speak with parents, about themselves and their families, in an effort to explore how the past life experiences of bilingual parents of young children have influenced their own attitudes and understandings about language learning and bilingualism, and how these affect the decisions they make regarding the language learning of their children. I am a part of this research myself as I attempt to raise my own children bilingually; therefore my own experiences and reflections form an integral part of the study. Conversing with other parents about raising children to speak two languages is a regular part of my life. Overhearing my conversations with my children in a language other than English, strangers approach me and recount personal stories about language learning and their children; friends seek me out to continue earlier conversations about the fears and concerns, as well as the great satisfactions they encounter within bilingual family life.

In my own life I began to become truly intrigued by the phenomenon of bilingualism as a young parent while studying for a graduate degree in education. I grew up in Vancouver, a unilingual anglophone of parents who also, although they had studied other languages, spoke only English. My father was the director of International House, a centre for international students on the University of British Columbia campus, so I grew up in a household where there were often guests and students from other countries, speaking other languages. My younger brother's first words were Malay. Despite an early interest, I was a poor student of French, the second language offered at the high school I attended. I persisted in my attempts to learn French until third year university, although my poor grades affected my overall standing. After completing a BA in English Literature I accepted the offer of a Federal bursary to study French in Quebec City while teaching conversational English in a local high school. I had decided to give the language one more chance, and if I was not able to learn there, I would give it up completely. I did learn, in fact, became fluent. Overall, I spent six years in Quebec, two in Quebec City and four more in Inuit villages in northern Quebec, as a teacher of Inuit children. I met and married a francophone and am now raising two bilingual children in a predominantly francophone household in a predominantly anglophone community. It is not always straightforward or easy, although our children have achieved a level of bilingualism that allows them to participate in their community while able to

communicate with family members who are unilingual French speakers at a level comparable with children their own age.

This did not happen by accident. Even before the birth of our first child we began to discuss linguistic options and strategies. We were united in our desire for our children to be fully bilingual, and in our expectations that this was both possible and advantageous. We rejected the strategy of "one parent one language" on the basis that it did not encourage the use of a family language, and made it difficult to envisage which language the parents would use when speaking together (see Zierer, 1977 for similar conclusions.) When our move to Vancouver became imminent, we decided it was important to emphasize the use of the minority language in the home to maximize exposure and provide every opportunity for learning. As French is a minority language in Vancouver, and we had already established French as the means of communication between the two of us, it was natural to begin using French with our daughter from the time she was born. I thought I would find it difficult to use my second language with my children but actually found it quite easy and natural. The potential difficulties worked themselves out, such as what language to use to sing nursery rhymes, play finger games, and read stories? When I knew only the English version, that is what I used, switching back to French for the accompanying conversation. Books for babies can easily be translated as most of them have single words or short sentences on each page. Poetry has always been a big part of our lives, however, and we always read and enjoy it in the original language.

As parents we were, and continue to be, very conscious of what we are teaching our children, what our expectations are, and how we can help our children meet them. We frequently discuss the linguistic progress of our children, in addition to their physical, intellectual and emotional development. We are very conscious of the fact that our expectations are high: they are expected to be fluent and literate in two languages, as well as reach other developmental stages of childhood. There are times when this comes very easily:

Amalie (3yrs, 2 months) was her typical outgoing self today. We were at Robson park when Amalie came running back to where I was standing with the stroller watching Madeleine (16 months) play in the sand pile. "Ils parlent français, maman, ils parlent français, comme nous!" she said, gesturing toward a woman with a young boy. We smiled at each other across the park, and she began to walk slowly towards me. We introduced ourselves and chatted about the weather. Amalie hopped from one foot to the other, full of excitement, anxious to join in the conversation. "Tu parles bien français," the woman said, looking down at her. "Oui, et mon papa, et ma maman, et ma petite soeur aussi.", pointing to Madeleine, who looked up inquiringly, rosy pink cheeks covered in sand. I am proud that my daughter is able to converse so easily with a stranger in what is mostly a family language for her; because she spends most of her time with me I

am the one who has given her this ability. I am intrigued that she is so intent on making connections with French-speaking people she meets; with building a community based on language.

personal records 09/13/93

At other times this bilingual interaction with our children is not so easy, or straightforward. Many times my husband and I must remind them that the family language is French, and insist that they use it when speaking in the home:

Once again I am asking my 5 year old daughter, as I do many times every day, to speak French when we are together as a family. She responds: "I think you have to tell my brain to speak French, Mama, because I don't think my ears are listening"

personal records, 11/03/95

Sometimes the ambivalence comes from within ourselves:

There are times, especially lately, when I find myself deliberately choosing to speak English, more, even delighting in hearing the English language roll off my tongue when speaking with my children. I am so eloquent, I find the words that express my thoughts so easily, words that I know my children will also know and understand. I take such pleasure in communicating

important ideas with words that resonate with meaning for me. Me, who always insisted that we speak only French, that French was the natural language for our family conversations. And it was for so many years. Even now, I automatically speak to young children I do not know in French first, the language comes unbidden to my lips. Is it because my children are now older, at 5 and 7 years now capable of extended conversations on complicated topics? Perhaps. However, when I hear my husband speaking English with the children (is he influenced by my recent, obvious delight in using my mother tongue? or merely influenced by the pervasive local linguistic input) I immediately rebuke him and request a return to French. He quickly complies.

researcher journal 01/03/98

I was so sure, when I started out nearly eight years ago, that I knew exactly what I was doing, and that it would all unfold according to plan. I have learned so much more about language, about bilingualism, about parenting than I knew existed. But this study goes far beyond my own family. What has led me to undertake such a study are the numbers of people I meet who spontaneously remark on the bilingualism of my children, and who equally spontaneously recount their own experiences with language learning and languages in the family.

Many conversations touched upon the difficulties of parenting bilingually, of being consistent in using a certain language with a child, and with working out the family strategy that makes sense and is also possible within the complexities of family life. The notion that raising a child to be bilingual is a conscious act, which needs careful deliberation, and is often more challenging than parents are prepared for, was raised repeatedly in the conversations. We talked about the effort involved, and the alternative, or what would happen if we did not make the effort.

Do you find that it's an effort?

Yeah.

It's something that you have to be conscious of doing?

All the time because I'll, if I don't make a conscious effort I'll always lapse into English and I'll never speak Greek.

conversation with family F

So like so that decision was made quite a long time ago. And when we actually had kids we found that it's actually more difficult than what I thought of. Like thought it was going to be hard because we need this, like English (unclear), it's going to be hard. But I didn't think it would be as hard as it is. Actually we find it even harder now, now that Gillian's going to preschool cause she's surrounded by English and it's quite hard to keep it up at home.

I didn't think of a strategy. I thought it might happen [Carolyn learn Greek] but I really didn't have much faith in it happening. I really didn't think it would. I was talking with Mike and was saying that by the time Carolyn, you know, has kids of her own, both our cultures could be gone. I'm Greek, both my parents are Greek, Mike's mom is white, his father's Native, so that by the time Carolyn has kids they could be anything, they could be a whole mix of stuff.

It's kind of sad in a way, it's kind of sad, and when you're younger and your parents want you to marry someone Greek, that was my parents' wish, but I mean they were cool about it as well. My sister's not married to a Greek guy, I'm not married to a Greek guy, my brother is not going to marry a Greek girl, I don't think. And I used to think relax, what's the big deal, but now I sort of think it is a little bit of a big deal.

In what way?

I don't even know what it is that bothers me, it is, so then "What's your ethnic background?" And you can name off all 20 different things, and at some point I think there's just going to be no different ethnic backgrounds. A hundred years ago you could travel, you couldn't

travel so much so you married somebody from your country. I don't even know why it saddens me a bit.

conversation with family A

This nostalgia is repeated often in popular literature, for example in E. Annie Proulx's Accordion Crimes (1996):

"I don't talk Polish, just picked up a couple of words from my grandmother. *Na zdrowie*. You know." He sighed. "It's a shame, ain't it, how the generation lost the language. I'd love to know it but--" He spread his hands in despair. (p. 319)

The connections between language and identity are many and varied. Here a family has decided that it is important to keep up a family language partly because of a connection with physical appearance as well as national heritage. This theme did not become an important one for the study as other families did not make the same connection between language and race. However, it is an important point worth pursuing. Are families whose appearance does not immediately suggest that they are speakers of a minority language more likely to try to blend in linguistically by speaking the majority language, than those whose appearance immediately suggests that they are immigrants? How do families resolve issues around ethnicity, language and identity?

...but to keep Julia and Nicole, like to speak in Cantonese, it takes up a little bit of effort. You have to make them understand like why we are doing that.

So do you explain to them?

Yeah. Yeah. And then like I just would, a couple of reasons being that like to show the respect that we use their common language. So people understand what we are talking about so they can participate and not being singled out. And the other thing is that like why we keep like ourselves in the family, it could help in Cantonese being that like I think that is part of the identity. Yeah, that is an integral part of their identity. It's like, even though they speak fluent English, they are Canadian but from the physical appearance people know that she is an Asian Canadian, may not know what or the girl's nationality or where is the originator. But then I think that which helps them to have a good self-identity so that's why we do it this way.

conversation with family H

Rizvi (1994), in a discussion of the power relationships existent in multicultural education, describes a means for understanding ethnicity in modern, multicultural societies:

Ethnicity needs to be understood in terms of a politics of location, positionality and enunciation, not so much as a process of discovery of

lost "roots", but of construction of a "new" or "emergent" ethnicity,
linked to contemporary social relations and to relations of power. (p.56)

Rizvi writes that "Marginalized people clearly need to honour many of the overt aspects of their traditions and history, but they also need..." (p. 65) in the words of Hall (1991)

... to understand the languages which they've been not taught to speak. They need to understand and revalue the traditions and the inheritances of cultural expression and creativity. And, in that sense, the past is not only a position from which to speak, but it is also a necessary resource in what one has to say. ... So the relationship of the kind of ethnicity I am talking about to the past is not a simple one-- it is a constructed one. It is constructed in history, and it is constructed politically in part. It is part of a narrative. We tell ourselves the stories of the parts of our roots in order to come into contact creatively with it.
(p. 15)

In their comments on the connections of ethnicity, language and identity, Rizvi and Hall suggest a means by which families of marginal and multi ethnic backgrounds can understand their situation, and place themselves within contemporary society without denying their cultural heritage. This is a difficult dilemma for many families, as the conversations have illustrated.

The following quote suggests that people are very aware of the connections between the appearance of a person and the expectations of the language they will speak.

I mean because I don't look as an immigrant, I'm white, I have red hair, so people would be surprised when they hear my accent. I can see that, I mean I see it when we start talking and then they hear, the first time they hear an accent it's like oh. And of course they would say where are you from, Europe or are you from Quebec? Just because I have an accent and then I'm white, they wouldn't pick up.

Do you see that as a barrier to communication or is it ...?

Oh yes. It could be. It could be. Oh yeah, absolutely.

.....

Probably the way you look and that's why I said William's white and he has blue eyes and his hair is light brown. So that's, I mean I'm sure that even the most fluent Canadian person that looks Chinese because she or he was born to Chinese parents or oriental or whatever, um, it is different. Like the way people approach that.

conversation with family B

Some families do not focus on the difficulties, or the potential problems that may arise from not being consistent about the languages, or by mixing languages, but focus instead on the positive aspects of being able to

share two languages with one's child, and to delight in the learning that is taking place.

But it's not a difficult thing for you to have to, you're speaking English at home to your husband and you turn and speak Mandarin to Paula and then or to remember to change into Mandarin or to perhaps ...

No, that's right, yeah. And yes it's interesting, it's not difficult at all. It's just sometimes I start mixing languages up like Paula does too. I guess linguistically it's not a very good thing to do. But then it just comes out naturally and if it happens, it happens. And we just love it.

conversation with family J

The advice given to parents by those academics, such as Saunders (1982) and Baker (1995), who advocate bilingualism is that it is "natural" to speak one's first language with one's children, and that if one simply speaks the language the children will happily and easily learn it. The following quotation is from The Bilingual Family Newsletter that is published several times a year in England by a publisher that specializes in research in multiple language learning:

To help your would-be polyglots reinforce what comes so naturally, begin with the basics: relaxation, fun, spontaneity, vibrant interaction and every day natural behaviours. It seems effortless and has worked best for our children. (Bérubé, 1998, p. 4)

The newsletter is designed for families in a European context who are helping their children acquire two or more languages. While offering encouragement and some helpful advice, and most of all, a sense of solidarity and community to families interested in bilingualism for their children, The Bilingual Family Newsletter has, at times, a tendency to simplify the complexities of day to day family life, and in doing so denies the kind of real experiences faced by parents. The featured families are usually successfully bilingual and the advice given seems somewhat simplistic, as Bérubé, (1998) writes: "Raising children bilingually in a monolingual community requires minimal effort but maximum commitment" (p.4).

In contrast, here are comments from two families where the children were not being raised to speak the first language of the mother and so were not be offered an opportunity to become bilingual. The parents express their concerns about the difficulties of helping their children acquire two languages and their lack of knowledge about where to turn for information.

Maybe, it's... I was going to say that it's too much of an effort, but it's not just too much of an effort, it's close to impossible. Even if I speak to her in Greek, it's still a mixture of Greek and English, and she'll still pick it up that way.

conversation with family A

So the reason I wanted to come and talk to you about it was because I was really interested to know whether, what or if at all you had thought about language when you were first, you know, planning to have children and then when Charles was first born and whether it has simply been an issue or whether you had thought deliberately what language he would speak, whether you would like him to learn German at all, whether you had thought that was important.

No, not initially. There was no thought about that at all but it's become more important now and I don't know why, you know, after he's what three, four years old, that maybe having another child, maybe it's seeing my sister spending the time speaking to her son in German. It's become now something that I would like but it's hard to figure out how to do it.

conversation with family E

The kitchen conversations around difficulties of maintaining a heritage language, the motivations for doing so, and the ultimate results... what is it that can be learned from these conversations?

We stopped. There was a period, I don't know if it was sort of after high school. Maybe it's the rebellious stage, rebellion against, you know, everything that your parents stand for and German wasn't one of those things that I really wanted to do. I was proud of being able to speak German and I used it a lot when I was working at Mount Co-op.

Oh great. Oh yeah.

So I, um, in fact at one point in time I even got a raise based on the fact that I could speak German to all the German tourists that came to the store. So I was really proud of being able to speak it, but I think what's really hard is because when I stopped speaking it on a regular basis I was quite young so that my vocabulary is of an elementary school German. So I don't have the adult words and it makes it kind of awkward sometimes when you're talking with older people.

conversation with family E

What I have learned is that parents have varying understandings as to what advantages knowing two languages may bring to their children. Some believe that the extra knowledge is enough to warrant the extra effort needed to help children acquire two languages simultaneously, while others, such as the parent in the conversation above need further assurance. The parents who had strong cultural or religious ties to their language indicated that bilingualism for their children was very important in the present time, as well as for the future. I have many questions that I am still attempting to answer as to why parents would make great efforts to help their children acquire two languages in early childhood. Does the decision to help children acquire two languages depend on how much support the parent feels from other family members? Or is there a stronger connection to self? Why would

some parents be conscious about the possible advantages and others not? Is it a question of education or class? We now understand better the pressures from within the individual parent and the family unit, and from without, from extended family, friends, neighbours, and society at large about the difficulties, the choices to be made. Is it realistic to expect people to be conscious about the language they use?

I feel so guilty-- not only did I lose my temper and yell at the girls when I should be patient and understanding, I yelled at them in English! I have to calm down, be endlessly patient and find the appropriate words in French to express how I'm feeling, when really I'm ready to explode. It's not fair, but it is, because I was the one who wanted to live here, in this English-speaking community, so it is at least partially up to me to make sure that inside the home my children live in a French-speaking world. I didn't think at the time how profoundly that decision would affect the rest of my life, my role as a parent and my relationship with my children.

personal journal, March, 1998

I feel such conflicting emotions about this whole bilingual thing. I am resentful at times when I can't just speak naturally, talk about what I remember from being a child in the language I lived it, discuss things in the way I think best and most fluently, tell stories and be funny and joke around spontaneously without having to stop and think about the

language part. But it is so wonderful to hear my children speak fluently in French, and feel so at home in French language situations: making friends with the artist on the street corner in Paris, chatting with the waitress in the cafe in Montreal, and joining so easily into family life with the aunts, uncles, cousins and family friends who do not speak any English, knowing that I was able to give at least a part of that to them.

personal journal, August, 1998

*If only things were easy, straightforward and if only we knew that what we are doing is the right thing. Another shock today: I have been feeling pulled in all directions, trying to complete this dissertation and care for my family. I feel that things are getting somewhat settled after a very busy month when I come across a passage in Max Van Manen, whom I turned to for advice on writing up my research: Someday, someone might be brave enough to do a mischievous study. It would test the pedagogic worth of dominant educational perspectives and theories. It would examine the lives of the people who produce scholarly writings about education. One might imagine the preposterous but true allegations: This one has abandoned his wife and children for the sake of an academic career in education. That one leaves two children in day care from eight to five in order to free up time to write about teaching kids (p. 148.) *Preposterous but true that I am.**

personal journal, September, 1998

Another writer who has explored the experience of being a parent from a phenomenological viewpoint is David G. Smith (1984) who takes up this paradoxical idea of how we know our children, yet they remain strangers to us:

The child comes as a stranger, but a stranger that we ourselves have created. What makes a child so strange is that he (sic) is so familiar. After all we made him. He is our own flesh and blood. That is why his otherness is so incomprehensible. He takes us by surprise. ... He is always beyond our understanding because he is beyond us. (p. 292)

Smith quotes from T.S. Eliot's The Four Quartets, which is also appropriate for this study, as it expresses the some times sentiments of parents who are finding their efforts to help their children acquire two languages challenging in its complexities:

So here I am, ...
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. (1963, pp. 202-203)

We may want something for our children, in this case bilingualism, because of the attachments we ourselves feel towards a minority language, and because of the advantages bilingualism has brought us, but wanting something for someone else, even our children, cannot guarantee that they will also want the same thing. We can offer opportunities for our children to acquire a language, we can provide material and social and educational situations to increase exposure to the language, we can become a positive role model by demonstrating the pleasures and advantages of being a bilingual person, we can share our pride in our language and culture, but then we can only hope that our children will come to understand our perspective.

Children and bilingualism

The field of research on children and bilingualism is dominated by studies in which English is the majority language of the communities where the participants live. The rather special nature of English as the most popular and powerful international language, with a correspondingly high status in many areas such as science, technology and popular culture, must be taken into account, as this has a great effect on the motivation to learn and use English and would also influence the maintenance of the minority language.

Our collective fascination with language is well documented; we have only to look around us to see the continuing plethora of print written in an effort to illuminate the nature of language: what it is to learn a language, know a language. How do we learn to understand what is meant and say

what we mean? How do we learn how to piece together that great code of sounds and silences that allows us to communicate thoughts and ideas, our needs and desires to others in our language community? There is a great deal of research on how children learn a first language in the home and in early childhood institutions such as preschools, although the studies are generally limited to children learning a majority language, most often English.

Researchers in this area have concentrated on determining developmental stages of children and the sequence of sounds, vocabulary, syntax and pragmatic acquisition strategies (Brown, 1973; Snow, 1972; Wells, 1985). Data collected on infants and very young children in the home focuses most often on children interacting with their mothers (Snow & Ferguson, 1977; Wells, 1985). There are few longitudinal studies of early language learning of minority language children within the family, as opposed to research in preschool or primary classrooms. A few exceptions are Padilla & Liebman, (1975), who studied a group of three year-old Spanish-speaking American children in their homes, and Rodriguez, (1982), Villanueva (1990), and Gilyard (1991), who wrote autobiographical accounts of growing up in the United States speaking a minority language/dialect. Even in these studies the influence of the school on language learning and use is strongly evident.

What happens when we must learn two or more codes in order to function fully in society? This topic of bilingualism and the learning of two languages in childhood has intrigued researchers for decades but there is still much we do not know. We do know that bilingualism, even

multilingualism, is the norm for the majority of the world's population (Edwards, 1994; Grosjean, 1982), yet it is still considered to be an extraordinary state in Canada, the United States and other English-speaking countries, and children who are accomplished bilinguals are often seen as "different" in these countries:

In many cases bilingualism is viewed negatively and with suspicion. Members of the bilingual community often share the negative attitudes of monolinguals, often to the point where they discourage their children from using the language of the home, when this is different from the one used in society. (Romaine, 1995, p. 288)

This attitude that bilingual children are considered to be quite extraordinary, in a positive sense for an elite few, and in a negative way for a great many, especially working class and immigrant minority groups, has influenced the research on bilingualism where children do successfully learn two languages (Dopke, 1992; Fantini, 1985; Saunders, 1982; 1988).

The term bilingual can mean anything from passive understanding of a second language to full fluency in two languages (see Baetens Beardsmore, 1982; Romaine, 1995). In practice, bilingualism usually means something between the two, and the languages are used often used for different domains, such as home and school or work, so that the individual has strengths in different lexicons and registers of each language (Grosjean, 1982; Hamers & Blanc, 1989). Wallace Lambert (1977) proposed the term "balanced bilingual" to describe someone who has equal proficiency in two languages, as well as

making the distinction between "additive" and "subtractive bilingualism". With the former type the individual learns a second language while continuing to use and develop her first, while the second type describes an individual replacing a first language with a second. Other definitions of bilingualism distinguish between the way the languages are organized cognitively, learned and used in any given situation.

Most of the early research in bilingualism in young children (such as Leopold, 1939-1949) has been in the form of case studies of children who learn two languages from birth or a very young age (also called simultaneous bilingualism). McLaughlin (1984) refers to infant bilingualism as simultaneous, and child bilingualism as successive language acquisition. He sets an arbitrary age limit of three years; that is, if a child begins to learn a second language before the age of three he/she is simultaneously learning the two languages, whereas if this begins after age three, it is successive language acquisition. Not all researchers agree with this distinction between simultaneous and successive or the age limit of three years (DeHouwer, 1990; Hamers & Blanc, 1989). One of the earliest studies where systematic records were kept is that of Ronjat (1913, as described in Hamers & Blanc, 1989), a French psychologist, who recorded the bilingual (French & German) development of his son from birth to the age of four. Ronjat determined that his son was able to distinguish between the two languages from an early age and rarely mixed them, and concluded that bilingualism did not delay the cognitive development of the child in any way.

Leopold (1939-1949), a linguist of German origin living in the United States, produced what is still considered to be one of the most detailed case studies of a child learning two languages from birth. His daughter, Hildegard, learned German from her father and spoke English with her mother and other family members. Leopold began recording every sound Hildegard produced and noted everything she was able to understand until that became impractical. He was one of the first researchers in the field to take extensive account of the outside influences on Hildegard's choice and production of language. We learn that while Hildegard learned a lot of German words as a very young child, English was her dominant language when she began to speak in sentences, until a trip to Germany at the age of three years brought her German into dominance. These studies, along with Pavlovitch (1920, as described in Romaine, 1995), set the standard for future case studies of bilingual children.

Researchers looking at early childhood bilingualism have been very interested in learning about how children acquire two different phonetic, lexical, morphological and syntactic systems and whether the two systems are learned as one and separated later when the child has greater cognitive and metalingual understanding, or whether they are always two systems. There is conflicting evidence as to how the two language codes develop as separate systems (Volterra & Taschner, 1978). Leopold (1939-49) suggested that his daughter began with one phonetic and morphological system which she later separated into two, English and German, when she began to speak, while

DeHouwer (1990) maintains that bilingual children use two separate systems practically from birth, and that every effort should be made to keep them distinct. The enormous possibility for variation in how the language systems develop, and the amount and kind of interference from one language to another appears to be at least partly related to the particular languages involved; that is the structures that are marked or unmarked, complex or transparent for a given language (see Slobin, 1985 for crosslinguistic studies of children learning language). One example showing the importance of including the social/family context in the study of language acquisition in children is found in Romaine (1995), who discusses Ochs' (1982) findings on the acquisition of ergative case markings by Samoan children, where she concludes that linguistic and cognitive factors in language learning are always accompanied by social factors. Ochs found that Samoan children learn ergative case markings much later (around age 4) than Kaluli children, according to Scheffelin (1981), although "the category is encoded for both in a transparent and uniform manner" (p. 213). It appears that this category is limited to men's speech in Samoan society and used only very seldom in the home so the Samoan children have little exposure to it.

There has been a good deal of debate over whether bilingualism offers cognitive advantages to the bilingual. Hakuta (1986) writes that research on bilingualism in the early part of this century centred on using various tests to show the relationship between bilingualism and intelligence. The general conclusion was that there was a negative effect on children who spoke a

language other than the one used in school in the home (Jespersen, 1922; Smith, 1935). More recently, there has been considerable interest in proving the positive effects. This is a result of the landmark study of Peal and Lambert, published in 1962, in which they suggested that students who had spent some time in French immersion programs in Montreal had certain cognitive advantages over monolinguals of the same age. During the 1970's and 80's these results were corroborated by other researchers (Cummins, 1978; Feldman & Shen, 1971; Ianco-Worrall, 1972; Kessler & Quinn, 1987; Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Some generalized findings of these studies are as follows: bilingual children have an earlier and greater awareness of the arbitrariness of language, they show an earlier ability to separate meaning from sound, they display greater linguistic and cognitive creativity, and a greater facility at concept formation (Saunders, 1988). It must be emphasized that these findings are generalized, and certain sociolinguistic and cultural factors, such as the majority or minority status of the languages involved, have not been taken into account in all of the research.

Bialystock (1991) sums up the most recent philosophy regarding the connections between bilingualism and intelligence:

Politically, it seems less necessary to "prove" the acceptability of bilingualism for children. We are free, that is, to discover that being bilingual may in fact bring no special cognitive or linguistic benefit to our children, and that finding will not threaten the existence of children in our educational system who happen to be bilingual. (p.7)

It is interesting for this study that this debate continues despite the research of the last twenty-five years. It appears that this research has not completely permeated social consciousness to become public knowledge, and some of the parents in this study are still unsure of the wisdom of their decisions, and the long-term effects of their choices. Many parents expressed doubts, especially after having come in contact with professionals such as doctors, public health nurses or teachers who advised them against teaching two or more languages to their child(ren).

Family strategies for language acquisition

The strategy used by both Ronjat and Leopold, was termed "one person, one language" by Ronjat. As the name implies, each parent speaks a different language to the child(ren). This is a very popular strategy for raising bilingual children used by many bilingual families (DeHouwer, 1990; Dopke, 1992; Fantini, 1985; Saunders, 1982; 1988; Taeschner, 1983), and is highly recommended by academics (Baker, 1993; Garcia, 1991). The main argument for this strategy is that the child associates a language with a person, and is therefore prompted to use the language whenever he/she sees that person. Baker(1995) writes that it is important for people to speak their first language with their children because it is more "natural", and they will be able to share the richness of the language that they have known since childhood, including stories, songs and games (pp. 15-16). Baker also states:

If a minority language mother speaks the majority language with a "foreign" accent (and if her language is sometimes incorrect), then the teenager may be embarrassed, the parent ridiculed. If such a language minority mother uses her minority language, she may retain more authority and credibility, and be more valued by the teenager. (p. 16)

These may be important factors in building a family strategy (they also suggest some interesting things about family dynamics), but there are others to be considered. Researchers in the field of dual language learning in childhood strongly recommend a strategy that is "natural" rather than artificial or contrived, such as speaking one language in the morning and other in the afternoon, or different languages on different days of the week, because it is so much easier to be consistent. Yet those who advocate "one person- one language" do not seem to regard having to speak to two people in two different languages at the same time as unnatural. There is no mention of a family language here; what do they all speak around the dinner table? A further argument for one language in the home is that it maximizes the exposure to a minority language, and to different registers of that language. It is difficult for a child to learn adult speech if they never hear two adults talking together. Of course, the most important factor here is the particular language situation of the family: whether the parents both speak the same language(s), whether their respective first languages are the same or not, what language they use together, the status attributed to the languages in question, opportunities for language use outside the home, etc. All of these

must be taken into account when devising a family strategy that will have the best chance of being successful (see Romaine, 1995, for a very comprehensive overview of the possible family language combinations.) For example, if the mother is the primary caregiver and is a native speaker of a majority language while the father speaks a minority language and spends much less time with the child, it is less likely that the child will become an active bilingual using the "one person, one language" approach. There are studies, however, that show that this is possible, although it entails a good deal of effort on the part of the father (Dopke, 1992; Saunders, 1982; 1988). There are so many possible variations in family language situations that it is really impossible to dictate the "best way" to encourage bilingualism in children. More research is needed on how different families of varying linguistic, cultural, socio-economic and occupational backgrounds use two or more languages with their children, not just those families which include a linguist parent and children who have many advantages for successful language learning. Speaking from experience I would say that it is more important to work out a strategy that takes into account the particular situation of the family, seems "natural" and "do-able" to them and then to follow it consistently, keeping in mind that people are very rarely truly "balanced" bilinguals, but usually dominant in one language or another.

The strategies that the families in this study use begin to sound more and more complicated, as we discuss the various complexities that surround the languages in our lives, particularly as our children begin to grow up,

become speakers of language(s) themselves, and move into spheres larger than the immediate family unit. We have come to the realization that one strategy is never enough for a single family, let alone for all of them. Here two of the parent participants discuss some of the implications of deciding on a family language strategy, and the realities of attempting to follow it.

Yeah, actually I did discuss with my husband and eventually we decided "yes" that she should learn both English and Chinese. That's why I made a special arrangement that since she was three months old we always had Chinese baby-sitters for her and she goes to the baby-sitters 7 hours a day, 5 days a week.

conversation with family J

... whichever language it happens to be. And if they're responding to you in English, you have to say yeah, that's right, you said that really well and you knew how to.... Usually we don't say what day is it in French, we say how does papa say it or how did grandmamma say it, or something like that. Or how did mommy say it, and then he's doing a connection with people as opposed to a language.

To language, yeah. We never did that, although it was, it's interesting I've just, for me I know that, you know, it was so important when the kids were really little and well we just first moved here and I can just

remember it being a big deal, it was a big deal when they were little and I guess maybe that's why as time goes on why Amalie is stronger than Madeleine because it was a bigger deal and I really do remember studying for hours and hours and only speaking French to her. And thinking this was such a high priority. And I know now that I mean the girls are, if they're in French Immersion so the teacher speaks to them in French, Amalie reads better in French than English, even though she's just French Immersion and not in programme cadre. But we keep feeding her French books and she's more at ease with that. But I think there's so many more books in English, I'm not worried about her English. But even though they speak English with their friends, they're hearing French most of the day. So when I go at 4:30 in the afternoon to pick them up and I'm tired and they're tired and we're driving through traffic to get home, I don't even try. I just speak English and I know that when Michel gets home he will only speak French to them and I know that when we took them to France and they had to speak French they could. It's not a big deal any more. You know like I will still speak French to them sometimes and certainly when we're sitting the four of us around the dinner table, we speak in French which I'm happy to speak, and so they get quite a lot of French. So now if I'm tired and I don't feel like speaking French, I'm not going to worry about it although I used to. What about you?

Yeah. ... and it comes into like when you have languages used even with particular people and then you switch to English well it seems really silly just to switch to French if it's an effort. I can see it being if it comes out that way then that's one thing, but if it doesn't, I mean you're already speaking in English and your children aren't stupid. They'll figure it out. But what we've been trying to do then is to, well we've decided it's really important is one that, just if he hears French and that he gets as close to as much French as possible. And secondly that we try to make it, find a social context and put French in because if all he hears is Bernard and I speaking French, it doesn't become all that important and so we've been going to his French play group, we haven't started up again this year, but we'll be going to that again and then he's with other children who speak in French. All of the other mothers are native French speakers. And it's like a good workout. He sees a reason to speak French because there are all these other children who speak in French.

conversation with family D

Nearly all of the systematic longitudinal case studies of children who are raised to be bilingual from birth are of middle class families where the children successfully, to varying degrees, learn two languages in the home. Dopke (1992) comments on how unusual this is:

Cases reported in the literature overwhelmingly demonstrate the successful establishment of productive bilingualism in young children.

This contrasts strongly with many of the real experiences of the people who spoke with me about their situations. There is a tendency in the literature to generalize about the level of language knowledge and the consistent way that it is learned. In reality, it is not only very difficult to determine who is bilingual but just what is bilingualism. (p. 19)

It is interesting to note that in at least two of the cases the other language was not the native language of the parent (in both cases the father) who was the sole contact for this language in the family (Dopke, 1992; Saunders, 1982; 1988). The best known of the unsuccessful cases documented is that of the English-speaking American Burling (1959) whose young son learned Garo during an extended stay in India. The child apparently became quite fluent in the language as he was looked after by Garo-speaking servants, but lost the language shortly after returning to the United States.

All of these studies report on children from middle class families with parents who are often professionals in the fields of linguistics, psychology and/or education. There was a large degree of personal desire for the children to learn two languages, and a certain amount of choice involved. The children in the majority of the studies (DeHouwer, 1990; Dopke, 1992; Fantini, 1985; Leopold, 1939-49; Saunders, 1982; 1988; Taeschner, 1983) all had ample opportunities to learn the majority/school language from native speakers from a very early age. They were not in danger of being stigmatized or being unable to participate fully in school because of a lack of knowledge of

the language used there. These cases show that under certain circumstances there is an element of choice involved in raising children to be bilingual. More commonly, the choices are far more limited: speakers of minority languages who are not secure members of the middle class, such as indigenous peoples or immigrants, may attempt to encourage their children to become bilingual in their minority as well as the majority language, but may become overwhelmed by a lack of information, discouragement from educational and health professionals, and the enormous amount of effort involved (Arnberg, 1987). These people do not have the option of raising their children to be monolingual in the minority language. People of the First Nations have even fewer options in that they cannot pass on an ancestral language that they themselves do not know because they or their parents were punished for using it at residential school (Johnson, 1988; Haigbrown, 1988). These socio-political factors surrounding issues of language learning, language choice, and bilingualism are only just beginning to be considered in the research into minority language retention and maintenance in families.

The concept of choice in terms of language use is an interesting one, and one which became important to this study. I found that when I and my children had a choice of languages to use, that is we are more or less equally fluent in two languages, a tension developed over whose preferred language we would agree to use. My husband and I have chosen to speak French together, and have chosen to help our children acquire this language in the home. We therefore expect that they will choose to use French when

speaking with us. This is not always the case, as children make their own choices about which language they prefer to use, which have resulted in some interesting negotiations with regards to which language is acceptable and appropriate for whom in various different situations and settings. I began with the notion that I would be the one to decide about language use in my family, and that the rules for language use would be simple and straightforward. I have learned, over the last eight years, that one person cannot make and totally enforce rules regarding language use by other people, even if they are young, dependent children with whom one has a loving, respectful relationship, and that nothing involving language and children is ever simple or straightforward.

The conversations that began around the kitchen table do not end there. Babies grow into children who move around, eager to step out into the wider world. People who become parents find their lives have changed, and they begin to see the world in different ways. Suddenly they have so much in common with someone they meet by chance on the street, in the park, on the playground, because they are both parents of young children. Conversations about language change too, as people begin to discuss their strategies, difficulties and dreams with others outside of the family circle.

Chapter Three

Conversations about Language and Learning in the Community

Learning ... is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture. It is not just that the child must make his (sic) knowledge his own, but that he must make it his own in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to a culture. (Bruner, 1986, p. 127)

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speakers' intentions. (Bahktin, 1981, p. 294)

Those communities that do not know the value of language for individuals and for the continuation of the community, and do not understand the value of linking generation to generation, are communities that die. (Proceedings from the Aboriginal Language Policy Conference, Ottawa, 1988, p. 21)

I am sitting on a bus with 18 four-year-olds and their parents on our way to Maplewood Farm in North Vancouver. It is a damp, chilly day in spring and we are on our way to see the baby chicks, lambs and kids. My daughter decides to sit with her friends and I am soon joined by a woman whom I know only as "Karen's mom." We introduce ourselves properly and I soon learn that Elizabeth works the night shift as a nurse and has three other children besides Karen. "And what do

you do?" she turns to me and I attempt once again to explain my interest in people and languages. "You know, you should really come and talk to my dad, he'd love it. He's French, but from Saskatchewan." The bus bumps and rumbles its way through east Vancouver and over the Second Narrows Bridge, the preschool teachers are leading a rousing chorus of "Old Macdonald had a farm," and eighteen small children in boots, hats and raincoats are wild with excitement but we scarcely hear them. Elizabeth continues her story of leaving the big extended French Canadian family in Saskatchewan as a child to come to the west coast. "You know Carmen Campagne, the children's singer? That's my cousin. Her father was really strict about the French, and those kids all moved out to Quebec. They just couldn't wait to get to a place where everyone spoke French and was into that culture. My dad just couldn't see the point of it, he and his brothers would argue about it at times. After we left we totally lost touch with that part of the family, they weren't speaking to us for a while. I buy all her tapes though, for the kids. I'd love it if dad could teach my kids some French but he says he just doesn't have the time. He'd love to talk to you about all this, though." The story breaks off with our arrival at the farm. I am left to ruminate on the potential of such conversations for learning about how it is that some families pass on minority languages in the home, some don't, and why this might be so.

personal journal, April, 1995

As we move from the private into the public realm, from the kitchen to the back yard and out into the playground, our relationships with our children change from without and within. From outside come pressures to conform and fit in with the rest of the group, from within there are pressures to find a place and an identity for oneself. This situation coincides with the child's broadening horizons and developing sense of self and identity as distinct from mother, father and family. Yet the connections are strongly present as we move from the nuclear family into the extended family, and the role of extended family, friends and neighbours is important.

Lately one of my concerns is about, like now Gillian is more exposed to other kids or other people around. The thing I'm feeling more and more is the pressure from the outside to just conform, to just speak English. Like she's playing in the, we have a townhouse and outside with the kids and she would use English. And when I come in, like right now I can sense that if I speak to her in Cantonese she feels a little bit funny, not the same as other kids. So some times I think that she actually prefers for me to talk to her in English, in front of other kids and not in Cantonese cause the other kid will look at her and think that she's a little bit different. So like I would think that's one of the things I'm struggling with right now. Like it's whether I should just pursue and just or when I talked about, always talking to Cantonese

and I can just try saying to the other kids, well just, you know, not to kind of embarrassment and just speak a different language. So I don't know what to do.

conversation with family I

How do parents with different linguistic backgrounds pull together the complex threads of their lives, and keep the lines of communication open in their families when not everyone speaks the same language? When they are teaching their children a language that their parents do not know and understand? How can they do what they know is linguistically important for their child, that is teach the minority language, when this means that the child may not be able to communicate at an early age with members of the extended family?

[Describing the situation of friends whose young child speaks only Cantonese, which one set of grandparents does not understand.] *Even before she reaches school age, very soon she'll go to pre-school and play with children in the neighborhood and even now as she starts to play more and more outside the home she's learning more and more English very quickly. But it was very hard for the grandparents and they feel a lot of strain and pressure. Did you find your situation to be similar?*

Yeah, my mother-in-law died last March when Paula was almost, she was 9 months old. Yeah, I wonder what she might have, how she

might have reacted now. Maybe it wouldn't have made too much difference because she was, although she was 84 when she died she was very open-minded and she, after I joined the family or even before that, she started reading Chinese history and yeah, and buying maps and trying to, even doing things like cutting up the newspaper clips on ESL and those kinds of things. So she wanted to, she showed a lot of interest in what I did and who I am. So probably she would have found it amazing that Paula could speak to her, to my mother-in-law in a foreign language. And also the different situation would have been that Paula could speak, could say enough things in English to amuse her, even if she lived until now. Yeah, it might have been a different situation and my sister-in-law who heard Paula speak, like Paula doesn't know how to say aunt in English, but she knows how to say all those things in different ways in Chinese. In Chinese you don't call everybody aunt, for example father's sister would be "gugu" and mother's sister would be "yiyi." And "a yi" would be a general name for aunt. For she, Paula calls my sister-in-law "gugu" and she didn't mind. My sister-in-law didn't mind. Actually, she was very happy that she could call her something. Yeah, she said things like "gugu, bye-bye" so she knew that Paula was speaking to her and she was amazed. So yeah it hasn't been a problem so far.

Oh that's great. I think maybe we had to stop and think about it, but those kinds, that kind of support can be a great help in affirming our decisions.

Right. And yeah the other thing too is that I was wondering while we were talking that would that have influenced my decision. I don't think so. It might have, I don't know, I might feel a bit bad if my relatives don't understand Paula. But then I think it's just too big a thing, too big a decision to make just because my brother-in-law is not happy that Paula didn't speak English. No, I don't think I would have stopped her from learning Chinese, no. It's just, to me, it's quite important. I don't think that would have mattered. But it might have made me feel a bit ...

Uncomfortable?

... uncomfortable, yeah.

For that moment, for the situation maybe.

Right.

conversation with family J

Can we underestimate the importance of belonging to a community of extended family and friends? How much does language matter in these relationships? How can we work through the complicated issues of what is important to teach our children, how do we know, and what do we do in order to help them learn that which we believe is important? The following

conversation is about a child who has not learned the first language of her mother. Does it matter?

...you know the Greek family thing, the kids are number one.

Oh, I remember, I remember being here. I came here once, and I don't know where you were, but you had come over for a visit with Carolyn and you were out of the room at the time. Carolyn was a tiny, tiny baby.

I think she was 2 weeks old, I came over when she was 2 weeks old.

And a whole group of your mother's friends came over and I was sort of sitting there smiling and they were all speaking Greek together, and they were just, oh this baby, they were just like, tears streaming down their faces, you know, they were just so excited to see this baby. It was obviously a really big thing, and it was fun to see.

conversation with family A

The complexity of language, the fact that it is something we think we know, we know language through language, as it were, leads some people to question what they do really know, and has lead this parent to certain doubts about what he is asking his children to do.

Because it's in such, because the language, the everyday language takes on a formal complexity when it's done in a public domain that you'd be surprised, it sounds like a different language. So to be bilingual in that context would mean knowing multi-registers and all that. And I was speaking to someone who was Korean and they tell me that there's so

many registers and so many, you know, keys that you have to speak to people in according to their place in society and you know to be perfectly bilingual you have to know not only the language, but the pragmatics. And you think you have that idea but then you don't really know if you have that idea.

conversation with family F

What influence does the community have on a parent's actions with their child? Would a parent who does not feel supported by the community continue in their efforts to raise their child bilingually? Let's hear from another participant whose child is fluent only in the minority language.

And I know that I'm going by a culture that supports me speaking Spanish to him.

How do you know that?

I see it all the time. "Oh, that's great that he's bilingual. Oh, isn't that great. Or just keep it up, don't worry, he'll be fine in school."

There's a lot about that. Even the TV, like having a channel that airs programs in different languages or libraries that have books in Spanish. All of that is important I think just to support us. You see, that's different in Israel too. Like my sister, I was talking to a friend of her's who's Argentinean. She left Argentina to go to Israel. I think it was 5 or 6 years ago and she didn't know how to speak Hebrew, just a few words. She has three children today. Only the oldest was born in

Argentina so he's probably 7 or something like that and they don't speak Spanish. She just turned completely and when I asked her why she said that her second son was having difficulty learning Hebrew. They were speaking in Spanish at home. And she talked to I forget if it was a specialist or the doctor or something like that and they said just stop with the Spanish, go ahead with the Hebrew and later on when they are proficient in Hebrew you can go on with the Spanish. And she never did.

I mean my doctor, William's doctor, never ever made a comment about that. She actually, when she was talking to him and trying to have a sense of how he was developing and everything, she said well for me it's very hard because I can see that he's more fluent in Spanish than he is in English, so that I can't assess. Like for her language development it wasn't an indicator of anything because she knew that there was this other language that he was developing. So in that sense for me it's a support for me. It's like, "yeah, go ahead."

conversation with family B

The following parent responds to a query about whether friends and family members support his efforts to help his children acquire two languages in the home.

No, they're very encouraging because I think part of the nostalgia is trying to keep the tradition and I think that many people want to do

that but they don't make a concerted effort in doing it. Or they separate the spaces and say well you know you speak Greek within this heritage language context, this classroom situation and you don't speak it everyday. And many people don't speak Greek with their kids. And they expect them to speak it anyway.

conversation with family F

My children and I are attending the open gym class at the local community centre. About 25 children aged five and under are running, jumping, clambering all over the equipment set out, throwing balls and hoops in all directions, bumping into each other and shrieking in delight. My children and I are speaking French as we join in the activities: "Regardes, Mama, regardes-moi! Attrapes-moi!" One of the supervisors is watching me, hearing me. Eyes on the mass of moving bodies she sidles over and begins to question me about how it is that my children speak and understand French. She is obviously pregnant, and although ethnically Chinese, she explains that her parents refused to teach Chinese to her and her siblings: "They thought English was more important. My grandmother wanted us to know Chinese though, and she would teach us when she came to stay. She and my mother used to argue, in Chinese, about whether or not to speak Chinese!" She smiles in recollection, and goes on, "I think it's so important though, and I'd love my baby to be able to speak Chinese, even though I can't," while rubbing her swollen belly reflectively. "What do you suggest I

do?" We go on to talk about Cantonese night school classes and possible visits to grandparents, sharing a moment of real communication through the exchange of pasts, presents and future hopes.

personal journal, November, 1994

A beautiful day in early summer and my 10 month old daughter and I are exploring a park a bit farther afield than we usually go. Amalie is scooting around on the sand, attempting to climb everything in sight with all the reckless daredevilishness of the under-ones, stopping occasionally to stick sandy fingers into her mouth. The lone other person in the park, a woman, sits on a bench watching us while gently pushing a baby carriage back and forth. There is something wistful in her look and looking for adult company myself I manage to capture Amalie and take her over to say hello. She smiles shyly but does not respond when I make the obligatory comment about the weather. She is from Croatia she manages to tell me with her very limited English. She is hesitant to speak, but smiles and nods, encouraging me to talk. She is fascinated by the fact that I speak French with my daughter, "Speak English, too?" she asks wonderingly, watching Amalie make a grab for the baby toys in the carriage with her sandy fingers, "Ok, is ok." The woman shows me a list of verb conjugations that someone has copied out of a grammar text. "I learn

English," she says, "Canada is good," and gestures to the sleeping baby in the carriage. I smile and nod in return, waiting to hear more. I am touched by how difficult her life must be, yet profoundly aware of the similarities between us at this moment: two women with their babies in the park, hungry for adult conversation, trying to do the best for our children, wondering about the future for them. Suddenly Amalie off again, clambering down from my lap and crawling rapidly towards the tennis courts. I head after her, turning once to look back toward the bench; the woman is standing, preparing to depart. We wave and she walks slowly out of sight. What could have developed out of this encounter had we been able to continue? The moment was so full of meaning, of real communication between two people who had many barriers to work around, but whose commonalties and need to communicate overcame them for those few minutes.

personal journal, May, 1991

All of these situations illustrate the influence others can have on our decisions, our convictions, our resolutions about what is important for our children, despite doubts we may have about our beliefs or our ability to carry through with the relevant action.

So with the, did you find that the system, when you came to Canada you said 7 years ago, so you were already an adult more or less. And was the language you had enough or did you find that it was ...

Oh, it's never enough.

... still very different.

It's never enough. And even today it's not enough. Oh yeah. My husband used to come home, I would open the door and he would be standing there and saying, "please speak to me in Spanish. I cannot stand it anymore!" Yeah. It's quite different.

So is he from Argentina as well?

Yeah. It's also true that we learned British English and there were a lot of words that we were misusing, not misusing but we were using like words like trousers or what is it, stones instead of rocks or the opposite way, I mean I forget. It doesn't make much sense now when you're putting it into context but for me I was very hooked up in the words and I was trying to learn the language. We would sit to watch TV with a dictionary in our hands. It just, what was that word, what was that word, and tried to find the word in the dictionary to see what it meant. But it wasn't enough. And even today I mean I cannot express myself in Spanish as I, in English as I do in Spanish. It's particularly ideas and stuff like that. And it usually makes, I can see when people are nodding and they don't understand what I'm saying. And they say, uhuh uhuh, uhuh uhuh. And I would go, like you don't understand. No, no, they wouldn't ask. Or the fact that I have an accent. I mean because I don't look as an immigrant, I'm white, I have red hair, so people would be surprised when they hear my accent. I can see that, I mean I see it when

we start talking and then they hear, the first time they hear an accent it's like oh. And of course they would say where are you from, Europe or are you from Quebec? Just because I have an accent and then I'm white, they wouldn't pick up.

Do you see that as a barrier to communication or is it ...?

Oh yes. It could be. It could be. Oh yeah, absolutely.

Yeah, yeah, I think it is. I think that a lot of people have the assumption that because you don't speak English perfectly well you're more stupid, stupider. And we, my friends and I, we talk about this quite often, about how people just assume that, that language, your ability to pronounce certain words or to even use certain words is a, direct evidence of how well or bad you fit.

It's like a marker, a social marker but it's also an intelligent, like an intellectual marker.

Yeah. Yeah. Which is quite interesting. Like we laugh a lot about this. I mean I don't think I have encountered a lot of real problems with this, particularly in academia. I haven't found that anyone would be quite, I mean like, that they wouldn't take my ideas seriously because of that. At least not in a way that would bother me enough for me to complain.

Might it happen then in another context? Is it ...?

Yeah, but I don't care that much. I mean if I'm talking to someone on the street or in a store or even socially, I mean it bothers me but not to

an extent where I would just make a point of pointing that out or just complain about it.

But it's interesting, it's true, and I found, I don't know about Spanish here because Spanish in Vancouver is still exotic enough that it's not a socio-political, it's not a political marker. But I know that in my experience that if you go to a city like Montreal and you speak French with an English accent, people, doesn't matter how good your French is, people will switch into English in a pointed way as though to say my English will always be better than your French. And it's like a political statement and I find it, like anybody can mispronounce something even in your first language. Sometimes it just comes out wrong or not hear something. Somebody says, excuse me, you know, but it's just because you haven't heard, it's not because you don't understand. And yet people are so quick to jump onto it cause you don't understand, you don't know what you're talking about, I have to use my second language with you because you're such a, you know. I find that and maybe I'm super-sensitive and I wonder if that might be the case for Spanish. For example, in the United States that might be the case.

Well I don't know. I think that it is quite political in the United States though. There's this whole second language or a Spanish movement, I don't know, one language only. I forget the name of the movement, English only thing. So I think that it is quite political over there. But I haven't found that here in Argentina, ah, here in Canada. And I

haven't found a lot of people who can speak Spanish actually. I mean it is quite tricky too, like we go on the bus or anywhere public and we want to say something private and we do say so in Spanish in a quite loud voice. I mean, without caring, and we have to be careful because there's more and more people who understand it. So that becomes interesting.

conversation with family B

This next parent describes the far-reaching effects that societal pressure has had on language learning in her family, but goes on to explain how people can change as societies change, and how life experience can allow one to reassess one's intentions and actions in an area such as the use of language.

My mom speaks to me in German.

Is this something new since your son was born?

No, she's always done a bit. Yeah. She wouldn't when ... she's really changed her attitude because when we were little she was in the U.S. and everyone told her how rude it was to speak in a second language in front of people who didn't understand.

Really.

And so she was made to feel embarrassed to speak German to us when there were other people there. And so she always switched to English,

but this time she says I don't care what anybody thinks, I'm going to keep speaking to Nicholas in German. And so my brother, David, has been re-emerging into German. My dad's learning a lot more German. Everybody's learning way more German because she's just going to keep speaking to him in German.

Well that's great.

And she's decided this time that she's just going to speak her dialect, what comes easy for her and forget about how, to always kind of force herself to speak high German.

conversation with family D

This next parent describes the importance of mentoring, and the influence another family had on her resolve to continue to speak Spanish to her son while living here in Canada, and on her efforts to teach him to be proud of his language and heritage.

One of the things I learned from this friend of ours, they're a bit older and their daughter is grown up now. She's really bilingual, really comfortable in both [languages]. She's like someone who lived all her life in Chile, but really, she's fully Canadian, no accent or anything. Anyway, one of the things he said to me was that it was really important for him that he raised his daughter not to be ashamed of her first language, of her language and the fact that she could speak Spanish. So that's why he always spoke Spanish with her, always, even

when he was with people who were not native speakers, were not Spanish speakers and did not understand the conversation. He always used Spanish and this way he could show her that she never had to be ashamed to speak Spanish in front of other people. So I always remember that when I'm in a conversation with my son and other people who are not Spanish speakers, I remember this and even if the tension begins to build I just keep translating and speaking Spanish so that my son, like this other girl, will not grow up being ashamed of Spanish.

conversation with family B

This parent describes coming to the realization that he and his partner would play a role in the development cultural identity of their children through their use of language. He talks about the resistance both he and his wife experienced growing up as the children of immigrant parents, and the gradual acceptance and pride in their cultural heritage that they came to as adults. It is one thing, the parent says, to come to the understanding that language and heritage are important, and another to know how to pass a sense of them on to one's children. The parent describes how the living circumstances of the family end up playing a large role in the way the parents eventually take action.

You know, we didn't really talk about it until we were faced with, you know, the problem of a talking child. You know, it was very much

expected by both of us that they would grow up speaking two languages because they had to communicate with their grandparents. They could expect to go to Greece very often and to be part of, well to be Greek anywhere is to be part of a community. As long as your parents are involved in that community you're going to be there. And whereas both of us resisted being Greek when we were growing up, and didn't really want to necessarily have that cultural identification because we wanted to be more in the mainstream in terms of, you know, we're Canadian, we're not Greek. After going back to Greece, for me it was magnified, you know, and it was magnified you know almost in the negative way saying that well, you know, now I identify more with this country than I do with Canada. And you know for Dorothy it wasn't like that. She still identifies more with Canada but I identify more with Greece than I do with Canada now. So it was more or less expected. The only question was how do we do this. And Dorothy spoke to a lot of people who were doing similar things and she came up with the idea that she would speak Greek to them and that I would speak English because one of her friends whose child spoke, she's actually American but she speaks Greek well enough to make me think that she's Greek. Well the only thing, the only language that she speaks with her child is Greek and but her child also knows Spanish and Thai and some other languages. So she can, Dorothy came up with the idea of speaking, you know, separating the languages that way. And in

Greece there was no real problem because when Anthony started speaking, the first language he spoke was Greek, and the kids who he played with were Greek.

conversation with family F

Sometimes there is information available in the community, but it can be difficult to find. One day I happened to notice a small white piece of paper on a rack while waiting outside my daughter's preschool. It was right at the bottom, tucked in behind some pamphlets on soccer school. The contents, which follow, are very much in line with my own way of thinking about bilingualism and language maintenance in the family. What is interesting to me is that there is no indication on the page who wrote or distributed it, or even who it is addressed to. On inquiry, the preschool teachers had no idea who had produced the page, or put it in their rack. Here is an exact replication of this page.

Keep children connected to the family
through language

When language and culture are preserved children learn to be proud of their family.

If they are not proud they begin to pay more attention to their friends and not their parents.

Spend time talking to your children in the language you know best.

Tell them stories and read books in your family's language.

Turn off the TV and talk together more.

Explain to your children how great it is to know two (or three) languages (for jobs, school etc.).

Often when children are exposed to English at daycare or school, they give up their home language.

Only you, the parents, can help them to keep their home language so that they can become truly bilingual.

0611A

Further investigation revealed that the Vancouver Richmond Board of Health had some role to play in the writing and distributing of the information, although I have never been able to determine exactly who is responsible or why they did not identify themselves. However, as a result of my inquiries I had several very interesting conversations with the preschool teachers, one of whom speaks Italian as a first language, while the other not only speaks Spanish as a first language, but teaches it to children at a community centre on Saturdays. Other parents joined in our discussions on bilingual language acquisition in children, and I was invited to lead a workshop for parents of children in the preschool on that topic. The workshop was well-attended and the parents appreciated the information I was able to pass on to them, but most of our time was spent in discussing our own families, the specific situations we are faced with, and the particular challenges that are preoccupying us at the moment. The parents at that workshop wanted information, but more importantly, they wanted to meet

with others in similar situations to share stories, discuss and expand their understandings and reaffirm their beliefs in what they are doing.

Sometimes being a bilingual parent raising a child can lead one to making decisions that go against professional advice, and following one's heart in matters relating to the child. This doesn't make the decision any easier to make. The following conversation is one I had with a parent of a child who attends the same school as my children. The child is beyond preschool age, which means that the family does not fit the criteria for the study so they are not actually participants. However, I chose to record the conversation in my journal and reproduce it here because I was interested in the parent's reactions to the professional advice she was given.

How is Louise?

Well, she is having trouble at school. The teacher thinks she is dyslexic, so she has been helping her; she's very patient. We have to work very hard on the dictée-- she has a lot of trouble with it. But the teacher is so good to her, helping her, and encouraging her.

That's good that the teacher is helpful but are you sure of what the problem is? You could help her more if you know what she has most trouble with.

We are waiting to have her tested but the school won't do it right away and there is a year's waiting list at Children's Hospital for those kinds

of tests. We took her to our family doctor to ask about that and he said that she should not be going to French Immersion school, that she would be better off in a "regular school."

So what did you say to him?

Nothing, we just came home. We don't want to change her now, she's really likes her class, her teacher. But we really wonder, you know.

This is a family who speaks Spanish at home as the mother is from Mexico, and some French as the father is Quebecois. English is the third language for the children. Louise is nine years old.

personal journal, March, 1998

I have included the following story because it is an example of a situation where the parents of a young girl decided to send her away to school, in part to improve her language skills, against the prevailing opinion of the local community, and despite the recent history of the people of the parents' generation who were forced to attend residential schools. Once again, this entry does not involve a family with very young children, but it is a story that I found very moving, and relevant to this study of what it is to be a bilingual parent. Sometimes parents feel they need to go against community opinion, although they themselves may once have shared this opinion, in order to do what they believe is right for their child.

I am sitting in a small twin otter plane flying to Montreal from Povungnituk, Quebec where my husband has been doing a locum and where we lived and worked for two and half years before our children were born. The first stop on the route south is Inukjuak, another small Inuit community, where I spent two years teaching before moving to Povungnituk. In Inukjuak a woman I know boards the plane and sits beside me. As my children are being entertained by the other passengers she and I are free to chat. I ask about her trip south, knowing that she is active with many local organizations, including the parent's committee at the school, and must often travel to meet with government officials. "Not this time, " she replies, "I'm going to visit Talasia in Montreal." Talasia is her daughter, and was a student of mine at one time. "She's OK, I hope," I respond, knowing that the reason most people went to Montreal was for more extensive medical treatment than they could get in the north. "She's fine," her mother replies, "She's going to school there, and boarding with a family we know. We just didn't think she would get a good enough education in English up here in the village. It's really important for her to be fluent in English and the kids speak too much Inutittut at home." I am stunned, thinking of the history of education here among the Inuit people of Northern Quebec. How emphatic they were about taking control of their own education through the formation of a locally run board in 1978 that was funded through the James Bay Land Agreement.

How one of the first things they did was to build secondary schools in all the villages, regardless of the cost, so that children did not have to be sent away to residential school to continue their education. How the other important thing they did was to include Inutittut as the first language the students studied at school in the primary grades, and as a compulsory subject right through to the end of secondary school. After all that the Inuit had accomplished to bring their education system home, here was a family, active in local education matters and politically astute, sending their fourteen-year-old daughter away to live in the city of Montreal in order to get "a good education." Was it an easy decision for them? I did not get a chance to ask.

personal journal, April, 1993

Some participants brought up the topic of how some languages are valued over others. For some parents, the so-called value of a particular language in an international context was a determining factor in their decision to help their child acquire two languages.

..at one point it was an advantage to you to have another language.

Yes.

And so I wonder if you ever think about that in terms of Charles, that you had the advantage of learning 2 languages and it did become an advantage to you, would you think about helping him to learn so that he could have similar advantage that ...

I never thought of it in terms of that, in terms of it, no.

Because I, maybe it's a little hard to try and think how German could be an advantage, but there are a lot of jobs for example that speaking German as well as English could be a real advantage if you wanted to work with a company that dealt a lot with Germany.

But there isn't that much, but then Germany, hmm, I don't think there is as much of an advantage. If I was thinking in terms of that then I would think in terms of one of the Oriental languages. I think that would gain much more benefit in the future. Whereas German I don't think so. I don't think there is.

conversation with family E

I have a question, in terms of what we were speaking of the other day. I found that very interesting when you were speaking the reasons why you didn't think it essential for Paula to learn your first language now, in hopes that maybe later she would. I wonder if you would like to repeat that, if you do, if you feel comfortable. It's up to you.

Yeah, again the major reason is that in terms of, well it's the efficiency problem that as I said if I start speaking my language to her, I feel that I might waste my time anyway because the only person she hears it from is me. And also because everybody else speaks English and Chinese, everybody else around me. So I feel more comfortable and Mandarin

comes much more naturally. So I just feel like if I start teaching her I have to make a conscious effort. It just doesn't happen very naturally which might make things a bit more difficult and in the end she might, both of us might be frustrated wasting the time that she might not even learn because of the environmental factors. Meaning that there isn't enough environment for her to hear and speak L1. Yeah, that was the major reason that I thought well she doesn't have, it's nice if she does learn it but not, it doesn't have to now. But I do like to speak to her in my first language at times, consciously, because there are a few vowels in our language that do not exist in Chinese or in English. And I know that before a certain age you're supposed to be exposed to and as many sounds as possible and for that reason so that she can become a better language learner in the future. For that reason I will. Again, it's very pragmatic. Yeah, but for now I think she'll be fine with Chinese and English.

As I said if my son joins us, and that friend of mine, if her family joins us in a way that we have, that we can come, they can come visit, we can go visit them, then she has a few more places to hear it and speak it to some other people.

Becomes more ...

Effective to, yeah ...

Spend the time working on that.

Right.

And so you're not concerned about the fact that she won't have the same cultural linguistic connection to ...

No. Because she won't anyway because just having me who is not, I don't think I'm sure of everything. Like I don't think I'm purely of my ethnic group, and nobody will believe that's what I am. I'm not pure Chinese either in terms of culture and language. That's what I'm referring to. And I'm not English, pure English in language and culture either. So if she gets that from a person like me, she wouldn't have exposure to authentic anything, anyway. And it doesn't matter to me. So what, I mean is you're not, you just are.

conversation with family J

Years ago, a lady asked me: "What is the point of teaching your boys Finnish-- wouldn't it be better for them to learn a more useful language like French?

(Grover, 1998, p. 1)

I am sitting on a blanket at the beach, enjoying the late afternoon sunshine on my back and the wonderful light reflecting off the water. My children, aged 4 and 6, begin to wander off down toward the water. I call to them, in French as usual, and get up to follow them, all the while reminding them of the importance of staying together while

near the ocean. Soon their father returns from his swim and comes to collect them to play in the waves. I return to my blanket and book, and am surprised to look up and see a strange man hovering over me.

"You speak French to your children," he says to me accusingly, in heavily accented English. "Yes, " I reply hesitantly, wondering what has prompted him to speak to me and where this conversation will go.

"Well you shouldn't, " he responds, "You shouldn't bother teaching them a European language, it's not important for them to learn."

"Well, I disagree with you. We speak French with our children because it is their father's first language, the only language of many of their relatives, and one of the official languages of this country. It is important for them to learn it." "Oh, no, " he replies, "Not here in Vancouver, it's the Pacific, the Asian languages they should be learning, Chinese, Japanese, that's the future." I ask him where he is from, and learn that he and his family (he gestures toward a woman and two older children sitting next to a log nearby. I smile, and they turn away, looking embarrassed) arrived from the former Yugoslavia 4 months ago. "We're all learning English, my wife and I at night school and my children at school. We don't speak our language any more, we want our children to be at home here. Soon I will be working as an engineer again, and my children will learn to speak Japanese." We chat briefly about how he likes living in Vancouver ("Very much ," he says, but admits that his wife is homesick) and how difficult it is to

transfer his professional credentials to Canada. A shout from the water catches my attention and I turn to see my family calling and waving. I wave in return, and am still smiling as I look back up at this stranger so full of advice. "You should be thinking of the future," he says, shaking his head as he turns and walks away. A short time later, as I am writing down our conversation, I notice the family packing up to go. As they pass in front of me one of the children speaks in a language I do not know. The mother responds, so quietly that I cannot hear her words, only see the movement in her face.

personal journal, July 1996

So what does this idea of different languages having more "value" than others really mean? Certainly there is a body of research which indicates that certain languages have greater status than others (Edwards, 1994, Pennycook, 1989, Phillipson, 1992), particularly with relation to a political, historical and geographical context. For example, the French language in Canada, although one of the two official languages, was for many years a lower status language than English, which was considered to be the language of commerce, privilege and authority, because it was the language of those people who had economic wealth and positions of power. At the same time, in West African countries, French is the language of the colonizers, and hence the language of wealth, education and authority. It is the same language, but the context is different. These examples illustrate the complexity of language status. We use

the terms "minority" and "majority" for languages, when, in fact, the minority language might be spoken by the majority of the inhabitants of a country or region. In the following chapter there is a more detailed discussion of the terms minority and majority language.

However, this fact does not address the situations described above where parents have placed a certain value on a particular language because of a possible use in an international context. What does it mean to place "value" on languages? How does this affect the child learning or acquiring two or more languages, which may not be considered to be of equal "value?" How do we live within all of the contradictions suggested in conversation with people and texts on the subject, and what effects do these contradictions have on our communications with each other and within such societal institutions as school?

Chapter Four

Talking About School

It was my first year of school, my first days away from the private world of our house and tongue. I thought English would be simply a version of our Korean. Like another kind of coat you could wear. I didn't know what a difference in language meant then. Or how my tongue would tie in the initial attempts, stiffen so, struggle like an animal booby-trapped and dying inside my head. Native speakers may not know this but English is a scabrous mouthful. (Lee, 1995, p. 233)

A curriculum designed for my child is a conversation that leaves space for her responses, that is transformed by her questions. (Grumet, 1988, p. 173)

School. Which school? In a sense, we have too many choices about school. Having French as a family language means that our children can go to the programme cadre school, or the neighbourhood school in English, or even a French Immersion school, although I doubt we'll choose this option. Actually, being able to speak French is not a criteria for attending le programme cadre, having a parent whose first language is French and who was educated in French is. Our daughter fits this criteria but the logistics of having her attend Kindergarten in a school all the way across town, despite the bus service, is too complicated for our situation. I am at the university, on

the other side of town, so I cannot be at home when she is dropped off. In the end we will send her to a private English language Kindergarten on the university campus because it is the most convenient for me. Is that the way we make decisions for our families?

personal journal April, 1995

As language learning always takes place within a sociocultural context (Romaine, 1995), this study must consider the boundaries and influences of this context in describing experiences and attaching meaning to them. Although few of the participants in this study had children of school age, the impact of school, and the role of the public school system, including its policies surrounding language, were very much on the minds of the participants, as is evident in the conversations.

Second language learning has always been a valued part of education in the province of British Columbia, with courses in the western European languages of French, German and Spanish routinely offered in secondary schools in this province, indeed required for graduation and for acceptance into university. Changes have taken place in Language Education with the successful implementation of French Immersion, and the current move to begin second language teaching in the intermediate grades and to include non-European languages such as Japanese, Mandarin and Punjabi into the curriculum. For a more detailed description of language courses taught in British Columbia, and a critical review of the recent British Columbia Language Education Policy see Reeder, Hasebe-Ludt & Thomas, (1997). With

the exception of the Programme Cadre for francophone students, all of these language programs are designed for students who do not already speak these languages. There is little recognition in the education system for students who are, or are attempting to become bilingual, or trying to maintain this linguistic state, and there is little local research about how parents who are themselves bilingual view their own role in the language learning of their children.

So often in our schools we focus on the "problems", the children who do not speak the language of the classroom, those who are not able to learn in ways that we expect them to, those who face the challenge of poverty and abuse. We focus on their deficiencies and inadequacies, rather than looking to their strengths. For children who are not "problem", and many bilingual children are not, their personal challenge of learning and developing in two languages is simply ignored. It is well documented that children who are strong in a first language learn a second more easily, and that the learning of languages is a valuable mental challenge as well as an academic and economic advantage in later life (Ashworth, 1988; Cummins, 1984). Yet, nothing is done within most school system to encourage children to continue with their learning of a home language other than English, and little is done for parents to encourage them to help their child at home. Wong-Fillmore (1991) describes the situation for many immigrant children in her paper entitled "When learning a second language means losing the first." In fact, there is still considerable feeling among professionals that it is "better" for

children to learn only one language, and if there is any difficulty such as a speech impediment, learning disability etc. that that language had better be English.

I am helping at hot dog day at my daughter's school where she is in grade one. This is a programme cadre school where the children who attend must qualify according to a specific criteria such as whether one of their parents attended school in French as a child. Another parent asks me where I am from and I explain, in French, that I am from Vancouver but that my child attends the school because her father is from Quebec. The woman begins to tell me about her family, that she and her husband are both francophone from Quebec and so their children have a right to be at the school and receive an education in French. "But one of my sons isn't allowed to come, they took him out of the school. Can you believe that? They said he needed special help and they couldn't give it to him here so he has to go to another school, a special school, in English. So now only one of my sons can speak French. The other only speaks English, because of them. And you, you who aren't even French can send your kid here. Do you think that's right?" She has become visibly upset and leans towards me. I back away slightly, unable to respond, the warm hot dog wrapped in a napkin still in my hand. For this woman language learning happens very definitely at school.

personal journal, November, 1996

The politics of language learning jumps into the conversations about school, particularly when the languages involved are French and English, the two official languages of this country. Federal laws protect the rights of French speakers, including the right to an education in the language of their choice. Recently this has meant the formation of a partially province-wide French Language School Board to take over the administration of the *programme cadre* students and schools in school district in the southern part of the province including Vancouver Island and the lower mainland. Parents must be members of this board in order to send their children to schools under its jurisdiction, but in order to become members they must fit the criteria outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 23:

Citizens of Canada,

(a) whose first language learned and still understood is that of the English or French linguistic minority population of the province in which they reside, or (b) who have received their primary school instruction in Canada in English or French and reside in a province where the language in which they received that instruction is the language of the English or French linguistic minority population of the province,

have the right to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in that language in that province. (p. 19)¹

The glossy pamphlet from the new French School Board has arrived in the mail today, addressed to my husband because he is the eligible member in our family. I open it anyway and study the photographs and short biographies of the six people who are running for election to the Board. Not one of them is from British Columbia or attended school here. I was born in British Columbia, speak fluent French, am a member of the teaching profession and concerned about educational issues, and I am a parent of a child in a school which is under the jurisdiction of this school board, but I am not eligible to vote in this election or join the parent association of this board because I do not come from a French-speaking family. I am not allowed to participate in the policymaking of my child's educational system because I am from the wrong ethnolinguistic background. I fold up the pamphlet and put it back in the envelope with my husband's name on it.

personal journal, January 1997

There is no place in this organization for parents like myself, whose children are eligible for the program through their father's linguistic background. As

¹ Martel (1991) describes the development of the various minority language education programs designed to fit with this section of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in each of the provinces and territories.

an anglophone parent of francophone children I feel as though I do not exist for the new province-wide French language school board, yet the majority of the families whose children attend the French language schools are like my own: made up of one anglophone and one francophone parent. There is so little public or official acknowledgment of mixed language families, or of the challenges they face in raising their children. Why is this so? People of mixed race, mixed religion and mixed culture find themselves in a place between, that is part of neither one group or the other. What kind of an effect does that have on their development of self and identity? How can we reach out to all families, particularly those who do not fit neatly into one of the many so-called "ethnic groups" of people who make up this country?

I am at the local park with my children, enjoying one of the last evenings of late summer and I fall into conversation with a neighbour who is here with his own children. As it is now September we begin to talk about school, discovering that neither of us sends our children to the local public school beside the playground where we are now standing. When the neighbour learns that my daughter, now in grade one, goes to a French language school because her father speaks French as a first language, and that she is picked up and brought home by school bus, all free of charge to us, he becomes thoughtful. "Why is it," he asks, "That your child can go to a school like that, by bus, and it is all covered by taxpayer's money, when we have to pay to send our child to

a school where she can learn the heritage language of our family, Hebrew? Why is that?" I begin to talk about the historical precedents for publicly supporting both English and French language education in Canada. My co-conversant interrupts, "But Jewish people have been in Canada for a very long time and made many contributions. So have lots of other people. Why single out the French for these benefits? Especially here in BC, where there really aren't very many of you!" "Under the BNA act the French had the right to an education in their language, and this was transferred to the Charter of Rights when it was drafted. It's a historical thing." He is obviously not convinced so I smile uneasily and turn away to push my daughter who is calling from the swings. What kind of an effect on society does singling out one language for financial and educational support in a multilingual society such as ours? But Canada is a bilingual country, I tell myself, it is right that both languages should be supported. But what about the other languages spoken by Canadians? What messages are we sending out about them? It's all very well to talk about historical precedents, but what about aboriginal languages? Not only were they not supported in society and school, there was a ruthless and highly successful campaign to eliminate them through the residential schools. What do we need to do to acknowledge the importance of all languages and the contributions of all language speakers to Canadian society?

personal journal, September 1996

From home to school for minority language speakers

There is a large body of research into minority language maintenance concerns children who begin life learning a language that is not spoken by the majority of people around them and/or used as a language of instruction in school, and so are forced to learn another language when they reach school age in order to get an education. This research concentrates on the difficulties these children face when they enter school with little knowledge of the school language (Ashworth, 1979; 1988; Scarcella, 1990). As well as research in the way minority language children learn a second language at school, there is considerable interest on what is termed "home-school discontinuity" (Ogbu, 1982; 1987; Scarcella, 1990), that is, the problems they have in adapting to school life when their early language socialization has been different from white, middle class children (Erickson, 1993; Heath, 1983; Philips, 1972; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988). There have been studies into school maintenance programs for minority languages, called heritage language programs in Canada (Benyon & Toohey, 1991; Cummins, 1992; Cummins & Danesi, 1990; Larter & Cheng, 1986), but little research into family maintenance of minority languages in Canada. One exception is a study of French and English-speaking families outlined in Goodz (1994), but the research takes place in Montreal, a city where both those languages might be considered to be majority in a sense, so it is not really a study of minority language maintenance.

Hispanic students in the United States

If we turn to research literature on minority language students in school in the United States we find that it has often focused on Spanish-speaking children because of their large numbers in some regions (Dulay & Burt, 1985; Fishman, 1986; Garcia, 1991; Hakuta, 1986). Early data collection on groups of bilingual/minority language speakers in the United States has leaned almost exclusively toward the competence testing of individual children, with the predictable results of children doing poorly in their weaker language, which was usually the language of the test (Jespersen, 1922; Smith, 1935). This is no longer the case, and minority languages, particularly Spanish Bilingual Education programs are more frequently used in schools in the United States (Hakuta & Diaz, 1985; Hakuta, 1986; Paulston, 1992). However, too few studies have looked at language learning in the home for these students in the same way that the case studies of the rather elite bilingual children described earlier do. As stated earlier, some of the literature we see on the topic is autobiographical, such as Rodriguez (1982) and Villanueva (1990), which can give us extremely interesting retrospective views of language learning in childhood. Villanueva is very nostalgic about the fact that it is a struggle for him to teach his children Spanish (p. 83), while Rodriguez is openly assimilationist and states that it was advantageous for him to have replaced his childhood Spanish with English (p. 19). Studies of bilingual language learning in families such as these, including personal and autobiographical accounts of the process from all family members, parents as

well as children, would enhance our understanding of how and why children become (or don't become) bilingual in families of various classes and cultures.

The situation is changing with the introduction of Bill 227 which would outlaw the teaching of any language other than English in the state of California. Those who support this law believe that languages other than English belong in the home and not in public spaces such as school. Those who are opposed point to the successes of bilingual education in schools where it has been properly implemented and funded. Villeneuve (1990) found that those Spanish-speaking students who received early literacy instruction in both Spanish and English performed better on English language reading tests than those who were taught only in English. These results correspond to what Canadian researchers Genesee (1987), Lambert & Tucker (1972), and Swain & Lapkin (1982) found with English-speaking children enrolled in French Immersion programs in Canada. It must be noted that the two programs, that is bilingual education in the United States and French Immersion in Canada are not entirely similar, as Spanish is a minority language in the United States, and Spanish/English bilingual education is intended as a minority language maintenance program, whereas:

the students [in French Immersion programs] are speakers of a prestigious, majority language and are learning a second language which carries with it potential political, economic, and social rewards for its learners. (Swain & Lapkin, 1991, p. 203)

Other recent research is beginning to include some of the sociolinguistic factors affecting the entire family when a minority language, or two languages are used in the home, and some of the emotional issues surrounding the connections of language and ethnic identity (Dopke, 1992; Edwards, 1994; Fantini, 1985; Pan, 1995; Yamamoto, 1995). There is also a greater consideration of the political connections to minority language retention (Cooper, 1989; Erickson, 1993; Fishman, 1986) and the emotional/affective implications of the lack of maintenance of a language within the family, sometimes referred to as language loss (Landry & Allard, 1992; Seliger & Vago, 1991). Researchers are only beginning to try to understand why some families place a greater priority on retaining minority languages than others, how it is that some individuals are more successful bilinguals than others, and how the many layers of linguistic and socio political factors relating to minority languages and bilingualism in the home, school and society fit together.

Learning from bilingual families

Educators have much to learn from minority language families about the way they facilitate children's language learning, in terms of linguistic proficiency, language socialization and the establishment of a personal and ethnic group identity through minority language maintenance. There is a great deal of effort involved in raising children bilingually (Arnberg, 1987;

Baker, 1995; Dopke, 1992); parents must already be convinced of the advantages and the importance of bilingualism and minority language maintenance before they begin such a venture, and remain convinced throughout the long journey. For this reason we need to learn more about how parents develop and retain this conviction, so essential to the success of their efforts, and to open up our educational language planning process to include the linguistic goals and desires of minority language speakers as well as majority group members.

School is a whole new world. I mean, they just take no notice of the fact that a child may know a whole lot of things, but in a different language. It's like, "just leave that at the door, thank you very much." You'd think they'd want to incorporate that into the school work, that they'd want to build on what kids already know, but they just don't. They have such a set idea about what's important in school, and other languages just isn't it.

conversation with family F

There is a need for further research to achieve a greater understanding as well as recognition of the factors which lead minority language families to persist in their efforts to help their children acquire and develop two or more languages successfully.

Somehow I think if you're not starting the language early on you're not going to get a good grasp of it, or maybe you are, I don't know. Most

people ... I've seen people start to learn Greek when they were 10 or 11 and they just didn't get it. People who had one Greek parent and went to Greek school to learn and just couldn't grasp it.

You feel they really needed to start earlier.

Yeah, from day one, I think so.

conversation with family A

What does it mean to be the speaker of a language other than English on your first day of school? It is not always a positive feeling, although many positive things can eventually come from the experience, as one of the parents describes. It was interesting to note that the two mothers who are not actively teaching their first languages to their children both mentioned unhappy or embarrassing memories of not being able to speak English, the language of school.

I can tell you the first memory I had when I realized I didn't speak English very well was when I was in kindergarten and I remember I wanted to ask for a drink of water but I didn't know the words. I mean I could speak English well enough that people could understand me but I remember I couldn't get my tongue around what I needed to say and I think I finally asked for a glass of water and she said, "Well, you can have a drink of water but I don't have any glasses." (laughs)

conversation with family A

But you still, you didn't feel like your English, the remark that you made that you would have been an ESL had they had such a thing when you started school. So you didn't feel like your English was really super strong when you first started school.

I know my written English was very poor.

Yeah but that was kindergarten. Nobody knew how to write.

No, but even like in grade 4.

Oh really.

Even that far along. I know I always had problems with spelling and I think part of that is knowing, um, speaking German first.

And was that, do you remember that? Do you remember feeling, wishing that you weren't that, you weren't German speaking or that you ...?

No I never, I never wanted to not to be German speaking, but I remember feeling, not feeling very good about myself because English, my written English wasn't very good. My spelling wasn't very good. You know, like I'd be in the bottom reading group and the bottom spelling group and all of those things and I remember not feeling very good about that.

But you did fine. I mean you went on to university and you obviously didn't continue to have problems with it.

No well I still did. I remember being at university doing my, working my teaching, one of the teaching courses you have to take and we had to do, it was a speaking course, and they were correcting some of the ways I was pronouncing words.

Really.

Yeah.

Because I don't see you as having an accent or anything, you don't ...

But I, gesture, was one of the words ...

Gesture?

Gesture. I don't know how I said it before. I can't remember. And am I saying it right now?

You're saying it fine now.

But I remember them focusing on this word, gesture, because I was saying it wrong during my speech and a couple of other words as well that they picked on.

Wow. So that made you feel unsure of yourself, eh, you wondered if you really wanted to get up and teach all those kids.

No.

No?

No, I think I felt, one thing I feel about teaching was that, and I think part of the reason I went into it too was because I know that not being a

top student that I could offer something to students that weren't top students themselves because I knew of how, you know, the trouble I had had. I figured that I would be more understanding and possibly offer them different solutions on how to deal with problems that they might not get from someone that didn't have these problems.

conversation with family E

Knowing two different languages means more than knowing two sets of vocabulary. It means knowing two sets of pragmatic rules, and it means being comfortable enough to want to socialize, and take part in the activities that are happening around us. That is a lot of knowledge for one child to have. It is hard for parents to watch their children struggle with the language of the classroom and be unable to fully participate or express their ideas and knowledge because of linguistic barriers.

There's a lot of things that are verbalized and go through language, you know, that the whole body language. For me it's hard to think why but I think that had William been socialized in English, I think that it would have been a little bit better, easier for him to relate to other people. I can see him when he goes into a classroom and he wants to tell a story and he lacks words, you know, and the whole verbs and connective words. There's, it makes things more difficult for him. And he likes to talk a lot. So people have to have this patience and I don't think they really understand what he's saying and it makes him seem

less mature than he actually is. Like the things that he can verbalize in Spanish, he cannot verbalize in English yet, I don't think. I mean he doesn't speak English to me unless I speak English to him, so it's hard to know.

Yeah. But that's interesting and it does start to bring up these kinds of concerns about is this going to right itself, you know, is it going to work out on its own or will I need to intervene in some way. I mean you as an educator you must think about something like that, what you know of early childhood education and the importance of beginning and self confidence in terms of early literacy that that ...

See in my training we didn't encounter a lot of bilingualism. It was never an issue. It was never an issue. So I know really little. I'm just going by instinct here.

conversation with family B

We are constantly being faced with decisions for our children. Sometimes the actions we must take appear obvious, but at other times we are not sure. In order to help our children develop and maintain two languages we are not always sure that the actions we take will be the best for the whole development of the child. We must consider the whole child, not just their language. And many times, we will never know if our decisions

were the right ones. Here a parent talks about the sacrifices she felt that her daughter had to make in order to attend a French as a first language (*programme cadre*) school rather than the neighbourhood school, where the language of instruction is English. This same parent later says that she does not think her children would be able to acquire enough French to become fluent if they did not attend the *programme cadre*.

Au bout du compte je pense que ça vaut la peine. Mais dans ma vie immédiate, un des grands désavantages pour moi c'est que j'ai dû sortir ma fille d'une école que j'aime beaucoup, l'école du quartier où on connaît tout le monde et on se sentait très bien. Maintenant elle est isolée, loin, dans un petit portatif où elle est loin du reste de l'école. Je ne trouve pas ça extraordinaire, mais c'est un sacrifice que je me dis qui vaut la peine pour mon idéalisme du bilinguisme. Dans vingt ans on va demander à Alacie si on a fait un bon choix.

conversation with family C

Sometimes the choices for schooling can be overwhelming. There may not seem to be any good place to send one's child, or there may be several possibilities, none of which may be ideal. As parents we wonder what is most important for each child, and how can we be really sure that we are offering our children what they need. We are fortunate in this country to have certain choices for the schooling of our children, and those of us who desire schooling in the French language are even more fortunate than most as there are many opportunities for children to attend school in French. However,

how much choice do we really have in terms of our children's daily experiences in school? Do parents really have much say in what happens after we say good bye to our child at the classroom door?

The choices around school for Amalie have come up again. We thought it was going to be so straightforward; she would go to the school she was qualified to attend where she would continue to learn and develop her literacy and numeracy skills in her first language. It hasn't worked out that way for various reasons. The school is quite a distance from our home and even further from work, which makes the after school care situation complicated and impractical. We are not happy with the quality of instruction in Amalie's class, or with the administration. I do not feel welcome when I come to the school because I do not share the same linguistic background with the teachers, administration or other parents. For all of these reasons we are thinking of taking our daughter out of one school in the middle of the year and putting her in another. Is that a wise decision, in terms of her adaptation to the education system? Our first choice for schooling now is French Immersion, something I thought I would never consider. "Why would I place my daughter, who already speaks French as a first language, in a program with children who do not speak French, but who are just beginning to learn it? She will be bored and unchallenged." I thought. Now it appears to be the best choice because the standard of French is equal to or higher even than at the

programme cadre school, according to some teachers; because the parents are welcomed at the school and they play an active role in many school activities; because the school has a strong arts program with an orchestra, choir, dance clubs and drama activities; because the school is much closer to our home and feels more like our neighbourhood school than the other ever could. I like the idea of sending my children to the neighbourhood school and did consider it, thinking that they would have opportunities to learn and explore literacy and numeracy in the majority language, English, along with the rest of the class who speak it as a first language, while we continued to use French in the home. In discussing the situation with a neighbour who did send her child to the local school, I found that my assumptions were once again mistaken. The neighbour described her daughter's Kindergarten class as being made up of twenty children, only two of whom speak English at home, one of these being her child. Very few of the children have any English skills at all and the teacher spends most of the time teaching English vocabulary. The neighbour admits that it is a different kind of challenge than she expected for her daughter in Kindergarten. Will we be putting our child into a similar situation, but with a minority language, French, as the language of instruction? Will that make a difference? Another acquaintance, who is from Quebec, tells me that he would never send his child to a French Immersion school because he dislikes the accent the children use when they speak French. Is that a

good basis on which to choose a school for one's child? Will we ever know if we are doing the right thing?

personal journal, January 1996

In the end, we did send Amalie to the French Immersion school. Our ideals of the most appropriate education setting for our daughter became secondary concerns when faced with the practical considerations of schedules, geography and family circumstances.

personal journal, March, 1996

The parents I conversed with were concerned about the lack of training teachers had for encouraging dual language learning in their classrooms. Most teachers, when encountering a child who speaks a language other than English are concerned about their ability to participate in the program designed for the class. If the child speaks only a language other than English then there is great pressure on the child to learn English as soon as possible in order to be able to master the content goals for the year. The language she/he is able to speak, and the knowledge he/she has amassed in that language, tends to be ignored, unless it is viewed to "interfere" with the learning of English. Children who speak English fluently as well as another language are not viewed as potential problems, but their considerable linguistic knowledge

is largely ignored. Most teachers do not view the maintenance of a language other than English to be any concern of theirs.

And I don't know if second languages are valued really in the classroom situations, like in kindergarten or grade 1 situations. From what I see they're not really valued in terms of what they bring to the learning experience. I think they're considered a drawback. You know, just like you said because it's "How can we correct this error of kids speaking a first language?" And that's what I see in his own kindergarten experience here. It's very much learning a standard language, using it well and being good, you know, good mannered and well behaved. And that's the cultural norm.

conversation with family F

William is not that social and the fact that he's more fluent in Spanish than in English just makes his social interactions more difficult. That's one thing. The other thing is that the teachers, although he's been to two very good places, I don't think they are that well trained. I don't know if it's training. I don't know what it is, you know.

conversation with family B

The joys of passing family languages, both spoken and written, are sometimes overshadowed by the memories of what happens when a person is not able to

communicate well in the majority language, such as is described in this passage from E. Annie Proulx's Accordion Crimes:

In this way Hieronim learned that to be foreign, to be Polish, not to be American, was a terrible thing and all that could be done about it was to change one's name and talk about baseball. (p. 292)

Well you know, it's not just that I want him to be able to speak Ismaili, but it's so important to be able to speak English too, you know when he goes to school. It's so important to be fluent in English when they start school because I know that children who don't know the language have so much trouble at school. They don't understand, they aren't able to learn. I mean, I'd like him to know our home languages but I'm not disappointed that he speaks English so well before he goes to school. Right now he's taking swimming lessons and I'm happy that he can understand, and he can talk with his teacher and she understands him. I'm really happy about that.

Yeah, good communication is important for children to learn.

Yes, that's it, the communication is really essential for a good, a good relationship with the teacher and the school. I'm really happy that my children will have that.

conversation with family G

Sometimes the issues surrounding language learning become very complex, depending on such issues as immigration patterns and demographics of a particular school, such as this situation where the parents decided to send their Cantonese speaking daughters to a French Immersion school so that they would learn to speak English well because there would not be many other Cantonese speakers there.

Out of curiosity, why did you decide to put them into French Immersion?

Again you will ask this question. Like in fact we really haven't thought much about it. When we tried to get a school for Julia, but we have an awesome teacher at the daycare with some input, then we look around for like a school. Like at that time in our mind is that like I would like to put her in a place that she can really learn, concentrate and learn, and then also like to be able to learn English properly and then so but what I'm concerned about is that like that is just my personal observation. A lot of Chinese people or Chinese students just hang around together and then they may not really be like they're talking in English. Like after school hours which reminds me of the old days that I was there before. And which is like a failure of my life of learning of language. But it reminds me of that. And like I wish, I don't think that it would be a bad opportunity for her. So when I looked for a school I always kept that in mind, right, so that's why we have tried like some

Catholic schools or some private schools because like in the public school in the area that we live, like it would take us a lot of assets to try not having those effects on her.

I'm a little bit confused. If you go back a little bit. So you were saying you don't want her to hang around with kids after school and speak English?

Cantonese.

Cantonese.

That's right.

So you're trying to get away from a school that has a large Cantonese speaking population.

Right.

You want her to practice her English.

That's right. And then in a more natural environment.

Oh, okay.

And then the play time, I'll see it at work in the most natural environment for her to learn but if she was to hang around with just like people like of the same, with other Chinese kids, I've seen a lot of examples like that, but are they just like out of those two hours they just speak Cantonese.

I see.

And like when we talk to the teachers of the day care and then like she recommends Julia to take a more challenge because she seems to have the ability to pick up another language which like is we're quite excited about it. But we have to pay at that time for the reason that like it'll be a challenge for us as the parents that well because we don't know French. How are we going to help her at the earliest age that when she's picking up the language and then also we worry about that because English is already her second language. If she's learning French will it put her behind in learning English because it won't be until Grade 4 that she will learn English at school. So it's a challenge for us too, right. But like and so we thought of a lot of things and but it happened like, I found L'Ecole Bilingue, the school, and a spot for her and it's convenient in location and I heard a good reputation about it and we talked to the teacher and the daycare again and she just tells us don't worry, she'll be able to handle it. Which she means that Julia will be able to handle it. So we just thought okay, we'll give it a shot. And see whether she's interested in that or not which I think means most, if she has the motivation or that she does or that she don't feel bad about it, then I think that that would mean a great success, right. And so like we said okay, we'll just do it, it'll turn out really good.

That's good.

And she enjoys it a lot and then I couldn't help her with French but we've been trying to let her know that like we don't know that and that

we cannot, like we cannot learn as good as she does. We're trying to let her know that like if you make an effort you will be able to do it. So when she was at kindergarten, one time she was mad and she said mom, why are you not, like tell me a story, because she brought home with her French a storybook and I said that no I just couldn't understand that. So then I thought about it and I went to a bookstore and got the French dictionary and then I just like looked at the dictionary like word by word and get it translated and then so, but the thing is that I told her the story in Cantonese. Again, I just wanted to show her that like "No, mom doesn't know French, but I'm making an effort to do it." So then I would like her to know that. She needs to make an effort to learn as well.

conversation with family H

The complex layers of understanding that lead to our decisions for our children are fraught with tension. Here, these children, who speak Cantonese at home, are sent to a French Immersion school in order to learn English (and French) in a natural way with other children. My own children, who speak French at home, also attend a French immersion school because it is convenient for our home and schedules. We make the best decisions we can for our children's current well-being and future happiness, based on the information we have and the situations we find ourselves within, but often, each time, it is a step out into the unknown. When I consider that, in offering

the opportunity to my children to acquire two languages and cultures as part of our family life, I am making decisions that will affect how my children will identify themselves within society; I am continually awestruck with the immensity of the undertaking, the repercussions that will continue to ripple across all of our lives, and the lighthearted way I set off with the best of intentions, believing that it was quite a simple matter.

In the following chapter I return home with families as the participants and I reflect on what bilingualism is coming to mean to us, in light of our conversations about our children and dual language acquisition within the family, in the community, and at school.

Chapter Five

Storytime, Lullabytime

What is it about the language of stories that makes such a difference in the way my children and I read books together? For example, those baby picture books with mostly pictures or photographs and very few words are so easy to translate into French simultaneously, not just because there are so few words, but because the story is in the pictures, not the words, so the story can be in any language. As soon as the text becomes important it is not so obvious any more. We were reading Margaret Wise Brown's Goodnight Moon once again tonight, and it is an example of a picture book with a few simple words as text, yet I would not think of "reading" that one in French because the original language is so memorable. Is this the definition of poetic language, the language that in Merleau-Ponty's words "sings the world?" Or is it the association of language, whether spoken or written, with the memory of our first experience with a particular text that is important? I think of Martin Luther King's speech "I have a dream," of the poetry of Emil Nelligan, and cannot imagine that they would have the same impact for me in translated versions. But maybe this is a result of the fact that I am bilingual and am moved by each of them in the original language. The important connection is still the one between the reader and the text, although the triangular connection of text, language and reader is an interesting one for those who have access to the language in

question. It is fascinating to be making these discoveries about the relationships between language and text, and translation, in my home life with my children, at the same time as I struggle to understand the philosophical works on language and text (in translation) of Gadamer's Truth and Method, Bahktin's The Dialogic Imagination , Derrida's Writing and Difference and Foucault's Archeology of Knowledge.

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. ... The book is not simply the object one holds in one's hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative (Foucault, 1972, p.23.) *Relative to what, I wonder; and consider the possibilities of the relationships of the words, that is, their sounds in a particular language, to the images, the illustrations, the prior knowledge that the child has about the subject, and from there to the unity or whole message the book conveys. The sounds of language matter in the acquisition of literacy, I am discovering, as well as in the learning of languages.*

personal journal, February, 1996

We have come now to the end of the day, to storytime, and lullabytime. Many families read together or sing to their young children at

bedtime. Parents may begin to consider literacy in the family language for children at any age, but usually by the time the child is approaching school age of four or five. Parents who themselves are readers may have books in their language that they enjoy sharing with their children. Some take advantage of those branches of the public library system which carry books for both children and adults in other languages, but these are limited to languages that have a large population in this region, such as French, Mandarin, Vietnamese, and German. For speakers of other languages there are few written resources available. Parents may be aware that the written form of a language is quite different from the spoken form, and that offering the children an opportunity to become literate in the family language involves much more direct instruction than using a language orally in the family. Some parents are reluctant to take on the task of teaching their children literacy skills in any language, believing that it is up to the schools to do that, whereas others embrace the idea, understanding or instinctively reaching out for the strong connections between literacy and minority language maintenance (Au, 1993; Early & Gunderson, 1993; Edelsky, 1991).

Although the children in the participating families are very young, literacy in both the family language and the majority language came up as a topic in many of the conversations with the families. Those parents who were active in helping their children to begin to explore literacy in the family language appeared to have reached similar conclusions on their own as Reeder & Shapiro (1996) do in their study on the role of parents in the

development of emergent literacy in preschoolers. That is, the parents in this study were not only reading to their children, but engaging in talk and storytelling, and providing opportunities for writing in meaningful ways, thereby attempting to: "... live out the values and attitudes that underlie natural, daily engagement in literate activities" (p. 126). These parents may have come to such a well-developed understanding of the importance of introducing natural literacy activities in an informal way to very young children as a result of their heightened awareness of language learning as bilingual people, although it may also be due to the fact that they are all well-educated, and many work as educators.

Here some of the families discuss those aspects of literacy which are important to them. The concerns of the first parent range from making literacy in the family language relevant to the child, to the contact with extended family that written language and technology such as email allows, to the extra burden that teaching written language will place on the time the family has together.

... people have asked me if I would, if it would be me the one teaching him how to read and write. Like someone will have to do it. It won't come naturally I don't think. I mean he will have some incentive, we'll have to do something about it. Most of his books at home are in Spanish. Although lately they have been both. But most of his books are in Spanish and we read in Spanish a lot. We don't ever speak English at home, I mean unless it's like one word but it's thrown here

or there. Or it's playing, like something like that. But we speak almost Spanish. There's a lot of Spanish stuff around so he will pick it up but I think that he will need some guidance, but just following up. And I'm not sure how the logistics with that will work either, you know.

That will make a difference in children's relationship I think to literacy. It makes a big difference in terms of what their continued interest in the language ...

Right.

... because as they become exposed to print, especially in a household where books are really important and reading and writing is important to keep up in oral language.

Yeah. We are in very close contact with my family in Argentina too. So e-mail, he knows that we e-mail our families and that may be a way of putting him together in contact with his cousins. But we'll have to work on it, you know. It won't come as natural as English will. Or I can say well they will teach him how to read and write in school. Like I don't have to worry about that. And this is an added, I shouldn't say burden, but it's another, it's one more stress, it's one more thing that's put in our relationship as parents with William. Like at a point I thought of just saying okay, like twice a week, for three times a week I will sit with him and read and write or whatever. Like do something like that. And it's something that I'll have to think about. If I want that

in our relationship, like I come home after the whole day or work and he comes from school. Do I want to do that or do I want to play with him? You know, like there's stuff that I can do playing but there's, I mean if I have this goal and being a teacher myself, you know, like you have all of these in your mind.

Yeah, that's right too. And then what will it take the place of. Like you said, play, outside play when it's a nice day or learning a musical instrument or other things, working on the computer that does take time and you need to set aside time for that...

Right. Right. And I don't know how that will work out. I mean at this point we're quite happy. His vocabulary is amazing. I mean he just, I mean it says how much he can really absorb. The other thing that I was thinking of as I was thinking that we were going to meet today is that having the two languages enabled him to learn both languages in a different way.

conversation with family B

The practical concerns of how much time is available for family activities are real ones for parents, which require them to make choices about priorities for their children among the many possibilities of what the family can do together. The importance a parent places on literacy in general will play a role, but how do parents make decisions regarding the importance of literacy in the second and/ or third language(s)? Contact with distant family and

friends is one important factor for the parent in the conversation above, as it is in my own family, where my children are strongly encouraged to write letters to their grandmother and other relatives in French. However, the children are still young, and literacy in any language is still in the future. It seems that we base our decisions on continual trial and re-evaluation of the situation as the child adjusts to expectations and reveals what he or she is capable of and interested in. There is continual tension between what is important to the parent, that is, their children's development of fluency and literacy in two languages, and what is possible in terms of time, the child's capabilities and the family situation, which makes the parents' decision-making role all that more difficult.

The following parent describes the way literacy in the family language has magnified and clarified the differences between the two languages for his child, and the time they spend on literacy activities has made a difference in the amount of family language used by the child. This echoes the final statement of the previous parent, and shows how these parents are coming to understand the idea that learning two languages is not simply a matter of having two separate sets of vocabulary, but allows the bilingual, even a young child, the means to begin to understand the complex richness of language itself, on many different levels.

I notice with Anthony too, now that he's begun to start reading and writing, that the differences that are more magnified in terms of

reciting the alphabet of learning how to spell a Greek word and what words to use, but he's pretty good at keeping the alphabet separate so he can, you know, it may as we see corrects me when ... yeah, when I forget a letter or something like that, you know. But it's really interesting in terms of how the language that he knew in Greece when he was learning how to first speak, you know, is beginning to come back. So I don't even think, you know, personally I don't even think there is such a thing as language loss personally. You know, it's just, I think it's always there and it's just a matter of not bringing it back but getting re-acquainted with the structure of it.

conversation with family F

The sounds of oral language have begun to interest me, particularly in relation to the meanings of words, and how that connects to my daughters' early stages of literacy development. Does a word in a particular language have the same meaning as the translation of that word in another language, or does the association of the sounds have an influence on meaning? Several parents talked about the significance of songs and children's rhymes to their memories of language learning in childhood, and how much they enjoyed sharing these with their own children. One of the parents who does not normally speak to her children in her first language sings them a lullaby in that language, although she adds the information that she translates it into English for them. My own experience as a second language teacher has shown

me the positive results for language learning that setting words to music can have. Young children learn songs in a second language, and remember the words to them, far more easily than they learn the words without music.

Songs that a parent may sing at the end of the day have a special connection to feelings of security and belonging within the family, which help the child develop a sense of identity with the language of the song. One of the parents who grew up speaking English with his father recalls the songs in Dutch that the father sang, and the long-term effects they had on his feelings of connection to that language and culture. Here he describes how he sings to his children in what he considers to be his first language, English, although the language he normally speaks to them is French.

Aussi, je connais beaucoup plus de chansons en anglais et j'aime chanter avec mes enfants. Quand je chante des petites chansons de mon enfance, je le fais en anglais, mais ce n'est pas la langue de communication. C'est comme mon père qui chantait en hollandais. Il me parlait en anglais tout le temps, mais de temps en temps il y avait quelque chose qui est sorti en hollandais, mais c'était une chose de luxe, pas la norme.

conversation with family C

Another parent talks about the memories of early songs and rhymes in her first language, German, and how pleased she is that her mother is teaching them in turn to her son. This parent is not teaching her first language to her

children. The conversation helped her to remember and reflect on her childhood in German, which she no longer speaks, but which her mother is teaching to her children. This parent was very revealing about the complexities of language learning, yet very open to possibilities and looking for ways to her children to have more opportunities and more positive experiences than herself.

I remember, like I remember quite a lot of them [nursery rhymes], like probably more than I know completely in English. And then my mom has a poem for everything. Like if there's a firefly that goes by, she has a song for it. For everything, seriously everything, she has a poem for it or a song or something. And then she starts reciting them and I go, wait a minute, I know that too, and it just dredges way back to my childhood. And then I start remembering these things too. She has little poems for things that all these things that are dangerous like knife, fork, and I have a little poem and so Nicholas recites that all the time, every time he has a knife in his hand he recites this little poem in German.

conversation with family D

Reflecting on bilingualism

Now the children have fallen asleep, and, gazing on their sleeping forms, we pause for a few minutes at the end of a busy day to reflect on our

lives with them. We think of the daily struggles, the challenges and tensions of living the contradictions and wonder why this language, this bilingualism is so important to us. The parents here respond to their self-questioning of why this is important to them. The responses are widely varied and reflect the life experiences of the parent, which connects directly back to the original invitation the participants were given to begin the conversations: "Tell me about your experience with language." The parents' personal lived experience has a direct influence on their understanding of language learning and language use in society, and this is reflected in the how they communicate and interact with their children. This parent talks about the "naturalness" of speaking her first language with her child.

I cannot see myself speaking any other language but Spanish to William. And after seeing my sister I said well maybe I could if I had to. But when I have to say "I love you" or you know make up songs and stuff like that, it's Spanish. It just comes out so naturally to me. And having to speak any other language would have been an effort for me. That's the first thing. I mean the most natural thing is Spanish.

conversation with family B

The second takes a more pragmatic approach and discusses how knowing several languages is useful, particularly if interested in studying documents in the original language.

But after I'd been here I think English is no longer just something that gets me a job. Now that I think about it, it's, you know, it's something more than that. I don't have to work in this language because I have the other two that I can work in. But it just opens up so much more. Like the kind of things that I was not able to read in Chinese because not everything is translated into Chinese. And when you want to study something in depths, you know that it's good to look at the original.

conversation with family J

The following parents, who are both from Quebec, talk about how learning different languages allowed them to learn about different people and their cultures. They both saw themselves as somewhat isolated when they were unilingual francophones living in Quebec, and have enjoyed the way that travel and learning other languages have opened doors and broken down barriers for them. Both hope that their children will be able to enjoy the freedoms and opportunities to learn about other people that being bilingual has brought them.

... in those days they could choose a language of choice and they would always choose English because it was the language of prosperity. So because of that I think there were huge motivators in learning the language and to come back to today I think what happens is that it was particularly painful for me because as a child already I loved diversity and I loved to think of other cultures and how they were living and I

dreamed of visiting those lands. So when I eventually left Quebec to go and teach French and I didn't speak English although I was 26, you know, I really took advantage of that immersion and I really put my whole effort into learning the language. And there again there was, especially when I came here to B.C. and I saw these other worlds, this other universe that had been, were born in other lands, and there was even a more of an attraction towards that. And now it's a continuum. I really see, you know, continually in some ways or a consistency in my motivations throughout life. And it has a lot to do with overcoming in some ways the cultural and linguistic isolations I lived as a child and gradually see the world from a different perspective and then for (unclear) through Asia here and for her to really have some integration about that and she'll do what she wants with it. Maybe she'll choose "I don't want French, I don't want Japanese. I just want to be", you know. I doubt it, I hope not.

conversation with family K

Mais, une chose que j'ai remarquée, une raison qui m'a fait aimer les langues, qui m'a rendue curieuse de vouloir apprendre les langues, c'est que j'ai trouvé que ça a coupé des barrières sociales. Parce que quand j'étais dans une langue étrangère tout le monde était égal. Je peux parler avec qui que ce soit, un medecin ou un enfant, n'importe quel être humain de la société, c'est un être humain et j'ai cherché à communiquer avec eux. Tandis que, au Québec, dans ma langue

maternelle, j'avais une façon de m'exprimer avec une telle, et une autre avec une telle autre, puis j'ai varié ma personnalité dépendamment de mon audience. J'ai trouvé que dans une langue étrangère ces barrières là, ils disparaissaient. J'ai communiqué avec tout le monde, et j'ai trouvé tout le monde absolument fascinant. J'ai trouvé que tout le monde avait quelque chose à dire. Avant j'étais probablement snob, certains gens, je ne communiquais pas avec, je ne choisisais pas d'aller leur parler, disons. J'ai trouvé ça extraordinaire, et j'ai adoré apprendre les langues pour ça. Ça m'a ouvert des portes magnifiques, j'ai communiqué avec plein de gens différents. C'est une des choses qui m'a poussée à continuer à apprendre des langues étrangères.

.....

Est-ce que c'est le bilinguisme qui est important à toi, plus important que le fait que ta langue maternelle n'est pas la langue majoritaire ici? Important pour tes enfants, je veux dire.

Tu veux dire que si j'étais au Québec, et que Kevin était francophone, est-ce que le bilinguisme serait important, si je désirais ça pour mes enfants?

Oui.

Oh, moi je crois au bilinguisme. Au Québec j'enverrais mes enfants en immersion anglaise, parce que je trouve ça magnifique d'être bilingue, trilingue. Ça te donne le goût de voyager, aussi, plus tard. Tu as un bon outil, tu te sens pas paralysé, tu veux aller ici et là parce que tu sais que tu vas être habile. Tu vas pouvoir te débrouiller dans la langue de la place. Ça ouvre plein de portes, je trouve ça extraordinaire. Aussi, je me dis, si mes enfants sont bilingues, à un tout jeune âge, ça leur donne la chance d'être trilingue, polyglotte. Parce que, une fois tu connais deux langues, les autres langues viennent plus facilement.

conversation with family C

The following conversation, with a parent who grew up in a communist country, reveals how much learning other languages allowed them to feel some kind of contact with the rest of the world while living in a society that was very closed.

For us learning other languages was our way to try to contact the rest of the world. We were not allowed to travel or have any contact with the non-Communist world so anyone who was interested in other people or cultures studied the languages to try and learn more. Of course we had to study our own language and Russian first, before we could turn to English and other European languages, and it was very abstract, an

intellectual exercise only, but it was our only way to feel in touch with the outside world.

conversation with family L

This next parent muses about how her own growing sense of her cultural and ethnic identity has influenced her efforts to pass her language on to her daughter. This person remarks on the irony of the fact that if she had had a child as a newly arrived immigrant she might not have taught that child her first language, which is Japanese. It is only now, when the parent has learned to speak English fluently and has made a place for herself in her new country, that she feels impelled to turn back to her cultural heritage and try to pass some of it on to her daughter through the language. Is there a possibility that Canadian society as whole might be reaching this stage of maturity where there is no longer such a tremendous need to assimilate that we can allow ourselves to appreciate the cultural heritage of all of the people who live in this country? There are times when it seems as though this might be possible; there is certainly a revived interest in ethnic diversity, particularly in popular culture such as literature, music and film. Will this translate into a greater interest in multiple language learning and maintenance?

I'm sitting here and I'm not sure if I would have made the same choice if I were maybe 25, you know, a young mother. I was so immersed in this culture and I was trying so hard to speak English and I was trying

so hard to learn it and I wanted to become fluent, and so if I had Christine at that point and you know trying myself to assimilate into this environment, I'm not sure if I would have taught her, you know, Japanese. But yeah, so now I feel comfortable with this although I always feel handicapped somehow or, you know, always that will never go away from me. But now I'm older and I think I appreciate my Japanese identity much more so than I did 20 years ago or 15 years ago. And yeah, so I'm glad in a way that I had Christine this late. So that I'm really motivated and it's important to me to teach her Japanese and I really would like her to know that part of her heritage is Japanese. But I don't know if I would have thought that way before.

conversation with family K

I am intrigued by the word "handicapped" that she has chosen to describe her situation in her adopted country, and think of a dictionary definition of the word *handicap*:

The extra weight or other condition imposed on a superior in favour of an inferior competitor in any athletic or other match; hence, any encumbrance or disability that weighs upon effort and makes success more difficult (Oxford English Dictionary, p. 1250.)

Is that the nature of the immigrant experience? To feel weighted down, encumbered by a cultural and linguistic heritage, regardless of how successfully one has adapted to the new country; how well one has learned

the new language? For this parent it is time, and a successful adaptation, that has given her the perspective that helping her daughter acquire her own cultural and linguistic heritage is important. Is this what parents need in order to understand why it might be beneficial for children to learn the language of their parents if it is not the majority language of the community, as well as that majority language? There appears to be a contradiction here, as long term immigrants are often the least likely to pass on a heritage language to their children. I think about the parents in this family, the mother from Japan, the father an educator from Quebec, and speculate that parents need more than time and a successful adaptation to come to the same conclusions as this parent here. They need an opportunity to discuss their situations with others who have similar interests and concerns, and to reflect on the implications of their interactions with their children.

Some of the parents and I conversed at length about the idea of bilingualism; what it meant to be bilingual, and whether it was possible to be bilingual in a society that appears to favour monolingualism. We talked about the advantages, and possible disadvantages that a person, particularly a child, who is bilingual might have. One of the topics that arose was identity, how language and identity are strongly connected, and what kind of identity a truly bilingual child might develop.

J'en rencontre des parfaits bilingues, très peu; ils sont fascinants, tu les regardes, tu te poses la question. C'est ça que je veux pour mes enfants.

Ça donne que des avantages? Ou est-ce que ça peut donner des désavantages aussi, d'être parfaitement bilingue? Moi, je ne sais pas comment ça peut être parce que je ne le suis pas. J'ai mon identité anglophone, j'ai grandi toute ma vie en anglais, des parents anglophones. Je ne sais pas comment ça peut être pour quelqu'un qui n'a pas juste une identité mais deux. Je me demande si ça peut être difficile d'avoir deux identités avec deux langues.

Je pense que les enfants bilingues développent leur propre identité à eux. Ils ne peuvent pas s'associer avec un grand groupe parce qu'ils sont rares, les enfants parfaitement bilingues, mais ils ont leur identité à eux, je dirais. Ils ont moins que quelqu'un complètement québécois, disons, qui a une richesse de culture québécoise. Nos enfants bilingues n'auront pas ça. Et il n'auront pas une richesse culturelle anglophone de la Colombie-Britannique aussi développée, alors ils sont faibles dans les deux mondes. Ils vont vivre avec des petits trous ici et là, mais je pense qu'ils vont être comblés par d'autres richesses qu'ils ont que les autres n'auront pas. Au bout du compte je pense que ça vaut la peine.

conversation with family C

The parent cited above is convinced that the separate identity that bilingual children come to form for themselves is a positive thing. These children will be few in number, she admits, but the richness of their dual languages and cultures will make up for any lack, or "holes" as she puts it. She does not

consider the possibility that there may be negative effects, such as marginalization. This puts me in mind of a comment made by Kelleen Toohey at a presentation she gave at UBC in September, 1997 on a research project she is carrying out involving kindergarten children learning English as a Second Language in Vancouver schools. Toohey was commenting on the challenges facing young children who have to learn a new language while coming to terms with the socialisation process of school.

Becoming bilingual does not overcome the marginality-- it creates a new marginality. (Toohey, 1997)

This possibility of marginalization adds a new layer of complexity to the already complex situation faced by the parents in the circumstances being explored here. Would we really want place our children in a potentially marginalized space? How can we know what it is to be a bilingual child attempting to create an identity for oneself? Neither the parent cited above, nor I, grew up speaking and understanding more than one language or living with more than one culture. Can we really predict how positive the experience will be for our children?

The parents talked about their own linguistic ideals for themselves and their children, and were concerned about whether their expectations were fair to their children. This next parent wondered about whether his expectations for his daughter were too high, but goes on to share his pleasure at how his child has met these expectations. Seeing his daughter as a successful language

learner has allowed him to increase his own understanding of what is important for language learning.

Yeah, but three languages, you know. It's like, but you know for me we're asking her what, to meet our expectations and I think, I mean for me what I was concerned was that speaking English to each other¹ that her, I know her French or her Japanese might be limited or that she might be tempted to see English as superior because that's the language we speak in. So far it's not at all the case. She sees me, she thinks in French, she sees mom, she says Japanese and it seemed to her a complete facility and just different minds she puts on, you know. Depending on the people, there doesn't seem to be preferences, just abilities. And that's very, that reassured me and I would really advise people asking in the future not to worry because children can learn. A good example I think of a child who if parents are really convinced, they really value their language, and they really communicate who they are through their language that then children are not ambivalent towards the language because I see what some children, like we went to a story time last week in French and there were children who understood all French and both parents spoke French but they answered in English and I would bet that there were mixed messages sent to the child that the child spent most of her time in English daycare. The child is kind of two minds about language.

¹ This parent and his partner speak their only common language, English, together.

There is no doubt in the following parent's mind about the future language learning of her child. She sees the responsibility as being her own to "make sure" that her child speaks both the language of her mother's country and that of her father's. She acknowledges the possibility that her child might not want to follow her wishes in this regard at all stages of her language learning, but takes the responsibility onto herself for the ultimate fulfillment of her goals.

So is it an assumption of yours that Paula will be bilingual when she grows ...

I think I will make sure that she will. As you said, and I went through that too, I refuse to even, there was some period of time now when I think about it, it feels silly but I didn't really refuse but I wanted to speak more Mandarin. I felt that was cool to speak in Mandarin, behave like a Chinese person rather than who I was. But the point is Paula might have, she might go through the same period that she thinks that being English is cool, why should I speak Chinese? But that doesn't matter as a Chinese person. I will make sure that she knows both. As I said if it's necessary I will go back to China for a year or two to make sure that she speaks Mandarin.

So you foresee that as being something that will happen naturally?

It's something she must do.

conversation with family I

The following parent describes some of the fears he has about the possible outcomes of the high expectations he has for his daughter. He acknowledges the influence other people's stories have on his beliefs about language learning, despite the progress that his young daughter is making in learning three languages simultaneously.

I'm just afraid that, you know, because we try to teach her three languages that none of them will be very good, and I hear that story so often by other people, and I just don't want that happening.

conversation with family K

This next parent was able to express the importance of language for broadening perspectives, learning about other cultures and keeping connections to family cultures in her comments about how important language learning, in particular the learning of the family language, was to her.

In fact I like, the way that I look at language is that like it's, I'd just say that the way that I look at communication is that it's a very powerful thing. So like to learn a language would help a person a lot. Like in the way that like would broaden their perspective in looking at things

and then as what I said before I see it in language, cultural heritage. And every different language comes from different cultures and every different cultures have their good things in there. So if I learn a language they will be able to get those good things and will broaden their perspective in analyzing something, and looking at things and communicating with people. And they will just have the courage to communicate with all different other people and not being restricted by one language but [have] two. So I would think from it would be like a lifetime treasure for them.

.....

Because like I think that I learn from myself as well, my past experiences as well. Like if you cannot communicate well, it doesn't matter how intelligent you are, you just wouldn't be able to express it and just like some hidden treasure.

conversation with family H

There can be no conclusion to this research, as there was really no beginning. I stepped into circles of conversations that were already taking place and lifted out sections of them to listen more closely. While I have been doing that, the conversations continue, so that we, the readers of this paper, will never hear the whole story, or know the whole truth of what it is to be a

bilingual parent. As I listen to the conversations, and interact with them again in the writing of this text, understandings continue to emerge.

There can be no such thing as an isolated utterance. It always presupposes utterances that precede and follow it. No one utterance can be either the first or the last. (Bahktin, 1986, p. 135)

Reflecting on the conversations with the participants, my own experiences, and on this text as it has come together here, I have pulled together some emerging understandings about parenting bilingual children. They are: a) raising a child to be bilingual is a deliberate act that is often more difficult than parents expected, b) that parents who have a mentor; someone they know who has been successful in doing so, are much more likely to persist despite difficulties, c) that close religious, cultural or familial ties to other speakers of the minority language are positive influences on both parents and children, d) that parents are greatly encouraged by meeting health and/or educational professionals who are positive and informative about bilingualism in young children, e) that the level of bilingualism of the parents is not a strong indicator of whether the children will also be taught two languages, although their perception of being successful second language learners themselves is, and f) that co-operation of parents and family members is important for successful language learning.

I feel a responsibility to "do" something with the stories I have collected, to try to make sense of them for myself, and others, and to act in ways that follow responsibly from what I now know. Van Manen (1984) writes:

The end of phenomenological research is to sponsor a critical educational competence: knowing how to act tactfully in pedagogic situations on the basis of a carefully edified thoughtfulness. ... Phenomenological research has as its ultimate aim to fulfill our human nature: to become more fully who we are (p.36.)

It is important for people who do touch the lives of parents with young children to know what it is to be a bilingual parent, and to be faced with the decisions and the daily situations described by the participants of this study. It is important for the health professionals and teachers to know that their words and actions can influence the decisions of the parents and will have an impact on the approach the family takes toward language learning. It is important for parents to know that they are not alone in wanting to realize the potential of raising a child to be bilingual, that there is no one right way to do it, and that every family experiences doubts and setbacks on their language learning adventure. We are left, here, with the resonances of hopes, desires, fears, determination, voiced in language; language of shared memory, opportunity and possibility.

Epilogue

Yet, the unexpected surfaces in any situation where human beings are. As our children grow to find their own voices in the languages of the world, we as parents continue to find ourselves on a journey of discovery about what it is for them to be a bilingual person with hopes and dreams and understandings of their own, which in turn helps us in our coming to understand ourselves as bilingual and parent.

"Mummy, don't say it in French, tell me in English. I like it better when you tell it in English, you are more you." (Madeleine, aged 6). My children have once again begged me to tell them a story of when I was young. Sitting on one of their beds in the darkened room I began, "Quand j'étais petite..." when my younger daughter's outburst stopped me. I considered momentarily, and then agreed. It was easier to talk about my childhood in English as that was the only language I knew at the time. But in thinking over the incident later, and thinking about the pattern our family language strategy have fallen into, I am bemused. We thought so carefully about how we would use language in our family. We planned to maximize exposure to the minority language and encourage family solidarity by using only French in the home. The children would speak only French at home with both of us, we thought, and become fluent and comfortable with the language. I would continue to use and develop my second language and my

husband would be able to come home and relax by speaking his first language after a long day of conversing in a foreign tongue. It was all so simple, clear and straightforward, we thought. But living with children is never simple, clear and straightforward, and neither is dealing with the intricacies of language usage. We are constantly asking our children to speak French in the home as they don't do it naturally, particularly the younger one. But when they are required to speak French, in Quebec or France, for example, or with French-speaking relatives, they are able, with few hesitations or lack of vocabulary, even the younger one. In the end, the children do choose what seems to be appropriate for them and the situations they find themselves in. For my daughter, speaking to me in English, hearing about my English-speaking childhood in English, is appropriate, and right. For her to be sensitive to the nuances and associations of language with experience is wonderful. For the moment, I have been able to give her the gift of two languages. I have also been able to help her build an understanding of what it is to have two means for communicating thoughts and ideas, and a system for discerning when each is appropriate for use. For me, it is indeed a treasure.

personal journal, September 1998

Phenomenology, not unlike poetry, is a poetizing project; it tries an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling, wherein we aim to

involve the voice in an original singing of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1973). ... Language that authentically speaks the world rather than abstractly speaking it is a language that reverberates the world, as Merleau-Ponty says, a language that sings the world.

(Van Manen, 1990, p. 13.)

So what is it to be a bilingual parent? It is
to live with/in the contradictions
the unknowns
the untidiness, the uncertainty, the tensions
to believe in oneself, one's language
to look to the future with expectations and hopes
and to live in the joys of the present

References

- Aoki, T. (1991). Inspiriting curriculum: Talks with teachers. Edmonton, AB: Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta.
- Arnberg, L. (1987). Raising children bilingually: The preschool years. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Ashworth, M. (1979). The forces which shaped them. Vancouver: New Star Books.
- Ashworth, M. (1988). Blessed with bilingual brains. Vancouver: Educational Press.
- Au, K. H. (1993). Literacy instruction in multicultural settings. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Baker, C. (1993). Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Baker, C. (1995). A parents' and teachers' guide to bilingualism. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). The dialogic imagination. (M. Holquist, Ed.; C. Emerson and M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
(Original work published 1975).
- Bateson, M.C. (1989). Composing a life. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Bérubé, B. (1998). Two polyglots, three languages. Bilingual Family Newsletter, 15(2), 3-8.

- Beynon, J. & Toohey, K. (1991). Heritage language education in British Columbia: Policy and programs. The Canadian Modern Language Review / La Revue Canadienne des Langues Vivantes, 47(7), 607-616.
- Bialystock, E. (Ed.). (1991). Language processing in bilingual children. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bleicher, J. (1980). Contemporary hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as method, philosophy and critique. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bontekoe, R. (1996). Dimensions of the hermeneutic circle. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.
- Brown, M.W. (1947). Goodnight moon. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Brown, R. (1973). A first language: The early stages. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1986). Actual minds, possible worlds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruns, G.L. (1992). Hermeneutics, ancient and modern. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Burling, R. (1959). Language development of a Garo and English speaking child. Word, 15, 45-68.
- Carson, T. (1986). Closing the gap between research and practise: Conversation as a mode of doing research. Phenomenology and Pedagogy, 4 (2), 73-85.
- Carter, K. (1993). The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education. Educational Researcher, 22(1), 5-12.

- Chomsky, N. (1968). Language and mind. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Connolly, M. & Clandinin, J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. Educational Researcher, 19(5), 2-14.
- Cooper, R.L. (1989). Language planning and social change. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Courts, P.L. (1991). Literacy and empowerment: The meaning makers. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- Cruikshank, J. (1990). Life lived like a story. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Cummins, J. (1978). Bilingualism and the development of metalinguistic awareness. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 9, 131-149.
- Cummins, J. (1984). Bilingualism and special education: Issues in assessment and pedagogy. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (1992). Heritage language teaching in Canadian schools. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 24, 281-286.
- Cummins, J. & Danesi, M. (1990). Heritage languages: The development and denial of Canada's linguistic resources. Toronto: Our schools/Our selves Education Foundation and Garamond Press.
- Daniels, H. A. (Ed.). (1990). Not only English: Affirming America's multilingual heritage. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

- DeHouwer, A. (1990). The acquisition of two languages from birth: A case study. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Delpit, L. (1995). Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom. New York: New Press.
- Derrida, J. (1978). Writing and difference. (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1967).
- Dopke, S. (1992). One parent, one language: An interactional approach. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Dulay, H. & Burt, M. (1985). The relative proficiency of limited English proficient students. In J.E. Alatis & J.J. Staczek (Eds.), Perspectives on bilingualism and bilingual education, (pp. 189-208). Washington,DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Early, M. & Gunderson, L. (1993). Linking home, school and community literacy. TESL Canada Journal, 11(1), 99-111.
- Edelsky, C. (1991). With literacy and justice for all: Rethinking the social in language and education. London, UK: The Falmer Press.
- Edwards, J. (1994). Multilingualism. London; New York: Routledge.
- Eliot, T.S. (1963). The Four Quartets. In Collected poems 1909-1962. London: Faber and Faber.
- Erickson, F. (1993). Transformation and school success: The politics and culture of educational achievement. In E. Jacob & C. Jordan (Eds.), Minority education: Anthropological perspectives (pp. 27-51). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

- Erneling, C. (1993). Understanding language acquisition: The framework of learning. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Fantini, A. (1985). Language acquisition of a bilingual child: A sociolinguistic perspective to age 10. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Feldman, C. & Shen, M. (1971). Some language-related cognitive advantages of bilingual five-year-olds. Journal of Genetic Psychology, 118, 235-244.
- Fine, M. (1994). Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research methods (pp. 70-82). London: Sage Publications.
- Fishman, J. (1986). The rise and fall of the ethnic revival: Perspectives on language and ethnicity. Berlin; New York: Mouton.
- Fontana, A. & Frey, J.H. (1994). Interviewing: The art of science. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research methods (pp. 361-376). London: Sage Publications.
- Foucault, M. (1972). The archeology of knowledge and the discourse on language. (A. M. S. Smith, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1989). Truth and method, (2nd rev. ed.). (J. Weinsheimer & D.G. Marshall, Trans). New York: Crossroad. (Original work published 1960).
- Gallagher, S. (1992). Hermeneutics and education. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Garcia, O. (Ed.) (1991). Bilingual education. Focusschrift in honor of Joshua A. Fishman. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

- Genesee, F. (1987). Learning through two languages. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House.
- Gilyard, K. (1991). Voices of the self: A study of language competence. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Glesne, C. & Peshkin, A. (1992). Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Goodz, N. (1994). Interactions between parents and children in bilingual families. In F. Genesee (Ed.), Educating second language children, (pp. 61-81). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Greene, M. (1991). Foreword. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education, (pp 4-8). New York & London: Teachers College Press.
- Grosjean, F. (1982). Life with two languages: An introduction to bilingualism. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Grover, M. (1998). Editorial. The Bilingual Family Newsletter, 15(2), 1.
- Grumet, M. (1987). The politics of personal knowledge. Curriculum Inquiry, 17, 319-329.
- Grumet, M. (1988). Bittermilk: Women and teaching. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Gudmundsdottir, S. (1996). The teller, the tale and the one being told: The narrative nature of the research interview. Curriculum Inquiry, 26, 293-306.

- Gurevitch, Z. (1995). The possibility of conversation. The Sociological Quarterly, 36(1), 97-109.
- Haigbrown, C. (1988). Resistance and renewal: Surviving the Indian residential school. Vancouver: Tillacum Books.
- Hakuta, K. (1986). Mirror of language. The debate on bilingualism. New York: Basic Books.
- Hakuta, K. & Diaz, R. (1984). The relationship between bilingualism and cognitive ability: A critical discussion and some new longitudinal data. In K.E. Nelson (Ed.), Children's Language. Vol. 5. pp. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hall, S. (1991). Ethnicity, identity and difference. Radical America, 23(2), 9-20.
- Hamers, J. & Blanc, M. (1989). Bilinguality and bilingualism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harrison, G. Bellin, W. & Piette, B. (1981). Bilingual mothers in Wales and the language of their children. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Heath, S.B. (1983). Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1971). Poetry, language and thought. (A. Hofstadter, Trans.) New York: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1927)
- hooks, b. (1990). Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics. Boston: South End.
- Ianco-Worrall, A. (1972). Bilingualism and cognitive development. Child Development, 43, 390-400.

- Jespersen, O. (1922). Language. Its nature, development and origin. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- Johnston, B. (1988). Indian school days. Toronto: Key Porter Books.
- Kessler, C. & Quinn, M.E. (1987). Language minority children's linguistic and cognitive creativity. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 8, 173-186.
- Knoblauch, C.H. & Brannon, (1988). Knowing our knowledge: A phenomenological basis for teacher research. In L.Z. Smith(Ed.), Audits of meaning: A festschrift in honour of Ann E. Berthoff (pp.). Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.
- Krall, F. (1988). From the inside out: Personal history as educational research. Educational Theory, 38(4), 467-479.
- Lambert, W. (1977). The effects of bilingualism on the individual: cognitive and socio-cultural consequences. In P. Hornby (Ed.). Bilingualism. Psychological, social and educational implications, (pp. 15-28). New York: Academic Press.
- Lambert, W. & Tucker, G.R. (1972). The bilingual education of children: The St. Lambert experiment. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Landry, R. & Allard, R. (1992). Subtractive bilingualism: The case of Franco-Americans in Maine's St. John Valley. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 13, 515-544.
- Lanza, E. (1988). Language strategies in the home: Linguistic input and infant bilingualism. In A. Holman, E. Hansen, J. Gimbel & J.N. Jørgensen,

- (Eds.), Copenhagen studies in bilingualism (Vol. 4). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Larter, S. & Cheng, M. (1986). Teaching heritage languages and cultures in an integrated/extended day. Toronto: Toronto Board of Education, Information Services Division.
- Lee, C-R. (1995). Native Speaker. New York: Berkeley Publishing Group.
- Leopold, W.F. (1939-1949). Speech development of a bilingual child (Vols. 1-4). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Locke, J. L. (1993). The child's path to spoken language. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- McLaughlin, B. (1984). Second language acquisition in childhood: Volume 1. Preschool children. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Martel, A. (1991). Official language minority education rights in Canada: From instruction to management. Ottawa: Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.
- Meisel, J. (Ed.). (1990). Two first languages: Early grammatical development in bilingual children. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Foris Publications.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). Signs. Evanston, ILL: Northwestern University Press.
- Mishler, E.G. (1986). Research interviewing: Context and narrative. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Moerk, E.L. (1992). A first language taught and learned. Baltimore, MD: P.H. Brookes.

- Ochs, E. (1982). Talking to children in Western Samoa. Language in Society, 11, 77-105.
- Ogbu, J.U. (1982). Cultural discontinuities and schooling. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 13(4), 209-307.
- Ogbu, J.U. (1987). Variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 18(4), 312-331.
- Oxford English Dictionary, (compact edition.) (1971). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Padilla, A.M. & Leibman, E. (1975). Language acquisition in the bilingual child. The Bilingual Review, 2, 34-55.
- Pan, B.A. (1995). Code negotiation in bilingual families: "My body starts speaking English". Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 16, 315-328.
- Paulston, C.B. (1992). Sociolinguistic perspectives on bilingual education. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Peal, E. & Lambert, W. (1962). Relation of bilingualism to intelligence. Psychological Monographs, 76, 1-23.
- Pennycook, A. (1989). The concept of method, interested knowledge, and the politics of language teaching. TESOL Quarterly, 23(4), 589-618.
- Peterat, L. (1986). The conversation and company of educated women. Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois.

- Philips, S.U. (1972). Participant structures and communicative competence: Warm Springs children in community and classroom. In C.B. Cazden, V.P. John, & D. Hymes (Eds.), Functions of language in the classroom. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). Linguistic imperialism. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pinar, W. (1988). Whole, bright, deep with understanding: Issues in qualitative research and autobiographical method. In W. Pinar (Ed.), Contemporary curriculum discourses (pp. 135-153). Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch Scarisbrick.
- Proceedings from the Aboriginal Language Policy conference. (1988). Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs.
- Proulx, E. A. (1996). Accordion Crimes. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Reeder, K. & Shapiro, J. (1996). A portrait of the literate apprentice. In R.O. Freedle, (Series Ed.), Reeder, K., Shapiro, J., Watson, R. & Goelman, H. (Vol. Eds.), Advances in discourse processes: Vol. 56. Literate apprenticeships: The emergence of language and literacy in the preschool years, (pp. 119-133). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.
- Reeder, K. , Hasebe-Ludt, E. & Thomas, L. (1997). Taking the next steps: Toward a coherent language education policy for British Columbia. Canadian Modern Language Review, 53(2), 373-402.
- Reynolds, A. (1991). The cognitive consequences of bilingualism. In A. Reynolds (Ed.), Bilingualism, multiculturalism, and second language

- learning: The McGill conference in honour of W.E. Lambert, (pp. 145-182). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Risser, J. (1995). Hermeneutics of the possible: On finitude and truth in philosophical hermeneutics. In L.K. Schmidt (Ed.), The spectre of relativism: Truth, dialogue and *phronesis* in philosophical hermeneutics (pp. 111-128). Evanston, ILL: Northwestern University Press.
- Rizvi, F. (1994). The arts, education and the politics of multiculturalism. In S. Gunew & F. Rizvi (Eds.), Culture, difference and the arts, (pp. 54-68). St. Leonards, AUST: Allen & Unwin.
- Rodriguez, R. (1982). Hunger of Memory: The education of Richard Rodriguez. Boston: Godine.
- Romaine, S. (1995). Bilingualism, (2nd edition). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Saunders, G. (1982). Bilingual children: Guidance for the family. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Saunders, G. (1988). Bilingual children: From birth to teens. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Scarcella, R. (1990). Teaching language minority students in the multicultural classroom. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Scheiffelin, B. (1981). A developmental study of pragmatic appropriateness of word order and case marking in Kaluli. In W. Deutsch (Ed.), The child's construction of language, (pp. 105-120). London; New York: Academic Press.

- Seliger, H. & Vago, R. (1991). First language attrition: Structural and theoretical perspectives. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. & Cummins, J. (Eds.) (1988). Minority education: From shame to struggle. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Slobin, D. (Ed.).(1985). The crosslinguistic study of language acquisition (Vol. 1-3). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Smith, D.G. (1984). Living with children. Phenomenology & Pedagogy, 2(3), 287-292.
- Smith, M. (1935). A study of five bilingual children from the same family. Child Development, 2, 271-282.
- Snow, C. (1972). Mothers' speech to children learning. Child Development, 43, 549-65.
- Snow, C. & Ferguson, C. (Eds.) (1977). Talking to children: Language input and acquisition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sumara, D. J. (1996). Private readings in public: Schooling the literary imagination. New York: Peter Lang.
- Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (1982). Evaluating bilingual education: A Canadian case study. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (1991). Additive bilingualism and French immersion education: The roles of language proficiency and literacy. In A. Reynolds (Ed.), Bilingualism, multiculturalism and second language learning. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Taeschner, T. (1983). The sun is feminine: A study of language acquisition in bilingual children. Berlin: Springer-Verlag.
- Toohey, K. (1997). Invited address given at the Department of Language Education, University of British Columbia.
- Van Manen, M. (1984). Practising phenomenological writing. Phenomenology and Pedagogy, 2(1), 36-69.
- Van Manen, M. (1990). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy. London, ON: Althouse Press.
- Villanueva, V. (1990). Solamente Ingles and hispanics. In H.A. Daniels (Ed.), Not only English: Affirming America's multilingual heritage. Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Volterra, V. & Taeschner, T. (1978). The acquisition and development of language by bilingual children. Journal of Child Language, 5, 311-326.
- Wells, G. (1985). Language development in the preschool years. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitehurst, G.J. (1992). Foreward. In E.L. Moerk, A first language taught and learned, (pp. vii-ix). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- Witherall, C. & Noddings, N. (1991). Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education. New York & London: Teachers College Press.
- Wong-Fillmore, L. (1991). When learning a second language means losing the first. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 6, 323-346.
- Yamamoto, M. (1995). Bilingualism in international families. Journal of multicultural and multilingual development, 16, 63-86.

Zierer, E. (1977). Experiences in the bilingual education of a child of pre-school age. IRAL, 15, 143-149.

Appendix I

Translations from French

pages 1-2

When it's the weekend and I've spent all day in Vancouver with anglophone friends I dream in English at night! But for me, I've always spoken French with my children from the first day of their lives, it's not natural to speak English. But if it's spontaneous, perhaps if I am angry... It happens about once a month [that I speak English with my children,] but when it happens it's not natural, it's not the usual language I use with my children.

I find that very important; the changes that happen, the different stages we live through in our lives, as compared to you, who are in a similar situation. I think the language we speak makes a difference to who we are, and I agree with you in one sense; yes it is more natural for me to speak French with my children because I also have always done so, and I love the sense of intimacy we have when we speak French as a family. But, in another sense, it's more natural to speak in English because I grew up in English and my memories of childhood are in the English language.

pages 50-51

I think that I always wanted my children to speak another language, and since I really like the French language, I would have liked that. With Suzanne it became even more important, so we've always done that [spoken French.] Now it's become natural. I don't know if I had been with an anglophone whether I would have been capable of doing that. Surely not. So I'm happy about that [the fact that my children speak French] and I'm proud too.

You don't find that it's difficult to speak in French all the time?

It's very natural so I don't even think about it.

I am curious because I agree very much with the theory, with the idea behind the practise of speaking French; that is, to have a family language, to give the best chance possible to the minority language. But, in practise, I find it difficult at times to speak French with my children. Sometimes when we are driving in the car, for example, and the traffic is bad, the children are arguing in the back seat, we're late for something, and one of the girls asks me a complicated question such as "How does the moon stay up in the sky?" At that point I have trouble responding in French, in good French, using language that is at their level. I didn't imagine situations like that. When the children were babies it wasn't a problem, it's just since they are a bit older. It's not because I have a lot of difficulty with the language or don't like to speak it.

I feel that I speak French well, and it's a pleasure for me to speak it. But when I feel under stress, complicated things come out better in English. Does that happen to anyone else?

page 140

In the end I think it's worth it. But in my immediate life, one of the big disadvantages for me is that I had to take my daughter out of a school that I liked a lot, the neighbourhood school where we knew everyone and we felt good. Now she is isolated, far, in a little portable where she is far from the rest of the school. I don't think that is wonderful, but it is a sacrifice that I tell myself is worth it for my ideal of bilingualism. In twenty years we will ask Alacie if we made a good choice.

page 159

Also, I know a lot more songs in English and I like to sing with my children. When I sing the little songs of my childhood I do it in English, but it's not the language of communication. It's like my father who sang in Dutch. He spoke to me in English all the time, but from time to time something would come out in Dutch, but it was an extra, not the norm.

pages 163-165

But one thing that I've noticed, one reason that has made me love languages; that has made me curious to learn languages, is that I found that it broke down social barriers. Because when I use a foreign language everyone becomes equal. I can speak with anyone, a doctor or a child, no matter which person in society, they are human beings and I try to communicate with them. When I was in Quebec, in my first language, I had one way of speaking to someone and another way to speak to someone else, and I would change my personality depending on my audience. I found that in a foreign language these barriers disappeared. I communicated with everyone and I found that everyone is absolutely fascinating. I found that everyone had something to say. Before, I was probably a snob, some people, I wouldn't speak with, I wouldn't choose to go and talk with them, let's say. I found that extraordinary, and I loved learning languages for that. It opened magnificent doors for me, I communicated with many different people. It's one of the things that pushed me to continue to learn foreign languages.

.....

Is it the bilingualism that's important to you, more important than the fact that your first language is not the majority language here? Important for your children, I mean.

You mean that if I lived in Quebec and Kevin was francophone, would bilingualism be important, would I want it for my children?

Yes.

Oh, me, I believe in bilingualism. In Quebec I would send my children to English Immersion because I find it wonderful to be bilingual, trilingual. It makes you want to travel, also, later on. You have a good tool, you don't feel paralyzed, you want to go here and there because you know that you are capable, you can get by in the local language. That opens lots of doors, I find that extraordinary. Also, I say to myself, if my children are bilingual at a young age that will give them the chance to be trilingual, polyglot because once you know two languages, the others come more easily.

pages 168-169

Does it [bilingualism] have only advantages? Or could there be disadvantages also, to be completely bilingual? I don't know how it would be because I am not. I have my anglophone identity, I grew up in the English language with English-speaking parents. I don't know how it would be for someone who had not just one identity but two. I wonder if it would be difficult to have two identities along with two languages?

I think that bilingual children develop their own identity. They can't associate with a large group because they are rare, perfectly bilingual children, but they have their own identity I would say. They have less than somebody completely Quebecois, let's say, who has all the wealth of the Quebec culture. Our bilingual children will not have that. And they won't have their English language culture as fully developed, so that they will have less in these two worlds. They will live with small holes here and there, but I think that they will be completed by other things of value that they will have that the others will not. In the end I think that it's worth it.