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Bilingualism in Pre-school

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Book Review Introduction

Bilingualism in Preschool

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Even though bilingualism is a norm around the world, some parents, educators, and early childhood specialists may express doubts about bilingualism in young learners. These kinds of misconceptions are particularly prevalent in communities where most children grow up as monolingual speakers and, as a result, adult members of the community come to view bilingualism as ‘dangerous’ or ‘abnormal’ (García, 2009; Genessee, 1998; Genessee & Nicoladis, 2006). These myths about bilingualism stem from the belief that bilingualism will confuse children (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012).

Research has shown though, that contrary to the idea that two languages confuse people, there is evidence that well-developed bilingualism actually enhances one’s “cognitive flexibility” (Baker, 2011, p. 207) that is, bilingual people (including children) are better able to see things from two or more perspectives and to understand how other people think. Bilinguals also have better auditory discrimination. Bilinguals also mature earlier than monolinguals in terms of linguistic abstraction (i.e., ability to think and talk about language, Baker, 2011). However, bilingual development in young children can be poorly understood by many and regarded with skepticism by others.

Bilingualism in preschool is a complex process that depends on parents, grandparents, playmates, daycare workers, and early childhood teachers. The role of early childhood daycare workers and teachers cannot be underestimated. They can facilitate the development of two or more languages by having sustained, rich, and varied experiences in both languages. Teachers can also support parents in providing the confidence and reassurance they crave by assuring them that using the language they know best will pave the way to success. Language—any language—is a window to the world. It is better for parents to provide plenty of input and interaction in a language they are comfortable in than to hold back because they are not fluent or comfortable when speaking a specific language.

In this issue, Susana DeJesús reviews Karen Nemeth’s book *Young Dual Language Learners* (2014). This is an important contribution in light of the interest that Universal Pre-kindergarten education for all is eliciting. In her review, DeJesús stresses the practical side of the book, underlining that all children are capable of learning two languages in childhood and that knowing the language of one’s parents is an important and essential component of children’s cultural identity and sense of belonging. An important point is how the education of bilingual children can differ from that of monolingual children. DeJesús points out how bilingual children’s education requires

interactive instruction across multiple media and how children benefit from exploring the myriad linguistic, social, and cultural elements that surround them. After reading the book review I gathered how bilingual education for young children is a tool that will allow them to walk strong in this increasingly multicultural-multilingual world in which we live.

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