

Homeschooling and Bilingual Education

A Well-Kept Secret

David Carlson

Although the author found no writing or research on home-based bilingual education, he discovered that it worked quite well.

The idea of writing about home-based bilingual education first came to me about 15 years ago. I was then living in Ann Arbor, Michigan. My daughter was only five years old, and she was growing and learning without an institutional education through an approach that is typically called homeschooling.

Right at the outset, I'd like to say that I am using the word "homeschooling" to describe our approach, even though I am aware of three unfortunate implications of the term. First, there's the *home* part. Many people presume that a homeschooled child is unhealthily sequestered at home, away from normal social interaction in the broader community. Our daughter wasn't; she grew up having a very healthy and positive social life. Second, there's the *schooling* part. Some people hear "schooling" and automatically assume that what takes place mimics school, following a rigid curriculum and schedule. Our approach was much freer than that, at times bordering on unschooling. And third, for many there's a knee-jerk reaction to the entire concept of homeschooling: if we're homeschoolers we must be whackos, indoctrinating our child with bigotry and dogma. Well, we're not. The main reason we decided to homeschool was so we could raise our daughter to be bilingual. In particular, we wanted her to grow up as a balanced bilingual — someone able to use both of her languages with equal fluency in a wide variety of situations.

When We First Considered Homeschooling

My wife is Japanese, and she and I speak both Japanese and English. Because bilingualism is such an



DAVID CARLSON is a professor at Matsumoto Dental University in Japan. His main professional interest is linguistics, especially language learning and bilingualism. Trained as a classical pianist, he enjoys performing chamber music as well as oldies rock. He also produces his own podcast about foreigners living in Japan (japanofiles.com).

integral part of our lives, and because we wanted to raise our daughter to have two native languages and cultures, we were naturally eager to learn more about others' experiences of raising children bilingually, especially about families who did it outside of an institutional setting. But from what I could tell, no magazine articles or books geared toward parents had been written on home-based bilingual education. So to put out some feelers I wrote a few short articles of my own, presenting our approach to home-schooling using two languages, and sent my articles to various homeschooling and bilingualism related magazines and newsletters (Carlson 1995a; 1995b; 1996a; 1996b). I then waited patiently for contacts from like-minded families. But I never heard from anyone.

Next I turned to the academic literature on bilingualism and bilingual education, hoping to find some research on home-based bilingual education, but instead I was struck by the tacit assumption in the professional literature on bilingualism that *all* children are schooled. When researchers looked at various models of bilingual education, what they really were examining were different flavors of institution-based schooling. Home-based education was totally off the bilingualism research radar. Even writers who expressly considered alternatives to bilingual education still dealt with children receiving a classroom-based education (Crawford 1995).

Another thing I immediately noticed about the bilingualism literature was an obsession with problems. Articles on bilingualism are replete with references to difficulties of one sort or another. And there's no question about it — institutional education can definitely be rough on a bilingual child. Ask any parent of a bilingual child who attends school, and unless the school has a unique and progressively minded dual-language program, you're bound to hear how schooling has had a negative effect on the non-school language. The best that most of these parents can hope for is what is known as "language maintenance" — attempting to preserve facility in the non-school language at home, usually through considerable personal effort and expense, but with decreasing results as the child gets older.

Then there's the institutional side of the bilingualism issue, which ignores the individual child and of-

ten takes the view that bilingualism is a problem for the schools and for society as a whole. As anyone who has studied the history of bilingual education knows, bilingualism viewed in this way quickly becomes a contentious issue; wherever bilingual education exists, politics is close by (Crawford 1995; Baker 2002). Surrounding bilingual education are political debates about national identity, dominance, and control by the group in power, as well as fears of political subversiveness (Baker 2002, 237).

During the Second World War my own German-speaking relatives in the U.S. felt pressured to give up their heritage language, even in their own home, and subsequently they became a monolingual English-only family. For an especially heart-wrenching look at organized government intervention to obliterate other languages and cultures, there is the 2008 documentary *Our Spirits Don't Speak English: Indian Boarding School*, a film which presents accounts of Native American children forcibly removed from their families and educated in English-only boarding schools as part of the U.S. government's systematic attempt to "kill the Indian and spare the man." The result of such official policies, which see bilingualism as a societal problem that warrants intervention, is that a bilingual child is little more than an expendable cog in an assimilation machine.

Fifteen years ago, when we were still in the early days of our bilingual homeschooling, many of these ideas were coursing through my mind. Because my wife and I wanted our daughter to use both Japanese and English each and every day in a wide variety of situations, and to grow up to be a balanced bilingual adult, our decision to forego institutional schooling seemed like the right thing to do. We homeschooled very happily in Ann Arbor for several years.

However, in 1998 things suddenly changed. Because of my university work we moved to Japan, and for the next three-and-a-half years our daughter attended a Japanese elementary school where no English was used. Japanese law requires school attendance through grade 9, although there are possible exemptions in certain situations, including for children with foreign nationality, so we could have applied for an exemption. There were two main reasons that we chose to enroll our daughter in a Japanese school. First, my increased work load in Japan

made it extremely difficult to continue my regular involvement in my daughter's English-language homeschooling. We also thought it might be a good experience for her.

As you might expect, Emily progressed in Japanese while her English was unable to keep pace, despite my attempts at language maintenance when I had time. Fortunately, after Emily completed the sixth grade my workload decreased, which meant I could once again be actively involved in her education, and so she decided to resume homeschooling. She gradually regained a sense of balance between her two languages, and she continued her homeschooling up until she was 18. Today she attends university in Canada.

Current Reflections

As empty-nesters, still living in Japan, my wife and I no longer have the same day-to-day involvement with homeschooling. Yet I often think about it, reflecting on how good home-based education was for our daughter's bilingualism. Through bilingual homeschooling she was able to grow and learn using both of her first languages in various contexts every day so that now, as an adult, she has a balanced native-speaker command of two languages — something that never would have happened had she continued to attend school. Naturally, I think that home-based education could be a positive and strong form of bilingual education for other parents who want to raise children with a native command of two (or more) languages and with a healthy multicultural identity.

Just the other day, as I was going through a box of papers from our Ann Arbor days, I came across a folder full of old notes I had made for my earlier articles on homeschooling and bilingualism, and it got me wondering how things have changed in 15 years. Is anyone now doing research on bilingual homeschooling? Have current typologies of bilingual education expanded to encompass more than just schooling? And are there now support groups out there for bilingual homeschooling children and their parents?

As for support groups, I was pleased to discover that things have changed considerably. There are now several international online discussions about

bilingual homeschooling; there are even country-specific and language-combination-specific forums. It appears, however, that the answers to my other two questions are still "no." Search as I might, I have yet to come across academic work that examines bilingual homeschooling or studies that places it within the framework of bilingual education.

The apparent lack of interest in homeschooling as a model for bilingual education, even among language planners, strikes me as odd, especially given the potential for this particular model to produce fluent bilingualism and a healthy sense of bicultural identity. Colin Baker, in a recent typology of bilingual programs (2006, 214), illustrates what he calls the multi-dimensionality of bilingual education, yet all ten forms of bilingual education described are firmly rooted in a school classroom setting.

Currently in the U.S. there are approximately two million K–12 homeschooled children (Ray 2008), while 9.3% of Americans speak two languages fluently (ACTFL 2005). Home-based education is also growing in popularity in other parts of the world, including many European countries where the percentage of the population that is bilingual is even greater than that of the United States. Clearly there are bilingual homeschoolers out there, enough to warrant research interest and inclusion in a thorough typology of bilingual education.

I suspect that the main reason for this lack of discussion lies in our modern use of the word *education*. Even though the root meaning of the word, from the Latin verb *educare*, is "to raise or to bring up," the dominant paradigm of modern education is not the raising or bringing up of children. Rather, it is institutional schooling. Consider the following statement from the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE 2009), a professional organization that claims to be devoted to representing language learners:

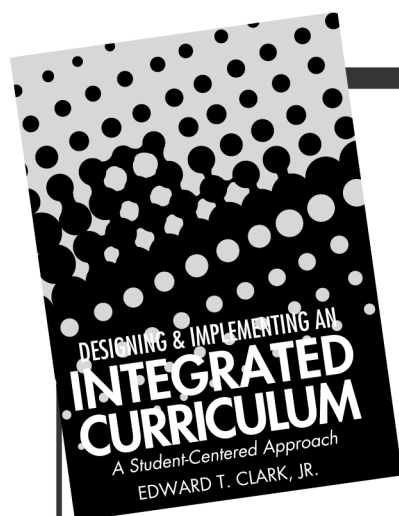
Defined broadly, (bilingual education) can mean any use of two languages *in school* — by teachers or students or both — for a variety of social and pedagogical purposes. In today's context, a period of demographic transformation in the United States, bilingual education means something more specific. It refers to approaches *in the classroom* that use the native lan-

guages of English language learners (ELLs) for instruction. (emphasis added)

However, for those of us involved with home-based education, the "education equals schooling" paradigm is not the only model for education. There are a growing number of families who know that getting an education does not require going to school. And the same can be said about getting a bilingual education. Our family is proof that education using more than one language exists outside of institutional settings, and I look forward to the day when the discussion of bilingual education acknowledges other forms of learning besides the classroom-based varieties.

References

- ACTFL. 2005. Senate Resolution 170 of the 109th Congress 1st Session, February 1, 2005. Available online at www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3782.
- Baker, C. 2002. Bilingual education. In *The Oxford handbook of applied linguistics*, edited by R. Kaplan. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Baker, C. 2006. *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism*. 4th ed. Clevedon, North Somerset, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Carlson, D. 1995a. Reflections on language use and homeschooling. *The Bilingual Family Newsletter* 12(3): 7.
- Carlson, D. 1995b. Raising a bilingual child. *Growing Without Schooling* 108: 21-22.
- Carlson, D. 1996a. Homeschooling an EJ bilingual child in the US. *Bilingual Japan* 5(3): 2-4.
- Carlson, D. 1996b. Homeschooling with two languages. *Home Education Magazine* 13(1): 37-40.
- Crawford, J. 1995. Bilingual education: History, politics, theory and practice, 3rd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Bilingual Education Services.
- Our spirits don't speak English: Indian boarding school*. 2008. Directed by Chip Richie. Rich-Heape Films. DVD.
- NABE 2009. What Is Bilingual Education? National Association for Bilingual Education. Available online at www.nabe.org/education/index.html.
- Ray, B. 2008 U.S. homeschool population size and growth: Comments. National Home Education Research Institute. Available online at www.nheri.org/Latest/Homeschool-Population-Size-and-Growth.html.



Designing and Implementing an Integrated Curriculum A Student-Centered Approach

Edward T. Clark, Jr.

Designing and Implementing an Integrated Curriculum is a powerful curriculum development tool for teachers, schools, and school districts. It can be used to help educators evaluate the effectiveness of their current curricula and develop new ones that better meet the needs of their students as individuals and members of society.

"This is a visionary book, yet firmly grounded in the author's extensive and successful work with school staffs attempting genuine restructuring."

—Ron Miller, Editor
Great Ideas in Education

"Clark's perspective has stimulated and sustained us as we have reconstructed our curriculum."

—Kurt Anderson, Middle School Principal

Table of Contents

- Educational Reform: A Design Problem
- The Design Solution: Systems Thinking
- Creating a New Educational Vision
- Creating a Context for Teaching and Learning
- Questions Worth Arguing About
- Concepts as Organizing Frameworks
- Implementing an Integrated Curriculum
- Designing Schools as Learning Communities

ISBN 0-9627232-7-4
4th printing, 2002 \$21.95
Holistic Education Press,
P.O. Box 328, Brandon, VT
05733-0328
1-800-639-4122
<http://www.great-ideas.org>

Copyright of Encounter is the property of Psychology Press / Holistic Education Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.