

Book Reviewed: A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism (3rd Edition) – Baker, Colin (2007) Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters

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A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism, as Baker notes in the Introduction, "...is for parents and teachers who are bilinguals themselves, for monolingual parents and teachers, and for other professionals such as doctors, speech therapists, practicing psychologists, counselors and teachers who want to know more" (p. xvi). Baker's stated objective is to provide "straightforward answers" to "frequently asked questions" on a broad range of topics within.

The discipline of bilingualism: The six chapters (called sections) of the book (Family Questions, Language Development Questions, Questions about Problems, Reading and Writing Questions, Education Questions, and Concluding Questions) are followed by a lengthy Glossary (pp. 202-225), providing short, but substantive, explanations for each of the entries. All six sections consist of a multitude of questions, each of which is answered in some detail, on the topic under discussion in that section. Baker asserts, "Such a book aims to inform and 'enable' the journey through childhood bilingualism, stimulate deeper thought and reflection, provide a variety of ideas, and to encourage" (p. xxiv). This goal has, in the opinion of this reviewer, been accomplished.

In the section on Family Questions (Section A), responses to the questions posed make clear that bilingualism is to be supported (with numerous advantages of bilingualism conveniently listed in a table, p.2) and that heritage language maintenance should be a goal of parents. Of note, families are encouraged to discuss/plan the language development of their children. As Baker states, "Bilingualism in the family opens up extra areas for discussion and decisions" (p. 11). The section on Language Development Questions (Section B) highlights the readiness of children to acquire more than one language, addresses issues that will facilitate decision-making regarding concurrent v. sequential learning of languages by children, and touches on the issue of bilingualism as it relates to intelligence. Baker accurately asserts, "One totally discredited view about bilingualism is that children's intelligence will suffer if they are bilingual" (p. 42). On the contrary, it is reported that current research suggests advantages for bilingual children in thinking. In Questions About Problems (Section C), Baker grapples with a number of reservations (unfounded arguments/beliefs) that could lead some, unfortunately, to believe that raising children bilingually is not advisable. The comprehensive treatment of a variety of issues (e.g., code-switching, cultural identity, personality development) lends additional support to the position that children raised bilingually are, indeed, most fortunate (although it is asserted that the process is not necessarily devoid of problems). The responses offered in Reading and Writing Questions (Section D) provide suggestions to facilitate the process of learning to read and write in more than one language. In recognition of the capacity of language learners, Baker points out, "Many children who are trilingual or multilingual also become literate in three or even more languages" (p. 104). Education Questions (Section E) incorporates a detailed (and extremely useful) explanation of the various types of bilingual education. In Concluding Questions (Section F) miscellaneous issues are addressed serving to fill in gaps not covered in the previous sections.

This book clearly merits praise. It covers a broad range of topics in a substantive manner (only touched on in the overview above), yet it is written in a style appropriate for a very wide target audience. Unquestionably, the author's goal of providing a "readable introduction" on the topic is achieved. Responses to the questions posed in each of the sections are sufficiently (but not excessively) detailed, and should provide readily comprehensible information (of interest on its own), but, critically, also furnish the basis for making informed decisions in the domain of childhood bilingualism. The question-answer format of the book is quite appealing, with the Contents page listing all the questions in each section. The format of the book, structured to give readers the choice of reading res-

ponses to selected questions (as a handy reference) or of reading the entire book, maximizes its usefulness.

Among the many commendable features of the book is the convincing manner in which the case is made for maintaining and treasuring one's heritage language. Given the all too frequent erosion of heritage languages, well documented in the literature, this is particularly praiseworthy. Baker notes, for example, "Retaining the minority language while ensuring that majority language competence is high enables a bilingual child to have more rather than less.....Gaining fluency in the majority language while retaining the minority language will be a multiplication of language skills and culture" (p.166). The value placed on maintaining one's heritage language is, justifiably, a recurrent theme of the book. Additional features worthy of note include the list of sources providing additional information on bilingualism. Details about suggested books on the topic as well as a list of 16 websites (the latter neatly presented in a table, p. 198) are likely to lead many readers to pursue further investigation of bilingualism.

While the book is based on solid linguistic underpinnings, it is also couched in a societal framework that sharpens its message and greatly heightens its appeal. The inclusion of political, economic, legal, family, and community issues, to name a few, serves to illustrate this strength of the book. Additionally, bilingualism throughout the book is discussed in an international context, an attribute adding immeasurably to its usefulness. Baker's objective "..... to provide a comprehensive introduction to this increasingly important international topic" (p. xv) is, without question, realized.

Put simply, all who read this book will, at a minimum, find it both interesting and informative (with a greater understanding of the benefits of bilingualism). Beyond that, it will provide many with the guidance/suggestions needed to make informed decisions about raising children bilingually. This book should be well received by its readership. The topic is of major importance, the treatment is thorough, the writing style is clear, and the reasoning is sound.