

UMass Researcher's Book on Raising Bilingual Children Encourages Parents and Offers 20 Years of Research

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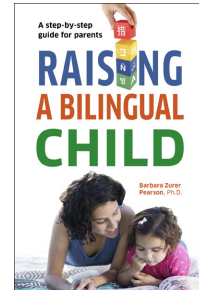
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AMHERST, Mass. – Parents who want to raise their young children to speak more than one language have a new guide in the book, "Raising a Bilingual Child," by Barbara Zurer Pearson, a research associate and adjunct professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

The book, published by Living Language, part of Random House, combines the latest scientific findings and research on bilingualism with comments and observation from parents and the children they raised in bilingual households. It discusses common myths and beliefs about what happens to children when they learn more than one language as they grow up, and what many observers see as the intellectual and emotional benefits of bilingualism.



Overall, Pearson argues that children who learn more than one language enjoy certain economic and cultural advantages over single-language children as they grow to adulthood. She also looks at how young children have a special ability to learn language, and how it is they can learn more than one language.

"It's such a gift to provide our children the opportunity to grow up speaking two languages," Pearson says. "But I have found that parents, especially in the U.S., need a little help and a lot of encouragement to do it."

Pearson bases her conclusions on the experiences of more than 100 families contacted while writing the book and on a series of scientific studies she and her colleagues in Miami conducted over a 20-year period on how children learn and process language. The families come from all over the world. The have either raised or are raising bilingual children, or considered the idea and decided not to try teaching two or more languages to their children.

The book takes a detailed look at how young children learn languages. Pearson discusses how from infancy, children hear words and sentences, learn to speak them and at the same time learn to focus on communicating meaning with these building blocks of language. She offers parents guidance on how to encourage small children to talk, how to listen and how to guide children's speech to help them learn.

Pearson shows how infants can and do learn a second language using many of the same tools available to acquire basic communication skills. She also looks at how learning a second language later in life is a somewhat different process.

Other issues reviewed in the book concern how bilingual households function. Pearson talks about families where parents are immigrants and speak one language while children are learning a different language that is used in the outside society. Other cases involved parents who speak different native languages but raise children to speak the dominant language of their society along with the parent's native tongues. Still other cases involved parents who are themselves monolingual or second-language learners, but who enlist others to provide the second language for their children.

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