

Education

How to educate children is a big issue for many parents. Especially for "international-marriage"* couples this issue may be more profound. In this global age, many persons are moving around the globe and education is becoming more flexible. Because of this atmosphere, I think there could be no collect "role models" for education of children of "international-marriage" couples.

Since the establishment of this website, *Die Kreuzungsstelle*, I received many questions from parents about education. The questions I received can be classified into two types: One question is regarding the choice of school type (i.e. local or international schools)**, and the other regarding concerns of how children can be educated to become bilingual. Therefore I would like to address these two topics here.

For the first type of question, my answer would be, the choice of school should attend depends on the parents' wishes, family income, and preferences of where the family would like to live in the future.

For example, when the parents move many times - if a child was born in Japan and few years later the family decides to move to China and then to the U.S.A., etc. - in such cases, I think enrolling their children into international schools is better in order to reduce the children's efforts in adjusting to many systems or cultures. However, if parents prefer to live in one place (nation), then one can consider two options: to enroll their children in a local school or an international school.

In my case, I went to a local school because it was the wish of my parent's - especially that of my father's. But there are more reasons. The first (or main) reason is that my family did not live near any big cities such as Tokyo, Yokohama, or Kobe where many international schools are located, and the second reason is that my family's income was not enough to send me to such schools.

Someone once asked me, based on my personal experience, if I thought going to an international school better, or if going to a local school was better. The answer, based on my limited information of international schools, was that it was better for me to have gone to a local school. The reason is that in a local school, I was able to learn more about Japan and Japanese culture or behavior.

In local schools, needless to say, I learned about Japanese history, customs, music, plays, and *Kanji* (Chinese characters adopted in Japan). By going to local schools, I could learn how to live in

Japan and the culture (or "social customs") of Japan, it is not high culture such as Kabuki but it is "mainstream Japanese culture" or school culture.

In a 2004 survey, it is said that 1 out of 18 marriages involving Japanese citizens are international marriages (in Tokyo it is 1 out of 10 marriages). However, about 30 years ago, the rate was not so high. For this reason, in my generation, sometimes I was the only student named *Haafu* in my local school, or I was the only student visibly recognized as the "Other" in Japan.

I can't accept the fact that in many societies if a person doesn't look like many of its other members, the individual is always discriminated against or has the possibility of being the victim of emotional and psychological violence. In my case, in school, I was protected by many teachers and friends, but out of school, I had to fight against many forms of discrimination (but not through violence).

I cannot say what is best for children because I hear from individuals who are called *Haafu* about the hard times they have in local schools. For example, a student have an experience in their classrooms when the teacher insists on seeing and treating him/her as "*gaijin*"(means foreigner or outsider) and by this teacher's behavior he/she experiences discrimination from other classmates. By hearing about such experiences, sometimes I thought international schools were better than local schools. But I also hear of discrimination (in Japanese "*Ijime*") in international school, I cannot say international schools, so safe for every child.

Here I emphasize that the choice must depend on thoughts about the child's future, a family's future plans, its income, and/or the parents' wish -not on intentions to avoid the possibility of encountering a bad experience.

Next, I write about educating children to be able to understand or speak the languages that the child's parents speak. In Japan, a common stereotype of *Haafu* is that they are born and raised in an international marriage family, and that they have two or more native tongues and often individuals ask me, "Can you speak English?" or "Can you speak German?" or "Can you really speak Japanese?"

Individuals who are labeled *Haafu*, especially those who are visibly recognizable as the "Other", face the possibility of living under such conditions. Sometimes the question tends to be as such:

"Aren't you *Haafu*? If you are, why you can't speak English?" Another is, "Oh, you are so lucky. You can learn a foreign language from your mother (or father). Not learning a foreign language is such a waste of an opportunity!" Such individuals also think that every individual has the ability to teach a foreign language. With these stereotypes, if a person labeled as *Haafu* can't speak a foreign language, especially English, the person is sometimes labeled or thought of as a "failure type of *Haafu*". So, I name this situation "Bilingual Pressure".

The Bilingual Pressure sometimes influences parents, mostly mothers of children who grew up in Japan. I think this is one reason why the mothers of new born children or infants ask me how to educate their children so that they grow up to become bilingual. Of course, this is not the only reason, and there is also the need for children to be able to communicate with his/her parents. But by reading some comments written in Japanese by mothers and fathers, I think many individuals are influenced by Bilingual Pressure in Japanese society.

Above, I primarily wrote about the cases of mothers who are Japanese but now, I would like to address another type of individual: mothers who come from outside of Japan.

From my experience, if the mothers who are "foreigners" and whose native language is one other than Japanese, have more of a chance to speak with their children than fathers who are non-Japanese (a "foreigner"). And when the mothers want to input their first language into their child, probably it could be done if the mother has enough time or ability to do it. They can use the language as a tool of communication in daily interaction, or read a child books, sing songs, etc. (But that is only input and whether children speak the language is another matter. A child's speak abilities depend on that child's atmosphere and will).

I think the wish to speak with one's own child in one's native tongue is every parent's wish. However, in some cases, it becomes difficult because the international status of one certain language may be reproduced in the family. If the relationship of the parents or the relationship of the parents' homelands is not equal (in terms of which has more influence and status in the world), sometimes one's language is forbidden or given much less importance at home - I called that "Monolingual Pressure".

For such a reason, raising a child to become multilingual is not easy, not only in terms of the time necessary for the full acquisition of language or the educational ability of the parents, but also in terms

of the relationship of the parents or the relationship between the parents' homelands. Needless to say, if a person has a mother or father who speaks a language different from the place where the children grow up, to teach the other language is not easy.

Educating children is a big issue for every household or nation. If the parent or parents are influenced by pressures such as "Bilingual Pressure" or the low linguistic status internationally of their native tongue, education may seem even more painful. My hope for new couples is that they have a good time talking about their children's education and find common ground. I hope each individual will respect the other and not look down on one another, in terms of not only each other's character, but also in terms of the international relationship between their home countries. If this is not done, I think there are risks that a child's may experience a painful childhood.

Finally, I'd like to explain why I can write in English. One big reason is that I have a good friend who checks my writing. But the other reason is that I was subject to the bilingual pressure and expectations to learn English, not German. The pressure is very stressful, but if one uses it as motivation, it can be very helpful***

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*Here I refer to local schools as those that follow the curricula of Japanese national government. They can be public or private Japanese schools for the purposes of this discussion.

**A marriage type which the wife and husband each have a different nationality (citizenship) or come from different nations(or culture).

***At least in Japan, in many local schools, students could not have a good education of second language, for example English. And so students who want have a good education must go language school such as British Council..