Bilingual/Multilingual Child Network (BMCN) First Annual Meeting, 2016

Date and time: August 10th, 2016 (Wednesday) 11AM - 5PM

Location: International Christian University, Kiyoshi Togasaki Memorial Dialogue House and Dining Hall, 1st floor Dining Hall and 2nd floor International Conference Room Supported in part by: ICU Institute for Educational Research and Service

Number of Participants: 98 (participants included individuals affiliated with nonprofit organizations/local municipal groups providing learning support activities, boards of education, universities, public/private schools, international schools, overseas supplementary schools, individuals affiliated with local government offices, clinical psychology clinics, etc., with roughly 15 participants from abroad)

Outline of Proceedings:

- 1. Meet-and-Greet Lunch: 11:30 AM 1PM at A-area of Dialogue House 1st floor Cafeteria Participants were free to partake in lunch and social interaction.
- 2. Study Group: 1PM to 5PM at Dialogue House 2nd floor International Conference Room Proceedings were divided into a first and second half and conducted in a 2 part format. During the first part, an explanation of the purpose of the event was given, after which participants presented reports on educational practice and the identification of issues related to BM children, with 2 cases presented by domestic educational institutions, and 1 case presented by an overseas educational institution. Additionally, the contents of 1 report conducted by a local government body on the status of family assistance were presented. During the 2nd half, participants split up into 6 different working groups to engage in discussions, namely, "public relations activities," "establishing guidelines," "cooperating with government offices," "groups separated by school age (early childhood, elementary age, middle and high school age)."

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Part 1	13:00-13:15	(1) Explanation of Intents and Purpose and Identification of Issues	Kazuko Nakajima
		(2) Listening to Voices from the Field	
	13:15-13:45	"Practical Activities to Serve the Spanish Speaking Community - Domestic Efforts"	Etsuko Takahashi
	13:45-14:15	"Supporting the Education of Multilingual Children - Efforts to Support International Children in the 1st Grade"	Kaoru Shimada
	14:30-15:00	"The Actual Conditions of BM Education Abroad- The Case of Michigan in the United States"	Hitomi Oketani
	15:00-15:30	"Supporting Families Raising BM Infants and Toddlers - Efforts at the Domestic Local Level"	Eriko Ishii
Part 2	15:45-16:00	Introduction of the Yotsuya Yui Clinic (clinic director Yu Abe, clinical psychotherapist Nélida Tanaka)	Kazuko Nakajima
	16:00-17:10	Discussions conducted in the 6 separate Working Groups (WG)	All participants
	17:10-17:30	Group presentations and closing remarks	Kazuko Nakajima

Study Group Program

Study Group Part 1 - Overview of Presentations Explanation of Purpose and Intent/Identifying Issues "In Regards to the Bilingual/Multilingual Child Network (BMCN)"

Kazuko Nakajima (professor emeritus, Toronto University)

The "Bilingual Multilingual Child Network" (BMCN) views children who grow up in a multilingual environment (hereinafter referred to as BM) in a positive light, and is an organization of parents, educators, instructors, researchers, volunteers, etc., that aims to foster the growth of bilingual/multilingual talent that is needed in this era of globalization. For BM children, growing up in a household language environment where the language spoken at home differs with that spoken outside of the home, or where the languages spoken at home differ between father and mother, or for situations where the child transfers between schools in different countries during their school years, such factors can all result in situations where the child is unable to reach an age-appropriate level of language proficiency. A temporarily limited condition refers to a condition where such a child in the process of growing up in contact with 1 or more languages is temporarily unable to reach ageappropriate levels in either language. As a matter of practice, this manifests itself in a variety of ways, depending on the age of the child. At age 2 or 3, the child may be a "late-talker" or may "speak words the parents don't understand;" at age 4, such children may take longer to develop an interest in written letters or characters and may exhibit underdeveloped "character learning readiness;" upon entering elementary school, such children may exhibit "slow learning of characters;" at 3rd or 4th grade, there may be "difficulty participating in class due to poor fundamental development in reading and writing;" at 5th or 6th grade and on to middle school, there are actual reported cases of children exhibiting "difficulty engaging in abstract thought." As previously mentioned, such conditions are strictly temporary, and although these issues are resolved once the child's environment changes, there are countless cases, both domestically and abroad, of such BM children being placed in special needs education classrooms. Such conditions differ from a functional disability, and parents must first understand that these are issues unique to healthy children growing up in a multilingual environment, and furthermore, it is vital that the doctors, nurses, childcare workers, teachers, instructors, and volunteers, etc., that work with such children also have a correct understanding of this matter.

Listening to Voices in the Field

(1) "Practical Activities to Serve the Spanish Speaking Community - Domestic Efforts" Etsuko Takahashi (vice president, Asociación Japonés Peruana)

The presenter works as an educational counselor as part of an educational assistance activity (nonprofit organization) that serves the Spanish speaking community. The knowledge needed to engage in such activities includes an understanding of Japanese language learning, mother tongue learning, concepts of development and communication, and intercultural pedagogy. At our preschool in "Y" city, which is in its 7th year of operations, we serve children with foreign backgrounds preparing to enter elementary school, by creating specialized lesson plans that are administered from November to March. Before beginning the support activities, we first ask parents to sign a document that states "that parents consent to provide the school with necessary information regarding their child" (as there are cases where we need to connect such families to other educational and support institutions). Additionally, at the beginning and end of the program, we administer a test to check the child's Japanese and mother tongue vocabulary, and we have confirmed that for almost all cases, children are able to increase their vocabulary not just in Japanese but in the mother tongue as well.

While observing the children in a group setting, there are often situations where

developmental issues come to our attention, and here, I would like to give 4 specific examples of how they are identified: (1) Cases where the parent or teacher observe the child participating in group activities and feel that the child needs help, (2) cases where the child was receiving counseling in their mother tongue and were identified as needing help, (3) cases where the parent already knew their child needed help, and where individuals from the board of education came to observe and conduct an examination of the child, thereby placing the child in a special needs education classroom, (4) cases where the child was in a special needs education classroom in preschool, but were able to begin attending regular classes upon entering elementary school, among others.

With the understanding that there are limitations in trying to solve such problems on our own, and acknowledging that such problems must be examined from the perspective of multiple stakeholders, we hope to address the following issues moving forward:

- 1 What kind of assessment methods should be used to determine the child's current condition?
- 2 What needs to be done to provide parents with information?
- 3 How can such issues be shared in a way that allows the general public to gain a better understanding?

(2) "Supporting the Education of Multilingual Children - Efforts to Support International Children in the 1st Grade"

Kaoru Shimada (Japanese instructor, Keimei Gakuen Elementary School International Classroom)

Keimei Gakuen is a private school that serves a student body, of which 1/3 of the students have connections to multilingual environments, such as returnees, or students tied to transnational marriage or foreign resident households, and the presenter has served as a Japanese instructor at this elementary school for a long time. In recent years, in addition to children with international backgrounds entering the school as mid-year transfers, we are seeing a growing influx of such students enter from the 1st grade, as well as children with multicultural backgrounds that transfer into the school who exhibit developmental issues. For those children living in a multilingual environment, it is difficult to make up for any lags in reading and writing ability in Japanese that develop at the 1st grade level, and this plays a major factor in cases where such children go on to become double-limited (limited in both languages). Starting with such a paucity of vocabulary during their early childhood years, students go on to encounter the difficult vocabulary found in endless Kanji studying and Kanji tests, and face problems with proper reading and comprehension of Kanji compounds with varying on/kun readings, and while such students may appear to be conversationally fluent, these problems continue to snowball as the student progresses from grades 1 through 3. In response to this, for the purposes of providing support to such students in terms of Japanese learning ability and self-esteem, we conduct a vocabulary performance assessment upon the child enrolling or transferring into the school, administer a survey aimed at parents to understand the child's language environment, provide guidelines on how such international households can better prepare children for Japanese language learning, provide enhanced pull-out individualized instruction for our international classrooms conducted during our 1st grade Japanese as a national language and math class periods, provide preparatory support for Kanji tests, as well as to provide activities to foster phonetic awareness at an early age and game activities that incorporate elements of special needs education teaching methods, among a variety of different ways we have adapted our teaching.

(3) "The Actual Conditions of BM Education Abroad- The Case of Michigan in the United States"

Hitomi Oketani (Eastern Michigan University, USA)

Michigan is a state located in the Midwestern region of the United States of America, and it is a state known for its vibrant automotive industry. For this reason, close to 500 Japaneseaffiliated companies are located there, and just as there are a variety of Japanese language related educational institutions in the area, the situation of the children attending such institutions varies widely as well. Examples of such institutions where Japanese language instruction is offered include the supplementary Japanese school, which is an educational institution that serves Japanese living abroad, as well as a local Japanese and English two-way immersion school. Furthermore, in the state of Michigan, Japanese is taught as a school subject at local schools at the K-12 level (equivalent to the upper preschool level to the 3rd year of high school in Japan).

During this presentation, it was acknowledged that there are learners with diverse backgrounds and varying needs, and it was emphasized that in order to "foster the bilingual/multilingual talent needed for the global era" (which is the theme for the launching of this group), one of the key areas that needs to be addressed is the importance of providing "parents" with support, and this presentation described some of the activities related to this need.

(4) "Supporting Families Raising BM Infants and Toddlers - Efforts at the Domestic Local Level"

Eriko Ishii (Tokyo Woman's Christian University)

In relation to providing childcare support for households with BM children, a presentation was given to analyze and report on the importance of making active efforts to encourage early childhood learning, based on the observations made in 3 studies and briefing sessions conducted by the City of Yokohama International Affairs Division and the Yokohama Association for International Communications and Exchanges, as well as an overview of parental participatory activities of a volunteer group in Saitama City (Chikyukko Club 2000).

From the City of Yokohama's study, it was made apparent that for foreign residents with infants, such residents lack information and social connections with those around them, and that there is a great need for spaces in which such children can feel a sense of belonging and where parents can receive consultation, thereby indicating the need to strengthen cooperation between childcare assistance and Japanese language assistance providers. While an extremely diverse variety of opinions were given, and numerous issues were identified, in regards to the problems faced by children that are thought to be dealing with developmental issues and efforts to support such children, the report was unable to shed light on the actual situation or to identify the needs of such families. This in itself indicates that there are difficulties in acknowledging the problems such families face and in the sharing of information on this subject, and the very root of this problem lies in the fact that no steps are being taken to address these issues.

Through the activities of the Chikyukko Club, where everyone including parents get involved in focused, experiential, and fun-filled activities, we were able to observe that such activities lead to group learning. It is thought that activities like this will encourage parents to make a conscious effort to provide children with opportunities to engage in qualitatively diverse language usage activities and experiences at home, leading them to gain a better grasp of the child's development from a multifaceted perspective.

Study Group Part 2 - "Discussions Conducted in Separate Working Groups (WG)" 1) WG 1 [Activities to Raise Public Awareness]

Public awareness activities should be aimed toward 4 groups, namely, (1) parents and guardians, (2) preschool teachers and childcare instructors, (3) school teachers, (4) board of education members. A public awareness pamphlet should contain such key phrases as, "for the emotional well-being of the child," "for healthy identity development," and "please place great importance in the mother tongue as a link between the parent and child." Regarding its contents, some creative approaches will need to be taken, such as the presentation of success stories where the child was able to retain their mother tongue ability, aimed particularly at parents that understand the issues they are facing, but are unsure of how to solve them. In addition to the pamphlet, the effective usage of other mediums, such as leaflets or cards, online activities using Facebook, etc., and maternity record books could also be a possibility.

By gaining the support of trusted authority figures, in the fields of healthcare, education, and politics, and requesting for cooperation from the Agency for Cultural Affairs and Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, we hope to make such public awareness activities more effective. The issue remains of where funding can be acquired from. (Summary written by Yoko Suzuki and Junko Majima)

2) WG2 [Questionnaire/Guidebook Development]

If teachers in the field were given an academic/behavioral checklist that helps them identify if a child with a multilingual/multicultural background struggles with developmental disabilities, such teachers would be able to take action in a more timely manner and would be better able to provide instruction and support that meets the needs of each child. Additionally, teachers also need easy to understand guidelines on where they should go to ask for advice, and what step-by-step process should be taken in order to provide instruction and support that meets that child's needs, in the event that the school or parents identify something "atypical" with the child's language acquisition or development. Such guidelines should also include information on how the child can be supported at home and at school, and how teachers can gain the understanding of the parents, among other things. As a specific set of guidelines, we have created the following list. Items included "academic/behavioral checklist for children with multilingual/multicultural backgrounds," "understanding the child's words and behaviors = items to check to identify both language acquisition issues + developmental issues from both perspectives (since there are cases where such language related issues and developmental issues are mutually misdiagnosed)," "flow chart that is used to explain to schools/parents the process by which assistance is provided," "developmental disability guidebook aimed toward foreign parents," "understanding developmental disabilities," "information on useful social resources," "organizations providing consultation services (counseling related to disability rehabilitation/education and multilingual counseling)," "medical institutions that provide multilingual services," "special needs education (special needs education classrooms/special needs education schools/disability rehabilitation record books/employment assistance)," "how to interact with the child at home in a way that meets her individual characteristics," and "materials to raise public awareness among schools and supporters (methods of providing instruction and support for children with multilingual/multicultural backgrounds that deal with developmental disabilities)." In addition to this, participants discussed about the need for a survey/questionnaire form for students transferring in, as well as the specific method of conducting such hearings. (Summary written by Kaoru Shimada)

3) WG3 [Cooperating with Government Offices]

Participants shared information on such things as the measures being taken by the local

government offices they have been working with, for Zama City in Kanagawa Prefecture, Kawasaki City, Yokohama City, Chiba City in Chiba Prefecture, Isesaki City and Oizumi-cho in Gunma Prefecture, and Toyonaka City in Osaka Prefecture. Participants indicated their desire for such government offices to take up the role of identifying the actual conditions of people with foreign backgrounds and to provide such people with vital information. Although the current situation varies widely between the different municipalities, the participants are hopeful that such systems will become better maintained over time. As is the case in the state of Michigan, in the United States, government institutions overseas view such immigrant children from other countries as a valuable resource that equates to "global talent." For its recent efforts to adopt this stance, it can be said that the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is making progress. It is also important that the national government support the efforts of parents engaged in mother tongue maintenance activities. (Summary written by Eriko Ishii and Hitomi Oketani)

4) WG4-1 [Early Childhood]

For children that are born in Japan and that spend their early childhood in household or community settings where there is absolutely no Japanese spoken, upon entering elementary school, there are cases where such children are unable to speak Japanese and can't engage in group activities, causing those around them to suspect the child to have language development issues. For this reason, it is necessary that parents are made aware of such information by preschools and childcare providers during school health examinations.

It was noted that reading children's books out-loud is an effective method to raise awareness for parents, and to encourage mother tongue learning for toddlers. Practical examples were introduced, such as "teaching with picture books," "parent-child participation in the reading of children's books," "storytelling in the mother tongue," "having the child speak (write) about their impressions after reading a book," and "book borrowing for international classrooms." Some solutions given to address current issues included, "creating multilingual versions of the Bookstart program," "raising public awareness on the importance of the mother tongue by distributing pamphlets, etc., to parents at physical examinations conducted at age 1 and 3," "providing interpreting services during events organized by the city government on raising infants and toddlers," and "creating opportunities to hear from parents that have actually raised bilingual children." Additionally, while cases of children being identified during physical examinations as possibly having developmental issues are increasing, it is difficult to distinguish between functional issues and linguistic issues. It is also necessary to raise awareness among nurses as well as parents. (Summary written by Etsuko Takahashi)

5) WG4-2 [Elementary School]

The participants included individuals directly involved at schools and in the community, both domestically and abroad, in Yokohama, Aichi, Osaka, Spain, Switzerland, the United States, and Taiwan, etc., and participants shared information on issues related to language development that such children face, as well as examples of support activities provided. Some anecdotal examples include, a "case of a 1st grade child growing up in a Malay and English speaking home environment, and a Japanese speaking school environment, where the child is unable to learn Japanese, and is unable to connect characters with sounds," as well as a "case of a child studying 4 languages in a transnational household abroad, where the child is unable to become proficient in any of the languages, and ended up quitting supplementary school." In regards to the latter, participants identified issues such as the "problems with the system of promotion used at supplementary schools,"

and "a lack of understanding on the part of parents," and in response to this, experts participating in the group advised that "limiting the child to using just 1 language does not necessarily solve such problems," and that "households and schools should work together to provide ideas on how to increase opportunities to come into contact with the language." As an example of support activities for such children, a case was given "where a child was non-proficient in Spanish and Japanese (the language of instruction at school) during her early elementary years, but was able to exhibit dramatic growth in both languages over the course of a year, through cooperation between the parents and Japanese language teacher, through the intense usage of conversation and storytelling in both languages," after which actual spoken audio and transcribed data was presented. (Summary written by Chiho Sakurai and Kazuko Nakajima)

6) WG4-3 [Middle and High School Students]

Although it seems that early childhood is recognized as a vital stage for language development, participants engaged in discussions on what measures could be taken for students with limited proficiency at the middle and high school levels. Participants from Osaka, Aichi, a public school in Hamamatsu, a private school in Tokyo, and California provided examples for support activities conducted at typical high schools, part-time high schools, and support starting at the middle school level. Regarding the elementary school DLA study, as there were cases where some learners were suspected of having learning disabilities based on their Japanese language scores, recommendations were made to add aspects of mother tongue proficiency in determining the child's development. In response to this, it was reported that while experts have noted that items from the WISC (test for cognitive ability) can be used to identify areas where the child needs support, such as "cognitive ability, performance, working memory, processing speed," etc., in cases where the child exhibits poor working memory, the effects of such support may be limited. Additionally, participants expressed that there is a need for the development of a DLA geared toward students in the 3rd grade of middle school up through high school. Other issues identified included the underdevelopment of such assessment tools, as well as the lack of cooperation between medical and educational institutions. (Summary written by Kazue Yamashita)

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(Compiled by Yoko Suzuki)