

Airika - Ohio TESOL Convention 2007

“I would like to share some of my thoughts that I could not shake off of me even a couple of days after attending the session that discussed problems with internationally adopted children. As it appears, most people, including school administrators, interpret the word bi-lingual too light-heartedly. The younger the internationally adopted child the faster the mother tongue expires after moving to the United States. Let’s say a three-year-old moves here in July, by November they will have lost most everything they knew in their first language – all the hard work they put into learning it - gone, the most crucial first three years for language learning - wasted.

Most children pick up English, like sponges, relatively fast, enough to get by that is. But will this be enough in our competitive society later on? Let’s say that a six-year-old moves here and starts learning English, does alright, is considered bi-lingual in the eyes of both parents and teachers. Could that be so though? Discrepancies and gaps do not usually show up until high school.

I can draw a parallel between internationally adopted children and those of my students. Will they be proficient in one, two, three, or none of the languages they use? Depends on how old they were upon their arrival to the United States. Also, how much energy, time, knowledge etc. their parents have to share with their offspring in this new home called America. Having an international family myself, that session caused me to re-evaluate my child’s knowledge of two languages and I have to admit that the result was not 50/50.”