

Mei Mei's Story

By Wei Li Chen

Mei Mei just had her third birthday recently. Mei Mei was born here in the United States. Both of her parents came to this country to further their education and decided to stay. It has been six months since she was enrolled in this child care program. Six months ago, she had to say good-bye to Nai Nai (Grandma) when Nai Nai had to go back to China to take care of things at home. Mei Mei still misses Nai Nai, who liked to talk to her all the time. People say that is how she learned to speak so well as a two and half years old! Although Ma Ma (Mom) and Ba Ba (Dad) had worried about her transition into a new environment, especially because the only language spoken at the child care is English, Mei Mei seems to be doing fine. She was lucky to have found two friends who were bilingual and also speak Chinese so she can talk to them freely when they play, and sometimes, they would help her to pass the message to the teacher for her if she had some needs.

Today, when Ma Ma came to pick up Mei Mei, the Head Teacher pulled her aside. She told Ma Ma that they had a concern about Mei Mei's "language development" (read: English language learning) because it had been about six month and she still did not speak English. The teacher wanted Ma Ma to "push" her at home "so Mei Mei could learn English faster."

Ma Ma came home with a heavy heart, and felt a little confused. All the relatives and friends had told her how well Mei Mei spoke (Chinese) as a three years old, now the teacher told her that Mei Mei's "language development" should be of a concern; even though Mei Mei does not speak English at the school, Ma Ma had noticed that she could understand a lot, and practiced English words when she played alone. Isn't this how it is suppose to be when young children are learning a second language? What seems wrong from the teacher's eye? If Ma Ma and Ba Ba all try to speak English with Mei Mei at home, as the teacher suggested, isn't she going to forget about Chinese? How will she communicate with Nai Nai when she comes to visit again? But a teacher is someone who has the professional training in child development and education, isn't her advise supposed to be followed? Ma Ma is really confused now.

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