Co-constructing bilingual learning: an equal exchange of strategies between complementary and mainstream teachers

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Abstract

Teachers in complementary schools are often assumed to be using outmoded teaching strategies and an authoritarian approach to discipline. However, it is rare for mainstream teachers to have visited these community-run after-school or weekend classes, which remain on the margins of educational provision. This paper argues that complementary teachers' knowledge has been 'doubly devalued': firstly because of their location in the informal learning sector, and secondly because their work focuses on languages and cultures that are ignored or viewed negatively by the wider society. Our action research study with complementary teachers in East London challenges mainstream preconceptions in showing the creative range of teaching strategies devised to meet the needs of multi-level, mixed-age classes in under-resourced conditions. Uniquely, the research set up partnerships between these complementary teachers and local primary school teachers, in which they visited each other's settings and jointly planned topic-based lessons adapted to each context. Findings demonstrate that mainstream teachers had much to learn from their complementary colleagues about negotiating teacher-student relationships, the child as independent learner and as leader within a learning community, and the use of bilingual strategies. Partnership teaching created mutual respect for each other's expertise, crucial to the equal valuing of shared knowledge.

Keywords: Complementary schools, community languages, bilingual teachers, innovative pedagogy, culture of learning, UK

Introduction

'Now that's what I call good practice!'

This was the response of a primary school teacher at a seminar on bilingual learning, after watching a videorecording of a Bangladeshi grandmother teaching Bengali and Arabic to a group of children ranging in age from five to nine, in a home setting in East London. The mainstream teacher was impressed by the strategies the grandmother used to support each child as they worked on independent reading or writing tasks at their particular level, whilst she simultaneously engaged the attention of two active toddlers also present in the room by encouraging them to look at alphabet books.

Immediately before seeing this videorecording, the same primary teacher had expressed the view that complementary classes were occupying time in children's lives that could be used more productively. He was concerned that Bengali classes would be taught through traditional methods to which he assumed children would have a negative response. Yet the video extract and ensuing discussion enabled him to appreciate the expertise of complementary teachers and recognise the importance of such language and literacy classes for children's learning.

As researchers investigating bilingual learning with teachers in East London, this rapid change in understanding by the primary teacher was a pivotal moment in our own thinking. It led us to interrogate the issues lying behind the teacher's initial assumptions, and to consider how bridges could be built between mainstream and complementary educators so that they could share expertise for the overall benefit of their students.

We therefore devised an action research project in which primary teachers visited local complementary schools teaching Bengali, Somali or Russian, and hosted return visits by teacher partners from those settings. Each complementary-mainstream partnership then worked collaboratively to plan and teach topic-based lessons, using strategies that enabled children to develop their linguistic skills in each context.

In this paper we first discuss research taking place internationally that shows the particular advantages of learning in informal settings, yet also reveals that such learning goes unacknowledged or unappreciated by mainstream educators. We then show how community languages have been marginalised in education systems around the world, even in situations where official rhetoric endorses the advantages of multilingualism. Since complementary teachers work with community languages in informal settings, we argue that their knowledge has been 'doubly devalued' by the mainstream education system. Finally we engage with recent studies on teaching and learning in complementary schools, which indicate that a range of pedagogies is actually taking place in these varied settings.

We then present our study, explaining the critical action research methodology that we adopted to construct a more equal relationship between teachers from the dominant mainstream system and the marginalised complementary sector. Our findings show how teachers worked collaboratively to share strategies, with primary teachers recognising the expertise of their complementary colleagues, gaining understanding of children's potential as learners and developing multilingual pedagogies adapted to their own classes.

Learning in informal settings
A socio-cultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Gregory et al, 2004) explains how children construct concepts through social interaction as they gradually become fully participant members of their communities. From this perspective, education begins at home and continues in out-of-school settings, alongside children's experiences in mainstream school. Research in family and community contexts shows that the teaching-learning relationship often involves negotiation of roles, depending on the particular knowledge and expertise held by adults and children. Strategies used also tend to be adapted to the learner's varying needs. Finally, in many social groups, the child's high-level functioning is required both for their own progress and for that of the wider community.

The negotiation of the teacher-learner relationship in informal contexts was highlighted by Rogoff (1990, 2003) in her ethnographic studies of children from US and Mayan backgrounds undertaking tasks with the help of their carers. Although adults scaffolded understanding in a variety of ways through 'guided participation', Rogoff noted the active role often played by children in stimulating the learning exchange. In migration contexts, children's role can expand, since they tend to

develop the new language more quickly than their parents and may thus take the lead in activities requiring that language (Kenner, 2005). Such two-way learning due to differentiation of knowledge is clearly manifested in interactions between children and grandparents, where the older and younger generations exchange cultural and linguistic experience from their country of origin and the new country respectively (Kenner et al, 2007; Gregory et al, 2007).

Out-of-school learning, whether it takes place at home or in an organised setting such as a community group or class, may thus show some characteristics of informality in teacher-student relationships, especially if the participants include adults and children from migration backgrounds. Such negotiated and flexible interactions have been observed in contexts ranging from homework clubs in community centres in the US (Lee and Hawkins, 2008; Nicoletti, under review) to a community art gallery offering education for young people in London (Dash, 2010).

What expectations may teachers in informal settings have of the child's orientation to their own learning and that of others, particularly in migration contexts? Greenfield (1994) has argued that contrasting developmental scripts operate in Western societies and in other parts of the world: 'independence' and 'interdependence' respectively. The former would place a greater emphasis on the success of an individual child, whilst the latter would sacrifice individual achievement and autonomy to the values of obedience, respect and devotion to the needs of the wider community. Such an argument sets up a contradiction between being a self-directed learner and being communally responsible for learning as a group.

However, Ochs and Izquierdo (2010) show the considerable degree of autonomy required of young children in non-Western societies as they carry out tasks necessary to the everyday functioning of their community. These children are operating in a manner that is both 'independent' and 'interdependent'. A similar pattern could therefore occur with school achievement, with children being independent learners who are also aware of the needs of others, taking responsibility both for their own success and for that of their peers. Indeed, this pattern might be expected to operate particularly within a community in a new country, where ethnic minority families have migrated because of a desire for their children's educational success, and there are strong collective ties as the group aims to maintain its linguistic and cultural heritage (Gregory et al, 2010).

We will shortly consider how the above issues apply to complementary schools in the UK and elsewhere. To conclude this section, we emphasise that children may be learning effectively in informal settings, but with little recognition from mainstream educators (Hull and Schultz, 2002). Long and Volk (2009) encouraged US teachers to visit community learning contexts in order to challenge deficit views of children and families, and noted how these visits increased their understanding. A group of Canadian educators (Botelho et al, 2009: 250) urge teachers to 'expand our notion of where learning happens' by 'making sure that we as well as families are crossing the bridge between home/community and school'. They set up a summer institute programme including literacy programmes held in a local mosque, involving teachers from the mosque community and parent volunteers. Unfortunately such initiatives are rare, and the power of dominant educational structures leaves little space for valuing the pedagogies taking place in non-mainstream sites (Nieto and Bode, 2008).

Community languages: ignored and devalued
A similar devaluing of knowledge and expertise takes place with regard to minority or 'community' languages, as they are termed in the UK. Although the previous UK government discovered the benefits of complementary schools for children's learning, and funded the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education as well as the Our Languages project to link mainstream and complementary schools, no funding was forthcoming for the basic needs of hard-pressed complementary schools throughout the UK. Meanwhile, 'incoherent discourses' (Anderson et al, 2008) operated in government and the wider society. Whilst ministers of education produced rhetorical statements supporting the benefits of multilingualism, their counterparts in other ministries denigrated the skills of immigrants and deplored their use of languages other than English (Blackledge, 2006).

Nor have community languages fared better in other English-dominant countries. Valdés et al (2008: 107) argue that 'hegemonic beliefs about monolingualism and bilingualism are deeply embedded in educational institutions' in the US, leading to the reinforcement of societal values concerning heritage languages. 'Massive attrition of students' heritage language competence over the course of schooling' in the US context has been noted by Cummins (2005: 585). In Australia, Lo Bianco (2008: 67) notes the struggle to constitute community languages as 'proper objects for policy attention', since despite more pluralistic discourses of national identity in recent years, they tend to be seen as parochial. This view applies particularly to indigenous languages, in comparison to 'elite' languages used for international trade. Mãori and Pasifika peoples in New Zealand have also struggled to get equal consideration for their languages in education, despite the success of bilingual schooling projects involving Mãori or Samoan (May, 2005; Tuafuti and McCaffery, 2005). Even in Canada, where there have been positive initiatives in heritage language education with good outcomes from bilingual programmes, aboriginal languages have only received funding relatively recently, and many heritage language communities still struggle to run after-school or weekend classes with minimal resources (Duff, 2008).

Complementary schools are therefore subject to a dual discrimination, since they teach undervalued languages in undervalued educational settings. In the next section, we discuss what is actually taking place in this 'doubly devalued' sector in terms of teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning in complementary schools
Practitioners in UK complementary schools face challenging conditions. Most work in 'borrowed' spaces that belong to or are used by others, ranging from rooms in church halls or community centres to mainstream classrooms (Gregory and Williams, 2000; Martin et al, 2006). Classes are often mixed-age, multi-level, or both (Hall et al, 2002). A few practitioners have textbooks from home countries whilst many have none, and access to ICT resources is rare (Issa and Williams, 2009). Some teachers are qualified in their home countries (Barradas, 2007), some also work in the mainstream (Conteh, 2007) and others are dedicated volunteers from the community. Finally, complementary teachers are very low-paid or not paid at all (Issa and Williams, 2009).

It would be greatly advantageous to teachers in the complementary sector to have full access to training and properly-resourced classrooms, and a strong interest in professional development has been shown by complementary teachers in the UK (Anderson, 2008; Anderson and Chung, 2011), the US (Liu, 2006) and Australia (Clyne and Fernandez, 2008). However, what is remarkable is the resilience and creativity of complementary teachers in the face of very difficult conditions. Their work is often underpinned by the strong teacher-student relationship and communal approach characteristic of informal learning settings. Studies in the UK (Barradas and Chen, 2008; Hall et al, 2002) and the US (Tran, 2008) describe relationships between complementary teachers and their students as close and supportive. Parents and teachers are jointly committed to students' success as individuals who are members of a community with shared cultural as well as academic goals. Staff at complementary schools teach to their students' strengths (Hall et al, 2002) and help them develop confident learner identities (Creese et al, 2006, Gregory et al, forthcoming). Older or more advanced students may act as learning mentors in mixed-age, multi-level classes, as found by Rosowsky (2006) in mosque classes in northern England.

Complementary teachers have to invent, adapt and negotiate strategies to meet their learners' needs. Practitioners who are also teachers in mainstream schools during the week, which is relatively common in Australia (Clyne and Fernandez, 2008) and becoming more common in the UK (Issa and Williams, 2009; Conteh, 2007), can draw on aspects of mainstream pedagogy. Teachers arriving from other countries soon realise, like those interviewed by Issa and Williams (2009: 118) in London, that 'Children here are different. They need a number of approaches, not just one'. Greek teachers in London began to use communicative approaches involving visual stimuli, music and drama to engage their students (Panthazi, 2010). In Chinese schools in Montreal, traditional methodologies such as recitation of text were combined with questioning to stimulate imaginative thinking about the text, and reformulating pupils' responses to expand on their ideas (Curdt-Christiansen, 2006).

Bilingual learning, in which teacher and students switch between English and the community language, is often found necessary due to students' varied competence in their mother tongue. Blackledge and Creese (2010) call this approach 'flexible bilingualism', and demonstrate how it helps students access meaning. Issa and Williams (2009) found bilingual learning to be a feature of complementary schools across London, and Panthazi (2010) also noted that teachers used 'bilingual reflection' judiciously, such as exploring cognate English words with Greek roots.

One approach not yet explored in research is the potential for a two-way exchange of strategies between complementary and mainstream teachers. Robertson (2010) conducted a groundbreaking project in which students in initial teacher education at a UK university visited complementary schools and reflected on the implications for their own teaching. This experience had a striking effect on these future teachers' understanding of their pupils' linguistic and cultural skills, and the significance of community learning. The research we will now discuss took one step further by setting up partnerships to encourage teachers from both sectors to share strategies with each other.

The teacher partnership project

The two-year study took place in the east London borough of Tower Hamlets, where the university researchers worked closely with the Languages Service of the local education authority. The predominant population of Tower Hamlets is of Bangladeshi origin, mostly settled for at least two generations, with a recently-arrived Somali community and ongoing arrivals from a wide range of other countries. Unusually for the UK, the Languages Service has some funding available for complementary schools and runs a one-year part-time teacher training course in collaboration with a further education college, as well as termly professional development sessions. Bengali complementary schools are well established, and there are smaller numbers of schools run by other language communities.

Participant teachers came from two primary schools and four complementary schools (two Bengali, one Somali and one Russian) plus on-site after-school Bengali and Somali classes at one of the primary schools. Table 1 gives key details of the schools involved.

Table 1: Participating schools

Primary School A	Pupils mainly Bangladeshi British. Class size 20-25.
After-school Bengali class at School A	Two days a week, 3.30–5 pm. 15 pupils aged 5-15.
After-school Somali class at School A	Two days a week, 3.30–5 pm. Started in response to parents' request when project began. 12 pupils aged 3-11, accompanied by parents.
Bengali Community School	Two blocks from School A, some pupils in common. Based in community centre, modern pre-fabricated building. 60 pupils aged 5-15 in 3 classes. Classes every weekday, 5–7 pm, in Bengali and Qur'anic Arabic.
Somali Community School	Two sites: old community hall (2 days a week, 5-7 pm) and cramped community flat (Saturday and Sunday mornings). Each class 20 pupils aged 5-15.
Primary School B	Around half of pupils Bangladeshi British, others from a considerable mix of origins. Class size 20-25.
Bengali Mosque School	Some pupils in common with School B. On premises of Islamic secondary school. 160 pupils aged 6-13 in 8 classes. Classes every weekday, 5–7 pm, in Bengali and Qur'anic Arabic.
Russian Community School	Some pupils in common with School B. In rooms at a church with a Sunday service in Russian. 25 students aged 5-15 in 3 classes. Classes Sunday 12.30-1.30.

Eight teacher partnerships were set up, as shown in Table 2. Six involved School A, the larger primary school with greater staff capacity, and two involved School B.

Table 2: Teaching partnerships

Mainstream partner	Complementary partner
Annika (School A)	Sulaman (Bengali Community School)
Alison (School A)	Shah (Bengali Community School)
James (School A)	Zainab (Somali Community School)
Siobhan (School A)	Muna (Somali Community School)
Shaheen (School A)	Rakib (School A Bengali class)
Jane (School A)	Osman (School A Somali class)
Hamida (School B)	Redwan (Bengali Mosque School)
Jo (School B)	Natasha & Tanya (Russian Community School)

Sulaman, headteacher of Bengali Community School, had founded the school ten years previously and developed the syllabus. His colleague Shah had several years experience and was currently attending the local authority's teacher training course, which Sulaman had also undertaken in the past. Zainab and Muna had begun teaching at Somali Community School in the last couple of years, and were attending the local authority course. Rakib, a teacher from School A, taught the after-school Bengali class. School A had participated in a previous research project on bilingual learning and, realising the importance of Bengali to children's intellectual development, had subsequently instituted Bengali as part of the school's 'modern foreign language' offer, along with French and Spanish. Rakib therefore also taught Bengali as part of the mainstream school curriculum. Osman, who taught the after-school Somali class, had been a secondary school teacher of history and geography in Somalia. Redwan from Bengali Mosque School had attended training sessions at a local Muslim Centre. Natasha at Russian Community School had been a secondary school ICT teacher in Russia, whilst her colleague Tanya did not have previous teaching experience.

Of the mainstream teachers, all had a number of years experience apart from James, the music and drama teacher in School A, who was planning to take a teacher training course to become a class teacher in the future. With regard to linguistic knowledge other than English, Annika spoke Swedish since her mother was from Sweden, whilst Shaheen and Hamida were from Bangladeshi families and spoke Bengali (Shaheen grew up in Bangladesh and Hamida in London), and Jane had learnt some Arabic whilst working in Egypt.

The research team had worked together on two previous projects concerning children's home and community learning. One of us is white British, a Londoner for thirty years, and one is Bangladeshi British, having moved to England at age eight and grown up in Tower Hamlets, and is still resident there and also a part-time community worker in the borough.

Our research question was:

- How can complementary-mainstream teacher partnerships develop pedagogies to enhance children's learning in both settings?

To address this issue, we interviewed each participant teacher before they visited their partner's setting, to find out whether they had ever visited such a setting before and explore their ideas concerning the project. Following the initial visits, joint planning sessions around a chosen topic were held for each partnership at the primary school, to take advantage of resources there. Partners taught their first lesson based on the joint planning, visiting each other to observe. A second planning session was then held before teaching further lessons on the same theme or a new one. The project was therefore designed to follow the action research model of two cycles of activity, the second one taking advantage of what had been learnt in the first. Teachers were interviewed during or after the partnership work to discuss their responses.

A critical action research methodology
We were conducting a study in which participants did not begin on equal terms, due to one group coming from mainstream schools that held considerably more societal and institutional power than complementary schools. We therefore had to develop a critical approach that deconstructed stereotypical assumptions, in order to co-construct partnerships that could operate on a more egalitarian basis. Essentially, we needed to help participants construct a different gaze when observing the other setting. For mainstream teachers, this meant building a non-deficit perspective into the initial interview questions and the question sheet we provided to guide observations. With regard to complementary teachers, we had already visited their classes and noted their pedagogical strengths as well as the difficulties they faced. We now needed to support them to be aware of these strengths in the face of the potentially daunting dominance of the well-resourced mainstream.

We ensured that mainstream teachers visited complementary schools first, so that complementary teachers were on their own ground and had greater confidence. We devised the same initial interview questions and the same observation sheet for teachers from both sectors, rather than reinforcing the general assumption that mainstream teachers have greater experience and pedagogical knowledge whereas their complementary partners would have more to learn. Interview questions therefore asked about the differences that participants thought might exist between settings, what skills they would like to add to their teaching and how their partner teacher might be able to assist them, and how they would like to help children use their mother tongue (or were already doing so, in the case of complementary teachers). Observation sheets stated that 'children learn in many different ways' and suggested focusing on children's learning rather than the teaching methods used, and looking for the strengths and interests that pupils showed, beginning with how children used community languages and English within the lesson (an inevitable advantage for complementary classes since other languages were rarely used in mainstream school), and including how children helped each other or studied independently, how cultural knowledge was used, and the teacher/child and teacher/parent relationship. In attempting to shift the gaze from the dominant mainstream view of 'good practice' in teaching methods (such as games, roleplay and investigative tasks) to a focus on social and cultural aspects of learning, we took a similar approach to that of Robertson (2010). In order to 'shift teacher training students' longheld assumptions and perspectives' (Robertson, 2010: 124), she set observation tasks for their visits to complementary schools that also focused on the child as learner, and these ideas helped nourish our own thinking as we constructed our methodological tools.

Analysis and findings
Interviews with teachers, fieldnotes on teachers' visits to each other's settings and partnership planning sessions, and videorecorded lesson observations were analysed qualitatively to identify themes emerging. We followed the changing perceptions of mainstream and complementary teachers regarding pedagogies over the course of the project, noting also their actual use of strategies in the classroom at different points in the partnership work. We will first discuss teachers' knowledge and perceptions as presented in the initial interviews before the partnership work began. We then consider key themes arising from the action research data, beginning with aspects of pedagogy from the complementary sector that provided new understandings for mainstream teachers, and then considering the ideas gained by complementary teachers.

Teachers' initial perceptions
None of the mainstream teachers had visited a complementary school during their teacher training or teaching career. Annika and Hamida had attended one themselves as a child, in Swedish and Bengali respectively. Both recognised the importance of learning mother tongue, and the challenges facing complementary teachers. Annika referred to the different levels in a class, whilst Hamida remembered traditional teaching methods but thought these might have changed by now. Jo made the connection between her childhood experiences of 'school out-of-school', such as Sunday school or drama classes, which had given her skills and confidence. Several teachers hypothesised that complementary teaching methods might be more formal and disciplined, particularly given the likelihood of large classes and few resources. However, since all the teachers had volunteered to participate in the project, they were clearly interested in complementary schools, and several thought groupwork or experiential learning might be taking place there. Shaheen could see the value of linking mainstream and complementary schools; she had taught a Bengali complementary class in the past, and made use of methods picked up from her mother who was a primary school teacher in the UK.

The mainstream teachers were open to learning from their complementary school partners. Jo pointed out that it was easy to 'get set in a bubble' with regard to one's classroom strategies, whilst several people wondered if complementary teachers – perhaps due to their cultural knowledge - might have more appropriate ways to engage and involve children, or to work with those whose behaviour was challenging.

The only person who had recently met complementary teachers was Annika. When conducting a training session for the local authority, she had found some participants to be 'incredibly intuitive' and 'aware how children will learn best', and felt 'we shared a common understanding'. She noted complementary teachers' different strengths, particularly their knowledge of children's language resources.

Language issues were generally seen as an area where complementary teachers could help their partners. Annika recognised that mother tongue classes could support learning: 'I'm fully behind it, anything we can gather about how they're learning in language one should help inform their learning in language two'. Siobhan expected to see 'skills developing in mother tongue that you wouldn't see in school'. Alison had noticed Rakib, who taught Bengali in the primary school, putting up keywords in

Bengali to support children's learning, and wondered whether she could do the same. Jo was keen to try bilingual strategies, such as a child reading in a different language and their classmates trying to guess the meaning. Jane was concerned that the only Somali child in her class had no mother tongue support for her learning and hoped that Osman as the Somali teacher could help with this.

Hamida was particularly aware of the potential advantages of bilingual learning, explaining that children 'grow their language [ie English] on their mother tongue language…so in their head they are translating and they are using what they already know'. She could envisage topic work in more than one language, especially to build academic vocabulary in mother tongue, given her own experience of losing Bengali as she only spoke it in family contexts and 'you're forever speaking English'. However, despite this awareness, she was not currently teaching in this way. She felt her partner teacher could help her with methods for learning and teaching Bengali.

Shaheen also understood how bilingual learning worked, based on research findings and her own experience. If children compare words in different languages 'that helps them to memorise more, it's exercise for the brain'. She had used dual language teaching in primary school in the past, but 'it got lost somewhere' because she saw no other languages being used in school 'so I just thought, well nobody cares'. She did not think bilingual topic work would be time-consuming; 'it naturally can fit in, if you want it to'.

Meanwhile, the complementary teachers were equally unfamiliar with the mainstream setting; none had visited a mainstream school as part of their work as a teacher. Some had been inside a primary school as parents, and noted the abundance of resources and visual aids. Several commented on mainstream advantages such as having your own premises, training, and more time spent with pupils.

Complementary teachers were aware that mainstream pedagogies could differ from their own. Redwan had heard about 'learning through play', whereas he taught in 'Bangladeshi style', and he was keen to learn mainstream strategies. Osman was using BBC online materials to find out about UK teaching methods. Tanya taught the youngest children in Russian school and was interested in approaches for early learning. She and Natasha, as new complementary teachers, saw mainstream schools as having more knowledge about children and their learning, whereas their school specialised in Russian language and culture. Natasha even referred to the mainstream as children's 'natural environment'.

However, more experienced complementary teachers had greater confidence in their own methodologies. Sulaman had been teaching for ten years and spoke eloquently about the approaches he had developed. His explanation of how he gave each child a task slightly above their level, to challenge them and stimulate their learning, chimed perfectly with Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), though Sulaman had figured out this approach alone. He wrote his own songs and poems for children to study, encouraging them to express their ideas, and talked of children's need to move around during the class -'when they're moving, their mind is moving' – which fits with the kinaesthetic learning approach. He considered that learning could be a two-way exchange between himself and his mainstream partner. Sulaman's colleague Shah thought the project could introduce an element of healthy

competition between the sectors: 'I will try and do my best to show my best and they will try their best and through this it will be very good for the students, they will learn lots of things'.

The only teacher who taught in both sectors was Rakib, an experienced class teacher at School A who now taught Bengali in the curriculum as well as after school. He used some similar methods in both settings, such as working with stories and rhymes, but pointed out that his after school class had a much wider range of ages and levels, 'so we have to concentrate on one-to-one teaching, we teach them according to their need'.

Rakib was already linking his in-school Bengali teaching to curriculum topics and thought this approach could be developed further: 'the second and third generation need to know the language [ie Bengali], so that's why they can use their mother tongue alongside English to study'. Meanwhile, Shah and Sulaman commented on the need to teach bilingually. Shah said 'here the first language for the children is English….I help them to understand through English, if I use only Bangla they don't always understand. I let them speak a little English and encourage them to speak Bangla'. Natasha also recognised that 'I cannot teach Russian as I was taught at school…I need to teach Russian as a second language'.

Both groups of teachers were therefore keen to begin the project, to find out more about each other's settings and methods, and to share ideas. For almost all of them, the partnership work was a venture into new territory. We will now consider what they found there, starting with pedagogies arising from complementary school.

Teacher-student relationship
All the complementary teachers created a relationship with their pupils that was friendly, yet firm. Discipline was negotiated through warmth as well as strictness. Children hugged Zainab as they arrived in class, and there seemed to be no contradiction between this close relationship and Zainab's direct approach to instructions or reprimands. If children misbehaved, they had to stand facing the wall, but accepted this in a good-humoured way and were allowed to contribute to class discussion from their temporary position. Redwan's chair and table were on a raised platform with a red carpet, showing the significance of the teacher role, but he explained how important it was to have a friendly relationship with children, especially since they were tired after a day at mainstream school. He greeted the children respectfully with 'asalaam aleikum', and they responded in kind. A similar atmosphere of mutual respect through the 'salaam' greeting was noticeable in Sulaman's and Shah's classes. In Natasha's much smaller class, the children were treated as part of a family. As Natasha helped Sasha with his work, she put her arm round him and called him by the Russian diminutive of 'Sashka'.

Mainstream teachers were impressed by the relationships between teachers and students in their partners' classes. Jo noted that children received more individual attention in the small classes at Russian school, which could make them more relaxed and confident. Alison commented on the discipline shown by children in Shah's class, their respect for learning and for the teacher. James also said of the Somali teachers he observed: 'their children have a lot of respect for them'. Several teachers were struck by the way that complementary teachers managed children with difficult behaviour,

some of whom behaved similarly in mainstream school. For example, when Sulaman taught a mainstream class as part of the project, he took under his wing children who might have become disruptive, inviting them to stand next to him and help with the teaching. Complementary teachers' attitudes to their students seemed to emanate from a shared sense of community and cultural understanding, adapted to children growing up in the UK.

High expectations of students
Although complementary teachers had less teaching time available than their mainstream colleagues, this did not mean they had lower expectations. Zainab and Muna were determined that every student should succeed, and required each child to demonstrate their learning, for example when making their own sentences in Somali or when performing a song. Shah was concerned to see that when groupwork took place in a mainstream classroom, not all groups were asked to report back, so some could not consolidate their learning. Zainab set demanding tasks, such as translating sentences from English into Somali, and encouraged her students with cries of 'Come on!' in English until the task was completed. Sulaman, Shah and Muna set up friendly competitions between groups to motivate their students. Shah offered step by step support to a group of students experiencing the most difficulties with a task, adding confidence by saying 'you are my stronger group' and 'you think you can't but you can', and offering to reward them if they did well. Sulaman expressed a wish to offer an increasingly challenging curriculum and for teachers to expect even more of students.

High standards were especially noticeable when students were preparing for public performance. Students from Bengali Community School rehearsed over and over again for the Tower Hamlets Languages Celebration, making their own costumes and props with materials brought from home. In comparison, their companion group from School A had to fit practice into fragmented moments in the school day. Annika was impressed by the efforts made at complementary school and noted ruefully that the mainstream curriculum left little space for children to develop their work in this way.

Complementary schools could devise their own marking systems, and several teachers used this flexibility to motivate students. Sulaman explained how he gave students the chance to get a higher mark if they attempted a harder task. He also sometimes gave a better mark than the student strictly deserved, just a few points away from the top mark, in order to encourage them to strive for the top mark next time. Natasha discussed with Sasha why he had not got the top mark of five for that day's work, explaining exactly what he needed to do to obtain it. Rapid feedback to pupils was considered important. Zainab marked each child's spelling test on the spot whilst her pupils did another task. James noted children's eagerness as they waited for their results, and the beneficial effect of an instant evaluation. Jo was rather surprised when a parent at Russian school, recognising her from primary school, complained that children put effort into homework that was marked late or not at all, compared to the immediate feedback at complementary class.

Knowledge exchange between teacher and student
Whereas complementary teachers were the experts in mother tongue knowledge, their students had the advantage with respect to English. When Zainab taught new vocabulary in Somali, she asked children for simultaneous translation into English,

and this involved negotiation between teacher and students as different possible meanings were discussed. When Zainab had to write the English word on the board, children would prompt her, for example by sounding out the individual letters that spelt 'tea', or explaining that 'pizza' began with 'p' not 'b' (sounds that were difficult for Zainab to distinguish). Similarly, children in Redwan's class corrected his spelling of 'shef' to 'chef'. Yet respect for the teacher was maintained, as James noted. Seeing Zainab's comfortable admission that she did not know everything and needed help, he realised he could ask for support when he had difficulty with spelling due to dyslexia. Jo could also see the benefits of a more equal teacher-student relationship, commenting to Sasha after he had explained how to write letters of the alphabet at Russian school 'it makes a change, doesn't it Sasha, when you know more than me!'

The child as learner and teacher
Due to the mixed-age and multi-level profile of many complementary classes, children were often required to work independently on tasks or to act as teacher within a small group. In Redwan's class, each child practised the Bengali alphabet letters they were currently learning. Some rehearsed their knowledge individually by reciting either silently or aloud, whilst others worked in twos or threes, taking it in turns to test their peers by listening. When they were ready, they put up their hands and Redwan came over to check their learning. Muna organised her multi-age class into groups for some activities, designating the more advanced learners as leaders. Rakib's class had a wide range of learners, from a nine-year-old reading stories in Bengali to a 14-year-old who was a complete beginner. Rakib circulated around the room responding to students' requests for help. After observing Sulaman's pupils, Annika commented that children were not asked to be such independent learners in primary school. The challenging conditions in complementary school required children to develop their concentration and self-motivation.

A child might also teach the whole class. Whilst Sulaman was busy with administrative tasks, ten-year-old Rafia taught the lesson, setting up her own list of points on the whiteboard which she proceeded to explain. Zainab and Muna began their lessons with ten Somali words on the board and children learnt through recitation, firstly led by the teacher and then by each student in turn. Children waited eagerly for their moment as teacher, knowing that everyone would have the opportunity. Each led their peers with confidence, using a dramatic voice, varying their intonation, emphasising details such as long vowel sounds and demanding high standards of pronunciation. James was struck by the effectiveness of the 'child as teacher' strategy: 'It's a more rounded use of resources, it develops the children in different ways – self-learning, self-monitoring…the understanding you get from having to teach something, to try to explain it, focusing in your head on what it should be'. Whenever children presented their work in front of Zainab's class, others would join in with corrections, and everyone would clap. Children were not only responsible for their own learning, but also for that of the group.

Bilingual strategies
Most complementary teachers used one language to prompt the other, and explored meanings through translation. Like Sulaman, Shah and Rakib, Redwan switched between Standard Bengali, Sylheti (the children's spoken variety) and English to aid understanding. If a child made use of the English system – for example, suggesting 'Jamaica' when asked for a country name beginning with a Bengali letter sounding

similar to the English 'J' – he would acknowledge the idea and explain the difference. In Arabic classes another language was added for meaning-making. A story from the Qur'an, recited by pupils in Sulaman's class, included the Arabic word for elephant, 'fil'. Sulaman asked what it meant and children offered ideas from English: 'feeling your hand' or 'filling the gap'. Laughing, Sulaman commented 'three languages we are learning'. He explained 'fil' in Arabic meant elephant and asked them for the Bengali word, which one child supplied: 'hati'.

Zainab's class also discussed different meanings when translating keywords from Somali into English, many of which had a cultural basis. One Somali word meant something like a 'hot water bottle', but was this the same as the English item or was it a jug used for hot water? Was a 'sleeping mat' similar to a 'sleeping bag'? The discussion between teacher and children went to and fro between the two languages as they negotiated the meaning, and made a final decision on the English word which was then written on the board. To understand the meaning of a Somali song, Zainab encouraged children to build ideas in English, which led to complex thinking; a phrase involving the Somali words 'aqoon' (knowledge) and 'iftiin' (light or brightness) produced suggestions such as 'your knowledge is bright' and 'your brain shines a light on the darkness'.

Developing bilingual work in partnership
Teacher partners planned together to find ways in which bilingual strategies could be used in primary school as well as complementary class. In mainstream classrooms, this involved children drawing on their own languages and learning each other's. Shah and Alison used stories in more than one language: 'The Buri and the Marrow' in Bengali and English, and the Pied Piper dual language storybook in Bengali and English, and Somali and English. Natasha, Tanya and Jo also worked with parallel stories: 'Kolobok' in Russian was a little ball of dough whose sad demise was highly similar to that of 'The Gingerbread Man' in English. After listening to the stories in both versions and working out the meaning, children built up their vocabulary in different languages as well as English through role-playing particular scenes. In Alison's class, children wrote playscripts including words and phrases in different languages, which were often chosen for effect. Shah asked his students to write the story in English as a basis for further study in Bengali.

Redwan and Hamida focused on animal vocabulary to engage with the 'Noah's Ark' story, which children also encountered in their Qur'anic studies. The pupils from Hamida's multilingual class took a worksheet of animal pictures home to ask parents to write words in other languages. Redwan's students used the same sheet to generate Bengali and English words. The teacher partners also worked together on the theme of 'Jobs in different countries', using photos from Bangladesh as a stimulus. Children in both classes drew on their experiences in Bangladesh to offer words they knew, and learned new ones in English as well as Bengali. Hamida and Redwan used the vocabulary to compare initial phonemes in Bengali and English.

Osman and Jane took the theme of 'food', for which a Somali parent helped children in Jane's nursery class to make 'laxoox' bread, and Jane and Osman used shared writing in English and Somali to scribe children's memories of the experience. Osman's class enjoyed 'laxoox' bread with accompanying meat and vegetables, then generated words for the ingredients in Somali. Rakib's after-school Bengali class,

Osman's Somali class and Shaheen's Year 1 class combined for a gardening session at the primary school, including parents, where children learned parallel vocabulary in three languages as they planted together.

Transliteration was a key strategy in enabling teachers and children who did not know Bengali or Russian to work with texts in these languages. Sulaman and Annika worked with a Bengali poem that they compared to an English one on a similar theme. Sulaman's pupils as well as Annika's needed a transliteration of the complex literary language in Bengali, together with a translation into English, in order to fully understand the contents of the poem. By working with these three versions alongside each other, children in both classes could build meanings. Sulaman set tasks in which pupils could answer in any or all of Bengali script, transliterated Bengali or Sylheti, or English. He characterised this approach as learning 'in between', saying that 'once they do all those, it will stay in their mind'. The ideas generated by translating between languages, and the reinforcement of concepts, gave maximum support to children's thinking and made for a rich learning experience. Meanwhile Annika's pupils of Bangladeshi origin wrote questions in transliterated Sylheti or Bengali to take home to parents, providing the basis for a dialogue about the poem. Students who did not speak Bengali showed the English version to parents and asked if they knew similar poems in other languages, returning with songs in Arabic and transliterated Urdu, and a Spanish translation of the original poem. Annika, who was initially disconcerted when planning for children to use Bengali, saying 'I feel de-skilled!', quickly realised that her role was to act as facilitator for the children to take their multilingual learning forward.

The partnership work added to complementary teachers' bilingual strategies as well as generating mainstream ones. Transliteration, which had always featured in Sulaman's and Shah's work, became a stronger element. It was used judiciously, with differentiated tasks for students to ensure they moved towards the development of Bengali script. The new complementary teachers, Osman, Natasha and Tanya, began to use English as well as Somali or Russian in their teaching after observing children learning bilingually in the project activities in mainstream class. They realised how English together with mother tongue could act as a resource for their pupils.

Through participation in the project, mainstream teachers began to use or develop their language expertise. Shaheen rapidly developed ideas with her project partner, Rakib. They had been working as colleagues in the same school for years but this was their first opportunity to devise bilingual lessons together. Annika taught her class a song in Swedish, to their mutual delight. Jane began to refer to her knowledge of Arabic when working with Osman, since Arabic is also spoken in Somalia and was part of his lessons. Alison began to learn some Bengali for the first time in her teaching career, and noted that 'I was thinking in English and Bangla for some of the words'.

Children's language expertise was also revealed by the project. A child in Siobhan's class, known to speak Pashto, turned out to speak three other languages and to be literate in Farsi. Annika was surprised by the previously hidden capacities of her pupils and said 'it was lovely to see the confidence of the children who were able to take on the task and engage with it, using their mother tongue'. Alison commented that a child previously too shy to speak to her had used the Somali/English dual

language storybook as a support for bilingual writing, and later written a Mother's Day card in Somali and shown it to her: 'that's really developed my relationship with her'. Summing up the project's main effect in her eyes, Alison stated that 'the biggest thing was seeing the impact of children using their mother tongue within the classroom – the effect it had on their self-esteem was so high'.

Groupwork, games and role-play
These approaches are often used in mainstream primary teaching and were also found helpful in complementary school. Some complementary teachers were already employing such strategies, either because they had undertaken the local authority training or (with regard to groupwork) because they had devised ways of dealing with mixed level classes. Rakib brought his experience as a primary teacher into his complementary classes. For others, these techniques or aspects of them were new and offered additional possibilities. For all the complementary teachers, topic-based work and interaction with their mainstream partners enabled them to develop their strategies further.

When Zainab's class engaged in groupwork to discuss the meaning of a Somali song, she commented on the good results of telling children to 'ask your friends'. Redwan arranged his students into groups to discuss photos of Bangladesh, and children worked conscientiously to generate Bengali words describing the pictures. Osman, acting on Jane's advice and on the learning through play that he had observed in her nursery class, divided his class into older and younger groups and gave them differentiated activities; for example, the younger group sorted plastic models of fruit and vegetables into those grown in England or in Somalia, whilst older children produced a diagram in which they wrote vocabulary for each category and identified items grown in both countries.

Natasha and Tanya also benefited from using a 'hands-on' approach with their partner teacher Jo, developing children's vocabulary and narrative skills through roleplays based on a story. Natasha saw pupils' positive response, noting that 'if they're active, they learn better', while Tanya talked of learning 'the creative way'. Both incorporated these strategies into their lessons for the project, encouraging children to imagine the Kolobok character meeting a new set of animals in Africa, or having to dress up in different clothes to protect himself from rain. They used the topic to develop Russian literacy, by labelling pictures of animals or practising certain alphabet letters in vocabulary for clothes. Natasha commented: 'I learned lots of methods and techniques from primary school teachers which I adopted and now use in my work'.

Sulaman and Shah already used differentiated groupwork and games in their classes. The project brought the additional dimension of exploring a topic through a range of activities that developed different skills. As Shah pointed out, 'it's what they can do with one story, how they learn the words, to do role plays, how to answer questions, how to make speeches.' He adapted games such as wordsearches or Word Bingo, which he was accustomed to using for Bengali literacy, to the topic and children responded with even more enthusiasm.

Complementary teachers who encountered mainstream-style lesson planning for the first time understood the principles and rapidly learnt how to apply them. Osman

wrote lesson plans in Somali which included the learning intention, success criteria, key vocabulary, key skills, differentiated activities, and plenary to revise learning. Tanya's lesson plan on 'Dressing up Kolobok' began with children learning Russian words for clothes they were wearing, and continued with vocabulary flashcards, reinforcing learning by composing sentences using the new words and drawing clothes on pictures of characters from the story.

Shah's comment sums up the exchange of strategies between complementary and mainstream teachers: 'I liked lots of things and understood a lot of what they do....I can work comparatively with them, that is what I liked, that I could show very well my work and they were happy too, they also said they learnt from us, that was my wish.'

Interweaving strategies
Finally, we show an example of teachers combining strategies from both settings: James co-teaching a Year 6 class with Zainab and Muna at primary school. The topic was a Somali song, 'Arday baan ahay' (I am a student), about a child running eagerly to school to learn. Table 3 shows how the teachers switched between strategies during the lesson. The complementary strategies were typical of Zainab's and Muna's Somali classes, as discussed earlier, whilst the mainstream strategies were often used by James as a primary music and drama teacher.

Table 3: Strategies used for co-teaching

Complementary strategy	Mainstream strategy
recitation of keywords	
correcting pronunciation	
child as teacher	
negotiating translation	
children help with spelling	
	drama to practise meaning
expectations for behaviour	
	split into 2 groups, each learn half of song
	fine-tune performance
child as leader with support	

James introduced his Somali colleagues to the class as equals by saying 'we're teaching buddies.' Zainab led the first class recitation of keywords from the song, emphasising correct pronunciation, and James the second one. Then several children enthusiastically took turns as teacher, including Abdilahi, one of the two Somali children in the class. Abdilahi helped again as discussion took place about word meanings. James wrote the English translations beside the keywords, and children corrected him when he mis-spelled a word, just as children in Zainab's class would help her with English spelling. He accepted their help, reminding them he was dyslexic and nobody is perfect. James then used drama to support learning of the keywords. Children chose Somali words to put into English sentences and act out: for example 'the *arday* went to the *dugsida*' (the student went to school).

Before handing over to Zainab and Muna to teach the song, James highlighted the expectations for behaviour in complementary school: 'their students have a lot of

respoect for them…so I don't want to have to tell you to stop talking when they're talking'. Realising the song needed to be broken down into smaller chunks of language because children were unfamiliar with Somali, James split the class into two groups, each learning part of the song. As a music teacher, James emphasised the quality of singing, and indeed high standards for performance are also typical of complementary school. When the class combined to sing the whole song, Zainab asked for a leader from each group, prompting them and supporting their singing when needed.

At the end of the lesson, pupils remembered the keywords and, with help from the children and adults who spoke Somali, managed to understand the complete text. The combined strategies led to a highly effective lesson in which children actively participated in learning new language and negotiating meaning. Working bilingually, and switching roles between teachers and students, maximised the group's learning resources. Co-teaching was conducted seamlessly and with mutual understanding. James recognised the value of complementary teachers having different strategies that could add to mainstream teaching when he said: 'it isn't what you do, and that's why it's good for you to see it.'

Conclusion
This study demonstrates that an equal exchange of strategies between complementary and mainstream teachers can add an extra dimension to teaching and learning in multilingual contexts. It is not a simple matter of mainstream skills being exchanged for cultural knowledge from teachers based in the community. These teachers had also developed approaches well adapted to their students' needs, often involving a mutual exchange of linguistic knowledge between child and teacher, whilst also maintaining respect for authority within the classroom. The 'child-as-teacher' strategy enabled pupils to develop and consolidate learning by leading small groups or the whole class. As well as encouraging individual pupils, complementary teachers emphasised the success of the group as a learning community, presenting a contrast to the target-driven assessment that focuses on 'levels' for each child in many mainstream education systems. Finally, complementary teachers treated children as bilingual or multilingual learners, building on their knowledge in other languages alongside English. The project showed that these strategies could be adapted for use in mainstream classrooms, enabling children to draw on the full range of their multilingual resources for learning.

The very attributes of complementary teachers which have been seen in a negative light – their bilingualism in minority languages and their location in the informal learning sector – should therefore be re-interpreted as strengths that make an important contribution to children's learning. Teachers in our project combined understanding of children's linguistic and cultural background with innovative pedagogical approaches based in home and community learning. Rather than being doubly devalued, as is so often the case, we would argue that complementary teachers' knowledge should be 'doubly valued' and respected by mainstream educators.

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