

## **ESRC Seminar Series: Complementary Schools: Research, Policy and Practice University of East London, Goldsmiths and King's College London**

### **Seminar 1 (March 12 2009): University of East London**

#### ***Multiculturalism and Multilingualism***

Focusing on: the role of complementary schools in a multicultural and multilingual Britain, in developing social cohesion and community relations, and in the construction of social identities of children and their families from immigrant and minority ethnic backgrounds; the role of immigrant and minority languages in education.

This report covers findings on the above themes from sessions on:

#### **Tapping multilingualism as a resource: What we are learning about 'heritage'**

**community language education** Terry Wiley, Arizona State University with responses from Sarah Cartwright, CILT, Jani Rashid, Education Bradford

**Schools and Community Cohesion** Sheila McCreary, Community Cohesion Unit, DCSF with response from Jean Conteh, University of Leeds

**Complementary school experiences** Jaffar Jama, UEL/Somali Families and Children Support Centre, Luljeta Nuzi, Shpresa Albanian Programme, Sajanben Odedra and Arvind Bhatt, Jalaram Bal Vikas, Leicester

### **Complementary schools, identity construction, social cohesion and community relations**

#### ***Complementary schools provide an important social, cultural and educational network for minority communities***

For newly-arrived families, complementary schools are a source of support and guidance. Examples were given from the US and the UK, such as the Shpresa Albanian project in London, which advises parents on the English school system, trains them on issues including child protection and anti-racism, and encourages them to go into volunteering and adult education. In Camden, north London, new arrivals are referred to Shpresa for this support. 'Shpresa' means 'hope', and the programme aims to help parents and children 'integrate with dignity'.

Complementary schools have also become key for second and third generation communities. The first generation often experienced assimilation, being told that maintaining their languages would interfere with the acquisition of English. They then realised that loss of the community language meant their children were also losing their cultural identities and self-esteem. An example was given of Somali children who avoided talking to the older generation because of insufficient knowledge of Somali. Somali classes proved very important to these children to help them recover their identity, culture and sense of belonging. Parents who missed out on literacy skills can study at complementary school too – at a Gujarati school in Leicester, the oldest student taking GCSE in Gujarati was 63.

#### ***Children need to know who they are and respect themselves in order to integrate***

This was a view strongly expressed by practitioners at the seminar. Many second and third generation children want to be seen as bilingual but there is often no social space for this at

mainstream school. Complementary schools provide a 'safe space' for the construction of multilingual and multicultural identities. Aspects of complementary schooling that aid this include:

- A holistic approach to learning
- Study of history and culture
- Cultural activities such as dance
- Bilingual teaching through community languages and English
- Community language enabling communication with parents/grandparents
- Learning cultural appropriacy
- Role models for children and young people

### ***Complementary schools can encourage intercultural understanding***

Complementary schools give students self-confidence and this encourages them to respect others. The headteacher of a Gujarati school commented that 'we want them to keep our language and culture alive but we want them to value other languages and cultures as well'. This is an important agenda for the complementary sector, making sure that different cultures are discussed alongside the maintenance of the community's language and history. In some cases, hierarchies between different languages (such as Sylheti and Standard Bengali) also need to be addressed.

The ESRC seminar demonstrated the importance of complementary schools sharing experiences and ideas with each other. Teachers can visit each other's schools and observe each other's teaching – for example, a Somali teacher will learn from visiting a Russian teacher and vice versa. Some LEAs have a forum for community schools to share practice. Research projects also enable practitioners from different language backgrounds to meet.

Interaction between complementary schools and the mainstream sector can also help integration through the appreciation of different cultures. The DCSF community cohesion agenda recognised this and encouraged initiatives to create 'empowered, cohesive and active communities' such as:

- the School Linking Network for mainstream/complementary schools
- citizenship lessons piloted in madrassahs and taught in mainstream as well
- themed subject days in which the whole school visits a community site such as local places of worship
- mainstream schools working with complementary schools through Extended Schools eg a Sports College working with local madrassahs
- putting information about activities/projects on the DCSF Community Cohesion website

Schools need to realise that such initiatives will help with their Ofsted results.

### **Role of minority languages in education**

#### ***Children's languages are still not being widely recognised in mainstream schools***

Many children lose their languages quickly once they enter pre-school, due to lack of support and value for languages other than English. A teaching assistant who is also a complementary school teacher gave the example of speaking in Somali to children in mainstream school, but finding they replied in English because they were embarrassed to speak Somali in front of peers.

The struggle for legitimacy of minority languages also continues to take place in the US. There are now laws against bilingual education in many states. Bilingual education encountered difficulties partly because it was designed as transitional only, and parents were not always enthusiastic since they had been ostracised for speaking their language and did not feel it was sufficiently valued. Languages such as Tagalog from the Philippines are numerically important in the US but ignored with regard to language teaching due to the colonial past.

Campaigns have been set up for the recognition of minority languages in examinations (GCSE in Albanian in the UK) and for the provision of language teaching (a student demonstration resulted in Khmer being taught in the University of Arizona, after a census question had been inserted in a student questionnaire and revealed large numbers of Khmer speakers).

***Positive links can be made between mainstream and complementary schools***

Students at a Gujarati school in Leicester take their achievements, such as certificates and badges, to show in mainstream assemblies. Class teachers from mainstream school come to the complementary school when festivals are being celebrated.

Shpresa Albanian programme began with a cultural show at a Newham primary school. This led to setting up Albanian language classes in school, open to all children, and Albanian children began to do well in the mainstream. The programme has now spread to seven schools in Newham.

***Bilingual staff are a resource in both mainstream and complementary sectors***

Staff in mainstream schools are often also working in complementary schools, but this goes unrecognised. Bilingual teachers and teaching assistants should be encouraged to use their linguistic and cultural skills in mainstream school, whether for language teaching or in other parts of the curriculum. New staff can be found through contacts with complementary schools; for example, a Bengali teacher was offered a placement as a senior teaching assistant which proved very successful. Complementary school teachers have many skills, including the experience of teaching students at different levels in the same class. This knowledge could be applied to mainstream language teaching, where classes may also contain students who are from that language background alongside beginner learners.

***New initiatives are being set up in teacher education regarding community languages***

The TDA World Languages initiative is looking at ways of increasing mentoring support. For example, a maths teacher who speaks Turkish could also be a mentor for an ITE student training to teach Turkish. Complementary schools need to be recognised as placements by Ofsted. Apparently Ofsted is keen to pursue this route but training institutions are not always aware that this is the case – there is a perception that ‘Ofsted wouldn’t like it’. ITE students also need to visit complementary schools to learn about their importance. Some positive links are being set up, such as visits by ITE students from the Institute of Education to a Bengali school in London. Another example was students in the US visiting Navajo schools and sharing ideas at the end of the day. Professional development should also provide opportunities for teachers to meet across sectors; an example was given of a seminar at York University where complementary teachers worked with mainstream teachers of French and Spanish. Recognition of teacher qualifications from other countries remains an important issue – in the US there has been a move to gain recognition for Mexican teachers in order to increase the supply of Spanish teaching in schools.

## **Implications of seminar findings**

### **For higher education**

Make opportunities in higher education to study community languages alongside a degree, for students who have missed the opportunity to study at complementary school or who wish to develop their languages further. This happens in the UK (at SOAS for example) and the US (at University of Arizona).

Enable higher education students to become researchers in language communities (as happens in Arizona)

### **For teacher education and development**

Support and continue the World Languages initiative

Tap into staff skills – recognise the potential of staff who already work in both mainstream and complementary sectors and can link the two, seek staff from complementary schools to also work in mainstream

### **For mainstream schools**

Recognise other languages so children feel proud of them and can use them for learning

Include complementary schools as sites to visit when studying the history and culture of the local community

Use new secondary curriculum for community-wide learning

### **For complementary schools**

Government needs to recognise the contribution of complementary schools to community cohesion and educational achievement, and invest in the sector (for example, teachers in a Gujarati school in Leicester worked for an entire year without any funding – yet their school caters for SEN children and offers homework support)

Funding streams should not be directed to one type of group (as with Prevention of Violent Extremism funding which tends to focus on madrassahs) since this singles out that group and divides them from others

The particular and different contribution of complementary schools needs to be understood – as an independent ‘safe space’ which doesn’t replicate the mainstream but gives children other possibilities for development. Schools will have diverse aims due to their specific histories and circumstances.

Children who may not have a community language also need this kind of support – for example, British African-Caribbean children and white working-class children. Joint activities could be set up between complementary schools and other groups in the local community.