

**Developing bilingual pedagogies through partnership between
supplementary and mainstream schools**

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A child helps his primary school teacher introduce Somali vocabulary to Year 6 classmates

Introduction

The first year of the project has been very successful. Excellent partnerships have been developed between primary and community school teachers, who have worked together closely, sharing their respective skills. Both sets of teachers have learned much from each other about different teaching approaches. In addition, community teachers have benefited from access to knowledge and resources available in the mainstream, whilst primary teachers have broadened their understanding of children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The overall outcome is that teachers in both sectors now know more about 'the whole child', through building up a fuller picture of their pupils' learning experiences in each educational context. The primary and community schools involved are on track to continue their partnerships next year. The second part of the project will also involve dissemination, and we have collected a substantial amount of material on which to base resource development and teacher training.

Participants

Two Tower Hamlets primary schools (Smithy Street Primary School and Hermitage Primary School) have participated in the project. Five community schools have participated so far (Stifford Centre Bengali classes, Wadajir Somali Community Group, Darul Ummah Bengali classes, Svetlyacok Russian School and Smithy Street after-school Bengali class). Wapping Bangladesh Association (Bengali classes) will join the project next year. The community schools thus represent the major languages in Tower Hamlets (Bengali and Somali), together with one of the smaller language groups spread throughout the borough (Russian).

Nine primary teachers and nine community teachers have participated in the partnerships so far. The three other partnerships planned could not be put into place this year (reasons included teachers' maternity leave, sickness and family illness), so they are planned for the autumn term. However, additional participants were involved during this year. In one primary school, a Year 5 teacher involved her colleague who taught the parallel Year 5 group, and several bilingual assistants also joined in the work. A Somali parent with previous language teaching experience became involved as assistant teacher in one of the Somali classes. Children in primary school year groups from nursery to Year 6 took part in the bilingual lessons. Community school classes (mostly mixed age) also covered this age range.

Lessons taught

The following eleven sets of lessons were jointly planned by the teacher partnerships and taught in ways adapted to each setting. Some partnerships embarked upon more than one topic. Each topic typically involved at least two lessons (in some cases as many as five) taught by each teacher partner. In community classes, lessons were taught bilingually in mother tongue and English. In primary school, children were encouraged to use their different mother tongues as well as English.

Bilingual poetry

Children studied the traditional Bengali poem 'Kajla Didi' (in three versions – Bengali script, Bengali transliterated into English script, and English translation) about a girl whose sister has gone missing, and wrote questions to take home to parents and grandparents. They brought back answers and additional poems in other languages. After comparing 'Kajla Didi' to the English poem 'What Happened to Lulu?' by Charles Causley, which also involves a missing sister, the children wrote poems of their own on the theme of loss.

Somali song

Children learned keywords from a traditional Somali song on the importance of school, using drama to support their understanding. They then learnt to perform the entire song, studied the English translation, and took questions home to parents to fully investigate the meaning.

Animals/ Noah's Ark

Children took pictures of animals home to request vocabulary in different languages from parents, and listened to the Noah's Ark story in English and Bengali. The nursery class in primary school used a large cardboard ark constructed by their teacher to roleplay the animals going into the ark, naming them in different languages. In the Bengali community class, children wrote the story in their own words at home.

Jobs in different countries

Children examined photos of people working in different settings in Bangladesh to establish which jobs were similar or different to those carried out in England. They generated vocabulary in Bengali and English for job titles and shared typical experiences from their own visits to Bangladesh of which the photos reminded them, such as riding in rickshaws instead of cars or buses.

The Gingerbread Man

Children first heard the story in English, followed by seeing a Russian version on the interactive whiteboard or laptop. They learned the rhyme that was central to the story, in Russian as well as English. The primary school class performed the rhyme in Russian outside in the playground, whilst in Russian class children picked out words they recognised and used phonics to sound these out and write them on the board.

Memories of school

Children studied excerpts from 'When I Lived in Somalia', a book in which Tower Hamlets primary school pupils interviewed their parents. They devised their own questions about memories of school, which they practised in class with an interview panel of parents and bilingual assistants, before translating their questions into mother tongue to ask parents and grandparents at home. In primary school, where the work was part of a topic on transition from primary to secondary school, Year 6 children devised powerpoint presentations for a whole school assembly on their findings.

The Old Woman and the Pumpkin

Children studied this traditional story in English and Bengali. They established the sequencing of the story, acted out episodes in both languages, and used wordsearches in Bengali and English to consolidate vocabulary learning. Children in primary school

with other languages read dual language storybooks to the class in Turkish and Somali.

Somali bread-making

The Somali class teacher brought 'laxoox' bread and meat and vegetable accompaniments to the Somali class to share with parents and children. Families then learnt and wrote Somali and English words around food, and talked about how bread was made. In primary school, a Somali parent came into the nursery class to make 'laxoox' bread with children. The nursery teacher then conducted a shared writing session, supported by the Somali teacher, to create a bilingual book using photos of the bread-making activity.

The Pied Piper

Children read the story in English and compared it to a dual language Bengali version. They took key vocabulary items home to parents to find out equivalents in other languages. In Bengali class, they used the game of word bingo to practise writing the words in Bengali script. After re-enacting an episode from the story, primary children wrote a playscript in English and other languages, and children in community class wrote their own version of the entire story.

Fruit and vegetables and gardening

Children in the Somali after-school class at one of the primary schools sorted fruit and vegetables into those grown in Somalia and in England. Older children used a Venn diagram to represent these differences and overlaps, whilst younger children drew the items and named them in both languages. Year 1 children in the same primary school brought a fruit or vegetable from home to school, with an information sheet filled in by parents in different languages, and did observational drawings. Meanwhile, the Bengali after-school class worked in the school's ICT suite, using a Bengali font to create restaurant menus of their favourite Bangladeshi food. Families from the Somali and Bengali after-school classes came together with children and parents from the Year 1 class for a joint gardening session, in which they planted vegetables together and talked about the activity in Somali, Bengali and English.

Bangladesh topic

As part of an International Primary Curriculum topic on Bangladesh in primary school, children were introduced to different items of clothing from Bangladesh and matched the Bengali vocabulary to English words. They talked about why the clothing was adapted to the climate in Bangladesh, dressed up in the clothing and found out how to wear each item appropriately. They then learned a traditional song about sunshine and rain in Bengali and devised a dance performance to accompany their singing.

Teacher development

All nine of the community school teachers involved in the project so far have developed their teaching skills through observing and taking on strategies used in primary school. Each partnership was organised so that community teachers could see their partner teacher at work, and then discuss the methods they used, such as groupwork, drama, shared writing, storyreading, games or project work. Such

methods were then incorporated into the community teacher's lessons via shared planning with the primary teacher. For example, a nursery teacher who had observed her partner teacher's multi-age Somali class suggested activities suitable for the younger children (hands-on, with objects they could handle, and involving games) and lent resources from the primary school for the lesson. This advice proved successful, and the Somali teacher then planned another lesson on 'colours' in which children began by identifying colours of the clothing they were wearing. Teachers from the Russian school were introduced by their primary teacher partner to the learning of stories through drama. Having successfully worked on the 'Gingerbread Man' story, they went on to use a similar approach with 'Red Riding Hood'. Community teachers also shared strategies with each other; the more experienced Bengali after-school teacher ran a joint session on gardening with the Somali after-school teacher, modelling the teaching of vocabulary in context. Community teachers were given support to fill in lesson plan templates used in primary school, which for some teachers was the first time they had used categories such as 'learning intention' and 'differentiation'.

Meanwhile, all nine of the primary teachers gained a great deal from their community teacher partners, both in understanding the significance of community schools in children's learning and in finding out how to draw on children's languages in their mainstream teaching. None of the primary teachers had visited a community class prior to the project. They were curious as to what might take place there and were aware that there was potential for linking together children's mainstream and community experiences. For example, one said:

'what happens to the children outside mainstream school is very separate and we don't really get to see that other part of the child...I think they see that side of life as much more part of their family and community'

She hoped that the project *'will give me a bit more of that whole picture of the children, because there's always that little bit that's missing'*.

Through being involved in the project, all the primary teachers commented that they had gained a deeper understanding of the children they taught, mentioning aspects such as the importance of learning mother tongue, children's cultural knowledge and links with family heritage, and children's bilingual identities. One teacher summed this up by saying:

'It's about the whole child really for me...just by having contact with their community schools I feel I can understand a bit more about their learning in a broader context – they've got skills we don't always use in class and doing the poetry work has given us the chance to use some of those skills...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, it just felt very positive to see them'.

All the primary teachers developed strategies for introducing children's home languages into their primary school learning, after observing their community partners working bilingually in the community class setting. Strategies included children comparing vocabulary in different languages, writing questions to interview parents in mother tongue, producing bilingual posters and powerpoint presentations, writing stories and poetry bilingually and performing bilingual roleplays. Several teachers commented that such approaches could easily be incorporated into new topic-based primary curricula, such as the International Primary Curriculum.

Since community teachers typically have multi-age, multi-level classes, they tend to devise novel teaching approaches to meet this challenge. Primary teachers benefited from seeing these strategies, such as ‘the child as teacher’, in which children take it in turns to teach the whole class or lead a group. In some instances, teacher partners co-taught in the mainstream or community setting. For example, two Somali teachers helped a primary teacher to teach a Somali song to a Year 6 class. The three teachers worked together as equals, switching between community class strategies such as group recitation or ‘child as teacher’, and mainstream strategies such as learning vocabulary through drama. The result was a highly effective lesson in which the whole class was able to perform and understand the Somali song, even though Somali was the language of only two of the pupils.

Parents and grandparents were involved in the project work in a number of ways in both community and primary classes: helping children with homework which had been designed bilingually, coming into class to be interviewed on a topic or demonstrate a particular skill, or supporting children’s learning during the class by supplying words and phrases in the home language. Primary teachers were particularly motivated to take steps to link with families after being struck by the greater involvement of parents that they observed in community classes. The new links paid off in terms of learning; for example, one primary teacher was impressed that almost every child in her class managed to discuss a Bengali poem with family members overnight, compared to the usual lower response when homework was set. In both settings, family involvement brought children, parents and teachers closer and gave an additional dimension of cultural knowledge to the learning. As one community teacher put it: *‘when the parents are able to do so, sharing with the homework for different ideas, sharing, to learn more better, it’s a little guide from the home, I think it’s wonderful’*.

Two partnerships who had accomplished their joint work in the autumn term 2008 had the opportunity to present it to a large audience at the Tower Hamlets Annual Languages Celebration in February 2009. Children from Stifford Centre and Smithy Street Primary School presented bilingual poetry, whilst children from Wadajir Somali Community group and Smithy Street performed a Somali song. This was the first time the Annual Celebration had included joint presentations from primary and community schools, and Stifford Centre and Wadajir Somali Community received partnership awards for this work from Tower Hamlets. The Somali group’s performance with Smithy Street was also shown on Somali satellite TV and widely viewed in the local Somali community.

Children’s learning

We collected data on children’s learning through videorecording of lessons, teacher assessment, interviews with teachers and children’s learning records. These multiple sources of evidence demonstrated that all the children involved in the project were actively engaged in the activities and produced work showing advancement in their learning. In addition, we conducted case studies of 36 children from both mainstream and community classes.

The children's learning of concepts, vocabulary and knowledge about language is evidenced in detail in the lesson descriptions above. Here we will comment on some examples of individual children's responses to the project:

- A child in Bengali class not yet proficient in Bengali script, who benefited from her teacher making a Bengali poem available in transliteration and English translation as well as Bengali script. By using all three versions to work out the meaning of the poem, she felt she had improved her learning.
- A Somali child initially embarrassed about his language being introduced into his primary school, who rapidly gained confidence as he became involved in helping his primary teacher present Somali vocabulary to his classmates.
- A Turkish child with little literacy in English, who surprised his primary teacher by reading out a story in Turkish from a dual language book, thus demonstrating his firm foundation in literacy skills in Turkish.
- Children from non-Bengali speaking backgrounds who were the first to match up Bengali and English words on the interactive whiteboard in their primary class, and engaged with great enjoyment in dressing up in traditional Bangladeshi clothing.
- A Somali child whose discussion with family members at home enabled her to clarify the meaning of metaphors in a song studied in Somali class, such as 'I am the flower of my country', which she explained in English as follows: *'The student says this because she is the hope for her country and her family. Being a student she knows she can gain skills to benefit her country.'*
- The Russian-speaking child, initially inattentive in primary school and shy in community school, who became confident and focused in both settings when he saw his primary and community teachers visiting each other and when he helped his primary school classmates perform roleplays in Russian. His community teacher commented: *'He has changed now that I've seen him in his English school...Now he helps me in Russian school and tells me stories of what he did in the week...He really enjoys learning Russian and thinks it is something "cool"'*.

School partnerships

Smithy Street Primary School

(partnership with Stifford Centre Bengali classes, Wadajir Somali Community and Smithy Street after-school Bengali class)

The project was launched in 8 October 2008 at a special after-school event for children, parents, and primary and community teachers, with speakers from Tower Hamlets, Goldsmiths and CILT (the National Centre for Languages). The Somali parents present immediately requested an after-school Somali class at Smithy Street (similar to the class already existing for Bengali), which was set up later in the year with the school giving premises rent-free, funded by Tower Hamlets Languages Service.

After a successful year's work as described above, a meeting was held on June 18 2009 to which all partners were invited, to discuss future ways of working in partnership. The following events and activities are planned:

- World Languages Day, September 26 2009 – to include presentations of work from the project and a joint celebration with community classes and families

- Panel discussion with parents on bringing up children bilingually, including a Goldsmiths representative on the research evidence and a speech and language therapist on supporting bilingual children with special educational needs, and community class representatives. Followed by an intercultural poetry event to promote community cohesion.
- Primary teachers to draw up list of children attending community classes at start of year and encourage children to bring mother tongue work to show in school.
- Primary teachers to plan a languages angle to International Primary Curriculum topics taught over next academic year, and to link with community teachers so that these topics can be delivered in community as well as mainstream settings.
- Community teachers to be invited to relevant INSET sessions at primary school, starting with day on International Primary Curriculum on July 13 2009.
- Sharing of resources, eg community classes to be invited to use primary school ICT suite.

Hermitage Primary School

(partnership with Darul Ummah Bengali classes and Svetlyacok Russian School)

The project was launched at a Languages Day at the school on 26 September 2008, where each class gave a performance of a song, poetry or dance in one of the home languages of the school's pupils. Community class teachers attended, together with representatives from Goldsmiths and Tower Hamlets.

Work on the project has gone well at Hermitage, as described above. The research has been found successful in sharing teaching approaches between mainstream and community, bringing children's languages into the primary curriculum and enabling children who are in a minority in the school (eg Russian speakers) to gain additional confidence as learners. Partnerships with the above community schools will continue next year, and an additional partnership will be set up with Wapping Bangladesh Association.

Specific future partnership plans have not yet been made because the school will have a new headteacher in September 2009, and she will obviously need to take the lead. Zoe Howe, the new head, is very interested in the project and attended the June 2009 Advisory Group meeting, where she was able to gain a clear picture of the research findings so far. Goldsmiths will be liaising with Zoe in the autumn term to take the project further.

Advisory Group

The Advisory Group has met once a term as planned. It has 20 members, including representatives from Tower Hamlets Council and Children's Services, Goldsmiths, the primary and community schools involved, parents from Bengali, Somali and Russian schools, a neighbouring LEA (Southwark), another university (University of East London), and national organisations (CILT – the National Centre for Languages, ALL – the Association for Language Learning, National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education, and NALDIC – the professional association for teachers of English as an Additional Language). In the autumn term 2008, initial findings from the research were presented, and Advisory Group members commented on how the

project complemented other local and national initiatives on community schools and bilingual learning. In spring 2008 the focus was on community/mainstream partnerships in Tower Hamlets and beyond. The summer 2008 meeting discussed effective approaches to bilingual learning highlighted by the research.

Conference presentations

Findings have been presented at:

‘Valuing Our Languages’ seminar for DCSF-funded Our Languages Project, CILT, January 22 2009

‘Languages of the Wider World’, SOAS, April 16-17 2009

ESRC seminar on Complementary Schools, King’s College London, June 16 2009

‘Making Multilingualism Meaningful’, London Metropolitan University, June 19-20 2009

‘International Symposium on Bilingualism 7’, Utrecht University, July 8-11 2009