

Wanted! Bilingual and Bicultural Leaders to Run Brave New Schools

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It is an established research finding (e.g. Hopkins et al., 1994) that leadership through heads or principals is a very important contributing factor in creating a school's ethos identity and ultimately its success or failure as an institution.

Administrators who are rigidly monolingual and monocultural in outlook are not the most suitable leaders to have in an international context and, as our world is becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural, there is little place for such people in national education systems either. Let me explain what I mean by "rigidly monolingual and monocultural."

There are leaders who firmly believe that their own language and culture are better and more important than those of others. There are also those leaders who may have given little serious thought to this idea. They have simply grown up with the assumption that their language is the only language of consequence. As a result, they behave as if it is a universally accepted fact that their western culture and language is somehow better: theirs is the language of power and prestige and therefore everybody should be striving to learn it. Often these leaders also feel that the learning of another language is irrelevant to their personal growth: they see no point in it. Rigidly monolingual leaders may have good intentions to help ESL students but often they are uninformed or misinformed and the policies and practices that they introduce can be detrimental for second language children.

It is not necessary to be a polyglot to be a successful international school leader. It is essential, however, that leaders are interested in other languages and cultures, and value them as much as they value their own. It is also important that administrators strive to learn the host country language of the school they are working in. This would seem not only common sense but also a common courtesy. Unfortunately, rigidly monolingual administrators often do not take the time to do this. Learning a new language can be both a humbling and, at the same time, an extremely rewarding experience. Those leaders and teachers who themselves are acquiring a new language whilst working with children whose first language is different from that of the curriculum, will have a far greater empathy with their students. Learning a new language will also help them develop a critical awareness of their own language and culture. They will better understand the complexities of language learning and realize fully just how long this takes.

Schools are first and foremost communities of learners where members learn together and learn from each other. Where there is an international population there should also be an international curriculum and international educators who share the common goal of developing their students' multilingual talents.

Monolingualism and monoculturalism is not the goal of international education yet it would appear that in some schools it is part of the hidden agenda. In other schools, which claim to be international, they overtly promote such goals. Politics is never far from the surface in educational decision making. Schools who promote learning through the majority language only¹ (i.e. English, which is the majority language in a large number of International Schools) may have bought into the political ideal of assimilation, the process by which members of a language group lose their own language and culture which are replaced by a different language and culture. By applying the principle of assimilation these schools hope to promote social unity.

Politics in Education

International School administrators who introduce majority language only policies may have taken the political stance of assimilation at the expense of the political idea of the rights of the individual. The chances are that people who make such decisions will be rigidly monolingual and thus unable to have a pluralistic outlook regarding the teaching and learning of languages. As the learning of other languages is fundamental in international education, it goes without saying that there should be no place for an individual who “can’t learn languages” or who is “not interested in learning other languages”. This sort of person simply does not belong and does not have the mindset necessary to work in a school where awareness of language is all-important (Gallagher, 2005). International parents and students will have difficulty relating to people who think along these lines. Fortunately, as the oft-quoted phrase suggests, monolingualism is curable! Learning in one *lingua franca* is not enough anymore. International education has a duty to promote the human rights of all languages and the maintenance of all cultures.

Teachers and administrators should be aware of how politics can affect education and be above those politics, especially when political notions hinder good practice. (For a fuller discussion on this see Gallagher 2008).

Human Relations at the heart of all schooling

Cummins (2004) says that “human relations are at the heart of all schooling.” We know from our own schooling experiences that if a teacher believed in us we did better than if we felt he or she didn’t care for us or think us very capable. This also applies to educators and administrators. If the administration does not believe in its teachers then the teachers may not perform well in the classroom. Creating a caring and secure environment for teachers and for students is essential if they are to open their minds. Hostility of any kind only hinders learning. A collaborative ethos must be all-pervasive and must be led by

¹ In this paper, majority language means a high status language. Majority refers to the status and power of a language group rather than its numerical size.

administrators who are authoritative (and by this I mean informed about language acquisition and learning) rather than authoritarian.

What is effective leadership? Recently I attended a symphony performed by the Santa Cecilia orchestra of Rome and conducted by the composer and academy award winner Howard Shore. Now I am aware that this is a much used analogy for school leaders, but as I observed Howard Shore lead the orchestra with his heart and with great passion, totally involved and engaged with every single musician, I couldn't help but feel this is the sort of leadership we need in education. His musical score, his inspiration, his clear ideas were the equivalent of a cohesive educational plan and vision. He was visible to every one of his players: listening, involved and understanding their differences, just as an effective Head of School should be visiting classrooms, talking and listening to teachers, parents and students. Leading a great orchestra is something you cannot do on your own, nor is leading a great school. Leading an orchestra, just like leading a school, is a collaborative effort. A good school leader will recruit teachers who share the school's vision on education and who are knowledgeable about language acquisition and language learning, just as a conductor will expect to work with skilled musicians who are passionate about their music. Effective administrators will involve their teachers in the decision making process using their specialist knowledge just as conductors depend heavily on their musicians' expert knowledge. Conductors also establish trustworthy relationships with musicians instead of micro-managing them. The conductor shares the glory of the standing ovation with his colleagues realizing that without them harmonious music would not be possible. Effective school leaders delegate and appreciate the work done by their staff. Passion, Knowledge, Skill, Vision, Visibility, Collaboration, Sharing and Caring are all necessary in the quest for harmony in schools. There is no place for mediocrity in the orchestra and so it should be in schools too. Just as the conductor is of no worth without his orchestra, an effective school needs a shared vision, shared responsibility and an overriding collaborative ethos.

Qualities for an Effective International School Leadership Team:

- Experienced International School Teachers and Administrators;
- Passionate about Education;
- Have a working knowledge of at least one other language;
- Interested in language learning;
- Have a strong educational vision that suits the needs of all learners, including those whose first language is different from that of the curriculum;
- Have a pedagogical approach that is open to other cultures;
- Have a positive attitude towards bilingualism and biculturalism;
- Informed on first and second language acquisition;
- Able to oversee school-wide collaborative planning and school-wide continuity of learning;

- Collaborative in approach;
- Able to motivate and inspire teachers and students;
- Open to dialogue;
- Able to build community;
- Able to foster good staff morale;
- Able to communicate effectively with parents;
- Authoritative rather than authoritarian;
- Tolerant;
- Transparent;
- Honest.

The importance of administrators having open minds cannot be over stressed. Today's schools need educators who are open to new ideas, to other cultures and to other languages. Respect for diversity must be more than the rhetoric of school mission statements and policies. It must be the driving force behind everything that takes place within a school. The bullet points listed above can be turned into questions that administrative teams should ask themselves during periodic self-study and evaluation sessions. When it is obvious that the administrative team does not meet the listed criteria, then critical reflection and improvement plans are necessary. Effective administrators are not bureaucrats; they are educators who recognize the importance of placing human relations at the heart of schooling.

Oppressive School Practices

Second language speakers of English now outnumber those who have English as their first language, 431 million to 329 million (Crystal, 2003). English is the lingua franca of our globalized society and educators and parents need to be aware of the negative potential of neoimperialistic curricula, pedagogies and oppressive school practices. Parents of children whose language is different from that of the curriculum need to be involved in decision making processes. Parents can form one of the most important decision making groups within a school. If there are no ESL parents involved then the right decisions may not be made about how ESL is considered. One example is the practice in many International Schools of charging parents for ESL lessons over and above tuition fees. When this happens it implies that such lessons are outside what the school considers to be normal. A school that classifies itself as "International" cannot consider ESL children as being outside the norm. Another example of a common, yet inappropriate, policy for ESL learners is the English-only rule that exists in some schools. In these schools a decision has been made that the only language to be spoken in the classrooms and sometimes even in the playground is English. There are even schools that suggest to parents that they stop speaking their home language with their children so that they will learn English more quickly. Informed educators know that this is nonsense but often the policy has been introduced by a well-intentioned but very misinformed administrator who believes that by insisting on English they are

keeping standards high and helping children achieve more. These kinds of policy are often introduced by administrators who have no background in international education or second language acquisition and who want to do everything the way it was done in their previous school. It is often the case that they have come from schools having a largely monolingual student and teacher population.

Education needs to adapt to our Multilingual Multicultural World

The world is changing. It is fast becoming multilingual and multicultural and our teacher training colleges need to adapt in order to be well prepared for the challenge of a global community. As it stands at present many newly qualified teachers do not know how to deal with second language learners. They learn on the job – if they choose to do so. They may be presented with a curriculum that does not suit the needs of second language learners. The administrators and policy makers who develop such curricula were trained to work only with monolingual children. One system reinforces and perpetuates the other. Schools in every part of our globe are becoming international through necessity as they awaken to the reality of having to deal with culturally diverse children 1 2 and we owe it to these children to educate administrators, policy makers, teacher trainers and teachers so they can provide for all children growing up in a multicultural society.

Hegemony of the English Language

We must also educate and inform parents who are directly affected by the hegemony of the English language. We have the ethical responsibility to create schools where multilingualism and multiculturalism are not simply respected but promoted and where authoritarian leaders who demand conformity to past traditions of linguistic culture and privilege are replaced by those who hold a pedagogical approach that is inclusive and open to all other cultures.

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References

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Gallagher, E. (2005) *Comment*, ECIS International Schools Magazine 8 (1) 3-4. Saxmundham: Peridot Press, a division of John Catt Educational Ltd.

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Weaving Other Languages and Cultures into the Curriculum in International Primary Schools

Eithne Gallagher

Introduction

English is the medium of instruction in the vast majority of International Schools but the student population of these schools is largely made up of children whose L1 is other than English. However, the fact that International Schools serve an international population does not mean that these schools follow an international curriculum or employ international educators who are committed to educating students in ways that make use of children's multilingual talents. In many International Schools this is simply not the case. Children are often discouraged from using their L1 within the school.

The children in International Schools are privileged in many ways. They come from affluent families; their parents are often professional people who have high expectations for their children. The schools they attend are often situated in beautiful locations and are aesthetically very pleasant places to be. They are generally over-packed with resources and have abundant libraries, spilling over with books in the English language.

Some children, especially those whose parents are part of the global, mobile workforce, move and encounter a new language every few years. These "global elites" can arrive as young as 3 years old in our Early Childhood classrooms. You can imagine their bewildered state as they learn nursery rhymes and listen to stories in a strange tongue; especially (as is often the case) when they find themselves with a group of children who speak the same home language as they do but are not allowed or encouraged to use it. What message are we giving children when this happens?

In recent years, an increasing number of educators in International Schools have been attempting to articulate and implement a new plurilingual understanding of what the "international" in International Schools should represent (see Gallagher 2008 for an outline of these ideas). We have argued that students and teachers alike should begin to consider their classes as *interlingual*, where the *inter* stands for international-mindedness, that is, the notion that everyone should be open and responsive to learning about other languages. In interlingual classrooms teachers encourage children to make use of all their languages to help them become aware of the differences and similarities of languages. There is normally one language of instruction but all the languages in the classroom can be used to help children access it. This does not mean that the teacher needs to be a polyglot, but she does need to have a mindset that is open to other languages and cultures, and to be interested in learning from both her students and their families. This opportunity and mindset would of course also be passed on to those children in the class who speak only English.

Many enlightened ESL teachers in International Schools have been teaching in ways that validate children's languages and cultures for a number of years. However, this perspective is not yet incorporated into most mainstream instructional contexts in International Schools. Identity text creation represents a powerful way of beginning this conversation between ESL and mainstream teachers about the value of children's home languages and cultures. The experience I describe below demonstrates how successful identity text creation can be in instilling linguistic pride in students within a mainstream classroom context.

Context

I teach children who are learning English in Marymount International School in Rome, Italy and the identity text project the class teacher and I implemented involved a class of 17 Grade 4 children from different language backgrounds. Only one child in the group was monolingual. Nine children considered Italian to be their strongest language. The other children came from Arabic, Amharic, Greek, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish and Russian backgrounds. The class teacher, Claudia De Rocchis, is a Canadian of Italian origin who, like me, speaks English, French and Italian. We had little knowledge of the other 15 languages used in this project but we learnt much from the children and their parents as we progressed.

Our school strives to instil in our children an awareness of the world as a global community and the part we can all play in making the world a better place. One of the local charities the school is involved with is The Peter Pan Association (<http://www.peterpanonlus.it/>), which helps children to become aware of the problems faced by families with children fighting to recover from cancer. The Association seeks to provide a link between the hospitalized child and the healthy child. To promote awareness of their work, they run an annual competition called The Peter Pan Project. The Grade 4 class had decided to take part in this and Claudia invited me to lead the class in some collaborative writing. The children were asked to write a story or poem for blind children based on the theme of 'Respect towards others who are different from us'. They chose to write a story.

Process

I began by discussing with the children the theme and how each child in the class was unique. Very quickly we found ourselves talking about language and cultural differences. We learned how to say 'respect' and 'accept' in all the languages of the class. We wanted the blind children to know how diverse our group was and so it was decided that we would write, collaboratively, a multilingual tale and make a CD of it in English and all the other languages so that the blind children would be able to listen to the story.

Next we decided on the genre for the story; it was to be a fairytale. We discovered that fairytales begin and end the same way in many languages so we made a multilingual poster of all the different scripts representing the notions of *Once upon a time...* and *They all lived happily ever after...* and we hung this centre stage in the classroom. Each child and teacher was given a Fairytale Planner where they had to write ideas under the headings of Good Characters, Bad Characters, The Problem, The Magic and The Happy Ending. They were free to write their ideas

in their L1 or in English. I then asked the children to give me all the names for the characters. I put them all on the flip chart and we voted to choose the ones we would use for the story. We then listened to each others' ideas for problems and magic and so-on and decided to get started with our story writing and make decisions about how we would proceed as we went along. The children had lots of opportunities for discussion and they were free to interact in their L1. The class teacher and I spoke in English but constantly asked questions like "How do you say such-and-such in Greek, Amharic, etc.?" The atmosphere was relaxed but respectful. No one felt excluded and everyone sensed they had something to offer. I elicited and scribed, changed and crossed out, added and discussed. Some of the children wrote on the flipchart words and phrases in their L1 when they had difficulty expressing their ideas in English. They later worked with the class teacher using the translation tools available in the Google and Babel Fish web sites and wrote the English above their L1 text. We added punctuation, edited and revised, and finally we were happy with our tale. Next we decided where the page breaks should be. Once the story was divided up each child had a page to illustrate and write their bit of the story in their L1 and in English. We invited the children to choose which part of the story they wanted to illustrate so that each child felt they had ownership.

Outcomes

Our project culminated with the production of a multilingual booklet protected by a clear plastic cover containing the dual language texts and illustrations the children had created. We also produced a PowerPoint presentation with integrated voiceover where the children themselves each read their individual pages. A CD copy of the book was also produced.

Other less tangible but nonetheless valid outcomes included various live presentations performed by the students for their grade peers, students visiting from other schools, and parents. The students were so enthusiastic and involved that they started a project to write a play based on their story.

The following illustrations show some of the pages from our book.



Impact

When we started to discuss languages we discovered that many of the children felt they were better readers and writers in English than they were in their L1, especially the children from non-Italian backgrounds who had been in International Education for most of their school lives.

The child who spoke Lebanese did not know how to read and write it (we discovered that her parents were having a difficult time getting her even to respond to them in Arabic). She was learning French with her father and that was the language she wanted to use. An Italian girl whose mother was teaching her Spanish decided she wanted to write her piece in Spanish. This prompted the Argentinean boy who is trilingual in Spanish, Portuguese and English to help her with Spanish. We were rather surprised as generally this child had been one of the more reserved and timid members of the group but evidently, in this context, he had the opportunity to shine as a linguistic expert and he was more than eager to do so. Another Italian girl wrote her text in German; her father was a fluent speaker of German and, whereas she had no knowledge of that language, she had a great desire to learn it.

I think it is interesting that some of the Italian children chose not to write in Italian. This perhaps shows that, since Italian is the majority language in the school, they felt more secure in their linguistic identity and therefore readier to grasp the opportunity to investigate other languages. It also demonstrates how this kind of exercise gives children a hunger to know more about other languages. The children who came from bilingual families (Italian and another language) chose the other language. All of the children needed help from their parents to write and to practice reading their texts. Several children, although fluent in their L1 (Arabic, Amharic and Russian), did not know how to read or write it well. The Italian children were competent readers and writers of Italian as they had been receiving formal instruction in school in Italian since first grade. The Greek child was also able to read and write Greek well. He had only been at the school for a year and his parents had been encouraged from day one to maintain his home language. The Korean child, who had grown up in Italy and is trilingual, chose to write in Korean; although a fluent speaker she too needed help from her parents. The monolingual American girl had been learning Italian in school for a couple of years. She did not like Italian and did not want to try and write her text in Italian. However, in talking with her, I discovered she wanted to learn Dutch. Her best friend came from Holland. She had been at the school but had returned to Amsterdam. I told her to e-mail her and ask her to translate the text. When this was done I found an older Dutch student to help the child with reading the text.

After the book had been created, the next phase involved turning the classroom into a recording studio. Before doing the final recording we invited other classes to come and listen to the tale and follow a PowerPoint presentation of the book. Our good and bad characters looked a little different on each page as each child had a different notion of what a fairy and a dragon looked like. Each and every child was proud of this book. I cannot tell you how many times children would stop me in the corridor to ask "When are you coming to work on our book?" The class teacher (Claudia) had the good idea of making copies of the CD and book to sell them to raise

money for our sister school in Zambia. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends of Grade 4 all over the globe received copies of our multilingual tale, *The Power of Friendship*.

In Claudia's words:

"The Power of Friendship promoted inquiry and respectful communication among the languages, cultures and religions within our classroom community. Working together as a group through the reading, writing and recording process, the 4th Graders were engaged and continuously interacting in different languages as they built trust, compromise and encouragement with each other. Their enthusiasm to share their own language and to learn other languages and their passion for wanting to make a difference in the life of other people was the key to such a creative and moving project which generated a positive and memorable learning atmosphere. This project made me realize how important encouraging children to think and use not only their own languages, but listening to other languages, is for building a better community and a better world."

I firmly believe that knowing another language helps people see the world differently. Our world needs to be seen and understood in a new way. Using identity texts in school helps create an awareness of other languages whilst at the same time strengthening the inner identity of the child that all too often goes unnoticed in International Schools where the main focus is on accelerating English language growth.

Reference

Gallagher, E (2008) *Equal Rights to the Curriculum: Many Languages, One Message*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters

Further reading

The Power of Friendship book can be viewed and heard at the following sites:

www.marymountrome.org

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fb68Ob9QQg4>

An outline of the pedagogical approach from the perspective of multilingual students can be viewed at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tFA0IPeSjU&feature=related>

This article will appear in:

Cummins, J. & Early, M. (Eds.) *Identity Texts: the collaborative creation of power in multilingual schools*: Trentham Books June 2011

This book shows how identity texts have been used as a central focus for effective and inspirational pedagogy in multilingual school contexts that is engaging students around the world.

The term identity texts was first used by the Canada-wide Multiliteracies Project to describe a variety of creative work by students, including collaborative inquiry, literary narratives, dramatic and multimodal performances, led by classroom teachers. Jim Cummins and Margaret Early describe their nature, the ways in which they relate to broader orientations to pedagogy and consider two pedagogical frameworks within which they have been integrated.

Identity Texts is essential reading for everyone concerned with developing appropriate pedagogy for schools and for all who work with multilingual children.