

## *The Glitterlings and Interlingual Classrooms:*

*Teaching and Learning through a Multilingual Lens in the Early Years*

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Building a better world for future generations is essential for the continued existence of humanity. Education can no longer simply reinforce conformity among homogeneous populations or promote homogeneity among diverse populations. We need a new educational paradigm. As Jim Cummins (2008) points out:

*‘Resolution of urgent ecological challenges and mediation of global conflicts require cooperation rather than competition, respect rather than disdain and the exercise of imaginative intellect rather than conventional thinking.’*

The building blocks for a better world must be seeded in Early Years education. We must enable children to see themselves as agents of change who are capable of understanding world views and universal values. Children should be aware that they all have a diverse cultural, ethnic, gendered, linguistic and racial identity because they will then be better equipped to accept that others are the same. As Skelton (2002) says, “I am different and have a right to be. You are different from me with the same rights but we can live together.”

### **Interlingual Teaching and Learning**

In today’s ever smaller world schools need to be orientating their curricula towards nurturing tomorrow’s Global Citizens. This means implementing a thoroughly inclusive teaching approach that recognises and supports all languages and cultures present in the school. We need “Interlingual” classrooms and schools. The “Inter” prefix brings the notion of everyone being open and responsive to learning about other languages. In the Interlingual classroom children not only learn their own mother-tongue but learn about all the other classroom languages as well. Interlingual classrooms are places where children are allowed to use their languages as cognitive tools. They can transfer skills, concepts and learning strategies across languages.



*A Glitterlings “Big Book” engaging the EYs class at Marymount International School Rome. The children are learning what the word ‘polyglot’ means.*

Interlingual teaching and learning takes as its starting point the practices of bilingualism, which include translanguaging (using languages flexibly, shifting and mixing them in the learning process), and transliteracy in the individual, and expands these practices for the benefit of the individual and the Interlingual community. Garcia (2009) argues that translanguaging has much value for bilingual children. It gives them a voice and builds on their home language practices. It also creates authentic language awareness activities for monolingual children by stirring the natural linguistic curiosity that is inherent in all young children.

Children need to experience a sense of belonging in Early Childhood settings so there is a seamless flow between children’s homes and school. We know that children achieve greater educational outcomes when they learn in a setting that embraces their language and culture (Fleer, 2002) and values prior learning experiences.

Teachers should be careful that young children are not silenced because they are not encouraged to use their home languages. Research has shown that children need to construct and reconstruct their lived lives in playful contexts and they also have to find their lives mirrored and referenced in the texts they encounter in the early years.

Administrators and teachers must become informed about the relevant research on multilingualism and take responsibility for implementing practices that address both students’ language learning and academic needs. Principals and Vice Principals have the role of evaluating teachers and to do this correctly they need to be informed on what effective practice for multilingual learners looks like. Teachers need to build language objectives as well as content objectives into their planning. School leaders have a crucial role to play in creating a collaborative ethos of critical enquiry and setting up the circumstances for teachers to plan effectively.

## Inspirational Pedagogy

Inspirational Pedagogy was coined by Cummins (Cummins and Early, 2015). He describes it as the kind of instruction that you would like your own child to receive. It involves school and literacy experiences that students remember throughout their lives. Cummins explains the concept of inspirational pedagogy in the following points:

- Students are academically engaged and intrinsically motivated;
- Students are generating knowledge, producing literature and/or art, and acting on social realities;
- Students' intellectual work is being shared with a meaningful audience (peers, parents, teachers, partner classes, etc.);
- Students' identities are being affirmed within the context of academic learning.

Communication becomes more inclusive and democratic through the 'emerging, inspirational pedagogy' of Interlingual teaching and learning.

*Through genuine experiences with other languages in the formative years of schooling, we can set a trend of international mindedness that will be a step towards our world becoming more genuinely democratic, pluricultural and plurilingual.*

## Getting Parents or Carers Involved

Effective Early Years teachers help children develop strategies for the identification and resolution of conflict and research tells us that practitioners who engage parents are the most effective in doing this. Sometimes, parents or carers believe that the best way for non-English language background children to integrate into school life is to jump into English and leave their home languages behind. They may even feel that support for their home language will slow their children down in acquiring English. Sadly, this belief is misinformed. Even though we always want to respect families' views, it is our responsibility to demonstrate the power of current research and best practice. It is crucial that parents or carers are involved in the Interlingual approach. We can help show them the benefits of this approach and explain that respected research demonstrates that children need a strong home language as a foundation to build on. Providing home language support is the way to achieve academic success in English. Children need to know they are accepted for *who they are* in our classrooms. Allowing them to use their home languages and inviting parents to be part of this educational process contributes to creating in the child a feeling of belonging, of inner well-being and security.

Teachers can facilitate the process by helping children connect key words and concepts from the classroom to their home or second language. This will ensure the Interlingual classroom empowers children for lifelong learning and enables them to act effectively and powerfully in their personal lives and on the global stage.



*The librarian at ESF International Kindergarten Tsing Yi Hong Kong reading Ling A Ling learns a Lullaby - a Glitterling story about a Japanese child who misses Japan and her Grandma. The Glitterlings show her that Japan doesn't have to feel so far away*

### **Communication and Language**

Involving children in critical thinking rather than giving the child knowledge to learn and regurgitate is also a crucial step in the language acquisition process. Children naturally investigate in order to learn, they want to experience things and to 'have a go'. We know that learning language starts with the child and is controlled by the child. The motivation to communicate comes from within and as a result of other children and adults activating their natural curiosity and moving language development forward. All young children need relevant and appropriate experiences coupled with the support of caring, sensitive and knowledgeable adults in order to learn and develop.

### **What is Oxford International Early Years: The Glitterlings?**

The Glitterlings is an Interlingual story and play-based English Language course which is the first of its kind. Interlingual Teaching and Learning is, in fact, the essence of the course and what is unique about it. The Glitterlings programme is aligned to the successful Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS) which originates in the UK. The EYFS combined with the Interlingual Teaching and Learning Goals (ITLGs) ensure the needs of young learners are met in a creative and dynamic way that allows the child and the teacher to become involved in a mutual learning process where each one learns from the other. Learning is not the sole domain of children: teachers have to become learners as well. To this end, teaching

and learning goals are grouped together to facilitate the Interlingual approach and to provide a more genuine setting for mutual learning to take place.



Glitterlings poster

## Parental Involvement

The Glitterlings New Word Book, along with the 'write-in space' in the Story books, allows parents and children to connect key words and concepts from the course to their home or second language. Connecting learning to students' home lives is a core component of effective instruction.

Interlingual teachers hold parent meetings to inform them about interlingual teaching and learning and discuss the tasks that parents can fulfil such as:

- Taking part in language related activities in the classroom;
- Retelling the stories in their home language;
- Translating classroom materials;
- etc.

By sharing knowledge with parents, teachers can bring about change that will benefit the child as an individual and improve the school community as a whole. Every parent is a valuable resource that teachers and children can count on to diffuse and extend the multilingual, multicultural ethos of the school.

In Glitterling environments children know that their home language is valued and respected and they learn that there is a place for all languages in the classroom.

## **The Joy of Multilingual and Multicultural Learning**

The Interlingual Glitterling classroom empowers children for lifelong learning and enables them to act effectively and powerfully in their personal lives and on the global stage. The nine stories are based around exciting, global themes that are charming, relevant and engaging for children. The Glitterling characters are curious, delightful, fun-loving polyglots that come from *'two stars left of the moon'*. They help children discover the joy of learning about multilingualism and multiculturalism. They challenge them to think beyond the limits of the classroom walls and introduce them to a world of languages beyond their own and the language of instruction.

## **A Global Child**

The Glitterlings Interlingual classrooms are places where, through cultural awareness and respect for other languages, the ideas and responsibilities of 'world citizenship' are nurtured and developed. There is cultural and linguistic authenticity in everyday play. Glitterling classrooms are places where international mindedness is seen in action, internationalism is felt and Interlingual children learn *who they are* in the context of the classroom and the broader society. They learn to work within an international framework of tolerance and respect.

## **The Multilingual Lens**

Cummins says (2015), 'Inspirational pedagogy becomes a feasible goal when we interpret curricular expectations in light of the funds of knowledge represented by our students and their communities and expand the instructional space within our classrooms by teaching through [an Interlingual,] multilingual lens.' This involves school and literacy experiences that students are likely to remember throughout their lifetimes.

***Children will not only remember their adorable Glitterling friends and the exciting adventures they had with them, but will understand from this early age that being a polyglot is not only a desirable outcome of education but also an achievable one.***

We can change our way of thinking through changing what happens in classrooms. Communication expands becoming more inclusive and democratic through the 'emerging, inspirational pedagogy' of Interlingual teaching and learning in Glitterling classrooms.

Through such genuine experiences with other languages in the formative years of schooling we can set a trend of international mindedness that will be a step towards our world becoming better, more genuinely democratic, pluricultural and plurilingual.

Eithne Gallagher  
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## About the Author

Eithne Gallagher is a recognised authority in the field of ESL in International Education and has over twenty years' experience of teaching in international schools. She has twice been chair of the European Council of International Schools ESL & Mother-tongue Committee; she is a regular presenter at international school conferences and has delivered workshops and lectures for teachers, administrators and parents across the world.



Her writings on ESL & Mother-tongue issues have been widely published in educational journals and magazines and she has published a book entitled Equal Rights to the Curriculum in which she argues for school reform to meet the educational needs of all children growing up in a multicultural society. Eithne's most recent work is a story-based Early Years programme for International Schools and Pre-schools: The Glitterlings was published by Oxford University Press in October 2015. Eithne provides support and consultancy for schools wishing to implement inclusive, ESL and mother-tongue policies.

Eithne is the mother of three bilingual children and lives with her family on a hilltop outside Rome.

## Some Endorsements for Oxford International Early Years: The Glitterlings.

### **Ofelia García**

*“The polyglot Glitterlings may come from two stars left of the moon, but on earth, where young multilingual children are being educated, this English language program gets five stars. Gallagher takes these very young multilingual learners of English on a journey of expansion in which English exists in connection with their own home language and the languages of others in the classrooms. Through the power of the polyglot Glitterlings, Gallagher challenges the children not only to enter the English language universe, but also to listen to others, to become polyglots, and to feel proud and secure in their multilingual ability and recognize it in others. Based on the latest research on language learning, the interlingual approach of the Glitterlings’ books helps young children appropriate the new linguistic features of English in relationship with those they already possess, building a strong foundation for their own language and literacy development, as well as supporting the multilingual planet in which we live.”*

**Ofelia García**

Professor in the Ph.D. programs of Urban Education and of Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures and Languages at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

### **Fred Genesee**

*“FINALLY! A series that celebrates and promotes children’s multilingual/multicultural backgrounds as a foundation for promoting the acquisition of English. There is growing research evidence of rich and dynamic inter-relationships between multilinguals’ language and cultural competencies. But, for too long, books for children have ignored these critical links. This beautifully-illustrated series fills this gap and provides lots of helpful suggestions for turning classrooms into multilingual/multicultural ones. This series will move classrooms in exciting new directions as teachers and students make connections between the languages and cultures they already know and English.”*

**Fred Genesee**

Professor Emeritus Psychology Department McGill University