

Conveying the “right” kind of message: Planning for the first language and culture within the primary classroom

GEETA LUDHRA
Brunel University, West London

DEBORAH JONES
Brunel University, West London

ABSTRACT: This school-based reflective narrative explores how one inner London primary school raised their awareness of the language needs of Advanced Bilingual Learners (ABL) through an emphasis on developing and celebrating pupils' first language skills alongside English. It stresses the central role of the teacher in planning language learning environments which empower pupils to talk confidently in their first language without feeling marginalised. In this setting, no one language is viewed as being of a lower status than the other. This paper outlines the teacher's role in crafting this process by building on pupils' social and cultural experiences. It further highlights the role of senior management in developing a whole-school ethos which promotes linguistic and cultural diversity, where the identities of multilingual pupils are nurtured. Evidence was collected through participant observation work conducted over a one-year period. The study was predominantly focused within a Year Six classroom (pupils aged between 10-11 years) in a multicultural school where the majority of pupils had Punjabi as their first language. At the time of the study, the school operated within the support framework and principles of a DfES (Department for Education and Skills) National Pilot Project within the UK (2004-2006). The national project was designed to promote a heightened awareness of strategies to support ABL at Key Stage Two (pupils between 7-11 years).

KEYWORDS: Advanced Bilingual Learner (ABL), culture, first language, identity.

INTRODUCTION

Most primary teaching is challenging, especially within inner-city, London-based, primary schools where a high population of pupils now speak languages other than English. Teachers are expected to plan and teach using inclusive approaches, set suitable learning challenges, respond to pupils' diverse needs and overcome potential barriers to learning (DfES, 2006, pp. 38-39). Within this myriad of challenges, it is the fundamental role played by speaking and listening that can potentially unlock some of the learning mysteries for bilingual pupils. The role of speaking and listening in the UK has had a chequered history. In 1988, the Cox Report (English for Ages 5-11) stated that the value of talk as a means of learning was widely accepted since 1987 had seen the establishing of the National Oracy Project to enhance the role of speaking and listening in learning. However, although the English National Curriculum (DfES, 1988; DfEE, 2000) gave the same weighting to speaking and

listening as to reading and writing, the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998) focused almost exclusively on reading and writing.

UK studies have shown that children have limited opportunities to engage in active enquiry through talk (Galton & Williamson, 1992). In response to a perceived need in teachers, guidelines were developed in the UK (DfEE, 2003) to once again raise the profile of talk in the primary classroom. The Primary National Strategy (PNS) for English (DfES, 2006) has been the most recent initiative in raising the status of speaking and listening, where it has been centrally positioned at the forefront of English teaching. The key aims of the PNS (2006) are to draw on excellence in teaching and learning approaches to ensure access and enjoyment for all pupils, build on pupils’ prior learning experiences and ensure a more personalized approach to learning. The PNS framework highlights the need for cognitive challenge to remain high for pupils where English is not their first language and recommends opportunities for pupils to use their first language across the curriculum. The three driving principles of the PNS bilingual framework are that:

1. bilingualism is an asset where the first language plays a significant role in the development of additional languages;
2. cognitive challenge can and should be appropriately high;
3. language acquisition goes hand in hand with cognitive and academic development, with an inclusive curriculum as the context (DfES, 2006).

This framework then gives official recognition to the importance of transferring skills from Language 1 (L1) to additional languages and a positive move is seen in the replacement of the term “community” language (as in previous documentation) by the term “first” language (Conteh, 2006).

The particular focus of this paper is the category of children defined as “Advanced Bilingual Learners” (ABL). These are considered to be:

Children who have had considerable exposure to English and are no longer in the early stages of English language acquisition. These are children who, often born in this country, appear to be fluent in ordinary everyday conversational contexts, but require continued support in order to develop the cognitive and academic language necessary for academic success (DfES, 2006, Unit 2, p. 2).

ABL, then, are those children who have studied in the school system for at least five years. There has, until recently, been an assumption that pupils within this group have the necessary language skills to access the formal curriculum at both primary and secondary levels, and as a result are able to achieve their full potential. However, until recently, there has been limited discussion, identification or planned guidance for this group of pupils within primary education, and the performance of ABL throughout their schooling is indicative of underachievement (Ofsted, 2005).

THE EAL PILOT PROJECT: AIMS

The EAL Pilot Project was part of a national research initiative conducted in 21 local authorities in England. It was designed to increase the confidence and knowledge of primary teachers in meeting the needs of ABL. Within this primary school, which is

the focus of this article, two EAL project consultants worked closely with the school senior management to review existing provision for ABL pupils and further develop whole-school approaches. The underlying principles of the school-based project were:

- speaking and listening should sit at the forefront of all language teaching (with particular reference to first language opportunities);
- planning for the use of the first language across the curriculum (a focus on “language functions” and “language structures”);
- planning for interactive approaches to language teaching where multilingual pupils were encouraged to take risks – cognitively, imaginatively and pedagogically – a notion increasingly alien within an education system that is governed by testing (especially, within the Year 6 curriculum, where testing takes on a higher profile).

This article will consider the impact of the National EAL Pilot Project upon policy and practice within the school. Participation in the project led the school to interrogate the key issues associated with the identified underachievement of ABL. Prior to the project, a greater focus was placed on pupils at the early stages of language development (it was assumed that ABL were coping well). The first language was being used in early years classrooms, but not being mirrored further up the school. The project also supported other changes in the school. Two examples included the change in displays and lesson-planning.

Consultants worked with staff to address the content of core subject displays (in English, maths and science) to instigate a move from show-casing pupils’ work to “working wall” displays. Working walls better supported pupils’ learning during lessons as key scaffolds. Language structures and technical vocabulary were displayed in the pupils’ languages as well as in English. These displays were referred to during lessons and both teacher and pupils contributed to their content.

The quality and depth of teacher planning in relation to meeting the language needs of ABL were given a clearer focus. All teachers were required to identify “curricular language targets” for the core subjects so that groups of pupils with similar targets were working together. Language support mechanisms were planned for and assessed across the curriculum, and this allowed pupils to apply and practise their language skills in all areas of learning.

The school context

This study is located within a West London school where there is a high level of ethnic diversity. 98% of its pupils spoke English as an additional language as opposed to national figures of 13.5% (Multiverse, 2007). For the majority of children in the school, the first language was Punjabi with Urdu as a second. Around two-thirds of the staff were bilingual. Punjabi and Urdu lessons were offered as an option to all pupils as part of the main school timetable and approximately 60% of pupils took this opportunity for study.

The 2003, school Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) inspection report stated that “provision for pupils with EAL was inadequate” within the school. At the start of the project, lesson observations (in Maths, English and Science) were conducted

across all classes and these revealed a disappointing depiction of standards in general. First, bilingual teaching strategies were given on a lower priority within the school and speaking and listening were not being purposefully planned for to develop the academic language needs of ABL. Expectations were considered to be low and this was manifested in pupil attainment statistics. However, all of this is not uncommon. Indeed, it reflects a general pattern in many schools (White, Lewis & Fletcher-Campbell, 2006). A study by Ofsted (2005) revealed that expectations of ABL were observed to be “too low” in around two-thirds of the schools monitored.

A second finding revealed that although the majority of teachers shared the first language and culture of the pupils they taught, they did not necessarily draw on their whole-language experience within their teaching. They did, however, appreciate the benefits of using the first language to help them communicate with family and relatives at home. A further point of interest is that close examination of selected ABL work (writing samples, reading comprehension data, observations of talk, assessment data from end of year tests) made it clear that these pupils formed an under achieving group across the school.

This study focuses predominantly on a class of higher-ability Year Six pupils aged between 10-11 years. Target pupils were chosen across Key Stage Two classes; these were those who were not working towards achieving the expected average National Curriculum level of 4 by the end of Year Six. The philosophy of the EAL consultants and management within the school focused on having high expectations for these pupils and exploring strategies for them to be successful and meet national standards.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

For the purpose of this paper, literature and school-based observations will be discussed around planning (the teacher’s role) and how the school drew on pupils’ first language and culture within the school.

Planning for the language needs of ABL: The school’s role

Prior to the EAL project, teachers were not required to identify the “language functions” or related “language structures” on their planning documentation. They were not required to explicitly reference how they might include opportunities for pupils to use their first languages. The pilot project promoted these key principles through whole-school training alongside more focused, weekly planning sessions with teachers. Time was also given to senior staff (specifically, the language coordinator) to work alongside the consultants in team planning meetings and staff training.

Bilingual pupils (and indeed multilingual pupils) require support, confidence and the necessary language to articulate more complex thoughts at length within different contexts. It is often within a process of explaining or describing that their implicit thoughts “click” into place. Because talk is interwoven into the fabric of the primary classroom, it is assumed that competency develops “naturally” and without the need for explicit teaching. Many ABL are able to give an impression of oral proficiency through their conversational language, and some teachers may take this as signaling that they no longer require additional language scaffolding.

The teacher's role in planning for the first language and culture is crucial, and teachers need to genuinely believe in the power of integrating diverse knowledge in their classrooms. This has been highlighted as far back as in the Bullock Report (DES, 1975), where it is stated that home and school cultures and languages should not be seen as separate. Children should not be expected to "cast off" their first language and culture at school. Sharma (2000) argues that despite this recognition in the Bullock Report "...the British education system dismally failed to implement this principle....The language policy in the education of Asian children never really progressed beyond a grudgingly ritualistic respect for the child's home language" (p. 161). It is therefore important that schools consider how they can move beyond ritualistic practices to wholeheartedly embrace language diversity. In planning and teaching for talk, many teachers would argue that this is an integral part of their daily life and therefore does not require formal planning. In practice, focused teaching of talk was not observed at the start of the EAL project in the school.

ABL still require talk to be modelled explicitly (especially the more academic and formal language registers of the curriculum) through a dialogic approach, so that they can understand and reflect on the process of language learning. As role models of talk, teachers fundamentally contribute to this process (Coles, 2005; Myhill, 2006). Those teachers who shared the same first language as their pupils were encouraged to use their bilingual skills, and those teachers who did not were encouraged to facilitate and plan for such opportunities between pupils. Some members of staff felt slightly uncomfortable with this, especially if they did not speak a language other than English. There were also views amongst some teachers and parents that schools should promote "English only" and in order for children to succeed, they needed to be "totally immersed" in English whilst at school. The pilot project promoted the empowering of pupils in effective language classrooms where the experienced adult, peer or teacher acted as facilitator, encouraging and scaffolding pupil-pupil talk (Bruner, 1986). Within the model of the "zone of proximal development", learning takes place most effectively within a context of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). This learning is more than just rehearsing the mechanical aspects of language but is broader, drawing on both social and cultural aspects of learning.

ABL need to develop a familiarity with academic language so that they can take creative risks with language rather than opting for "safer" vocabulary choices. Clearly the assessment system and tests assume an understanding of academic language and this is where many ABL are disadvantaged. By developing academic language in their first language alongside English, pupils are better able to discuss meanings and concepts across the two languages and explore more abstract language with peers. Although the school provided Punjabi and Urdu language classes, these were run in isolation from the main curriculum. This had consequences, as potential links between teachers and the content of those sessions were not being exploited at the planning stage.

Many ABL generally possess a good language awareness of the syntactic structures of their first language and are therefore better able to develop linguistic confidence and expertise simultaneously. In doing this, pupils can actively engage in cognitively demanding tasks (Dodwell, 1999; Lewis, 2006). As part of the project, teachers were

encouraged to draw on teaching assistants to pre-teach and discuss academic terminology (science and mathematics vocabulary) in the first language.

Most initial classroom observations revealed widespread use of initiation (through teacher questioning), response (by the child) and feedback (by the teacher). In such processes, interactions between children and teachers were brief with the children focusing on giving the “right” answer rather than engaging in open discussion. Dialogic teaching approaches counter this (Alexander, 2006). In line with Alexander’s recommendations (2003) for dialogic talk, teachers within the school shifted their approach to better improving interactions with pupils and between pupils. There are four conditions which encourage this approach and these were evident in lesson observations by the end of the project. The fourth stage is crucial for ABL, as they need to be encouraged to take risks with language in talk and writing.

1. *Collective*: Children and teachers addressing learning tasks together;
2. *Reciprocal*: Children and teachers listen to each other and consider alternative viewpoints;
3. *Cumulative*: The importance of building on each other’s ideas is promoted;
4. *Supportive*: Children articulate ideas in a risk free environment and support each other.

Planning for the first language and culture must stem from a whole-school belief that permeates through leadership, language co-ordinators and governors (Blair & Bourne, 1998). School language policies should make clear not only the mechanical aspects of language learning but the school’s belief in multilingual approaches. Planning for the needs of children with EAL is not the sole responsibility of the English Co-ordinator, but all staff within the school as it crosses the whole curriculum. In response to this, the school language policy was adapted in line with project initiatives to better illustrate the school’s belief about the importance of the first language and culture in line with the PNS principles.

In order for teachers to appreciate the benefits of promoting Language One, they need to possess an awareness of EAL pedagogy and research which illustrates that promoting the first language does *not* delay the development of language two. Where teachers do not embrace pupils’ first language and culture, the latter can potentially experience “damaging dividedness” (Miller, 1996), which can affect pupils’ self-esteem, and also social and cognitive development (Baker, 1996).

Encouraging first-language opportunities for talk was a key focus of the project and the starting point for this was the compilation of a whole-school language register (pupils and all associated staff). In doing this, teachers developed a heightened awareness of the language groups they taught and the skills of those teaching them. This in turn led individuals to research related cultural and language needs required for making effective individualised provision. This process further promoted a dialogue among teachers, pupils and support staff, where an interest was generated in the first languages and cultures of all members of the school community. Although the children were predominantly of Punjabi origin, they were not a homogenous group. Languages spoken included Hindi, Farsi, Punjabi, Arabic and Urdu. As a celebration of this, management decided that the end-of-year school reports would

include a comment on first language development. This action conveyed powerful messages to pupils and parents about the status of the first language and culture within the school context.

The school embraced strategies such as first-language partners (focused discussions with those speaking the same first language). Through this strategy, pupils were able to discuss academic language registers which they might not have come across before (Kotler, Wegerif & Le Voi, 2001). The language curriculum was now drawing on their “total language experience” (Gibbons, 1991).

As part of the EAL pilot project, school-based training on theories of language acquisition were delivered to help teachers better understand the underlying principles. Unfortunately, pedagogy training (centred around key theorists such as Cummins, Baker and Gibbons) was not well received by some staff. Teachers were more concerned about “having tips for the job” as opposed to understanding theoretical models.

Developing planning frameworks: Underpinning principles in pedagogy

Planning for the language needs of ABL is a complex part of the teacher’s role, especially where teachers may lack the knowledge, understanding and pedagogy. All these factors contribute to the level of teacher confidence. When planning for the language needs of ABL, it is vital that discussions consider not only communicative and cognitive aspects of language learning, but broader aspects of the cultural and social dimensions of language. When these strands are planned for in an integrated approach, language learning takes on a more three-dimensional and holistic quality. Gravelle (2000) provides a valuable framework for planning for bilingual learners which incorporates these strands (Figure 1).

	1. What do learners bring to the task?	2. What does the task demand of them?	3. What support needs to be planned?
Social			
Cognitive			
Linguistic			

Figure 1: A framework for planning

The questions in Figure 1 were used to prompt practitioners at the planning stage. Teachers were encouraged to explore the prior experiences of pupils, the language demands of the lesson and possible support/scaffolding necessary for language success. The pivotal role of the adult/ teacher is to provide the necessary scaffolds for language learning and exploit opportunities for bilingual talk where possible. This is where the bilingual teacher may feel at an advantage. Sharing the same language and cultural background can at times provide an “insider” lens to view pupils’ cultures and histories. Clearly, the success of this is not solely dependent on those who share the same culture and language, as all teachers should find out about their pupil’s language and cultural needs as part of good classroom practice.

As the project developed, monitoring exercises conducted by the literacy coordinator revealed that teachers were giving greater consideration to the three questions outlined by Gravelle (2000) and this ensured that activities were better matched to pupils’ capabilities and experiences. In planning for contextually embedded language opportunities for ABL, teachers were creating a more relevant language curriculum. School-based training outlined Cummins’ influential work in understanding the distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALPS). BICS refer to everyday conversational, social language and CALP refers to the academic language of the school curriculum.

In order for ABL to succeed, both BICS and CALP need to be developed. ABL, particularly in upper Key Stage 2, need to develop the CALP aspects of the language curriculum, as this is where language becomes less context-embedded and more academic. Cummins (2000, p. 39), uses the term “additive bilingualism” to describe pupils’ “linguistic, cognitive, or academic growth”. “Additive bilingualism” benefits the student, whereby they learn a second language whilst continuing to develop the academic and conceptual aspects of their first language. In order for staff to reflect on *how* and *where* to plan language activities, Cummins’ quadrant framework (2000, p. 68) was used as a prompt during planning sessions (see Figure 2). Staff were encouraged to consider the location of planned activities in relation to this framework and the learners in their class.

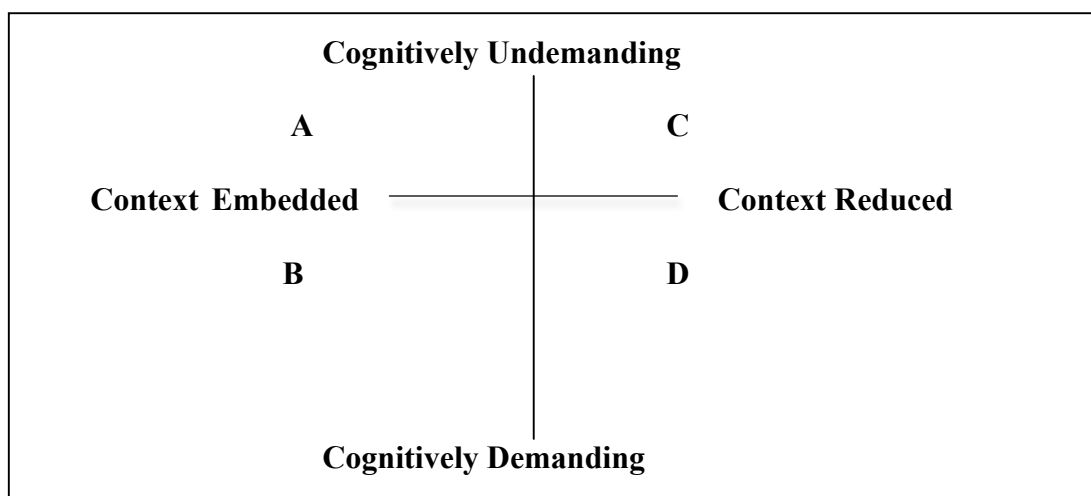


Figure 2: Cummin’s (2000) quadrant framework

ABL require the majority of their work to be located in quadrant B, which places high cognitive demand on the pupil within contextually embedded examples. This allows them to negotiate meaningful ideas. As pupils become more confident within contextually embedded examples, the aim is to encourage them to work within more abstract notions where they can apply their knowledge (see Hall, 2001 for worked examples). Leung (1997) usefully describes the mainstream language curriculum as a “double curriculum” for bilingual pupils where they are challenged as a result of two components:

1. The subject based knowledge and skills; and

2. The language expressions (curriculum content and language content).

The use of language functions and language structures supports this. When monitoring planning, senior management and consultants could assess the breadth of these functions and structures across a typical week as well as the nature of the content in terms of culturally relevant material.

Benefits of the planning sessions

As the project progressed, planning sessions revealed a heightened awareness of the language requirements for ABL. In practice, this new focused dialogue between practitioners at weekly planning meetings ensured that lessons were being critiqued at a higher level, specifically in relation to language demands.

The school adapted its lesson-planning template to make explicit reference to technical language, key vocabulary, language requirements (language functions and structures) and curricular language targets for pupils. Having this information displayed on planning documentation prompted teachers to discuss and incorporate the strategies early on. Staff made fewer assumptions about children’s prior experiences, and pre-empted situations which might have presented contextual difficulties during lessons. Planning for the language needs of ABL therefore took into account the language demands of that subject area, the content and key skills. Language planning was now taking on a new dimension.

Osterling and Fox (2004) describe teachers as “cultural brokers” and “cultural mediators” in this process of second language learning. A further benefit of these planning sessions was a heightened level of teacher preparedness and analytical skills. More experienced and longer-serving teachers did not necessarily have “better” skills and knowledge because they had years of experience to draw on. They may, as Franson (1999) described in her study, lack the skills to analyse their classroom practice and related pedagogical issues. In a report by Blair and Bourne (1998), training for teachers was highlighted as a key feature to success in multilingual settings. According to the report, many newly qualified teachers felt ill prepared to teach in these settings. Some teachers in this project expressed concerns over not being prepared enough because of the pressures of having to prepare a “separate curriculum”. The temptation for these teachers was to use commercially produced schemes to make themselves feel more prepared. As one newly qualified teacher within the school commented:

University training and school mentors do not prepare you to teach bilingual pupils. I felt lost and inadequate with my first class and lost confidence in my teaching ability. Teacher Education needs to give more time to the area of bilingualism. My PGCE course had very little training on this compared to other strands.

This raises an important concern in terms of “teacher preparedness” not only for schools but for initial teacher trainers (ITT), as to how effectively trainees are being prepared, particularly in urban areas. The 2007 NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher) Survey showed preparation to teach learners with English as an additional language was the lowest-rated strand of their teacher training course. Only thirty four percent of NQTs rated EAL training as “very good” or “good” in comparison to eighty-eight per cent rating the overall quality of their training as “very good” or “good”. (TDA, 2007)

CELEBRATING THE FIRST LANGUAGE AND CULTURE WITHIN THE CURRICULUM

These short vignettes illustrate the impact of the project at classroom level and provide examples of how pupils can draw on their first language in the classroom.

Vignette 1: Celebrating language diversity through the school newspaper

Year Six ABL were engaged in a project where they were required to create the school newspaper using the computer facilities available (this was run as an after-school project). The aims were to provide a forum for pupils to publish their writing (in English, Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi), to celebrate and share events from their culture and develop discussion opportunities in first language. Ten one-hour sessions were offered to 21 pupils in the target sample (16 pupils attended the sessions). The pupils took ownership of the school newspaper and the teacher acted as facilitator. Examples of bilingual articles included a Punjabi folk tale, a Punjabi poem (linked to a creative writing session in English), an Indian ‘*cha*’ (tea) recipe from a girl’s grandmother and a football quiz. Language support staff and parents were used to help with the editing process and this again engaged the wider school community.

The newspaper was aimed at a wide audience including parents, family, local community members and staff. The benefits of encouraging children to write and publish in their first language alongside English are many (Cummins, 2003). In promoting this project, the school positively demonstrated how they clearly valued the linguistic and cultural experiences of pupils in a meaningful context, providing a real audience for their work. The multilingual newspaper embraced a cross-generational community as it was read at different levels. This is revealed in the comment made by a Punjabi, lunch-time supervisor:

I can’t believe little Rani wrote such a good Punjabi poem. I only brought the newspaper because her mum told me in the playground it had Punjabi and Hindi articles in it this time. It was so funny reading an Indian cha recipe written by young children – she’s so mature now (translated from Punjabi).

Observations of the sessions showed that discussions in the first language alongside English encouraged and stimulated joint decision-making through carefully planned exploratory talk at a high level (see case studies of Dimitriadi, Hodson & Ludhra, 2006). These planned sessions created opportunities for pupils to become “problem-solvers” rather than “information-receivers” where they took responsibility for their own learning within a group. This learning was facilitated in meaningful language interactions with peers (Gibbons, 1991). Such activities clearly move beyond tokenistic ways of celebrating language diversity.

Vignette 2: Celebrating language diversity in classroom writing

As part of the project, the first language was also drawn upon within weekly creative writing lessons. During a poetry lesson, an ABL asked if she could write her completed English poem in Punjabi. The Punjabi teacher had previously discussed this pupil’s talents in her first language with the teacher. After writing the poem in

Punjabi, she was asked to translate it and explore the similarities and differences in word order between the two languages, explicitly discussing the comparisons with her teacher. Other pupils wanted to follow her example. The “domino” effect of wanting to “advertise” their bilingual talents was becoming pronounced. Pupils felt proud of the status of their first language and writing a Punjabi/ Hindi or Urdu poem in their “English” writing book was signaling the “right kind” of message – a message that said their first language was just as important as English. The message also conveyed that the classroom accepted not only their language, but their family, ethnicity and culture (Gibbons, 1991). By maintaining the first language within the curriculum, pupils were able to “keep their cultures alive” and see the language as “part of their ethnic and cultural identity” (Anwar, 1998).

Vignette 3: Drama builds bridges between Shakespeare and Bollywood

Extended drama activities were used to support the written studies of more complex and traditionally “British” texts such as Shakespeare. Drama provided ABL with a valuable forum to explore language in an interactive style with peers, and this appeared to enhance their understanding of the curriculum by making it less fragmented (Winston & Tandy, 2001). Although ABL can face anxieties in understanding the various academic and often abstract strands of complex literature such as Shakespeare, drama techniques can successfully bridge the gaps and deepen understanding.

During drama lessons, children actively explored issues of human significance. They described how the drama had changed their preconceived attitudes and fears of Shakespeare. As one Punjabi boy commented (before the drama sessions):

Miss, do we have to study Shakespeare? My brother told me it’s so boring – it’s got all that British posh language and it’s gonna be too hard for me to understand.

In contrast, the same pupil’s self evaluation form read (after the drama):

I loved this play and I really understood it. I can’t get the songs out of my head. It was great making the props and acting out the scenes. A bit like the Indian movies.

Introducing the children to a theatrical version of this play allowed them to engage in a musically “child-friendly” version. This was used alongside the children’s version of the text and the video version. (Interestingly, most of the children in the class had never visited the theatre before, but already had a wealth of experience of Bollywood cinema to draw on.) In presenting one of Shakespeare’s plays through varied forms, potential learning barriers were removed and gradually more sophisticated language was introduced after the practical experiences. This social and communal experience of drama encouraged language development, as the participation of each team member was required (Winston & Tandy, 2001).

It is important that teachers do not shy away from using more cognitively demanding texts but explore avenues for making those texts more accessible for ABL. In this way, they will not be denied the literary experiences of their monolingual peers in

other schools. Children were able to connect certain themes and plots to Bollywood cinema. For example, when studying *Romeo and Juliet*, one girl remarked:

Miss, this happens all the time in Indian films when the rich girl can't marry the poor boy because their families hate each other and one is poorer. They always get together in the end but sometimes they kill themselves if their parents don't let them get married.

Where opportunities are created for a connection to be made from a cultural perspective, children will draw upon their personal experiences. In fact, ‘Shakespeare’s dilemmas can be seen to parallel the cultural complexity through which these children negotiate their lives’ (Winston, 2004, p. 139). These drama opportunities allowed pupils to confidently voice and articulate their thoughts based upon familiar experiences.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has emphasised the importance of planning for the needs of ABL. As well as planning for the cognitive and academic language skills of ABL, teachers need to consider *how* they will connect with pupils’ families and wider communities in order to understand their cultural and linguistic experiences at a broader level (Ofsted, 2005). It is important that the cultures and languages of both home and school be intertwined. As leaders of the school community, management conveys powerful messages and therefore needs to consider the ways in which training can encourage reflection on multilingual teaching and pedagogy (Kotler, Wegerif & Le Voi, 2001). Giving the “right” kind of message about the importance of the first language and culture relates to both policies and school ethos. Part of this message needs to be conveyed through initial teacher training programmes, where currently topics about ‘bilingualism, culture and identity’ tend to have a low priority (Conteh, 2006).

The EAL Pilot Project allowed senior teachers within the school to explore these issues through promoting a deeper understanding of EAL pedagogy among staff, taking time to “team-plan” with colleagues and liaise with expert consultants in this field. Consequently, staff were better able to appreciate how additive bilingualism could be supported and the impact of this in maintaining pupils’ identity, religious values, cultural and community ties (Mills, 2001).

As a result of the project, it was realised that greater links need to be forged between mainstream practitioners and bilingual teachers (who are often employed on a contractual basis). This study revealed that there is much to be done in terms of raising their status as “proper teachers” and also meeting their training needs (Conteh, 2007). ABL saw a real purpose in using their first language within lessons and this in turn made them feel special for being bilingual, rather than viewing it as problem or an aspect to be hidden.

Those teachers who share the first language and culture of their pupils may believe that they are at an advantage in terms of accessing the cultures and histories of their pupils outside of the classroom. In many cases this will hold true. However, it does not imply that monolingual teachers are inadequate. Indeed, in this study, such staff

exhibited real enthusiasm and embraced the project. All teachers need to question their personal beliefs about multilingualism within the curriculum – even teachers who share the same first language and culture as their pupils can hold reservations about its use and status within the classroom (Lee & Oxelson, 2006). Where teachers feel confident, they will empower pupils to talk in their first languages and set up regular opportunities to do so. Talk must therefore sit at the forefront of this process and the power of talk must lie with the pupils, where they are active agents in the language learning process.

Since the EAL intervention programme, literacy results within the school have continued to rise. This school is now one of the 100 most improved schools in the country, their Ofsted rating having risen from “satisfactory” to “good” in 2008. The provision made for pupils with EAL was commended. At the end of the pilot project, English test results were the highest in the schools’ history. A whole-school focus on ABL, careful tracking of data and a genuine belief in the power of the first language ensured academic success for not only ABL, but *all* pupils.

Clearly, 21st-century schools and teacher training institutions play a fundamental role in preparing and educating pupils to learn within a culturally diverse society. As Cummins (1996, p. 224) rightly highlights, classrooms are more likely to achieve this goal “where cultural diversity is seen as a resource” by the teacher. This is clearly a complex area as it moves beyond developing isolated language skills. It requires a deep understanding of differences in ethnic backgrounds, class, religion and other cultural issues and the impact of these on nurturing children’s identities so that they feel empowered to use a wide range of language.

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