

A World of Languages: developing children's love of languages. Young Pathfinder 10.

**Datta, M. & Pomphrey, C. (2004)
London: CILT.**

This is a welcome addition to the Young Pathfinder series published by CILT. The wealth of knowledge and experience of the authors, both experienced teacher trainers at the London Metropolitan University, is amply displayed throughout the book.

The book is Language Awareness writ large, full of ideas for classroom activities involving the languages that pupils bring with them to the classroom. But its purpose goes much deeper, clearly articulating the importance of including the languages of the pupils not only for reasons of identity, and self-esteem, but also for cognitive and academic development.

This publication is timely, just as the primary strategy through the EAL pilot programme is promoting a strand on the use of first language in the classroom, and just as modern foreign language is being introduced into the primary curriculum. With the former, this will address the lack of examples of how first language can be used in lessons and integrated into the literacy strategy. With the latter, this will help classteachers to pave the way and create the right ethos for language learning and introducing foreign language into the curriculum.

The first chapter starts with giving space for children's voices, '*giving children the opportunity to articulate their knowledge [about language acquisition, language varieties, social uses of language, links between language and identity and language and culture] can help their conceptualisation of what language is and motivate them to learn other languages.*

We often here talk about 'valuing bilingualism' or 'celebrating diversity'. But what do these mean in practice? What do 'valuing' and 'celebrating' look like? Is it about having welcome posters and a map showing where all the pupils come from, or assemblies on the different festivals, or answering the register in French? The authors assert, '*The opportunity to articulate and reflect on their experiences in class discussions reinforces their own identity and gives value to the language and varieties that are closest to them.*

How often are there opportunities for children to talk about their own language?

Here again, those of us who are wary of using bilingual pupils to 'raise the awareness of monolingual children' are reminded that what language awareness lessons are about are provision of opportunities for '*intellectually stimulating talk about language*'.

The book speaks directly to classteachers, whether or not they are bilinguals – full of classroom activities that even monolingual teachers can facilitate, activities that are embedded in primary classroom learning contexts with children constantly to the fore. The examples cited make one realise how many opportunities there are and that not to use them creates many missed opportunities for putting into practice what schools claim they do to 'value diversity'.

The book is not just full of practical examples. These are supported by explanations of their links to culture, identity, affective factors, and cross cultural communications. Throughout the book, the focus is always on the pupils – be it about the knowledge and experiences they bring, or the sensitivities around language and identity/status/appropriacy. At every stage, suggestions for activities are carefully supported by advice that speaks from experience, and guides teachers to potential pitfalls of focussing on multilingual activities without first creating the appropriate ethos and conditions as in '*work of this kind needs a supportive classroom ethos where children can talk freely about issues which are very personal and sensitive.*' We are reminded that we can inadvertently give out signals to children and they '*might assume that their teacher does not think that reading and writing in (Hindi) is as important or valuable as literacy in English.* All there are clearly set out in the second chapter on 'Managing multilingual activities'. The chapter also includes examples of how to include parents and other adults in school and the community in order to achieve the goals.

Recently, there has been a great deal of attention on induction of mid-term new arrivals (with various DfES publications, and guidance materials being produced). One example in the book takes induction of mid-term new arrival one step further with '*the class started learning Gujarati from a parent and a group of Gujarati-speaking children in order to be able to greet a new pupil who was arriving from India to join the class*'.

The timeliness of the book is that it addresses many of the issues that are current in primary education at the moment. The book brings back some of the work developed in the National Oracy Project (1990), now revisited in the Primary Strategy, and provides further classroom ideas to complement the recent focus on speaking and listening and gives suggestions on how to use a multilingual approach to the teaching of word, sentence and text level work. This book shows how the activities go beyond tokenism and helps to deliver a curriculum that reflects and brings into active play the cultures of the pupils and how these work on many levels and across the curriculum – addressing the aims of the national curriculum, and the various elements: primary (modern foreign) language learning, literacy strategy, diversity and inclusion.

The authors cite Stubbs (in Garcia and Baker, 1995) who says that
'Britain is often recognised as a country with profoundly monolingual assumptions and a widespread apathy towards learning other languages.' They counter with the conviction that *'Sharing children 's language histories, knowledge and skills is empowering for every child, and creates the inspiration and motivation to learn a new language....adults (teachers, parents...) are partners in this process.'*

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