

Complementary schooling and the teaching of community languages

Supplementary or Complementary schooling, organised by minority ethnic and linguistic groups to support their own communities, has a long history in supporting community language learning. Complementary schools are voluntary schools - sometimes called 'community' or 'supplementary' schools - which serve specific linguistic and/or religious and cultural groups, particularly through community language classes.

Successive governments have encouraged minority communities themselves to be responsible for maintaining their own community, cultural and linguistic heritages separate from the mainstream. In many ways this view has contributed to the separation between the voluntary sector and statutory education sections and there is now a long history of the two sectors having little contact with one another in any institutional sense. However, a recent policy document does refer to the possible benefits to be gained from the teaching of community languages in terms of the value added complementary schooling brings to achievement across educational domains (DfES, 2003) Referring to mainstream schools, the government document states,

2.36: Successful schools reach out to their communities. They often make premises available for community use, which can build bridges and develop dialogue. Many pupils have also benefited greatly from out-of-school-hours learning in community-run initiatives such as supplementary schools. Some supplementary schools focus on the curriculum, others on cultural, mother tongue or religious faith instruction. Attendance can enhance pupils' respect, promote self-discipline and inspire pupils to have high aspirations to succeed. (DfES, 2003)

This can be seen as a forward looking statement because of the recognition it gives to the important role complementary schools play in children's lives and because it puts the onus on the mainstream school to extend its contacts with complementary and community organisations.

NALDIC (2004) too has welcomed recent government moves to promote children's and teachers' bilingualism within schools. NALDIC's response to question 4 in the Aiming High Consultation document (DfES, 2003) is a follows:

A significant area of development which is inadequately explored in the consultation document is the impact that the development of bilingual education and an enhanced community language provision in schools would have in leading to a wider participation in schooling of adults with minority language skills. NALDIC has long argued that there needs to be a greater acknowledgement of the key role of first language/mother tongue in learning and attainment, including:

- A recognition of the importance of prior knowledge brought by bilingual pupils
- The role of L1 (first language) in the maintenance of individual and cultural identities
- The role of L1 in supporting learning in the development of English and the work of bilingual staff
- The importance of parents and communities in relation to L1 development and learning.

Similarly the Nuffield Inquiry on Languages (Nuffield, 2000) recommended that there should be a nationally co-ordinated programme of bilingual learning in the UK. In one statement the Nuffield Inquiry argues,

There is a widespread public perception, backed by research, that learning another language needs to start earlier if the next generation is to achieve higher standards. An early start to language learning also enhances literacy, citizenship and intercultural tolerance. (Nuffield, 2000, <http://www.wmin.ac.uk/sshl/nuffield/findings.htm>).

Nuffield also claim that in spite of parental demand, there is still no UK-wide agenda for children to start languages early. Complementary schools are one of the few educational institutions where children can learn and build upon the early process of language and cultural acquisition from the home.

Two pieces of recent research on complementary/supplementary schooling can be found at:

[Every Teacher Has A Story To Tell: A pilot study of teachers in supplementary and mother tongue school - Raymonde Sneddon \(June 2003\)](http://www.multiverse.ac.uk/index.aspx)

<http://www.multiverse.ac.uk/index.aspx> -under bilingual and multilingual learners, community schools and organisations

http://www.le.ac.uk/education/research/complementary_schools

Complementary schools and their communities in Leicester (Peter Martin, Angela Creese and Arvind Bhatt) This presents the final report of an ESRC funded study on the provision of complementary education and the role played by the schools in their community

References

Bhatt, A. Bhojani, N., Creese, A. and Martin, P (2004). *Occasional Paper 18 - Complementary and mainstream schooling: a case for reciprocity?* Watford : NALDIC

DfES (2003) *Aiming High. Raising Attainment for Minority Ethnic Pupils*. London : DfES

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