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Educating Global Citizens: Exploring citizenship dimensions of multicultural classrooms

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Abstract

This ongoing citizenship education project explores how children's linguistic and cultural experiences are utilised to create harmonious citizens in pre school/early primary school settings. Initial observations found positive correlations between the individualised 'child centred' approaches of the teaching staff and children's emotional security as a 'symbiotic' relationship. Positive aspects of team teaching approaches were also observed. The project has been extended to explore similar activities in two more multicultural schools. Children's naturally occurring conversations with their peers and teachers are recorded at intervals. Observations reveal interesting patterns between children's cultural (i.e. home and wider community) experiences and their interpretations of the planned activities. Positive outcomes of the 'symbiotic' approaches are also found.

Introduction

This project was set up in September 2006 to look at possible correlations between children's home experiences and their learning in Early Years' Settings (EYs). It found some interesting developments relating to children's interpretations of learning contexts created by adults as well as their perception of themselves in relation to others. Now in its second year, the project has expanded to include two more institutions, a nursery school and a primary school. This paper looks at the nursery school in some detail, exploring some key strategies used by staff to support children's language development particularly of those who come from non-English speaking homes. The paper analyses such strategies in the context of creating a multicultural learning environment in which children's responses to teacher directed tasks as well as to each other is explored.

Some Theoretical Considerations

The project adopts a holistic socio-cultural perspective to language and learning development of children in general and bilingual children in particular (Drury, 2007). This approach is similar to that explored by Vygotsky (1978) who essentially perceived language, culture and cognition as interlinked. The paper extends this in the context of early schooling, using constructs of scaffolding, guided participation and cooperation to explore the role of adults and peers in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The social-cultural aspect of children's learning emphasises the interrelatedness of social, cultural and linguistic aspects of children's experiences. It also explores the way new learners adapt to new learning environments particularly where the rules of

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engagement and the learning contexts are negotiated through a different language medium.

Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, together with Vygotsky and Bruner, places language as embedded within cultural and historical experiences. An utterance represents the social experience which makes it unique placing it within a social context. Wertsch (1991) describes this process as one person speaking through another; Bakhtin called it 'ventriloquation':

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation...It exists in other people's mouths, in other people's concrete contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own. (Bakhtin, 1981:293-294)

Central to a socio-cultural perspective is the notion that those less experienced learn through interaction and collaboration through more knowledgeable others. These could be a teacher, adult, sibling or a peer, assisting children's participation in learning contexts within the frame of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Bruner (1991) calls the process of modelling whereby the adult assists the child to reach their full potential *scaffolding*. The central purpose of the process is seen as the learner focussing on the manageable aspects of the tasks. The emphasis is also on the manageable steps whereby each step is used as a basis for supporting (or scaffolding) the more challenging aspects of the next one.

Such strategies for supporting newcomers into Early Years' settings also support Rogoff's (1990) findings suggesting that children who are new to learning contexts different from their home environments benefit from 'guided participation'. The key finding supporting her theory relates to the role of adults as 'facilitators' rather than 'leaders' in this process. Children's home environments, social and cultural practices form the basis of their conceptual development which, as in the case of second language learners, take place in the home language. Rogoff highlights:

The tacit forms of communication in the verbal and non-verbal exchanges of daily life and the distal arrangements involved in the regulation of children's activities, material goods and companions (1998:229).

Children learning a second language quickly learn to dispossess their home language in the mainly English-speaking medium of the Nursery school. The period that follows is known as the 'silent period' when the child tries to make sense of the new environment. This is often done through non-verbal interaction. It is therefore more appropriate to call this 'a non verbal period'. Tobors (1997) calls this a 'double bind' as she describes second language learners' need to learn the new language and their need to interact in order to learn the language. Wong-Fillmore (1979) found that children differed markedly in their response to the problem of making contact with native speakers. She found social confidence was important for successful language learning. Thompson's

work emphasises the importance of establishing same language co-ordination groups to encourage what he calls 'enculturation' of new arrivals in the nursery.

Methodology

Children's naturally occurring conversations with their peers and teachers were tape recorded at five weekly intervals. These were supported by informal interviews with teachers and parents for possible links to other factors such as attitudes to education and home/community experiences. This phase of the project is for the duration of twelve months.

An initial letter of request was sent to the headteacher outlining the project requesting an appointment to meet and discuss the project in more detail. A preliminary visit was subsequently arranged and details were discussed. The headteacher was happy with the proposal suggesting a few minor changes to take into account the practicalities of the nursery. For example she suggested that including monolingual English speaking children in our sample would reflect the cultural mix of the nursery much better. She also suggested that talking to the staff about the project would help them understand our aims as well as provide opportunities for clarifying any issues. It was agreed to set up a date to meet the nursery staff face to face to explain the nature of the project. It was important to explain to the staff that we were there mainly to look at the way children were interacting with each other through the tasks set out by themselves in the natural environment of the nursery. The meeting went according to plan. Teachers asked questions about their commitment on their part and seemed mostly happy to discover that we did not require anything additional from them. We indicated that we were looking at recording children's routine interactions 'as they were happening' in the nursery and our main interest was to highlight the positive practice and try and focus on why/how these were useful for the sample group. We asked their views about placing audiocassettes in strategic places in the nursery as we tried to focus on our targeted children.

Focus group

The group consisted of six to eight children aged between 3 years 0 months and 3 years 6 months. All children had started the nursery at the same time (September 2007). Although the children came from different linguistic backgrounds they all shared similar socio economic status. Their parents worked as factory workers, small shop owners, office cleaners, parking attendants as well as shop assistants.

The language backgrounds of the children were Turkish (3) Mandarin, (1) Bengali (2), Afro-Caribbean (1) and English (1). All children were exposed to these languages at home.

Sample transcripts presented in this paper are chosen from twelve sessions recorded over a period of eight months. They are chosen as they represent different approaches used by the nursery well. They are to be perceived not as single, 'one off' sessions but as part of a sequence of planned activities.

The Project School: LAMBETH Nursery School

The school is situated at the heart of the multicultural borough of Lambeth in the middle of a large housing estate in South London. School statistics reveal higher than average numbers of children are from families of low socio-economic status (35%) with significant numbers of children reported as from one-parent families. The Nursery catered for 60 part time children.

The school is truly multicultural in its outlook, representing over 20 different languages. A visitor entering the school is met by a large display showing different languages spoken by all the children in the school. Pictures of parents and their children with appropriate captions 'My name is...I speak Portuguese at home.' Another caption reads 'Every week we are learning how to say hello in a different language. This week it is Turkish' accompanied by a word *Merhaba* (hello) underneath it.

The school has established very good links with parents. It adapted a visiting schedule to homes of all children due to start the nursery at the next entry date. A table for the schedule of visits was drawn up and shared with relevant staff according to their relevant expertise. For example a Turkish speaking staff would be visiting the home of a Turkish-speaking child. A member of staff may also visit a home where she/he has knowledge of the cultural practices through personal experiences: for example, he/she may be married to someone from the same country or may have lived/worked there for some time. This often facilitated a good point of contact between home and school and provided useful information for the nursery. It also enabled children to get used to the adult they would be working with in the nursery. This initial bond established through visits often provided a firm basis for the development of good relationships between the children and adults. The information obtained from the initial visit was entered into children's *Initial Assessment File* which is then updated regularly by the assigned staff.

The nursery ran a children's centre which was often led by parents or other professionals with expertise in various activities. On the day of the visit (Friday) we saw a well attended (nearly 25 parents) 'parents and toddlers singing group' run by two parents who were confident singers. Children appeared to enjoy this immensely. During another visit we had a chance to drop in on a 'toy library' session which ran between 1.30-2.45 in the afternoon. Parents who visited the library could stay for 'Stay and Play' sessions run by a speech and language advisor. While children played in a safe environment of the nursery their parents had a chance to speak to the speech and language advisor about their children's language development. In addition to these the centre runs a 'Breakfast Club' (8.15-9.15 am) and an 'After School Club' (3.15- 6.00 pm). Below is the weekly timetable showing some scheduled activities of the centre.

Table 1 **Lambeth Nursery School and Children's Centre**

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8.45 am- 9.30 am Toy Library 10.00-12.00 am Parents Make and Take With Tracy	9.30-1.15 Parents and Toddler group With Anna D, Tara, Carol & Anna R.	10.00-12 noon Introduction to NVQ With Tracy	9.30-12 noon Childminders Group	9.15am-9.45 am Book Library 10.30-11.30 am Parents and Toddlers Singing group With Veronique
1.30-2.45pm Toy Library + Stay and Play Speech and Language Advisor Anna D.	1.00-3.00pm Sewing Group With Forever	1.00-3.00pm ESOL Group With Albert	Hair and Beauty Workshops Dates available after Easter	1.00-3.00pm Early Literacy Workshops For Parents & Carers

*Also Available: Breakfast Club 8.00-9.15 am
After School Club 3.15-6.00 pm
Run by Carol and Anna R.*

The Nursery school was well resourced. During the visits we saw a lot of stimulating activities. One of the most interesting was the effective use of the Interactive White Board showing a film of a baby inside its mother's belly. Children listened with immense interest as the teacher explained some of the physical changes affecting the baby before being born.

The Nursery staff totalled ten. Four were nursery teachers and the rest were assistants. In addition there were staff who ran sessions at the Parents' Centre. The languages spoken amongst the whole staff included Turkish, Portuguese, Bengali, Vietnamese and Mandarin. In addition parents were quite happy to provide translations in other languages represented in the Nursery such as Italian, Polish, German and Urdu.

Strategies for supporting newcomers

The extracts below demonstrate various strategies used by the school to support newcomers in the nursery. **In extract 1**, Dilara a Turkish speaking newcomer (also in the sample chosen for the study) has been placed in a group with two other Turkish speakers Gülay and Bekir who are in their second term at the nursery, two English speakers Darren and Julie and Khalid, and a Bengali speaker who is also in his second term. Yeliz, a Turkish speaking teacher who is reading a story called Three Billy Goats Gruff, manages the group.

Extract 1

No	Utterer	Utterance	Translation
1	Teacher (turning to Dilara)	(Showing the front cover) Who remembers this story? <i>Sen bunun adını biliyormusun?</i>	Do you know the name of this story?
2	Dilara	(Hesitates)	
3	Gülay	Ben biliyorum. <i>Üç tane keçi</i>	I know The three goats
4	Dilara	<i>üç tane keçi</i>	The Three goats
5	Teacher	<i>Aferin- Üç tane keçi</i> , Three Billy Goats Gruff (Reading the story) ...and they didn't have any food left	
6	Darren	They are hungry	
7	Bekir	<i>Acıktılar</i>	They are hungry
8	Dilara	<i>Acıktılar</i>	They are hungry
9	Teacher (offers the Turkish version)	<i>Evet..acıktılar değil mi?</i> ..but they couldn't cross to the other side of the bridge because there lived a big ugly, hungry monster <i>köprüünün altında kocaman, çirkin bir canavar yaşıyormus</i>	Yes, they are hungry aren't they?
10	Children (altogether)	A big monster	
11	Teacher	Where is the monster?	
12	Children (altogether)	Under the bridge	
13	Teacher (to Dilara)	<i>Nerdeymis canavar?</i>	Where is the monster?
14	Dilara	<i>Altında</i>	Underneath
14	Teacher (to Julie)	where is the monster Julie?	
15	Julie	Under the bridge	
16	Teacher (to Khalid)	where is it Khalid?	
17	Khalid	Under the bridge	
18	Teacher (to Khalid and Julie) (Turns to Dilara showing the picture of the monster)	Well Done! Where is the monster Dilara?	
19	Dilara	Under bridge	
20	Teacher	Well Done Dilara.. Well Done! <i>Aferin</i>	Well Done!

In this extract the teacher is using two languages to read the story, using peer support to invite Dilara who is new to the activity. The key strategy used by the teacher is repetition using both languages to ensure participation of all the children. Dilara's participation is encouraged using Bekir and Gülay as models for using Turkish while using Jenny, Darren and Khalid's knowledge for English. The latter strategy acts as an icebreaker, a safe environment for welcoming Dilara while continuing with the story in English. It was through careful modelling and monitoring that the teacher feels happy to offer something in English to her. As also seen in the extract the teacher does so but not until she offers it to Khalid and Julie first. Although it appears to pay off in this extract it is useful to mention that it is about finding the right moment to have a go at it. As I noticed during some of my other visits Dilara has not always been this forthcoming. She appeared to be following interactions between children and adults and making non-verbal gestures. This activity shows a process of development of her participation. Teachers' constant monitoring and persistence is very important in this process.

Extract 2: The next extract illustrates the role of the teacher in facilitating interaction between second language learners and English speaking children. The children are helping their teacher make a cake. On this occasion it is Bilal the Bengali speaking child supported by Aysha the Bengali speaking Nursery Assistant.

No	Utterer	Utterance	Translation
67	Nursery Assistant	Ok now whose turn is it? I need someone to help me mix it up	
68	Chantelle (comes forward to take the spoon)	Me!	
69	Bilal	<i>Ekon amar bari</i>	Its my turn
70	Nursery Assistant	<i>Turni jodi Chantelleke bolthe chao</i> 'My turn Chantelle'	If you want to tell Chantelle...
71	Bilal	My turn Chantelle	
	Nursery Assistant	<i>Mishabo!</i>	Stir it !
72	Nursery Assistant (to Bilal)	good! Well done Bilal!	
	(to Chantelle)	thank you Chantelle ..It was Bilal's turn and you will be after him.	
73	Nursery Assistant (to Bilal)	<i>Bilal, tumi ki shesh? Amar mone hoytumi Chantelle ke ekon dhi-te paro, tumi bhol-te paro..</i> 'Now its your turn Chantelle'	Have you finished Bilal? I think you can give it to Chantelle now? You can say..
74	Bilal	Is your turn Chantelle	
75	Nursery Assistant	Well done Bilal. Good boy! <i>Amra chulithe rekhe ranna korbo</i> We will put it in the oven to cook!	We will put it in the oven to cook

In this extract the nursery assistant begins first by interacting in English but quite aware of the need to engage Bilal with the activity as well the rest of the group. She does this

by first using Bengali and setting very clear models to allow Bilal to use English in the context of the activity. As always giving plenty of praise to him at this early stage of English Language use is very important for developing his confidence.

Extract 3: In this third and last extract, Jennifer the Mandarin Speaking Teacher (MST) is going through a shopping list with a group. Lei, a newcomer also speaks Mandarin. The teacher's task is to help children identify certain items in their 'shopping baskets'. Before attempting to teach Lei the teacher will explore Lei's knowledge of the names in Mandarin first. Dilara who is a Turkish speaker has just decided to join the group.

Extract 3

No	Utterer	Utterance	Translation
21	Darren (holding it)	I got an egg	
21	MST	Well done Darren. Who else has an egg?	
23	Dilara(Shows hers)	<i>Bende de var yumurta(Turkish)</i>	I also have an egg
24	MST (tries to say it)	Well Done Dilara.. <i>yummurta..</i>	egg
25	Dilara (Smiles)		
26	MST (to Lei)	<i>Zesishenmè?</i>	What's this?
27	Lei	<i>Robo</i>	Carrot
28	MST	In English?	
29	Darren	Carrot	
30	Lei	Carrot	
31	MST (to all) (showing a picture of a fish) (to Lei)	<i>Hen hao!</i> What this? Who has this? <i>Zesishenmè?</i>	Well done ! What's this?
32	children	Fish	
33	Lei	<i>Yu</i>	Fish
34	MST	<i>Ying Yu zen me shuo ne?</i>	In English?
35	Lei	Fish	
36	MST	<i>Hen hao!</i>	Well done!
37	Dilara	<i>Balık (Turkish)</i> Fish	Fish
38	Darren	<i>Balık!</i> Fish	
39	Khalid/Julie	<i>Balık...</i> Fish	
40	Lei	Balık, <i>Yu</i> , Fish	Fish
41	MST	Excellent.Well done to all of you!	

In this extract it is useful to highlight the ethos of the school and the implicit message about the use of languages negotiated through the teacher's interaction with the children. This is conveyed through children's confidence in language use. Although the teacher's main task was to teach names of shopping items in English, other languages are very

much used as starting points. Dilara's confidence to mention eggs in Turkish can be attributed to her confidence as much as her unawareness of the teacher's knowledge of Turkish. For Dilara, being given opportunities to use Turkish on previous occasions has deemed it acceptable, therefore to Dilara 'it can be used'. In this case the Mandarin speaking teacher's attempts to repeat it have reinforced it even further. The interaction also acts as a positive influence on Lei who, prior to this was just content with using Mandarin when his teacher spoke him to. Dilara's confidence to use Turkish has not only encouraged others to 'have a go at it', it has also made learning a shared experience. Other utterances clearly demonstrate how natural it was to make the transition into English.

Summary and Key Findings

Extracts presented in this paper represent samples of various strategies used to support newcomers into the nursery. It is useful to perceive each sample as a result of a sequence of similar activities. Each activity was planned to increase the level of a newcomer's participation. In similar studies mentioned in this paper children's silent period was highlighted. One interesting finding of this study was that this period was almost non-existent as children were given opportunities to interact in their own languages with adults which affected their confidence positively. This facilitated a smoother interaction with 'English only' speaking peers and adults. Transcripts during the first week of children's arrival revealed some useful evidence of non-verbal interactions and gestures. The use of the home languages appeared to have acted as a catalyst as children were beginning to use English words with appropriate intervention strategies adopted by teachers as shown in the examples. It can therefore be argued that through appropriate strategies the gap could be reduced considerably. As shown in this study the use of children's home languages as a starting point of communication acted as a catalyst.

The transcripts also reveal good examples of modelling and scaffolding for second language acquisition. Clear planning by all the staff was central to this. As shown in the examples above, monolingual English speaking children were selected and used as models for language use before inviting newcomers to have a go at it. This enhanced peer group interaction considerably. In all strategies adopted children's home experiences - in this case, their home languages and culturally specific experiences such as food and costume games played at home - were used as starting points for further learning. This can be described as using the *familiar* to teach the *unfamiliar*. The emotional enrichment provided the basis for further learning. Children quickly learned that the nursery provided a natural extension of their home environments and their languages were part of this new environment. Once this was established, learning English became a natural and almost inevitable process. What made the transition to English natural for them was that learning of English was related to what they had already learned in their own languages i.e. English did not represent a *different world* only a *different way* of expressing it.

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