

# Linguistic and Cultural Innovation in Schools: The Languages Challenge

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# 7. The Path Less Travelled

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.  
Robert Frost, 1920

The case studies in this book have tracked the process of change from a mainstream approach to diversity, to one more finely-tuned to the linguistic and cultural empowerment of their children. Each case study example sits within local systems, beliefs, and attitudes towards language and culture, managing change from inside these systems. Whilst the schools mirror the specifics of their own locality, as a collective set of narratives there are overarching lessons to be learnt and questions to be asked. This chapter explores these emerging questions and invites readers to consider them from their own context and from several perspectives: as school leaders and policymakers, as teachers and educators, and as researchers.

## Insights for leadership and administrators

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### Sharing the vision

Significant in several case study stories is the match or mismatch between school goals and those of the individual teacher. For example, the success of the Europa School, Culham, lay in the fact that the whole school community was engaged in the vision of a bilingual school committed to a European curriculum. In the case of the Haleakala Waldorf School, Maui, we see the staff team discussing explicitly the core value of *aloha*, its meaning to them, and its significance for the social health of the team.

- How widely do you consider the values and vision of your school are understood and shared?
- How do you communicate this vision?
- What, for you, constitutes evidence that these values are shared?
- How do you take account of those who have differing perspectives? How do you listen to these perspectives and respond to them?

In the German European School, Singapore, being an internationalist and educator at heart emerged as more important to the change process than the teachers themselves being bilingual. In other words, belief in the need for change had an altruistic element, as an aspiration for future generations and for others, not only – and sometimes not even – for self. In all these cases, making core values explicit, and part of dialogue, was essential to the process of change and to making values concrete through practice and policy.

- How explicit is discussion of the values which lie at the heart of your school culture?
- Where do these values come from?

- How does the school leadership contribute to/take the lead in constructing and demonstrating these values?
- What challenges are there in carrying values through into practice?

## Sharing responsibility and the notion of distributed leadership

As the British School Amsterdam became a language-rich environment, we saw a shift in the devolution of responsibility for the EAL child: from the sole concern of the EAL co-ordinator, to a shared responsibility of the whole school community for the language experience of all children.

- Where does your school sit on the spectrum of responsibility for the language culture of the school: from sole concern of the EAL co-ordinator, to whole school involvement?
- Who is felt to be responsible for the language enrichment of children in your school: the EAL co-ordinator, the language teachers, all teachers, both teachers and administrators, parents and families?
- How well does the current balance of responsibilities give support and recognition to the children with other languages in your school?
- How might you change the school culture so the responsibility is more widely spread?
- What needs to happen for this to take place?

The Europa School, Culham demonstrated the value of collective action in taking forward the vision of a bilingual state school. They pooled expertise – legal, financial, educational, organizational, administrative – and created a flat hierarchy in which each contributor was a leader in their area of expertise and a team-player in other respects. Through this distributed leadership, challenges were successfully negotiated with everyone working to their own personal strengths and no single person assuming oversight (Harris, 2008).

- How far is the leadership in your school *distributed* so individuals have responsibility within an area that plays to their own personal strengths?
- What is, or would be, the value of this kind of distributed leadership – both for the individuals afforded roles of responsibility and for the team as a whole?
- How do you think this kind of sharing differs from the idea of a single leader who delegates responsibility roles?

## Involving others

For many schools, visitors mean supervision, authority, and judgement. However, there are other ways in which schools might bring others into the school community to offer outsider observations of the school in progress: parents, international visitors, mentors and consultants, researchers, and fellow-teachers. In Chapters 2 and 5, the researcher as observer cast a fresh eye on the events taking place in school. This included, for example, verifying that what the school saw as its core vision was genuinely visible to an outsider too and feeding back to the school examples of distinction and distinctiveness which an insider may take for granted.

- What can an outsider's perspective on the school contribute to your understanding of it?
- What kinds of outsider expertise and experience would be valued by the school community?

## Developing teachers

Significant in the story of the British School Amsterdam is the impact of teacher development on best practice in language pedagogy. The EAL teacher changed from a front-ended vocabulary and grammar approach to language teaching, to one deeply grounded in the way children actually learn a second language. In other words, it was a refreshed, research-based knowledge of language acquisition which inspired and re-energised both teachers and their pedagogy. Assumptions about language pedagogy, without theory and knowledge, led to outmoded ways of teaching that were not in the best interests of the children.

- How far do you feel it is the task of an EAL specialist to acquire knowledge about language/the EAL learner and how far is it the task of the school as a whole?
- What can you do, as a school leader, to give teachers opportunities to see beyond their assumptions about language learning?
- Do you think research does, or should, make a difference to their practice?
- If so, in what ways does your school foster a culture of learning for its teachers? How could you build on what is working well? How could you develop this culture further?

Exploring further the issue of teacher development, the Waldorf School, Maui story demonstrates the fact that deep learning is slow learning, not only within but across generations. For example, in the Hawaiian case, it took four decades between the change in policy towards Hawaiian culture and teacher capacity to implement this change. In the case of Aga Khan Academy Mombasa, legislation concerning the role of local and national languages started long before the timing became right to put it into practice. In other words, there is a very great leap between change in policy and the change in hearts, minds, and practicalities to action this policy.

- How far do you think leadership makes a difference to this leap from changed and progressive legislation to its actual practice?
- Can you identify a similar policy change in your own context, which you have been, or could be, responsible for carrying through into your school?
- What challenges do you anticipate, or have you already experienced, in achieving this change? What strategies might be or have been helpful?
- Which strategies used by school leaders in Hawaii and Mombasa may be helpful in your own context?

## Insights for teachers and practitioners

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### A sense of place

The narratives from Mombasa and Hawaii suggest the value of giving children a sense of their own location, historically, politically, holistically, ecologically. This entails the school team developing a pedagogy of place that is internalised and embedded into the working life of the school. Chapter 2 suggested that this sense of place is not something simply imbibed by being present somewhere; it needs to be learnt and the learning lead to action. For the children in Kenya, it was a return of status to their national language, Kiswahili; for the children on Maui it was a knowledge of their landscape expressed in many ways including through the language of dance.

- In what ways do children in your classroom engage with where they are, historically, politically, linguistically, ecologically? How far is what they do, and what they learn, specific to where they are?
- What do you think are the advantages of connecting learning in your classroom with where the children actually are geographically? What are the challenges in doing so?

## Learning inside and outside the classroom

In the Early Years Framework for schools described in Chapter 6, a number of recommendations were made regarding the role of home languages inside and outside of formal learning. As a teacher, it is clear that your practice impacts greatly on the language culture in the classroom: but the framework suggests that it also influences the culture during play and informal outside-class interactions.

For children whose home language is not English, *providers must take reasonable steps* [emphasis added] to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home. (Department for Education, 2012, p.6)

- As far as you are concerned as a practitioner, what would “reasonable steps to develop and use their home language” actually look like in your own school context and what would be your own role in taking these steps?
- How can you, in classroom settings, prepare the ground for the use of home languages outside those settings: for example, in the playground and at home.

The framework also suggests that practitioners might turn to the home language in assessment when children do not have a sufficient grasp of the English language to demonstrate their skills.

If a child does not have a strong grasp of English language, practitioners must explore the child’s skills in the home language with parents and/or carers, to establish whether there is cause for concern about language delay. (Department for Education, 2012, p.6)

Thus, the framework suggests what might happen when teacher and child do not share the home language: in other words, working with parents/carers.

- In what ways do you and your school reach out to parents/carers and include them in the understanding of individual children?
- As a teacher, how might you foster this shared partnership with parents, so you can arrive at this more finely-tuned assessment of children whose home language is not English?

## Using classroom space

In the Aga Khan Academy Mombasa, one of the critical differences to the success of dual language teaching was the use of a single classroom for both languages. Instead of a physical separation, the languages were physically brought together in one place. This had both practical and psychological advantages: practical in that the walls could display the languages together contrastively and psychologically in that they were given equal status and validity.

- How do you currently use classroom space to share, display, and showcase language?
- What is the balance between English language/other languages on display around your classroom walls today?

- How would you now wish to change the role of language on your classroom walls, to take account of your learners/school goals?

## Insights for researchers

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### Translanguaging and code-switching

Translanguaging was briefly defined in Chapter One as intentional and planned use of languages, while code-switching was defined as reactive and spontaneous language shift (Garcia, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017; Creese & Blackledge, 2010). The case studies in this book have shown teachers in Kenya, Singapore, and Hawaii deliberately planning for movement between languages, setting up classrooms where there is a join between languages both in physical space and in task design. Yet, as indicated in Chapter 1, the debate remains as to the validity of the concept of translanguaging and how it relates or does not relate to the construct of code-switching.

- In observing bilingual learners, when and how do they move between first and second languages? What are the different purposes and contexts in which they do so? Do any patterns emerge?
- How do learners respond when teachers in multilingual settings separate out languages?
- How do learners respond when teachers in multilingual settings encourage a join between languages?
- In noting the two categories above, what key difference do you notice in the way learners respond in the first and in the second situations?
- Given your own research into the questions above, how would you respond to the question: is the distinction between translanguaging and code-switching a valid one?

### On not doing and not knowing

In Chapter 2, we identified the fact that Western paradigms of learning assume participation and action are keys to effective learning, whilst Hawai’ian ways of learning value listening and watching before acting. This capacity to listen before acting and before knowing, was interestingly demonstrated in the Europa School, where children during the storytelling day chose story sessions in languages they were not studying and enjoyed them anyway. They reported fascination with the storytelling experience even though they did not understand the detail. We would like to encourage the following research exploration designed both to empower children in the use of their home language and also explore the nature of “not knowing and not doing” as strategies for learning.

- What happens when children (or their parents) share stories with their fellow-pupils using their home language? How does the storyteller respond to the higher status and leadership role this affords them?
- How do the children respond, when listening to their fellow-pupil speaking in their language of proficiency?
- What strategies do they use to interpret the story?

## On role models and language identity

Chapter 1 noted that seeing teachers and fellow-pupils as role models of bilinguals gives status to the bilingual process (Baker & Wright, 2017; de Meija, 2002; Bismilla et. al., 2005). Thus, a school which provides opportunities for children to speak their home languages, in principle, sets up a virtuous circle of language empowerment.

- How far does the opportunity for children/parents to tell stories in their home languages change the status of bilingualism in your classroom?
- Ask the children both before and after this experience what they feel about other languages in the classroom. Notice if there is any change as a result of the intervention.

It was also suggested that normalising the use of multiple languages enhanced the status of bilingualism. We have seen in the case studies several ways in which multiple languages were normalized. In the Aga Khan Academy, teachers team-taught side by side using Kiswahili and English; in the Europa School, children chose to carry multilingual exchanges into the playground and to the lunch table. In the British School of Amsterdam, the classroom spaces displayed multiple languages as an indicator of the changed attitude to home languages.

- What does normalising multiple languages actually entail and what is its effect on learner attitudes? Track the ways in which your school demonstrates the view that multiple languages are acceptable. What are the visible signs, on the walls, in the use of resources, in the language choices of teachers, and the wider school community?
- How far are these visible signs consciously noticed by children? By staff? Conduct an investigation by asking children and staff where, when, and how they are aware of more than one language being used.
- How far does this normalization correlate with language use? Notice when and how children move between languages.
- As a research initiative, it would be interesting to compare these questions across several schools to notice patterns and correlations between visible signs of languages normalised and actual language choices made by children.

## The Interdependence Hypothesis

The Interdependence Hypothesis posits that the level of mastery of a child's first language is linked to their development in a new language at school (Cummins, 1979, 2008). The presumption is of transferability – that which I can think and do in my own language, I can transfer into a new language, provided I learn the words.

- Explore the hypothesis that enhancing the child's first language will enhance their development in the second language at school, by following the stages of tracking evidence suggested below.
  - Track what is being done within the school to empower the use of the child's first language.
  - Track examples of the child's change in confidence and proficiency in the school language.
  - Notice if and how there are any links between your first and your second set of observations.



## Developing a language program

There are many factors that influence whether a programme designed to develop bilingualism will be successful and the age of onset of the programme, often considered to be one of the most important factors, is only a minor factor in shaping success (Mephisto & Genesee, 2015). In Chapter 1, the following questions were invited as we move towards formulation of a program that best serves its learners.

- Who is being served with the program?
- What would we like the program to help them achieve?
- What are the factors within/outside our control that will promote success?
- What are the factors within/outside our control that may interfere or confound?

How can you as reader carry forward the insights of these five inspirational case study schools, in order to answer these questions for your own context and make a difference to your own community of learners?

## Concluding comments from the authors

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We would like to conclude by telling our own stories of the schools we researched: where we began and what we take away from each school, and how the experience of working with them has influenced our own learning.

### Concluding comments from Eowyn Crisfield

#### The British School of Amsterdam

I began working with the British School of Amsterdam in the very early days of my consultancy. I was looking for ways to connect my knowledge and experience as an ESL teacher with the more theoretical knowledge I had gained over the course of an MA in Applied Linguistics, especially regarding the development of bilingual learners in schools. The BSA journey to improve their approach to multilingual students in their school, and to find out “what do we need to know next,” ultimately led me to my own journey of making those connections between theory and practice. With each step in the professional development programme, I learned more about how to help teachers understand theories related to language development in school, and also about how to help schools build programmes that are inclusive of their non-native speaker students. Working with the staff at the BSA over the years, and with the parents, has shown me how clearly schools can make a difference, starting with a change of perspective. I aim to take this understanding with me to other schools, to demonstrate that being from a monolingual system doesn’t mean you have to have a monolingual mindset.

#### German European School Singapore

I first visited the German European School Singapore in February 2015. They had invited me to provide professional development for the European Section Primary School, centred around their celebration of International Mother Language Day. The festival they held at the school was inspiring and it was clear that there was a true spirit of supporting and welcoming their students in all their diversity. What was unique was the aspect of language in the festival: all the language groups were providing not only games and stories but also showcasing their languages for the other students to try out. This event, and subsequent efforts to continue and expand their dedication to home

language support, are a welcome addition to the international school ethos and clearly demonstrate how much schools can do if their heart and their research are in the right place.

### The Aga Khan Academy Mombasa

The Aga Khan Academy Mombasa is a unique school in a unique organisation. Although I've worked with a great many schools over the years, working with the AKA Mombasa has been a critical part of my own professional development journey. Working outside the European context, and indeed the Western context, and learning to contextualise my knowledge and skills to be able to work effectively in an African context has been both a pleasure and a challenge. The lessons learned from working with the Academy have given me a deeper insight into the complexities of international education in local contexts, as well as into the myriad ways that the local language ecology impacts on programmes and professional development. The Academy should be a model of language equality for schools who want to promote local languages in parity with global languages and I hope their story will serve as an inspiration for other schools in linguistically diverse areas, to embrace the local alongside the global.

### My main take-away points

*Leadership:* This has come through in all the case study schools as a key factor of success. School leadership needs to believe strongly in the place of languages in their schools, as making space (and budget) for these programmes is not easy. Teachers can make small changes in their own classrooms, but systemic and systematic change must be driven by dedicated leadership, with a clear vision of what they want to achieve, so that change can come from inside, rather than being imposed from outside.

*Context:* Despite the fact that several of my case study schools have similar student body and locational aspects, the approach they have taken to languages has varied immensely. This has shown me, again and again, how important it is to consider the context of each school individually, no matter how similar it may seem on the surface to other schools. This has been a particularly deeply felt outcome of working with the bilingual programme at AKA Mombasa, where they have taught me much about how the environment – people, place, languages – are at the heart of any educational planning.

*Research:* In all my case study schools (and indeed in most schools I've worked with) there has been a real thirst for knowledge about bilingual learners. The roadblock is that many teachers and administrators feel that the knowledge being generated by research is either not accessible to them or not applicable to their context. Events like the ECIS ESL/MT conference (now ECIS MLIE), that bring researchers together with practitioners, are critically important for allowing schools to access research knowledge. More importantly, the researchers presenting at the ECIS ESL/MT conference have been able to = connect their research to practice and to show clearly the *how* rather than only the *why*. This is evidenced by the examples of teachers returning from the conference and initiating or maintaining change within their schools. We all need to think more carefully about building bridges between research and practice in the area of languages in schools.

*Reflective practice:* All of the case studies I have presented have been described as *journeys*, as indeed I have characterised my own learning process as well. The choice for the word *journey* reflects the innate continuing nature of developing and implementing a language-rich pedagogy in any school. None of the case studies presented have included a first, successful attempt at change. They all include elements of taking risks, getting things not quite right, refining, trying again, and getting it a bit more right the next time. All of the schools have had multiple phases in the development and implementation of their unique approaches, yet none of them would say that they

are finished. This is a sign of true reflective practice, and a desire to get things right, even if it takes time, effort, and resources.

## Concluding comments from Jane Spiro

### Hawaʻii and embodied learning

As a regular visitor to Hawaʻii to visit family, I became increasingly concerned to seek the story of the islands in their natural and pre-colonised existence. Even as an outsider, it was possible to recognise glimpses of a silenced culture and language in the Hawaʻiian place-names and *loan* phrases (such as *aloha* and *mahalo*) used widely to greet and to thank; in images such as the turtle or the hibiscus flower; artefacts such as the Hawaiiʻan lei or garland; institutions such as the Bishop Museum and Kamehameha Schools founded by Princess Puaʻhua, the last inheritor of the Hawaiian royal estates; buildings such as the only royal palace on Hawaiian soil; and pan-Asian customs such as the shedding of shoes on the doorstep. The presence of a strong Polynesian culture was evident, offering tantalisingly small samples of what the bigger world view and cosmology might mean. Yet in seeking to travel further into this cosmology, as an outsider it was hard to go beyond a packaged and commodified version of the culture: for example, hula dance events in expensive tourist resorts or small phrasebooks of Hawaiiʻan language encapsulating in reductive translation some of its deepest core values. This heavy hand on a delicate and exquisitely nurtured ancient culture was visible too in the approach to the land. Land, in the Hawaʻiian world view, was the living body of gods: for example, Pele, the god of volcanoes emitting fiery anger that reformed the landscape; and sea a pathway between islands inhabited by creatures who were neighbours in the shared domain of sea/land. In contrast to this, concrete shopping malls, high rise hotels, and paved car parks have been built facing and blocking out views of the sea and plastic or polystyrene packaging is sent to landfills or washed up on hidden beaches with no care for recycling or sustainability.

Having observed this chasm between the Hawaʻii that pre-existed the arrival of western travellers, and the current one, I felt an urgency to seek out what was authentic to the islands. This quest took me first to the College of Education doctoral programme at the University of Hawaʻii, and there to doctoral educators in the heart of Hawaʻiian revitalisation, and to Jocelyn Romero Demirbag in particular. What was interesting for me in meeting Jocelyn, was not only the breadth and depth of her involvement with Waldorf Schools in Hawaii, but also her own acquired connection with Hawaii as place. The dialogue between us allowed me to recognise the complexity of a relationship with an indigenous culture and to ask questions about ownership and appropriation. I recognised the delicate balance between sharing knowledge and losing ownership of it; and the nature of learning as a form of power over what is learnt.

The experience of visiting schools at different stages of response to Hawaʻiian revitalisation was a humbling one. It required me to make peace with my own habit of questioning and to learn in the Polynesian way through listening and watching. A key observation was that I was seeing educators like Jocelyn and Makaʻala who had learnt and re-learnt an ancient culture and were embodying it, or teaching it through actually *being* it. In the Kamehameha School on the main island of Oahu I saw the craft of feather fans being revitalised, the construction of buildings open to the four corners with a free-flow between rooms and spaces, and an amphitheatre area where closing ceremonies were offered to the day and the school week. Whilst this book is about language, and our key project has been to show the critical links between this and the self-esteem and identity of children, what I most learnt from the Hawaʻii experience was that language is only one of multiple ways in which a home culture is deeply learnt: use of space, light, movement, and the way time is marked are examples of

how language connects with non-linguistic learning. In developing a home language or acquiring a second one, children come to *embody* this learning: to become a child with more dimensions to the way they understand and live in the world. This is what I saw at first hand, in watching the grace of teenage boys greeting the mountains with hula movements or the watchful quietness of 6-year old children as they sat in a circle learning about the phases of the moon.

### The Europa School, Culham

My first encounter with the Europa School Culham was through repute: the story of the collective response of parents, teachers, and governors to save the European School after its decree of execution and disconnect from Brussels. Its origins were thus, from the start, known to be radical and courageous. In addition, it was a school placed within a monocultural school system, but known to be uniquely committed to multiple languages and the European identity of its children. I was thus pleased to be invited to act as co-opted governor in the Education committee and on the Full Governing Board. This role allowed me a privileged insight into the mechanism of a school as it built its cohort year by year. In this role, what I observed was the importance of everyday minutiae and day-to-day vigilance in implementing a vision. What turned vision into practice was the patience and precision to consider every detail and its role in the whole, such as the positioning of school computers, the safety of playground equipment, school dress code, and the language of school signs. Also, a critical part of making this vision real was the close involvement of parents and families. Families were considered at every point in the school week and year: in school decision-making; end-of-term shows and presentations; invitations to share experiences and feedback; regular information-sharing events; and access to school reporting and governance records. Involvement, openness, and access to information were exhaustive.

Yet alongside the small-scale, for this school community, were constant reminders and references to the reasons for it all: the nurturing of the European child confident across languages and cultures. What was important learning for me was to see how the small-scale worked alongside the core and fundamentals constantly and consciously. In governing board meetings, where there were differing views or challenging decisions, the dialogue would refer back regularly to the overarching goal and mission. This referencing provided a check and balance against which to measure decisions. This did not mean decisions were simple. At times, the same event or issue was interpreted by some as in harmony with overarching aims, whilst for others it conflicted; but what was noteworthy was that the decision was grappled with in relation to these core aims.

### My main take-away points

*The value of specificity:* Whilst individual stories appear to have a specificity unique to themselves, in fact the more precise this specificity, the more it appears to have a wider relatability to other settings. The struggles of the Europa School for validation and compliance within the system reflects similar struggles in other settings too. The connection with locality, opened up in the Waldorf Schools Hawa'i, could equally apply to schools in urban New York or industrial Gdansk. Understanding the detail allows us to prepare for setbacks through the experiences and examples of others and to see beyond these setbacks to possible resolution.

*Connections between language and place:* This book offers overarching insights into the way language empowers speakers and connects them with past and present, but it also shows us how language connects with the specifics of place, memory, collective and personal history. For example, children in a largely monolingual Culham were learning Spanish or French and this experience lifted them into a new aspirational place, both geographically and psychically. As future bilingual speakers, literally new European places will be open to them as a result of their language knowledge.

The section above has also shown how I perceived the connection between Hawaii as language and Hawaii as place. The case study of Kiswahili further enriches this point: whether *place* is actually a marker in time, such as childhood or the future, it is part of what we learn in connecting with a first or second language.

*Embodied learning:* A presiding insight from all the case studies, and through my experience of working with them, is that learning a language entails a deeper learning which changes children and teachers in ways which are unexpected. I restate here the example of the child in Europa School learning German, as the first in his family to know a second language. Teaching his parents German, he explained that their response was pride in their son, growing from a monolingual family life into a bilingual European one. As we have seen in these accounts, a central vision acts as a way of navigating through minutiae, setbacks, the annoying and conflictual, the trivial and the everyday. What is hoped for, in sharing these journeys along the path less travelled, is that the arrival is achievable and the benefits worthwhile in ways which defy and go beyond expectations.

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