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21 years in east London: issues in policy, research and practice

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is very much an introduction to work-in-progress and is based on a presentation at a seminar at London Metropolitan University and the ensuing debate (Mau, 2011). It builds on personal experience as a practitioner in the community language sector for 21 years (Sneddon, 1993), and on experience of research in the field, some of which was carried out with my late colleague Peter Martin. Peter and I began to explore some of the many dimensions of diversity in the complementary school sector on our doorstep in east London. We were fascinated by the way it developed organically to meet the very specific needs of highly localised communities and how issues of power and status impact in different ways and offer different opportunities and challenges to differently situated communities (Sneddon & Martin, forthcoming).

Issues in policy: from problem to resource

Some years ago Anderson referred to the "incoherent" public discourse on multilingualism (Anderson et al, 2008:191). Little has changed at the time of writing.

Safe and hidden

Ruiz (1994) in a discussion on orientations in language planning described how different societies categorise the languages of minorities as a problem, a resource or a right. There has been some shift in public discourse in the UK from considering community languages as a problem to viewing them as a resource, but they are rarely referred to as a right. The discourse of assimilation, especially in the field of education, is prevalent in many of the government documents which make reference to the languages of immigrants in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s (Reid, 1998; Bourne, 1991). BaetensBeardsmore has referred to the "deep-seated and widespread fear of bilingualism" and the "all-pervading tendency to couple the notion of 'problems' to that of bilingualism" (2003: 10).

The Bullock Report (DES, 1975) made positive references to the value of bilingualism and noted that it

> is of great importance to the children and their families, and also to society as a whole.... we should see mother tongue as an asset, as something to be nurtured, and one of the agencies which should nurture it is the school. Certainly, the school should adopt a positive attitude to its pupils' bilingualism and whenever possible should help to maintain and deepen their knowledge of their mother tongue (p. 293-294).

However this observation failed to make any impact on the status of community languages. The Swann Report into the education of children from ethnic minority groups (DES, 1985) concluded that the maintenance of community languages was not in the remit of mainstream education and was best addressed by communities themselves.

The Linguistic Minority Report (LMP, 1985) was a major investigation into the prevalence and usage of community languages in three local authorities in England. The accompanying Mother Tongue Teaching Directory mapped the language teaching offered by community organisations at the time.

However the ground breaking work of the LMP was never followed up and, in spite of many interesting initiatives in the field of mother tongue teaching (Tansley, 1986; Tosi, 1984) the issue of language and cultural maintenance remained firmly in the hands of the communities themselves with little official recognition. Communities developed "safe", but largely "hidden" spaces in which young people could learn about their language and culture and worked to strengthen "cultural and religious identity in the face of the threat of cultural assimilation" (Hall et al.2002: 415).

Different terms are currently in use to refer to these alternative spaces for learning in the UK: community language schools, supplementary schools, Saturday schools, complementary schools, and out-of-hours learning. There has been considerable discussion of these terms in the literature. In this paper I follow Martin et al (2004) in using the term 'complementary schools'.

Rassool comments that when official government discourse celebrates multiculturalism and linguistic diversity it tends to do so "without recourse to the social experiences of the speakers of these languages" (1995) and in ways that do not reflect bilingual people's every day experiences (Hall et al 2002; Leung et al, 1997). The misunderstanding and fear of multilingualism is encapsulated in a comment made by a former senior member of the government (Blunkett, 2002: 76) who referred to multilingual interactions within families and communities as "schizophrenic".

Emerging from the underground.

The Resource Unit for Supplementary and Mother Tongue Schools was set up in 1997 at the initiative of the Trust for London, a charitable trust that funded many complementary schools in the London area. The Unit worked to raise awareness of and to provide support and training to the sector. It was successful in promoting community languages and in bringing the sector to the attention of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

The value of complementary education has more recently become recognised and its potential is referred to in official documents. The *Aiming High* report notes
> *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. …Attendance can enhance pupils' respect, promote self-discipline and inspire pupils to have high aspirations to succeed.*
> (DfES, 2003: 26)

A series of initiatives over the last few years have made the complementary sector better known to educators in mainstream schools.

- The DfES offered grants to the Resource Unit to compile a Directory of Schools (Kempadoo&Abdelrazak, 1999) and to publish a set of Guidelines (Abdelrazak, 1999).
- It offered funding to the renamed National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRC) to establish a national database and a Quality Framework for complementary schools.
- The National Languages Strategy (DfES, 2002) created an entitlement for primary school children to learn a language and indicated that any language could be taught. Of the 55 languages currently taught in complementary schools in the UK, 23 are currently available at examination level (GCSE) in England, although few mainstream schools teach them as part of the time-tabled curriculum.
- The innovative Our Languages project was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to promote the teaching of community languages and develop partnerships between complementary an mainstream schools (CILT, 2008).

While the most recent study of multilingualism in London (Eversley et al. 2010) records 233 languages spoken by school pupils, and the Positively Plurilingual report celebrates the value of "English Plus" (CILT, 2006), the status of languages spoken by communities that originate in migration remains ambiguous. These languages are generally known as Community Languages and do not have the status of the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL, such as French, Spanish and German) traditionally taughtin the curriculum of mainstream schools. However, changing patterns of migration and priorities in the globalised economies have seen this distinction blurred: French is now spoken as a "community language" by a substantial resident population originating not only from France, but from Francophone countries all over the world. The same applies to Spanish. On the other hand community languages such as Arabic and Mandarin Chinese are now more commonly found on the MFL curriculum (Anderson et al. 2008).

The emerging discourse above clearly signals that community languages can be a valuable resource, both to the individual concerned and to society as a whole in the context of globalised economies. However while the discourse is much more positive towards linguistic diversity, it does not remove the enormous power imbalance between languages. The recognition in some official educational documents does little to challenge the overwhelmingly monolingual orientation of the National Curriculum as whole, which makes very little reference to bilingualism. While the value of complementary schools is recognised, there is no entitlement to funding of any kind to support their teaching. However much mainstream schools may celebrate their linguistic diversity, their pupils are in no doubt where the power lies. While community languages are achieving recognition, there are serious differences in status between major European languages and languages such as Turkish and Bengali. While the status of Arabic and Mandarin is rising, only 23 modern languages are currently available for study at GCSE. New power relations may be developing as a new hierarchy of languages emerges: The Albanian organisation Shpresa Programme are concerned that, as more languages become available to study for GCSE, those that do not (such as Albanian) will be perceived as having less status. Community languages have progressed in some areas of public discourse from problem to resource, but in the absence of any statutory resources, they are a long way from being recognised as a right.

Issues in research

Superdiversity: the challenge of meeting community needs when " everybody is everywhere"

Patterns of migration since the 1990s have greatly increased the scale and the nature of diversity in London. The east of London has historically been the starting point for many migrating communities. It still is and the range of countries of origin has increased. Recent arrivals, whether from Eastern Europe such as the Latvians, Lithuanians and Poles, refugees from Kosovo and new communities originating from the Lusophonecountries in Africa have settled in substantial numbers in east London boroughs. However traditional patterns of immigration whereby particular ethnic communities settled in identified districts, such as, for example, the Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets,or the Punjabis in Southall (Baker &Eversley, 2000) is no longer the dominant pattern. New communities are much more widely dispersed (Vertovec, 2007) and this has an impact on the influence they can have on power relations and politics at the local level.

The new trajectories of migration have created greater dimensions of variation: alongside ethnicity (which in some communities, such as the Somali, is very complex and does not equate with country of origin, as our simplistic definitions often assume (Adfam, 2009))and language, issues of social class, educational background and immigration status have created complex patterns within and across communities. Because complementary schools are set up by communities to meet their

specific needs for the transmission of language and culture, they are in a position to be uniquely responsive to these needs on a very localised basis.

As a result, the dimension of variation in the sector is considerable. In size the schools vary from a dozen pupils to several hundred. With respect to premises some meet in individuals' front room, other rent space in mainstream schools or community centres. With respect to funding, some operate entirely with volunteers, other employ paid staff and a few, like some Turkish and Portuguese schools, have teachers provided by the country of origin. The economic status of the community they serve determines whether they can charge fees or whether they depend on grants from charitable trusts or Local Authorities.Some, like the Yoruba schools, work in isolation, others, like the Mandarin schools, are part of umbrella organisations that provide a framework for training and teaching materials.Some schools teach to UK qualifications, where these exist, other assess pupils on internally developed measures or, like Japanese and some Mandarin schools, prepare them for exams in the country of origin. With respect to language teaching, in some long established communities such as the Greek speaking one in north London, it is not uncommon for complementary schools to be virtually teaching a foreign language as the pupils who attend have limited exposure to the language in the home (Gardner-Chloros et al, 2005). Other schools are developing pedagogical strategies that enable them to meet the needs of children on a very wide spectrum of home-language knowledge.

Researching complementary schools in their communities

Although complementary schools of various sorts have been in existence in the UK for many years (McLean, 1985), there has been comparatively little research in the field since the Linguistic Minorities Project. Significant studies include Li Wei's study of the role of Chinese supplementary schools in Newcastle in the maintenance of Chinese(1993), a comparative study of supplementary schooling in Leeds and Oslo by Hall et al (2002) and Arthur's (2003) study of Somali literacy teaching in Liverpool.

A number of small scale studies have explored different aspects of community language teaching, several of them carried out by PhD students who met as the Community Languages Research Group in London in the early 2000s. Several of these have been published in two recent collections (Conteh, Martin & Robertson, 2007; Lytra & Martin, 2010). They offer accounts of teaching and learning and document the way in which priorities, procedures and practices vary in different communities and localities.

More recently the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded substantial studies of the complementary sector. These explored in depth the linguistic and pedagogical practices in complementary schools in four different communities in England. Studies in Gujarati schools in Leicester and in Bengali schools in Birmingham, Chinese schools in Manchester, and Turkish schools in London (Creese et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2004; 2006; Creese et al, 2008; Blackledge& Creese, 2010). These studies revealed the complex ways in which languages are negotiated in the multilingual classroom and how bilingual learning is managed. The studies also revealed the important role complementary schools play in providing safe environments in which pupils can explore and negotiate their learner and personal identities. A study of young Bangladeshi children in east London schools by Kenner et al has demonstrated how mainstream and complementary school teachers planning and delivering lessons together can help pupils develop bilingual learning strategies. Such creative strategies also helped children to gain a deeper understanding of different areas of the curriculum such as poetry or mathematics(2007; 2011).

Researching diversity: a snapshot

An initial pilot study with18 teachers, interviewed while attending a course at the Resource Unit for Supplementary and Mother Tongue Schools in London,offered a snapshot of these dimensions, but also of the commonalities in the teachers' experience. The Bengali teachers were working with children from an established community that came from rural areas in the Indian sub-continent, seeking employment, two and three generations ago. The Gujaratis were also working with an established Indian community, but one that came as refugees, with a middle class profile, in a secondary migration from East Africa. The Iranian, Iraqi and Somali teachers were working with refugee communities more recently arrived. The Yoruba speaking Nigerians, the Chinese from Hong-Kong and Mainland China and the Afro-Caribbean were representing communities that were long established but constantly receiving new members, some arriving for educational rather than economic opportunities. All except the Polish teacher, whose school included both descendants from World War II veterans and recent arrivals, had limited physical contact with the countries of origin either due to distance and cost of travel or political circumstances (Sneddon, 2003).

The majority of the teachers in the group were volunteers who responded to the very real threat of cultural assimilation (Hall et al, 2002) by their commitment to teaching the language and culture of their communities. Coming from different ethnic, social and economic backgrounds, they nevertheless had a great deal in common: all perceived the role of their school as providing education in a safe environment. They perceived mainstream schools as presenting a threat in so far as they *"stereotype children, have low expectations, fail to address institutional racism and lack cultural knowledge"* (p.3). The teachers referred to the distinctive role they played in British society in "*bridging cultural divides and affirming dual identities"* (p.3). They also discussed their relationship with the children they taught. Some said it was friendly and informal, others mentioned being treated with respect, but all felt it was much closer than the relationship children had with their mainstream school teachers.

Some of the following comments are indicative of the teachers' priorities with respect to their specific community.

Chinese Mandarin School: *we are passing on the national treasure*
A Somali school :*I have helped my community for 12 years to get their rights and benefits. Now they are settled, the challenge is education for the children*
A Caribbean school:*I would like to see the young children of my community have as much of a chance as the host community to become teachers, lawyers and doctors*
A Bengali school: *I believe without the mother tongue and supplementary schools, most of the ethnic minorities will be left behind*

The lack of funding opportunities united all theteachers.

Research: contrasting communities.

A study by Sneddon and Martin (forthcoming, no pagination) explored how a localised factor such as population density could have a significant impact on the way a complementary school operates with the same ethnic population. The study contrasted the situation of schools that teach Bengali in two neighbouring London Boroughs: Tower Hamlets and Hackney. While the Bangladeshi community in both boroughs tends to be economically disadvantaged, in Tower Hamlets children of Bangladeshi origin constitute 54% of the school population.

> *… the density of the community in Tower Hamlets and its engagement with the democratic process has enabled it to develop a local power base and promote a range of*

linguistic and culturally appropriate services. Pressure from the community on its elected representatives has ensured that mother tongue education was prioritised by the education authority.

As a result of this prioritisation, teachers of Bengali, trained and employed centrally by the Local Authority's Children's Services and supervised by the Community Languages Service team, are deployed in 61 community organisations as well as 23 after-school classes throughout the borough. They teach to a specially developed syllabus aimed at GCSE examinations and are managed alongside all Modern Foreign Languages taught in the borough. As a result of this level of support, the classes in the borough are free to children (Community Languages Service, 2007).

The neighbouring borough of Hackney has a more diverse population with a low proportion of children from the Bangladeshi community. JCE is the only complementary school teaching Bengali. The small parent-run school has been in existence for 21 years but has never received any recognition or funding from its local authority. It could only receive such funding by bidding for running curriculum support in English and maths instead of Bengali. Instead, it leads a hand-to-mouth existence, funded by charitable trusts on the basis of the achievement of its pupils at GCSE and the economic disadvantage of its pupils, and a small fee paid by families.

The same paper contrasts complementary schools run by well-established communities such as the Bangladeshi one, originating in economic migration, with one run for a new community with a very different migration trajectory. The new organisation, Shpresa Programme, set up by Albanian speaking refugees,benefited from funding initiatives designed to support the integration of refugees. It developed an innovative model of partnership which engages directly with mainstream education. In return for free use of premises in nine different schools, the organisation offered support to families and to school staff on how best to meet the needs of Albanian speaking children. In so doing it raised the profile of the Albanian community and its culture in the wider community (Sneddon, 2010).

While both the Albanian and Bangladeshi communities share high levels of economic disadvantage (as measured by free school meals which almost all their children claim), many in the Albanian community arrived with qualifications and experience which, although not recognised in the British workplace, have been deployed to build a large and professionally managed organisation able to negotiate confidently with public services. This has not been the case with JCE members who have struggled with paperwork (Sneddon & Martin, op.cit.).

Emerging from the underground: the tensions –opportunities and challenges.

Opportunities
The recent more positive government discourse on bilingualism and linguistic diversity has been greatly welcomed by complementary schools. Together with recent research and the recognition of the value of their work, this has produced opportunities for the sector to become better known and to develop their professionalism.

The **Our Languages**project   highlighted the benefits of studying community languages and the innovative ways in which complementary schools have worked in partnership with mainstreams schools. A Toolkit produced by the project has provided advice on developing such projects (CILT, 2009) and there is a great deal of information and resources available from the website (www.ourlanguages.org.uk). The project enabled schools to network locally and nationally and make their work known.

The **National Resource Centre** for supplementary education (NRC) through its courses and its Quality Framework has helped to professionalise the sector, advising complementary schools on policies and practices, providing opportunities for more experienced complementary school teachers to mentor others. Attendance at courses and the database of complementary schools offered further networking opportunities.

The range of community languages available at **examination level** has increased. Many complementary schools have found that studying for a recognised academic qualification, such as GCSE, is very motivating for teenagers who are more likely to continue studying the language and benefit from the generally high grades they obtain. As many community language students sit their exam early, they become familiar with the process and this can increase their confidence when facing their main sequence of exams.

The range of ITE institutions able to offer a **PGCE in community languages** has also increased: Arabic, Bengali, Mandarin Chinese, Urdu, Turkish, Punjabi are now offered in several universities(Ofsted, 2008) and flexible opportunities for study are available (Anderson, 2008). This ensures that both mainstream and complementary schools can employ teachers with full Qualified Teacher Status to teach community languages to examination level.

The blurring of distinctions between languages traditionally defined as Community Languages and MFL has made it easier to for schools to extend their language offer and for authorities such as Tower Hamlets to manage all language teaching underone management. It offers opportunities to practitioners and researchers to explore commonalities as well as differences in pedagogical approaches to teaching languages in different contexts (as additional languages, as new foreign languages, as community languages). It also supports the development of multilingual pedagogies that build on bilingual children's skills and reflect the way in which languages are actually used in multilingual communities(Kenner and Ruby, 2011; Conteh and Gleisner, 2011; Garcia, 2008;Cummins et al, 2011).

Emerging from the underground

Challenges

Government discourse on community languages may be more positive than it was a decade ago, but it remains profoundly ambivalent. It offers some opportunities but removes few challenges. Bilingualism in community languages and English is more often referred to as a resource rather than a problem, but this concept does not translate into National Curriculum content, where bilingualism is barely mentioned. Primary schools are authorised to teach any language, but only 1% choose to teach the languages spoken in the homes of their pupils (Anderson et al, 2008). Some secondary schools offer community languages at GCSE, but their number is small. Evidence from the Turkish community (Dedezade, 2011) suggests that this is increasingly being offered out-of-hours, rather than as part of the time-tabled curriculum. The range of languages available at GCSE level, at 22, is still less than half of the 55 that young people learn in their complementary schools.

The status and balance of power between languages has changed little. Aside from Tower Hamlets, whose support of community languages is unique in the UK, only a handful of Local Authorities offers small grants and support to the sector. The responsibility for developing the range of linguistic skills of the UK population remains firmly with local communities themselves.

Issues of funding and status remain and complementary schools face new challenges related to their mission and purpose (Sneddon & Martin, forthcoming). Increased visibility and acceptance in the mainstream throw up some interesting paradoxes for complementary schools. The issue of funding united all the teachers in the 2003 study. A number of complementary Schools receivefunding from grant making trusts. Paradoxically as they have become better known and their status has improved, their work is no longer considered to be innovative and charitable trusts are less supportive. Local Authorities are looking for financial savings in areas where they have no statutory duty and few offer even a token amount of funding.In a move to increase the privatisation of public services, the government commissions services from the voluntary sector. This policy extends to Local Authorities. Many have replaced small grant programmes that were available to complementary schools, by commissioning. However thiscommissioning, often a privatisation of study support,generally concerns additional teaching in English and maths and the conditions attached can work against the original mission of complementary schools to respond to the identified needs of their specific community. The authority in which JCE is located requires applicants for commissions to produce full schemes of work in advance and disenfranchises community teachers(who mostly have qualifications from the country of origin) through requiring all teachers implementing the programme to have UK Qualified Teacher Status. The commissioning process is particularly damaging (it has even been described as "toxic") to small community groups that are easily outbid by large national charities (Tyler, 2008; HCVS, 2010).

The paradox of visibility can create new tensions for complementary schools. While they welcome the opportunity to become more professional (through, for example working towards the NRC's Quality Framework) not all are happy adopting teaching styles and materials that reflect the teaching of languages in mainstream schools, rather than the way in which languages are actually used within bilingual communities. Some schools that run successful GCSE classes are concerned that they teach languages on a shoestring while the mainstream schools who enter the pupils for examinations can claim the credit. By bidding for commissions, such as those described above, or focusing on teaching languages for UK examinations, they can compromise their identity as grassroots organisations and their mission to meet the particular needs of their users and support the evolution of their cultural identity.

> *Mainstream providers place great emphasis on gaining qualifications, while complementary school directors give high priority to gaining access to the history, culture and/or religion associated with the language. Teachers in complementary schools rate high students' enjoyment of language learning and opportunities to meet others from similar background, seeing both of these as important factors in students' choosing to study a community language (CILT, 2005:3).*

Staying in the light

Strong communities that are well established in particular localities support the development of culturally specific services such as complementary schools. The greater the density of the community, the more likely they are to have a measure of political power at the local level. As the examples from the Bangladeshi community discussed in this paper demonstrate, density and status can determine whether they are invisible and marginalised or have a degree of local political influence and power.

Superdiversity, the increased ethnic, linguistic and social diversity and the wider geographical distribution of minority communities, present a challenge. But it is a challenge that small grass-roots organisations may be uniquely well-positioned to meet, resulting as they do from community members working together to meet a specific identified need. Generally managed by their users, they can negotiate the delicate cultural balancing act involved in providing relevant social,

educational and artistic services.Organisations can negotiate locally to support each other. For example Shpresa Programme has obtained funding from a charitable trust to mentor fledgling organisations and is currently helping a Polish, a Lithuanian, a Somali and a Portuguese group to establish themselves. As identified by the teachers in the 2003 pilot study, funding remains the biggest challenge of all, especially in economically disadvantaged communities. Thesocial class origins and economic status of communities have an impact on the kind of organisations that they can support and few communities in east London are in a position to support complementary schools through fees alone.

Colleagues from the complementary sector in east London present at the seminar offered several ways forward to ensure that the sector in their very diverse boroughs avoids becoming once again invisible and marginalised. Their initiatives are focused around networking, mentoring and sharing good practice as well as campaigning to raise the profile of their work. These include creating the Newham Supplementary Education Partnership (Pinder, 2011);supporting a campaign by students to extend GCSE accreditation to languages such as Albanian, Lithuanian and Somali taught in local complementary schools (Pollard, 2011); working in partnership with the University of East London School of Education to develop a programme of teaching workshops for complementary schools. By working together to develop innovative solutions they hope to empower their sector and extend its influence.

As researchers and teacherswe can study the complementary sector, the role of community languages in personal bilingualism and the impact of multilingualism on communities, and by disseminating our findings through our teaching and our writing we can contribute a little to help keep an exciting and innovative educational sector out of the shadows.

Raymonde Sneddon – UEL – 22nd September 2011

For my colleague Peter Martin (1949-2009)

(4811 words)

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