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Article title: Multicultural, Heritage and Learner Identities in Complementary Schools

Year of publication: 2006

Citation: Creese, A. et al (2006) 'Multicultural, Heritage and Learner Identities in Complementary Schools' *Language and Education* 20 (1) 23-43

Link to published version: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09500780608668708>

DOI: 10.1080/09500780608668708

Multicultural, Heritage and Learner Identities in Complementary Schools

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In this paper¹ we look at three identity positions salient in research of young people studying in complementary schools in Leicester, a large linguistically and ethnically diverse city in the East Midlands, England. Our discussion of identity focuses on three identity positions: multicultural, heritage and learner. The first two of these are linked to discussions on ethnicity as a social category. We explore the fluidity and stability of ethnicity as a social description in interview transcripts of young people at complementary schools. In addition, the paper explores another, more emergent identity salient in the two schools, that of 'learner identity'. The research can be characterised as adopting a linguistic ethnographic approach using a team of ethnographers. Data was collected for 20 weeks by four researchers and consists of fieldnotes, interviews and audio recordings of classroom interactions. We consider the importance of ambiguity and certainty in students' conceptualisation of themselves around ethnicity and linguistic diversity and look at the institutional role complementary schools play in the production of these and successful learner identities. We explore how complementary schools privilege and encourage these particular identity positionings in their endorsement of flexible bilingualism. Overall, we argue that complementary schools allowed the children a safe haven for exploring ethnic and linguistic identities while producing opportunities for performing successful learner identity.

Keywords: interaction, identity, ethnicity, Leicester, Gujarati

Introduction

This paper draws on data from two complementary schools in Leicester to discuss different student, and to a lesser extent, teacher identity positionings taken up and developed there. Two schools are at the centre of this study. We have called these complementary schools Mount Hill (MH) and Temple Vale (TV). The schools are in diverse areas of Leicester, itself a linguistically diverse city. Leicester is the tenth largest city in the UK and a third of its population are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest of these groups are of Gujarati heritages (Leicester City Council, 1991, 2000, 2001). The student numbers on roll at the two schools are 90 for MH and 110 for TV. MH employs seven members of staff while TV employs 10 teachers. The schools were also chosen in the larger

study because they contrasted in their affiliations. MH is linked to a neighbourhood community association through a mainstream school where it also holds its weekly classes on a Tuesday evening from 18.00 to 20.00. TV is linked to a local Hindu temple but holds its classes in a nearby Further Education College every Saturday from 10.00 to midday.

There are many different kinds of complementary schools in the UK context. Some schools work towards providing supplementary teaching and learning on mainstream subject curriculum while also providing opportunities for the exploration of cultural and heritage knowledges. Other schools have their foundation in religious maintenance. Still other schools are more focused on language learning and maintenance and link the learning of language to aspects of culture and community. Our study is focused on this last group and looks at community language complementary schools. Moreover, within this category, schools differ. Some complementary schools may be linked to local mainstream schools and neighbourhood associations while others have formal links with places of worship. It is children of school age who generally attend these schools. Their ages range from 5 years to 16 years old. However, some schools do encourage adults to attend either with the children or through attending separate classes. The students are grouped broadly around language proficiency and age. Many children start attending these schools from a young age (around 5 or 6) and continue until completing a GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) or Advanced level.² In the two schools we attended class sizes ranged from 6 to 25. Within classes, ages also ranged. So for example in one class children's ages ranged from 9 to 13 years. The children were English born with the majority of teachers Indian or African born.

The schools may or may not receive financial support from the local government. However, even where they do, this amount is small. Some schools seek additional money through bidding to external funding agencies. Others support themselves only through parent and community contributions. Lack of government funding has meant that these schools have had the freedom to develop their own curriculum, syllabuses and examinations. However, complementary schools may use national examinations to measure language proficiency and enter their students for higher level qualifications in Gujarati (GCSE and Advanced level²).

The aim of the complementary school research project was to build an awareness of how complementary schools serve their communities and aimed to identify participants' beliefs in, and attitudes to, their languages, literacies and cultures. A particular focus to emerge was the complementary schools' contribution to providing a context for negotiating identities. This is the concern of this particular paper in this collection.

Complementary Schools

Complementary schools, like any educational institution, are political and social contexts where particular ideologies dominate and children, adolescents, teachers and parents interact to reproduce and reaffirm or resist and challenge these ideologies. In the UK, supplementary or complementary schooling has emerged because of a lack of support for bilingual education in the mainstream.

Such schools represent individual and community attempts to organise themselves voluntarily to privilege other histories, languages and cultures not easily available to them in mainstream education. Their separateness from mainstream educational policy means they receive very little public money, if any, but also retain institutional freedom to determine their own curricula and pedagogic goals.

It is helpful to consider schools as sites of representation (Miller, 2003a, 2003b) and as speech communities where particular discourses come to dominate and particular ideologies prevail (Creese, in press). Like mainstream schools, complementary schools also play their part in developing student identities and we consider three of these dominant identities in this paper. Our understanding of identity is one of shifting positions constituted by context and participation. We view identities as dynamic and multiple rather than unitary and fixed.

In discussing three particular salient identity positions, we aim to show how schools privilege particular identifications through their institutional discourse. However, we also acknowledge that these positions shift both institutionally and individually. Although not the discussion of this paper, some students attend complementary schools because they are required to by their parents. We are aware, therefore, that the three identity positions we describe below are not taken up by all the students. We are also aware that students may align themselves in varying ways over time to these positions as their own lives change.

Of the three identity positions we explore in this paper, we will suggest that two of these are institutionally developed; whereas, the third is institutionally allowed. Two identity positions are privileged by the school and actively encouraged. These are *heritage/community* identities and *learning* identities. The third position we have called *multicultural* identity. We argue that this identification is allowed rather than explicitly encouraged by complementary schools. This is because complementary schools provide a multilingual space for the exploration and enactment of multicultural identities and flexible bilingualism.

Our aim then, is to represent three identity positions found in the context of two Gujarati complementary schools in Leicester. In representing these particular identities, we acknowledge that many other identities exist within the complementary school context, including those which explicitly resist the three we have chosen to describe in detail below. Moreover, although we have categorised and labelled three identities, we do not claim that these are discreet. Indeed, we see identity positionings as multiple and contingent on context. The three particular identity positions we describe below were salient in the context and emerged through our ethnographic study of the two complementary schools. We see these identities as sitting within complementary school cultures both implicitly and explicitly. That is, the two complementary schools either directly aimed at producing particular identity positionings around language, community and learning or implicitly allowed students to explore their multilingualism and multiculturalism in ways perhaps not easily available to them in their mainstream schools.

We have grouped these three identity positions around the term *flexible bilingualism*. We believe this term is useful in capturing both individual and institutional attitudes to language and their users. From an institutional perspective,

we will show how complementary schools encourage flexible bilingualism in the importance they give to bilingualism and bilingual pedagogies in their institutional discourses. As Martin *et al.* (this volume) shows the schools and their participants see bilingualism as usual and normal. In this way, complementary schools provide a space for bilingual language use which is endorsing of bilingualism and code-switching. We see complementary schools providing a context for students to put together their languages and their linguistic repertoires in new and flexible ways. Robertson (this volume) makes a similar point in showing how community language schools ask students to draw across their literacy contexts to develop their literacies. Complementary schools are institutional spaces which are fairly unique in doing such work in the UK. In our data, they appear to encourage flexibility in language and literacy learning and, we will argue, the two schools allow for young people to inhabit and perform identities perhaps not so easily available for them to take up in their mainstream educational contexts.

In an interesting article about black supplementary schools which are not necessarily based on community language maintenance, Mirza and Reay (2000) argue that such schools represent a new social movement. Their argument is that supplementary schools provide a context in which whiteness is displaced as central and blackness is seen as normative. They show how black women rework individualised notions of community through their own practices in organising, running and teaching in such schools. Their account is of black women putting in enormous amounts of energy to facilitate social transformation based on child centred approaches to education and a collective approach to organising educational structures.

In the narratives of the black woman in their study, Mirza and Reay show how black supplementary schools provide alternative, autonomous spaces where teachers and pupils can create oppositional and empowering narratives of blackness. They end their paper with:

While the schools had a distinct identity forged by the need to escape and transform the confines of subordination which has been externally ascribed to them as racialised 'others', ... the schools' emphasis on 'fitting in with the mainstream' and the holistic and progressive childcentred vision of education was based on openness, mutuality, co-operation and symbiosis with the mainstream schools. (Mirza & Reay, 2000: 540)

We would go along with much of their findings in our own study of complementary schools in Leicester. Like the Mirza and Reay study discussed above, the two Gujarati complementary schools were organised around community networks with teachers often working in more than one complementary school. The majority of teachers were women and often worked in both complementary and mainstream schools allowing them to bring pedagogic continuities to the different sites. Finally, like the Mirza and Reay study discussed above, we found that complementary schools offered a space for alternative discourses from dominant mainstream positions to be constructed and voiced. Our argument is that complementary schools allowed young people and teachers to develop narratives about their identities as bilingual and multicultural. Within these discourses, ethnicity could be seen as both ambiguous and resilient. It also

allowed teachers, parents and students to project a discourse around successful learner identities. This was one of the most prevalent identification positions in the two complementary schools in this study (Martin *et al.*, 2003). We will take each of these identities in turn as the paper unfolds.

This paper is organised along the following lines. First, selective literature on identity, ethnicity and learning is described. This literature is intended to explicate the descriptions of the three identity positions described in the second section of the paper. These three positions are heritage/community, learner identities and multicultural identity. The first and last of these three identities (heritage/community and multicultural) are linked to our discussion of the social category of ethnicity. It is here that we consider how these young people from Leicester describe themselves in terms of their identification to particular ethnic and linguistic categories. The second identity category, learner identity, is concerned with how the school constructs the learner as a successful student around language and more mainstream examination agendas.

Negotiating Identity

Identity refers to 'our sense of who we are and our relationship to the world' (Kanno, 2003: 3). Our social identities signpost particular subjectivities and in voicing these identities we show ourselves as active, creative individuals able to construct social meanings. At the same time however, we recognise identities themselves as social constructions, existing as they do within ever present but shifting social structures, cultures and ideologies. It is predominantly through language that this work is done. Norton Peirce (1995) argues that language should be seen as a social practice taking place within relationships of power. Similarly, others working from feminist post-structuralist literatures have argued:

For post-structuralists, meaning is not fixed in language, in other cultural symbols or in consistent power relationships. It shifts as different linguistic, institutional, cultural and social factors come together in various ways. Meaning is influenced by and influences shifting patterns of power. (Kenway *et al.*, 1994, cited in Mauthner & Hey, 1999: 69)

We hope to show that participants at the two complementary schools in this study recognise and endorse the ambiguity of their identity positions and view this, not as a problem, but rather as a sophistication. In her longitudinal study of four teenage Japanese students Kanno (2003) showed how the students became more sophisticated in negotiating their bilingual and bicultural identities with their surroundings. We find this notion of the sophisticated bilingual helpful for this study. Indeed, we will suggest that complementary schools allowed a space for the students to negotiate a combination of ambiguity and sophistication around their ethnic and linguistic diversity.

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) have looked at how identities are negotiated in multilingual contexts. They describe five principles. First, that identity options are constructed, validated, and performed through discourses and that these discourses are available to individuals at particular times and places. If we consider this in relation to complementary schools, we can see that complemen-

tary schools offer access to discourses and linguistic resources which other institutional contexts may not. The availability of Gujarati extends a choice to young people studying in that context to take it up (or not). Pavlenko and Blackledge's second principle is that languages and identities are embedded within local and global relations of power which may be challenged, or negotiated, or may be found to be non-negotiable. This principle points to the wider social context and requires a consideration of how complementary schools sit within existing social structures and educational hierarchies. Their third principle is that identities are constructed at the interface between age, race, class, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientation, location, and social status, and are often fragmented, hybrid, de-centred, multiple and shifting. Fourth, imagination plays a crucial role in the process of the creation of new identity options. Young people in complementary schools represent members of broader social, linguistic and religious communities. Complementary schools provide a possible context for them to imagine and create new affiliations between their communities and identities. Pavlenko and Blackledge's fifth principle points to the importance of individual narratives in the negotiation and constitution of identities. This principle is particularly helpful in this paper, as we will see that complementary schools provide a space for young people to narrate their stories and capture their complex and changing relationship between language and identities. This fluid process is particularly salient in the young people's narratives presented later in this paper.

Janet Maybin has also looked at identification processes in young adolescents. Quoting Jenkins (Jenkins, 1996, in Maybin, forthcoming) she suggests that the problematic alignment of how we see ourselves and how others see us is a particularly important theme in the lives of older children. She explains this further:

Jenkins (1996) argues that identity can only be understood as process, as 'being' or 'becoming' . . . [H]e sees it essentially as a practical accomplishment, an ongoing dialectical process between internal definitions of the self as similar or different to others, and external definitions offered by others through naming, categorizing, responding to us, treating us, talking about us. Because a projected identity has to be perceived and accepted by others in order to have saliency, Jenkins suggests (following Barth) that identities are 'to be found and negotiated at their boundaries, where the internal and external meet' (p24). (Maybin, forthcoming)

This is useful in understanding how young people negotiate and manage their own positioning in relation to their peers and others.

Much of the work on identity points to the importance of fluidity (Koven, 1998; Mills, in press; Woodward, 2002). Pennycook (2003: 513–14), with reference to the work of Williams (1992) and Cameron (1995), has noted that sociolinguistics has traditionally operated with 'fixed and static categories of class, gender and identity membership as if these were transparent givens onto which language can be mapped'. Pennycook (2003: 514) points to the need for 'far more fluid ways of thinking about language, identity and belonging'. Critically, then, any focus on language performance 'needs to be understood in ways that do not start with prior social definitions of who we are' (Pennycook, 2003: 514). We now turn to consider how ethnicity might be considered in this way.

Negotiating Ethnicity

In his seminal work on ‘language crossing’ among adolescent friendship groups in one neighbourhood in the South Midlands of England, Rampton refers to ‘the use of a language which isn’t generally thought to “belong” to the speaker’. He goes on to describe language crossing as involving ‘a sense of movement across quite sharply felt social ethnic boundaries’ (Rampton, 1998: 291). Language crossings are artful performances in which often ‘the constraints of ordinary social order were relaxed and normal social relations couldn’t be taken for granted’ (Rampton, 1995: 291).

Rampton’s argument is that although ethnic boundaries are ‘relatively fixed’, in his data, they were not ‘inviolable’, and ‘quite plainly, adolescents didn’t submit reverentially to absolutist ideas about ethnicity being fixed at birth or during the early years of socialisation’ (Rampton, 1998: 299). Rampton argues for a new conceptualisation of ethnicity. He quotes Stuart Hall to support him in this argument:

We are beginning to see constructions of . . . a new conception of ethnicity: a new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses difference and which depends, in part on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities . . . this is not an ethnicity which is doomed to survive, as Englishness was, only by marginalizing, dispossessing, displacing and forgetting other ethnicities. This precisely is the ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity. (Hall, 1988: 29, in Rampton, 1998: 313)

Rampton’s work on *Crossing* is of great interest to us because it deals with the agentive and creative nature of adolescent talk in creating new identities around ethnicity. Or as Rampton argues, it shows how ‘adolescent attempt to escape, resist or affirm the racial orderings that threaten to dominate their everyday experience’ (Rampton, 1995: 20). It highlights the importance of resisting notions of ‘romantic bilingualism’ (Leung *et al.*, 1997: 53) in which young people are turned into ‘reified speakers of community languages, [and] in the process their ethnicities are also reified’ (Rampton, 1998: 553).

At first glance the relevance of Rampton’s work on ‘language crossing’ to this study of identity in complementary schools may not be immediately clear. Complementary language schools may appear suspiciously like institutions whose sole purpose is to essentialise and demarcate the boundaries around ethnicity. That is, complementary schools might actually appear to recruit their students and teachers around the boundaries of ethnicity, language and in some cases, religion. And indeed, we will see that some of what complementary schools do is to maintain particular heritages, community traditions and languages. However, we find Rampton’s work useful to the arguments made in this paper in several ways. The first is around his claim that adolescents do not submit reverentially to absolutist ideas about ethnicity. And second and relatedly, that adolescents’ performance of ethnic identity is accomplished through negotiation. His work on language crossing has shown how individuals may appropriate – or even invent linguistic practices – to negotiate their identities.

Another scholar whose work on ethnicity is useful to the analysis undertaken in this paper is Stephen May. May's work balances the post-modernist interest in the fluidity of ethnicity with 'the resilience of ethnicity as something more fixed in explaining the individual and collective allegiances of many people in the world today' (May, 2001: 25). May's interest is in describing the continuities of externally and internally enforced ethnic boundaries and how these impact on the content and meaning of particular ethnicities. May uses John Rex's work to question:

[w]hy it is that, despite the very strong pressure in complex societies for groups to be formed on the basis of congruence of interest, many individuals do in fact stubbornly continue to unite with those with whom they have ties of ethnic sameness, even though such alliances might run contrary to patterns of group formation determined by shared interests. (Rex, 1991: 11, cited in May, 2001: 44)

May's view is that ethnicity is neither static nor monolithic and that ethnic continuities do not preclude cultural and linguistic change and adaptation, and vice versa. May's work therefore stresses the importance of historical continuities in the description of ethnicity while also acknowledging it as socially constructed and fluid within certain limits. May highlights the importance of heritage and community in understanding ethnic identities, concepts also important to this study on complementary schools.

Complementary Schools: Projecting Successful Learner Identities

While the notion of ethnic identity has a long tradition of debate, the concept of 'learner identity' is more emergent. A body of knowledge exists within the adult learning literature (Crichton & Kinsel, 2003; Gorard & Rees, 2002) which looks at life-long learning trajectories of young people and adult learners. This literature has concerned itself with social inclusion and processes of participation. One particular concept, 'learning career' is prevalent as a way of theorising identity mediated within institutional structures (Crossan *et al.*, 2003).

The learning career, then, is seen as an aspect of identity formation, which may be 'noticeably transformed' through 'the exposure of young people to more diverse forms of social interaction, and to new events and changing circumstances, such as occur during the adolescent years'. (Bloomer & Hodgkinson, 2000: 590, in Crossan *et al.*, 2003: 57)

The above quote makes reference to the interaction between learning and identity. Lave and Wenger argue that 'learning and a sense of identity are inseparable' (1991). Lemke (2002) also argues that new learning reshapes identity:

We extend forms of activity that we have learned by previous social participation to our present lonely situation . . . Change in beliefs and identities, and the acquisition of persistent skills, takes time. (Lemke, 2002: 37–9)

Bonny Norton's work (Norton, 2000; Norton Pierce, 1995) has been seminal in conceptualising the relationship between the language learner and the social world and she has critiqued much of the second language acquisition literature

for failing to develop a comprehensive theory of identity which integrates the language learner and the language learning context (Norton, 2000: 4). She argues that social identity is not something that belongs to the individual but emerges out of the learner's interaction with the learning context. She formulated the concept of investment to replace the traditional concept of motivation in order to better capture the complex negotiation between the language learner and the learning context. Moreover, she points out that language learners do not live in idealised, homogeneous communities but in complex, heterogeneous ones and that identity construction must be understood in terms of issue of power from within this heterogeneity. For Norton, an 'investment' in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own social identity. This literature is helpful to the themes raised in this paper because it highlights the variety of communities to which students attending complementary schools belong. It also makes the connection between investing in learning a language and investing in a social identity. We will see that the teachers in complementary schools encourage their students to invest in the target language and through its teaching, particular aspects of heritage/community identities. We will also see that a dominant complementary school discourse is one of producing successful learner identities tied to a heritage/community identity. Norton's point regarding heterogeneity is also important here. Complementary schools bring children together who share particular bilingual linguistic heritages as well as networked communities. However, across these commonalities there will also be differences. Some students will reject the schools' dominant ideologies around linguistic and cultural heritages and learning. Such students may experience the schools' ideologies as coercive.

Methodology

In our research project on complementary schools, we were a four member research team who also differed in our professional, linguistic, ethnic, gender and social profiles. Two members of the team speak Gujarati, are black and are culturally immersed in the aspects of the diverse Gujarati community in Leicester (AB and NB). Two other researchers (AC and PM) do not speak Gujarati, are white and are not culturally immersed in Leicester's Gujarati communities. We visited each school 10 times to observe classroom. In addition to classroom visits, the research team also attended other school functions, such as prize giving, teacher meetings, assemblies, PTA meetings and other extramural school events (sponsored walks, literary events). It was often the case that two or sometimes three of the research team were concurrently together at these events. We were paired researchers in the sense that we would go into the same two classes per visit individually. This meant that a Gujarati-speaking researcher and non-Gujarati-speaking researcher worked together; so for example, AC would go into one class for one hour and AB to another. At the break time they would change to their paired researcher's class. This meant that they saw the same teachers working with the same students for each visit. Our fieldnotes therefore shared an account of the same class observation each week. We have described this process in detail elsewhere (Creese, forthcoming).

In addition to fieldnotes, other sources of data include the following:

- Semi structured-interviews: three teachers, one teaching administrator, two non-teaching, principal administrator, three student group interviews (with four to six students per group), one individual student interview, two parent interviews.
- Classroom transcripts: two audio recordings.
- Parental questionnaire in Gujarati and English.

The data used in this paper draws from all types of data above. We now turn to look at three identity positions salient in the two complementary schools.

- heritage / community;
- learner identities;
- multicultural identities.

We will deal with them in this order because the first two identities were explicitly encouraged by the two schools whereas the last was implicitly developed through providing students with a multilingual space to develop their multicultural / multilingual views of identity.

Heritage and community identities

The identification position we describe in this section is about a desire to be affiliated to a heritage / community identity. This identity projects a wish desire to express difference from dominant cultures, languages and histories. The heritage identities we describe here use discourses to narrate histories of life in Gujarat and / or the diasporas from India to East Africa to England. These discourses were apparent in the texts, classroom materials and classroom and personal discourses of some teachers. Parents too highlighted the importance of maintaining children's cultural and linguistic links to historic heritages in India and Africa. Heritage identities were also linked to Leicester community identities. Teachers used their knowledges of life in diasporadic Gujarati speaking communities to make links to the Leicester Gujarati community. We will see these points exemplified below. We start with four respondents to the parental questionnaire who were asked the question, 'Why are your children learning Gujarati?'

Extract 1

(Parental questionnaire)

Our children learn English and other languages in schools . . . yet they don't have any awareness of their own language and are illiterate in terms of reading / writing Gujarati. Our children know why they celebrate Easter, New year, Christmas but don't know why Hindus celebrate festivals such as Holi. Learning Gujarati opens up doors and knowledge about our cultures, customs. If our children are aware of them then there is a chance our grandchildren will also know about them and pass them on to future generations.

Gujarati is our language and we are from Gujarat, children can learn about Gujarat's history and especially be able to read Gandhi's Experiments with truth.

Children can know what our language is, they can write to grandparents in Gujarat and talk to them on the phone, can understand our books such as Gita, Mahabharat and Ramayan.

It is important to learn Gujarati to understand our culture. We have to keep Gujarati alive. By learning Gujarati we can keep our identity. Both parents and children have to share why Gujarati should be learnt and give it importance.

In these responses we see parents link the learning of Gujarati to an understanding of aspects of Gujarati-speaking cultures and to the maintenance of the language they most associate with that culture. In these parental quotes Gujarati culture is Hindu, and linked explicitly to Gujarat and its history, literacy and festivals. In one quote it is also linked to the teachings of Ghandi. Throughout the questionnaire the importance of maintaining family links in India is a recurring theme given for learning Gujarati.

The importance of teaching Gujarati culture, festivals and Hindu traditions was important in both schools. It was handled in the assemblies and in many of the anecdotes that teachers told in class as well as in some of the teaching materials used. The example below shows a teacher linking celebrations going on around Mother's Day in Leicester to a traditional Hindu poem.

Extract 2

(NB, Fieldnotes: TV)

The teacher asks, 'Why do we celebrate Mother's Day?' One boy says 'To say Thank you'.

Teacher then explains at length in Gujarati how mothers look after us since the day we are born, nobody cares as much as they do and adds that it's not only on Mother's Day that they should be thanked but everybody should help their mums whenever they can. Mothers work so hard, they go out to work, look after the children, do all the housework and shoulder so much 'responsibility'.

Teacher writes out a verse in Gujarati on the board called 'My beloved Mother'. She reads out each line, the children repeat after her. She explains what it means. 'Even when you grow up, don't ever forget your mum and dad. They have gone through innumerable sacrifices for you'. She tells them the verse is from a Bhajan-traditional Hindu song and she will bring the whole song for them to read and understand.

In the above extract we see the teacher link traditional Hindu teachings, children's home life and Mother's Day celebrations. This was common in our data. Teachers often sought to link themes for the children. Complementary schools offered children connections between their home lives, their mainstream school lives and their linguistic and cultural heritages. In the final extracts in this section we look at what some children say about their reasons for learning Gujarati.

Extract 3

(Group student interview: six students mixed gender, mixed ages, 10–15-year-olds. TV)

I: What does the language [Gujarati] mean to you?

S5: It's, I think it means, I think we should learn it because it's our mother tongue and it's our language that we are born with.

I: OK.

S1: And it like opens a whole new gate, like stuff you've never seen before, and can't do without knowing the language.

Extract 4

(Group student interview: six students mixed gender and ages, MH)

I: What is it? What does it make you feel?

< PAUSE >

I: Can you explain to me? No? Is it a bit hard to explain? Yeah? OK.

S: Um, it makes you feel like, um, pure Gujarati person.

These extracts speak of the importance for students of learning Gujarati in complementary schools as a way to capture a more 'pure' ethnic and linguistic identity not available to them in other English dominant domains of their lives. The notion of a 'language that we are born with' which is further nourished by the mother's tongue ties this heritage identity to family and community life. In addition, these transcripts also indicate a second identification position around the role of complementary schooling in supporting the maintenance of Gujarati. In both extracts above, the students make reference to opening gates and improving themselves. We would link both these comments to the next identity positions we deal with in this paper: learner identities.

Learner identities

As we have argued above, one identification which teachers encouraged at complementary schools was around being a successful student learner. This was very clearly projected in the interview accounts from the administrators at both schools.

Extract 5

(Interview with MH administrator)

I think that what the kids see themselves achieving is a sort of qualification, they come to supplementary schools hopefully to get a GCSE in Gujarati and probably some A level Gujarati if they sort of choose to. So at this point, I personally feel, the children see it as learning a language and get a qualification at the end of it . . . Hopefully I/ we at Mount Hill are tying in with them. And giving them, [a chance to] achieve a certificate or something. But bringing in, you know, the teaching, the coaching of culture and religion and the language and the alphabet and the grammar, whatever comes into it as a part of that. And I think it has proved fruitful, because if you do it proper – if you shout about it, you might put them off . . . And I think coming to a supplementary school in their own time, it has given them a little bit of a ownership,

its 'mine'. Obviously, and they choose to, and they come in year in, year out. So they have to come to this course continuously for them to achieve their GCSE at least, you know. So a child is coming at six, by the time they are in mainstream Year 8 or Year 7³ even, they can have a GCSE achievement and a good grade; A's, B's and C's even, you know.

Extract 6

(Interview with TV teacher/administrator)

Main aim is to get the children go through GCSE's er AS-level, A-level so by the time they've finished here it's not all washed away, it's not all forgotten and finished, they can use it to expand their personal qualities and universities, and they recognise that, because we, give our own exams here, so they got that extra GCSE. So, for example, when my son, he left from here and he was only 11 and then he had one GCSE already and when he finished it, and they both finished it they had instead of 9 GCSE's they had 10. So yeah we always prepare for, that, that's the goal, but then again we always look at the culture side and we are always promoting our language through culture as well, so it's aiming for Gujarati GCSE AS-level, A-level er incorporating the cultural aspect of it, valuing the mother tongue.

Both administrators give a clear account of the remit of their schools. It is to produce successful learners measured in terms of achieving an externally evaluated qualification. Here the complementary school agenda very much dovetails with the mainstream agenda. The teaching of language and culture is part of the process of teaching towards successful examination results. Teachers, parents and students in complementary schools do not see themselves as at odds with the mainstream in this regard. Complementary schooling is presented as giving students a head start in their mainstream schools. There were copious references in the student interviews and parents questionnaires to pursuing complementary schooling through to accredited examination levels and the success that this extended to them across their learning contexts. In the extract below, we present two examples of this.

Extract 7

(Interviewing an individual student from TV, 13 years old)

- I:** Right, I think I know what you're going to say about my next question, but are you proud to be able to speak Gujarati?
- P:** Yeah.
- I:** Can you say a little bit more about that? How, how proud are you?
- P:** Children who are my age couldn't do GCSE's and A-levels, so I'm proud, it's an achievement for me to do something that young and get it out the way.

Extract 8

(Interviewing a group of children from TV, ages 10–15)

- I:** And do you want to continue studying it until like GCSE or A-level, perhaps some of you are doing that?

- S1:** I've done GCSE and AS-level.
- S2:** I might do GCSE but I don't know about A-level, but it depends if I pass.
- S5:** I want to because . if I do it I feel like I've like completed my whole like Gujarati thing and . and then I know everything about Gujarati, well not everything but how to speak most of the words and how to write most of the words.
- I:** Right.
- S4:** Stuff like, you say you have to, it's better to go onto A-level because like you say you speak Gujarati but then you can't really read or write it, like you know some people can't really speak English so, you know, so you can write in Gujarati and it just uses your skill.
- I:** So it sounds quite important then.
- S5:** Yeah.
- I:** Are there any of you that don't really think that it's necessary to take an exam, but just coming to school and speaking?
- S1:** I think having an exam is good because you know where you are yourself,
- I:** Right.
- S5:** It's better for you.
- I:** That's true, and as one of you said, you can actually show it as a ..
- S4:** You know how much you've learnt and how much you took in.

The students in the above extracts valued the role complementary schooling played in allowing them to be successful learners. The two complementary schools in this study offered students an opportunity to develop a successful learner identity tied to both narrow and wide conceptions of ethnic and linguistic identity. Students were able to move between heritage and community identities as well as bilingual and multicultural hybrid identities. We explore the last of the identity positions below.

Multicultural identities

One view of multiculturalism is that society does not have clearly demarcated traditions which blend into distinct heritages. Rather, there is a coexistence of many heritages and newly invented traditions within a single nation-state (Kottak & Kozaitis, 1999). The emphasis is on fluidity and new combinations. However, the literature of multiculturalism often make little reference directly to linguistic difference and instead, focuses its discussion on culture, ideology and ethnicity (see for example Parekh's *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (2000)). This means that linguistic diversity becomes hidden behind a discussion of 'cultural heritage' which is always in danger of simplification and essentialisation (Atkinson, 1999; Holliday, 1999; Kramsch, 1993; Leung *et al.*, 1997)

In the extract below, we see the importance a group of girls give to not being located in one cultural, linguistic or ethnic identity position. We can also see an identification taken up around linguistic sophistication. That is, the ability to move between languages and between essentialist ethnicity positions. The interviewer (I) was pursuing a discussion about the use of Gujarati beyond the complementary school and family context.

Extract 9

(Interview at MH with four teenage girls)

- I: Um, do you use Gujarati in your mainstream schools?
S: No.
S: Yeah.
S: Sometimes.
I: Right . . .
S: Umm, no.
S: Yeah.
S: No, 'cos I go to a Catholic school.
I: And they don't use Gujarati?
S: No, because they're mostly, um, Christian so they don't.
I: Yeah. Do you . . .
S: But, I got a few friends who are Hindu so we speak Gujarati some-times.
I: Oh right. Are you allowed . . .
S: That is so lame.
I: Are you allowed to speak Gujarati in the class?
S: Yeah.
S: Yeah.
I: Oh right, right. How many of you don't use Gujarati at all.
S: In school?
I: in school. Your main school.
S: Yeah, I don't.
I: You don't.
S: No.
I: You don't? Why don't you?
S: It's because I've got white friends and Sikh friends so, they don't understand what I'm talking about.
I: Oh right, [indistinguishable]
S: Its lame.
S: And it is disrespect.
S: And its lame.
S: Talk Gujarati when English people are around.
I: Ah right.
S: They think we're [indistinguishable – Freshies?] and that so.
< LAUGHTER >
I: You're what? Freshies?
S: Yes, from India.
< All talking at once >
S: Not born here.
< All talking at once >
S: That is true though.
S: Yeah they think that.
S: They're talking about them or something.
S: That's a true fact. That does happen.

The notion of 'freshie' is a term of derision having a similar but more pejorative meaning to 'country bumpkin'. In this extract the girls use it to refer to someone who has only recently come to Britain. It is a term which describes the 'outsider'. According to these girls, using Gujarati on its own is what singles out a freshie. A freshie has a singular ethnicity and culture indexed by a singular language. In contrast, the ability to switch between Gujarati and English, signals flexibility both in terms of their bilingualism and also ethnic and cultural identities. Moving between languages displays a sophistication not available to the monolingual Gujarati or monolingual English speaker. Bilingualism indexes a multicultural identity in which cultures and languages are juxtaposed rather than essentialised. Moreover, the girls are aware of the importance of linguistic proficiency in this debate. Whereas they can look down on the freshie in the English dominant environment of the mainstream classroom, they similarly recognised their own vulnerability in their visits to India. Later in the same interview they again use the term freshie.

Extract 10

(Interview at MH with four teenage girls)

- S:** Everyone has to use Gujarati there [India].
I: Everyone has to use Gujarati there.
S: I don't like it when you go there because, I like it there, but it's just like, when you, everyone looks at you 'cos they know that you're not from there, and they stare at you even if you speak in Gujarati.
I: Yeah.
S: 'Cos of your clothes.
I: Ah right.
S: India but, if, if I go yeah. I don't know what place I'm gonna go to and the Gujarati's so much different to what we speak at home.
I: Yeah.
S: We speak a lot 'freshy'.
S: Yeah.
I: Freshy way yeah.

The concept of being a freshie or speaking freshy in both the extracts above describes the outsider. Such outsiders are constructed by the girls as inflexible in their performance of cultural and ethnic identity. A lack of bilingualism links the freshie to static ethnic identity categories. The girls appear to be expressing the importance of being multicultural and bilingual and the ability to move between languages and identities and avoid essentialised and essentialising ethnicities allocated by others and themselves. However, extracts 9 and 10 also indicate that these students have internalised an ideology concerning language, power and hierarchy. They seem to be aware that Gujarati is not a legitimate language in British mainstream schools. In other words, they may be sophisticated enough to switch linguistic gears to avoid being labelled something they would rather not be (i.e. a freshie) but perhaps are not yet sophisticated enough to start questioning the oppressive ideology that marginalises their Gujarati language and heritage.⁴

In the above extract, the girls discuss monolingualism and connect it to discussions of narrowness and lack of experience. In the extract which follows, we look at how an individual student views his two languages. We see that he views his languages as allowing him flexibility to perform different goals which monolingualism would not allow.

Extract 11

(PM interviewing an individual student from TV, 13 years old)

- I: I don't know how easy or difficult you'll find this question, but how important is speaking Gujarati in the way that you describe who you are?
- P: Very.
- I: Very? Can you tell me a little bit more about that?
- P: When I speak Gujarati .. it's my mother tongue so I can use it in life and use it like daily. Use it if something goes wrong. I can help. I can translate to someone from both languages and erm, help them.
- I: Very helpful. As far as deciding who you are, you're a British, young British Gujarati speaking boy, 13, or young man, of 13, so .. how, how do you relate Gujarati and English? What, what sort, in describing who you are? Do you know what I mean?
- P: No.
- I: Erm, you said Gujarati's very very important to you, what about English?
- P: It's as important.
- I: Right, for the same reasons? Or different reasons?
- P: For same reasons.

Here the speaker's self-descriptions of his attitudes towards his languages are of equivalence. That is, in terms of projecting a linguistic and ethnic identity his attitude is that both languages are of equal importance to him. Moreover, his two languages provide him with a flexibility which allows him to perform differently in different contexts. This does not mean that he is unaware that the two languages do not have functional equivalence in wider English society. He understood that he could not use his Gujarati much beyond his home life and his complementary school.

Extract 12

(PM interviewing an individual student from TV, 13 years old)

- I: Are there a lot of Gujarati speakers in your [mainstream] class and in your school?
- P: Yeh.
- I: Do you ever speak Gujarati to them?
- P: Sometimes . but rarely.
- I: In your mainstream school you hardly ever use Gujarati? Do you hear Urdu speakers speaking Urdu to each other?
- P: It's mostly English.
- I: Mostly English . what would happen if you did speak Gujarati to a friend . would it sound odd?

- P: Yes . if they don't understand what you are saying . if it matches what everyone else is talking on about it's all right . it might sound a bit weird.
- I: which occasions do you feel most comfortable speaking Gujarati?
- P: Home.
- I: Home
- P: School.
- I: This school?
- P: Yeah.
- I: Does Gujarati help you with other areas of you school work?
- P: RE.
- I: RE?
- P: We learnt, some of us used to learn about religion, went into your own classes and they come in handy and that, to do your RE work about Hinduism.

The domains of language use around Gujarati and English are clearly different despite the equivalence that the student above gives to them. Complementary schools provide a context for Gujarati use beyond the home. In addition, the subject area of religious education (RE) in mainstream schools seems to offer another limited opportunity. Several other students mentioned the importance of RE as a place to use their knowledge about Gujarati language and heritages in their mainstream contexts.

In the transcripts above, we have tried to show that one position taken up among the students attending complementary schooling is multicultural. Complementary schools are bilingual sites and provide students with a space to explore their multicultural lives. Although institutionally, the schools may not explicitly aim to develop a multicultural identity, they do provide a context for students to explore this. We have shown elsewhere the role that complementary teachers play in developing connections for students across their multicultural/multilingual and educational contexts (Bhatt *et al.*, 2004).

Discussion

We have argued that identity is always processual and its performance is always situated. We view complementary schooling as providing an important context for students to explore identity positions and create narratives in new and imaginative ways. Gujarati complementary schools provide an institutional context for young people to meet and consider (reproduce or contest) existing categories around nationality, culture, ethnicity, bilingualism and learning. They potentially provide their students with distinct institutional experiences different from their mainstream schools. This is because complementary schooling provide a context for identity negotiation in bilingual contexts in which languages and linguistic repertoires are foregrounded in school mission statements.

Nancy Hornberger (2001) has argued for the necessity of bilingual spaces and havens in dominant monolingual environments. We see complementary schools as places where the dominant ideologies around bilingualism are contested and where young people are able to explore identity positions more safely. Interestingly, our findings are that complementary schools do not enforce singular and

essentialised ethnic or heritage identities but instead provide a context for students to combine their different life experiences in more fluid ethnicities with flexible bilingualism. Bilingualism becomes a key resource in negotiating these complex identities. The Gujarati language was not linked to any one Gujarati culture, and indeed given the migration history of many of the teachers working in the school, this would be difficult to achieve since the majority of teachers themselves had lived and grown up in a variety of Gujarati speaking communities, including in India, East Africa and England. The teachers' life histories reflected travel and movement across national boundaries. Although particular histories, geographies and cultures were an important part of the curriculum in complementary schools, teachers usually attempted to make connections for the students between these and the students' lives in Leicester. The complementary schools provided a context for inclusion and difference and allowed for new manifestations of cultures and ideologies towards their bilingualism and ethnicity.

Finally, complementary schools provided children and adolescents with an opportunity to perform an identity as successful language learners. Students often achieved early examination successes in national examinations and this was viewed positively in both mainstream and complementary schools contexts. Moreover, examination success appeared to be used in part by the teachers, students and parents themselves as a benchmark of success in Gujarati proficiency. In this way, participants in complementary schools worked inside dominant educational agendas for measuring success.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at how two complementary schools provide safe spaces for the performances of different identity positions. We recognise that this might not always be so. Indeed, we acknowledge that for some young people complementary schools may restrict rather than extend multilingual performance. Moreover, very little has been done on complementary schools in minority ethnic and linguistic communities in England. There is a need for extended research in this area. However, we found that children in the Leicester complementary schools were able to use their languages in ways that would not usually be permitted in their mainstream schooling. In the Leicester Gujarati schools, students showed an awareness that the flexibility required of moving between languages and cultures was a sophisticated skill. Children did not view their languages as being tied to any one 'culture' or 'ethnicity'. Rather they described using their languages to identify with several overlapping cultures including classroom, school, family, heritage and popular youth cultures. They spoke of the importance of being multicultural and multilingual, which they recognised as requiring a level of sophistication. Children's self-descriptions were not fixed into static categories. Instead, their diverse linguistic repertoires projected shifting, multiple identity positions.

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Notes

1. The paper emerges from a larger study of Complementary Schools and their Communities in Leicester, supported by the ESRC (R000223949). This support is gratefully acknowledged.
2. GCSE is the General Certificate in Secondary Education and is usually taken at the age of 16. A *level* is Advanced level, a national level qualification beyond GCSE usually for 17–18 year olds. In complementary schools, children are often entered much earlier for their Gujarati examination. This could be from age 11 onwards.
3. Year seven and eight are for 11/12 year olds. GCSE examinations are usually taken in Year 11 (age 16).
4. We are grateful to Yasuko Kanno for making this last point.

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