Alternative spaces of learning in east London: opportunities and challenges

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Introduction

London, and east London particularly, has been an important site for immigration over the centuries. Prior to the Second World War the major immigrants into the city were Irish, and Polish and Russian Jews (Fishman, 1997; Block, 2005). In the period following the Second World War the demography of London, as well as the linguistic ecology of the city, changed dramatically. *The Other Languages of England* (Linguistic Minorities Project, 1985) provides a typology of migrations into the country between 1945 and 1982. It describes the migrants that came as political refugees and those that came seeking employment. In the post war years, Britain encouraged immigration, in part to help in the massive reconstruction process that was required. Since the 1990s political changes, persecution and war, famine and other ecological catastrophes, as well as the expansion of the EU, have led to an increase in the movement of peoples from different geographical and political contexts and greatly increased the scale and nature of diversity in London (Vertovec, 2007).

The paper explores some of the alternative spaces of learning that communities develop to transmit their language and culture to their children. The director of the London-based Resource Unit for Supplementary and Mother Tongue Schools, responsible for bringing these little known spaces to the attention of policy makers, made a distinction between 'supplementary schools', which provide support for

mainstream curriculum subjects, most commonly maths, English and science with additional cultural input, and 'mother tongue schools' that teach community languages. He noted that a number of schools perform both functions (Abdelrazak, 1999). There has been considerable discussion of these terms in the literature and several remain in use in the UK: community language schools, supplementary schools, out-of-hours learning. Recent research literature in the UK has used the term 'complementary school'. In this paper we follow Martin et al. (2004) in using this term, though some of the terms above feature in the names of organisations.

The paper starts with a brief history of the development of complementary schooling, a discussion of the political context in which it was created and the government discourse on the languages of communities originating in migration. It explores the way in which issues of power and policy impact at the local level on differently situated communities and how this influences the educational practices they develop in their schools. The model developed by an organisation created by recently arrived ethnic Albanian refugees is compared with a school run by the long-established Bangladeshi community.

A second comparison is between the way in which complementary schools for the Bangladeshi community operate in two neighbouring east London boroughs, Hackney and Tower Hamlets. This suggests that government policy and local political power can impact very differently on the same community in two different locations, only a few miles apart.

The penultimate section of the paper 'Emerging from the Underground' explores some of the strengths of the sector and ways in which these alternative spaces of learning respond to current developments in language learning in the UK and address opportunities and challenges offered by government policy.

The conclusion suggests that the current debate on community languages and complementary education would benefit from engaging with empirical research into the impact of power and policy on community language teaching and complementary schools.

Government discourses on multilingualism

Baker and Eversley (2000) found more than 300 languages spoken by children in London's schools, with a third of London's 850,000 schoolchildren speaking a language other than English at home.

In England, although there is some official recognition of the languages originating in migration (generally referred to as community languages), their status is uncertain. They do not have the status of 'Modern Foreign Language' and they have largely been left to fend for themselves. Government discourse which highlights the importance of multilingualism is not backed up by concrete action. The rhetoric in the Bullock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1975), although positive in its affirmation of bilingualism, did not lead to any real change in the status of the languages of minority groups. The Report states that the bilingualism of inner city students:

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).

Ten years later, the Swann Report considered that linguistic and cultural maintenance was beyond the remit of mainstream education and, instead, was 'best achieved within the ethnic minority communities themselves' (Department of Education and Science 1985, p. 406). This reflects what Baetens Beardsmore (2003, p. 10) has referred to as the 'deep-seated and widespread fear of bilingualism' and the 'all-pervading tendency to couple the notion of 'problems' to that of bilingualism', and to what Rassool has called 'the notion of a monolingual, English-speaking people' which, she states, has 'remained a potent variable in shaping common understandings of British nationhood'. This, despite the fact that 'bilingualism has been a reality for different social groups … throughout the centuries' (Rassool (1997, p. 114). The important point here is that although official documentation would appear to endorse and even celebrate bilingualism, multiculturalism and linguistic diversity, they do so 'without recourse to the social experiences of the speakers of these languages' (Rassool 1995, p. 288, cf. Hall et al., 2002). A similar point is made by Leung et al. (1997). Such multilingual interactional experiences have even been categorised as 'schizophrenic' by one senior member of the British government (Blunkett, 2002, p. 76; Martin et al.,

2007). This relates to what Bourne (1997, p. 56) has referred to as the 'ideology of homogeneity that is so powerfully being constructed' in the UK.

Despite the sentiments expressed above, there clearly has been a shift in the UK from viewing the languages of the new minorities as a 'problem' to viewing them as a 'resource', though not as a 'right'. These terms are taken from the influential article by Ruiz (1984) on the various orientations in language planning. As early as 1981 a government document refers to the languages of immigration as a valuable national resource (Department of Education and Science, 1981), although what this actually means was never made clear.

Language and cultural maintenance in the UK

Given the lack of status accorded to community languages in the UK, it is not surprising that the communities themselves became involved in setting up schools in order to promote their cultures and languages. Complementary education has, for well over a century, provided a 'safe' but largely 'hidden' space in which specific communities can learn about their own cultures and languages. Although the history of such education is relatively long in Britain (McLean, 1985), little was known about it outside the communities themselves until recently. According to Verma et al. (1994, p. 12), the initial aim of community language education was to strengthen 'cultural and religious identity in the face of the threat of cultural assimilation'. Hall et al. (2002, p. 415) refer to the roles that such schools play in 'correcting' the rather 'subtractive' approach to learning language in the mainstream sector. Complementary schools have also been set up to counteract perceived deficiencies in state education.

For example, Mirza and Reay (2000) refer to the 'spaces and places of black education desire' in black complementary schools. Approximately 55 different languages are taught in complementary schools in England, Scotland and Wales (CILT, 2005).

While there has been until recently a dearth of studies in the UK on community language education, those available demonstrate how children benefit from their multilingualism and the opportunities that the schools provide. Hall et al. (2002, p. 409) note how attendance at complementary schools provides 'a way of reclaiming the specificity of cultural and social identity …missing from mainstream schooling'. Such educational opportunities provide a safe haven for young people to use their bilingualism in creative and flexible ways (Martin et al., 2006).

Li Wei (1993) has studied the role of Chinese complementary schools in Newcastle in the maintenance of Chinese, and Arthur (2003) the teaching of Somali literacy in Liverpool. Two innovative research projects have recently been funded by the Social and Economic Research Council (ESRC): a study of Gujarati schools in Leicester (Creese et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2004 ; 2006) and *Investigating multilingualism in complementary schools in four communities* which explored language use in Bengali schools in Birmingham, Chinese schools in Manchester, Gujarati schools in Leicester and Turkish schools in London (Creese et al, 2008; Blackledge & Creese, 2010). The studies investigated the range of linguistic practices, how bilingualism and bilingual learning are managed in the different schools and the role the schools play in the negotiation of pupils' learner and multilingual and multicultural identities. Two recently published collections offer accounts of teaching and research in the

complementary school sector in the UK and document the way in which priorities, procedures and practices vary in different communities and localities (Conteh, Martin & Robertson, 2007; Lytra & Martin, 2010).

As complementary schools reflect the needs of their communities at the micro level, they vary greatly in size and organisation, from a dozen pupils meeting in someone's living room, to several hundred pupils using the facilities of a large school at the week-end. Some schools are entirely run by volunteers, others have salaried teachers. Some charge fees, others depend on grant aid from charitable foundations, a few receive some support from their Local Authorities. Some are isolated, while others come under umbrella organisations that provide teaching materials and a framework for training. Some teach curricula that prepare their students for official qualifications, such as GCSE and A levels, others aim for successful reintegration into the country of origin. The social and economic status of communities has an impact on the kind of organisations they can support. 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.

Emerging from the underground:

more recent developments in education policy

The UK government has begun to notice the potential of complementary education. A report published by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the ministry of education at the time, entitled *Aiming High,* notes:

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.

(Department for Education and Skills 2003, p. 26, emphasis added)

Following from this report a series of initiatives from the DfES and its successor, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), exemplified below, have indicated a greater interest in community languages and brought this largely underground educational provision to the attention of educators working in the mainstream. At the time of writing a new government has renamed the ministry 'Department for Education' and has yet to express an opinion on community languages.

The DfES offered grants to the Resource Unit for Supplementary and Mother Tongue Schools, set up in 1997 by the Trust for London to support the sector, to compile a Directory of Schools (Kempadoo & Abdelrazak, 1999) and to publish a set of Guidelines (Abdelrazak, 1999). More recently the DCSF provided financial support to the rebranded National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRC) to establish a national database and a Quality Framework for all types of complementary schools.

In response to the steep decline in the number of pupils opting to study languages at secondary school in the UK, the National Languages Strategy (DfES, 2002) created an entitlement, operational from 2011, for all children, aged 7 to 11, to learn a

language. The policy specifies that any language can be taught. Languages with world-wide status such as Chinese and Arabic are currently promoted as a resource in mainstream schools (Baker & Eversley, 2000). Anderson et al. (2008) note how this reveals contradictions inherent in the traditional divisions between community languages and the traditional Modern Foreign Languages, as Chinese and Arabic become 'cross-over' languages, belonging in both camps. Many communities are seeking to enhance the status of their languages, both through lobbying for more community language teaching in mainstream schools and through preparing students in complementary schools for GCSE and A Level exams where these qualifications are available. The DCSF also funded a project to encourage the teaching of community languages through innovative partnerships between complementary and mainstream schools. Its title, '*Our Languages',* suggests an engagement with a multilingual discourse (CILT, 2008). The lead organisation, the National Centre for Languages (CILT) promotes community language teaching (*Positively Plurilingual*, CILT, 2006) and the concept of 'English Plus'. *Routes into Languages*, another DCSF funded project, maps the current (very low) provision of community languages in Higher Education with a view to responding to the needs of local communities and to acting as a motor of economic and civic regeneration (Routes into Languages, 2008).

The gradually increasing demand for the teaching of community languages has led to the development of teacher training courses in the most widely spoken languages in ten universities (CILT, 2005) and to the development of Curriculum Guidelines (Anderson, 2008). The organisation responsible for the inspection of schools recommends the further development of such courses (OfSTED, 2008).

The case studies offered as examples in this paper contrast the way in which communities with different immigration trajectories and geographical locations within east London have worked to maintain their identities, their language and their literacy through complementary education and how they have been affected by and responded to the opportunities and challenges offered by current government policies.

The private and often hidden nature of complementary education creates difficulties of access for researchers. Many of the studies mentioned above were facilitated by the personal involvement of members of the research teams. This was also the case for the studies in the present paper. They originate from both experience of research and direct involvement in the sector (Martin et al., 2004; 2006; 2007; Sneddon, 1993; 2010) with a view to developing proposals for more formal explorations of this very rich resource on the researchers' doorstep. The involvement of the researchers in advisory and management boards and the organisation of seminars and conferences offered opportunities for networking within the sector. **The three examples (the two schools described and the Tower Hamlets model)** were chosen because they offered the opportunity to explore some of the many dimensions of diversity in the sector and the ways in which the operation of relations of power impact at the micro level of classroom interaction (Rampton, 2006).

Methods of inquiry

A research project into Albanian/English biliteracy led to a request by Shpresa, an Albanian organisation operating in east London, to the authors for a formal evaluation of their complementary school programme. This provided access to its partner

schools, to staff, children, parents and documentation, and resulted in a detailed study of Garnham School (Sneddon 2009; 2010). A personal involvement as fund-raiser as well as experience as a teacher educator led to a request from the committee of a small Bengali language school, Jenner Community Education (JCE), to carry out an internal evaluation of teaching and learning. The Tower Hamlets model of Local Authority funded provision was well known to the researchers through involvement in an advisory capacity as well as through the joint development of teacher education opportunities.

The empirical data which follow were obtained using ethnographic methods developed in the study of complementary schools in Leicester (Martin et al., 2004). The examples quoted in this paper derive from field notes and transcription of lessons observed. The focus of these was on classroom interaction, teaching methodology and language use. Six lesson observations were carried out in Garnham and four at JCE. The study at Garnham school also involved semi-structured interviews with the teacher, 10 children and, separately, with their mothers. The children's interviews focused on their language use, experiences of cultures and reflexions on personal identity. The teachers observed were interviewed; written evaluations of their experiences at JCE were obtained from 50 children as well as verbal feedback from their families in parents' meetings. The wider context of Shpresa's operation was provided by interviews with teachers, focus groups carried out with women volunteers and young people attending youth clubs, observations in other classes run by Shpresa and at several public events, as well as an extensive study of the organisation's files. The context of the much smaller JCE was obtained through attendance at meetings, regular visits to the school and participation in special events over a period of years.

Knowledge of the Tower Hamlets model derived from professional involvement was supplemented by a study of documentation on language provision and curricula in the Borough as well as a formal interview with the Director of Language Services.

The Shpresa organisation, which runs classes in a number of schools in east London, chose to be named. The two schools (Shpresa at Garnham and JCE) in which observations were carried out are referred to by pseudonyms. Written permission was obtained from all professionals, parents and children involved. All participants named were invited to choose their own pseudonyms. Copies of recorded data were made available to participants on CD and observation notes were discussed with the teachers observed.

New community, established community

The following section compares a model of complementary education developed by the more recently arrived Albanian community, as exemplified by Garnham School, with JCE, a school organised by an established Bangladeshi one.

New community

The Albanian/Kosovan community arrived in substantial numbers from 1992 from the war zone in Kosovo. It included asylum seekers who were dispersed throughout London. Many of the Albanians were traumatised by their experiences in Kosovo and the dangers of their clandestine journeys. One who made the journey in the back of a lorry described it:

… you go in, and you have to take the black bag with you, to wee-wee in the lorry, and you stay for two days. It was horrible, but we didn't choose to go to this country or that country or to another country, it was a lottery. There were some people who stayed for one week or two weeks in the lorry, because the driver didn't know and left part of the lorry somewhere… it was terrible.

While culture, traditional values, and language were very important, for the new arrivals the most urgent need was support for those seeking refugee status, legal advice, medical care, benefits, housing, registration with schools for the children. *Shpresa* ('hope' in Albanian) is a registered charity in east London set up by a refugee to meet these immediate needs in the community.

Shpresa – an Albanian complementary school model

As the most urgent needs were met, families realised that, once their children started in London schools, they learned English very rapidly, spoke it among themselves and family communication was affected as they gradually lost the active use of the Albanian language. A mother explains:

Well we talk Albanian at home as much as we can. But they prefer to respond in English. English is easy for them: they are born here, they go to school here.

The danger of losing their language motivated the community to create a setting in which they can meet, share their experiences, support each other and help their children both to maintain Albanian and to succeed in the English educational system.

By 2003 Shpresa had set up a model of education for the children that enabled it to meet the needs of a dispersed community. From the beginning the organisation engaged with the mainstream sector to promote integration into the host community through education and employment. Shpresa runs 9 after-school or week-end classes in 5 different London Boroughs.

The priorities in the Shpresa model helped the community to survive. As an organisation set up to support refugees it benefited from policies and initiatives (*Refugees into Teaching, Refugees into Business*) set up to encourage integration and employment. It also benefited from charitable trusts that prioritised the needs of refugee children. It negotiated with schools for free use of premises in exchange for payment in kind: information and training for teachers on meeting the needs of refugee children and workshops for parents on how to support their children. Shpresa trained and deployed Albanian volunteer teaching assistants in their partner schools (Sneddon, 2009; 2010). A volunteer explains:

> Joining with Shpresa was a huge privilege and a chance to learn and work
> for them. I increased my confidence… Working with Shpresa, I got the
> confidence to go back to education, back to employment.

In spite of their enthusiasm and innovative organisation, the community is vulnerable because of the lack of any formal status or funding accorded to complementary schools. The economic status of the community makes it unlikely that members could fund the service from their own resources. The transitional funding from charitable trusts is unlikely to extend to supporting language and cultural classes in the long term. Shpresa hopes that by demonstrating the educational and cultural benefit of their work they may obtain some statutory funding from local authorities or directly from their partner schools.

One of Shpresa's complementary schools runs on the premises of Garnham School on Thursday evenings. Forty-eight children attend in two groups of younger and older children. Each group has an hour of literacy and an hour of traditional dancing and games. The following notes are based on a two hour observation which was recorded, transcribed, then discussed with Ana, the teacher, as well as an extended interview with her. Ana has 20 years of experience of teaching in Albania.

In the classroom, the children sit in horse-shoe formation around large tables facing the white board. The arrangement is formal and reflects the style of teaching. The children have only an hour to learn basic literacy in Albanian. All the children in this class started school speaking only Albanian, but all have now become dominant in English. Ana is very aware of this and explains that, as well as teaching literacy and aspects of different subjects such as history, geography and maths, she is intent on getting the children to hear and respond to a good model of language. Ana conducts the whole lesson in Albanian, mostly from the front of the class.

She has a warm and expressive voice, articulates carefully and uses body language and home-made props from her large bags to ensure understanding.

Ana's teaching style reflects her training in Albania. She uses the *Abetare* literacy scheme, imported from Albania, which has a strong emphasis on the teaching of phonics. Ana is also aware that the children she teaches are used to a more interactive style and she maintains interest with a range of favourite activities using illustrated cards:

The children know what is expected of them, they respond rapidly individually or in unison; Ana builds up the pace *spejt! spejt!* (quick); the atmosphere becomes competitive. Ana explains the difference between consonants *(bashkëtingëllore)* and vowels (*zanore*). The children count the letters and digraphs from an alphabet chart. They move on to blending single sounds into syllables.

The lesson moves on. Rebecca volunteers a well known poem about the Albanian national Flag Day. She recites two stanzas; Ana supports her with a couple of prompts and all the children clap.

Towards the end of the session Ana summarises the lesson, reminding the children what they have learned. She moves them onto the mat and leads a loud and lively game. The children are enjoying the game and they cheer

and clap. Ana tells them it is time to pack up their workbooks and go to the gym for their dance lesson. They cheer again (Sneddon, 2010 p.48).

The observational notes show Ana facing the organisational and pedagogical challenges that are common to complementary schools: grouping children of widely different ages and levels of language knowledge; finding teaching materials suitable for UK born children; including cultural knowledge in the curriculum; maintaining pace and motivation for children who may prefer to be playing with their friends after school.

Established community

By contrast with the 1990s Albanian arrivals, the Bangladeshi community is now in its second and third generation and has been settled for over 40 years in the east end of London, an area which has traditionally provided unskilled and semi-skilled employment opportunities for newly arrived immigrants. The greatest concentration of Bangladeshis is to be found in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The majority originate from the district of Sylhet and speak Sylheti, a dialect of Bengali. As Sylheti is not normally written, education is always through standard Bengali.

The community are particularly keen to transmit their religious and moral values to their children as well as the use of both Sylheti and standard Bengali (Uddin, 2008). Literacy practices in school and community and the role that families play in the transmission of language and literacy have been studied by Rashid and Gregory (1997) and Gregory and Williams (2000) who have described the classes attended by the second generation of young British Bangladeshis, in which they learn standard

Bengali, using materials imported from Bangladesh, in a traditional teaching environment. More recently Kenner has researched bilingual learning through collaborative work in the classroom between mainstream and complementary school teachers (Kenner et al., 2007).

JCE Complementary School in Hackney

JCE caters for 70 children aged 7 to 16 on Saturday mornings. It was set up in 1989 by a group of Bangladeshi women who were desperate for their children to receive instruction in standard Bengali. The women came from a particularly disadvantaged section of the community, many of whom were unemployed and in temporary accommodation for homeless families (Sneddon, 1993). They were assisted in setting up the service by teachers in the mainstream primary school attended by their children. In the 21 years of its existence the school has received no funding or support from its Local Authority.

Bangladeshi identity, the Sylheti language spoken in the children's homes, the teaching of standard Bengali and the building of children's confidence and self-esteem were the initial priorities of the organisation. JCE is managed collectively by its users to provide a refuge from racism in the community and the poor expectations of teachers. Until recently it has shunned publicity and has a long waiting list by word of mouth only. As the community gained in confidence and funding allowed, it employed more experienced teachers who introduced teaching methods that were more interactive and familiar to the children from their mainstream schools and entered them for GCSE exams in Bengali at which the children excel. As the teachers provided advice and information, raised expectations and encouraged parental

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engagement with mainstream schools, so the children's confidence grew and their performance in mainstream school improved.

While JCE is an example of a community devising and running its own service to meet its own identified needs, its continuing economic disadvantage means that it can only meet a fraction of the running costs from children's fees. The Local Authority has not engaged with the concept of community languages as a resource. While it commissions a number of complementary schools to run English, maths or science lessons for children from ethnic groups identified as underperforming educationally in the borough, the payments are very modest and do not extend to supporting community language teaching. JCE is wholly dependent for its survival (use of school premises and teachers' fees) on funds raised from charitable trusts by a volunteer fund-raiser. At present this funding is mainly obtained on the basis of the community's economic disadvantage. While the current funders recognise the value of building children's confidence, as with Shpresa, there is no question of language maintenance being considered as a right. Due to the low density of the population locally and low levels of literacy among parents, the community do not have the political influence of their Bangladeshi neighbours in Tower Hamlets.

The following observational notes provide a brief account of the teaching strategies in two of the classrooms. While both teachers were educated in Bangladesh, both work during the week in mainstream schools and are used to organising group work. Like Ana at Shpresa, they are aware of the need to maintain pace and variety to hold children's interest.

There are 3 classes in this small school. The children all speak Sylheti at home, but vary in their knowledge of standard Bengali. They are grouped according to their knowledge of the written language, which means they are only roughly grouped by age. In class 1, the beginners are mostly aged seven to 9, but the group includes two older girls. The children work in small groups. The teacher has prepared her own resources: a range of vocabulary games based around fruit and colours which the children play in their groups as she circulates and asks questions. The pace of the lesson is designed to provide variety. The children move on to work sheets graded for difficulty designed to teach letters and match them to words that begin with the sound, as well as some basic vocabulary, also around the theme of fruit. After a 15 minute break, this is followed by some hand writing practice. As children complete this the teacher runs a competitive quiz based on homework set the week before. While she has used only standard Bengali up to this point, in this activity she occasionally clarifies a question using English. The session ends with a lively recitation of a poem using actions and the handing out of homework for the following week.

The intermediate class is quite large and includes all children past the early stages but not yet ready to study for GCSE examinations. The class work in five groups. The teacher has a lively manner, but a more teacher centred approach. He maintains interest through quick fire question and answer sessions. The children are following the Tower Hamlets syllabus and material from illustrated books imported from Bangladesh. The topic is leisure activities. The children have five questions to answer in writing about their hobbies. The teacher uses English regularly, and occasionally Sylheti, to explain and the children respond by using all

languages. The teacher circulates and asks questions. He calls the whole class to attention for a lively competitive quiz at the end of the class and all children join in.

The observations show both teachers working to address the differences in language ability in their classes through tailored differentiation and the use of teaching materials with a strong visual component. While both teachers use strategies familiar to the children from their mainstream schools: an interactive style and differentiated group work, there are significant differences in the way they use language in the classroom.

Discussion

Both Shpresa and JCE are vulnerable to changing policy priorities. 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.

There is much in common **in the vignettes from Garnham and JCE** as the teachers meet the challenges common to complementary schools. Clearly noticeable in these observations is the good behaviour of the children, their engagement with their learning and their warm relationship with their teachers.

Garnham school uses Albanian teaching resources and a **teacher-led** pedagogy. JCE's teachers supplement imported workbooks with materials adapted for London schoolchildren (the Tower Hamlets programme referred to below) and use a style of teaching closer to what the children experience in their mainstream schools. All three teachers adapt resources and make their own.

The vignettes show teachers deploying two different language strategies in the classroom, both of which are common in complementary schools. The second Bengali teacher's use of what Garcia calls 'translanguaging' (2009), and Blackledge and Creese call 'flexible bilingualism' (2010), involves the use of all available codes to support understanding (Martin et al, 2004) and reflects the way the children use their languages in their every day life**. Ana's almost exclusive use of Albanian (and the first Bengali teacher's use of Bengali) represent a common 'separate bilingualism' strategy and reflect the mission, entrusted to them by parents, to teach the children the standard language of literacy.**

The third generation Bengali children all use English as well as Sylheti in the home and the standard Bengali used in class is less familiar. Hence the three hours devoted to language teaching aimed at public examinations. While Shpresa has campaigned for a GCSE in Albanian, the chance of obtaining this is slim. Some of the differences between Shpresa and JCE, such as teaching styles, resources used and funding opportunities, can be accounted for by different migration trajectories and histories. **Both the Bengalis in Hackney and the Albanians are small minorities within their boroughs.**

The second comparison made in this paper concerns not teaching style or classroom practice but the difference that geography and status make to the operational context of complementary schools serving the same Bangladeshi community in two adjacent London Boroughs.

Bangladeshi complementary schools in Tower Hamlets

In Tower Hamlets the Bangladeshi heritage children constitute 54% of all school children. While generally economically disadvantaged, 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.

While the management committees of complementary schools retain overall responsibility for the classes, the teaching of Bengali in many of the schools is supported by a central team within the Local Authority's Children's Services that is unique in the UK. Teachers are employed part-time by the Local Authority and supervised by the Community Languages Service team. A training course in a local Further Education college leads to a qualification in community language teaching (Uddin, 2008).

A curriculum and assessment protocols for teaching Bengali have been developed that blend cultural and linguistic input with the requirements of the English examination

system for languages (GCSE and Asset Languages), thereby ensuring full parity with mainstream language qualifications. It is common practice for teachers in the classes to provide instruction using Sylheti and English as well as standard Bengali. Other communities have benefited from the Local Authority's policy and teachers are also funded for classes in Somali, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish, Urdu and Lithuanian (Community Languages Service, 2007).

The provision of trained and paid teachers raises the status of the classes, removes a great part of the fund raising challenge for schools and ensures classes are free. The difference in population density and political influence means that, while JCE receives no recognition or funding from its Local Authority and is the only complementary school teaching Bengali in its borough, the Local Authority funded teachers of Tower Hamlets are deployed in 61 community organisations as well as in 23 after school classes on school premises. But even this level of advantage may not ensure permanence as the policy remains vulnerable to changes of political control and the cost cutting expected in the present economic climate.

Emerging from the underground:

opportunities and challenges

The more positive approach to community languages evident in recent official documents has raised the profile of these languages and offered opportunities to complementary schools. The schools described above have made good use of these: Shpresa's work was published by '*Our Languages'* as a model of good practice in partnership (Shpresa Programme, 2008); the Tower Hamlets schools benefited from

the erosion of the distinction between community languages and traditional Modern Foreign Languages, JCE received assistance from the National Resource Centre to develop its professionalism. The community languages debate has moved on from the 'problem' to the 'resource'. However, it is only in the very specific context of Tower Hamlets that community languages are close to being considered as a right and the monolingual model of society remains unchallenged.

Also remaining are issues of funding and status and complementary schools are faced with new challenges related to their mission and purpose. As the schools achieve greater public recognition, they are no longer seen as innovative and find it harder, like JCE, to attract funding from charitable trusts. A government policy to commission public services from the voluntary sector has led to many Local Authorities, like the one in which JCE is situated, replacing small grant programmes that complementary schools could apply for (Tyler, 2008; HCVS, 2010).

However the recent studies of complementary schools referred to above, as well as the wealth of observational and interview data obtained by the present researchers, reveal the complementary schools' great strength. The schools are created by very localised communities to meet the distinctive linguistic and cultural needs of their pupils. For example when JCE first started, its aim was to strengthen the linguistic and cultural knowledge of the children in an environment that was felt to be threatening. As the small community it represented gained in confidence and raised its aspirations, the older children aimed for formal GCSE qualifications in Bengali. As they excelled at these, so the school encouraged them to enter for awards for service to the wider community which a number of pupils gained. The incentive of obtaining a formal

qualification in a community language can be a great motivator for pupils and Shpresa has lobbied hard for qualifications in Albanian. However complementary schools are aware of the tension between adopting teaching styles and materials that reflect the teaching of languages in mainstream schools, and developing new pedagogies to teach them in the way in which they are actually used within their **communities. Their** teaching also reflects their cultural mission and the need to make learning enjoyable to children who attend voluntarily.

> 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, p. 3).

Conclusion

In spite of the recently more positive rhetoric, the responsibility for complementary schools remains with local communities as it was at the time of the Swann report. The story of community languages demonstrates the power relations at play and UK society's ambivalence towards its multilingual and multicultural reality. As mentioned above, many schools have made good use of the opportunities offered to them by greater recognition, but all are aware that this is unlikely to be backed by any offer of resources. Bigger, more prosperous schools may engage with the commissioning process and benefit. Smaller ones will struggle and may remain visible or go deeper

underground as they feel threatened by over-regulation. To continue to offer the safe spaces in which languages and identities can develop, complementary schools will need to use their ingenuity (like Shpresa), political influence (like the schools in Tower Hamlets) or the dedication of their users (like JCE) to take advantage of opportunities and meet challenges without compromising their identity as grassroots organisations directly responsible to their users.

The current debate fails to engage critically with the issues of power, control and status that affect resources and the take-up of community language learning, and what Anderson et al. have called the 'incoherent discourse' around multilingualism (2008, p. 191). As the UK has become more ethnically and linguistically diverse since the 1990s, so the dimensions of diversity within communities become more visible: socio-economic status, migration trajectories, gender, religion and a greater geographical dispersal make it increasingly difficult to generalise about needs and practices or indeed to define communities by their ethnic and linguistic characteristics alone (Vertovec, 2007).

The close study of language use and pedagogical practices in individual classrooms, the conversations with pupils, their parents, their teachers, the volunteers, all of these provide opportunities to explore dimensions of diversity and the variety .of the schools' responses to the opportunities and challenges offered by public rhetoric and government policy. Such study may in turn offer opportunities to develop new pedagogies for language learning which build on multilingual experiences and practices. It may also provide an evidence base that reflects the real life diversity of the UK and could inform future policy and generate a more coherent discourse on multilingualism.

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