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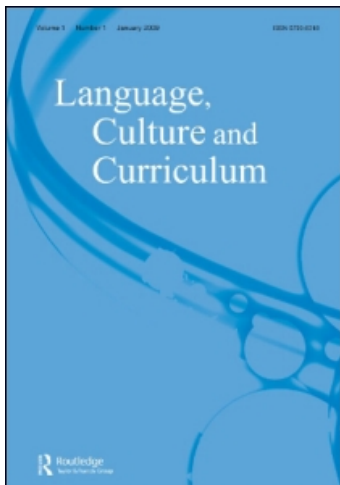
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# Home to School and School to Home: Syncretised Literacies in Linguistic Minority Communities

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This paper argues for the need to move beyond the paradigm of *parental involvement* in children's early literacy through *story-reading* practice, which presently informs home/school reading programmes, to consider a wider framework for family and community involvement. The first part of the paper examines the literature informing the current model showing the marked absence of studies on the different literacy practices in which children from new immigrant/minority ethnic families engage and which may be different from those of their teachers. This prevailing mainstream paradigm is illustrated through the experiences of two young children reading with their mother and sister. The second part of the paper draws upon findings from research projects investigating the home, school and community reading practices of new immigrant families in east London and compares them with families that do conform to the prevailing paradigm for successful involvement. Finally, it suggests principles for inclusive education for minority families.

After school, Jorna goes to Arabic classes from 5–7 p.m., four days a week. The book she takes from school, her elder sister helps her read. Her sister shows her the Bengali alphabet and they like to do drawing and writing together, turning it into a book. She likes to watch cartoons and Hindi films – her older brother brings them. She plays with the playhouse and listens to stories, but she can't move around too much because other people complain.

(Kelly, 1996)

Over the past three decades, a particular paradigm of successful involvement by families in children's literacy has prevailed. Official education reports have stressed the importance of regular story-reading by parents from early infancy and the absence of this practice has been used by teachers and governments alike to explain early reading difficulties. As early as 1975, the Bullock Report (7.2) informed parents that

The best way to prepare the very young child for reading is to hold him on your lap and read aloud to him stories he likes, over and over again... We believe that a priority need is ... to help parents recognise the value of sharing the experience of books with their children.

The maxim 'Babies need books' has changed little during later decades. It was reiterated in the Cox Report in the late 1980s (1989: 16: 8):

We hope that parents will share books with their children from their earli-

est days, read aloud to them and talk about the stories they have enjoyed together.

In the 1990s, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority Report on desirable outcomes for children's learning in nurseries (SCAA, 1996: 7) asked parents to support learning opportunities at home through 'reading and sharing books'. The Government White Paper on the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1997: 32) stated: 'Children who are read to regularly, hear stories, learn nursery rhymes, look at books, visit libraries and so on are much more likely to learn to read easily'. Most recently, the same message has been repeated in the Homework Guidelines (DfEE, 1998: 9) which stated: 'For children in Key Stage 1 homework should very largely consist of regular reading with parents and carers, looking at books together'.

Significantly, it is not enjoyment with any kind of print that counts. Both the official curriculum and the academic world in which teachers are trained only sanction and reinforce 'good' literature whose titles are provided in the curriculum; it is on these titles that the success of seven- and eleven-year-olds will be tested. Home experiences such as those of Jorna above are, therefore, excluded from the school model of success and even considered to be detrimental to school learning.

The crucial question for educators, however, is whether book and story-reading experiences at home are, in themselves, essential for successful cognitive and early reading development to take place. Or are they important simply because they reproduce what counts in early literacy tuition in British schools? In other words, does the problem of low achievement lie in inadequate parental involvement or in inadequate recognition by schools of the different strengths that children like Jorna might bring with them from their homes and communities? The answer is important, since we know that a number of new immigrant parents have always been and will always be unable to adopt school-based practices (Gregory, 1996; Greenhaigh & Hughes, 1999).

## Background

Although numerous studies from the English-speaking world point to the advantages for young children of family involvement in their literacy development, their emphasis has always been firmly and almost exclusively upon *parents* working with children *in specific ways* and often using particular school-sanctioned materials. Current models of *parental involvement in reading* in the UK are generally based on the following assumptions:

*Assumption One* The same home reading programmes are suitable whether all the school is from a monolingual or first-generation linguistic minority background. Parents should be capable of helping their children through storybook-reading whether or not they are able to read English.

Researchers in the UK have generally shown a reluctance to recognise cultural differences in the learning practices of minority group families. A number of factors might be responsible for this. Since the debate on linguistic and cognitive 'deficit' or 'difference' (Bernstein, 1971; Labov, 1972), researchers and teachers have been anxious to emphasise *similarities* rather than differences in language

use in the homes of different social classes (Wells, 1985; Tizard & Hughes, 1984). A second reason may well stem from the strong British tradition of *child-centredness* in early years education which is focused on the child as *individual* rather than a member of a cultural or ethnic group. Finally, recent government policy in the UK stresses the need to promote a 'common culture' (Tate, 1995) which will iron out cultural differences between groups. This aim is practically reinforced by the English National Curriculum (1995) which fails to acknowledge the learning practices of different minority groups. 'Equality of opportunity', a promise which is made in the Education Act of 1988, is currently interpreted as 'the same' provision. In practice, this means that families not benefiting from the 'equal opportunity' provided are viewed in terms of linguistic, cognitive or cultural deficit. Such a narrow definition of culture ignores the multiple pathways to literacy shown by both adults and children from minority groups in Western societies (Baynham, 1995; Kale & Luke, 1997).

*Assumption Two* Home reading programmes are for *parental* involvement not wider family or community participation.

Current home reading programmes assume *parental* participation rather than involvement by the wider family or community in young children's reading. However, the role of siblings in children's learning has been the subject of various research studies; some reveal how young children learn social and emotional skills (Dunn, 1989) and cognitive skills (Cicirelli, 1976) from older siblings. Others show how in non-Western societies older siblings are often culture brokers who may be as influential or more influential than parents in socialising young children (Whiting & Edwards, 1988; Rogoff, 1990). Recent studies are beginning to highlight the special role which may be played by older siblings in linguistic minority families where parents do not speak the new language (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Zukow, 1989; Perez *et al.*, 1994; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Gregory, 1998) and to suggest that the ways in which children learn from older siblings in the home environment may have implications for school learning. The role played by grandparents in home literacy teaching may also be significant in closely-knit families (Padmore, 1994; Williams, 1997), likewise other family members, such as uncles, aunts and older 'cousins' or 'friends' in the widest sense. These studies problematise the notion that parents will be the exclusive caregivers and 'teachers' in families of all backgrounds.

## Literacy and the Family: A Wider Theoretical Framework

The aim of this paper is to question the above assumptions and to explode the myth that linguistic minority children's reading success depends upon experience with 'authorised' reading experiences at home. The theoretical framework informing this argument synthesises perspectives from the 'New Literacy Studies', cultural psychology and cultural anthropology. The New Literacy Studies support an ideological model of literacy which signals explicitly that literacy practices are aspects not only of culture but also of power structures (Street, 1995; Baynham, 1995). Viewed in this way, school-sanctioned literacy – or 'Literacy', as referred to by Street (1995:14) – is just one of a multiplicity of literacies which take place in people's lives, in different domains, for a variety of

purposes and in different languages. Within this model, children and adults draw upon a number of different 'mediators of literacy'; such a mediator is defined as 'a person who makes his or her skills available to others, on a formal or informal basis, for them to accomplish specific literacy purposes' (Baynham, 1995: 39). They may be teachers at out-of-school community language classes, clubs, drama activities etc.; or they may be 'guiding lights' – mediators of literacy who are especially inspiring as mentors or role models, such as grandparents (Padmore, 1994) or siblings (Gregory, 1998).

Cultural psychology offers a 'cultural mediational model of reading' (Cole, 1996: 273) which recognises as vital the actual roles that significant 'experts' play in giving 'guided participation' (Rogoff, 1990) or 'scaffolding' (Bruner, 1986) to the learning of the novice. This concept is exemplified in the work of Wagner 1994, whose comparative study on children in Morocco shows how those engaged in formal learning of the Qur'an revealed different skills and strategies from those whose literacy learning took place only within the official school.

However, an important argument of this paper is that young people are not trapped within existing home and community practices. The children whose voices we hear below reveal a complex heterogeneity of traditions whereby reading practices from different domains are blended, resulting in a form of reinterpretation that is both new and dynamic. Duranti and Ochs (1996) refer to this type of blending as *syncretic literacy*, which merges not simply linguistic codes or texts, but different activities. Their example is the activity of doing homework by Samoan Americans, and they provide a finely-tuned analysis of the way in which Samoan and American traditions, languages, teaching and child-rearing activities are blended. In this paper, we argue that *contrasting* home and school strategies and practices may provide children with an enlarged treasure trove, upon which they can draw in the official English school.

## The Study

The findings below are drawn largely from a large bank of data, collected over seven years, on home, school and community reading practices among past and present generations of teachers and pupils in schools in Spitalfields, east London. The question investigated is: how do young children in Spitalfields, many of whom are of linguistic minority backgrounds, set about learning to read in their homes, communities and classrooms? The scope of the question is wide and separate phases of the research have addressed different issues attempting to piece together a complex jigsaw of the role of reading in the lives of families who, in many cases, do not fit those required by 'official' school demands.

This paper draws upon Phases 2 and 4 of the research (1994–1996 and 1998–1999) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (R000 22 1186 and R000 222487). Phase 2 examined the literacy histories and current practices in seven Bangladeshi British and six monolingual families whose five-year-old children attended two neighbouring schools. The question investigated was: what is the nature of reading practices taking place in the children's lives, and how far do children transfer reading strategies from home to school and vice versa? (Gregory, 1998; Gregory & Williams, 1998). Phase 4 addresses the role of siblings as mediators of literacy in two east London communities and is tracing

the work and play activities around literacy of ten Bangladeshi British and a similar number of monolingual families. Examples from monolingual children from other areas of London whose family literacy practices are recognised as 'valid' within the current 'parental involvement' framework have also been collected and analysed for the purpose of this paper.

A combination of methods from ethnography (participant observation, interviews, life histories etc.) and ethnomethodology (conversation analysis) has been used during different phases of the work. Ethnography was important in its aim to produce a 'cultural grammar' or a set of rules which need to be known in order to become a competent member of the group. The researchers themselves were teachers and shared in many of the experiences of the participants, spending considerable time in homes and classrooms and accompanying the families on shopping or other visits. At the same time, their task was to remain 'strange' to the situation in order to make explicit what is already known to the group. Ethnographic fieldwork went through the following stages:

- (1) prolonged and repetitive data collection during contextualised observations which disturbed the interactions of the participants as little as possible;
- (2) formulating questions and multiple hypotheses until a pattern is formed from the data to provide an analytic framework;
- (3) narrowing the focus to generate a limited number of hypotheses or 'typologies' which are then subjected to further investigation;
- (4) producing trustworthy evidence through a full and explicit description of the social world in which events studied take place.

Ethnographic methods enabled us to give a detailed account of the literacy practices taking place in homes, communities and classrooms as well examine patterns of difference and similarity between groups. However, they did not provide insight into the moment-by-moment construction of meaning between child and partner during reading sessions.

The vital aspect of an ethnomethodological approach was to show how child and adult (or older sibling) created 'cultural knowledge' in the home or classroom together, rather than viewing knowledge as preconstituted by cultural or social class background. The aim was to show how adult (or older sibling) and child 'situate' themselves in the reading 'lesson' and how they both participated in teaching and learning through interaction and negotiation. We are analysing the data using the method of multi-layering (Gregory, 1998). This approach enabled us to examine (1) the social context within which individual functioning is embedded (in-depth ethnographic analysis), (2) individual teaching strategies (codings) and (3) the role of the child in negotiating interactions (conversation analysis). A useful example of the value of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches has been found in Rogoff and Gauvain's (1986) pattern analysis used to examine instructional discourse in mother/child dyads.

## **Recognising Differences: Contrasting Materials, Mediators and Purposes**

Current views of what counts as partnership between home and school are illustrated in the following two examples of school-oriented (mainstream) and

monolingual families where school reading practices are adopted and reinforced. For children from such families, experiences with books can often begin from an early age. The following vignette of Ben (33 months) sharing a book with his mother, while his sister Alice (15 months) looks on, illustrates how this practice offers an opportunity for close interaction between child and adult, but also enables a particular set of behaviours and expectations around books to be modelled and reinforced.

*Mother*

That's an easy one.  
Get a more difficult one.

*Ben*

*(Ben looks through his books. His mother suggests 'Party'? Ben chooses another first and his mother reads its title: 'The Zoo'? Ben finally settles for 'Party', reading its title out loud.)*

02

Hallo Alice

03 No, Alice you can't have this book. Mummy and Ben are looking at this book. 'Susie and John are going to a party'. What's she doing, Ben?

05 Yes! What colour is it?

That party ... that party ...  
That ... is it that one?  
*(pointing to the present)*

06

Green

07 Nooo!

08

Blue

09 Bl-ue! What's she got on her feet?

10

White socks

11 Are they on her feet?

12

No

13 Now what's she doing?

14

Putting her shoes on

15 Now, what's the boy doing?

16

Putting trousers on

17 Are they short trousers or long trousers?

18

Long trousers.

19 Have a look. You can see his knees.

20 Are they short trousers or long trousers?

21

Short

22 Yes they are, aren't they.



Belinda does not read the story through but pauses to consider the detail of the illustrations, using the book as a focus for developing Ben's language. She poses questions and checks Ben's responses if they are inappropriate. The emphasis here is on accuracy and serves the same function as the early lexical labelling behaviour previously referred to. This pattern of question-response-retort is a behaviour that Ben will recognise when he starts school and it is one that he is already beginning to internalise:

<i>Mother</i>	<i>Ben</i>
23	
24 What is Ann doing?	What's Ann doing?
25	Opening her presents.

Such questioning techniques are just one characteristic of a school-oriented approach to literacy learning that may be adopted within the home. The following example illustrates how Isabel (aged 10) spontaneously adopts 'teacherly' behaviour when playing a game with her brother Alex (aged 4). The children are at home; the focus of the interaction is once more a book, although this time it is one that provides games, stories and quizzes for pre-school children. They have spent approximately 15 minutes playing one game from the book. They have now chosen a page on rhymes:

<i>Isabel</i>	<i>Alex</i>
01 OK. Log and ...?	
02	dog!
03 Good boy! Wiz.... Lizard and ....?	
04	wizard!
05 I gave it away a bit there, didn't I?	
Carrot and ....?	parrot
06	
07 Well done! Coat and....?	dote!
08	
...	
26 Can you think of any other rhymes?	Mmm.....
27	Hamster ..and..mmm. I can't think of any more rhymes...Ah! ( <i>shouts</i> ), Bear and pear!
28 Well done! What about cat and bat?	And bird and heard? ( <i>laughs</i> ) Back-
29	wards and Harrods!
30 No, no, no, no, no	Oh ...
32	
...	
45 What about?	( <i>interrupts</i> ) Cape and pape, paper
46	

16

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48

No

49 Mmm ... Late and plate

50

Mmm ... Fence and paint! No, no, no ...  
Fence and pence, pencil ....

51 Yes, pence, a pence, like one p.  
In other words, a pence.

52

Book and pook!

53 Naw, book and look!

54

Oh yeah. Door and poor. Yeah. Video  
and pedeo

55

*(both children)..N-a-w..*

The activity continues until the children's father joins in and suggests they make joke rhymes.

*Isabel*

*Alex*

81 House and louse

82

Now I'm gonna tell one. Cupboard and  
hubbard. Mother Hubbard!

83 Yes!

This playful scene between siblings, which lasts for over forty minutes, reveals the wealth of cultural and linguistic knowledge the two children share. They have a shared experience of nursery rhymes, and places that are cultural icons; a common understanding of rhyming words, and a deep knowledge of English. The encounter reflects the same pattern of interaction that was evident between Belinda and Ben and reveals the subtlety of Isabel's teaching style. She provides ample praise and encouragement for her brother, offering examples when he loses confidence, allowing him to experiment freely, yet correcting him when he makes a mistake. She pauses to allow him sufficient time to respond and suggests generalising beyond the page to their wider knowledge of rhyming words. In the following example, and on several other occasions, she explains words she thinks Alex may not understand:

*Isabel*

*Alex*

That's a good one. Do you know what  
a habit is?

Rabbit and habit!

Well, it's sort of ... How do you  
describe a habit? It's something, sort of,  
you do a lot of...

It is clear that the two children are already familiar with a school-oriented approach to literacy as they participate in this playful encounter which provides a strong scaffold for Alex's learning. It is likely that when Alex and Ben start

school shortly, they will recognise familiar patterns of interaction around books and stories and will be well placed to make a smooth transition into the world of the classroom. But what about children who do not have this shared understanding; whose experiences around literacy do not reflect those of the school and whose understanding of the nuances of English may still be developing?

### Community Classes: A Different Kind of Learning

For most of the Bangladeshi British children in our Spitalfields study, education continues long after mainstream school has finished, as the following conversation with six year old Ruhul demonstrates:

- 1 **R:** There are eighty-three children  
 2 **AW:** Eighty-three children in your Arabic class! And when do you go to that?  
 3 **R:** Seven o'clock to nine o'clock  
 4 **AW:** On?  
 5 **RA:** A night.  
 6 **AW:** Every night?  
 7 **R:** Monday to Friday  
 8 **AW:** Monday to Friday! You go for two hours every night! Aren't you tired?  
 9 **R:** I don't feel tired  
 10 **AW:** No? And who goes with you? Anybody from your class?  
 11 **R:** I go by myself...And some people go from upstairs...juniors  
 12 **AW:** And are you the youngest then?  
 13 **R:** Yes and I'm on the Qur'an  
 14 **AW:** You're on the Qur'an now.

Ruhul explains that he is reading the last primer before starting the Qur'an. He goes on to explain more about the structure of his classes.

- 22 **AW:** How many teachers are there for eighty-three children?  
 23 **RT:** There's two  
 24 **AW:** Only two? Who are they?  
 25 **R:** One is the Qur'an ..you know, all the Qur'an he can say it without looking  
 26 **AW:** He can.. What's his name?  
 27 **R:** I don't know. And one is ... he can ... he knows all the meanings  
 28 **AW:** Does he. Does he tell you the meanings?  
 29 **R:** Yes he does.  
 30 **AW:** So do you just read the Qur'an for two hours? Is that what you do?  
 31 **R:** Yes but I don't sometimes, I talk sometimes  
 32 **AW:** You don't!  
 33 **R:** I do

(Williams & Gregory 1999: 159)

This conversation gives some idea of the demands made upon children who participate in very different home literacy practices. For these children, learning to read and write is a complex business involving several languages. The home

dialect of the London Bangladeshis is Sylheti, an unwritten variety of Bengali and so parents feel that it is important that their children learn to read and write standard Bengali if they are to maintain their own culture. Finally, as practising Muslims, the children must read the Qur'an and therefore attend Qur'anic school and learn to read in Arabic. Already at age six, Ruhul realises that literacy is a serious business.

The class which Ruhul attended every day after school is typical of Qur'anic classes everywhere. The sessions are usually two hours long: few concessions are made to the young age of some of the children and even the smallest are expected to concentrate for long periods:

In this particular class there are two male teachers, one of whom is working with the more advanced children who are tackling the complicated word structures of the Qur'an. The other group consists of younger children who are in a different part of the room with the second teacher, grappling with sounds and letters and oral verse. Everyone sits on the mat swaying to the sound of his/her own voice. Although on initial appraisal the noise level seems high, little of this is idle chatter. It is the expressed wish of the teachers that children read aloud, partly to assist their learning, but more importantly so that Allah can hear. Children are encouraged to develop a harmonious recitation in unison with the gentle rocking to and fro which accompanies the reading. They are told that Allah listens to his servants and is pleased if they take time to make their reading meaningful ... 'Now, repeat after me', the teacher requests, 'Kalimah Tayyabh, la ilaha ilallaho, mohammadan rasolallaha'. He tells them to look at him as they repeat ... I leave the room on the third recitation of the prayer and notice that the children have not wavered: all remain seated on the floor as they have done for the last hour and a half. (Rashid 1996)

Teaching methods are traditional: the teacher reads a phrase and the children repeat after him until they are word perfect and the process continues with the next phrase. The pattern of listen, practise and repeat is shown clearly in the following extract, also taken from Rashid (1995):

The teacher stands in the centre and calls upon each child in turn to recite the passage which they have reached in their reading of the religious primer or the Qur'an.

**Teacher:** Read this, Shuma

**Shuma:** Alif, bah, tah, sayh, (*the names of the graphic symbols on the page*)

**Teacher:** What was that? Say it again

**Shuma:** Alif, bah, tah, sayh, jim

**Teacher:** Yes, that's it, now carry on

**Shuma:** Jim – jim, hae, kae, d- (*hesitates*)

**Teacher:** Dal – dal, remember it and repeat

**Shuma:** Dal, zal, rae, zae, sin, shin, swad, dwad,

**Teacher:** (*nods*) What's next? Thoy, zoy

**Shuma:** Zoy, thoy..

**Teacher:** No, no, listen carefully. Thoy, zoy

**Shuma:** (*repeats*)

**Teacher:** Fine, Now say it again from the beginning...

(field notes, N. Rashid, April, 1995)

The Bengali classes take place in a variety of locations. Some are held in teachers' houses, some in the children's homes and some in community centres as the one described by Rashid below.

Situated behind Petticoat Lane Market, this Bengali school is funded through the voluntary sector. It comprises two mobile rooms, the walls bare except for a few information posters made by the children. The room I enter has several rows of desks at which children sit quietly – some writing, others practising words under their breath. At the beginning, the teacher sits in front of the room, then starts to walk around. The children who are mumbling are practising the previous day's work and as the teacher passes around, the voice of the child he is listening to is momentarily amplified so that the teacher can correct if necessary before moving on to the next. Later the children read, some at a fast pace whilst others read with careful deliberation. When the teacher reaches the child I have come to observe, she reads confidently and eloquently and the few mistakes she makes are firmly corrected. Parts that are not understood are explained briefly in Sylheti ... and the lesson continues in this way to the end. (Rashid 1996)

Teaching in the Bengali classes is equally traditional: children work on one primer at a time, progressing gradually through the series. As the following conversation indicates, learning Bengali, even if it takes place in someone's front room with a friend's mum as the teacher, is also a serious undertaking.

- 1     **AW:**     Tell me what you do then on Saturdays and Sundays  
 2     **R:**        I don't come to school  
 3     **AW:**     You don't come to school but what do you do?  
 4     **R:**        I go to Bengali school then I come home  
 5     **AW:**     What time do you go to Bengali school?  
 6     **R:**        Eleven o'clock to one o'clock  
 7     **AW:**     And what do you do there?  
 8     **R:**        We read Bengali  
 9     **AW:**     And how do you do ...how do you learn that then?  
 10    **AW:**     And do you just have one book or do you have a lot of books?  
 11    **R:**        There's book two, book three, book four, book five... there's lots of books  
 12    **AW:**     Lots of books and which book are you on?  
 13    **R:**        Book one  
 14    **AW:**     Book one. Is it hard?  
 15    **R:**        Easy!  
 16    **AW:**     What do you have to do? Do you have to write in the book?  
 17    **R:**        You've got to read it. And sometimes they say, 'You've got to write it without looking'.  
 18    **AW:**     Write it without looking and then what do you do?  
 19    **R:**        Then if I'm right..she..they tell us  
 20    **AW:**     And who is your teacher?

- 21 **R:** There's two, Meli's dad and Jahanara's dad  
 22 **AW:** Jahanara's dad! Is he the teacher?  
 23 **R:** Jahanara's dad, and Tania..do you know Tania in Class One?  
 24 **AW:** No  
 25 **R:** Her mum

(Gregory & Williams, 2000: 174–175)

Although Ruhul is only six years old, he spends two hours every day, in addition to his mainstream school, in such classes. In contrast with the monolingual group who engaged mostly in informal literacy practices outside school, the Bangladeshi British children spent on average thirteen hours per week receiving formal instruction in organised classes. Thus their home literacy differs from that of many monolingual children in many respects. First, it is conducted as group rather than individual or paired activities, and an individual's progress (towards the completion of the Qur'an for example) is often marked by the whole group sharing sweets or other treats. Second, the purpose of reading is quite different from that of monolingual English children: learning to read and write in Bengali is seen as entering a cultural world and acquiring a language which was fought over during the violent struggle for independence from Pakistan in 1971; learning to read the Qur'an is necessary for taking on the Islamic faith and therefore an adult and serious occupation. Finally, even the task of reading at home in English is quite different for Bangladeshi British children. In this community where some parents are literate in Bengali but not necessarily in English, home reading usually means children reading their school texts not with Mum or Dad nor even with Grandma or Grandpa, but with those members of the family who are already fully proficient in English, i.e. the older sisters and brothers.

### **Reading between Siblings: A Syncretism of Literacies**

It was this 'booksharing' with older siblings that provided some of the most interesting insights into the young Bangladeshi British children's acquisition of literacy. The combination of cultures and learning styles the bilingual children were exposed to in their daily lives resulted in a unique method of tackling the school reading books at home. When the reading sessions were analysed, it became clear that the children were blending strategies learned in both their mainstream English school and in their Bengali and Arabic classes. This resulted in what we have termed 'syncretic literacy' (Gregory 1998) with the repetitions and fast-flowing pace characteristic of the Qur'anic reading, grafted onto strategies adopted from lessons in the English mainstream school such as echoing, 'chunking' of expressions and predicting. The transcriptions also revealed that the older siblings employed a series of intricate and finely tuned strategies to support the young readers as they struggled with the text. In the early stages when reading with a child who was just beginning to read, the supportive 'scaffolding' was almost total, with the older siblings providing almost every word for the beginning reader. As the younger child's proficiency increased however, the scaffolding was gradually removed until the child was able to read alone. We were able to identify the following stages in the scaffolding of the young children's reading:

*Listen and repeat:* the child repeats word by word after the older sibling

*Tandem reading:* the child echoes the sibling's reading, sometimes managing telegraphic speech

*Chained reading:* the sibling begins to read and the child continues, reading the next few words until s/he needs help again

*Almost alone:* the child initiates reading and reads until a word is unknown; the sibling corrects the error or supplies the word; the child repeats the word correctly and continues

*The recital:* the child recites the complete piece.

The following extracts illustrates Stage 1 *Listen and repeat*.

<i>Child</i>	<i>Sibling</i>
	1 The postman
2 The postman	3 It was Tum's birthday
4 was....birthday	5 Ram made
6 Ram made	7 him a birthday card
8 him a birthday card	

Stage 3 *Chained reading* is illustrated by the following extract.

<i>Child</i>	<i>Sibling</i>
	34 Okhta (this one)
	35 It's
36 It's a whobber. Meg...	37 Mog
38 Mog caught a fish	39 caught
40 caught a fish	
...	
44 They cook	45 cooked
46 cooked a fish	47 and
48 and Owl had a rest. Meg was looking	49 looked out

(Gregory 1998: 43–44)

In Stage 3 we see Akhlak and his sister practising 'chained reading': the sister starts and Akhlak continues reading the next few words until he needs help again; the sister then either corrects or provides the word. Akhlak repeats the correction and continues. These home reading sessions are characterised by a

very high number of turns and a fast-flowing pace, strategies that we have already seen in practice in the Qur'anic classes. It is notable that in spite of the child's young age, the focus is on print rather than on any illustrations. Furthermore, the older sibling's insistence on accuracy from the outset indicates that this is not play but serious work in which the roles of learner and teacher are clearly defined and not negotiable. As we shall see below, the children of first-generation immigrants take their role of mediator of new cultures, languages and literacies very seriously, even in play.

### Combining Experiences from Home and School

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | Good morning class   |  |
| 2 |  | Good morning Miss Wahida, good morning everyone. |
| 3 | I want to do the register. So, Sayeeda.  |  |
| 4 |  | Good morning Miss Wahida.                        |
| 5 | Good morning Sayeeda<br>OK. We've done your reading today.<br>Now we are going to do maths.<br>OK. |  |

The scene is a flat in Spitalfields Wahida, a Bangladeshi British child aged eleven, is playing schools with her eight-year-old sister Sayeeda. The pattern of the school day is reflected in the children's play. Maths is followed by a spelling test and a 'lesson' on homophones before assembly, followed by science, geography and art. Wahida demonstrates on the blackboard while Sayeeda writes in an exercise book. The following extracts show how Wahida has adopted the social, linguistic and cognitive rules of the classroom and how skilfully she scaffolds the learning of her sister by syncretising the knowledge she has gained from attending two schools, one during the day and the other each evening.

- 38     **Wahida:** Well done, Sayeeda. I'm going to give you a sticker later on. A headteacher's sticker. *(after clearing throat)* Now, we're going to do a spelling test. Are you ready, Sayeeda?
- 39     **Sayeeda:** Yes Miss.
- 40     **Wahida:** I'm going to give you at least 20 seconds for each of them, OK? The first one is tricycle, tricycle. Tricycle has three wheels, tricycle. The next one is commandment, Commandment, I COMMAND you to do as quickly as you can. Commandment. Next one is technology. Technology is a subject. Once you're grown up, Sayeeda, you're going to do hard technology. The next one is polydron.....

The spelling test continues until Wahida demonstrates the correct spellings on the board as Sayeeda marks her own work. Then the focus moves to homophones:



- 41 **Wahida:** Well done! Only two wrong. Now we're going to do homophones. Who knows what's a homophone is? No one? OK. I'll tell you one and then you're going to do some by yourselves. Like watch – one watch is your time, watch. And another watch is I'm watching you. OK? So Sayeeda, you wrote some in your book, haven't you? Can you tell me some please. Sayeeda, can you only give me three please.
- 42 **Sayeeda:** Oh I have to give five.
- 43 **Wahida:** No Sayeeda, we haven't got time. We've only another five minutes to assembly.

(Gregory & Williams, 2000: 200)

It is hard to imagine that when Wahida began school at five, she spoke very little English. Six years on, she is using the appropriate language of the classroom and the lexis of particular subjects. It is clear she has internalised the social, cognitive and linguistic rules of the classroom and has made them her own. She has taken on a register that accurately reflects that of her teacher as she confidently conducts the class through both the rituals of the day (the register, lunchtime, assembly) and the conventions of the classroom (lining up, writing the date, marking work).

Wahida demonstrates her knowledge of teaching strategies as she gives direct instruction, encourages participation, provides demonstrations, and structures the cognitive demands of different 'lessons', giving ample praise and encouragement to her pupil, who readily cooperates in this sophisticated game. In both the spelling lesson and the session on homophones, Wahida scaffolds Sayeeda's learning by contextualising words and providing examples of their meaning.

Wahida's emphasis on spelling and homophones accurately reflects the 'word level work' recommended for children of Sayeeda's age, as part of the Literacy Hour. It is possibly no coincidence that she chooses to concentrate on word level work rather than sentence level which demands a sound knowledge of English grammar or text level work which calls for greater interpretation of the meaning and underlying structure of texts.

Some of the procedures she employs reflect the approaches that she would have experienced in her community school, where teaching methods focus more on listening, repeating and practising than on interpretation.

Wahida is syncretising what she knows from the different literacies of both school contexts, in a way that is recognised by her sister. Wahida demonstrates how children who come to school with experiences of literacy that do not conform to the official view, can learn to integrate the literacy of the classroom with their previous experience in a way that is creative and sophisticated and enables them to be effective literacy learners.

## **Towards a New Paradigm of Inclusive Education for Linguistic Minority Communities**

If early experiences at home and in the community are to be recognised and extended, it would seem important that teachers have time to listen to parents and to find out about their children's literacy experiences out of school. The state-

ment at the beginning of this paper is the record of a conference between the parent of a Year 1 child and a teacher as part of the Primary Language Record (CLPE 1988). The teacher concerned was able to plan more appropriately for Jorna as a result of finding out about the content and style of her learning at home.

Our studies show that parents should not exclusively be seen as the principal mediators of children's literacy. For many children, particularly those who have English as an additional language, siblings play a very important role in modelling and supporting their younger brothers and sisters and giving them an understanding of what it means to be literate.

This research reveals the strong link between work and play and the gap between children's experiences at home and what officially counts as learning. Our work has shown the wealth of learning that is going on in homes that do not subscribe to mainstream practices and the success that can arise if these children's experiences are recognised and built upon.

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