Mediating knowledge

A day in the life of a bilingual practitioner: ways of mediating knowledge

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Raising questions

- If the knowledge mediated relates to becoming a ‘schooled child’ and learning English, how can bilingual practitioners contribute to creating ‘new spaces’ which challenge the monolingual views of mind?
- How can bilingual practitioners use children’s mother tongues to mediate learning when the curriculum is delivered in English?

“They’re not accessing the curriculum the way they should be … so if I’ve got their language and I’m able to use it then that is right that I should use it” (Sadiye)

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Find out more about this project and the Practice-based Professional Learning CETL at our web site: www.open.ac.uk/pbpl/

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What do bilingual practitioners do during one working day?

How do bilingual practitioners mediate young bilingual children’s learning?

What is distinctive about bilingual mediation?

Context

Bilingual practitioners use their language expertise and their knowledge and understanding of other cultures, the culture and working practices of schools and early years settings, and children’s learning and language development to support bilingual children and their parents.

A day in the life

We filmed two bilingual practitioners in early years settings at work for a day, and interviewed them afterwards. After analysis of the data, we compiled edited extracts to exemplify their work and interactions with children, staff and parents. We invited our practitioners, Razia and Sadiye, to view our edited compilations with us, and recorded their comments.

Funds of knowledge

Moll et. al. (1992) argue that the dominant model of education is framed within values of white English-speaking educators, emphasises the disadvantages of children from minority language backgrounds and undermines bilingual children’s first language development in favour of English.

Bilingual practitioners’ funds of knowledge include:
- knowledge, resources, competences, values, assumptions
- knowledge through life experiences and within social networks, e.g. siblings’ play and interaction, family’s traditions, community
- knowledge of the child as a ‘whole person’ through knowledge of ‘multiple spheres of activity’
- bilingual and bicultural knowledge of: children’s backgrounds; being a bilingual child and/or parent; the importance of providing connections/ being a ‘bridge’ for children and parents; the educational system; systems and procedures.

Emerging findings

Further analysis of all the data collected in our study has exposed some issues:
- There is still a big gap between policy rhetoric and reality for bilingual practitioners and children.
- Processes and practices continue to constrain what bilingual practitioners are able to do.
- Dominant discourses do not facilitate bilingual learning in mainstream settings.
- Much first language use is instrumental and children’s responses are minimal.

“I think also the fact that I have grown up in a home and my Mum couldn’t speak English, I’m able to work out what people with a second language ... are on about ... because I’m used to having to translate and interpret and work out ...” (Sadiye)

“They’re losing everything. So if you had a little input of their first language, I think that would be a benefit for everybody; parents, families, schools and children ... Now all the children who’ve been through my time at let’s say [this school], not many of them are reading or writing their first language at all.” (Razia)