Child Language Brokering in School

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Project Aims

- To provide an evidence base for stimulating good practice in schools in the use of pupils as language brokers for their own parents and others in school.
- To lay the basis for further work on theorising the social and cultural significance of CLB.

The two phases of the study

- Phase 1
  On-line survey involving separate questionnaires for teachers (n=63) and for adults with experience of acting as a CLB at school (ex-CLBs) (n=25)
- Phase 2
  Semi-structured interviews with selected participants (12 teachers and 14 ex-CLBs)

Phase 2 of the study: the interviewees

**Ex-CLBs**
- 14 respondents
- Ages – 17-26 years old
- Gender: 10 female/4 male
- Variety of languages: Bengali, Dutch, Twi, Turkish, German, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Pashto, Nepalese

**Teachers**
- 12 respondents
- Ages – 28-50 years old
- Gender: 10 female/2 male
- Range of backgrounds: White British, Italian/German, Jamaican, Hong Kong (Chinese), Polish

Key areas of the guide

- Choosing the best person to act as a translator: questions to support good practice
- Training young interpreters in a formal scheme
- Interpreting for parents and family members
- Supporting peers in the classroom
What the teachers had to say

Impact on school life

- Growing confidence
  I think it can be a really empowering experience. I think it can because if it’s showing that they’ve spent stuff, it’s showing that they’re actually getting somewhere. So if they see it written on a report, they don’t understand yes I’m working. I’m working, I’m trying to learn English but look actually I’ve worked some and I’ve learned these words. I’ve finally worked it, and now I can tell you those in my language, in our language, and I can explain to you stuff. So I think it can be quite empowering.

- Moments of embarrassment
  I felt uncomfortable for the student who was interpreting because I could see that he took it to him it was really serious and like he said, he was embarrassed. He immediately realised what he was doing wrong and he felt a bit down and embarrassed, because he felt like he had failed the lesson, and they are not behaving the way they should behave because they’re fighting outside of school.

- Improving language skills
  It does some of the students with their English as well. I’ve heard one of my, one of my colleagues, he says that yes it helps with their English, it helps to give them confidence, especially in a classroom situation.

- Removing pupils from their class
  It doesn’t help some of the students with their English as well. I’ve heard of one, one of my colleagues, he says that yes it helps with their English, it helps to give them confidence, especially in a classroom situation.

Disadvantages I would say is having to withdraw a student from a classroom situation. That’s when I think you’re doing it’s like, when a child knows something that you don’t know. So often in school teachers are the expert and the children are the learners, but we’re not, we’re both learners, you know, and when you get a child to translate for you if it’s, you can genuinely be grateful to a child for something that they’ve genuinely done to help you. Yeah, if it’s, it’s a very humanising situation. It isn’t, because it humanises all of us in a way that sometimes teacher-pupil relationships can be de-humanising because you’re not on the level with them and you are this powerful person and they’re this person without power, you know. So it puts you in an equal position much more. I’m not saying that you should be a friend or anything like that but I think it’s nice sometimes for the child to be, it’s like when a child knows something about something you don’t know...

Relationship with the pupil

- Teacher as a learner
  Yeah, I mean I love it when a student, yeah, because I love it when a child knows more than you do about something, you know. So often in school teachers are the expert and the children are the learners, but we’re not, we’re both learners, you know, and when you get a child to translate for you if it’s, you can genuinely be grateful to a child for something that they’ve genuinely done to help you. Yeah, if it’s, it’s, it’s a very humanising situation. It isn’t, because it humanises all of us in a way that sometimes teacher-pupil relationships can be de-humanising because you’re not on the level with them and you are this powerful person and they’re this person without power, you know. So it puts you in an equal position much more. I’m not saying that you should be a friend or anything like that but I think it’s nice sometimes for the child to be, it’s like when a child knows something about something you don’t know...

- Relating from positions of responsibility
  I think it does actually, it builds a bigger, it builds a stronger bond actually because I’m, I’m not just using them for that, I’m giving them that responsibility so I’m treating them as a young child, even though they might be young or they might be older but you’ve got that responsibility so I’m respecting you, I’m respecting your skills so I want to see those...

What the language brokers had to say

How teachers feel about having children acting as language brokers

- Feeling pride, admiration and respect for CLBs
  I do quite admire the ones, I have to say, that translate. Because I have to say I’m rubbish at languages, really rubbish. I learnt French, German and Latin when I was at school and I’m just, just truly, truly rubbish at languages.

- Feeling uncomfortable using CLBs in schools
  I think it can be a really empowering experience. I think it can because if it’s showing that they’ve spent stuff, it’s showing that they’re actually getting somewhere. So if they see it written on a report, they don’t understand yes I’m working. I’m working, I’m trying to learn English but look actually I’ve worked some and I’ve learned these words. I’ve finally worked it, and now I can tell you those in my language, in our language, and I can explain to you stuff. So I think it can be quite empowering.

Impact on the self - ‘How it made me feel’

- Growing confidence
  I felt skilled, gifted and possibly embarrassed because it like, the first two are really positive but the last probably because it can be really embarrassing to sort of like have to translate and everyone’s just like staring at you.

- Moments of embarrassment
  I think I can translate better than what I did before, before, yeah, because I think before I didn’t have good English and now I think I’m improving so it’s getting better all the time... I think it’s a getting better, yeah, and so does my communication skill as well. And also say like in talking with people, so like eye contact and stuff it’s getting better with me.

- Improving language skills
  Like before if you come to me I would be like shaking and stuff but now I’m like more confident, I’m talking to you, I’m fine.

- Empathy with others and feeling of belonging
  Because my friends and their parents could talk English and it’s only my parents who can’t so I was feeling a bit low because my mum was just staring at my teacher saying nothing and I was like mum say something and she was like ‘no, no’, she just go ‘no, no’, and I like it was ‘just tell your name and everything’. But she no how to tell her name and everything, but like it was a bit awkward though.

- BUT – if activity was unusual, a sense of isolation
  So it puts you in an equal position much more. I’m not saying that you should be a friend or anything like that but I think it’s nice sometimes for the child to be, it’s like when a child knows something about something you don’t know...
I think later on, before when I was doing it for myself it was just normal. But I think like later on when I was doing it for my brother as well, I think she was really, really grateful, I could see it in the way she looked at me and what she said to me as well. And I think she, she just respected me more and it gave her more trust towards me.

It had a positive impact in the sense that they, we sort of got closer; like I was, mum was like helping me out with my Spanish but also I would sort of, like say some words in English and my mum would pick that up as like even today we still have this thing where I speak in Spanish and she tries to speak in English and we just correct each other sometimes. So it did make us a bit closer. With my dad it sort of made us a little distant.

I think some teachers were uncomfortable with me like translating, like having my parents like not knowing English, because like it was in year 10 because it was vital for like me to get good grades and stuff so I think yeah the teacher was like kind of, I don’t know, like suspicious that I would lie, that, you know, to get good grades and stuff.

The aims of “Supporting Good Practice”

To suggest:

• How the CLB process can be most effective and positive at the same time
• How the worst problems can be avoided
• How the experience can have the most beneficial impact in the future on those who take part
• What separate contributions adults may make as interpreters and translators

Questions we are asking you

• Does the draft text cover the areas you would expect?
• Is there any substantial topic overlooked in your view?
• Does the draft contain any advice that you do not agree with?
• Can you identify any areas where you would like to see the advice strengthened?
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