

Child Language Brokering in School

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Child Language Brokering in School: background to the project

- Language brokering as an “atypical” role in childhood - but less atypical than it used to be
- Language brokering in schools: a special case?
- Lack of research or professional guidance

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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)

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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

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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

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What the teachers had to say

How teachers feel about having children acting as language brokers

- *Feeling pride, admiration and respect for CLBs*
- *Feeling uncomfortable using CLBs in schools*

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. **So I have to say that I admire and have great respect for anybody that can speak, so I just think that they're so clever, the fact that they don't even realise how, that what they're doing is so amazing, because if you think about the majority of people in this world, they can't, they won't be able to do what they can do. And I think they don't realise how beneficial it is to be able to do something like that.** So yeah I do, I do have the utmost respect...

[I Feel] **Helpless. Frustrated** I think. You almost want to click your fingers and you can speak every language in the world but **I think yeah frustrated and helpless, because there's nothing, you can only speak what you can in English and you can do all the hand gestures you want but it's, it's not, unless the child is saying exactly what you're saying they're never going to get across what you feel.** They can read your face maybe but apart from that.

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Impact on school life

- *Growing confidence*
- *Moments of embarrassment*
- *Improving language skills*
- *Removing pupils from their class*

I think it can be **a really empowering experience.** I think it can because it's, it's showing that they've learnt stuff, it's showing that they can do stuff and, and the parent may not understand it if they see it just 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 learned some and I've learned these words because 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.

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 was going on and he said that he felt let down and embarrassed, because these boys are from his country and they are in a new country and they are not behaving the way they should behave because they're fighting outside of school. And it, he just, he became too serious, well it's something that has to be taken seriously but we saw the sort of pressure, how he took control of everything and even wanted to go and talk to the other boys who were involved as well, which would have probably got him into trouble later on

It does help 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.

Disadvantages I would say is having to withdraw a student from a lesson, to come out of that lesson, so they have extra homework or work to catch up on.

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Relationship with the pupil

- *Teacher as a learner*
- *Relating from positions of responsibility*

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 all learners, you know, and when you get a child to translate for you it's, you can genuinely be grateful to a child for something that they've genuinely done to help you.** You, it's, it's **a very humanising situation,** isn't it, 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 the, **it's like when a child knows something about something you don't know...**

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 not 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, I want to use those.**

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What the language brokers had to say

Impact on the self - 'How it made me feel'

- *Growing confidence*
- *Moments of embarrassment*
- *Improving language skills*
- *Empathy with others and feeling of belonging*
- *BUT – if activity was unusual, a sense of isolation*

I felt smart, 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.

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 getting better, yeah, and so does my communication skill as well. And also say like in talking with people, so like eye contacts and stuff is getting better with me. And I'm not nervous. 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.

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 was like 'just tell your name and everything'. But she no how to tell her name and everything, but like it was a bit awkward though.

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Relationship with the parent/family

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.

• *Developing trust*

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It had a positive impact in the sense that they, we sort of got closer, like I was, mum was like helping me but with my Spanish but also I would sort of like say some words in English and my mum would pick that up so 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 lot closer. With my dad it sort of made us a little distant

• *Varied by relationship*

• *Brokering for siblings*

• *Defending own interests*

.....
a teacher called my mum and left a voicemail and my mum didn't understand it. And I listened to the voicemail and then I explained to him that like, he was like 'please don't tell her' and I was like 'no I have to tell her because she needs to know'. And I was glad I told her because when I went to the parents evening they addressed it again... I'm really close with my brother, I didn't want to like tell on him but then I thought if I don't tell on him he might go the wrong way, so it's kind of like that. So it's kind of like out of love that I'm doing this for you because I don't want you to go the Wrong way and mess up your education

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Relationship with the teacher

• *The role of the supportive teacher*

• *Recognising brokers duties within the whole school*

• *Sensing the teachers' thoughts and feelings*

when I was translating, I told my teacher she can't talk English and he was like it's cool, it happens to like most of the people from different countries, he told me that so I was like ok...he just goes like take your time, just take your time, there is no rush, so yeah, so I feel comfortable that time with my teacher, I feel happy because he understand me what I'm going through

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I'd have probably liked to have had more teacher support so like maybe if teachers understood more, because there were times when I probably walked in like a minute or two late for lessons because I had to take her somewhere and the teacher would just lose their mind at you.

.....
...so there was that time the teacher was angry and then came towards the student that no, this, that, that. But the student was like, what, have I done, ...

.....
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.

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Improving the text of the booklet “Supporting Good Practice”

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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

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“Supporting Good Practice”: Main headings

- Using adults: professional interpreters, bilingual staff and other adult brokers
- Using children and young people: trained young interpreters within a formal scheme
- Using children and young people: interpreting for parents and family members
- Using children and young people: supporting peers in the classroom and around the school

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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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Thanks to our funder

