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Papatoetoe High School
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Through a combination of review of current school practice, literature research and school/governing body visits investigate models of indigenous language learning and how effectively these programmes support English language acquisition.

Section 1 Introduction and Acknowledgments

The opportunity to have a one school term sabbatical was most appreciated and I extend my grateful thanks to those who supported and approved my application. My sabbatical intentions were significantly affected as I had knee replacement surgery at the start of my 10 week break from duties. Recovery from surgery curtailed some of my intended study but nevertheless I managed to explore aspects of mother tongue language learning in England, Wales, Ireland and Singapore.

My sabbatical coincided with a similar award for one of our deputy principals, Tim Trenwith. Having two of the senior leadership team away at the same time was a challenge but provided opportunities for others to step up and assume extra responsibilities. I acknowledge the following people for their excellent efforts and support during my time away from school:

1. Ben Taufua (BOT Chairperson) and other members of the Board
2. Rakesh Govind – acting principal
3. The others in the leadership team – Lindy Smith (acting Associate Principal), Barry Williams, Dr Karen Dobric, Richard Winn (acting DP), Jeneen Harrison (acting DP)
4. Robyn Muldrew (PA) for keeping me informed on important matters

Through my travels, readings and reflections on our second language curriculum structure at Papatoetoe High School, I feel that our school is on the right track with our approach to this curriculum area but am well aware of a number of constraints that prevent further development and expansion. Those constraints are largely out of our control and relate to government policy on second language learning and the inflexibility of staffing provision.

Section 2 Indigenous and Mother tongue language learning in selected overseas countries

In the latter part of my sabbatical I travelled to the UK with a Singapore stopover, visited a few schools and caught up with some ex Principals with whom I had previously met and worked with when on the executive of the ICP (International Confederation of Principals). The main focus of my discussions and observations were related to indigenous and mother tongue language learning but we often strayed into other areas of interest particularly around systemic matters and governance models.

In London I visited two schools, both very multicultural and serving mid to low socio-economic communities. Both schools had second language learning opportunities but there was no recognition of mother tongue languages. The languages offered were French, Spanish or German. One of the schools had a significant number of students who spoke Arabic and there were afterschool classes in Arabic offered by the local community on the school site. The reason given for students to learn Arabic was related to them gaining a stronger affinity and understanding of their culture. No consideration was given to linking the learning of Arabic to improving their English skills.

The other school had a high proportion of students of Asian ethnicity, mainly from Pakistan, and there were no opportunities for them to pursue their mother tongue language.

Both schools were 'academy' schools and their governance was removed from the local authority. This now seems to be the norm in London. The academy schools, usually in a group with one sponsor are governed by a board that dictates the curriculum offered and to a large extent the culture of each school. In one of the schools visited staff are required to be on-site from 7.30am to 6.00pm each day and to be involved in after school clubs and activities. Assessment seems to be totally based on exams with virtually no course work component.

In both Wales (especially in the north) and Ireland it was indeed refreshing to see the prevalence of indigenous language learning across the school system.

Wales has three delivery options in their schooling system – Welsh medium education (all subject areas taught in Welsh), Bi-lingual education (varying levels of delivery in Welsh) and the majority are English medium education (subjects taught in English but Welsh offered as a subject). In English medium schools, Welsh is a compulsory subject up to age 16 and Welsh is included in all teacher training courses.

The development and spread of Welsh medium schools has created much debate and has been the focus of several pieces of research. It appears that in those areas where the language is well embedded (the Northwest) Welsh medium education produces very effective outcomes. Such success stories are few in areas where Welsh is not the home language. English is the most common language spoken in Wales although it is obvious as a visitor that Welsh culture and pride is developed through an increasing awareness of Welsh language. Bi-lingual signage is common and an indicator of a commitment to the language.

The republic of Ireland also has the option of Irish-medium education although the vast majority of schools are English-medium with Irish as a compulsory subject. In the Irish Governments "20-year strategy for the Irish Language 2010 – 2013" there are some stated objectives that are related to the Irish education system:

Objective 5: "Irish will be taught as an obligatory subject from primary to leaving certificate level, The curriculum will foster oral and written competence in Irish among students and an understanding of its value to us as a people"

Objective 6: “A high standard of all-Irish education will be provided to school students whose parents/guardians so wish

To train as a primary teacher in Ireland applicants must satisfy an Irish language proficiency requirement which includes an oral test.

In speaking with school leaders in both Ireland and Wales it is obvious that there is a great deal of tension around the expansion of immersion and bi-lingual education. Most see the strong connection between identity/culture/national pride and the language as being positive. Some question the relevance of the language outside of that.

I have visited Singapore on several occasions and been to a number of schools. Singapore has compulsory second language (now called ‘mother tongue’) learning from kindergarten through to senior secondary school in the state system. English is the main language of instruction with Chinese and Malay being the mother tongue languages offered. The reality is that for the vast majority of middle class Singaporeans they have grown up in a totally English speaking environment and the mother tongue language offered is actually a second language for them.

For new migrants to Singapore there is no entitlement for their children to state education but access will be granted if the students have well developed English language. Foreigners with little or no English are unlikely to be accepted into a school and their options are to buy private tuition or attend a private school. Those foreigners who are able to bring their families with them to Singapore are in high paying positions. There are many lower paid foreign workers living and working in Singapore but they are not permitted to bring their families because it would be too expensive to support them.

Section 3: Second Language Learning at Papatoetoe High School – offering Hindi as a language option.

The compulsory education sector in New Zealand does not give the same level of priority to second language learning as do European, Asian and South American systems. The New Zealand Curriculum states that students should have the opportunity to learn a second language up to the end of year 10 but it is not compulsory. English is the dominant language of instruction and a compulsory language. The expectation is that all students will have gained competence in English language on leaving school. Over the past three decades there has been increasing numbers of migrant children coming into our schools from non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as New Zealand students who have experienced Maori immersion, pre-school programmes. For many of these students, migrant students in particular, their mother tongue language development is not provided for as they encounter an education system reliant on English language only.

This situation exists despite an overwhelming body of research led by Cummins (1979) which shows that the development of competence in a second language is closely related to the competence already developed in a first language. He also describes ‘semilingualism’ where students have difficulties in both their mother tongue language and their second language. In a study of non-English speaking background students in New Zealand, Kennedy

and Dewar (1997) also identified first language competency as a predictor for second language learning success, as well as being important in maintaining contact with their culture, religion and extended families.

Although not compulsory within the NZ Curriculum at Papatoetoe High School we have taken the further step of making second language learning compulsory in years 9 and 10. Hindi has been introduced as one of those language options, along with Te Reo Maori, Samoan, French and Japanese. Niuean and Spanish have been offered in the past but discontinued because of staffing changes. There is no intent to continue with Hindi as a senior language option and in general second language learning in the senior school does not have a strong following. Bearing this in mind and considering that the school has nearly 40% of its students being of Indian ethnicity, many of whom speak Hindi, it is of interest to gauge a range of effects that have resulted from the introduction of Hindi into the mix of languages to choose from.

Language is also an important aspect of cultural identity and introducing Hindi was supported by the wider Indian community based on anecdotal feedback.

The school has a large number of ESOL funded students (approximately 200) with the greatest number of them being Hindi speaking and the majority of them coming from Fiji. A significant number of non-ESOL funded students at the school also speak Hindi and for many of these students Hindi was the first language they learnt. Although Hindi is a common spoken language for many students at the school, it is not common for students to read or write in Hindi. There are also pronounced differences in dialect depending on whether the students are from India or Fiji. The Hindi language option offered at the school is formal Hindi. Whilst the majority of students choosing Hindi are of Indian ethnicity there are a small number of other students (Pasifika, Pakeha) who have taken the language as an option.

Using e-asTTle data for reading I conducted an analysis of students who have studied Hindi at the school compared against a control group (Hindi speaking students who didn't choose the Hindi option) to see if there was any difference in their gains made by the respective groups.

The data was inconclusive. Some students in both groups made gains of 2 or more curriculum levels over 2 years, others made smaller gains and some remained at a similar level. There was no real difference between the two groups. What is significant however was that the vast majority of students in both groups were recording asTTle scores well below expectations of 13 – 14 year olds on entering the school. Just over 40% were at curriculum level 3 or below as year 9 students.

I also carried out a survey of our current Hindi classes in years 9 and 10 and the following is a summary of the information gathered:

- Before they studied Hindi at Papatoetoe High School
 - 70% spoke Hindi everyday
 - 77% never or couldn't read Hindi
 - 80% never or couldn't write Hindi
 - 70% learnt Hindi from parents or other family members
- As a student of Hindi at Papatoetoe High School
 - 90% enjoyed the subject all or most of the time
 - 75% are confident in speaking Hindi all the time
- Most students do not make a link between learning Hindi and their acquisition and development of English language skills.
- Most students (83%) recognise a strong link between studying Hindi and understanding their culture.

Students shared stories of how they were able to converse with some family members to a much better level after studying Hindi and how they were now better able to understand proceedings at some religious ceremonies.

Staffing constraints make it very difficult to further develop the second language learning strategy at our school. The reality is that very few students choose to study another language once they enter the senior school – 40 only across 4 language options in year 11 in 2015. As a consequence language teachers have programmes consisting of only year 9 and year 10 classes or they are part time or they are teaching a language class outside of their main subject area.

In recent times we have offered Spanish (year 9 and 10) and Niuean (up to NCEA level 3) but had to discontinue those options when teachers left. With the school going through a period of roll decline it is going to be even more difficult to staff our language classes.

Nevertheless there are real benefits in offering mother tongue language options – at present we have Hindi and Samoan and making second language learning compulsory will still continue at year 9 but may be reviewed for year 10.

On March 27th I spoke of a conference organised by the office of Ethnic Affairs on “Lining up Language – navigating Government Policy”. My presentation focussed on the language curriculum structure at Papatoetoe High School. I also gave my thoughts on some policy developments:

- Formal recognition of Hindi within the NZ Curriculum and achievement standards developed. (Hindi now the 4th most spoken language in NZ)
- Recognition by the Ministry of Education of mother tongue language learning needs in staffing entitlement/allocation
- Compulsory second language learning in NZ state schools from year 1
- The issue of determining ethnicity in the education sector and the place of groups such as Fijian Indian.

References

- Cummins, J. (1979) Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Review of Educational Research*, Spring 1979: 222-251. AERA, Washington.
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