

Wanted!

Bilingual and Bicultural Leaders to Run Brave New Schools

It is an established research finding (e.g. Hopkins et al., 1994) that leadership through heads or principals is a very important contributing factor in creating a school's ethos identity and ultimately its success or failure as an institution.

Administrators who are rigidly monolingual and monocultural in outlook are not the most suitable leaders to have in an international context and, as our world is becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural, there is little place for such people in national education systems either. Let me explain what I mean by "rigidly monolingual and monocultural".

There are leaders who firmly believe that their own language and culture are better and more important than those of others. There are also those leaders who may have given little serious thought to this idea. They have simply grown up with the assumption that their language is the only language of consequence. As a result, they behave as if it is a universally accepted fact that their western culture and language is somehow better: theirs is the language of power and prestige and therefore everybody should be striving to learn it. Often these leaders also feel that the learning of another language is irrelevant to their personal growth: they see no point in it. Rigidly monolingual leaders may have good intentions to help ESL students but often they are uninformed or misinformed and the policies and practices that they introduce can be detrimental for second language children.

It is not necessary to be a polyglot to be a successful international school leader. It is essential, however, that leaders are interested in other languages and cultures, and

value them as much as they value their own. It is also important that administrators strive to learn the host country language of the school they are working in. This would seem not only common sense but also a common courtesy. Unfortunately, rigidly monolingual administrators often do not take the time to do this. Learning a new language can be both a humbling and, at the same time, an extremely rewarding experience. Those leaders and teachers who themselves are acquiring a new language whilst working with children whose first language is different from that of the curriculum, will have a far greater empathy with their students. Learning a new language will also help them develop a critical awareness of their own language and culture. They will better understand the complexities of language learning and realize fully just how long this takes.

Schools are first and foremost communities of learners where members learn together and learn from each other. Where there is an international population there should also be an international curriculum and international educators who share the common goal of developing their students' multilingual talents.

Monolingualism and monoculturalism is not the goal of International Education yet it would appear that in some schools it is part of the hidden agenda. In other schools, which claim to be international, they overtly promote such goals. Politics is never far from the surface in educational decision making. Schools who promote learning through the majority language only (i.e. English, which is the majority language in a large number of International Schools) may have bought into the political ideal of assimilation, the process by which members of a language group lose their own

· In this paper, Majority Language means a high status language. Majority refers to the status and power of a language group rather than its numerical size.

language and culture which are replaced by a different language and culture. By applying the principle of assimilation these schools hope to promote social unity.

Politics in Education

International School administrators who introduce majority language only policies may have taken the political stance of assimilation at the expense of the political idea of the rights of the individual. The chances are that people who make such decisions will be rigidly monolingual and thus unable to have a pluralistic outlook regarding the teaching and learning of languages. As the learning of other languages is fundamental in International Education, it goes without saying that there should be no place for an individual who “can’t learn languages” or who is “not interested in learning other languages”. This sort of person simply does not belong and does not have the mindset necessary to work in a school where awareness of language is all-important (Gallagher, 2005). International parents and students will have difficulty relating to people who think along these lines. Fortunately, as the oft-quoted phrase suggests, monolingualism is curable! Learning in one *lingua franca* is not enough anymore. International Education has a duty to promote the human rights of all languages and the maintenance of all cultures.

Teachers and administrators should be aware of how politics can affect education and be above those politics, especially when political notions hinder good practice. (For a fuller discussion on this see Gallagher 2008)

Human Relations at the heart of all schooling

Cummins (2004) says that “human relations are at the heart of all schooling”. We know from our own schooling experiences that if a teacher believed in us we did better than if we felt he or she didn’t care for us or think us very capable. This also applies to

educators and administrators. If the administration does not believe in its teachers then the teachers may not perform well in the classroom. Creating a caring and secure environment for teachers and for students is essential if they are to open their minds. Hostility of any kind only hinders learning. A collaborative ethos must be all-pervasive and must be led by administrators who are authoritative (and by this I mean informed about language acquisition and learning) rather than authoritarian.

What is effective leadership? Recently I attended a symphony performed by the Santa Cecilia orchestra of Rome and conducted by the composer and academy award winner Howard Shore. Now, I am aware that this is a much used analogy for school leaders, but as I observed Howard Shore lead the orchestra with his heart and with great passion, totally involved and engaged with every single musician, I couldn't help but feel this is the sort of leadership we need in education. His musical score, his inspiration, his clear ideas were the equivalent of a cohesive educational plan and vision. He was visible to every one of his players: listening, involved and understanding their differences, just as an effective Head of School should be visiting classrooms, talking and listening to teachers, parents and students. Leading a great orchestra is something you can not do on your own nor is leading a great school. Leading an orchestra just like leading a school is a collaborative effort. A good school leader will recruit teachers who share the school's vision on education and who are knowledgeable about language acquisition and language learning, just as a conductor will expect to work with skilled musicians who are passionate about their music. Effective administrators will involve their teachers in the decision making process using their specialist knowledge just as conductors depend heavily on their musician's expert knowledge. Conductors also establish trustworthy relationships with musicians instead of micro-managing them. The conductor shares the glory of the standing ovation with his colleagues realizing that

without them harmonious music would not be possible. Effective school leaders delegate and appreciate the work done by their staff. Passion, Knowledge, Skill, Vision, Visibility, Collaboration, Sharing and Caring are all necessary in the quest for harmony in schools. There is no place for mediocrity in the orchestra and so it should be in schools too. Just as the conductor is of no worth without his orchestra, an effective school needs a shared vision, shared responsibility and an overriding collaborative ethos.

Qualities for an Effective International School Leadership Team:

- Experienced International School Teachers and Administrators;
- Passionate about Education;
- Have a working knowledge of at least one other language;
- Interested in language learning;
- Have a Strong Educational Vision that suits the needs of all learners, including those whose first language is different from that of the curriculum;
- Have a pedagogical approach that is open to other cultures;
- Have a positive attitude towards bilingualism and biculturalism;
- Informed on first and second language acquisition;
- Able to oversee school-wide collaborative planning and school-wide continuity of learning;
- Collaborative in approach;
- Able to motivate and inspire teachers and students;
- Open to dialogue;

- Able to build community;
- Able to foster good staff morale;
- Able to communicate effectively with parents;
- Authoritative rather than authoritarian;
- Tolerant;
- Transparent;
- Honest.

The importance of administrators having open minds cannot be over stressed. Today's schools need educators who are open to new ideas, to other cultures and to other languages. Respect for diversity must be more than the rhetoric of school mission statements and policies. It must be the driving force behind everything that takes place within a school. The bullet points listed above can be turned into questions that administrative teams should ask themselves during periodic self-study and evaluation sessions. When it is obvious that the administrative team does not meet the listed criteria, then critical reflection and improvement plans are necessary. Effective administrators are not bureaucrats. They are educators who recognize the importance of placing human relations at the heart of schooling.

Oppressive School Practices

Second language speakers of English now outnumber those who have English as their first language, 431 million to 329 million (Crystal, 2003). English is the lingua franca of our globalized society and educators and parents need to be aware of the negative potential of neo-imperialistic curricula, pedagogies and oppressive school practices. Parents of children whose language is different from that of the curriculum need to be

involved in decision making processes. Parents can form one of the most important decision making groups within a school. If there are no ESL parents involved then the right decisions may not be made about how ESL is considered. One example is the practice in many International Schools of charging parents for ESL lessons over and above tuition fees. When this happens it implies that such lessons are outside what the school considers to be normal. A school that classifies itself as “International” cannot consider ESL children as being outside the norm. Another example of a common, yet inappropriate, policy for ESL learners is the English-only rule that exists in some schools. In these schools a decision has been made that the only language to be spoken in the classrooms and sometimes even in the playground is English. There are even schools that suggest to parents that they stop speaking their home language with their children so that they will learn English more quickly. Informed educators know that this is nonsense but often the policy has been introduced by a well-intentioned but very misinformed administrator who believes that by insisting on English they are keeping standards high and helping children achieve more. These kinds of policy are often introduced by administrators who have no background in International Education or second language acquisition and who want to do everything the way it was done in their previous school. It is often the case that they have come from schools having a largely monolingual student and teacher population.

Education needs to adapt to our Multilingual Multicultural World

The world is changing. It is fast becoming multilingual and multicultural and our teacher training colleges need to adapt in order to be well prepared for the challenge of a global community. As it stands at present many newly qualified teachers do not know how to deal with second language learners. They learn on the job – if they choose to do so. They may be presented with a curriculum that does not suit the needs of second

language learners. The administrators and policy makers who develop such curricula were trained to work only with monolingual children. One system reinforces and perpetuates the other. Schools in every part of our globe are becoming international through necessity as they awaken to the reality of having to deal with culturally diverse children and we owe it to these children to educate administrators, policy makers, teacher trainers and teachers so they can provide for *all* children growing up in a multicultural society.

Hegemony of the English Language

We must also educate and inform parents who are directly affected by the hegemony of the English language. We have the ethical responsibility to create schools where multilingualism and multiculturalism are not simply respected but promoted and where authoritarian leaders who demand conformity to past traditions of linguistic culture and privilege are replaced by those who hold a pedagogical approach that is inclusive and open to all other cultures.

Eithne Gallagher Rome 2009

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