

*Multilingualism as A Fact, a Right and a Resource for Developing Intercultural Awareness and Honoring Diversity in International Baccalaureate Programmes*

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Abstract

Recent rapid globalization has resulted in a shift in classroom demographics; increasingly, a community of learners consists of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and often many of them must access the curriculum in a language other than their mother tongue. In some contexts this has been construed as a problem. However, recognizing the fact of multilingualism, valorizing it as a right, and embracing it as a resource in fostering intercultural awareness can transform the context into a positive environment for learning. Such a response to multilingualism is integral to an International Baccalaureate (IB) education.

The IB offers high quality programmes of international educational to a worldwide community of schools. There are more than 900,000 IB students in over 140 countries. The programmes, since their inception, have placed a central value on language learning. The latest IB stance document on language and learning, *Language and learning in IB programmes* (IBO 2011), describes multilingualism as a fact, a right and a resource. All IB teachers have some pedagogical responsibility for students' development of multilingualism and intercultural understanding. As part of informing teachers' understandings of their role in relation to these aspects of an IB education, the stance document and subsequent professional development resources examine the concept of multilingualism and identify six language domains as being significant for nurturing the successful growth of both language(s) and intercultural awareness.

## **Introduction**

This paper, based on a power point presentation given at the ACLL conference on language learning ( Osaka 2013), will briefly describe how the IB interprets the idea of intercultural understanding and then go into more detail on the concept of multilingualism; it will then describe the six identified language domains relevant to developing multilingualism and their link to the effective development of intercultural awareness.

### **1. Intercultural understanding in an IB context**

The development of intercultural understanding is central to the IB mission. It involves developing the ability of students to be able to think critically while investigating possible interpretations of communications so as make informed choices on how to act. Intercultural awareness and understanding is fostered when there are conflicting viewpoints. This can occur when someone is learning a new language and is exposed to new world views and alternative perspectives. By actively responding to conflicting viewpoints and considering other ways of relating to the environment, students learn to engage in dialogical or critical thinking and begin to question their own assumptions. With increased critical awareness and understanding learners are able to become more and more decentred from embedded unilateral assumptions and thus question, and if appropriate transform, the borders of their identities,

*In taking a different perspective, language learners of any age or disposition can be brought to a greater critical awareness of themselves and others and thereby become more adequately educated for an international world.*

Byram 2008:18

### **2. Multilingualism in an IB context**

The publication, *What is an IB education* (IBO 2012) describes the connection between multilingualism and the development of intercultural understanding. Various historical factors have influenced the choice of the term multilingualism for describing the important language focus of an IB education. These will be described here as they have been important in the evolution of thinking about the development of intercultural understanding in the IB.

#### **2a. Contexts for subtractive bilingualism**

The learning of more than one language has not always been viewed as an asset. In fact, monolingualism has been, and is still, encouraged in some cultures where language is recognized as a powerful tool for socialization in developing a singular

sense of group identity and cultural membership. Gradol (2006:18) describes how in the nineteenth century, nation states promoted their particular language(s) as the standard and symbol of national affiliation while other languages (and associated cultures) were marginalised or repressed. When the USA immigrant population was expanding after world war two, English was seen as the language associated with successful assimilation into the new culture promising the ‘American dream.’ Consequently, immigrants were encouraged to, and often willingly participated in, abandoning their former languages and cultures. This created a context for what has subsequently been identified as *subtractive bilingualism* (Cummins 1994) which is a situation where a person’s mother tongue<sup>1</sup> is devalued and ceases to develop or be maintained to its maximum potential. It is instead replaced with a second language which is weakened in development because there is no active transfer of skills and knowledge from the mother tongue. Such understandings were not, however, in place in early assimilatory situations in the US and when the immigrant students tested poorly in standardized tests it was concluded that the cause was bilingualism with negative interference from a mother tongue. In reality, the norms of the tests had been ascertained for monolingual English speakers and were therefore inappropriate for second language learners. The misinterpretation of the results, projecting the outcomes of a subtractive bilingual context, set up a vicious cycle in which stricter repression of a mother tongue and its culture was presumed to be the best cure.

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### Multilingualism – a shifting concept

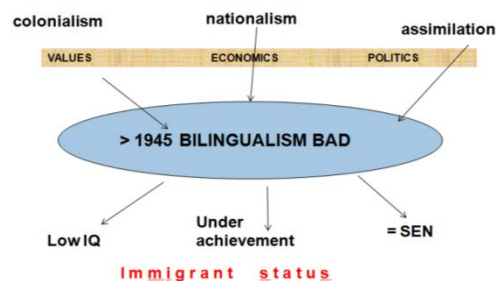


Fig 1: Slide illustrating context creating negative bilingualism

## 2b. Contexts for additive bilingualism

As nationalism weakened after world war two and as claims for human rights increased, views and ideas on language learning were subject to scrutiny and began to change. The links between language, political power and economic status were examined and discussed in academia as the field of linguistics expanded. Certain kinds of bilingualism came to be valued and promoted. Whereas subtractive bilingualism usually results in the replacement of students’ home languages with the

<sup>1</sup> The term *mother tongue* is used in research literature in various ways. It may denote the first language learner, the strongest language or the language as identified with a ‘native speaker’. In IB documents the term includes all these definitions.

language of the most powerful group, *additive bilingualism* (Cummins 1994) becomes the case when a mother tongue is valued, maintained and developed along with a second language so that knowledge and skills can be transferred. In fact, since the 1990s, a growing evidence base has pointed to the enhanced academic achievement of bilinguals in additive situations compared to monolinguals.

It was within this context of recognizing the value of bilingualism that the IB diploma programme took shape and established itself as a leader in international education partly because of its focus on developing international mindedness and intercultural awareness through requiring students to learn at least two languages. However, despite initial intentions not to limit the languages offered, the organizational structure of the programme came to reflect lingering modernist power structures, associations and assumptions about language. The development of what was considered successful bilingualism became constricted by a model which requires a discrete language A (which may or may not be the mother tongue) plus another discrete language B, within a curriculum where the language of instruction became predominantly English (with some Spanish and French). Consequently, many students for whom English was not a mother tongue were disadvantaged in learning the bulk of the curriculum, and became a new deficit sub culture or “ESL problem”.

### Multilingualism – a shifting concept

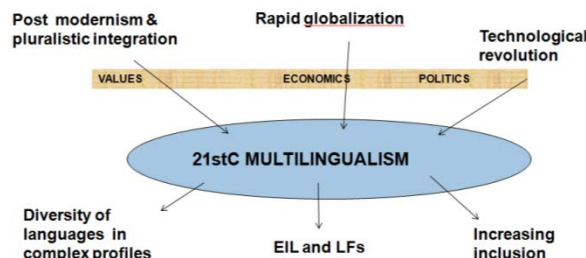


Fig 2: Slide illustrating context creating additive bilingualism

## 2c. Contexts for multilingualism

Influences today, include a move towards inclusion and pluralistic integration as opposed to assimilation as a means of affirming cultural identities. These have led to changes yet again in the way of thinking about languages and include valuing the right to developing a mother tongue as well as developing the language of instruction for everyone. Furthermore, instead of each language in a person’s repertoire being viewed as a separate tool they are seen as being part of a much more dynamic and interrelated set of practices best represented in a unified multilingual profile which is much more complex than a language A plus B model (Alastair Pennycook April 2010). This reconfiguration takes into account the complex linguistic realities of millions of people in diverse socio-cultural contexts and recognizes that an individual’s store of languages can include many levels of proficiency, including

partial competence and incomplete fluency, as well as metalinguistic awareness, learning strategies and opinions, preferences and passive or active knowledge on languages, language use and language learning/acquisition.

*multilinguality is expressed through actions, perceptions, attitudes and abilities ( and) not only linguistic facility” ( it) displays itself through physical, cognitive, cultural and social qualities (O’Laoire and Aronin 2006: 17–18)*

Such views of multilingualism opens up new ways to consider the complexity of overlapping domains of languages in a learning profile and how they may interact to promote socio-cultural competencies, intercultural awareness and international-mindedness. The IB embraces the development multilingualism in student populations as a fact , a right and a resource.

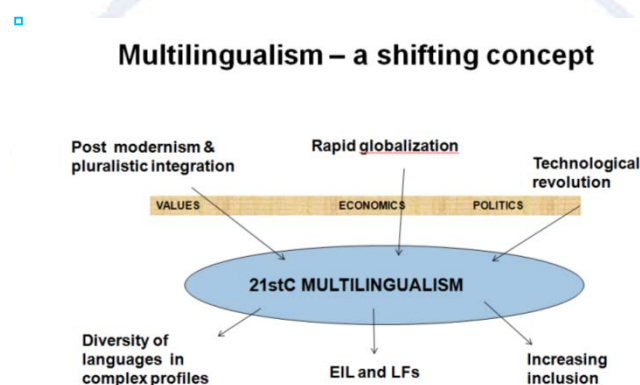


Fig 3: Slide illustrating context for development of multilingualism

### 3. Language domains

To support IB teachers’ understanding of multilingual repertoires in teaching for language development and intercultural understanding a continuum framework of language and learning domains has been described in the stance document; it is informed by various theoretical models as well as research and practice (Inugai-Dixon 2009).

The identified domains in the continuum, which are linked to the development of thinking skills across the curriculum are as follows:

- discrete skills
- basic interpersonal communicative skills—BICS (Cummins 1979)
- literacy acquisition
- cognitive academic language proficiency—CALP (Cummins 1979)
- literary analysis
- critical literacy



Fig 4: Slide illustrating language domains linked to thinking skills

### 3a. Discrete skills

Any language learning requires the development of foundational receptive (for example, listening and reading) and productive (for example, speaking and writing) skills. The organizing principles, and thus the approaches to teaching these skills will vary, depending on whether languages are alphabetic, such as the Romance languages, or non-alphabetic, such as Japanese and Chinese. Skills can be transferred from one language to another and when attention is drawn to similarities and differences in the ways cultures encode knowledge and ideas it is an opportunity to begin to reflect on intercultural understanding.

### 3b. Basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS)

In richly contextualized social situations, students can quickly acquire the necessary vocabulary, syntax, and accompanying gestures required for the construction of meaningful interactions.

In first-language learning and many introductory second-language learning courses, such early social interactions form the basis for developing what Jim Cummins (1979) calls the *basic interpersonal communicative skills* (BICS). BICS is important for personal development and cultural identity as well as for developing intercultural awareness.

*The acquisition of linguistic, pragmatic and other cultural knowledge through social experience [is] how individuals become socialised into particular identities, worldviews or values, and ideologies, as they learn language, whether it is their first language or an additional language.*

(Hornberger and McKay 2010: xix)

In second language learning situations these skills provide opportunities to consider alternative ways of behaving and thus reflect on one's own assumptions.( for example, on different ways of greeting such as bowing as opposed to kissing).



*Fig 5: Slide used to discuss how BICS can illustrate cultural differences in ways of behaving*

### **3c. Literacy acquisition**

Early opportunities for literacy development across the curriculum are important for the development of the academic language of abstract conceptualization and associated cognitive development in later schooling.

The successful development of students' literacy is characterized by a prolific increase in the reading and writing of a wide range of texts for different purposes and audiences. This is accompanied by an enormous growth in the fluent use of vocabulary and stylistic devices. What is sometimes referred to as the "language arts" provides creative opportunities for learners to gain a broad and deep command of the language and culture being studied; students play with and explore language and discover its expressive, dramatic, poetic and artistic aspects.

Developing literacy in a second language is full of opportunities to investigate the stories and dramas from another culture and consider different readings of the world. Michael Worton (quoted in Reisz 2010: 39) says that when learning any new language the pleasure in learning to creatively manipulate it:

*reveals to us a different culture in its fullest creative complexity as well as often in its most playful and joyful form.*



*Fig 6: Slide used to discuss different conceptions of glamour assumed in cultural narratives*

### **3d. Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)**

The development of academic language skills required for discourse in abstract and decontextualized settings in later schooling is referred to by Jim Cummins (1979) as *cognitive academic language proficiency* or CALP and is in contrast to the more socially contextualized language necessary in BICS.

The view that every teacher is a language teacher regardless of the aspects of the curriculum for which they have responsibility is not only important if all students are to have equal access to the curriculum but also so that teachers can seize opportunities to develop intercultural understandings.

Academic language is inextricably entwined with academic thinking. Robin Lakoff (in Hornberger and McKay 2010: 57) uses the idea of frames as mental structures to explain how we shape and construct meaning and describe conceptions of the world. As our conceptual frameworks change with cognitive development so do our descriptions. Thinking differently requires using language differently. Opportunities to investigate this abound in the humanities and arts but even in science and mathematics attention can be drawn to how language constructs understandings in different ways.

Jay Lemke asserts that teachers must be aware of the fact that, as well as acquiring new vocabulary, students need to:

*learn to use language as scientists themselves do – to name, describe, record, compare, explain, analyse, design, evaluate and theorize.*

(Lemke, in Wellington and Osborne 2001: iv)



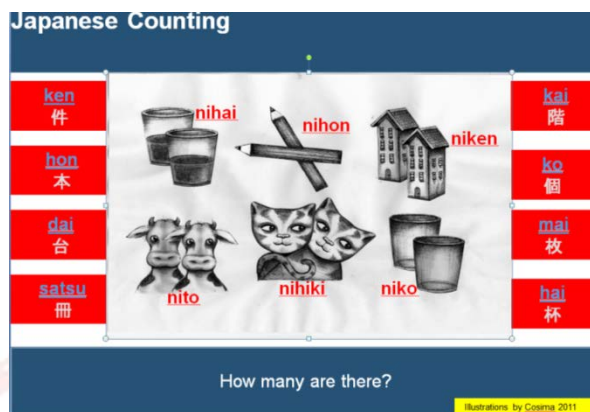


Fig 7: Slide illustrating how counting classifications vary across cultures. In English the classification is based on countable and uncountable nouns.

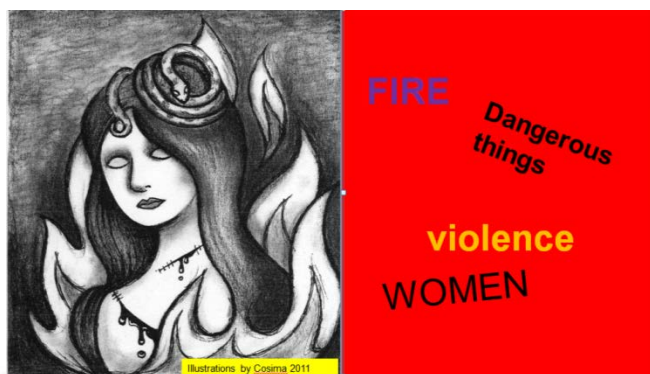
### 3e. Literary analysis

Literature has traditionally held a central and privileged place in language teaching. As well as the claim that extensive engagement with literature is effective for language learning, analysing literature also draws attention to how language is used to convey ideas and express the poetic dimensions of a culture. Interpretation, multiple readings and a consideration of cultural contexts require a study of word choice, symbolism, metaphoric imagery and their associated values. For this reason, the study of literature is widely recognized as a means to explore other cultures. The poet TS Eliot said,

*For the transmission of a culture—a peculiar way of thinking, feeling and behaving—[...] there is no safeguard more reliable than a language—a literary language, not necessarily a scientific language—but a poetic one.*  
(Eliot 1948: 57)

Through exploration of the literature of other cultures we can further develop intercultural awareness for while reading literature:

*we can leave our own consciousness and pass over into the consciousness of another person, another age, another culture [...] reading enables us to try on, identify with and ultimately enter for a brief time the wholly different perspective of another person's consciousness.*  
(Wolf 2008: 7)



*Fig 8: Slide illustrating how language encodes values and associations (in Dyribal the terms for woman, fire, snakes and dangerous things are similarly inflected)*

### 3f. Critical literacy

Critical literacy has become a generic term that includes the idea of critical thinking. Critical literacy involves a metalinguistic critique of all texts, whether oral or written, and includes literary analyses. It pays attention to the way in which reality is mediated by language and also to the way in which texts are constructed to represent versions of reality. Consideration is given to aspects such as:

- textual purpose
- gaps and silences
- power and interest in relation to purpose
- multiple meanings.

Critical literacy is seminal in the development of intercultural awareness, international-mindedness and transformative thinking. Paulo Freire considered that reading the word cannot be separated from reading the world and challenged the assumption that literacy is simply teaching students the skills necessary for reading and writing. He was interested in the communicative and dialogic aspect of literacy and, ultimately, its power for social action.

*True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking.*  
(Freire 1970: 73)

The IB Diploma Programme's course theory of knowledge (TOK) is a critical thinking course asking such questions as the following:

- What counts as knowledge?
- How does it grow?
- What are its limits?
- Who owns knowledge?

- What is the value of knowledge?
- What are the implications of having, or not having, knowledge?

(IB 2006: 3)

The critical literacy developed in TOK emphasises metacognition of the role of language in all learning and all IB teachers are encouraged to apply and develop this in all subject areas.



*Fig 9: Slide illustrating how values and beliefs inform action (consider the mountain sacred and it will not be mined for mineral resources)*

## **Conclusion**

In its commitment to the development of student intercultural understanding the IB recognizes the value of language learning and development of multilingualism as a resource for transformative pedagogy to promote critical thinking about cultural assumptions and to create opportunities for the crafting of new identity borders and subsequent actions appropriate to dispositions informed by international mindedness.

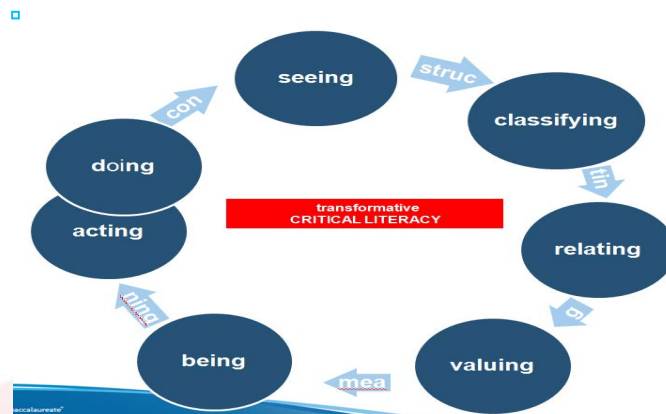


Fig 10: Slide illustrating how critical literacy is central to developing intercultural understanding through transforming habits based on cultural assumptions to actions informed by reflection on available choices

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(Illustrations by Cosima)



