

Tensions and Partnerships Between Community Schools and Mainstream Schools

Discussion in the Global Think Tank Meeting Dec. 8, 2024

Summary of the Discussion

Participants

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In the discussion on the topic “Tensions and Partnerships Between Community Schools and Mainstream Schools,”, a wealth of both positive and negative information was shared, varying by country and region. To convey this information as authentically as possible and to capture the voices of the participants, the recordings were transcribed and summarized. Please note that this documentation reflects the information from various countries and regions as of the time of the meeting, and this information is subject to change over time. The names of the speakers have been retained to deliver the voices of the participants.

The Status of Community HL Education in Different Countries

When community schools are recognized, it is important for the students, so that they see their languages as being valued and recognized, not just within their own community, but more widely. And it is important for the teachers working in those schools. Many of them are volunteers, who see that their work is not recognized and not often valued by mainstream schools and society.

The United States:

Language teaching in community schools is very different from teaching German, French, or Italian in mainstream schools.

(Renate) When comparing the results (language skills, cultural knowledge) of students in German CBHL schools with those of students in US mainstream German classes, the

comparison is always more positive for the heritage language students. This may be one of the reasons why cooperation with high schools is difficult.

The situation shows that high school students often only take German 101 and 102 and do not attend advanced German classes. In contrast, German CBHL school students, in addition to passing the AATG (American Association of Teachers of German) National German Exam (Levels 1-4) and the German AP (Advanced Placement), often also achieve level C1 (CEFR) of the Sprachdiplom (DSD), an official examination offered by Germany that allows admission to universities in a German-speaking country. In addition to the US standardized tests, in which German CBHL school students achieve consistently higher results, it is almost no longer necessary to work with mainstream German programs to accept the additional DSD test results. . American universities frequently do not know the DSD tests and therefore often do not accept them anyway.

Unlike most other countries where education is more nationalized, in the United States local control is more common. Officially known as an Local Education Authority (LEA), these may consist of a single school, a village, town, city, or county school district. This makes standardizing collaborations with community-based heritage language schools difficult and heritage schools are often tasked with reaching out to the individual public schools to create relationships and advocate for recognition. In an effort to assist, there are several state and even national initiatives. The [World Language Assistance Program \(World LEAP\) ACT or H.R. 5603](#) was introduced into the US House of Representatives in 2023 and will be reintroduced into the new congress in 2025. The U.S. Department of Education program will provide multi-year grants to LEAs to improve, expand, and establish world language programs and codify for the first time into national law, “Community-Based Heritage Language Programs.” The grant gives preference to public schools that work in collaboration with heritage language programs. At the state level work is also being done to include heritage and indigenous language students studying the language outside of the public schools. In Washington state, for example, funding was legislated to ensure that all students could test for the Washington State Seal of Biliteracy which provides for university credit. In the 2023-24 school year, 85 heritage and 36 tribal languages were tested. In Illinois, individual [community-based heritage language schools may apply annually](#) to test and award the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy to their students.

(Masako) The Global Seal of Biliteracy provides schools with a way to test, document, and certify the language skills of students in heritage language programs. They also provide resources to heritage schools on ways to communicate with and collaborate with their local public schools. Despite these positive trends, there are also negative developments. For example, public education covers the cost of tests and has students take assessments to receive the Global Seal of Biliteracy, which has led to a significant

decrease in the number of the students who take a test at Bulgarian heritage language schools. This is an example of how coexistence between public schools and CBHL (Community-Based Heritage Language) schools is becoming difficult.

Western Canada:

German used to be a widely taught foreign language. I (Patsy) took it myself through high school and university. It's not taught anywhere around Vancouver anymore in the schools. It's still taught at the university.

Nordic Countries:

In the Nordic context, the other 4 Nordic countries have mother tongue or heritage language education as part of the educational system. In Iceland, it is mostly in the hands of NGOs, with the exception of Swedish and Norwegian, and to some extent, Polish that are taught within the school system. All mother tongue teaching in the Nordic countries is also mostly marginalized, even though it is part of the system. (Renata)

The UK:

(Jim) Heritage languages and heritage language schools generally have been kept on the margins over decades. There has been minimal recognition of or support for the work carried out in community-based HL schools and little if any communication between mainstream and community-based schools (even when the community school is using mainstream school premises).

There have been repeated calls from experts for heritage languages to be given greater priority and support in national policy and for partnerships between mainstream and community based HL schools to be supported:

British Academy (2019) Languages in the UK. A call for action

‘There is a disconnect between mainstream education and community-based language- learning. The language-learning that goes on in thousands of complementary (or supplementary) schools in the UK has little public visibility.¹³ It is scarcely ever connected up with the learning done by the same children in mainstream schools. Although their extra linguistic competence has the potential to be an educational asset, some of these children even actively conceal it, feeling that it is irrelevant or embarrassing. This is bad for social cohesion: it weakens any positive connection and psychological integration between the children’s community or home life and their school life’

Association of School and College Leaders (2022)

‘The successful outcome of supplementary education is that pupils develop connections between their own home culture and that of their peers and acquire cultural agility so that they move between languages and cultures comfortably and confidently. Supplementary schools actively seek to encourage and assist social

integration and are sometimes called on to support children's wellbeing and learning in mainstream contexts. It is about building confidence and a sense of pride in a bilingual, bicultural identity'.

Thus it remains the case that even language teachers and those training to teach languages don't know of the existence of community-based heritage language schools. Often teachers don't know that children go to heritage schools, and so they're not even offering to have them take exams in their community languages, because they're not aware of it.

(Dina) In some schools like Pimlico schools, where they were running a course in Bengali, the children didn't really enjoy it. It was very traditional teaching. It wasn't very engaging. They didn't see the point of it, so many didn't go.

The most shocking thing for me (Dina) was doing a lecture for teachers who were doing an MA in Literacy. I asked them to tell me what it means for them to be bilingual, and one teacher said, "I speak Yoruba at home, but I didn't think that bilingualism applies to me. I thought to be bilingual, you have to speak French, Spanish, Italian, or German." So there is a lack of understanding, even among teachers, that all languages count. This really shows that there is a lot of work that needs to be done in terms of initial teacher training and initial and continuous professional development.

We are currently awaiting the outcome of the government's curriculum review for England and the stance it will take on bilingualism and heritage languages. At present they are hardly mentioned in official documents. It is worth noting that other parts of the UK (Scotland, Wales, and the island of Jersey) have developed policies which recognize and support multilingualism.

Switzerland:

This is also true in Switzerland. It's quite difficult, but there are French complementary schools in Switzerland, and all the teaching they do is 100% recognized/taken into account by the Swiss government. They have a great, great cooperation, whatever the teachers decide to teach in the complementary school or Saturday school is fully accepted by the public school, whatever the language. (Sabrina)

The Netherlands:

Gisi participated in an event about internationalization in the Dutch mainstream school system, and how to handle the multilingual children. Gisi spoke with a man there who had a table representing an agency that receives funding from the Dutch Ministry of Education to work on internationalization. They promote things like early second language education, not only for native speakers, like introducing English, French, or German to kids early, in the younger grades; exchanges with high schools; and global citizenship. Gisi asked if they might put something in their publication about what is being done with weekend schools and community languages, and he said that he doesn't think there is

much overlap with what they are doing now. Gisi mentioned that she respectfully disagrees that there is no overlap. So there is a lot of work that still needs to be done. There is a new law proposal. The Dutch government sent HLE Network a direct email saying that people have until January 7, 2025, to make a public comment on this law proposal, and it's been at least a year and a half in the making.

The public school system has no supervisory legal right over what happens in the private sector, not just language schools, but also language programs, religious weekend programs, and scouting and things like that. It seems like the government is only concerned about slapping people in the private sector on the wrist, and not offering any kind of support. HLE Network has prepared a statement about how they feel about this proposal (see link below).

The HLE Network, in the south of the Netherlands, is the only network for HL programs that exists in the country, and they have approached the Ministry of Education for help with expanding the network nationwide, but it was not possible.

(Gisi) "We spent a year suggesting things to the Ministry. It was good to develop a relationship with them, but none of the suggestions were possible. The people from the Ministry of Education have not yet attended any of our events. So I wrote an email to them when they sent the information about the law proposal. And I said, 'You should come and meet the people involved in this educational sector' They were kind in their response, pointing out that there are only a few staff members tasked with informal education so it is not possible to attend all events. But the attitude right now seems to be that they want to focus on finding a few bad apples, and in the process a whole lot of perfectly fine programs, which are doing a really good job, are going to suffer. The public view of these programs is going to deteriorate, and a right-wing group got a lot of votes one year ago, and so now there's actually an agenda point to close weekend schools.

Our public reaction to the law proposal (available in Dutch and English)

<https://www.hlenet.org/post/2025-reaction-wtio>

Positive Initiatives Underway to Address These Challenges

In the UK:

Our Languages Project (2007-2009)

The government-funded *Our Languages* project (2007-2009) was led by CILT, the National Centre for Languages in collaboration with the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) and the School Development Support Agency. The central aim of the project was to promote heritage language teaching and learning through partnerships between mainstream and supplementary/complementary schools. A valuable outcome was the creation of a toolkit with guidance on building partnerships:

CILT, the National Centre for Languages, National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and School Development Support Agency (Our Languages Project) (2009) *Partnerships in Language and Culture: A toolkit for complementary and mainstream schools working in partnership*. London: CILT.a

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Funding body which has supported partnerships between supplementary and mainstream schools.

Supplementary Schools Case Studies (2015)

<https://www.phf.org.uk/assets/documents/PHF-Education-Resources-Rpt-final.pdf?v=1715617460>

Young People's Foundation Trust (YPF) (formerly National Resource Center for Supplementary Education)

The YPF is part of the Complementary Education Network, founded in 2024, led by Nottingham Trent University, Åbo Akademi University (Finland), and Young People's Foundation Trust (YPF). Worth noting here is the collaboration between UK and Finland, reflecting the kind of international cooperation being promoted by the Global Think Tank.

<https://www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/news/news-articles/2024/10/celebrating-the-launch-of-the-complementary-education-network>

<https://www.ntu.ac.uk/research/groups-and-centres/projects/the-complementary-education-network>

<https://supplementaryeducation.org.uk/partnership-mainstream-supplementary-schools>

Manchester City of Languages recently hosted a half-day conference on directions of language policy initiatives in the UK:

Shpresa (Albanian community organisation)

<https://shpresaprogramme.org>

Excellent Youtube videos with young people from Shpresa and headteachers at host schools explaining successful partnership. Includes comments from expert on bilingualism and heritage languages, Dr Raymonde Sneddon.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDCJ_xV4N_k

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuDJB2NaWo8>

National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE) (2024-)

- Government funded project to support development of Languages education in the UK.
- Working through regional hubs
- Promoting partnerships between mainstream and community based HL schools

Cities of Languages and other regional hubs

In the absence of central government policy, a number of cities in England have chosen to name themselves Cities of Languages as a response to growing multilingualism and a desire to value and support all languages. This relates in part to education but focuses more broadly on multilingualism in public spaces. It has involved collaborations between universities, mainstream schools and community schools as well as local councils, museums, galleries, and other community organizations.

In recognition of this trend, in February 2025 the UK Association for Language Learning posted a new page on its website entitled “Cities of Languages” containing information about developments in a number of cities as well as a range of resources. It is hoped that this will encourage coordination of efforts and sharing across cities.

<https://www.all-languages.org.uk/cities-of-languages/>

Cities involved include:

Manchester

<https://mrcityoflanguages.org>

Towards a Language Strategy for Cities

Look at languages in the wider context of a multilingual society including domestic multilingualism and language diversity. Work is underway to develop a strategy to support this.

<https://mrcityoflanguages.org/2024/10/05/towards-a-language-strategy-for-cities/>

<https://mrcityoflanguages.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/towards-a-language-strategy-for-cities-2.pdf>

Newcastle

<https://internationalnewcastle.org.uk/newcastle-city-of-languages#>

Coventry

<https://warwick.ac.uk/sites/coventry-language-schools-network>

Portsmouth

<https://www.portsmoutheducationpartnership.co.uk/city-of-languages/#:~:text=Portsmouth%20City%20of%20Languages%20is,celebrating%20languages%20in%20the%20city>

Similar initiatives are taking place elsewhere:

Sheffield

Hub for Heritage Languages and Multilingualism

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/education/research/education/projects/hub-heritage-languages-and-multilingualism>

Cambridge

Cambridge Research in Community Language Education (CRICLE)

<https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/networks/cricle/>
Inaugural leadership forum for heritage language schools in Cambridge
<https://content.educ.cam.ac.uk/23-liu-heritage-language>

To make further progress, coordination of these initiatives is required. Greater recognition and support from the government is also needed.

In the Netherlands:

HLE Network continues to persist and seek to create recognition and connections.

Stichting Taal naar Keuze is another foundation in the Netherlands that is working to get secondary school students credit in their home language. Secondary school certification (Staatsexamen) are available in only about 8 languages, with most students forced to choose French and German. Taal naar Keuze tries to arrange it so students can drop French or German in favor of one of the other languages available, especially if it is a home language.

In the United States:

The Coalition of Community-Based Heritage Language Schools is serving to build awareness of heritage language programs and provide heritage schools with resources, opportunities for professional development and collaboration.

<https://www.heritagelanguageschools.org/coalition>

In the United States, all 50 states have adopted some kind of “Seal of Biliteracy” program to recognize bilingual students graduating from high school. Because many of these programs do not include heritage language schools, the Global Seal of Biliteracy is being used by many heritage language programs to provide an opportunity for schools to test, document, and celebrate language proficiency beginning at the 8th grade year. The program offers a digitally-shareable, stackable certification of language proficiency in over 120 languages at three unique proficiency levels and provides its recipients with pathways to university credit and advanced placement. The Global Seal is active in more than 60 countries and could be a solution for any program. www.theglobalseal.com

In the Global Think Tank:

There is a lot of rich information, and we are different, country by country. The working group focused on recognition of students’ bilingual or multilingual ability is seeking to make this visible. First, we need to know what’s going on in each country and the common ground that we share.

Let’s not keep this to ourselves. We can continue to discuss and make the information we generate widely available --in newsletters, on our websites, in a public bulletin.

Credit for Proficiency – Working Group

Can students and their HL schools receive credit and other recognition in their mainstream school for proficiency in a less commonly taught language that they developed in a weekend school?

When they do, it motivates them to sustain and learn it.

In the U.S., it varies by state. For example, in Illinois, there is a lot of support for the supplementary heritage language schools. So even if they test in one of those schools, they can get credit on their public school high school diploma (Linda).

There are 2 types of Seals of Biliteracy – the State Seal, issued by the state, and the Global Seal. I (Masako) have really favored the Global Seal, because the community-based schools can apply for it and put the Seal on student certificates. This also helps the schools to be more visible, and parents appreciate the schools for teaching their children, from kindergarten through high school.

Japanese Heritage Language (JHL) schools (Masako) use the Advanced Placement (AP) Japanese test score to apply for the Global Seal. The AP test is administered in high schools. When students get a passing score on the AP Japanese test, they give the score to their JHL school. Then the school submits to the Global Seal the AP score and evidence of English proficiency, which is shown by taking an English test, such as SAT or ACT, and the students receive the award.

However, recently, one JHL school faced a challenge with this. In Princeton, the Global Seal team told them that they need approval of release of the AP scores from high schools. Some schools released the score, but some other schools rejected it. Masako doesn't know why the scores were rejected. The goal is to have collaboration between public schools and heritage language schools, and releasing the AP test scores does not hurt the public schools. Also, the name of the JHL should be written on the certificate, with the student's name, because it is the JHL schools where the students gained the high level of proficiency to pass the test.

There are challenges in *German schools in the US* too (Renate). Many times the students come to a school, reach the level of AP and higher and take the AP in their public high school, because the Saturday school doesn't have the code and so cannot give the AP. Saturday school students have to take the AP in their public high school, which they sometimes are allowed to do, and sometimes not. Once they do it, it is an accomplishment for them. They can apply to university, and they are happy. We have really tried to do this, and we have struggled so much. We have for years and years and years, and the situation will not change.

In Iceland (Renata) It is possible to get credit for attending heritage language weekend schools. We are just kind of working on it at the moment. There are also assessment tests that kids take when they enter the upper secondary schools. This is in progress in Iceland.

In the Netherlands: see the part about Taal naar Keuze above.