

Letter to the Editor

Bilingualism and the CIS Accreditation process.

It is encouraging to see that the Council of International Schools (CIS) has engaged in dialogue on some of the issues that were raised in my article in the April 2005 issue of the *International Schools Journal* (Letter to the Editor, ISJ November 2005, Gerry Percy).

It seems appropriate to comment on salient points of his response.

- Dr Percy writes that ‘There is no sign of general pressure from CIS member schools for the CIS Accreditation Service to include in its role the “recognition, explanation and reward of bilingualism” and to do this “would fundamentally change the process of accreditation.”’ This seems to be saying that the CIS abnegates responsibility for a central part of every student’s development, i.e. their language(s), without which they would not succeed in any subject. ‘General pressure’ would presumably come from school heads and directors. It seems more likely that the members of the CIS Accreditation Office drive the agenda for what goes into the Guide. Also, as I recall there was no clamour from member schools for the standard that every school should have help for the learning disabled, or a challenging programme for the ‘gifted and talented’; these standards were put in by the then ECIS Accreditation document because they were considered to be necessary to provide a proper education for some students in international schools. It is in any case a well-known fact among ESL teachers that ESL matters are often peripheralised; ESL parents are often less vocal than fluent English speakers. The result is frequently that this body – of ESL students, parents and teachers – goes unheard. It is perhaps not surprising that ‘there is no general pressure from CIS member schools’ especially when the issues surrounding bilingualism can be mystified and made to appear complex.
- Dr Percy’s second point aims to show the accreditation document as perfectly valid as regards a school ‘pursuing bilingualism’. The point I was making in my article was that bilingual development and language development should be seen as key factors permeating the entire accreditation document. The *ESL Gazette* (August 2005) reported that: ‘The majority of students in international schools are non-native speakers of English. In the 2004 European Council of International Schools (ECIS) annual statistical survey, 297 schools with a total enrolment of 161,863

students indicated that over half the student population (59%) spoke English as an additional language (EAL). Of these, 198 schools (67%) had 50% or more such students while only 21 schools had fewer than 10% EAL speakers. In 18 schools none of the students spoke English as first language.' Therefore the majority of International School students will have grown up with one language (or more than one), their mother tongue(s), and later acquired English (the current World Language) as a second language. Balancing their language development is crucial if they are to be successful in additive bilingualism, where the second language is learnt in addition to, and does not replace the first language, and where there are also cognitive and metalinguistic advantages. It is also vital that they avoid the downside of subtractive bilingualism, where the second language replaces the first language, and can lead to cognitive disadvantages and the danger of anomie, which is a feeling of personal disorientation, anxiety & social isolation brought about by a confusion of identity. This is not something that a school 'may decide to pursue' but a central part of every student's development. As a body concerned with education, it might be expected that the CIS would feel a responsibility to show concern for this aspect, for what is now the majority of students, i.e. 'the broader picture'.

- The 'streamlining' of the structure for accreditation reports which happens to include English Language Support (ELS) with Student Support Services is excused as being more convenient for accreditation reports (one might ask what the purpose of accreditation is: for the writing of reports, or for improving the educational quality of the school?). However, the CIS, as a globally respected body for accrediting schools, must realize that there is often a culture in international schools which sets up programmes according to the structures laid down by just such agencies as the CIS. (The CIS Guidelines on writing Board Policy Manuals are another example of this: there is no section on 'Language Policy', but separate sections for ESL; Mother Tongue; Foreign Languages. This is a remarkably primitive instrument for setting policies in a contemporary international school, and leads to programmes running in isolation when there is a need for a unity of purpose under an overall Language Policy). Dr Percy mentions that 'ELS' is also included in Section B Curriculum if schools wish to incorporate it there. This is encouraging, and in fact this development arose after much work by the ECIS ESL and Mother Tongue Committee, who presented their concerns to the CIS. It is unfortunate that no action was taken in removing 'ELS' from Student Support Services, a recommendation also made by the Committee. The fact that Dr Percy replied to the committee that in fact no

subject committees had been involved in giving input to the new Accreditation Guide can only be seen as extraordinary, and will lead to a deprofessionalisation of educational content in the Guide. If pressure from schools is the yardstick by which the CIS changes the content of the Guide, then the huge pressure shown by the ESL & Mother Tongue Committee should be bowed to: teaching professionals deserve to be listened to – they are the ones who have the expertise in their pedagogical area, plus active, daily experience. Members of the ESL & MT Committee do not speak simply for themselves but for their colleagues and the students and parents with whom they have regular contact. Anyone wanting to see what difficulties they are having need only subscribe to the ESLMT Listserv of ECIS: the traffic is endless and consists mostly of professional ESL teachers asking their colleagues for help and advice in difficult situations which, in many cases, could be improved at a stroke by the insertion of a standard in the CIS Accreditation instrument.

Dr Percy highlights my use of ‘emotive phrases’ as if they in some way diminish my credibility. Hargreaves and Goodson (1996)^[1] are accepted authorities on professionalism in education. They propose seven standards for professionalism, the fifth of which is: ‘A commitment to active care and not just anodyne service for students. Professionalism must in this sense acknowledge and embrace the emotional as well as the cognitive dimensions of teaching, and also recognise the skills and dispositions that are essential to committed and effective caring.’ I therefore take Dr Percy’s use of ‘emotive’ to describe my writing as confirmation that I am a professional educator – I do care about the ability of students to be able to think coherently and to lead balanced, fulfilled lives.

- It is encouraging to see that some schools are delivering bilingual/multilingual programmes in two or three languages. However, our concern is for each individual student: in international schools students come from a multitude of language backgrounds, and each student deserves a carefully monitored programme of language development. Paradoxically, a school delivering a bilingual programme in two or three languages could actually create more difficulties for ESL students as it is quite likely that their mother tongue would not be among the languages offered. The best path to bilingualism in international schools is stated clearly by Professor Virginia Collier, an acclaimed authority on such matters, in her introduction to *The International Schools Journal Compendium: Volume 1, ESL* (ed. Murphy, 2003:8)^[2]: ‘When the demographics of a school population include a multilingual student group with small numbers of each language

represented, then mother tongue literacy development for each language group, combined with ESL taught through academic content, may be the best choice for support of non-English-speakers' needs.'

In conclusion I should like to reiterate the main thrust of my argument, which is that Part One of the Accreditation Guide could have a section devoted to the issue of the multilingual population that makes up the international community, and the importance of language development for each individual. A joint panel of researchers, and qualified practitioners from International Schools could be called on to present their recommendations, which would certainly comprise the inclusion of a language policy. Part Two of the Guide could have a section devoted to bilingual language development (and the ELS entry in Student Support Services would be removed). In this way the issue of students who do not have English as their best language can be dealt with in a positive, educationally-productive way. Otherwise bilingual/ESL students may be sidelined, undervalued, and their potential not achieved, with the possibility of the negative effects of subtractive bilingualism.

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References

^[2] **Murphy, E** (Ed.) (2003b) *The International Schools Compendium – ESL: Educating Non-native Speakers of English in an English-medium international school*. Suffolk, UK: Peridot Press, a division of John Catt Educational Ltd.

Note from the Editor

The CIS Accreditation Service had the opportunity to review Maurice Carder's letter before publication. While acknowledging Mr. Carder's valuable contribution to the debate on language matters, and while agreeing to revisit these issues (as well as many others) when drafting the next version of the 'Guide to School Evaluation and Accreditation', the Accreditation Service feels that the statements in Dr Percy's November 2005 response continue to be valid.