

THE MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT AS AN EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION FACTOR FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

A case study

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ABSTRACT • Multilingualism is a natural condition for humans. Recent studies on multilingual education have demonstrated its worth in developing the cognitive abilities and the character of learners, in addition to framing intercultural minds, a must in our increasingly globalizing world. The learning context plays an essential role in the achievement of these objectives, constituting one of the main elements of extrinsic motivation for language learning. This study analyses the motivational factors of a specific multilingual environment, that of the Liceo Internazionale Europeo Statale “Altiero Spinelli” of Turin, Italy, where students are stimulated to learn foreign languages and the English language in particular. This high school has a peculiar curriculum, based on the “L1 Project” which regulates all educational aspects. The factors taken into consideration are the curricular objectives, the participants, the languages and nationalities involved, the pedagogical approach, the teaching and learning of the English language, and several dimensions of the extended context. The paper features the results in terms of English language learning, considers the strengths and the weaknesses of the programme and suggests some directions for the development of its teaching and the learning environment.

KEYWORDS • language learning motivation, multilingual learning context, foreign language learning, English as a foreign language.

If we focus then not on separate languages as we have done in the past, but on the bilingual or multilingual discourse practices that we need and that are readily observable in bilingual classrooms, we can see that bilingual arrangements that build on translanguaging [...] is indeed the only way to build the plurilingual abilities that we will need in the future.
García (2009: 297, quoted in Jørgensen et al. 2012)

1. Introduction

MULTILINGUALISM is often considered a natural human condition, whereas monolingualism would be the exception (Chow & Cummins 2003), at least in non-western communities (Canagarajah & Wurr 2011). The most recent studies on multilingualism show that a multilingual education is valuable and effective in developing the learners' cognitive faculties and identity (Cenoz & Genesee 1998; Murray et al. 2011). Furthermore, multilingualism is said to facilitate cultural intercomprehension, an essential competence in an increasingly globalized

world (Bhatia & Ritchie 2013; Canagarajah & Wurr 2011). The learning context plays a fundamental role towards reaching these objectives, since it constitutes one of the main external factors for language learning motivation (Wenden 1991), which in turn is “one of the main determinants of second/foreign language (L2) learning achievement” (Dörnyei 1994: 273). According to Ryan & Deci,

Extrinsic motivation is a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome. Extrinsic motivation thus contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing an activity simply for the enjoyment of the activity itself, rather than its instrumental value (2000: 60).

Ryan & Deci develop the construct of extrinsic motivation into a number of categories, which they collocate in a continuum between “impoverished forms of motivation” and others representing “active, agentic states”, depending on the degree of “personal endorsement and [...] feeling of choice” of the learner through the processes of internalization and integration: external regulation, introjected regulation, identification, and integrated regulation.¹

This study examines the main elements of a specific multilingual learning context, that of the International European State High School “Altiero Spinelli” of Turin, Italy,² as they contribute to creating a stimulating environment for the learning of foreign languages, with special focus on English, in a way to favour the internalization and integration of the proposed “values and behavioral regulations” (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 60). This Italian state school is unique as far as its organization and curriculum design are concerned, thanks to its core “L1 Project” which determines the school’s learning objectives, and which may be observed as an example of good language teaching practices.

The perspective here adopted is from a “particularised, contextually grounded and qualitative angle of inquiry” in contrast with mainstream research in the language learning motivation field, “which has been concerned more with the general than the particular, with statistical averages and relations rather than rich descriptive analysis” (Ushioda 2011: 11). Therefore the focus of the study is a descriptive analysis of a configuration of educational practices as they may determine the comparative success of the school’s language learning programme. The contextual elements here taken into consideration are: the learning objectives, the learners, the teaching staff, the languages, the language teaching approach, the role of the English language in the school, and the school’s extended context. The second part of the paper outlines the promising results so far, examines the downsides of the project and delineates the developments which might improve it.

2. Objectives

As is stated in the “L1 Project” guidelines, a peculiarity of the school is the presence of a high number of non-Italian speaking students and bi- or tri-lingual students, and a teaching staff composed of Italian state teachers and native teaching consultants, whose role is to teach languages and other subjects in CLIL modality and in an intercultural perspective. The study of language is introduced not only as a vehicle for meaning, but as a world view shaping different

¹ Ryan and Deci (2000: 61) associate “external regulation” to “salience of extrinsic rewards or punishments” in terms of “compliance/reactance”; “introjection” is seen as “ego involvement” and “focus on approval from self or others”; “identification” is defined as “conscious valuing of activity” and “self-endorsement of goals”; finally, “integration” is associated to a “hierarchical synthesis of goals” and “congruence”.

² <www.istitutoaltierospinelli.eu> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

cultural identities. The experiential comparison between differing cultures fosters the awareness of the complexity and variety of contemporary society, and the development of a truly international and European conscience based on the sharing of common ethical and social values such as peace, tolerance, mutual knowledge and respect (Piano dell'Offerta Formativa 2013). In this regard, the main objectives of the teaching team's concerted action are as follows: develop and enrich the bi/trilingual students' language education; introduce Italian-speaking students to a European educational dimension through the extensive study and use of foreign languages; favour cultural integration through the continuous exchange of experiences among students of different nationalities, in a perspective of reciprocity, tolerance and cooperation; plan and implement CLIL programmes in languages other than Italian.

3. People & Languages

The atmosphere of the Liceo is truly international, thanks to the number and variety of nationalities present at all times of the school year. The recipients of the "L1 Project" are: bi/trilingual students; Italian native speaking students; non-Italian native speaking students on permanent or temporary stay. Most of the students have already attended the "Altiero Spinelli" primary and/or lower secondary school, which are organized according to the "L1 Project" principles too. Students from other secondary schools are admitted after passing an entry test in Italian, maths, English and French or German. About a third of the students are bi/trilingual or non-Italian native speakers. Most of the Italian native speakers have a multilingual background too, owing to their upbringing or family history; for instance, some students spend time abroad on a regular basis because of their parents' jobs, because they visit their extended family, or for extra-curricular educational purposes.

The most widespread languages among students are English, French and German; other students speak Romanian, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese and some others. The language department staff is composed of native Italian state teachers and native English, French, German and Chinese conversers and consultants. The school also promotes student and teacher exchanges, and welcomes visiting students, teachers, trainee teachers and interns for short- and long-term periods; for example, as far as English teaching is concerned, in the past few years there have been a one-year Fulbright scholarship recipient from Chicago, USA, a three-month exchange teacher from Sydney, Australia, a group of interns on a two-month AIESEC³ cultural exchange project from Belgium, Poland, Estonia, Turkey, Brazil and India.

4. Language Teaching & Learning

According to the school project, the students' language learning process is facilitated through informed eclectic methodology, with special emphasis on the naturalness of acquisition and the prevalence of communicative purposes. Linguistic knowledge and competence are subsequently studied and developed to enhance fluency and accuracy. Most lessons are co-taught by a state teacher and a consultant or converser, and students are grouped according to their learning needs. The approach is multimodal in order to stimulate all levels and learning styles, where difference is considered a source of enrichment: non-native Italian speakers learn their mother tongue (English, French or German) as their first language, Italian as their second, and at least one third foreign language; native Italian speakers learn at least two foreign languages; bi/trilingual speakers join groups on the basis of their language levels. Although most subjects are taught in Italian, all students learn some disciplines in another language, either

³ AIESEC is an international student association, <www.aiesec.org> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

in modular or immersive format; for instance, the three internationalization programmes (ESABAC,⁴ German option and Chinese option) include the immersive study of, respectively: history in French & debate in English; history, geography & music in German; music in Chinese.⁵ Classes and groups are formed according to the students' course of study and subject choice. There are several curricula, each entailing the study of one, two or three modern languages among French, German and Chinese, in addition to Italian and English.

A wealth of multilingual curricular and extracurricular projects are carried out in order to promote the interplay of formal, informal and incidental language learning, with great attention to exploiting opportunities for peer cooperation between students speaking different languages and for contact with external learning contexts. These include: the multilingual school journal, Spin!;⁶ the European Language Label-awarded⁷ multilingual drama lab and theatre company; the cinema lab, Siescinema;⁸ regular participation in the Erasmian European Youth Parliament⁹ (EEYP) since 2006; the school orchestra; maths, ICT, chess, skiing and rugby teams etc. To provide a minor example, the translation team who participated in the Juvenes Translatores¹⁰ 2009 competition was composed of a native French student, a native Italian, a bilingual German-Italian, a bilingual German-English and a native English speaker, each translating from and into different pairs of languages; at the preparatory meetings for the competition, teammates and teachers alike regularly code-switched from and to all the languages spoken in the group to communicate effectively.

5. English Language Teaching

The English language has a prominent role in the linguistic panorama of the school, being studied as a foreign language as well as being used as a lingua franca alongside Italian by both teachers and students. 50% of all English language, culture and literature courses are co-taught by a regular teacher and a native English-speaking converser or consultant. English is employed in the CLIL teaching of history or art history for one period a week throughout some of the five-year courses, and in the modular teaching of biology, geography, maths, physics and physical education by English native consultants with different accents (British, Scottish, standard American, Australian, etc.), backgrounds and teaching styles. In addition to the above-mentioned multilingual projects where English is used extensively, students may also choose to enrol in extra-curricular English courses preparing for Cambridge English examinations,¹¹ namely Preliminary (PET) in the second year, First (FCE) in the fourth year and Advanced (CAE) in the fifth year. In addition, the school has recently been recognised as an International Cambridge Centre by the University of Cambridge International Examinations.¹² Therefore students may take IGCSE and AS/A-Level exams. The courses activated so far, taught by native English consultants, are English as a first language, English as a foreign language, Science

⁴ Italian-French bi-national high school degree ("ESAME di stato" and "BACCALURÉAT").

⁵ See the video *Start App – Il Cinese in sette note* at <www.raiscuola.rai.it/articoli/start-app-il-cinese-in-sette-note/16397/default.aspx#l> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

⁶ <www.istitutoaltierospinelli.eu/index.php?act=viewCat&catId=193> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

⁷ The European Language Label is "an award encouraging new initiatives in the field of teaching and learning languages" awarded by the European Commission, <http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/strategic-framework/language-label_en.htm> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

⁸ <www.youtube.com/user/siescinema> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

⁹ <eeyp.eu> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

¹⁰ <ec.europa.eu/translatores> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

¹¹ <www.cambridgeenglish.org> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

¹² <www.cie.org.uk> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

Combined, Economics, and Art and Design. Another opportunity that the best and most independent students are encouraged to take is to spend part or all of their fourth year in an English-speaking country, thanks to an agreement between the Italian government and several other countries. The most popular destinations are the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; some students opt for Scandinavian countries or Japan, where English is used extensively as a medium of instruction. Students attend school regularly for the entire period of their stay abroad and keep in touch through the Internet with their teachers and class in Italy. When they come back, students take an examination for re-admission to the fifth year and are encouraged to share their experience with their schoolmates through presentations, lectures and brief workshops. The panoply of these initiatives allow for contact with and use of several varieties, for instance English as an International Language (EIL) or as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which is used by native speakers of other languages who use English to communicate (e.g. German native speakers and French native speakers), English as Second Language (ESL), which is used by students coming from countries where English is a second language like Sri Lanka and South Africa, English for Special Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which are introduced by teachers and developed alongside the performance of the school activities.

6. Synergies

The linguistic environment of the school has an osmotic relationship with its extended context, here considered in its main dimensions, according to a model adapted from Serragiotto (2003: 2-3).

Inner environment: from the very beginning students are introduced to less traditional educational approaches and methods, flexible programmes and group fluidity. Student interaction and socialization is encouraged and favoured by rich exchange opportunities. Student autonomy and cooperation are fostered in challenge-based activities, whereas learning responsibility is spurred by providing choice options. Educational innovation and experimentation are usually very welcome in the school and by parents.

Socio-linguistic dimension: the school context is multilingual at all levels and in all situations, and the general attitude towards multilingualism and foreign-language-speaking communities is very positive. Students feel proud to belong to the school community and strive to understand and speak the school's languages and each other's languages. Italian and English prevail as languages of instruction and communication; however, it is common to overhear three or four languages being spoken in any classroom, corridor or staff room at any time of the school day.

Socio-cultural dimension: students and families, who choose this school purposefully, are aware of the benefits of multilingual education, witnessing it in their daily school life, especially since it provides further educational and employment opportunities. On the whole, learning and education are highly regarded, and academic achievement is valued as a powerful means of personal and professional development.

External environment: the attitude of the local population towards the school's peculiarity is ambivalent. Being a relatively new institution, which started in 1994 but was officially founded in 2000, it is not widely known in the city of Turin and is gradually earning recognition. On the one hand, the school is appreciated as a good example of pedagogical experimentation and academic excellence; its students and staff are credited for their achievements, therefore being admitted to the school is an ambitious goal for the many who take the entrance examinations. On the other hand, the school is often seen as an élitist oddity by students, staff and families from other schools, and its presence and initiatives are at times challenged with manifestations that range from petty harassment to open hostility. There is an

unfortunate history of minor and major obstructionism, whose latest occurrence was a mass square demonstration against the destination of sorely-needed new classroom space to the school.

Socio-political and economic dimension: the local and national authorities are, quite understandably, in favour of the school's successful experimentation. The school was born as a result of the educational needs of a number of international organizations (European Training Foundation,¹³ International Training Centre of the ILO¹⁴ and Bureau International du Travail, UNESCO,¹⁵ UNICRI,¹⁶ UN System Staff College,¹⁷ etc.) based in Torino. In the past a number of conventions were signed with local councils and boards for financial subsidies. Regrettably, at present authorities and official organizations do not offer any kind of concrete support. Therefore the cost of the L1 Project, which mainly consists in the consultants' fees, is entirely supported by the students' families with some relief provided by the grants and awards won through participation in, respectively, national and international projects and competitions.

7. Results

The students of the Liceo "Altiero Spinelli" consistently show interest and engagement in the learning of the English language, with good and even excellent results. An informal survey¹⁸ among a sample of students (66 in total) from the first (26 students), fourth (20 students) and fifth year (20 students) has yielded homogenous results as far as the main extrinsic motivation factors for learning the English language are concerned. All but one stated that they like learning English ("Yes, SURE!"; "we love this language"), and indicated several extrinsic types of motivation as their main reasons for studying it: from the mainly external regulatory "because it is a compulsory school subject" (very few respondents) to the more internalized considerations about career perspectives ("it's always asked in job interviews"), international communicative needs ("to meet new people"; "it's the language everybody understands/speaks"; "without English there is no point to live in a modern world"), the desire "to speak English like an English person" and "to settle in an English-speaking country". Several respondents stated that they study English because "it's a wonderful language/a musical language/such a beautiful and multilayered language", they "like the sound of words" and "[m]oreover, English literature is very interesting and fascinating and being able to read novels and poems in the original language is fantastic!" – which may be ascribed to an intrinsic type of motivation. The principal motivational factors for language learning pertaining to the Liceo "Altiero Spinelli" are the following: the presence of mother-tongue teachers, who some define as "very competent", who "speak only English with us" and "teach us very well"; the teachers' "attitude and linguistic preparations [sic]"; the fact that several subjects are taught through the medium of English; the choice of "interesting themes of conversation"; the "international environment"; the high number of projects involving the use of English, the EEYP especially; the opportunity of taking international certificates for language competence; school trips to foreign destinations. In addition, the respondents to the survey identified a number of points

¹³ <www.etf.europa.eu> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

¹⁴ <www.itcilo.org/en> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

¹⁵ <www.centrounesco.to.it> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

¹⁶ <www.unicri.it> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

¹⁷ <www.unssc.org> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

¹⁸ The survey, conducted on 28 March 2014, was submitted to students in small groups, who responded anonymously to these questions: 1) Do you like learning English? 2) Why do you learn English? 3) What factors make English learning motivating in this school? 4) What factors would encourage you to learn more?

which would further motivate their English language learning: “group activities”, more weekly conversation lessons with “young mother tongue teachers interacting with us during the lesson”, “more knowledge about the English culture”, “international exchanges” and contact with English-speaking students.

Language proficiency may be considered a significant outcome of strong learning motivation. No comprehensive quantitative study of language learning achievement within the school has been carried out so far. However, partial data gathering and direct observation of student and alumni performance and results in the years 2006-2014 highlight the following:

- spoken and written communicative fluency and expressive efficacy in English when faced with informal and formal situations within and beyond the school context;
- the average English CEFR level of non-native school leavers is B2/C1, as confirmed by the results of those who take international language examinations;
- with very rare exceptions, all alumni continue their studies at university, with very successful results in their English language examinations.

Those who choose Italian universities confirm their interest in the English language as an object of study and as a means of communication by enrolling in English-taught programmes, and often winning scholarships which require good knowledge of English (e.g. European Erasmus programmes). An ever-increasing number, also among native Italian-speaking students, opt for foreign universities in English-speaking countries or where English is used as a medium of instruction.

In addition to these, a number of desirable multilingual skills are observable among students of all ages:

- a high degree of student engagement in curricular and extra-curricular activities involving the direct and indirect study of languages;
- confrontation and transfer of competencies between languages;
- good development of thinking skills;
- cross-breeding of interests;
- effortless code-switching.

8. Discussion

In spite of the very encouraging results in terms of student motivation towards the learning of languages and English especially, a number of issues might be tackled in order to develop the full potential of the programme. The following weaknesses in the system constitute a direct or indirect hindrance to the students’ motivation and need re-thinking in terms of funding, planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Facilities: the school has very limited and inadequate facilities. There are an acclaimed drama group, an orchestra and a rugby team, but there is no theatre, no music room and no rugby (or football) pitch. The gym is shared with two other schools occupying the same building. Most classrooms are so cramped that activities requiring space are impracticable; the extra rooms for group tuition are even smaller, underfurnished, inadequate in number and situated far from the main classrooms. The school’s timetable has lessons in the morning and in the afternoon, but there is no canteen and no adult surveillance, so students have to leave the school and loiter outside at lunch break. None of the labs (computer, biology, chemistry) has sufficient provision for a whole class. The school assembly room is shared with another school and may accommodate only half of the students at one time. Worst of all, there are so few classrooms that the school cannot accept all of the applicants, and every year a higher number of aspiring students is turned down.

Resources: a recent Italian law (L. 90/2012) promises to provide the children of the nearby European Training Foundation staff with plurilingual education in compliance with the European Schools system.¹⁹ In spite of the law, the school's multilingual programme is no longer being funded. One of the consequences is that substantial financial cuts are being made, to the detriment of the quantity and quality of teaching. Spending cuts do a disservice to students who are grouped in large and at times heterogeneous groups, and are perpetrated at the expense of consultants whose retribution is kept at a minimum. The needs for more consultancy hours for language teaching and CLIL modules cannot be met. In addition to that, the best and most experienced consultants, who have non-renewable fixed-term contracts of nine months, often choose to move on to better jobs, with repercussions on teaching continuity and wasting the resources invested in their in-service training.

Curricula: both the Italian state syllabi for secondary school and the L1 project objectives are ambitious and wide-spanning. It is often difficult to match them in complete and unabridged programmes, owing to the only partial compatibility between teaching resources and educational demands. The result is that staff and families overextend, teachers and students burn out, and programmes shrink.

Time management: the school's packed weekly schedule imposes periods of 50 minutes instead of 60, which produces condensed or even frenzied teaching. Concurrently, the school timetable is extremely complex, with 26 classes,²⁰ different pairs of teachers co-teaching and different language and subject groups meeting at different times. Hectic schedules do not allow for regularity in teachers' meetings, therefore hampering teacher communication and cooperation. Furthermore, overlapping initiatives, conferences, field trips and exchanges often reduce the number of regular teaching hours.

Teacher education: teachers new to the school find it difficult to adjust to the project requirements, since they have no specific education in multiculturalism, plurilingualism or CLIL, do not know how to work in a team, and occasionally have inadequate language proficiency; sometimes they respond with frustration or conflict, which impacts negatively on students' attitudes and performance.

Data comparability: international schools are excluded from the Kangourou²¹ English language competitions, and the OCSE-PISA tests²² in Italy do not include foreign languages so far. Fair competition might stimulate students' motivation, and comparison with other schools might provide insightful data about the school's achievements, strengths and weaknesses.

9. Developments

In the light of the above-mentioned difficulties, further development is desirable in a number of areas. Gradual and steady improvement would create an all-round motivation-fostering environment as regards:

- Language curriculum design which includes the transferability of knowledge, skills and competencies. In order to optimize teaching time and to achieve cognitive, metacognitive and interdisciplinary objectives, it is highly recommended that language course contents and activities should be coordinated. For example, the Italian syllabus

¹⁹ "L'Italia si adopererà per fornire un'adeguata istruzione scolastica materna, primaria e secondaria ai figli del personale della Fondazione garantendo un apprendimento plurilingue coerente con il sistema delle Scuole Europee (L. 90/2012)".

²⁰ In the 2013-2014 school year.

²¹ <www.kangourou.it> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

²² <http://www.invalsi.it/invalsi/ri/pisa2012.php?page=pisa2012_it_00> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

may focus on analysing and synthesising, the English one on dictionary use for decoding and encoding purposes, the French one on translation, and the German one on resource use and project management.

- Strengthening the tradition of interdisciplinary and group projects in order to overcome the students' perception of subjects as separate entities and with the aim of encouraging their ability to collaborate.
- Attention to teachers' needs in terms of life-long training and professional development. The initiatives which would probably prove the most helpful are the reinforcement of team-teaching culture, mentoring and focus groups. Involvement in teacher associations and teacher development programmes promoted by external partners would be beneficial too.
- Higher number of linguistic consultancy hours. The optimal arrangement would be full-time co-teaching for all languages, as the L1 project originally established. This would allow for smaller work groups with more intense interaction and oral practice.
- Extension of the project to more languages and cultures, among those already represented in the school by students, like Spanish, Romanian and Arabic. This would allow launching language learning in the intercomprehension modality, with greater involvement of the students and their families, and shared learning responsibility.
- Development of collaborative learning paradigms based on the use of ICT and the media, including online portfolios, learning management systems, open source resources and cloud computing.
- Enhancement of community spirit and increased involvement of families and alumni through associations and fund-raising events.
- Expansion of networking and cooperation at local, national and international levels. Connections might lead to vocational internships for students, more student and class exchanges, and Comenius programmes. Contact with universities might help adjust syllabi to their requirements and improve the students' preparation for university life.
- Extension of the international exams programme. Besides their interest in a wider selection of AS/A-Level exams (i.e. biology and chemistry), senior students often need to take the IELTS²³ exam as well as write their own personal statement in good academic English as application requirements for university. Other students are interested in taking the International Baccalaureate²⁴ (IB), a high school diploma recognized worldwide.
- Collaboration with the University of Torino and other institutions on applied linguistics research. The Liceo Spinelli would provide very fertile ground for trainee teacher programmes, research-action practices and investigations in the fields of, for example, longitudinal language learning acquisition, bilingual and multilingual education, comparison of SLA²⁵ progress between different linguistic groups, experimentation of teaching techniques, and correlations between aptitude, attitude and motivation.

10. Conclusion

This study has examined the main extrinsic factors determining the strong motivation of the students of an International School to study foreign languages, in particular English. Hitherto the project of the school has proved thoroughly motivating for students, thanks to its

²³ International English Language Testing System, <www.ielts.org> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

²⁴ <www.ibo.org> [last accessed 27/03/2014].

²⁵ Second Language Acquisition.

objectives, curricula, amalgam of students, teachers and languages, pedagogical approach, ELT methodologies, and synergies with the extended context; among the winning factors are the consistent pursuit of intercultural values, a good sense of community and a strong element of student choice over a wide variety of subjects and activities. A number of aspects which might further enhance students' motivation have been identified, among which the coordination of syllabi, time-management optimization, in-service teacher training, networking and internationalization. The ultimate aim of this article is to disseminate an example of good multilingual education practice which might prove useful to teachers, school managers and curriculum designers.

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