

Blog Post: Bilingual Schools – a great idea or a potential disaster?

The news reached me the other day that UGT, one of Spain's biggest trade unions, has made an official complaint against the Region of Madrid for employing non-qualified native English speaking teachers for their **pet project**, bilingual schools.

I can't believe it didn't happen earlier. While the economic crisis and spending cuts have **been constantly in the public eye**, the changes being carried out in the bilingual schools system have been **slipping in under the radar**.

Originally it consisted of having language assistants in primary schools. I'm sure few people would find a problem with this. In fact, I'd like to see it in the UK. It's a great way to introduce a foreign language at primary level.

But I digress. The language assistants **morphed into** the former president of the region Esperanza Aguirre's **flagship policy**. A polyglot herself, Aguirre had a vision of Spanish children growing up in a bilingual society, similar to that of the Nordic countries.

Not a bad idea in principle? Well, apart from the fact that I suspect this policy was brought in to detract from other very negative ones, there are some pretty fundamental **flaws** with the plan.

Firstly, the reason that Nordic countries have such a high level of English is that they are surrounded by the language. T.V is in English, films aren't dubbed and due to not many people being fluent in Finnish there is a real necessity for speaking a lingua franca.

In Spain, unless you live in the centre of the capital it is pretty much impossible to find a cinema where films aren't dubbed. Despite there being many English speaking programmes on TV, none of them are in the original language, and even in the "red button" **digital age** people won't watch in English.

A lot of parents don't speak English and out of large city centres it's not easy to find or hear people speaking it either.

Basically, for a six year old there is absolutely no necessity for them to speak in English. I was brought up bilingual, speaking Spanish in Scotland. I never spoke Spanish when I was young unless I was in Spain. Why? Because people understood me when I spoke to them in English. It was only in Spain when I realised English didn't work that I used Spanish.

So, if Spain wants to be truly "bilingual" in English it needs to change a lot of things on a social and cultural level.

But why on earth SHOULD Spain become a bilingual country? It has no historical ties with the UK, at least not very positive ones. Other countries such as Germany and Portugal have high levels of English without resorting to bilingualism. Isn't it enough to simply raise the hours and quality of English lessons children are getting at school? And what about the consequences of this "bilingualism". There may well be some potentially dangerous **fallout** from the way these schools are being organised and developed.

Teachers with years of experience are in danger of losing their jobs if they don't drastically improve their English in a very limited time, and often to an unachievable level. What does this say of how much their knowledge and experience is valued?

Youth unemployment is at over 50%. My English classes are full of incredibly talented, motivated and intelligent teaching graduates with a good level of English. It's impossible for them to find a job. Shouldn't these jobs be going to them?

The "native speaker" is **being put on a pedestal** and considered the best possible teacher simply because they grew up speaking the language. This is the equivalent of me performing open-heart surgery simply because I once put **a plaster** on someone. We are endangering an entire generation's education by putting them into the hands of unqualified people during crucial formative years. What does it say of a society or government when they don't value their teachers?

And in the long-term, what impact is this going to have on Spanish identity? Children are basically being told that unless you can speak English you're inadequate. I feel these schools are giving the English language priority over the Spanish one. **It smacks of imperialism**, an invading nation coming in and imposing their language on the population. We're destroying the beauty of studying a foreign language.

Learning a foreign language should be about opening doors to other worlds and ideas. It makes you a better human being because it makes you think in a different way. Imposing a language only leads to resentment.

Teaching is a vocation. Teachers are some of the most dedicated people in the world. It's the most important job there is. Without teachers, you can't have anything else. Spanish teachers are already fighting against some of the most severe public spending cuts in history. Are we really going to make them fight this battle as well?

Bilingual Schools – Vocabulary Sheet

This blog entry has been written in an informal to neutral style so we can consider the vocabulary and expressions to be the same register

<p><i>for their pet project, bilingual schools</i> a pet project, compound noun. The most important or special project a person, company, government etc. has</p>	<p><i>in the “red button” digital age people won’t watch in English.</i> (digital) age – compound noun We often make compound nouns to define an era using noun + age</p>
<p><i>spending cuts have been constantly in the public eye</i> to be in the public eye, - expression to be in the media</p>	<p><i>some potentially dangerous fallout from the way ...</i> fallout – noun, uncountable the negative results of a situation</p>
<p><i>the changeshas been slipping in under the radar</i> to slip in under the radar - expression to enter or happen undetected</p>	<p><i>The “native speaker” is being put on a pedestal</i> - to be put on a pedestal – expression To value someone too much, to glorify or idealise them</p>
<p><i>The language assistants morphed into Esperanza Aguirre’s flagship policy.</i> Morph into – multi-word verb, transitive Synonym of change into, more descriptive</p> <p>Flagship (policy/shop/business) – adjective, often used in the context of business The best or most important thing owned or produced by an organisation</p>	<p><i>put a plaster on someone</i> a plaster - noun, countable a sticky piece of material to cover cuts</p>
<p><i>are some pretty fundamental flaws with the plan.</i> Flaw – noun, negative, often collocates with fundamental An problem or weakness</p>	<p><i>It smacks of imperialism</i> To smack of something - expression To contain that quality (in the example, to contain aspects of imperialism)</p>