

# Developing bilingual learning strategies in mainstream and community contexts (ESRC-funded study 2006-07)

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# Bilingual learning: aspects to investigate

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- ✦ Transfer of concepts (Cummins, 1984)
- ✦ Translation/interpretation (Creese, 2004)
- ✦ Linking with cultural worlds (Martin-Jones & Saxena, 2003)
- ✦ Increasing knowledge about how language works (Bialystok, 2001)
- ✦ Learner identities (Cummins, 1996; Martin, Creese, Bhatt & Bhojani, 2004)

# The research context

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- ✦ Two primary schools in Tower Hamlets, East London: Smithy Street Primary and Old Palace Primary
- ✦ Second/third generation British Bangladeshi children, mostly more fluent in English than Sylheti/Bengali (Bangla)
- ✦ Children also attend community classes in Bengali and/or Arabic
- ✦ Achieving highly at primary school

What place does bilingual learning have for these children?

# The children's views

আমরা কেনে বাংলা মাতি ?

## Why We Speak Bangla?

**We speak Bangla because it is our mother tongue. When we go to Bangladesh we speak Bangla to our relatives. As well as that, we know two languages and that makes us proud and clever.**

**If you talk too much English then you will start forgetting Bangla.**

**It's very important for us to go to Bangla class.**

**Bangla is not very hard when you get the hang of it.**

**Bangla will help career wise. You will also feel part of the culture.**

**If you try and talk Bangla as much as you can then you will get better.**

**KEEP TRYING TO SPEAK BANGLA!**

By Naima

কই আয়র বাংলা চারি ?

## Where Do You Read Bangla?

Sometimes you can learn Bangla in Arabic classes. It is held in a community centre. Some newspapers have Bangla writing in them. There are Bangla natok on Channel 5. You can use Bangla while you're thinking. You can think Bengali in your head and write in English in your book. You can speak Bengali to your friends and relatives and teach your little brothers and sisters. There are Bengali programmes on TV.

By Maisha

# Participant children



Smithy Street

Old Palace

Year 2 (age 7)  
4 children

Year 2 (age 7)  
4 children

Year 4 (age 9)  
5 children

Year 6 (age 11)  
4 children

# Methodology: action research

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- ✦ Observe children in community class
- ✦ Plan bilingual tasks in literacy and numeracy for each group, relevant to mainstream curriculum, linking with community class learning
- ✦ Involve community and mainstream teachers in planning
- ✦ Children do task, watch video and comment (stimulated recall)
- ✦ Discuss data with teachers at end-of-term seminar
- ✦ Repeat process in second term

# Smithy Street Bengali class

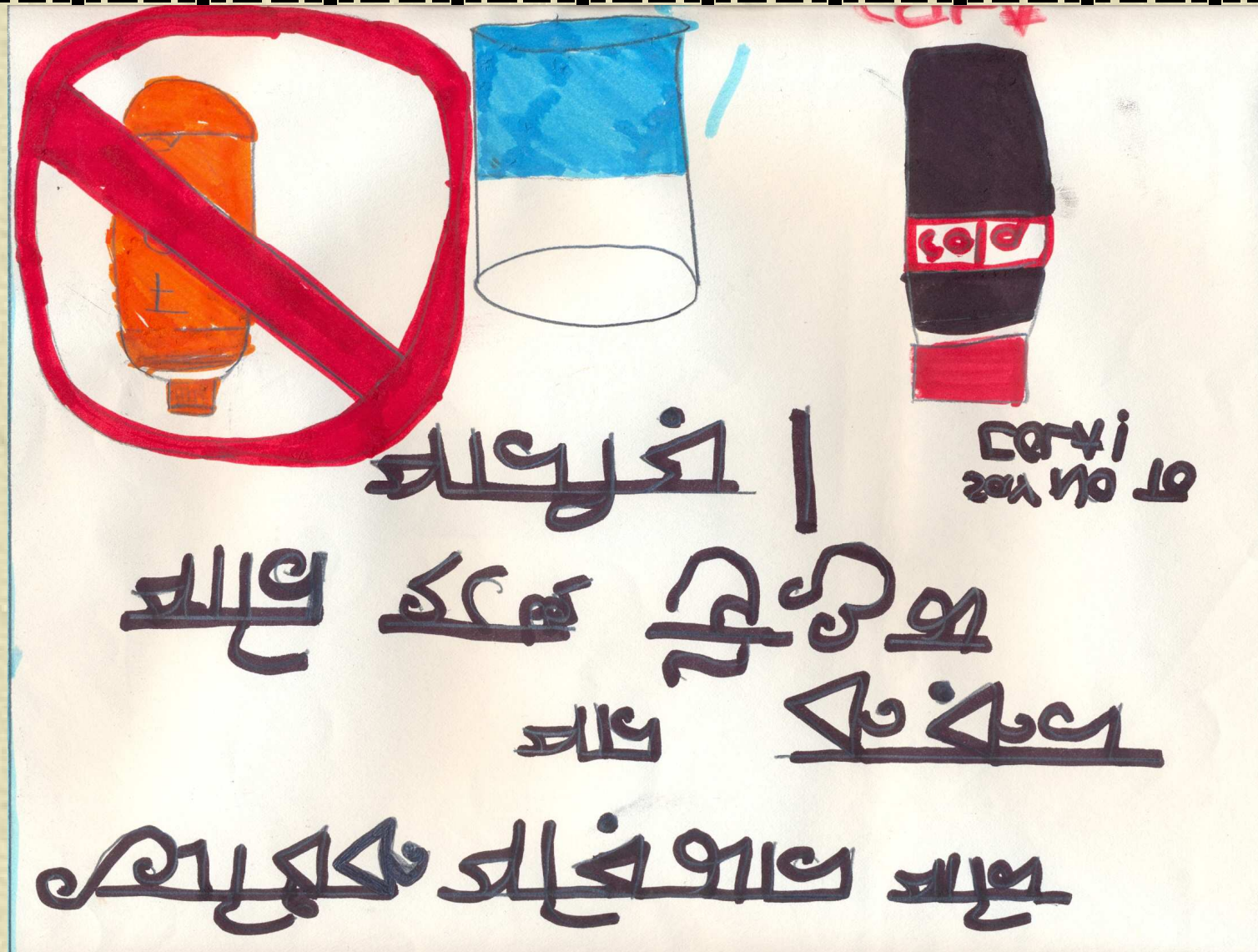
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- ✦ Rakib teaching double letters in Bengali and English – using both languages to explain
  - ✦ Comparing 'n + n' in both scripts
  - ✦ In English, joined horizontally
  - ✦ In Bengali, joined vertically
  - ✦ Heightens children's awareness of how both languages work



# Other Bengali class activities

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- ✳ Learning to read Bengali through textbooks specially created for children in the UK
  - ✳ Using interactive whiteboard to see how script is written
  - ✳ Dual-language storybooks and tapes
  - ✳ Roleplays with puppets – develops oracy
  - ✳ Shopping roleplays involving numeracy
  - ✳ Linking with curriculum topics – complements children's learning in mainstream class

# Bengali poster for Healthy Eating Week



# Children's views on using Bangla in school

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## ✦ Identity issues:

'We're going to be expressing our culture'

## ✦ Language maintenance issues:

'slowly, slowly we forget Bengali and then we will be like the English people only speaking one language'

# Language and learning: doing maths in Bangla

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- ✦ You understand more (if you use both languages)
  - ✦ It was different – in English you know what you have to do
  - ✦ We'd like to know more about Bangla numbers and operations....how to say it
  - ✦ Just liked it because it was different, liked it, liked it
  - ✦ You can learn in two different ways
  - ✦ And it's our mother tongue and we don't know much about it

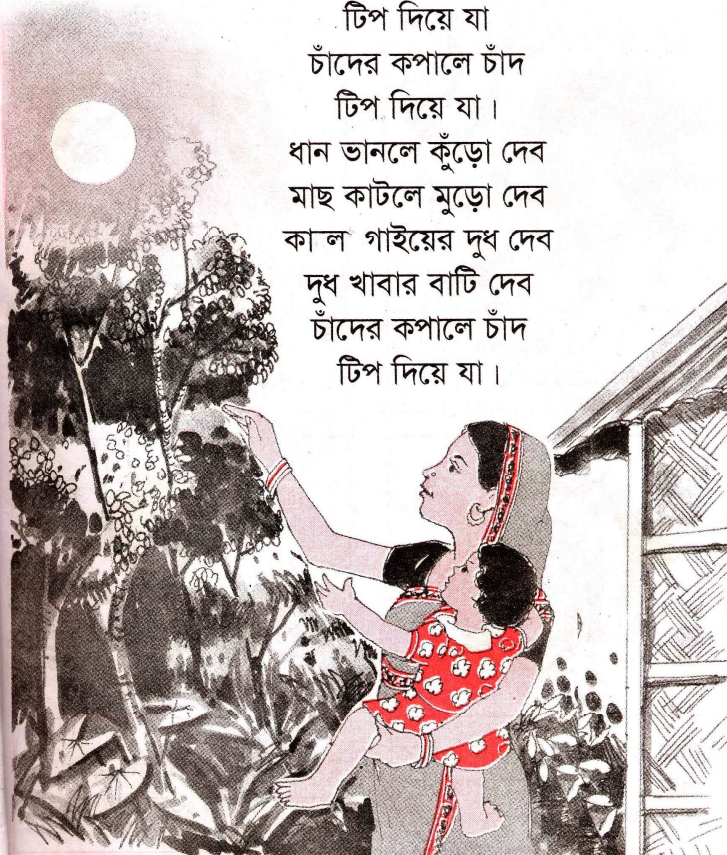
# Developing concepts in two languages: studying a *chora* (Bengali poem)

শুনি ও বলি

ছড়া

আয় আয় চাঁদ মামা

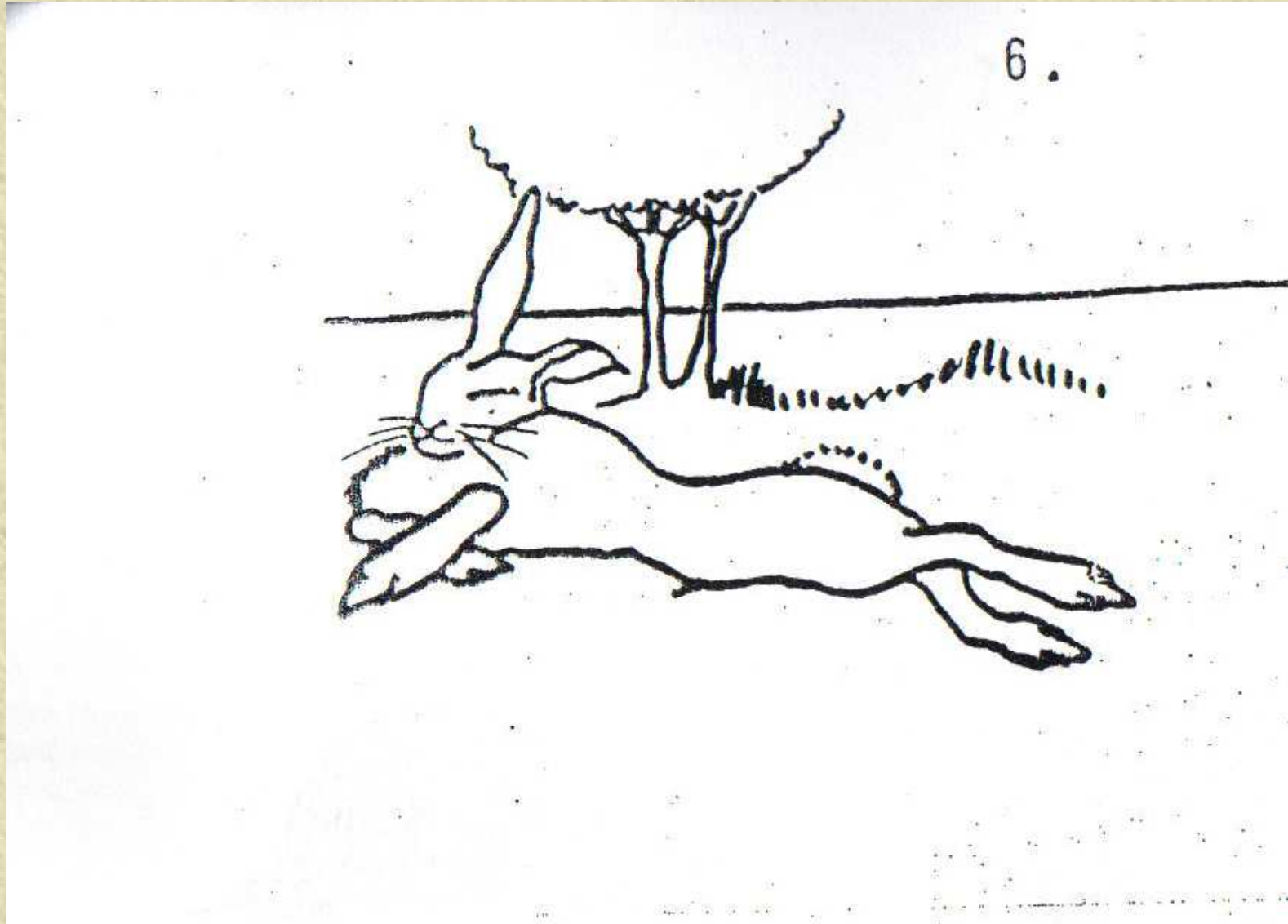
আয় আয় চাঁদ মামা  
টিপ দিয়ে যা  
চাঁদের কপালে চাঁদ  
টিপ দিয়ে যা ।  
ধান ভানলে কুঁড়ো দেব  
মাছ কাটলে মুড়ো দেব  
কাল গাইয়ের দুধ দেব  
দুধ খাবার বাটি দেব  
চাঁদের কপালে চাঁদ  
টিপ দিয়ে যা ।

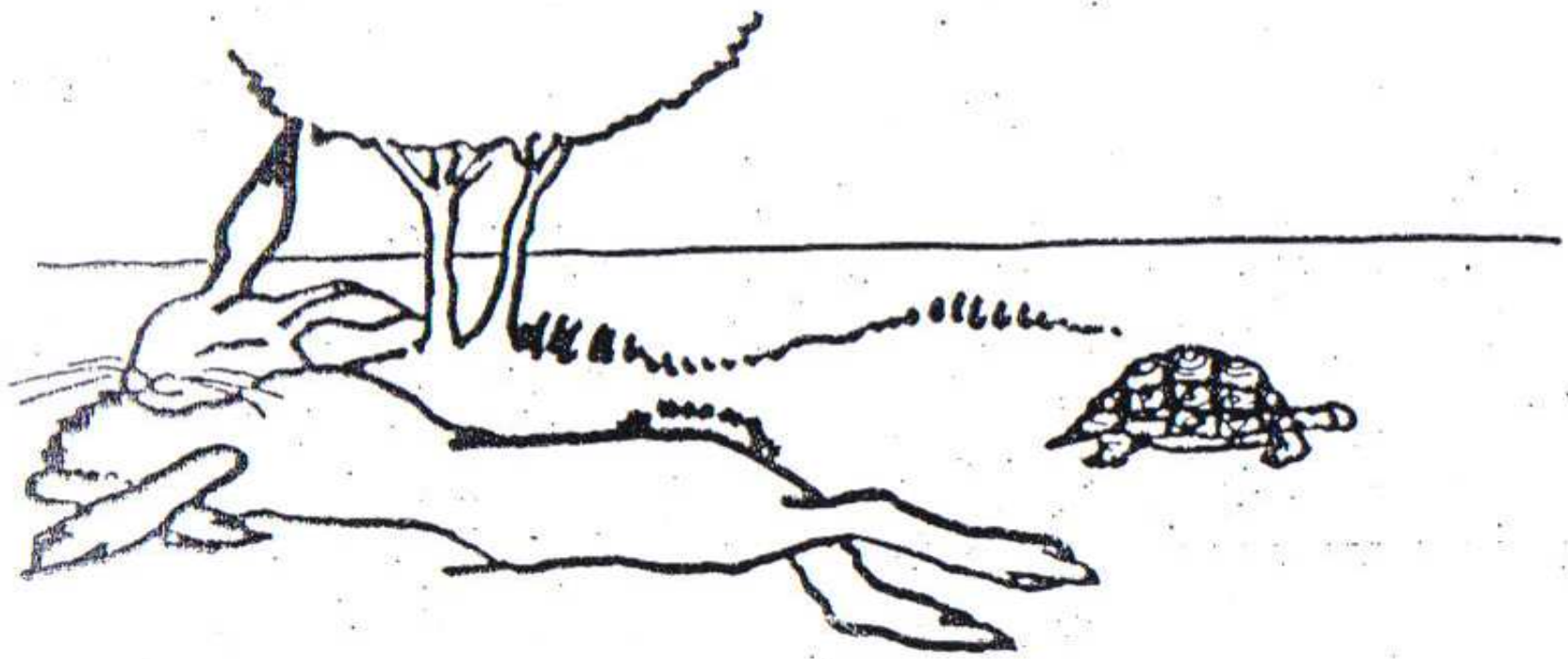


# Developing mathematical concepts in two languages

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- ✦ Fahmida's cousin is getting married and fish is being served at the wedding. Each fish feeds five people. How many fish are needed to feed twenty people?
  - ✦ Concept of *baita* (sharing) helps to understand division

# Khorgushti gobir goomey goomaya porilo

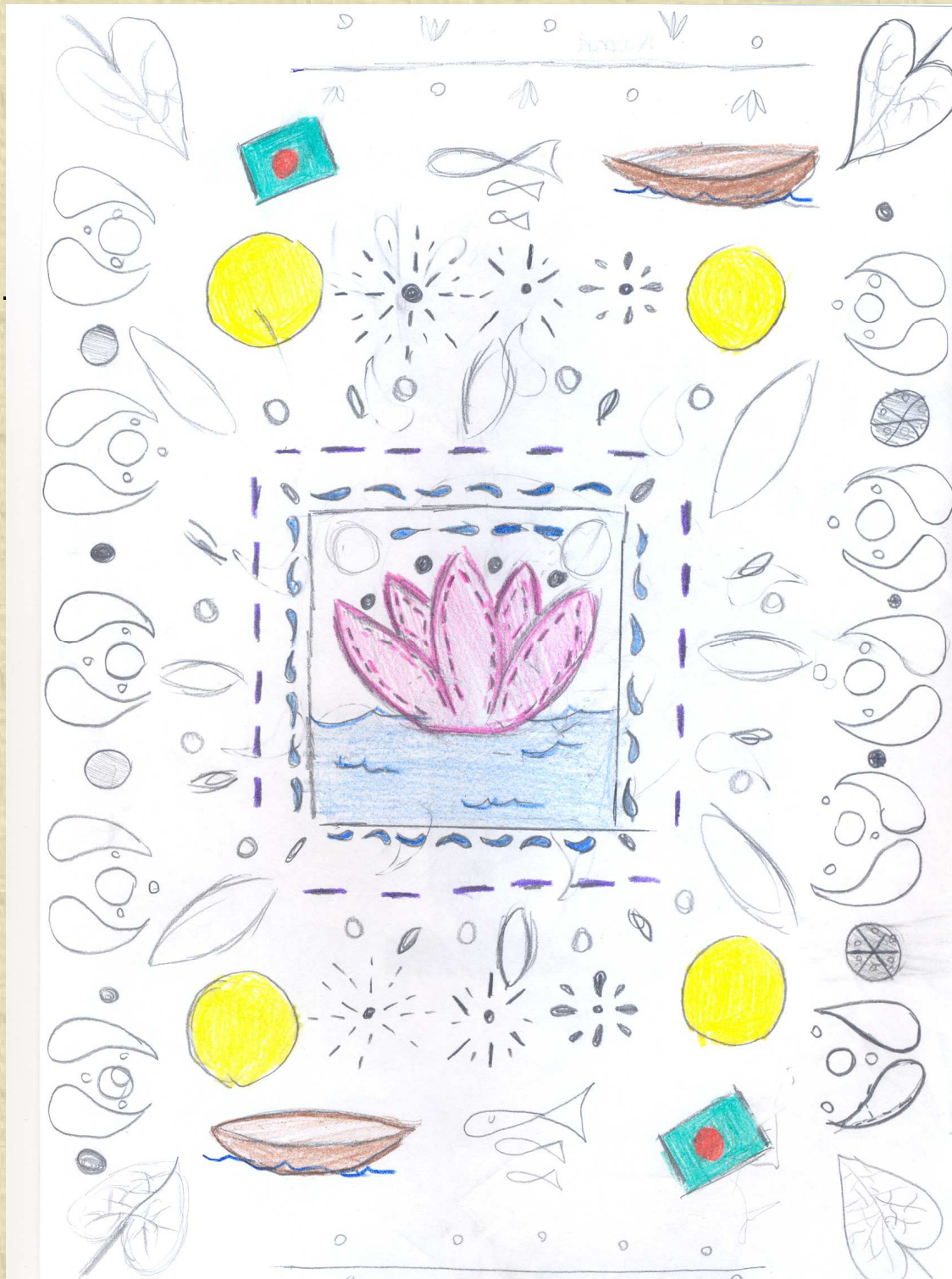






# Linking with cultural knowledge

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- ✦ Bilingual activities around the theme of Bangladeshi quilts – interview a quilt trader, design a quilt, write a piece describing it as if you were the curator of a museum



# Metalinguistic skills

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- ✦ Using phonic strategies from English to transliterate Bangla:

*'how do you spell khene?'*

*'just sound it out and....'*

- ✦ Some children decided on 'kh', others on 'k'

# Bilingual learning strategies

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- ✦ Presenting key vocabulary and structures bilingually
  - ✦ Providing bilingual resources
  - ✦ Using transliteration
  - ✦ Varying groupings so that children have opportunities to work with others sharing their language

# Collaborating with the community



- ✦ Making links with community language class teachers to work across the curriculum
- ✦ Having community language classes on site in school
- ✦ Setting up projects with parents and grandparents

# Whole-class benefits: broadening the curriculum



- ✦ Opening children's eyes to other worlds on their doorstep - linguistic knowledge and cultural understanding increases for all children

# Whole-class benefits: inclusion

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✦ *'When I used Bengali it made me feel different because it was other people's language – I didn't know it at first – when I started to try it, it made me feel a bit different'*

(a monolingual child comments on her positive feelings about working bilingually in class)

# Benefits to individual children

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The child whose English is not yet strong:

*Nusrat, Iqbal*

The child with Special Needs:

*Maryam*

The multilingual child:

*Amal*

The child doing well academically:

*Suraiya, Jameela, Shawon*



# Building children's future



- ✦ Examples of successful young people from *City Literacies* research

# The crucial role of the mainstream school in supporting language maintenance

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- ✦ 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation children in Miami are losing their Spanish competence unless they are schooled in Spanish – despite living in a substantial Latino community where Spanish is regularly used in the business and social infrastructure

(Eilers, Pearson and Cobo-Lewis, 2006)