

# EVALUATION OF THE GASCOIGNE SHPRESA PROJECT 2009

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I would like to thank the women and children who agreed to be observed and who gave such thoughtful answers to my many questions as well as the headteacher and staff of the school for facilitating the research process with such good grace in spite of the many demands on

their time. With thanks also to the late Peter Martin, who was involved at the initial stages of the research.

Raymonde Sneddon – University of East London – September 2009

*She's very clever, very, very good... I think she's more confident because of her background. She knows something about her background. She knows herself. ... I think when they know their language, they know how to write in their language, they do better in English...I personally think the club has had an impact on her. She knows her identity, she has found herself, she is more confident.*

Lala has been attending Albanian classes on a Thursday evening after school for a year. She is learning to read and write the language and practise the intricate steps of traditional Albanian dancing. Her teacher has noticed a substantial difference in her performance in class. It is comments such as the above that led to an invitation to the Cass School of Education, University of East London, to evaluate the partnership. The late Professor Peter Martin and Dr Raymonde Sneddon met in January 2008 with the headteacher and the EMA co-ordinator of the school and the Director and the Schools Project Manager from Shpresa Programme, which run the Albanian support programme in Gascoigne School.

## **1. The context**

### **1.1 The context of partnership**

Shpresa (meaning *hope* in Albanian) has been working in partnership with Gascoigne School since April 2007. The organisation developed a model of partnership which it offered to schools with substantial numbers of ethnic Albanian children. In exchange for the free use of school premises, Shpresa provides Albanian classes, games, sports and traditional dancing, in after school or week-end sessions for children. In addition to these activities the organisation provides its partnership schools with information about the Albanian community and culture. It offers workshops for parents and works to involve them in the education of their children and the life of the school. It can also provide trained Albanian volunteers to work in the school. It raises the profile and status of Albanian culture through providing children with opportunities to perform Albanian poetry, drama and dance, both within the school and in public venues. It aims to support the maintenance of the Albanian language, to improve children's attainment in their mainstream school, to improve communication within families and between parents and teachers. The combination of dance with literacy has proved popular with children and young people. Shpresa currently works with over 300 children.

Gascoigne School is a large primary school set in what was until recently a mainly white working class area, but is now very ethnically mixed. 88% of the children who attend speak English as an additional language, 25% of children are refugees and half of all children in the school are eligible for free school meals. It currently has 84 ethnic Albanian children on roll.

Families of children at Gascoigne school who attended Shpresa classes in a local community centre requested classes in their children's school as this would be more convenient for the community. They approached the headteacher who met with the director of Shpresa and agreed to a partnership for a trial period of 3 months, starting in April 2007. Shpresa set up an after school class which includes an hour of literacy

in Albanian and a very popular hour of games and lively and complex traditional dancing. It set up regular consultations with parents and ran support sessions to meet identified needs. It also provides individual support for parents if this is needed. In particular it ran the Step-by-Step parental support programme (ACE, 2004) that introduces parents into the English education system, helps them to support their children and get involved in the life of the school. It advised the school on issues of culture and language. It deployed three Albanian volunteers, training to work with children in schools. The director of Shpresa has regular meetings with the headteacher and the Ethnic Minority Achievement co-ordinator and has agreed to serve on the School's Board of Governors.

## **1.2 The context of policy and research**

There has recently been a greater acknowledgement in educational policy in the UK of the value of community languages and the complementary schools that teach them. The KS2 Framework for languages allows for the teaching of any language at KS2 and the barriers are breaking down between the traditional languages taught as Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) and community languages. The DCSF has recently supported a number of initiatives to encourage the learning of community languages. In particular it has funded the Our Languages project, managed by CILT (the National Centre for Languages, 2008a) which has supported the development of partnerships between complementary and mainstream schools. The recommended model reflects what Shpresa had already initiated in east London and the organisation was invited to submit a case study of the present partnership with Gascoigne School as an example of good practice (CILT, 2008b).

Recent research into complementary schools, the voluntary schools that teach the language and culture of their communities, has demonstrated their value in supporting the development of pupils' personal and learner identities (Martin *et al*, 2007). Recent work on the development of multiliteracy by Gregory (Gregory, 2008; Gregory *et al*, 2004) and Kenner (2004), reveals children who not only cope, but thrive, on becoming literate in languages which may be taught in very different ways in different settings. The research shows how their experiences can lead them to a deeper understanding of how their languages work and to reflect on the relationship between their languages, as the children in the present study demonstrate. Community organisations can play a key role in supporting parents to engage more successfully with their children's schools and support the school in making better use of parents' 'funds of knowledge' and expertise (Gonzalez *et al*, 1993).

The staff of Shpresa and of Gascoigne school are aware of current research. Their work individually and in partnership aims to support children to become confident bilinguals and to achieve to the best of their ability in the context of a school that values the culture and language of all children, supports their developing identities and is committed to community cohesion and social justice.

## **2. Methodology**

It was clear from the initial interviews with staff that they felt the ethnic Albanian children and the School as a whole were benefiting from the involvement of Shpresa. The study aimed to explore the impact of Shpresa on

- the achievement of Albanian speaking children in the mainstream school
- children's identity formation and cultural confidence

- parents' involvement in their children's education.

and to identify aspects of the partnership that contributed to this with a view to disseminating findings.

It is notoriously difficult to measure the impact of one particular initiative on such a complex issue as children's achievement in school as so many factors are involved. Comparative studies at a single school are particularly difficult as small numbers rarely produce statistically significant results and correlation does not prove causation. The data analysed and the observations and interviews reported below tell the story of a successful partnership between two educational establishments very committed to raising children's educational achievement.

Both **quantitative** and **qualitative** methods were applied in this study. End-of-year test results for all ethnic Albanian children from Reception to Year 6 for June 2008 were analysed and compared with results for other ethnic groups in the school. The achievement of attendees at the after-school classes was compared with the achievement of non-attendees.

Qualitative data was obtained through observations and semi-structured interviews. These were carried out with 12 children (5 girls and 7 boys aged 7 to 12), 8 mothers and 3 teachers. The children interviewed were asked about their language use and literacy experiences at home, their interests, their cultural and social life in England and Albania/Kosovo, their bilingualism and biliteracy, their life in school including friendships, interests and thoughts about their future. They completed diagrams that describe their language use in the family.

The parents (all who responded were mothers) were asked related questions about language use and literacy practices, their involvement with their children's education, their relationship with teachers and the school and their involvement with Shpresa. The teachers interviewed were asked for their impressions of the Albanian children in the school with respect to achievement and linguistic and cultural confidence. They were also asked about their relationship with the children's parents. Observations were carried out at the Shpresa classes and at public events organised by Shpresa at which the children performed.

Approval was obtained for the study from the University of East London's Ethics Committee. Information was provided to parents in both Albanian and English and written consent of parents and children was obtained for all interviews.

### **3. Summary of findings**

The quantitative and qualitative methodology was designed to test as far as possible the school's perception that their involvement with Shpresa had been beneficial, not only to children's self-esteem and confidence, but also to their academic attainment.

#### **Findings from the quantitative analysis**

The quote at the beginning of this report gives an example of teachers' perceptions of the impact of Shpresa on children. To test whether there was any measurable impact of the Albanian classes on the attainment in English of children who attended them,

the end of year results for 2007-2008 were analysed for all children. At the time of testing, in June 2008, there were 84 ethnic Albanian children in the school, of which 24 attended the Shpresa classes. Given the small numbers of children involved and the fluctuations from year to year, comparing means between groups of children was informative, but the differences are too small to be statistically significant.

A comparison was made between the two groups of children (attendees at Shpresa classes and non-attendees) using a tracking variable that measured their overall progress in English between June 2007 and June 2008 in relation to national norms (children at national norms = 2; below norms = 1; above norms = 3). While Shpresa attendees are closer to the national norm with a score of 1.70 against 1.55 for non-attendees, the result is not statistically significant.

However, comparing the ethnic Albanian children's test scores with all other significant groups in the school (White British, Black African, non-Albanian White Other), as well as whole school data and national norms, is revealing. At the end of KS1 for overall English, the Albanian children have marginally higher scores than all groups and, at 14.7, are close to the national benchmark of 15. This pattern is maintained in all years except Y5. At the end of KS2 for overall English, the Albanian children's scores are slightly higher than White British and non-Albanian White Other and similar to Black African (25.29 to 25.3 for BA); at 25.7 they are still short of the national benchmark of 27. They do, however, exceed this with a score of 28 for reading.

Given the economic status of the families and the fact that most of the Albanian children were new to English when they started in nursery, the data suggest that the children are making very rapid progress in English in the school.

### **Findings from the qualitative analysis**

The evidence regarding children's self-esteem and confidence is apparent through their own voices and they have been quoted at some length in the following sections of the report.

#### **Language and literacy**

All parents and children interviewed have testified to the great importance they place on the maintenance of the family language. Almost all the children spoke exclusively Albanian when they started in nursery. They learned English rapidly and use the language at home, alongside Albanian to their parents and, primarily, with their siblings. All children interviewed have good communicative skills in both languages.

All parents interviewed had some ABETARE materials in the home (the scheme used by Shpresa for teaching Albanian). Most families interviewed had access to satellite television and to the internet in Albanian. With respect to language use and literacy practices, the main difference between families of attendees and non-attendees is the help that attendees receive from both parents with their Albanian homework.

All families interviewed maintain contact with relatives in Albania/Kosovo and many visit regularly. This provides a reason for and an opportunity for children to maintain the use of Albanian.

### **Children's cultural confidence**

Children's confidence and pride in 'who they are' has been noted by teachers. The impact of Shpresa classes is most apparent in the way in which they talk about their bilingualism. While the data from language use and literacy experiences in the home are very similar for both groups, children's responses suggests that the children who work across languages both orally and in writing on a weekly basis have thought more deeply about their language learning and are more confident about discussing such complex issues.

While most of the Albanian children interviewed had an active and varied social life, those who attend Shpresa classes were very keen to tell the researcher about the opportunities it offered for practising skills such as traditional dances, and for participating in large-scale cultural events and public performances.

### **Children's life in school**

Children interviewed had a range of friends from different cultures. They spontaneously talked about their friends' culture and language with knowledge and respect. This came across strongly at interview as many of the children, and some of their mothers, commented on the benefits of mixing with children from different ethnic backgrounds. This suggests the school has been successful in creating a culture in which children 'know who they are' and are respectful of other children's identities.

### **Mothers' relationship with school**

All mothers interviewed were positive about the school. They appreciate the quality of education, the dedication of staff and their approachability. They are confident about talking to teachers. They have high aspirations for their children which appear realistic given the children's commitment to learning. They report that their children are settled and happy.

The women whose children attend classes have mostly attended the parental sessions run by Shpresa. They are particularly knowledgeable about how the school and the educational system operate and are very fulsome in their appreciation of the teachers' commitment to their children.

### **The impact of Shpresa**

The women whose children attend the classes and who make use of Shpresa's other services are enthusiastic about the classes, the dedication of the teacher and the support they received from the organisation in many aspects of their life in London. Several women would like their children to attend the classes but find that family and employment commitments make this difficult.

The responses of parents and children at interview suggest that Shpresa's involvement with the school has had a positive impact on children's confidence and self-esteem. The partnership appears to have raised the profile of Albanian culture. This has had an impact across the school and benefited all children not just those who attend classes. It helps to reinforce and support parents and children's commitment to education and the school's commitment to community cohesion.

## **4. The quantitative analysis**

The research question focused on whether the ethnic Albanian children who attend the Shpresa classes perform at a higher level in literacy than the Albanian children who do not. The following analysis is based on data provided by the assessment co-ordinator. This included detailed test results for all individual ethnic Albanian children as well as test results for the school as whole, analysed by ethnic group.

### **4.1 The context at end of KS2**

There are 117 children in the school in Year 6: 61 boys (52%) and 56 girls (48%). The school provides a sequence of tables that analyse the KS2 results for all children in the school. The data are analysed for reading, writing, overall English, maths and science, indicating the percentage of pupils who have achieved Level 4 and above and Level 5 and above for each of these. The same data are re-analysed by gender. For all these data, an average point score (APS) is given. The same analysis has been carried out by ethnic group. Figures are available for White British (24 children), White Other (23 children; this includes the 14 Albanian children), British Other (3 children), Pakistani (9 children), Indian (1 child) and Black Caribbean (6 children), Black/African (32 children, includes Somali children).

The KS2 Summary table shows the same percentage data on attainment compared to the Borough average and the national average for the years 2004 to 2008. The data indicate an average point score for all pupils in 2008 of 25.8, compared to the Borough average of 27.4 and the national average of 27.8. The school's score is the same as in 2004, but has declined from 26.8 in 2007. A bar chart shows the school's current ranking in the Borough and a line diagram shows the pattern over 5 years.

### **4.2 The context at end of KS1**

There are 98 pupils in Y2, 64 boys and 34 girls. The ethnic breakdown is: 30 White Other, 14 White British, 34 Black African, 5 Black Caribbean, 2 British Other and 13 Pakistani. The data are analysed for reading, writing and maths and then separately by gender.

The Key Stage 1 Summary table shows the same percentage data on attainment compared to the Borough average and the national average for the years 2004 to 2008. The data indicate an average point score for all pupils of 14.7 for 2008, compared to the Borough average of 14.9 and the national average of 15.3. The school's score has been climbing since 2004, when it was 13.9. A bar chart shows the school's current ranking in the Borough, almost at the half-way point and a line diagram shows the pattern over 5 years.

### **4.3 The Albanian children's attainment**

The test scores for Albanian children are included in the category White Other. Their test scores have been compared to the non-Albanian White Other, to White British and to Black/African, as these are the most substantial ethnic groups in the school, as well as to the scores for all children in the school.

On the KS2 data for reading, writing and maths the WO are ahead of the other two groups and level with BA for science. However on the Average Point Score they are barely ahead at 26.2, to 26.1 for BA and 24.9 for WB.

On the English APS they score 25.1, to 25.3 for BA and 24.3 for WB.

English total	Albanian mean	Albanian numbers	White Other mean	Non-AIWO mean	White British mean	Black/African mean	Whole school mean
1	8.2	13	6.7	5.1	7.3	9.1	8
<b>2</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>14.3</b>
3	16.3	21	14.3	10.4	15.1	16.7	15.5
4	19	11	16.9	15.7	15	17.5	17.3
5	21.3	6	19.7	19.2	21.2	23.2	22.2
<b>6</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>25.1</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>24.3</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>24.7</b>
Reading							
1	7.62	13	6.1	4.6	7.2	9.3	7.8
<b>2</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>14.6</b>
3	17.3	21	15.6	8.4	15.6	17.5	16.6
4	19.4	11	17.2	15.9	15.8	18.1	17.8
5	22	6	21	20.6	23.3	25.2	23.8
<b>6</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>25.9</b>
Writing							
1	8	13	7.4	6.5	7.5	8.9	8.3
<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>14</b>
3	16	21	14.8	8.9	14.7	16	14.5
4	19	11	16.7	20.6	14.3	17	16.8
5	21	6	18.6	17.9	20.2	22.1	21.2
<b>6</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>23.9</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>23.4</b>

#### 4.4 Comparing means

Given the small numbers of children involved and the fluctuations from year to year, comparing the means is informative, but the differences are too small to be statistically significant.

At the end of KS1 for overall English, the Albanian children have marginally higher scores than all groups and, at 14.7, are close to the national benchmark of 15. The differences in reading are greater than in writing. Given that, as both children and parents have reported, most of the Albanian children were new to English when they started in nursery, the data suggest that the children make rapid progress in English in the school.

The pattern is maintained in all years except Y5. At the end of KS2 for overall English, the Albanian children's scores are very slightly higher in comparison to all

groups in school but, at 25.7, they are still short of the national benchmark of 27. They do, however, exceed this with a score of 28 for reading.

#### **4.5 The Albanian children: comparing attendees with non-attendees**

Out of 84 children recorded as Albanian, 24 attend Shpresa classes. The availability of individual tests scores for all of these children enables a more sophisticated comparison to be made.

A comparison was made between attendees and non-attendees using a tracking variable that measured their overall progress in English in relation to national norms (children at national norms = 2; below norms = 1; above norms = 3).

Using an independent sample t-test, the mean tracking score for Shpresa non-attendees is 1.55 (Standard Deviation .702) and for attendees is 1.70 (Standard Deviation .876). The difference is in the right direction (Shpresa attendees are closer to the score of 2 = on track) but the result is not statistically significant (.482). Interestingly the spread of test scores is slightly wider for Shpresa attendees. A regression analysis with attendance at Shpresa, gender and school year group as variables, also failed to produce any statistically significant data.

As the figures indicated that attendance at Shpresa is lower among the older children, new variables were created to analyse the data for younger children (Y1-3) and older children (Y4-6). Given that all the children started school as new learners of English, a greater effect from Shpresa attendance with the older children would normally be expected, but the numbers are so low that it was not possible to test this hypothesis.

The analysis does suggest that, while the Albanian children are performing well in school, attendance at Shpresa has not made a statistically significant difference to their performance. However it must be borne in mind that given the fact that teaching of Albanian literacy is only one hour per week and that the classes had been running for just over a year at the point of testing, the effect would have to be exceptionally strong to register as statistically significant.

#### **4.6 Assessment effect**

In considering the data table above, it is interesting to note that the Albanian children are closest to the national norm for English overall in Years 2 (14.7 for 15) and 6 (25.29 for 27). This is even more striking for reading scores in Year 2 (15.3 for 15) and Year 6 (28 for 27) where the Albanian children exceed the national norms. There would appear to be an assessment effect. This may be random finding which will be compared with data from the 2009 tests when available. It also suggests two possibilities: that the annual internal tests may be marked more strictly than the end of KS1 and KS2 tests; or that the teachers are preparing the children for the test in a highly focused manner. It is possible that more structured teaching is supportive of the Albanian children as it may match more closely to the style of support they receive from their parents at home.

### **5. The qualitative analysis**

## 5.1 Language use and literacy practices

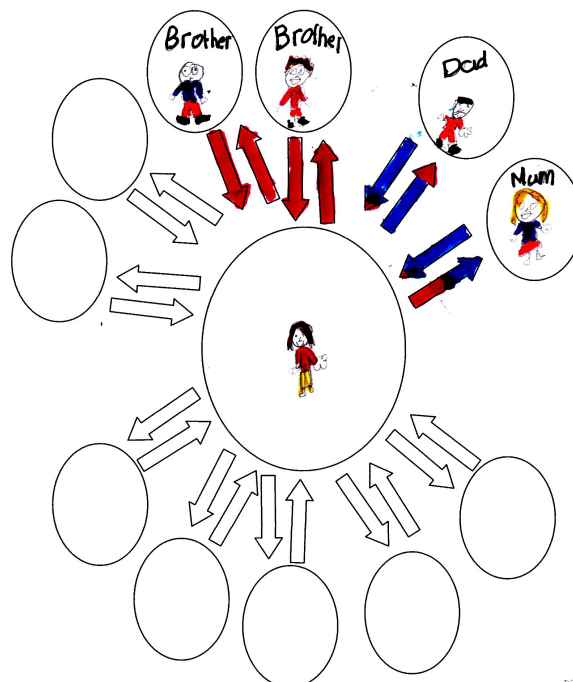
Based on the information provided by 10 children and seven women interviewed, there are great similarities in the way in which families use their languages in the home.

### 5.11 Language use at home

The families whose children attend Gascoigne School originate from both Albania and Kosovo. This is reflected in the families' speech. Although they all tend to refer to the language they speak at home as Albanian, a number of them use the Kosovan dialect in their communication with their children; standard Albanian, the language of education, is always used for literacy purposes. The term 'Albanian' is used in the following report, unless a specific point is being made about dialect use.

All mothers interviewed are very clear about the importance of ensuring that their children retain the use of Albanian in a very English dominant environment. At the point where they started in playgroup or nursery most of the children were primarily speakers of Albanian. Three of the children report learning a little English from older brothers and cousins and one child reports that her mother taught her some English at home before she started school. As the children become proficient in English at school, so they tend to use the language more at home. Both languages are spoken in the homes of all children.

Reports from both parents and children indicate that all parents speak the language to their children at home, some exclusively, even though the children commonly respond in both languages or mainly in English. The children, as many bilingual children do, tend to speak mainly English with their siblings. Leon's mother is particularly keen that Albanian should be spoken in the home, however this policy fails to have an impact on how the children speak to each other, as demonstrated by the diagram below, drawn by his 7 year old sister.



### Elina's language use diagram

The diagram above explains Elina's perception of how Albanian (in blue) and English (in red) are used within her family. The diagram shows that her parents speak entirely in Albanian to her and that she responds with more Albanian than English, but uses exclusively English with her siblings.

Miranda explains how her mother makes sure she speaks Albanian

*every time I try talking to my Mum in English, she says she doesn't understand, and she says 'speak Albanian', because she wants me to learn more Albanian.*

This strategy is confirmed by her mother: *'She would prefer to speak in English because her English is much better, you know. I try not to let her.'*

The quantity as well as the nature of the language spoken between siblings is an issue for Claudine who, when asked what she speaks with her brother, responds: *'Well, my brother likes playing on his Nintendo a lot, so I don't really get time to talk with him.'*

Both mothers and children refer to children asking their parents for explanations of unfamiliar words in Albanian. Several children describe this as a two-way process by which they, in turn, help their parents with explanations in English. One mother mentions that issues of grammatical gender in Albanian pose particularly difficulties for her son who frequently makes gender errors.

The children's responses make it clear that they themselves as well as their parents value the ability to speak Albanian. Arian explains why his parents think learning Albanian is important

*because it's our culture and sometimes they say, and when we go to Kosovo for holidays, and we have all these relatives and we have to learn to speak proper Albanian, because our relatives in Kosovo, they don't know how to speak English.*

Almost all mothers interviewed gave the need to be able to speak to relatives as the greatest incentive to maintain use of the language.

Arian is the only child in the sample who raises the issue of Kosovan dialect. He explains

*Albanian is a language where it's all mixed up, because sometimes we say Serbian words and Turkish words and ... Because once my Grandma said 'pass me a plate' but she said the word plate in Serbian, so I didn't know what she meant and I didn't know what to bring and then my Mum told me what she meant.*

He gives this as a reason for not wishing to attend the Albanian classes, although he knows his parents would like him to. His mother is aware of his reluctance but feels that he would adjust readily. He, however, is concerned that he might have difficulties with the standard language and that he might feel embarrassed.

### 5.12 Children's literacy experiences at home

Talking to parents in a range of contexts it is clear that finding literature for children in Albanian in England is very difficult. Two mothers have mentioned bringing some books back from Albania when the family went on holiday. None have been able to find children's books in London shops and Shpresa has confirmed that this is a major difficulty. As a result both parents and children in the present study have valued the dual language books that many of the children brought home from school when they were young.

Geni explains how he uses a dual language book with his mother

*... the other book was a book with English and Albanian. It helps you from Albanian to English. My Mum doesn't know, she doesn't know that much English. She knows lots of Albanian but not English that much and sometimes she uses that book and it says a word in Albanian and there's another word in English. She reads the word in English and then she gets it.*

Monica also describes

*In my school library I found a book a book called the Pied Piper and it was English and it was Albanian. So you could learn Albanian and you could learn more English. I read it to my Mum then I get my Mum to read English, because she's not that good at English. I read Albanian to her and she reads English to me and I ask my Mum 'what does this word mean?' and she's, like, 'look at the bottom because it's got translations'.*

All the children interviewed speak good English in the style of the children in their environment. Several use this skill to support parents. Vanessa describes how she helps her mother who is studying English at college:

*my Mum goes to, like, a school, college, and she learns more English because she don't know, like, much, and then when she comes home there is a paper that she has to write. And I have to help her and she does like a spelling test in English. So I read out the words and she has to write them and she checks them, makes sure she got right.*

While parents do not generally have access to children's books in Albanian, almost all mothers and children, when asked if they have children's books in Albanian, mention ABETARE. This is an Albanian scheme for teaching children which is used in the Albanian classes. It includes children's stories and poems. It is interesting that even those families whose children do not attend the Albanian classes have those materials at home. Neither Miranda nor Arian attend Shpresa classes, but Miranda is learning the alphabet with her mother and Arian is teaching himself, both using the ABETARE materials. Claudine has also been learning from Abetare with her mother and has recently joined the Albanian class.

Miranda: *'I have this ABETARE and there's words in it and it learns me and I have to read it every day, so I understand words.'*

A number of mothers report that they or their husbands read stories to the children in both Albanian and English, though they tended to do this when the children were younger. The children confirm this as well as the fact that the short stories and poems are part of the ABETARE materials.

In addition to informal story reading, the children who attend the Albanian class have homework and all have been given ABETARE materials to work from. Most parents help their children with this. Geni explains that, as well as helping with homework, his father helps him to read the more difficult stories from the scheme.

Story telling when the children were young is mentioned by several mothers. Vanessa reports that story telling is an ongoing event in her family. She enjoys the many tales her mother tells about her own childhood and the family in Kosovo. Her mother explained at some length that she had a difficult childhood as her parents were subsistence farmers, but she has many stories to tell about their strength and ingenuity and life on a small farm. Xhuli's mother told stories to the children when they were young, learning the art from her father who delighted the children with tales and poems when he visited them in England.

Several of the children mentioned audio and visual media. Many families have access to satellite television in Albanian. As well as listening to Albanian stories on audio cassettes, Vanessa watches Albanian junior television on a Sky channel. She also watches foreign films and explains that she can press a button to choose the language in which they are subtitled: *'at the bottom, it's translated in Albanian, but normally the sentences are turned around because Albanian and English, they're not connected, as I said.'* Several mothers reported that children ask questions about titles and sub-titles and manage to read a little in this way.

While Franc is not very interested in becoming literate in Albanian, the family use the internet to communicate in Albanian with relatives in Kosovo and he occasionally attempts to write a few words with help from his father.

While the only children who are learning to read are those who attend the Shpresa classes, all the children interviewed, whether through ABETARE materials or visual media, are familiar with the Albanian alphabet. Several of them spontaneously explained to me the differences between the Albanian and English alphabets. Lorent explains that, because the letters are very similar, you can learn them easily and *'just use them. Different ones, I just try to sound them'*. Geni appreciates the regularity of spelling in Albanian and makes it sound very easy *'you have to learn the other letters, how it works, some of them, and then you're perfect at reading.'*

### **Comparing groups:**

From the reports of children and their mothers on language use in the home, there does not appear to be much difference between families of attendees and non-attendees. All the children can communicate in some respect in Albanian and all families are concerned to maintain the use of the language.

All the children interviewed have access to some literacy materials in Albanian in the home, mainly from the ABETARE literacy scheme, and there is little difference between the groups with respect to materials available.

There is, however, a difference in literacy input as the children who attend the Shpresa classes receive help from both mothers and fathers with their homework and are more likely to receive help in reading short stories.

## 5.2 The children's social life in England and Albania/Kosovo

### 5.21 Children's interests and social life

The children's interests and social life are as varied and individual as those of most east London children. The children who attend the Shpresa classes are all occupied on a Thursday evening and most of them participate in concerts and public performances as well as family events at which they meet other Albanian speaking children, events that take up quite a bit of their time. However they still find time, like Leon and Vanessa, for drama classes. Vanessa is a bookworm and likes visiting the library to pursue her interests in science and art. Leon is enthusiastic about all the new opportunities offered in the top stream of his secondary school and is planning to take up Latin as an extra interest. All of the children enjoy talking about their interests but none of these, among the children interviewed, had yet crystallised into definite plans for the future.

The children who do not attend Shpresa have a little more disposable time. Arian is well informed and passionate about the environment. He is a voracious reader who prefers to spend the evening with a book rather than pursuing outside interests. However he does aim eventually for a very public career

*Because I'm born in England, I'm going to be an English Prime Minister, but if I was born in Kosovo I would have been a Kosovan Prime Minister.... So I'm thinking of being Prime Minister so I can tell everyone around the world to stop things like global warming and that's the main reason.*

Armando is under pressure from his mother to start thinking about his intended career before he starts secondary school. He likes a wide range of subjects in school. His hobbies include football, going to the park with his friends and to parties. He loves watching his father repair motor bike engines '*and I watched him and I picked up how to fix it*' and thinks that if he doesn't go into business he might like to be a mechanic.

Claudine is pragmatic: '*I want to be an artist when I grow up, I like it because I'm good at drawing, but have another job.*'

Miranda would like to be 'loads of things', like a cook, a dancer or a footballer. Others enjoy 'making things', playing tennis, swimming, going to ballet, tap-dancing and singing classes, would like to learn more languages, look after animals.

It is in talking to the children's mothers that one realises that many of these activities are dependent on parents having the time to take their children to clubs after school or ferry them to events at the week-end. One mother in particular, who was qualifying as an accountant, regretted that she worked long hours and could not take her daughter to the many activities that took her interest. This situation contrasts with the social opportunities offered to the children on visits to Albania or Kosovo.

## 5.22 Visits to Albania/Kosovo

Once families had received leave to remain in the UK and the political situation was safe, they were able to visit relatives in Albania or Kosovo. Maintaining this contact has been particularly important to families in England as many left reluctantly and in traumatic circumstances.

All of the children have visited either Albania or Kosovo, some many times, during the summer holidays. All of the mothers and most of the children mention that one of the most important reasons for being able to speak Albanian is to be able to communicate with family in the home country. Conversely, putting the children regularly in a situation in which they have access to other children and are obliged to communicate in Albanian is a very effective way of improving their fluency in the language.

Most of the children are pleased to find that they can communicate well when they find themselves in a situation where it is essential. Several of the mothers have noted how fluent their children become after a few days in the country. Arian's mother comments

*When we go there, my parents say, why are you saying that he doesn't speak much Albanian? As soon as we go there they change, they switch. So they immediately turn to the Albanian language. They speak fluently, maybe not that fluently, but, that's what my parents say, that they speak fluently Albanian.*

Only two children mention some difficulty in speaking Albanian: Armando reports he is not good at it and finds it boring to have to keep trying. Leon finds he can manage reasonably but lacks some basic vocabulary. His mother sends him to the shops to develop his confidence in speaking with strangers. While Arian feels he can generally communicate well, he experienced some difficulty with what he describes as 'words from other languages'. Three of the children mention that being fluent in English makes them popular as some of their cousins are learning English at school and they enjoy teaching them some English.

Claudine reports visiting very regularly. She mentions the specific friends that she looks forward to seeing in the summer and has favourite places:

*I would like to be good at Albanian because I might want to teach my kids when I grow up, Albanian as well. I might take them for a holiday there and take them to different places. To a little beach, it's a really nice place. It is safe because it (the water) is only up to here on me.*

Young children living in the London area can be very restricted in their opportunities to play out of doors as their parents worry about safety. The children interviewed all enjoy visiting their family's home country. They particularly mention the greater freedom they have, the opportunity to play with cousins, to stay out much later at night, to bathe in much warmer seas and to attend family events such as weddings. Franc explained that he feels really happy in Kosovo and that he plans to return to live there when he has finished his schooling in London.

Arian, while equally enjoying his stay, has been struck by the devastation caused by the war and describes this in some detail:

*There's some farmland and a lot of really poor places with, like, sometimes the electricity, there's power cuts and sometimes, I mean the electricity comes back on. And in lots of places there are, like, places where there are these TVs that don't really work very well all the time. And there's also a place, places where people, there are ruins from a house and people built a small house next to it.*

### **Comparing groups:**

With respect to visits to Albania and Kosovo or their language use when they go there, there is little difference to report between the two groups of children. Both groups include one child who reports some problems with fluency in Albanian. But both the children and their mothers' comments suggest that they are able to communicate effectively.

There are some substantial differences in the social lives of the children in England between the two groups. While most of the children have formal and informal activities with friends after school, the fact of attending a class every Thursday evening means that the attendees have more opportunity to meet regularly with other Albanian speakers, to practise traditional games and dances and to participate in public performances.

## **5.3 Children's bilingualism, biliteracy and cultural identity**

### **5.31 Benefits of bilingualism**

The question about their bilingualism was deliberately designed to provoke the children into thinking about their two languages together. To the question 'some people think that speaking two languages makes you clever. How do you feel about being bilingual?' the children made very varied responses, all of which are quoted below. Some were brief and prompted the children to think about language learning in general, some were much more complex.

Miranda, who does not attend Shpresa classes, thought carefully and seemed to agree. She responded: *'fine, good'* and then proceeded to describe to me the boards on which Language of the Month resources are displayed in her school:

*At school we have a display and sometimes when we have half-term, the teacher turns it into a different language, so we can learn more languages, like Spanish. And my Mum knows some languages, as well 'bona serra' is Italy.*

Franc, who does not attend the classes either, initially mumbles a response and when pressed says: *'it's like, if I need to say something in private, I can go on speaking my language.'* He could spot the benefit of having an alternative code and being able to have a private conversation with other Albanian speakers. In an attempt to get him to think about his two languages together I asked if he sometimes translated for people, but he did not think he had ever been asked to do this.

Armando attended Shpresa classes for part of the year 2007-2008 but left in July 08. He also needed prompting about the question and replied *'No, I've never thought about that'*. After a further prompt, he responded *'Actually, I think, if you know two languages it's pretty good because if somebody's talking, you'll understand. And that's pretty much.'* Armando seems to be referring to the benefit of being able to

understand people in two different contexts, which is obviously a benefit in his community.

Arian, who has indicated that he does not want to go to Albanian classes, was inclined to give a lot of thought to most questions and gave a sophisticated and well reasoned response : *'I'm not sure that, I'm not really sure that's true, because some people who can speak one language could be even more clever than one that speaks two languages. Because maybe someone can speak a little bit of one language and a little bit of the other, some other person can speak only one language but they're really good at that, at one language.* Upon being pressed about whether it makes any difference to him personally to be able to speak two languages, he responds *'no, not really, no.'*

Claudine, who has recently started the Albanian classes, reflects on the process of learning and how changes in context can affect recall

*'I think the more you learn one language, the more better you get. Like, if I didn't know Albanian and I kept learning Albanian, I start learning, I, like, get it more in to my head, like, more words I know and then I, um... once when I came back from our holidays, before I went to Year 4, after the Summer holidays I forgot all the English words, I forgot, like the long words, because I was learning too much Albanian.'*

Monica explains *'I quite like being, speaking two languages because it makes you quite different and you stand out from the rest, and I'm trying to go for French as well.*

Vanessa seemed very proud of her bilingualism and explained that it made her feel *'quite special. Because some people only speak English and they want to try and speak other languages but they can't, like, do the accent, and they can't really pronounce it properly'*. She goes on to explain the relationship between her languages: *'They're structured the same way but some of the sentences are, one word could be before the other one and it could still make sense in Albanian.'*

To Leon, who had just started secondary school, the matter seemed self evident and, unlike Arian, he seemed in no doubt about the cognitive benefits of multilingualism *'There's, like, lots of people that know more than one language that are in the top set. I'm in the top set for all my subjects'*. He is learning French and has been invited to join the Latin class. *'If you know more than one language, if you have a job that you have to go abroad it will be easier for you to communicate with people'* and with respect to Albanian in particular he comments *'it's important to learn and speak and write your own language. You might have to go back to your own country and, if you haven't learned it, like, it would be hard for you to adjust.'* A little older than most of the other children he has started to consider the practical benefits for his future.

Lorent is in no doubt that this is no problem. He finds it easy to switch from one to the other *'you just say it. Change straight away, like'*. While Xhuli says it feels good to know two languages, he adds, *'it's difficult... you can't learn two languages at the same time'*, but, frustratingly, he declined to elaborate.

A further question to encourage children to think about the relationship between their languages ('do you think that learning Albanian helps or not with learning English?') prompts some further thinking about how it feels to be living in two languages. The children are very clear about the importance of English: *'English, you live in it, you have to speak it every single day'*. Vanessa explains that you wouldn't understand anything in school if you weren't good at it.

Geni is exploring the complex relationship between language, culture and context and tells me

*'I do think if you know two languages you can learn more stuff about two languages and you have to use your brain even more. Because you have two languages and you have two rules. Like two types of rules, the Albanian rules and English rules. And if one rules says, um, eat at night time and if the English rules says, um, eat lunch-time and eat breakfast at lunch, at night and the Albanian rules says eat lunch at day time. It will be a little bit complicated. Then you have to do both of them at the same time. It's about the rules. A little bit complicated how you think about different things'*.

He goes on to explain that he's not sure about it making you more clever, but, like, Leon and Armando, he sees the practical value of being able, for example, to communicate with and help children new to the school who can't speak English and to help the teacher who can't speak Albanian, *'then you can just go up to them and tell them what the teacher is saying in English in Albanian'*.

The children have engaged with the question in very different and personal ways. Several of the children saw the practical benefits of bilingualism and Vanessa and Leon in particular were proud of their bilingual status. While Arian considered the logical implications of my question and gave a very considered answer, it is Claudine and Geni who thought deeply about the issue and struggled to express the complexity of their personal experience of language use in its cultural context. Xhuli, the lowest achiever in the group according to his test scores, is the one who suggested *'...it's difficult.'*

### **Comparing groups**

While the data from language use and literacy experiences in the home are very similar for both groups the children's responses to the question about their bilingualism suggests that some of the children who attend Shpresa and work across their languages both orally and in writing on a weekly basis have thought more deeply about the relationship between their languages and the ways in which they learn them and that this gives them more confidence in discussing such complex issues.

### **5.32 Becoming biliterate at Albanian school**

Observing the children's concentration and involvement in the Albanian reveals a lot about their commitment to it (observation notes are included in Appendix A). Claudine, who joined the class in its second year, explains:

*I think it's great, because it teaches you more Albanian that you don't actually understand that much. And it makes you learn more and then you can communicate with your family in Albania.*

They express appreciation for the careful explanations and comment on the way their work is marked and how this helps them to progress. Vanessa describes:

*Our teacher writes sentences and then we copy them in our workbook. She first makes sure we know what the words mean. If we don't know we put our hand up and say we don't know and then she explains it and then, when we know every single word, we write them in our text books, these books that we write in. Then she checks them and we come and we check the marks she has written in them, to try and improve them. And we get certificates that we have been a good pupil, a bad pupil, and it says all the hard things we've done and ... I still have my old one.*

However it is clear from talking to Armando that he is less keen than the others to speak Albanian. He attended (a little erratically) the Albanian school in the first year but explained that he had to go elsewhere on a Thursday evening and, while he said the school was 'OK', he did not like the games and dancing. Later in the interview he suggests he knows everything he feels he needs to know about Albanian:

*I wanted to leave because they taught me, like, half of the stuff that I needed to know. I knew how to speak, I knew the places in Kosovo and Albania, I knew the flag and what's happening there and I know nearly half of the stuff.*

### **5.33 Children's expressions of personal identity and culture**

All of the children when asked about their interest in Albanian and British culture, expressed in various ways their allegiance to both in varying degrees. Typical responses include 'I'd actually say I was born in England but my background is Kosovan'. 'I feel like, I would say both, because I was born in England but my parents are from Albania and Kosovo. I kind of feel Albanian more, but same with England.' 'I would say that I'm Albanian and English. I'm mixed like that, I know both languages.' 'I'm, like, Albanian, like my cousins and everything, but I like England because it's better, bigger.' Franc explains that he is British-Albanian, but does not elaborate; however his intention to move to Kosovo as an adult suggests a deep attachment to Kosovan culture.

In the same way as there was little difference between the groups in their use of Albanian in the home or in their literacy experiences in the language, there is little difference in the way in which they express their feeling about their biculturalism, and none of them chose to elaborate.

### **Comparing groups**

Where a difference becomes very apparent between the groups is in the way they talk about their hobbies and interests. The children who do not attend mentioned their interests, but did not go into much detail about their involvement. All of the children are aware of the importance of dancing in their culture, both from their holidays in Albania and from attending performances in England. Interestingly Arian connects his two cultures in relation to folk dancing:

*I'm not very good at it, but I just know some of the basic steps. This, kind of, it's, there's a kind of music, traditional music, and it kind of sounds like, it sounds a little bit like traditional English music.*

Miranda mentions attending a wedding in Albania at which *'people started dancing, so I followed the feet.'* She would like to learn but the time of the classes does not suit her mother's working hours.

The children who do attend become really animated when talking about dancing and performing and the special social significance that it has. Leon and Vanessa were thrilled to have the opportunity to dance and recite poetry on stage with microphones.

*If we go on a concert, says Vanessa, it feels like you're going on TV and being, like, popular. My friends, like, say 'I want to go to the concert, I want to do that!' And one day we went to this big concert and we had to held up our flag, because we went London and we had to held up our flag and sometimes people took photographs and put them in the newspapers.*

Lala tells how, since coming to the classes, the very disciplined dancing *'came up in my brain and I know how to do it!'*

They explain that there is more to dancing than just feeling like a television star. Vanessa and Monica explain the cultural importance of being able to hold their own at community weddings. Weddings in Albania are very much focused around a large party with music, explains Monica *'it's very important so you'll know how to dance in an Albanian wedding. You can't just stand still and think, what are they doing?'* Vanessa and her friend went to her sister's wedding and *'me and her, we were practising a dance and we done it in front of the stage and everyone was clapping and cheering'.*

Claudine has only recently joined the Albanian class and is just beginning to learn dance steps. She is looking forward to performing in public like the others in a stage production of Little Red Riding Hood in Albanian. She had been to Albanian concerts but had not yet performed in one.

### **5.34 Women and the Shpresa classes**

All the women interviewed are aware of the work of Shpresa and the organisation's involvement in the school. Of the women interviewed whose children are currently non-attendees, only one has indicated that her children show no interest in developing literacy in Albanian. Two others would like their children to attend, but Miranda's mother's working hours do not allow her to take her and Arian is not keen because of his fear that, as a speaker of Kosovan, he would find standard Albanian difficult. Armando dropped out of the Albanian class after one year.

The women whose children currently attend are very enthusiastic although several of them have mentioned that they feel one hour of language instruction is not sufficient. Khuli's mother would like classes to be twice a week, or perhaps a whole day as on the Mayfield site. Her children enjoy the classes, both the literacy and the dancing and are keen to join in all Shpresa activities for young people.

Claudine's mother enrolled her children at Shpresa in September 2008 and tells how both her children love the classes. She feels that the class needs more than one teacher:

*They are very very good at writing. Because they do not have a lot of time. I think that people who teach them are not enough, in my opinion. Sometimes children need more. There are not enough workers. They try to do everything. It's very hard for her. Maybe one helper or something like that.*

She explains that she didn't want to start her younger son at classes last year because of a language delay. However, now that he has joined she is thrilled to find him progressing and bursting to tell her what he has learned when he gets home.

Leon's family have recently moved away from Barking. But they greatly value the Shpresa classes and travel by bus from Dagenham to bring the children on Thursday evenings. Leon's mother values the classes:

*They are very good. The teacher explains very well. My children say they are very happy to come here. They say always, we learn this, and this, we learn this, when they come at home. It would be very good to have a certificate and to do an exam.*

Vanessa's mother is also very keen for her children to attend the Shpresa classes and learn Albanian. She thinks some of the children are forgetting their Albanian because parents' don't speak it enough in the home and this makes the Albanian teacher's job difficult. She thinks the teachers are very experienced and work very hard for the benefit of the children.

She goes on to explain the important role that Shpresa has played in her life, how she received help with all aspects of organising her life in Britain as well as learning how to support her children in school. Thanks to them she has learned to read and write some English. She is very appreciative of how hard the Shpresa staff work to help people.

### **Comparing groups**

The women who go to a lot of trouble to bring their children out again in the evening for 5 o'clock and see them enjoying the classes and excited about their learning are full of praise and in no doubt that the classes have a big impact on their children. They have also appreciated the advice they have received with respect to supporting their children's education.

## **5.4 Children and parents in Gascoigne School**

### **5.41 The children's voice**

When asked about their life in school and how they are getting on, most children indicate that they are pleased with their progress.

It may be because the focus of my interviews is on Albanian that they respond with a great deal of talk about languages, but it could also be that there is a strong culture of multilingualism within the school. For example, when asked about their friends and whether they speak Albanian with any of them, many of them list the languages or countries or origin of their friends and several mention the benefits of this. Arian:

*it is really a good thing that other people from other countries, if everyone was from the same country in this school and they had all completely the same background .. if I, maybe sometime, went to some other people from a different background, I'd find it really hard to get along with them... most of the people in Kosovo are, and in Albanian classes, are just Albanian. And I think, um, when my Mum and Dad were little, they had classes that had all Albanian people.*

The children mention speaking Albanian in school with close friends, but all the children had a range of friends. Claudine had a close friend in her class with whom she spoke Albanian but she informs me her other friends speak Arabic and Nigerian. Similarly Vanessa mentions that her friends speak Turkish, Russian, Kosovan and Albanian and that one comes from Barbados and Franc also mentions a friend who speaks Portuguese, and others who come from Italy and Pakistan and he mentions that *'sometimes they teach me some words'*.

Armando does not speak Albanian to his friends in school and explains that this is because many of his friends come from Africa (he mentions specifically that they speak 'Congolese') and Italy or China. Later in the interview he adds *'It's a useful thing to have friends from countries because they, like, tell me what's that in their language as well... but I mostly forget what they ask me.'*

Several of the children have mentioned teaching each other words in their language and this may be an effect of using the Language of the Month project. This is mentioned spontaneously by a number of children who tell me that they know some Spanish, Turkish or French and some try a few phrases. One remembered when Albanian was the language of the month and hoped it would come round again soon. Several of the children have mentioned that the headteacher and their own class teacher have asked them questions about their country and language and asked to be taught a few words. Claudine mentions that her teacher chivvies the class on with *Speyt! Speyt!* (quick) in Albanian. The interest of the children in languages, and the way they talk with respect about other languages and countries suggests that the school has created a strong multicultural and multilingual ethos and a culture of respect.

#### **5.42 The mothers' voice**

On the issue of language use in the family, the women interviewed were very committed to maintaining their children's use of spoken Albanian. The comments they made about this very much matched what their children reported. Not all were equally committed to developing their children's literacy, though almost all had some literacy materials at home and many had taught their children the basic Albanian alphabet. Those who had enrolled their children in the classes were particularly keen on a higher standard of spoken Albanian as well as the development of literacy. Xhuli's mother explains this: *I just speak with them in my language at home, you know, but they listen more to the teacher and she explains better and she teaches them to read and write.*

#### **5.43 Relationships with Gascoigne School**

A Shpresa teacher explained the value Albanian refugees placed on education: *'We will starve ourselves for education. We wear second hand clothes to pay for a private tutor if our children need it.'*

All women interviewed valued the education offered to their children. The support offered to parents by Shpresa, in groups and individually, was reinforced by school initiatives to improve parental participation. Advice was offered to parents of bilingual children on how to help their children with homework. All teachers and senior school staff are available in the playground at the beginning and the end of the school day to facilitate informal contact.

While several women report a lack of confidence in contacting teachers and difficulties in the past with communication, all those interviewed now feel that they can approach teachers readily. They know the procedure for making appointments and they particularly appreciate the ease with which they can talk informally to a teacher when they bring the children to school. Not only do they attend formal parents' meetings, but they are proactive in approaching teachers.

All women interviewed praised the school as a good or very good school. Several were particularly appreciative of the staff and their dedication to supporting the children. *'I'm happy, because the staff here are very good'* reported the mother of a lower achieving child. Another gave as an example her older children's high level of achievement at secondary school as evidence for the good grounding they had received at Gascoigne.

Two women reported some difficulties in the past with teachers who they felt had not addressed concerns they had about their children. She comments *'But if something like that happens now I would straight away talk to the headteacher or one of them.'* She feels confident now in her relationship with the school and feels it is very positive.

Several women mention the value given to Albanian culture in the school. Claudine's mother appreciates the way in which all children's cultures are valued and the very positive way in which the children from different backgrounds interact at school.

Two women had been unsure about bringing up their children to be bilingual and were very reassured by both the advice from Shpresa and the teachers' encouragement to speak Albanian to their children at home. Another loved the dual language books that the teacher in the nursery sent home for her to read to her children. Leon's mother had a great deal to say about the teaching staff:

*They are very good, yeah. This school is very good. And the teachers are very good. They behave very politely to parents. When I ask them about my children, they explain and they talk about my children. I ask them about behaviour, about teaching, about reading. The teachers are always polite. And when we ask something they are ready to give the answer.*

She specifically mentions the headteacher

*He's very, very good. I used to live opposite this school. I see Mr Garton every time he comes and goes in the holidays. I see him talk to children, work with them. He's very good. He works hard, very hard.... I think, it's*

*much better than many schools... It is very good. Because in this area there are a lot more people than in other areas that are Albanian. So it's very good...Our children make progress. They are learning very well.*

Vanessa's mother is equally full of praise:

*For three years, my two girls have gone to Gascoigne and are very happy. The staff work very hard for the children. I'm very happy with the teachers. They are very, very, very good teachers. Good teachers for teaching my girls, for everything. I'm very, very happy. I have never had a problem with the children's school. Never. My girls are very friendly.*

She attends all parents' evenings and finds the headteacher 'very, very nice'. She mentions that getting involved with the school has led her to make friends with parents from different backgrounds.

Claudine's mother reports:

*I had lots of problems last year with A. I tried talking to his teacher, to the headteacher. At least I am very pleased with his teacher, she finds ways with Adonis, to settle him down, getting him to work. He is very hard character, very strong. And she did very well. I'm very pleased with her. She finds ways of making him enjoy school.*

### **Comparing groups**

The women are all appear equally happy with the quality of education that their children receive and their relationship with the school. In each group there was one woman who had experienced difficulties in the past and had not felt confident pursuing the issue. Women in both groups referred to the respect shown for their culture in school.

The women whose children attend classes have mostly attended the parental sessions run by Shpresa. They are particularly knowledgeable about how the school and the educational system operate and are very fulsome in appreciation of the teachers' commitment to their children.

#### **5.44 Women's aspirations for their children**

The women's own experiences of education have been varied, but, for most, the move to Britain and the difficulties of learning a new language have meant that, while most have taken the opportunity to study, few have been able to realise their personal ambitions. They are keen for their children to achieve at a higher level.

All but one of the women mentioned university level study for their children. These ambitions appear realistic given the children's commitment to learning. Miranda's mother's response is very typical *'the first thing, is to study at least up to degree level. And then they are able to choose for themselves, whatever else they have the ability to do.'* She herself is the only one among the women interviewed who has a degree from a London University and is studying for a professional qualification. The women seem to have realistic expectations for their children. The one who did not mention degree level study is the mother of the child with below average test results in reading. Several of the women mention their children's out-of-school interests and are proud of older children's abilities in music, dance and art.

### 5.5 The teachers' voice

Both the headteacher and the EMA co-ordinator had been impressed by the impact that the involvement of Shpresa appeared to have on children's cultural confidence and achievement in school. Teachers interviewed about their impressions of the Albanian children comment on the children's language skills and their cultural confidence.

A KS1 teacher, quoted at the beginning of this report, offers Jonida as an example of what she considers to have been the impact of Shpresa on Albanian children in the school:

*She's very clever, very, very good... I think she's more confident because of her background. She knows something about her background. She knows herself. ... All the Albanian children, they are all willing to learn. They are very willing. They want to learn. But this one is more confident because she goes to the after school club. She's really good, she's very serious... When we do something in class, she'll go back home and research on that and bring it back to me. ... She'll actually go on the internet, research and type it and bring it to class... I think when they know their language, they know how to write in their language, they do better in English... I personally think the club has had an impact on her. She knows her identity, she has found herself, she is more confident. Though I don't know what they do in there, because I've not witnessed it. When we do the Diversity Week the Albanians perform in assembly.*

She offers another example of an enthusiastic learner:

*Last year I had a child who came to my class Working Towards Level 1. By the end of the year she had moved to 2A in writing, reading and maths.... She was so keen, she was always first to go to the library and bring books.*

A KS2 teacher is also struck by the children's linguistic and cultural confidence. She notes that both the highest and lowest ability children in her class are Albanian. She is impressed by the skills of some of the children:

*They are involved in lessons at a much higher level, metaphors and things, and they understand it. Once they have got the grammatical bit sorted out, tenses and ordering of words, I think Albanian has the adjective after the noun... once they've worked that out, their writing shoots up because they've got the higher level skills.*

She also notes that the children, as well being confident about their own culture, are culturally aware generally and 'more interested in finding out about things in general... they are interested in each other.'

She has observed that the children are comfortable talking to their parents in Albanian within school premises, switching to English when required and comments 'When people know where they come from and they value their language it gives them more confidence to do what they want to do.'

All the teachers commented on how keen parents are to support their children and appreciate the quality of the contact they have with them. The EMA co-ordinator

reports parents asking for worksheets to be sent home. The KS1 teacher finds that parents take every opportunity to come and ask her *'what can I do to support my child?'*

The KS 2 teacher commented on how parents' confidence in talking with teachers had developed, how their knowledge about school life had grown over the year. She particularly appreciates the opportunities for informal contact at the beginning and end of the school day which maintain an ongoing informal relationship. The teachers are aware that many parents are studying to improve their English, leading to greater confidence in helping their children and a more sophisticated interaction with teachers.

The school's own strategies work well in conjunction with the support offered by Shpresa: admissions procedures that insure the school know about children's language and literacy background and prior achievement, the advice given to parents to maintain the language of the family at home, the resources used in school and made available to parents, such as dual language books.

This is backed up by the school's overall approach to valuing culture and language and in particular their use of Language of the Month, which was mentioned by almost all of the children, and which has created a considerable interest in language learning within the school.

Another effective strategy that has affected home-school relationships is the policy of having class teachers and senior staff available in the playground just before and after school, thereby creating informal opportunities for parents and teachers to meet. Other strategies include coffee mornings, meetings facilitated by interpreters where necessary and the use of parents to bring in others.

The school works to ensure that their staff reflect the diversity of the school and provide linguistic and cultural role models.

### **5.6 Social cohesion in the school**

The school is *'a haven of calm within the community'*, says a recent OfSTED report. It elaborates

*pupils... enjoy school and appreciate the wide range of additional activities provided for them. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, and a tribute to the school's very good pastoral care and support (OfSTED, 2007:1).*

The women interviewed commented appreciatively on how their culture and language was incorporated into the school curriculum. Children interviewed had a wide range of friends from different ethnic backgrounds. They spontaneously talked about their friends' culture and language with knowledge and respect. This came across strongly at interview as many of the children, and some of their mothers, commented on the benefits of mixing with children from different ethnic backgrounds. This suggests the school has been successful in creating a culture in which children 'know who they are' and are respectful of other children's identities. Arian comments:

*it is really a good thing that other people from other countries, if everyone was from the same country in this school and they had all*

*completely the same background .. if I, maybe sometime, went to some other people from a different background, I'd find it really hard to get along with them...*

## **6 Discussion**

It is clear from the children's statements above that their language is acknowledged and valued in the school and that they have never been made to feel embarrassed about speaking another language at home. The school's awareness of the benefits of bilingualism and of the importance of incorporating language and culture in the curriculum led them to engage with Shpresa. The partnership provided the means to raise the children's skills in Albanian and enabled the whole school, through the performance of poetry and dance, to engage with Albanian culture. At this stage of the study it is not possible to say whether, as suggested by Cummins' empowerment model, the partnership has had an impact on children's measured achievement in English. But the test data at the end of the first year of partnership suggests that the children's literacy skills are developing well and that they are catching up with the 'moving target' of their peers.

The research of Cummins has shown that, while young children commonly learn to communicate in a second language within two years, it takes five to seven years for them to achieve full competence in the academic language of school (Cummins, 1984). The quantitative analysis of children's end-of-year results reveals that the ethnic Albanian children, whether or not they attend Shpresa classes, are learning English rapidly and performing very well indeed, especially at the end of KS1.

While all families interviewed are equally keen to maintain their language and culture, the children who attend the Shpresa classes have thought deeply about the way in which their two languages and cultures interact. While they sound and look like the born Londoners that most of them are, they are very confident and proud to perform Albanian poetry, drama and dance in public in front of large audiences.

The parents, and they are mostly mothers, who have attended the education support sessions run by Shpresa are well informed and confident about working with teachers to support their children. This knowledge, together with their greater involvement in the school seems to have made them particularly appreciative of the teachers' work and commitment.

Both the quantitative data and the interview data indicate that it is not only the children and parents who attend out of school classes who benefit from the input of Shpresa. The close social networks of families and the interactions of parents on school premises ensure that information is spread. Shpresa's involvement in the school through the work of trained volunteers in the classroom, support for cultural events and termly meetings with parents, ensures that the Albanian language and culture have a strong presence in the daily life of the school.

A Shpresa teacher explained the value Albanian refugees placed on education:

*We will starve ourselves for education. We wear second hand clothes to pay for a private tutor if our children need it.*

There is evidence from the interviews that the parents of the Albanian children greatly value education but were not sufficiently well informed or confident to make the best use of the opportunities available to them in the UK. The partnership with Shpresa has enabled the school to engage more effectively with them and empower them to support their children. This has led to the substantial growth in parent trust and involvement in the school, as reported by the headteacher.

The data obtained from interviews suggests that the following ingredients in the partnership between Gascoigne School and Shpresa were instrumental in its success:

#### The school

- values the language and culture of its children and works to incorporate these in its curriculum
- recognises the importance of partnership with parents and works to involve all its parents, especially those harder to reach
- carefully analyses patterns of pupil achievement and acts on the analysis
- develops out-of-hours provision and is willing to offer free premises and facilities in exchange for community input.

#### Shpresa

- is well organised and managed, has well trained staff and all policies and procedures in place (CRB checks, Child Protection training, risk assessments etc.)
- plans a language and learning programme that is lively and attractive to children (mixing physical activities with literacy) and offers them opportunities for public performances
- evaluates its activities on an ongoing basis, keeps in close touch with parents and children and responds to their needs
- respects school property and avoids creating an additional burden on teachers
- provides routes into training and employment for members of the Albanian community through its volunteer programme which also benefits the school.

There are many ways in which community organisations can support and complement the work of mainstream schools. The Our Languages project ([www.ourlanguages.org.uk](http://www.ourlanguages.org.uk)) offers many such examples. Their particular strength is their in-depth knowledge of their community which enables them to create a bridge between the community and the school. Not all organisations offer all the services that Shpresa does, not all are so professional and well developed, but all are committed to the welfare of their communities.

The example above was one that worked well because it developed into a genuine partnership. Both partners jointly established clear objectives and communicated regularly with each other and with children and parents to meet them. Joint working and the sharing of space can always create difficulties and these can best be overcome by open and regular discussion of issues as they arise.

Partners need to be aware of the different pressures on schools and community organisations. As the headteacher mentioned in the first interview '*Parents' groups often come with good ideas but they want the school to do an awful lot, which is rather hard after a day's teaching.*' Community organisations need to be aware of the heavy workload of teachers and of the need to keep any additional pressure on time or resources to a minimum. Schools need to be aware that community organisations operate with very limited, short-term and insecure funding, avoid exploiting the good will of volunteers and be willing to consider how they, in turn, can benefit the organisation.

The headteacher of Gascoigne School and the director of Shpresa are keen to demonstrate the benefits that children derive from a positive and creative commitment to community cohesion and to develop and spread their model to other schools and other communities. As the headteacher explains:

*All I have got for them is praise. As a model of how things work, it's a very good model. I could convince other schools as well. All I get is really good pay-back for it, in community relations, parental relations and during an OfSTED inspection, for example. I am more than happy. There are no disadvantages.* (CILT, 2008b)

## **Conclusion**

The findings suggest that the partnership has encouraged a strong and positive involvement of families in the education of their children and the life of the school, the development of confident cultural identities, literacy in Albanian and a high level of achievement in English. In view of current policy this study was particularly timely as it provides evidence of the value of mainstream/complementary school partnerships and a model that can be readily adapted for a wide range of cultures and settings.



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## Appendix - Observations at the Albanian class

The following is an observation carried out on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2008

### *Abetare* in the classroom

Back in the classroom, the children have hung up their coats and the older group has followed Ermir to the gym. The younger children sit in horse-shoe formation around large tables facing the white board. The arrangement is formal and reflects the style of teaching. The children have only an hour to learn basic literacy in Albanian. Ana tells the children: “*Tani do të prezamtojme veten tone. Gjithe secili do të thotë emrin e tij dhe sa vjeç është*” (Now we are going to introduce ourselves. Everyone has to say their name and how old they are). Antoneta stands up confidently: “*Unë jam Antoneta dhe jam 7 vjeç*” (My name is Antoneta and I am 7). The other children follow in turn. Ana asks them: “*çfarë date është sot?*” (what is today’s date?). The children respond in unison: “*sot është 6 Nentor 2008*” (to-day is 6<sup>th</sup> November 2008).

All the children in this class started school speaking only Albanian, but all have now become dominant in English. In earlier interviews mothers have expressed great concern over their children’s loss of fluency and confidence in Albanian. Ana is very aware of this and explains that, as well as teaching literacy and aspects of different subjects such as history, geography and maths, she is intent on getting the children to hear and respond to a good model of language:

She conducts the whole lesson in Albanian, mostly from the front of the class. She has a warm and expressive voice, articulates carefully and uses body language and props from her large bags.

Albanian uses the Roman alphabet and has a regular grapho-phonetic relationship. There is a strong emphasis in this programme on learning the letters that represent the 36 phonemes of Albanian. An understanding of this relationship can help children to transfer their reading skills from English to Albanian with comparative ease (Sneddon 2008). Ana distributes flash cards for the children to use in pairs and follows this with illustrated letter cards attached to the white board: Aa for *ariu* (a bear), Rr for *rosa* (a duck), Ee for *elefant* (an elephant) and Eë for *ëmbelsira* (a cake).

The children know exactly what is expected of them, they respond rapidly individually or in unison; Ana builds up the pace *spejt! spejt!* (quick); the atmosphere becomes competitive. The lesson then moves on to the initial letters of children’s names. Ana explains the difference between consonants (*bashkëtingëllore*) and vowels (*zanore*). The children count the letters and digraphs from an alphabet chart (36), consonants (29) and vowels (7). They move on to blending single sounds into syllables.

Ana hands out individual exercise books that are part of the *Abetare* literacy scheme and explains the tasks. The page they are using focuses on the letter I (pronounced ‘ee’ in Albanian). It includes handwriting practice, completing words, and a simple dictation exercise. Some children are working individually in their books, individuals come out to the board and make up short words with letter cards. One demonstrates ‘*unë – Ina – jam*’ (My name is Ina). Another reads: *Unë jam Iliri, Ilda, Indrit*. The class chant what is on the board.

The lesson moves on. Rebecca volunteers a well known poem about the Albanian national Flag Day:

*Babanë epyeti Beni*

*O babi a e di?*

*Pse flamurin e kemi?*

*Dy ngjyrqsh kug e zi? ...*

(Beni asked his father ‘father, do you know why our flag has the colours black and red?’) She recites two stanzas; Ana supports her with a couple of prompts and all the children clap. Another child recites another section in a quiet voice and is also cheered.

The only real opportunity for children to use spontaneous language is when Ana asks them to talk about the half-term holiday which they had the week before. A boy stands up and starts ‘Last week I...’ Ana interrupts “In Albanian!” He continues in Albanian to tell the class that he played in a football match and that his team won. Saima comments: “excellent!” On this occasion he is the only one to rise to the challenge of describing holiday activities in Albanian.

Towards the end of the session Ana summarises the lesson, reminding the children what they have learned. She moves them onto the mat and leads a game. She calls out: “*vigani!*” (tall) and “*skkurtabiqi!*” (small). The children respond by standing or crouching. The children are playing a kind of Simon Says game. The leader stands or squats and calls out an instruction. She tries to confuse them by doing the wrong action: the children must do what she says, not what she does. The pace is fast. Ana encourages the children to take on the role of leader of the game. They do, and loudly. A few children are talking excitedly in Albanian. The children are enjoying the game and they cheer and clap. Ana tells them it is time to pack up their workbooks and go to the gym for their dance lesson. They cheer again.

The *Abetare* programme that Ana is using is geared to teaching children in Albania. It includes a wide range of resources including stories and audio materials as well as textbooks and workbooks, some of which the children use at home. She differentiates lessons for the individual children in the class, taking account of their varying skills in Albanian and ensuring they hear a good model of speech. Although Ana has reported that she uses English if it is necessary to ensure understanding, there is little evidence of this in the lesson. There is also very little evidence of the children using a mixed code as reported, for example, in Gujarati classes in Leicester (Creese and Martin 2006). The children have been speaking entirely in Albanian throughout this class, but because of the way in which the class is run and the time constraints, there is little opportunity for them to speak among themselves. However the pace is fast and lively and it keeps the children very focused.

## **Dancing**

While the *Abetare* is taught in the classroom, dancing and games are going on, first with the older children, then with the younger. The gym is bright and spacious. On benches round the side two mothers are sitting, watching and chatting. They live too far away to go home and come back for their children.

The older children are in a circle. Ermir speaks in English: “OK, you know the words?” They children are playing a statues game. Two children chase the others. When the leader calls “*ngriva!*” those who mSaimège to freeze instantly cannot be caught. When the leader calls “*shriva!*” the players un-freeze and they are chased again. The children are very excited and running and shouting in both Albanian and English.

Ermir sits the children down in a circle to reflect on their learning:

Ermir: we’re going to play that again soon. Now, can you tell me why we play this game? Come on.

Child: to learn words?

Ermir: OK, so we learn words. What else?

Child: to work as a team

Ermir: perfect! To work as a team. Because there were two people working together, then the rest. So we had to work as one team and they had to work as one team. That is quite good. That’s important in the dancing too, working as a team. Because you are altogether dancing, and one of you, in the middle of the dance, as she is doing now, is doing something different. So it changes the team. OK? So if you be as a team, you can make it work. Yeah? What do you think? So did you all work as a team? You didn’t plan anything. Me with her (the girl who was his partner) we planned. Him and her, they planned.... So you can help each other. OK? Good. OK. So what is next? OK? You tell me. So why is that game?’

Child: to work in pairs and get exercise.

Ermir: Exercise. Always, every where you go, exercise is in everything you do. Dancing is exercise. As you learn you work as a team. Why is working as a team so important?’

Child: to make it work.

Ermir: what we are going to do is, I want you in one line first.

The children line up, try to pair up, hesitate, get confused, shriek with laughter. They play a game which involves responding rapidly to the number they have been given. The pace is very fast and the children are challenged when it gets faster still.

After the games the children move in to a dance formation, in two lines facing the teacher, girls in front, boys behind. Ermir demonstrates the steps and counts “1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8” to keep the rhythm. The children are watching carefully and very intent on getting the steps right. “Sometimes you have to do this on a big stage or a small stage. Sometimes you are going to have a big hall, sometimes a small one. So you have to get used, OK.?” Ermir demonstrates two different formations: with children spread out or closer together. He counts to keep the beat and the pace gets faster and faster. Children are concentrating hard and following his lead very closely. The steps are getting ever more complicated. All of this practice is without music. The CD player on the bench is not used.

Next Ermir arranges the children in a triangular formation. This is difficult and Ermir is moving children around to get them in the right position: “if you stay behind her, it’s an issue. You’re hiding. So always stay on her right side. OK? So it’s a triangle, so another girl should be there which she’s not. Yep. OK. So this is your place. Ready? Let’s go. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 other side. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and again”. He keeps counting and setting up the elaborate dance pattern, occasionally repositioning the children. “Me and her go back, and them two and you are going to go forward. OK?”

We're going to go. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, so you come her". It is a very intricate dance and the tempo is speeding up.

Later the younger children go to the gym. This time Ermir starts with dancing. They are practising very complex patterns with fierce concentration and are really working well in time and keeping the rhythm. The teacher tells the children "if you do the dance good, we can play games". He moves on to the same games played with the older children. The children are excited but remain disciplined and laugh a lot when they make mistakes.

Ermir has chosen to speak in English with the children, using Albanian only when it was an integral part of the game. He is engaging the children in reflection and teaching co-operation and team-work. He has high expectations of the children and they respond with team-work and discipline. The results are remarkable; it is obvious why the public performances of the children are popular.

### **Back in the classroom**

When the older children come in from their dancing lesson they settle down to a board game. *Zhongleri* (juggler) encourages the children to use new vocabulary to describe pictures.

Like the younger children they spoke Albanian when they started school and are now dominant in English.

The boards are packed away. The Albanian national day is in three weeks' time (28<sup>th</sup> November) and this is the opportunity for a history lesson. Ana is talking entirely in Albanian, but slowly, with expression, using body language, pictures, maps and artefacts. She is asking questions and the children are responding in Albanian, much more confidently than the younger children. The lesson works well as a language lesson: I only know a few words of Albanian, but I can follow it and learn about Albanian heroes, Ismail Qemali, Mother Theresa, and the significance of the *flamuri* (the flag), I learn from the map about the greater Albania and understand that it was broken up at a conference in 1913.

Ana hands out a page of text about the flag day and asks the children to underline words they don't know as she reads the text. Children ask for explanations and then take turns at reading. Ana nods approval and encouragement and then makes one of her rare statements in English "next week we are going to do this. We are going to do a concert about this, because 28 November is our flag day. That's why I am doing something. OK?" She writes questions on the board and uses the opportunity to focus children on questioning words like *kur* (when) and *kush* (who).

The history lesson ends with an enthusiastic and rousing rendition of the "flag song". The children know most of the words, but Ana is intent on ensuring they are all word perfect for a performance and hands out a printed copy. Her last words to the class are in English: "next week we're going to do it again, but you have to learn at home, with your mum and with your dad, OK?" The caretaker comes in and starts checking the

windows, Ana and the children rush to tidy, stuff their homework in their bags and grab their coats. A group of mothers and fathers are waiting for them in the hall and they disperse into the dark and the cold outside as the caretaker locks up at precisely 7 o'clock.

From Sneddon, R *ABETARE and Dancing*. Trentham Books. Forthcoming.