

THE WIX STORY: SUMMARY REPORT

By Dr Gabriela Meier, May 2012



Photograph taken by Wix children

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The Wix Story: summary report

“It looks like any other Victorian-built primary school behind security gates in a less affluent part of south London. But this small, Wandsworth state school could be about to change the way languages are taught, following the astonishing results of its bilingual teaching experiment.”(Lightfoot in the Guardian of 5.10.2010).

Introduction

The research project, presented in this report, was a response to press reports, such as by Lightfoot (above), which suggested that something extraordinary was going on at Wix Primary School. As a researcher in language education, with a special interest in bilingual education, this seemed an opportunity to learn more about what bilingual education can achieve in primary schools. Although by 2010 there had not been any systematic evaluation, two London schools had already followed suit (Fulham and Putney), and many more looked to Wix for inspiration.

The Wix story: This is the story of two schools and three streams in one building. The two schools will be referred to as Wix Primary School (WPS) and École de Wix (EdW), the streams will be referred to as the bilingual stream, the English classic stream and the French classic stream.

Wix Primary school (WPS): WPS is a state-run primary school in London administrated by the Borough of Wandsworth. It has a diverse intake socially, ethnically and linguistically, reflecting the local population. Before 2004, the school was struggling, and enrolment numbers had been decreasing. The families who send their children to WPS are partly from population groups with low socio-economic status.

École de Wix (EdW): The Lycée Charles de Gaulle is an extension of the French school system abroad. It runs four primary schools as feeder schools for their secondary school (11-18 years old) in London. One of these primary schools has leased space in the premises of Wix Primary School since 1993, and has adopted the name École de Wix. The fact that EdW is fee-paying self-selects families that are relatively well-to-do and who are ready to invest, at least financially, in their children’s education.

The classic streams: They provide mainstream schooling in either English (WPS) or French (EdW) following their respective curriculum. There used to be one Classic English stream and two classic French streams. However, the second classic French stream has been phased out, and from 2013 there will be one English classic stream, one French classic stream and one bilingual stream starting each year.

The bilingual stream: In 2006, a bilingual stream was implemented in cooperation between WPS and EdW. The first bilingual cohort of 14 EdW-registered French speakers and 14 WPS-registered English speakers started learning in two languages in one class. A new cohort has since started every year. At the time of this research there were 112 pupils in the bilingual stream, which will reach its maximum in 2013 with 168 children. There are also plans to introduce bilingual provision at foundation stage (nursery/reception). In order to get into the bilingual stream parents have to indicate their preference

on their school application forms, either to Wandsworth Council or to the Lycée Charles de Gaulle. These authorities will then select students according to their respective recruitment criteria. The difference in registration leads to the unusual situation where half of the families in the bilingual stream need to pay for their children's education (EdW), while the other half get exactly the same education for free (WPS). The bilingual class is then taught by a WPS-employed teacher in the one half of the week, and by a EdW-employed teacher in the other half of the week.

Two-way immersion education: The model used in the Wix bilingual stream is a two-way immersion model, which means that not only are there two languages used to teach curriculum content but it is taught to a class that consists of speakers of either language as first language. Thus, while half the children are linguistic experts in one class, the other half are experts in another class. This has the advantage that the language is modelled not only by the teacher (as in other second language classes), but also by half of the peers in the classroom.

Research findings: Based on the evidence from my research (funded by Esmée Fairbairn), I argue that the Wix bilingual stream has an integrative function, creating meaningful links between an English state school and a French international school. This had the effect that it has normalised bilingualism in school for all, supported social integration at many levels, and led to school improvement. However, I also argue that the implementation of a bilingual stream is an intervention that in the case of Wix has thrived because of its supportive and cooperative context. Indeed, the spirit of open-mindedness or 'ouverture' seems to be an underlying condition for the positive outcome. Thus, implementing a bilingual stream must be carefully considered and implemented for it to lead to improvements.

Report structure: The present report consists of 4 parts. The first part relates to research at Wix and internationally, and the second part makes recommendations for schools and policy makers, and provides additional information for parents. The 3rd part outlines the information campaign that formed part of the Esmée Fairbairn funded project. The last part acknowledges organisations and individuals who supported the project.

1) Research

In this part, I provide an overview and definitions relating to bilingual education, before research questions are answered based on the analysis of Wix data. I conclude by summarising the Wix research at the whole-school level, at stream level and with focus on the bilingual stream. Finally, I summarise the current state of knowledge including the findings from Wix

Existing bilingual two-way immersion programmes internationally

Bilingual education is not new, and in multilingual areas such as Wales, Catalonia, India and many African countries bilingual or multilingual education has long been the norm. However, the use of languages related to more recent migration for bilingual, or two-way, immersion education (see definitions in following section), was introduced in the USA in the 1960s (currently about 400 programmes mostly English-Spanish), and since the 1990s also in Europe, especially in Germany. The largest TWI programme in Europe was implemented in Berlin, where around 6000 young people are enrolled at any one time. This model comprises nine different language combinations (German with English, French, Greek, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish). These are run as streams in primary and secondary schools (6-19 years) in different parts of the city, reflecting the languages of the local communities. Since the Wix bilingual stream started in 2006, there have been a number of new bilingual projects in England (see directory on www.bien.org.uk).

Definitions

Bilingual immersion education: This means teaching school subjects through two languages instead of one. Thus, some subjects are taught in English, other subjects in another language. There is a range of benefits associated with this model (see page 8). Pedagogically, there is a dual focus in that content and language learning are integrated, which is sometimes referred to as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). There are different types of immersion education, and this depends on the language backgrounds of the learners.

One-way bilingual immersion education: It is assumed that none of the learners in the class speak the additional language as their first language.

Two-way bilingual immersion education (TWI): It is assumed that half the class speaks the additional language, or partner language, as their first language, while the other half has English as their first language. In Wix, half of the children in a bilingual class are French speakers, and the other half is likely to have an English language background, which makes Wix a true TWI model.

Flexible bilingual immersion education: The need for a new category of immersion education has emerged from the Wandsworth conference. In some contexts, it is likely that some native speakers of the additional language join a bilingual class, but numbers are unpredictable and can vary from year to year. This is the case, where schools cannot select learners on the basis of their 1st language.

Data collection

The following research findings are based on data collected in May/June 2011 in both schools and in all three streams: 146 parent questionnaires (return rate 25%) and 34 staff questionnaires (return rate 55.7%), 158 children's letters about their school (return rate 97.5%), as well as 27 interviews with staff and parent representatives and with 23 children (7-8 years old).

a) Main research question:

Did the implementation of the bilingual stream turn the struggling state school around?

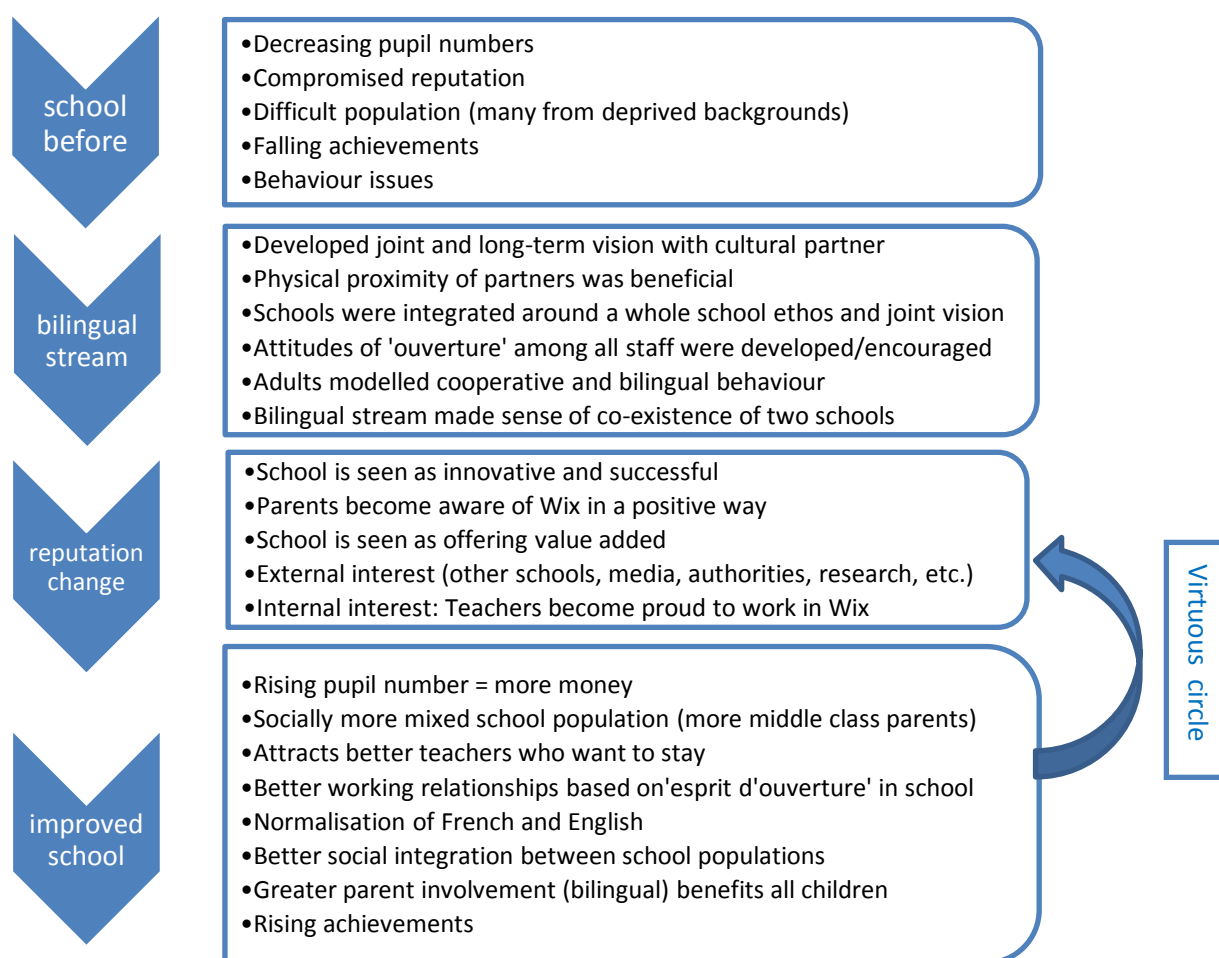
➔ The bilingual stream – once teething problems were overcome – did play an important role in turning the reputation of the previously struggling Wix Primary School around, which benefitted the whole school. Certain factors were crucial for the success of the bilingual stream and the improvement in the school reputation that set a virtuous circle in motion (Figure 1). These factors were:

- the collaborative leadership
- a joint and long-term vision
- a whole-school ethos
- staff attitudes of ‘ouverture’¹
- parents ready to invest in the school.

*c’est le cercle vertueux ;
quand ça fonctionne bien
les gens s’engagent et ça
fonctionne encore mieux,
etc...*

(EdW bilingual teacher)

Figure 1: Bilingual stream set a virtuous circle in motion - from WPS perspective



¹ ‘Ésprit d’ouverture’ or ‘ouverture’ were terms frequently used by EdW staff to describe an open-minded attitude to other people and other ways of doing things as well as different ways of thinking.

b) Description of Wix

Sub-question 1: How do people associated with the school describe Wix?

- At the time of the survey Wix (2011) was described as a good school by 100% of staff, 98.6% of parents and 100% of children, who participated in the research. It was described as a school that is unique and different, where 99.4% of staff, and 100% of parents felt that pupils are happy.

Sub-question 2: What is appreciated by stakeholders and where do they see scope for improvement?

- Stakeholders in Wix appreciate the school climate, the opportunities for social interaction and the academic activities. They feel, however, that the physical environment and social interaction between schools and between people could be improved further. Some children felt there was too much emphasis on work and not enough on sports and activities.

c) Changes observed in Wix

Sub-question 3: What was Wix like in the past?

- The WPS side suffered a period of struggle and reputation loss, and serious clashes, especially between WPS and EdW parents. This seems to have been partly due to a lack of cooperation and communication between the school leaders at the time.

Sub-question 4: What has changed in recent years?

- Important and positive changes have happened in terms of understanding between the schools and the streams, as well as greater external interest, which led to changed WPS demographics and improved academic achievements and behaviour on the WPS side.

Sub-question 5: What are the reasons for these changes?

- Important reasons for the changes observed in Wix were the implementation of the bilingual stream and a related improvement in reputation, methods adopted to introduce change, and outside support.

Sub-question 6: What are the obstacles to past/future changes?

- There are three types of obstacles. 1) Structural limitations, such as space, time and term dates, may have to be accommodated into the Wix story, since they are largely irremovable. 2) Other obstacles that have been identified could serve as opportunities for social integration and intercultural understanding (social class and ethnic diversity). 3) Some obstacles mentioned are either being changed already (uniform, dinner time), or could be changed or reduced through continued collaboration in the future (authority support and recognition of bilingual learning).

“que je venais à cette école, c’était terrible. Je n’entendais que des discriminations de collègues sur l’école anglaise, c’était les deux écoles ennemies, vraiment ennemies. [...] Donc, vraiment il y a eu une ouverture une vraie évolution par rapport à ça. Donc ça c’est par rapport au bilingue. Voilà.”

(EdW bilingual teacher)

d) Cooperation**Sub-question 7: What are the stakeholders' attitudes to cooperation?**

- The parents in the survey (largely self-selected) felt cooperation is associated with social interaction and the bilingual stream. The attitude towards cooperation between the two schools was clearly positive among parents with children in the bilingual stream. Some parents with children in the French Classic stream were more sceptical. But overall there seems to be a wish to improve the collaboration between the two schools. No-one questioned the fact that the two schools share premises.

"The collaboration between the Lycée + Wix is an amazing opportunity for local children. Furthermore if you visit the school you can see that all the children Wix/bilingual/Lycée are happy and having fun."

(WPS parent with child in bilingual stream)

e) The bilingual stream**Sub-question 8: How do insiders view the bilingual stream?**

- The bilingual stream is seen as an innovative, collaborative and experimental learning laboratory, which self-selects supportive and open-minded families and staff. It is seen as a collaborative framework where new ways of learning and teaching are pioneered, analysed, reflected and adapted, and where children build socially cohesive groups based on language learning as social participation supported by teachers. However, there is no agreement among teachers in terms of the linguistic aims of the bilingual stream.

f) Languages in Wix**Sub-question 9: What role do languages play in Wix?**

- The use of English and French has become normalised in all streams to varied degrees, as well as in the school as a whole. However, other languages are hardly recognised and could be celebrated more. Furthermore, staff may benefit from training to support learners of English as an additional language.

g) Learning from Wix**Sub-question 10: What can other schools learn from Wix?**

- Other schools can learn from Wix that it is possible to implement and run a two-way immersion stream in collaboration between an English state school and a fee-paying international school, and that it is possible to build friendly and respectful relationships between the relevant communities. However, this requires a great deal of open-mindedness towards different practices. It requires openness towards the bilingual stream, and towards collaboration on the part of stakeholders, especially school staff. Collaborative leadership, a long-term joint vision, and good communication are required to implement changes. Changes should be introduced step-by-step to give stakeholders time to adjust to new ideas.

"it can be done."

(WPS management)

"I think it works. You know, I think so far we can see that the bilingual stream has worked very, very well."

(WPS bilingual teacher)

h) Conclusion from the Wix research

Based on the evidence analysed, I argue that the bilingual stream had a positive influence at the three levels examined:

Whole school level: The Wix story has shown that the bilingual stream indeed played an important role in school improvement, and that an English state primary and a fee-paying French national school can successfully collaborate. This clearly benefitted WPS in terms of reputation and recruitment numbers, and it benefitted both schools in terms of improved school climate and more friendly relations between the schools, as well as offering intercultural learning opportunities for all. Additionally, the bilingual stream, as a product of the two schools, normalised language learning and bilingual school practice.

Between streams: the bilingual stream acted as a catalyst for social integration between streams in school and beyond by bringing parents, staff and children closer together. The bilingual stream has acted as a bridge or mediator between the Classic English and Classic French stream. This is an on-going process and the Wix community seems to be keen to continue on this path.

Within the bilingual stream: Wix has proven that it is possible to set up a bilingual stream between two national school systems, negotiating linguistic, cultural, curricular, socio-economic and ideological differences. Teachers value the collaboration with their international colleagues and the curricular freedom. However, they are also interested in learning more about bilingual education. Thus, they valued the exchange and learning enabled during a conference (17 March 2012, see below).

i) Wix findings and international research combined

Based on combined research findings, a well implemented and run two-way immersion programme can have the following benefits:

Language benefits: On average the WPS and EDW bilingual cohorts both did well in English and were above the French national average in French, and all did particularly well in Maths². International research indicates that this model achieves bilingualism and biliteracy at a relatively high level. According to international research, achieving native level in abstract use of a second language takes 4 to 6 years. Thus, continued language assessment is of great importance.

Academic achievements: There is anecdotal evidence from Wix that bilingual learners are more creative and imaginative. International research showed that learning in two languages does not reduce achievements in other subjects, in some cases they even improved.

Social benefits: The research in Wix points to good group cohesion in the bilingual class. International research found TWI education to have positive effects on social inclusion and conflict resolution skills. Thus, this may be a generalizable finding. One-way immersion may also have similar effects, but more research is needed in this area.

School improvement: The research in Wix showed that TWI education can have a positive effect on the reputation of the school—but only if other conditions are in place which enable communication and integration between all parts of the school based on open-mindedness and a long-term vision.

“after a few months of immersion education, the partner-language model [in Berlin] leads to basic language competence in both languages that goes way beyond achievable and envisaged aims of foreign language tuition”

*Prof. Christiane Fäcke,
University of Augsburg,*

² Based on year 3/CE1 English, French and Maths results. Only longitudinal research will show whether this is a consistent finding.

2) Recommendations

j) Recommendations for other schools

Based on the Wix research and the conference discussions, recommendations can be made to schools that are thinking of implementing bilingual classes.

Each school is different: Every school context is unique and each school has to find an approach that is right for them, based on the local circumstances.

- Choose a language that is used locally (community groups, companies, tourists, etc.).
- Choose between implementing a bilingual stream, or turn the whole school bilingual, depending on parental interest, staff and support from school community.

“once you’ve got the vision there, you can move forwards.”

(WPS management)

Whole school approach: Ensure that the whole school community (teachers, support staff, governors, parents, children) is informed about the bilingual project, even if only one stream is bilingual.

- Make sure all classes feel they belong to the school.
- Use all opportunities to teach the additional or partner language to all staff and children (assemblies, school trips, sport, etc.).
- Welcome volunteers and trainee teachers who speak the partner language into your school.

Open-mindedness: Research at Wix Primary School (London) has shown that open-mindedness is an important condition to accommodate a bilingual stream and work with groups of another language and culture.

k) Recommendations for policy makers

Authority support is crucial: Close collaboration between schools and local authorities is crucial for successful implementation of bilingual immersion education.

- Bilingual education (especially TWI) could form part of a community cohesion strategy.
- Help schools find a suitable type of bilingual education for their specific circumstances.
- Involve embassies and cultural representations in setting up and running bilingual projects.
- Link schools offering bilingual immersion education and provide joint training, enabling exchange and learning between schools (see e.g. Wandsworth conference p. 10).
- Consider research available to make informed decisions.

Recognition of bilingual learning: Work towards recognition and certification of bilingual/multilingual competencies.

- Work towards school inspection criteria that recognise and award bilingual learning and achievements.

l) Information for parents

- According to international research, all children can learn bilingually (with very few exceptions).
- It is important to support your child to learn bilingually: work towards good school-home contact and maximise opportunities to practice both languages outside school.
- For further questions see *Frequently Asked Questions* on www.bien.org.uk.

3) Information campaign

The main parts of the information campaign are a conference, incl. practitioner workshops (m) and a network with its own website (n), and publications (o-q).

m) Bilingual Immersion Education Conference

A conference was hosted by Wandsworth Children's Services in collaboration with Wix Primary School and the University of Exeter, and attracted 58 delegates. It was opened by John Johnston (Wandsworth Council), and there were talks by Marc Wolstencroft and Paul-Marie Blanchard (Wix), Jo Brown (Old Oak Primary School) and Dr Gabriela Meier (University of Exeter). These were followed by workshops about the ins and outs of using two languages for teaching and learning in English schools. It was an opportunity for networking that will continue virtually through the virtual network on www.bien.org.uk (see below), an opportunity welcomed by the delegates. The main themes highlighted in the conference were:

- Bilingual education works – but you have to do your homework.
- Every school has to design their own bilingual model.
- A whole school approach is required
- Openness and curiosity towards other ways of doing things needs to be promoted.
- Expectations need to be managed carefully (parents, local authorities).
- All opportunities for bilingual activities in and outside the classroom should be utilised.
- Criteria for assessment of bilingual competencies and for inspection of bilingual education should be reviewed, since they were devised for a monolingual school system.

"the realisation that I am part of a bilingual 'movement'"
(conference participant)

n) Bilingual Immersion Education Network (BIEN)

WWW.BIEN.ORG.UK

All interested individuals and organisations (practice, policy, research) are invited to join BIEN to share information and shape the development of bilingual immersion education in the UK. BIEN was launched during the conference above, and 38 people joined on the day. In May 2012, BIEN had more than 50 members. The website includes:

- Bilingual school directory
- Bibliography
- Research
- Definitions
- Discussions
- News
- Events
- FAQs
- Membership list
- And much more



Bilingual Immersion Education Network (BIEN)

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The Bilingual Immersion Education Network (BIEN) is a network for schools, policy makers, parents, researchers and other interested parties to network around the topic of bilingual immersion education in the UK. It is designed to support and inform about this educational trend.
[read more](#)

Picture: courtesy of Wix Primary School

Network	Publications	Events
Join "supporters of bilingual immersion education". The network has over 50 members.	Useful references and links to conference reports, position papers, journal articles and books	19 March 2012: Bilingual Education Conference in Wandsworth (see report)

o) Academic publications related to the Wix research

Meier, G. (under peer review) The role of bilingual education in school improvement: findings from Wix Primary School/École de Wix in London. In Synergies Europe No 7.

Meier, G. (in progress) "Il faut avoir l'esprit d'ouverture": Cooperation between an English and a French school to offer bilingual education in London and work towards social integration. In British Education Research Journal.

p) Practitioner-oriented publications related to the Wix research

Meier, G (2012) Conference Report. Wandsworth Bilingual Education Conference on 19 March 2012. Available from http://elac.ex.ac.uk:8080/bien_elgg/pg/file/read/31/wandsworth-bilingual-education-conference-1932012-report (last accessed 15.5.2012)

Meier, G. (in progress) Bilingual education and social cohesion: clear outcomes but what about the processes? In Conteh, J. and Meier, G. (eds.) (forthcoming) The Multilingual Turn in Languages Education. Clevedon Multilingual Matters.

Meier, G. (in progress) Bilingual Education works - but you have to do your homework. Publication TBC.

Meier, G. (in progress) Bilingual Education and social cohesion? Publication TBC.

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q) Useful literature related to bilingual immersion education

Coyle, D., Holmes, B. King, L. (2009) Towards an integrated curriculum - CLIL national statements and guidelines. Retrieved on 15.3.2012, http://www.languagescompany.com/images/stories/docs/news/clil_national_statement_and_guidelines.pdf

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Johnstone, R. (2003?) Evaluation Report: Early Partial Immersion in French at Walker Road Primary School, Aberdeen. The First Two Years: 2000/1 and 2001/2. Scottish CILT. Retrieved 15.3.2012, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/47021/0023967.pdf>

r) Other

Wandsworth Council and Exeter University (March 2012) Bilingual Education works – if you do your homework. Press Release sent to national and local press.

University of Exeter (April 2012) Bilingual Education works – if you do your homework. Alumni Magazine.

Meier, G. (June 2012) Bilingual Immersion Education Network (BIEN). Brochure for distribution through embassies, schools, head teacher and other organisations.

Meier, G. (forthcoming) BIEN News No 1/2012. Bi-annual newsletter of the BIEN network.

4) Acknowledgements

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Gabriela Meier, May 2012

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