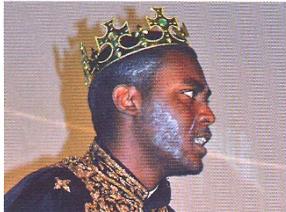




First person

## The play's the thing

*Performing Shakespeare in Ethiopia's native language was a revelation for David Redmond, IBDP Coordinator at the International Community School of Addis Ababa*



**A**t the International Community School of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, we are proud to celebrate the local. We are one of only a few IB World Schools that offer Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia. But it can be a challenge to promote, as it has very limited use outside the country. It's difficult to stand up and say there's value in Amharic. So we found an innovative way to demonstrate it.

Our IB Diploma Programme students (who can be followed at [@ICSADDISIB](http://ICSADDISIB)) staged a production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* entirely in Amharic. We used a version of the play that had been translated by the former Poet Laureate Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, a national literary treasure who lies buried in the National Cathedral in Addis Ababa, alongside former Emperor Haile Selassie.

Although our native Amharic speakers are fluent in English, this project gave them the chance to perform in their own language, a rare opportunity as most of their education is in English. The rich language of Shakespeare's play sings out musically in the lifting cadences of Amharic, whose emphatic phonemes seem to lift and amplify the actors' voices.

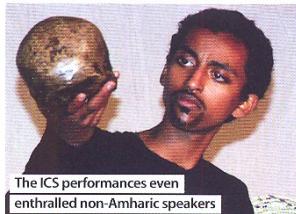
It was a challenge getting people together and working to a tight budget when all the students were busy with

different activities as well as in the process of university applications. But we were so confident it was a great learning experience that we organized rehearsals on evenings and weekends.

ICS student actors, led by teacher-director Sisay Zewde, staged the play at the school, where two performances were given to packed houses. Then the troupe took the show on the road over the winter break, performing in Hawassa, a town in the Rift Valley. In Ethiopia, there is still a reverence for monarchy, and the idea that there could be issues of betrayal is quite startling, so it was interesting to see how local audiences responded.

Students camped in the grounds of the SOS Children's Village, an orphanage and school with several branches in Ethiopia. They also performed in a town hall to an audience of more than 1,000 people. In the final scene, the power went out and the audience were holding up their mobiles to shed light on the stage. The show did indeed go on.

My main advice to schools considering a similar project would be: don't wait until it's perfect to do it. Start with a hit play that most people will know. Many people who didn't understand Amharic watched our performance and thought it was beautiful. A play really can function as a bridge between cultures.



**The ICS performances even enthralled non-Amharic speakers**

Book review



## Rethinking the learner experience

*Full on Learning: Involve me and I'll understand* by Zoë Elder (Crown House)

Teacher-turned-consultant seems to have become a viable career choice for seasoned educators. To the cynical, it seems an easy route: take the learnings of a life spent in the classroom, draw out some general lessons, give them a catchy name and wait for the book deal and conference circuit to beckon. As a 'curriculum designer' and former teacher, Zoë Elder may fit the stereotype, but from the start of *Full on Learning* she seems determined to provide more substance than most authors of her ilk. The foreword sets the pace by decrying educational bandwagons. The good news is that, for the majority of this exhaustive tome, she succeeds.

By comprehensively breaking down every aspect of the learner experience, Elder identifies the traits of fully engaged students, then sets about explaining how and why to encourage them through classroom practice. Great teaching does not happen by accident, charisma or authority, she says. Plan, plan and plan again could be her mantra: "It is consistency that sets the highest performers apart from the crowd," she explains. *Full on Learning* proceeds to critique the learning styles and techniques that underpin performance, including emotional engagement and inquiry-based learning. Creative thinking – still an enigma to many – is effectively demystified, as Elder shows the intellectual steps to unlock creativity, including revelatory classroom exercises drawn from leading creative thinkers.

The section on questioning is worth the cover price alone. Elder speaks eloquently of how teachers' inquiries 'should be deployed in the same way that a surgeon makes her first incision or a sculptor moulds his clay' before meticulously cataloguing dozens of questions that can be used in a real learning environment to stimulate thinking. It is the sort of engagingly personal, and effective, insight that sets *Full on Learning* apart.

Elements of the book will seem obvious to teachers in IB World Schools for whom inquiry-based learning is second nature. Even more practical tools would have been welcome, and it's true that the final chapters tail off, missing the opportunity to force readers into provocative follow-ups. But as a practical manual for the novice educator, or a tool to spread the word about effective practice into more didactic schools, there are few better titles on the market.

**Robert Jeffery**