

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

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NALDIC enters its 10th year looking forward to Conference 10 which for the first time will be held over 2 days. The conference will be aiming to draw together some of the important work carried out in the UK in our field over the past 10 years and I am sure will match the success of Conference 9 when Jim Cummins gave us such an inspirational start to the year.

Looking back over 10 years it is interesting to compare our concerns then with those of 2002.

Funding was an issue, but for once, in the spring of 1992, many EAL services and teams were looking forward to an increase in funding and a period of stability with the start of the new five-year Section 11 projects. This new phase followed a review of the grant which had identified misuse on a wide scale. The result was that projects were subject to a monitoring process involving targets and objectives which, although in some cases verging on the ludicrous in order to comply with Home Office regulations, did nevertheless give the work some focus and indeed some protection. Ironically, it has been the lack of guidance and the virtual absence of monitoring which has been an issue in recent times.

For all the problems associated with Section 11, it created space for the development of EAL practice and the means of attracting and retaining professionals into the work. In many authorities, it gave those practitioners an opportunity to establish EAL work as a distinctive specialism, a process in which NALDIC played a significant role. RSA and PGCE courses provided different levels of training and there was scope within the grant for the appointment of bilingual staff and the development of strategies for the use of first language in the classroom. There was a sense that EAL had been recognised albeit in the negative sense of it being needed to solve a 'problem' – a barrier to learning.

Less positive aspects of the grant included the loss of race equality work and mother tongue teaching and the fact that the responsibility for the work often did not rest firmly with schools, many of whom were thus able to evade some of their duties.

Bidding, prioritising of projects and the amount of money councils were prepared to commit was variable and was often at the mercy of local politics, a fact which has considerable significance for us now. By 1993, of course, the funding was already being reduced and, in the later years of the projects, with the grant remaining static for several years and the reduction of

higher and further education training options, the old insecurity returned.

Many of these issues formed the historical basis for the challenges which face us in 2002.

These challenges still include funding, both in terms of the global amount and the mechanism by which it is distributed. The legacy of the historical variations created by the bidding system is still with us. The introduction of an allocation formula to remove these historical factors without additional funding would cause problems for many LEAs which had traditionally been generous in their support of language work. The broader view of ethnic minority achievement taken by the DfES has led to the situation where *'overall resources have stood still while schools and LEAs have been asked to address a wider range of issues.'* (Ofsted 2001, para. 150). The needs of refugee pupils for instance should be properly met in the future.

The DfES has indicated that EMAG will be included in the consultation process around the government's comprehensive spending review during the summer term. NALDIC will respond at every opportunity to argue for an increase in the grant, which should continue to be ring fenced, for greater stability and for approaches that support EAL as a distinctive area of work.

Other challenges for 2002 include the need to continue a dialogue with government agencies on issues such as training and increased guidance and monitoring of EMAG.

Ofsted found the number of EAL specialists in schools to be decreasing and the NUT's Race Equality Survey carried out in 2001 found that EMAG staff had a bleak outlook on the future of EAL (NUT, 2001 p.5). It is vital that effective training programmes are in place for ITT and for serving teachers in order to sustain the level of expertise. This would be helped if the DfES would publish its commissioned work on EAL standards for teachers which colleagues have been anticipating for some time.

There is also a need for appropriate training programmes for bilingual staff and for teaching assistants and mentors who are increasingly becoming part of the delivery of EMAG. The challenge for NALDIC is to articulate an approach which supports all staff who are working with bilingual pupils in their particular roles while at the same time countering arbitrary moves towards dispensing with EAL expertise.

The need for such expertise is greater than ever, for example with the continuing development of early years education or the key role which EAL teachers are increasingly playing in the Key Stage 3 Strategy. EAL Assessment continues to be an area of much debate. Work done by NASSEA and the NALDIC/University of Bristol conference last year

helped to move the discussion forward and NALDIC will be looking to contribute further this year particularly in relation to formative assessment. Reliable EAL information should be an important part of the interpretation and analysis process required by ethnic monitoring.

Ethnic monitoring may help us to get a clearer national picture of achievement and more reliable data. Yet there are likely to be problems around transfer from one set of criteria to another. The DfES recently held a series of conferences across the country on the issues and the procedures involved in the one-off exercise which all schools must carry out using the new ethnic categories prior to next year's annual census in. It remains to be seen how successfully this will be carried out and therefore its effect on the reliability of the initial data.

Many of these challenges would be recognisable ten years ago. The topography has, however, altered significantly; the routes we take have to take account of this. Some things change - 8 years ago last month NALDIC News 2 was just out and consisted of a single A3 sheet. NALDIC News 25 our last bumper assessment issue ran to 51 pages!

Other things don't change. As Constant Leung in NALDIC News 2 put it, *'we all share a common concern: the achievement of bilingual learners in the mainstream context'*.

As professionals we have to continue to find ways of creating the space for EAL at the school and national levels in order to support this aim.

NUT (2001) *Race Equality Funding Survey*, London, NUT.

Ofsted (2001) *Managing Support for the Attainment of Pupils from Minority Ethnic Groups*, London, Ofsted.