

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

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In his article in this edition of NALDIC Quarterly, Robin Richardson comments that the changed legislative framework of the Equality Act 2010 brings with it the danger that *'the proposed changes will prove too complicated and too onerous, and will plunge us all into painful and exhausting squabbles and competitions, and that in consequence there will be inertia in many schools and local authorities, not the substantial improvements that supporters of the new legislation hope for.'*

In many ways this seems to me to be exactly the impact that the 85 pages of the *Consultation on the future distribution of school funding* is having on our field. We know change is in the air, we have that familiar feeling that the outcomes will not be good for our work and yet the wealth of proposals and complicated nature of the financial formulae and accompanying indicators disempower rather than inform us.

Standing back a little from the detail can help. In *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning: Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom* (2002) Pauline Gibbons likens word and sentence level work with EAL learners to focussing a pair of binoculars. Your first gaze is the whole vista and after a while you use the binoculars to hone in on a detail of the landscape. You know how to locate this detail because you have already seen it as part of the whole. When you have finished focusing on the detail, you will probably return to the whole panorama again but with an enhanced sense of what is there. In this way, word and sentence level activities can provide further opportunities for 'message abundance'.

Looking at the 'whole vista' of funding to meet the needs of bilingual and minoritized students what do we see? Well, firstly we see that funding for this area of work has been subject to a continual change and uncertainty. The creation of 'Section 11' in the 1960s without sufficient clarity or agreement about its purpose led to widespread abuse. This was tackled by the Home Office in the early 1980s but the rules had changed again by the late 1980s. Many Section 11 staff were forced into retirement or other jobs in 1993 due to heavy cuts in levels of funding and uncertainty about the future. The move from Section 11 at the Home Office to EMAG under the auspices of Department for Education caused further upheaval at end of the 1990s. The 2000s were characterized by an expansion in pupil numbers and moves towards formula funding with each funding round creating new 'winners

and losers' and each greeted as yet another stay of execution. And here we are in 2010 facing further upheaval as funding is poised to move from 'margins to mainstream'.

Looking at such a financial vista, those of you familiar with David Gillborn's work may be tempted to ask whether these continually contested funding debates are 'coincidence or conspiracy'. We know the potential for discord that each round of funding creates as we are goaded into a bizarre game of 'my inequality is bigger than your inequality' in lobbying for the needs of our particular 'deserving' group.

So where do we go from here to make sure we are saying the right things to the right people?

As Viv Edwards notes (see p 31), one of the unfortunate consequences of bolt-on solutions, rather than planning for diversity, is *'the tendency to pathologize language learners; another is the failure to capitalize upon their strengths'*. We believe that funding strands of work related to underachievement, additional language acquisition and race equality from a single pot has contributed to pathologizing minoritized and bilingual learners as 'underachieving' and has failed to capitalize on the advantages ethnic and linguistic diversity offer, both to the individual and to society. The new funding proposals go even further, by linking some groups of minoritized and bilingual learners to cognitive and learning additional needs.

NALDIC's position during consultations when funding moved from the Home Office to the DfE and in subsequent 'Aiming High' consultations was that whilst that there are overlaps between underachievement, additional language acquisition and race equality, these are not the same. We argued that *'there is also a significant difference which is insufficiently observed because the emphasis on 'achievement', brought about partly by compliance to funding, has masked the understanding that learning the language of the dominant society (which is required for success within it) should be a right or entitlement. Learning this language is itself a valid and self-sufficient goal, irrespective of achievement'* (NALDIC 2003). This is why in our response we restate our position that funding for EAL needs should be decoupled from 'underachievement' funding and also why we argue for the creation of a ring fenced 'equalities grant'. EAL needs persist, whether or not the child or student is underachieving. Similarly inequalities persist, and 'underachievement' is just one manifestation of this.

We therefore argue for a new equalities grant which should not rely on statistics of achievement or descriptions of 'cognitive and learning needs' but should be open about structural inequalities which exist in the education system and which need to be addressed at pupil, teacher, school, community and local authority level. In the words of the new Equality Act, work connected to this fund should *'remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who*

share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic; and take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. It should also 'encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low'.

EAL need should be funded based on a **right** or **entitlement** to support and on indicators of English language fluency. Although NALDIC views EAL provision as centrally about language issues, that is not to say that we view this as '*solely oriented to language learning. While this dimension is clearly of central importance, there are cognitive and socio-cultural dimensions to the language learning process: language learning is not only about communicating - it is embedded in culture and integral to the development of identity.*' (NALDIC, 2003) As well as having their language needs met, bilingual young people need to be able to flourish in an education system which is based on social justice and respect for identity and equalities.

In our response we also make clear that whilst the current system for funding EAL and ethnic minority issues is under-resourced, the ring fenced nature of the EMA grant has been a key element in successes which have been achieved to date. We argue strongly against the mainstreaming of EMA funding which threatens these fragile successes. Mainstreaming too often becomes a route for educational neglect.

In an article written by Robin Richardson for *Race Equality Teaching* in 2005, he imagines an apocryphal conversation taking place at 10 Downing Street 45 years ago:

'It won't do, Harold, it won't do,' said a deputation from various metropolitan councils up and down the land. 'Our people are not at all happy about the arrival of all these immigrants.' – 'So how much do you want, lad?' – 'That's very handsome of you, Harold, how much have you got?' – 'As much as you like.' – 'Extremely handsome. You'll compensate our supporters for having to put up with immigrants?' – 'Yes.' – 'Will we have to spend the money on the immigrants?' – 'No, you can spend it on whatever you like.' – 'What's the source of this money to be called?' – 'I have in mind, lad, to call it Section Eleven.'

In my view, replacing ring fenced funding with mainstreamed 'EAL' and 'Cognitive and Learning' Additional Educational Needs funding carries exactly the same dangers and arises from exactly the same pressures that were evident 45 years ago.

So that is the 'whole vista' and a little of the detail but how will we get our message across?

NALDIC was set up to represent the EAL profession and EAL as a field of education despite, or because of, the absence of 'official' recognition or status as a profession or as a field. NALDIC's role is to make explicit what other organisations do not - to highlight the extensive body of academic research that supports EAL as a field of education and pedagogy in the interests of bilingual learners. NALDIC recognises the interplay between language and ethnicity but we speak about ethnicity in its relation to language because our expertise is in bilingualism and language development. Our role as an Association has been to pursue a strategy of tackling these issues from a specifically EAL perspective.

This does not mean that we work alone. We are constantly seeking ways to make common cause to challenge policy-makers and institutions that we believe are damaging the interests of bilingual and minoritized learners. We do this through working with the NUT, the GTC, the Council for Subject Associations and through consultation and dialogue with government bodies such as QCDA, TDA and the DCSF. In the broader public arena, over the last year we have taken part in TV reports on EMAG funding cuts, radio debates on 'white-flight' and 'is multiculturalism is damaging our schools?' and written letters that appear in the press on these issues because we believe in active advocacy.

But we need your help. We hope that the articles in this edition of NQ provide you with the information that you need to respond to the specific challenge of the funding consultation, but also prepare you for local advocacy and networking. Our General Council has been preparing a letter which will shortly be published on the website which we hope members will personalize and send to their MPs directly after the election. This letter outlines the issues that concern all of us working for a better future for bilingual learners. We hope you will join us in bringing these to the attention of our policy makers.

References

- NALDIC (2003) *NALDIC response to the Consultation 'Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic Pupils'* Accessed online at <http://www.naldic.org.uk/docs/Aiming%20High%20Response.doc>
- Richardson, R (2005) *Stories and Struggles through Forty Years – and what next?* pp13-18 in *Race Equality Teaching* Vol 23, No.2, Spring 2005, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Accessed online at <http://www.multiverse.ac.uk/attachments/6cba13bd-9db6-46cb-b46f-8e28969224e6.pdf>