

# VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

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## Ian Jones

With the recent publication of the Standards Fund Circular, LEAs and schools now know the financial situation in relation to EMAG for the next 3 years. As predicted, this is not welcome news for many of us and while the reductions in funding are capped, major cuts in provision are inevitable for thousands of EAL pupils across the country. A glance at the LEAs that are facing reductions in funding confirms that it will be EAL learners who will be most adversely affected. In these circumstances it is likely that there will be a further reduction in staffing, a move from specialist teachers towards teaching assistants and an increasing reliance on mainstream class and subject teachers to pick up the slack.

Although NALDIC has continued to argue the case for EAL nationally, the messages in relation to EAL from the government are decidedly mixed and sometimes contradictory. On the one hand, there is a recognition of EAL as '*a discipline in which to develop specialist competence*,' support for specialist courses and an EAL pilot within the Primary National Strategy. On the other hand, the changes in EMAG funding, the remodelling of the work force and the achievement focus of the strategy itself are undermining the good intentions. For instance, unless schools recognise the distinctive nature of EAL as a specialist subject with cross curricular implications, the workforce remodelling agenda, while increasing the number of adults in the classroom, is likely to lead to a reduction in the numbers of specialist EAL teachers. There are two reasons why this might happen. One is constructed on a deficit model of bilingual pupils as being a problem. Approaches to 'solving' this problem are likely to take the form of an increase in bilingual support staff to provide access and an increase in teaching assistants to work with individuals or small groups of early stage pupils. The provision of appropriate training, specialist supervision and adequate provision for pupils who are beyond the early stages would be less likely. Of course, if schools take such a narrow view of their EAL learners in the first place, it is unlikely that teaching assistants will receive adequate training while the low expectations generated by this approach are likely to permeate through the whole school.

The second reason is the corollary of the first in that pupils who are not at the early stages are not a problem and are therefore invisible or, more accurately, their needs become conflated with those of monolingual English mother tongue speakers.

The diversity of EAL pupils' backgrounds and their varied learning trajectories are reduced to a simpler and more easily accommodated vision. This mainstreaming of EAL pupils' needs is matched by the mainstreaming of the response to those needs which will be catered for by the adoption by mainstream teachers of 'good practice' and inclusionary approaches, particularly those promoted through the National Strategies. There will thus be less mediation by specialist teachers and more reliance on the pedagogical hegemony of the Strategy - approaches which will be 'strengthened' by the incorporation of EAL through the national EAL pilot.

Of course, class and subject specialist teachers and other adults are the main providers of education for bilingual pupils. There is however, a danger that the price of mainstreaming EAL and the consequent reduction in EAL specialist support will lead to a further blurring of the distinctive needs of EAL pupils and a different kind of marginalisation, similar to the 'everyone responsible no-one responsible' situation that arose in relation to race equality work in the past. This time the danger is more from a position which argues that 'good practice for all', such as that promoted through the National Strategies will be good for EAL pupils and that their needs are not distinct from those of monolingual English speakers.

The focus on achievement which locates a bilingual pupil in relation to the narrow norms of Key Stage assessments sees an intermediate EAL learner who achieves Level 3 at KS2 as an underachieving minority ethnic pupil rather than a developing bilingual learner. Assessment instruments regularly fail to recognise this distinction, while EAL is often barely mentioned in strategies to raise achievement. The result of all this, is not just a matter of there being fewer EAL specialist teachers, less recognition of the distinctiveness of EAL or the simplification of the complex interrelationships between language, thought, identity and power. It is also about the loss of a voice, the disempowerment of the pupils themselves. The changes in EMAG are likely to take us further along this road.

In our response to the consultation on 'Aiming High' we stressed the need for the distinctiveness of EAL to be retained and for adequate funding to support EAL work in schools. Since then we have continued to articulate this position through the implementation of the Strategy and publication of the new EMAG guidance and the formula. The formula revealed last autumn, although not implemented for this financial year, is not good news for many of the LEAs who are due to take substantial cuts in their funding when faced with

increasing levels of need. Although EMAG remains ostensibly ring-fenced, the scope for its use has become broader while the opportunities for monitoring have reduced. In addition the LEAs hardest hit by the reduction in funding are those urban areas with large populations of bilingual pupils and shire counties with substantial pockets of such pupils in particular areas.

During the course of the year, NALDIC has argued that the new formula would disadvantage bilingual pupils and adversely affect EAL provision. We wrote to Stephen Twigg and Charles Clarke to protest about the way in which the formula was to be implemented and to alert them to the effects on many LEAs outside London with large populations of bilingual pupils. During the summer, NALDIC representatives attended a consultation seminar on EMAG organised by the DfES and following this we again wrote to the DfES expressing our concerns. It is possible that some of this has had an effect as an element of capping has been included and the move to full implementation is to be phased over 3 years. However, in many areas the reductions for next year will still be significant and will inevitably lead to job losses and a reduced level of EAL provision.

For the future, we are faced with two key interdependent challenges, one financial and one ideological. The financial challenge is to retain the

distinctiveness of EAL and sustain a focus on support for EAL pupils' needs in the context of funding which will be diminishing over the next few years and which will eventually see the absorption of the EMA Grant into a single school improvement grant and the loss of its ring fenced status.

The ideological challenge which is driving the financial changes is the ever increasing autonomy of schools and includes changes in the relationship between schools and LEAs and remodelling of the workforce. Ultimately, it seems that the revamped National Strategies will take responsibilities for EAL while monitoring will be confined to the 'single conversation' carried out by newly trained School Improvement Partners. Whether these are head teachers or a combination of head teachers and school improvement officers remains to be seen, but either way it is envisaged that the current level of expertise in LEAs would not be required. Provision for EAL would then be dependent on the approach of individual school management teams and much provision would inevitably fall to teaching assistants and other adults often on an individual pupil basis. For NALDIC the task would be to engage and support individual teachers and support staff while developing strategies to address school management issues and developing new pedagogies to take account of the changing context.