

# VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

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## Steve Cooke

Is there a future for expertise in the teaching of EAL? Perhaps the obvious answer is “Yes”, given the current situation in which not only established multilingual schools, but a wide range of schools are enrolling considerable numbers of youngsters with little or no experience of using English. When this is combined with a growing awareness, or perhaps I should say a revival of awareness, that learning to use the more formal, academic and literary registers of EAL is a major factor in the success or otherwise at school of children from established bilingual communities, then one would perhaps answer “Yes” even more emphatically. However, the fact there is a need for such expertise does not seem to convince some of the necessity to retain existing expertise or build for the future.

Perhaps the problem here is not one of a lack of willingness to nurture expertise in the field of EAL teaching, but in a perception that there isn’t much expertise involved in such an activity. After all isn’t it about teaching English (and if we speak English we can all teach it) to small groups of pupils and being very patient with them and keeping things simple and downloading some bilingual word lists for them etc. Where does the expertise lay in this? Of course, you might say that I am being unnecessarily cynical here and that I am making light of such things as the considerable interpersonal and pastoral skills needed for this kind of work. However, the point is that the various people, bodies and institutions that make up the educational establishment need to look beneath the surface. Underlying what can appear to be a relatively simple teaching situation is a complex set of decisions about what to teach, when and how. Similarly, an engaging inclusive science lesson is more often constructed on the basis of a linguistic analysis of the content and the demands of the tasks. Without an awareness of the thinking that goes into such lessons, they will interpret the situation in terms of attitude and personal characteristics of the teacher or teaching assistant.

Not surprisingly then documents such as the Draft Framework for Teaching Standards do not dwell on applied linguistics or language teaching / learning techniques but are rather more vague in their description of standards. Thus Mainscale and Post Threshold teachers should:

*Know how to make effective personalised provision for those they teach, including those for whom English is an additional language or who have special educational needs or disabilities, and how to take practical account of diversity and promote equality and inclusion.*

Whilst Excellent and Advanced Skills Teachers should:

*Have an extensive knowledge on matters of concerning equality, inclusion and diversity in teaching.*

To me ‘effective personalised provision’ could be interpreted in many different ways which do not necessarily specify a knowledge of second language learning or EAL teaching. Indeed, doesn’t the term personalised suggest firstly that EAL learners are unusual and, secondly that they require a separate and possibly non-inclusive approach.

Of course, it is unrealistic to expect all class teachers to become EAL teaching experts but if their teaching is to be language conscious then some degree of knowledge about how language works and how English in particular works would seem to be imperative.

The EAL (Pilot) Programme has done much to raise the profile of EAL learning and teaching and in particular has focused attention on the developmental English needs of ‘more advanced bilingual learners’. In highlighting Lyn Cameron’s analysis of the linguistic challenges of learning English not only for early stage learners but also for the ‘more advanced learners’ the Programme has opened the door to a greater consideration of the linguistic demands of using English across a range of genres. In many ways this has the potential to turn the tide against the perception of Level 3 Bilingual Pupils as being the same as ‘underachieving’ monolingual pupils and therefore in need of the same kind of interventions. There remains the question though of who is available to carry out this kind of analysis. I have a feeling that literacy co-ordinators and class teachers often may be in a position to act upon such an analysis but not be able to do the analysing themselves. This then means that unless they have access to the skills of a trained EAL professional they are unlikely to be able to focus on pupils’ developmental needs or develop the skills to carry out their own linguistic analysis.

What is more, this is not the only aspect of expertise in EAL teaching that the Strategy has brought to the fore. Knowledge of how to contextualise language, how to set up and sustain peer interaction, how to micro scaffold pupils’ learning through effective questioning and how to structure activities around reading are all part of a range of knowledge and skills that add up to a notion of expertise. If we are (as Frank Monaghan puts it) ‘to EAL the mainstream’ then this expertise is needed on a day to day basis to support the work of mainstream teaching staff. Without this support I fear that all the content of PDMs and INSET will not be effectively put into operation. As the NFER evaluation of the EAL Pilot / Programme reports, schools were of the opinion that effective use of consultancy time included:

*Partnership teaching with strategically targeted year groups or individual class teachers on specific priorities identified in the RA.*

*The consultant working with class teachers to help them in the planning of EAL strategies into existing units of work*

*The opportunity for teachers to discuss any issues or confusions individually with the consultant.*

*The consultant observing and monitoring practice within the classroom, after strategies had been introduced using both qualitative and quantitative methods.*

In addition to this the report also says that as well as some interpersonal and personal qualities that consultants were valued when they 'had the necessary expertise in pedagogy for EAL learners' and 'had previous practical experience of working with EAL learners in a classroom (e.g. practitioner, EMA consultant) in order to gain credibility amongst staff'.

The question of 'EALing' the mainstream also raises another question about the expertise of EAL practitioners. If they are going to engage with the mainstream then they need to be as conversant with mainstream content as class and subject teachers. In primary schools, this means getting to grips with the literacy and maths frameworks and the science curriculum as well as other subjects. In secondary school it may mean dealing with Shakespeare and medieval life and cell specialisation. For some this might seem a tall order in the same way that we cannot expect class and subject teachers to integrate content and language teaching without some sense of the linguistic we cannot expect ourselves to do the same thing without some handle on the content side. Does this mean EAL practitioners have to be a kind of 'superteacher' who knows all there is to know about anything and everything? I don't think so, but perhaps it does imply a particular kind of ability to be able to analyse the nature of different kinds of content and acquire the substance of the content through this process. In practical terms this can mean using Mohan's 'Knowledge Framework' to categorise sections of subject content and use this as a tool for planning. This process I believe is one in which you begin to make the content accessible to yourself. In turn, this leads to unit / lesson planning which can make the content accessible to EAL learners. Some of us may have some reservations about synthetic phonic programmes but it still means that we need to be fully aware of the structure and content of these programmes if we are going to have anything meaningful to say about how and when they are used with bilingual learners.

Of course, the recommendations of 'The Rose Report' place particular emphasis on the teaching of blending and segmenting as a part of a systematic synthetic phonics programme. The report also argues that this kind of programme needs to be built on a rich experience of oracy. The recommendations have become an integral part of the Early Years Foundation

Stage Framework. However, in relation to bilingual learners both The Rose Report and the framework itself dodge the question of what a rich experience of oracy means. It was disappointing in the draft Early Years Framework that use of first language although mentioned was not flagged as being a vital part of a four or five year old's development but more as an optional extra or as 'a nice thing to do sometimes'. Can a rich experience of oracy in English be built on neglect of a child's home language or by dipping into it selectively? Probably not. This opens up another area of expertise which although important in KS1 and 2 is crucial in the Foundation Stage. It is the expertise involved in using bilingual skills to ensure the continued development of a child's home language while at the same time managing their introduction to the acquisition of English. This kind of work involves a good deal of sound judgement and sensitivity as well as a good grasp of language (not just English) development.

But where does all this lead to? A number of points, I think, emerge from the current situation.

- Class / subject teachers need a more systematic grounding in language conscious content teaching which starts in initial teacher training, not with a half-day session on EAL but with a continuous consideration of the curriculum in relation to EAL learners.
- The Primary National EAL Programme needs to be embedded into local authorities and schools including those with smaller numbers of EAL Learners. It also needs to be embedded into all levels of the Primary National Strategy itself. This should also apply to secondary EAL initiatives and the Secondary National Strategy.
- At the same time the Primary National EAL Strategy needs to continue to refine and develop its materials and training. The EAL Toolkit should be a starting point, and it is a very useful one, rather than the end of the story.
- The way in which the EALing of the curriculum can benefit all learners whether bilingual or not needs to be further explored, demonstrated and disseminated.
- The use of home language and bilingual teaching needs further clarification as to its purposes, intents and anticipated outcomes. The distinctions between transitional and developmental and subtractive and additive bilingualism are often blurred in everyday policy and practice. This is often not the fault of the practitioners but results from the situation they find themselves in. A clearer working definition of what constitutes developmental / additive bilingual teaching would be very useful.
- The continuation of a ring-fenced grant focused on Ethnic Minority achievement is

vital. It needs to be sufficient to fund both local authority and school based capacity to provide high quality advice and training for staff and high quality teaching for bilingual pupils. If it is insufficient it will lead to further loss of available expertise and if funding is not ring fenced it will slide its way into propping up other areas of work. We are all aware that embedding can be a very positive move or in some cases a justification for shifting responsibility and funding to generalist rather than specialist staff.

- The existing expertise in EAL and bilingualism from higher education, local authorities schools and government agencies needs to be harnessed to provide a systematic programme of research, development and training which focuses on language teaching and learning, curriculum development, language and content teaching and bilingual teaching.

This last point is particularly important because the existing expertise is dwindling as staff who in the 1970s and 80s gained qualifications (RSA TESL, PGCEs in TESOL from London, Manchester, Leicester etc) and practical experience have retired, are retiring or are approaching retirement or in some unfortunate cases redundancy. It is a common perception that we are an aging (though not aged) community of practitioners and despite the presence of some younger colleagues that young teachers are not tempted to specialise because of the perceived lack of status and career opportunities in this field.

Given these particular circumstances wouldn't it make sense to establish a national centre for EAL which could bring together and harness the existing expertise and experience, as noted above, from a number of institutions? This could work together with the Primary and Secondary Strategies and increase their capacity to deliver research, development and training. It could also be the body which designed and administered a national qualification in EAL / bilingual teaching which could be delivered in regional centres. This might be considered a case of re-inventing the RSA TESL, but would that necessarily be a bad thing? At the moment, leaving the onus on higher education institutions to provide courses and qualifications (and these of course need to be financially viable or rely on small and unstable pockets of government subsidy) has led to something of a 'post code lottery' in which access to courses is a matter of geography and circumstances.

In the early 1980s I remember an HMI commenting that from the early 1960s successive governments had viewed EAL teaching in schools as a short term issue which would disappear within a few years. Forty years on from the establishing of Section XI funding, it is surely time to acknowledge that short term measures are not and never have been the answer to increased global mobility. The setting up of the Primary EAL

Programme is a promising move in the right direction. The extent to which the programme can be fully effective is dependent on practitioners at local authority and school level. Funding which is based on year to year uncertainty or even promises of three year stability cannot sustain appropriate long term provision. For practitioners at all levels constantly looking over your shoulder or wondering whether your work will still be funded next year is a demoralising way to operate.

If this and any future governments are serious about creating a world class education system, then one of their criteria for evaluation must be the extent to which it provides for children who because of a range of circumstances are at various stages of acquiring social and academic registers of English. To achieve high quality provision in this area it is necessary to build capacity at all levels. An essential part of both quality and capacity is the depth and availability of expertise. Sustaining capacity is about ensuring that existing expertise is replicated in successive generations. We must find a way now before it is too late of using our collective expertise to build current capacity and to inform the practices of the newer members of the teaching profession. I apologise if this sounds overly dramatic, but I, probably like you, am conscious of colleagues who have retired or will retire in the next few years. Having given so much to the field in which we work, they could have given so much more and indeed could still give so much more if there was a coherent and stable structure for the field of EAL and Bilingual teaching.

As Joni Mitchell once famously sang in 'Big Yellow Taxi':

*Don't it always seem to go  
That you don't know what you have got till it's gone.*

Of course back in 1968 she was singing about trees and environmental issues. Nearly forty years on, it seems that Members of the Government and opposition parties have finally started to take the maintenance of the environment seriously. Let's hope that in the same way they now begin to see education for a multilingual society as worthy of some long term planning and that they listen to what we as individuals and collectively as members of various organisations, including NALDIC, have to say on this matter.