

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

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The theme of this edition is the title from our 2008 Annual Conference *EAL: More than Just Good Practice*. As Pauline Gibbons notes in her address this *'says a lot to those of us who've been in EAL/ESL for a very long time, and it summarises what many of us have been doing for years, which is to argue for the need, first of all, for specialist EAL teachers, and, secondly, for an EAL-aware general teaching force. And we have argued this on the grounds that children who are being educated through the medium of their second language need different kinds of scaffolding from children who are learning through the medium of their mother tongue'*.

It may be useful for us to reflect on what has happened in this *'very long time'* to specialist EAL teachers and to establish an EAL-aware general teaching force. Looking back, it is clear that the influence on the UK educational scene of many teaching and learning approaches informed by developments in countries such as Australia has had an impact on the extent to which teaching in classrooms in the UK is 'EAL-compatible'. This is most evident in approaches to literacy and literacy across the curriculum. Similarly, our view that linguistic diversity is not a passing phenomenon but an ever present reality has also gained ground. Few central initiatives are now complete without some reference to meeting the needs of EAL learners. In addition, a number of concerted efforts have been made by government agencies to strengthen the EAL-awareness of the general teaching force. These include efforts supported by the 'Aiming High' initiative and more lately by the setting up of Ethnicity, Social Class and Gender Achievement (ESCGA) strand of the National Strategies. The aims of these programmes are to support school leadership teams to plan strategically to improve provision for Black and Minority Ethnic learners and to enable teachers to understand and apply EAL pedagogy and practice in order to accelerate progress and raise attainment of EAL learners. Similarly the TDA has funded NALDIC to develop an EAL subject resource network for staff involved in initial teacher education to ensure that mainstream student teachers get more preparation for the multi-lingual classroom than a one-day 'diversity' event. In addition, in a welcome move, the TDA has recently launched a five-year workforce development strategy for EAL.

So far, so good but is this really enough? Whatever achievement statistics may tell us about the performance of EAL learners in tests and examinations compared to their peers, what do our eyes and ears tell us about everyday provision for EAL learners in classrooms up and down the country? Firstly they tell us that classrooms are more linguistically diverse than ever. If we need

confirmation of this, the January 2008 School Census gave us more information than ever before on the linguistic backgrounds of our learners. We know that the first language of over 800,000 pupils in primary and secondary schools is not English and that bilingual learners now make up 12.5% or 1 in 8 of all pupils. We know that Panjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Somali, Polish, Arabic, Portuguese, Turkish and Tamil are the first languages of over 600,000 of our pupils and that a further 200,000 pupils have access to another 230 languages between them. Some see this increasing linguistic diversity as a threat to 'integration'. We do not, but we do argue that we need to consider carefully how well our national curriculum and assessment arrangements match the pupils we see in our classes.

Secondly, we know that with workforce remodelling there are many more teaching and learning support staff involved in the education of bilingual learners. From 2004 to 2008, the FTE of EAL/EMA support staff has risen from 2,500 to 3,000. This represents an increase of 20%. Welcome though this increase is, we also know that there are not enough specialist *teachers* of EAL. This message has come across strongly from the National Audit of EAL Training and Development Provision and from recent work as part of the TDA five-year year workforce strategy. Pointers from the early research suggest that there is a mismatch in the system between demand and the number of skilled people available. This is hardly surprising. Between 2004 and 2008, the FTE equivalent of EMA/EAL teachers nationally increased by only 253 from a FTE of 3,405 to 3,658. This increase of around 8% falls far short of the 23% rise in EAL pupil numbers during the same time frame. Added to this, we know that devolution of funding to schools has led to cutbacks and the watering down of centrally held local authority expertise in many regions.

Some may say there will never be enough funding for a sufficient number of EAL specialists and so mainstream teachers are key. We do not. Of course there must be an expectation that all teachers, and not just EAL specialist teachers, have responsibility for the academic success of bilingual students. But like Pauline Gibbons, we argue for the need for specialist EAL teachers **and** an EAL-aware general teaching force. All teachers have responsibility for the diverse learning needs of pupils but we have yet to hear the argument that schools do not also need specialist SENCOs who *'have the necessary standing to influence differentiated teaching to meets pupils' individual needs'* (see page 35).

Without the expertise that EAL specialists provide we are likely to end up with what a colleague once described as 'EAL-lite' teaching, curriculum and assessment. Bilingual pupils deserve better.