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"What am I doing here? The role of Teacher and Pupil Identity in Developing English Academic Proficiency."

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Professor Cummins welcomed the opportunity to work in the UK field, where he recognised the 'intellectual energy' evident in NALDIC and its membership and the commitment of EAL professionals to creating contexts where learners could develop a sense of empowerment and make contributions to society. On the other hand, he had also noted the frustration that professionals felt in the UK as a result of recent initiatives and of the marginalisation of EAL provision, much of which was familiar to him as many from similar themes in North America.

Professor Cummins felt that, both in the UK and in North America, there was an attack on "the possibility of injecting imagination into education" through a proliferation of bureaucratic top-down mandates which showed little commitment to education in the broadest and most fundamental sense. Teachers needed to ask themselves continuously what their vision of education was, what they wanted to achieve in their interactions with their pupils and the identity options they wanted to open up for them as a result of the time spent with them. He quoted from Eagan[1]: "Imagination is not some desirable but dispensable frill but at the heart of any truly educational experience. It is not something split off from the basics of disciplined thought or rational inquiry but it is the quality that can give them life or meaning. Stimulating the imagination is not an alternative educational activity to be argued for in competition with other things. It is a pre-requisite to making any activity educational". Eagan considered imagination as central to all areas of the curriculum but many recent developments had had the effect of implementing the curriculum in a scripted way, where the goal was to make the curriculum almost teacher-proof. In this situation, where professionalism and imagination are not seen as being important, the ways in which teachers and learners are being constructed is problematic.

Professor Cummins' theme would therefore be that teachers need to push back against those top-down mandates, come to terms with their own identity as educators and form collective identities within schools. He suggested that the themes of the Bullock Report on school-based language policies needed to be revisited - unless teachers know what it is that they are trying to do with language, the assumptions being made about language and the role it plays in pupils' lives and families' lives, they are not in a position to develop language adequately or to resist the top-down mandates that are often ignorant about the nature of language proficiency and how it should be developed. He doubted that many bureaucrats, talking about promoting academic language proficiency or literacy, had a clear idea of the issues involved or the nature of academic language. He cited as an example

[1] Eagan, Kieran (1992) *Imagination in Teaching and Learning: The Middle School Years.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press

moves on both sides of the Atlantic to remedy the teacher shortage by having a two-layer system where people who do not have formal teaching qualifications are brought in and simply deliver the script. The reading programme preferred by most of the large urban districts in the US is called 'Open Court', a scripted phonics programme where teachers have to be on the same page of the programme, working on the same phoneme at any particular time of the day, with so-called 'coaches' who monitor compliance with this policy. This would seem to represent a control fetish, a top-down mandate that wants to micro-manage anything that is happening in the school, and issues related to EAL pupils tend to be ignored within this. Assertions that EAL pupils take at least five years to learn English are considered absurd given that children seem to acquire fluent English very quickly, and are merely designed to hang on to EAL specialists' jobs. Professor Cummins wanted to focus on ways in which we can resist this rhetoric and also to address the substantive issues with respect to the nature of literacy, ways in which it can be developed and the special considerations with respect to second language learners or EAL pupils, so that issues related to learner identities and teacher identities are not excluded from any kind of consideration.

In beginning to focus on teaching language, Professor Cummins then went on make a distinction between three aspects of proficiency which have real consequences in terms of children's lives in schools and go right to the heart of many of the misconceptions with respect to EAL provision on both sides of the Atlantic. The three categories he distinguished are conversational fluency, (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills or BICS), Discrete Language Skills and Academic Language Proficiency. The first refers to the ability to carry on a conversation in familiar face-to-face situations, where prior knowledge is activated and it is possible to predict what is going to happen; there are also clues to the meaning through facial expressions, gesture and intonation. This is the kind of fluency or proficiency in the language that native speakers develop in the first five or six years of life, and involves use of high frequency words and simple grammatical constructions. Second language learners generally develop conversational fluency in their second language within a year or two of being immersed in the language or being exposed to it in a school context or outside school. What has happened is that policy-makers take conversational fluency as language proficiency, and conflate the two. The example given was that of Proposition 227 in California, a law passed in June 1998 which essentially tried to banish or exclude bilingual education and restrict the time given to language support. Underlying the law was the assumption that one year of support for English learners was sufficient, and then learners are put into the mainstream with no support. So these conceptions of language literally have direct consequences for learners.

Another category of language, termed language skills by Professor Cummins, refers to very specific phonological literacy and grammatical knowledge that students acquire. Some of these skills are acquired early in schooling, for example knowledge of letters of the alphabet, knowledge of the sounds that these letters and combinations of letters make, the ability to decode written words into appropriate sounds. All of these are the focus of early literacy instruction, and appropriately so. But other aspects continue to be acquired throughout schooling, for example conventions about spelling, capitalisation, information about grammatical rules. In terms of second language learners, what the research shows is that these discrete language skills can be acquired in the early years of schooling, simultaneously with the acquisition of conversational skills. But the research also shows that these

discrete language skills do not generalise to academic language proficiency. Tests seemed to show the efficacy of these programmes, and they do have good results in the first few years, but this is then followed by what has been termed the 'Grade 4 slump', a phenomenon where children seem to be doing well in the first few grades, but when they reach Grade 3 or Grade 4, their attainment levels worsen dramatically. One of the reasons for this is that the curriculum suddenly becomes more inaccessible for a learner who has been used to a focus on discrete language skills, now having to cope with the uncontrolled vocabulary of mathematics, science, social studies and history. The danger then is, if education in general and English as an additional language in particular is de-professionalised, imagination is taken out of the equation, as are learner identity and teacher identity. Education then fails to address what children need to become imaginative learners, and fails to understand the nature of academic language.

Academic Language Proficiency refers to the ability to understand and produce increasingly complex oral and written language. English is a hybrid language, composed of Anglo-Saxon that was in place roughly between the fifth century and the eleventh century, and following the Norman invasion, the Norman language based on Old French, Latin and Greek. Over the next three or four centuries, the two languages integrated to become English. This did not happen evenly over all domains and functions of language. The Anglo-Saxon lexicon remained the language of everyday interactions, whereas the Greek and Latin based language remained high status, and became the language of literacy. It is essential that pupils get access to this type of language if they are going to succeed in school. Research has repeatedly shown that EAL pupils take at least five years on average to bridge the gap. We know also that native speakers of English who come to school at age five conversation-proficient in English need to learn the literacy required in school. Professor Cummins described an 'Orwellian double think process' in which policy makers understand that children's language repertoires and literacy skills need to be expanded when they come to school, but will not accept the premise that it usually takes at least five years for EAL pupils to catch up, or that EAL pupils are pursuing a moving target, because as they are learning English they are also catching up to pupils who are also learning academic English. Research by Collier and Thomas was quoted in respect of the task facing EAL learners in that, during a ten month school year where a native speaker of English would be expected to make ten months' academic gain, in order to catch up in six years, an EAL pupil has to make fifteen months' academic gain. When there are cutbacks in EAL provision and marginalisation of EAL teachers, this displays 'profound ignorance' of the nature of language proficiency, and the kind of support that is required for pupils to catch up. Development of this kind of proficiency requires different kinds of instruction from what might be successful in developing discrete language skills.

Professor Cummins quoted from the work of David Corson on 'academic words', showing a list of the most common words that cut across academic disciplines. In contrast with the most common words in the English language, which come predominantly from Anglo-Saxon sources and are short and monosyllabic, the academic words are multi-syllabic, and generally will not appear in conversational interaction. Literally, academic language can be seen as a different language. In terms of the implications for instruction, unless children are immersed in literacy through reading, they are not getting access to this language. Finding a way to get children to identify themselves as readers and to relate curriculum material to their lives is essential. The affective domain, rather than just the cognitive or academic

domain in the narrow sense, is important, and learner identity is fundamental. Professor Cummins warned of the dangers of what he termed the 'technocrifisation' of education where issues related to the affective domain and imagination are excluded. He felt, as Eagan had outlined, that for any activity or interaction in the classroom to be seen as educational, it must also be infused with imagination.

In order to develop this kind of language, it is also essential to focus directly on demystifying how it works. In this country, valuable work had been done on the development of critical language awareness which needed to be revisited. Teachers needed to make the learning of and about language fun, to get children to see themselves not just as readers but also as 'harvesters' of the language that they are reading. They should be focused not just on the meaning of what they are reading but also looking at words that sound interesting, and that they want to explore further. Professor Cummins gave examples of work on word derivation, on prefixes and suffixes, in ways that would be more likely to make the word 'stick' rather than explaining it at an abstract level. All this would come under the umbrella of critical language awareness, as could phonics if taught in an interactive way, and also exploring how language is used to manipulate, to persuade, and to exclude.

Teachers need to ask themselves the question "What am I doing here?", and get together as a school community to focus on their beliefs with respect to language and how language can be developed, as well as their beliefs with respect to learning and their vision of education. Unless they focus on these issues, and are clear about what they hope to achieve in the ten months that they are going to be interacting with their pupils, reinvigorating their vision, then they would easily fall prey to top-down mandates and allow themselves to be constructed as robots who just read the scripts. Professor Cummins provided a diagrammatic schema or framework to help in this process and to act as a starting point for developing a school-based language policy. The inner circle of the diagram, teacher-student interactions, is similar to Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development' – the interpersonal space created when teachers interact with children. Ideally, for real learning to be happening, this would include maximum cognitive engagement, so that children are analysing and synthesising information, and above all, being required to use their imagination in the learning process. Also in that inner circle is negotiation of identity, in the context of a learning environment where children feel safe, secure and motivated enough to invest their identities fully in the learning process. Generally this can happen in a non-problematic way when there is a match between the background, cultural expectations and language of the teacher and the pupils who happen to be in his or her classroom. However, the history of the education of ethnic minority children often shows profound mismatches between what the school expects and what the children bring to school. In many parts of the world, the explicit message to children and their parents is that they must leave their language and culture at the schoolhouse door and become a different kind of person, one that the school will be willing to teach. In this situation, many children do not relate to schooling and identity investment does not happen. Children may try hard in the early grades to please the teacher, to show that they are intelligent, that they have experiences in their background that they want to share, and yet over time the negative message comes over to them. Patterns of societal power relations that operate in the wider society also have to be taken into account. Priorities in our schools are expressed by the structures that are set up, and by what is included in teacher education. Thus, contexts where the training of mainstream classroom teachers includes almost nothing about issues related to language development, bilingualism or racism, and

where EAL teachers are marginalized, show the priorities of our society. Issues related to identity and power have been excluded from school effectiveness formulae. In order to create contexts of empowerment in classrooms where pupils will engage to the maximum intellectually, aspects of the broader societal power structure will therefore also need to be challenged.

Contexts need to be created where children will be given opportunities to use language to generate new knowledge, to create literature and art and to act on social realities. Professor Cummins outlined some of the ways in which children's critical literacy, and their ability to deconstruct how meaning is put together in texts, can be developed. One example might be a focus on the life of Guiseppe Mizzifante, the Vatican librarian in the early 1800s who was able to learn to speak fifty languages, to understand seventy-seven and to translate one hundred and fourteen. This 'fun fact' could lead to a study of the linguistic community of the school so as to acknowledge and celebrate the linguistic accomplishments of the group of learners. The information could be fed into a computer and used to generate pie charts and bar graphs and other statistical manipulations, thus integrating mathematics into the project. Pupils could then use a map of the world to find out where these languages are spoken, so that the countries are not just abstract places but are personalised to friends in the classroom. Further work could be done on how languages travelled and the stories behind language migration. This then becomes an expanding universe that goes right across the curriculum, where intellect, imagination and identity are all integrated with the learning process.

Further examples were given of the ways in which children were able to bring their languages into the classroom and thus communicate affirmative messages about who they are and the importance of their language. The first was in a Maths class where children had been asked to create mathematics problems using their first language, and the children were able to bring in cultural references as well as demonstrating their skills in another language. The learning process also becomes much more powerful when it is personalised in the identities of the children, thus challenging the pattern of coercive power relations in the broader society. The collaborative creation of power is fundamental, creating contexts in a classroom where children's intellects are allowed to flourish even though they may not be able to express their ideas in English, and finding ways to let children show their intelligence and their imagination. If teachers really can look at how language and power integrate, curriculum objectives will not only be met but will be achieved far more profoundly than if the script had been slavishly followed. In order for this to happen, teachers must look at their own identity as educators and realise that as educators imagination is fundamental. The challenge for teachers is to be able to re-inject imagination into the equation and an awareness of how power relations operate both in society and in the school, and to look at language as a resource that can be used with children in order to ensure that they become more powerful contributors linguistically and intellectually to society. Professor Cummins concluded by saying, "Even though we're in a process where we feel the constrictions from the top-down mandates, I think if we start pushing back both individually and collectively, then we'll implement education that is powerful, both for children and for us, because empowerment is a reciprocal process".