

Promoting EAL Teacher Professionalism – a NALDIC statement

The education environment is constantly changing. Schools are expected to serve an increasingly diverse population in the context of shifting policy priorities. In these circumstances the professionalism of the EAL specialist teacher has to be regularly reviewed in the light of different circumstances and an updated knowledge base. Building on The EAL Teacher: Descriptors of Good Practice which we published in 2002, we now update and extend our statement on professionalism. The effectiveness of our professional work requires a clear and accurate understanding of how EAL is continuously evolving. We welcome your comments.

A specialist EAL teacher has to know and to make use of an up-to-date body of knowledge and skills in the following areas in a context-sensitive way:

Complex additional language development patterns because there are many different types of EAL/bilingual pupils in school. Pupil-oriented EAL teaching and support strategies have to take into account a whole host of considerations such as stage of English language development, type/s of English language learning needs, home/first/other language development, age/phase of education, social and educational background, and inter-ethnic/race relations in the learning environment.

English as a complex linguistic and communication system because pupils need to learn both formal rules of grammar and pervasive (often invisible) social rules of use. Well-informed EAL teaching requires accurate diagnosis of pupil English language development needs in terms of vocabulary, sentence grammar and discourse organisation in both spoken and written modes for personal, social and academic purposes. Responsive EAL teaching has to enable pupils to understand and develop the ability to use everyday informal English and more formal academic English to meet their communication needs at every stage of their schooling.

Language as part of social, cultural and multimodal practices because language-based meaning-making in school (as elsewhere) tends to occur in culturally-patterned ways and in conjunction with other modes of meaning-making, e.g. gestures, role play or graphic displays. Sensitive EAL teaching will enable pupils to understand and develop the ability to learn, for instance, ways of participating in class discussion (i.e. the rules governing the what, the when and the how in local contexts). Such knowledge will also assist pupils to develop their own

social space, identity and voice in English through effective social participation.

Classroom (school) as a language ecology because it is a complex ecosystem comprising multiple participants (teachers and pupils), their beliefs, teaching/learning styles and histories, institutional rules and memories, local community and national policy influences, all of which are in dynamic and fluid constellation of interaction. Skilful EAL teaching has to navigate around and through these constantly shifting formations to provide the optimal teaching, learning and support opportunities for EAL pupils.

Teaching as community development and resource management because schools as institutions offer specific opportunities and constraints. Effective EAL practice has to explore and exploit the available human (teacher and pupil) expertise and institutional/curriculum provision to maximise the quality of the learning experience for EAL pupils. For instance, the specific form of partnership teaching, i.e. ways of collaborating between a subject/class teacher and an EAL specialist, in a school has to take into account school past practices and current policy, (informal but real) staff attitudes and expertise, and curriculum arrangements. The skilful EAL teacher also has to articulate the reasons for their decisions and actions in professionally recognised terms.

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