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What is This?
English as an Additional Language: assumptions and challenges

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Abstract
The number of pupils who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) in our English schools is increasing with an increased influx of migrants from Europe. This paper investigates how schools are addressing the needs of these children. Using survey and interviews with teachers and paraprofessionals (teaching assistants and bilingual assistants), the identification of personal assumptions and challenges of EAL provision are explored. Early indications suggest huge differential practice for EAL provision, support and training. Many staff suggested that they are culturally unaware and have little experience of supporting EAL children. Furthermore, the key challenge for leaders is how best to cater for EAL children using a diverse workforce creatively and within tight financial constraints and competing school priorities.

Keywords
English as an Additional Language, paraprofessionals, cultural attitudes, diversity

Introduction
This paper reports some interesting research on the assumptions made of children who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) by those who are responsible for EAL provision. As the impact of mass migration becomes more evident in English classrooms, this research focus is of considerable value to practitioners, researchers and those in strategic planning to assess how best to deploy the wider workforce in improving and creating efficiencies and safeguarding all pupils. What follows is a review of some key issues associated with EAL provision and then reflection and analysis of our research evidence to suggest strategies for promoting further good practice in classrooms.

This paper focuses on the challenges faced by teachers and paraprofessionals in supporting EAL children in primary schools. The counties in which this study was conducted featured settings with high concentrations of EAL children as well as settings in the same area where there are no EAL children, and an even smaller number of minority ethnic staff within the schools. Therefore many teachers within the same county have, as yet, little or no consistent experience of teaching and supporting EAL children.

Literature
The issues associated with accommodating EAL pupils in the classroom is considered briefly in this introduction. Incorrectly labelling EAL pupils as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) rather than as pupils who are experiencing a ‘temporary language barrier’ is noted by Hall (2001: 1). Therefore, when assessing pupils with EAL, the need for teachers to be sensitive to cultural attitudes and languages becomes paramount. Where there are different forms of culture, histories and language of pupils (Creese, 2003), in what Haugen calls ‘language ecology’ (1972: 325), it is essential to build effective bridges between the home and school environment whereby the home culture is understood as best as possible. The ‘Community Cohesion and Engagement’ policy of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2007: 3) further encourages schools to make provision for children with EAL.

There remain other challenges in supporting pupils with EAL. Where there is diversity among people in terms of ethnicity, Lumby & Coleman (2007) suggest that nurturing such interrelationships in diverse contexts require adopting sensitivity in all activities and actions. Leading and managing diverse staff therefore necessitates valuing diversity and assessing the skills base to its best advantage (Lumby et al., 2004). At the time of writing this paper, the Teaching and Development Agency (TDA), in collaboration with the Learning and Skills Network (LSN), was seeking views in order to produce a draft strategy for the development of English as an Additional Language (EAL) for the school workforce (TDA, 2009). This draft strategy should be in place by March 2010. One key finding of our research supports the DCSF (2007) evidence of a patchy provision for training and support for teachers to cater for pupils of EAL,

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and whatever training is offered is not specific enough to effectively support the language development of EAL children and the cultural awareness of wider staff.

So what does good practice in EAL look like?

Many forms of good practice are evident in many settings. Woolfolk et al. (2008: 221) suggest that five key areas need to be implemented when working with EAL children. They consist of; clarity of learning goals, guided practice leading to independent practice, engaging tasks, opportunities for interaction and encouragement from the teacher. Particular strengths included modelling whereby activities were modelled well with the use of visual aids and where children were given a variety of opportunities to record their interactions through different mediums other than pencil and paper. Good partnerships were also evident in some cases whereby staff in schools with a high proportion of EAL children would share their methods with nearby schools. We fully report our research in *Education 3–13* journal (pending publication). But for this paper, a brief review of the methodology and outcomes to suggest what good practice looks like is reported.

Findings

We aimed to obtain a range of perspectives, experiences and perceptions of the provision for EAL children of primary school age. In particular, we chose to focus our investigation on schools which supported, directly or indirectly, EAL children as well as those schools that have virtually no experience of EAL children in order to gain some comparisons. An interpretivist approach allowed for an understanding of ‘the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it’ (Schwandt, 1998: 221). The sample was made up of 48 adults, of which 20 were teachers, 20 were teaching assistants, 7 were SENCOs and one was an Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant Coordinator (EMAGC). The claim here is not one of representativeness, but of attempting to use a stratified sample (Cohen et al., 2007: 111) of adults’ experience to generate insights into the issues linked with EAL to develop good practice.

We combined and analysed the interview data and survey feedback using qualitative content analysis technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For ease of clarity, we present the data and its analysis in three tables: Table 1 is on the assumptions associated with the abilities of EAL children; Table 2 is on how EAL practice can be made more inclusive and Table 3 shows the responses of three different sample groups on the type of specific training needed regarding EAL children. We consider Table 1 in the next section.

### Assumptions associated with abilities of EAL children

Some negative notions of EAL children’s ability, language skills and understanding are voiced by staff in the data shown in Table 1. If good practice outlined by Woolfolk et al. (2008: 221) is to be promoted, then what our evidence suggests is that much greater effort through the leaders and managers of the schools is needed to encourage, facilitate and engage the wider workforce to collaborate on pedagogical, cultural and linguistic debate to ensure that the potential of all pupils is enhanced. According to Hall (2001), incorrect labelling of EAL children is likely to be attributed to misunderstanding by teachers. Creese (2003) supports the idea that limited understanding of cultural ‘ideologies and values’ (p. 1) by some adults is unhelpful in supporting EAL children. Table 2 provides evidence to show what makes EAL practice more inclusive.

### Making EAL practice more inclusive

Most staff wanted specific EAL-focused training and development to enhance their skills in supporting EAL children (see Table 2). However, competing priorities and tight resource management within a school has led leaders to identify what individual needs are against whole school priorities (Lepkowska, 2008). In order to be secure and
Table 2. How EAL practice can be made more inclusive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Teacher assistants</th>
<th>SENCO/EMAG Coordinator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that all staff receive training on how to effectively plan and provide opportunities for EAL children to talk/practise English</td>
<td>Encourage staff to attend specific EAL courses (if they exist!)</td>
<td>More training available regularly – good links with parents and schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that planning and assessment are thorough to cater for EAL children</td>
<td>More varied training available regularly, that staff should be encouraged to attend</td>
<td>Leaders need to listen to difficulties experienced by teachers and make sure that middle managers have time to investigate/source resources/meet with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide more LSA support to carry out assessments regularly</td>
<td>Get some training to be aware of teaching EAL children effectively</td>
<td>EAL training needs to be incorporated into CPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make available training and resources to support all staff</td>
<td>Encourage all staff to attend EAL courses as part of their professional development.</td>
<td>LSAs need to play a more active role in the delivery of EAL techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/INSET days for the whole school on EAL</td>
<td>More emphasis on CPD regarding the needs of the children in the school (EAL)</td>
<td>More training in terms of how to access/plan for EAL children specifically, and also to have workshops regarding their culture for better understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMT have employed a part-time bilingual assistant</td>
<td>All staff need to be trained</td>
<td>Need to develop policy which covers social integration (inclusion) to help the family and access to resources, including expert advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authority support for the one EAL child that our school had as our head was well known and had good contacts (this would not normally happen in other settings)</td>
<td>Good links with parents/carers and other schools</td>
<td>Having 1:1 support for EAL children with the basic letter/sounds and numbers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Showing the type of specific training needed regarding EAL children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Teaching assistants</th>
<th>SENCO/EMAG coordinator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to develop key resources in less popular languages</td>
<td>How to encourage motivation in EAL children (specific strategies)</td>
<td>Specific cross-curricular resources to help EAL children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techniques for the development of skills and knowledge</td>
<td>How these children could be satisfied learners given the right opportunities in life</td>
<td>Knowing about the starting points for children who have no English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific training on where to start</td>
<td></td>
<td>Instant access to advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also specific training on particular resources and different approaches</td>
<td></td>
<td>Instant access to cultural information. In Early Years lack of progress with EAL children is sometimes linked to a lack of development – which means that their needs are not taken seriously by Senior Management Team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

confident learners, EAL children need to feel ‘accepted’ for who they are, regardless of race, religion or cultural background (DfES, 2006: 7), so that they can successfully access the curriculum.

This is where a diverse workforce can add value to school provision. The comment of the SENCO about middle managers needing time to undertake their role and the need for leaders to listen to staff concerns has important management implications (Day et al., 2000). In an inclusive setting, this means further research on what is effective leadership and management for and with a diverse workforce (Lumby et al., 2004). Table 3 shows data on the type of specific training needed regarding EAL children and analyses the implications for promoting good practice.

From our data in Table 3, some staff chose specific courses and training while others focused on developing cultural awareness or how best to adapt the curriculum. The data also suggests that the senior leadership team at times do not listen to their staff as ‘they appear to be so obsessed with their development plan’ (teacher comment) that meeting the needs of EAL children is not a priority and consequently, therefore, the funding is not allocated in that...
direction. So, the leadership challenge is to ensure that structures and systems are in place to monitor the take-up and impact of such training (Lepkowska, 2008).

We also found that EAL staff do not exist in white schools therefore the teachers in those schools were ‘afraid to have EAL children’ (comment from a TA) in their class as they would not feel confident in meeting their needs, especially when it comes to the end of key stage tests. Within the changing educational landscape, this offers leaders, staff and governors a creative opportunity to reorganise their workforce for and with diversity (Lumby et al., 2004) in a multicultural or monochromatic school.

Conclusion

This paper offers a synthesis of some interesting research on the assumptions made of English as an Additional Language (EAL) children by those who are responsible for EAL provision. The main points that have emerged from the study with regard to accommodating EAL pupils in the classroom and their implications for practice are as follows. There has to be a holistic approach in developing a sound policy to promote inclusive practice, and within that, the EAL pupil provision has to be of a high quality. The school leaders and their teams have to promote values of equal opportunity to ensure greater sensitivity to varied cultural needs. This has implications for practice in the way support of paraprofessionals is organised and implemented. In this connection, it is an important priority that teachers, paraprofessionals and SENCOs require continuous professional development to develop a comprehensive awareness of cultural diversity in the classroom.

This paper has highlighted the key issues and we suggest that, for future practice, this means the need for good staff recruitment and retention, that high-quality continuous professional development programmes are available for all staff and that leadership is developed at all levels.

In summary, if the needs of EAL children are to be effectively met, the aim of government—and indeed society—is to raise achievement by making schools more inclusive. Increased efforts need to be made to ensure that an adequate level of funding reaches schools to train leaders in managing for and with diversity, to re-evaluate the needs of the teachers and paraprofessionals and to adequately support their training to better serve the needs of EAL children.

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References


Biography

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