The importance of socio-cultural factors

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Abstract

The aim of the research project is to find out how two different schools within the same borough cater to children learning EAL and bilingual children. Observing two children aged 4-5, within a reception class setting was one research method used. Notes were made on their verbal and non-verbal interactions, with either an English-speaking student or a Tamil speaking student and their overall involvement in routine activities. To follow, interviews were also conducted with each school's EAL/EMA coordinators to gain first had information on exactly what each school provides, and to see if there were any differences in their approach. The paper looks into theories behind mainstreaming EAL students, the difficulties that settings come across and the key strategies and acts that have been put in place to narrow the gap between EAL student and English speaking students.

Introduction

English is described as the primary language, which is spoken and written in the British Isles (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). Hence it is empirical that all children in an early years setting linguistically aquire the language in order to be able to understand and complete the work that is put in place by the national curriculum. This case study will look into bilingual children and children learning EAL (English as an additional language) particularly focusing on children from an ethnic-minority background.

In England (2009), 856, 670 pupils were recorded as having a mother tongue other than English; this represented a total of 492, 390 pupils or 15. 2% at primary school (Statistical First Release August 2009). Inner London was

recorded as having 54. 1% of pupils learning English as a second language making it a prime researching ground for this topic. Research from the same statistical evidence also showed that there were more than 200 languages that are spoken in the homes of children attending schools in England (DFES 2001). The large statistical evidence begins to unravel the rapidly increasing number of EAL pupils.

An increasing amount of pressure is put on mainstream classroom teachers to be able to handle both English-speaking students and Children learning EAL within a mainstream setting. This stresses the importance of all the ever-changing policies and strategies that have been implemented by the government and local authorities. These are not in place for the best intreset of the pupils but also to enable settings to achieve their highest potential. Most of the educational theories and practices are derived from research completed in Europe, Australia or northern America; a limited area of the world (Cable, C 2005). Research findings from these areas of the world will not be applicable in settings with children from ethnic minority backgrounds. This becomes another barrier for both the members of staff and pupils; expectations will begin to vary especially for a child from an ethnic minority background. Teachers with a lack of experience in a socially diverse field will base and derive most of their way of practice/ teaching from research which may limit the extent of help and support they can offer children, from any other background than those that the research has been based upon.

Maslow’s work recognised the importance of socio-cultural factors, he believed that all children needed to feel safe, valued and needed a sense of belonging (Catlow. J 2006). This will be very difficult if the teacher has not

got a wider understanding of a child's specific cultural background, beliefs and a general way of life. It will restrict interactions, as no familiarity would be available for the child to feel a sense of belonging. It is crucial to have a general understanding of an individual pupil, especially if they have arrived from a war-torn country or if they've had no previous experience in an educational setting. This means that the child will not only have to acquire a new language but immerse themselves in completely new settings and environment with the possibility that no extra support will be provided by the family and parents, as they also may not be accustomed to the life and ways of schooling of this country.

In 2006 the primary national strategy (Excellence and enjoyment, 2006) said that significant progress had been made in raising standards for primary schools and that many individual children from minority ethnic groups and those learning EAL were achieving impressive results; but this was not the case for all the children. Achievement gaps between different social and ethnic groups are still prevalent and needs further work (Mahon, Crutchley and Quinn 2003). Through observations and interviews it leads to the main research question of how do schools cater to children learning English as a second language? As the main question was very open, it was broken down by only looking at two different schools' with a high population of ethnic diversity (evidence from Ofsted reports, 2008 and 2010). Then the different approaches they have in assisting children learning English as a second language and new arrivals into the school was looked into. The main aim was to see how well each setting provided conditions for learning with valued diversity, promote confidence and a sense of belonging, along with how well

they developed effective partnerships with parents, carer's, families and communities. First hand information was gained via interviews with the EMA (ethnic minority coordinators) to see how the school deals with LEA and bilingual children. Observations in a classroom setting were to see how their strategies were being implemented and how this affected or enabled the LEA or bilingual children to participate and understand the basic curriculum. The first hand research was then related back to secondary research to see how well the settings were using/complying to strategies, and policies such as the EYFS framework, work from NALDIC, Dfes, ECM, EMAG Aiming High and Primary national strategies.

Literature review

English as additional language (EAL) has only been mainstreamed in English school education since the mid 1980's(leung). From then onwards, over the past thirty years, the concept of integrating EAL learners into the mainstream curriculum has been a major point of interest for policy makers and educationalists(nalidc). As Lamb 2001 stated " we currently live and teach in a highly complex and increasingly multilingual society". This is evident from the data collected via CILT; the annual school census: language data collection showed that in 2008 14. 3% (466, 420) of all LA (local authority)maintained primary school children have a first language known to be other than English. The latest data from the same census showed that the percentage had increased to 16. 0% (518, 020). Reason s for the rapid increase could be due to the current economical state and labour demands leading to the recruitment of workers from other parts of the world (Leung) and the growing numbers of asylum seeker/refugee children. Data from

(DfES 2002) found that 70% of the children who were in those circumstances came from homes where little or no English is spoken (DfES 2002). These movements within the UK has led to English as an additional language becoming an important social and educational policy concern (for example, Bullock 1975; Department of education and science (DES) 1985; commission for racial equality (CRE) 1986; Department of education and science DES 1998; Department for education and employment (DfEE) 1999 qualifications and curriculum authority (QC a) 2000; DfEE 2001

The current EAL policy was first implemented at a time ” when there was a perceived need to tackle racism”(leung). It was designed to remove any barriers and allow an equal access to education. The main aim was to give all children an equal opportunity by integrating them into the mainstream curriculum regardless of their English language competence. In England the way EAL has been perceived has shifted over the years. Even the label has evolved from English as a foreign language (EFL) which only focused on learning the language. This term failed to integrate the broader curriculum and overlooks the importance of one’s first / home language. At a time when the term EFL was used students were often taught in separate language centres where no social links could be formed with native English speakers. soon after the findings of the 1986 Commission for Racial Equality report was released the separate language centres were closed down and specialist language support was incorporated within the context of mainstream classrooms. Further research from (DFES 2010) has now shown that Children who are learning English as an additional language will learn more quickly alongside fluent users of English who can provide good language and

learning role models. This is evident in (reference the case study) and many other school who use a “ Buddy system” to ease children into school seetings throughout the induction period.

Globally, there now exists a broad spectrum of literature on the education of EAL and bilingual pupils (Bourne & Reid, 2003). Most of the ideas and developments that have risen in the field of EAL can be seen as falling into the following four categories.

Language content orientation is based on a very structural approach , an example of this is the Scope material(1978). This advsed teachers that ‘ from the very beginnng you have to see it that your pupils learn correctly organized language’. The incorporation of grammar , spoken laguage and written skills were developed through themed work eg; shopping or farm animals. With the use of visual enhancement and group discussion it allowed eal pupils to develop all of the conventional aspects of learning English.

Content- language orientation is when subject specific uses of vocabulary and expressions are identified and classroom strategies are built around these in order to promote both understanding of he subject content and learning of English at the same time. An example of this is seen n (dale & cuevas, 1987) workthey pointed out that maths uses English language vocabulary in a particular way hence pupils needed to be aware of the context each xpressions belonged to e. g the notion of subtraction can also be reffered to as; take- away, subtract from and etc. following fro this (Mohan 1986; 1990; 2001) proposed an content language intergration approach which ties language expressios and curriculum content together

via a set of underlying knowledge stuctures . he also suggested that the use of visual representations should be used to assit understanding of the key language and content meaning by students.

Trans curriculum language orientaton is another form of eal pedagogy. An example of this is Cummins (Cummins, 1992; 1996; 2000; Cummins and swain, 1986) suggestion that language proficiency can be distinguished between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive/academic language proffiency (CALP). BICS is usually when the meanings communicated is familiar to those involvrd in the conversation or when gestures and actions are provided for better understanding e. g greeting friends or going to play in the playground. CALP is language that is embedded in the context of a curriculm usually the language that contributes to educational success. This work went on to show that children learning an additional language can become conversationally fluent in the new language in 2-3 ears but may take 5 years or longer to catch up with monolingual peers in the development of CALP. Along with Cumin’s work the conceptual framewok prposed by snow, met & gensee (1989; 1992) that enables EAL and content teachers to share a common teaching agenda. Both of their ideas are pedagogically relevant to second language development within the mainstream curriculum. Cummin’s work can be used to plan out classroom strategies whilst the framework drawn up by Snow et al can be used for both language and subject content analysis and planning

The fourth category is student orientation. The early work of Levin (edited by Meek 1996) was most influential in this theory. This was the first that saw mixed ability teaching in mainstream classrooms as a potentially effective

response to meeting the language learning needs of eal pupils . Unlike the content and language orientated approaches this focuses more on the pupils level of progression and emphasies that social interaction between students and between students and teachers as pivotal. Another example of the important role of the first language is Cummin’s work on the underlying proficiency. This work showed that ‘ those who have developed CALP in their first language can transfer much of this learning to additional languages. The same theory is also prevalent in Collier’s (1995) theory , the previous experience of leanring, apptitiued , leanring style which was developed through the acquisition of the first language can be adapted into the way that the second language is learnt. As mentioned in (Naldic) the label of EAL itself appears to be part linguistic, part educational, part social and part political therefore the learner’s social and cultural experiences will impact on their progress in language acquisition as well as on their cognitive and academic development(ref). the development of a second language should not be seen as a problem or hinderance but “ as an opputunity to enhance her/his cultural heritage by adding a new language to their repertoire without losing proficiency in the first.

Eal pedagogy has also been influenced by social constructivist theories; this emphasizes the importance of scaffolding learning, which highlights the socio-cultural and emotional factors. These factors are largely influenced by the attitude towards the children, culture, language, religion and ethnicity (ref) . This is mirrored by the work of Vygotsky (1962) who emphasized the influence of social interaction, cultural context and language in cognition and the role of a more experienced person in supporting children’s learning

through scaffolding in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Cable, 2005). Another socialist's theory was Maslow's work on recognising the importance of socio-cultural factors, he believed that all children needed to feel safe, valued and needed a sense of belonging (Catlow 2006) whilst Bruner's work was focused more on the linguistic and coginitive side " the link between high order language functions and thinking and learning skills". Each of these theories are very interlinked yet focus on different apectss of the leanring process " a central characteristic of each policy development is a recognition of the ' overlapping social and cultural phenomena which impact on attainment in school' (TTA, 2003).

Bilingual learners and children learning EAL face two main tasks in school: they need to learn English and they need to learn the content of the curriculum (Excellence and enjoyment, 2006). Both aspects need to be equally balanced, particular focus on just grasping the language can leand to children falling behind on their academical process. One of the difficulties that is faced by schools is wheter to place children in settings with a lower cognitive demand to place the focus on improving the language aquisition skills or keeping them in classroom with peers of the same age group so they feel included and not made to feel reduced academically. There are national educational documents which suggest that along with English minority languages should also be considered languages of the mainstream curriculum; an example of this is found in the English (subject) national curriculum documents " teachers are advised that in realtion to the development of spoken and written English they should be ' building on pupils' experiences of language at home and in the wider community, so that

their developing uses of English and other languages support one another (DfEE and QCA 1999). For optimal educational outcome both the every child matters outcome and the EYFS key principles must always be followed in every setting to ensure that each individual child has an equal opportunity to succeed (Excellence and enjoyment, 2006). the overall ethos and curriculum of a school should be inclusive and welcoming (Sure start for everyone. 2004) as Leung stated children who do not feel a sense of belonging and do not feel comfortable in their surrounding will not learn. This links back to the pivotal relationships and attachments formed with members of staff. Schools need to stress the importance of cultural relevance for all families and ensure that they feel the setting is a place where they can feel comfortable, respected, valued and included (Excellence and enjoyment, 2006). The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 states that every school should have a race equality policy which should cover staff, pupils, parents/carers and the wider community (DfES 2004). It is through language and the interactions with proximal society that culture is transmitted to the child. In this context the learner's sense of identity develops, and language is central to this process (Franson, 2009). many parents would want their children to perform to their best abilities at a school level their first language plays a crucial part within the context of the family and community. In many cases the first language is the only means of communication with the extended family such as grandparents and family living abroad (ref) . not only is the first language helpful in coding a second languageas stated in(Excellence and enjoyment, 2006) " it is widely accepted that home language skills are transferable to new languages and strengthen children's understanding of language use" but a crucial factor in keeping the family close.

A difficulty that arises in settings is when the teachers are not given enough information on how to work with these children.” a teacher’s identity is not only conceived within an individual practitioners head, but it is also identified by the set of core values and beliefs that have traditionally been linked to that role”. Society places a particalur ideology on what teacher’s should be able to handle children (Hanworth 2008) but current research shows that most teachers felt that the level of trainining given throughout the intial teacher training stage (ITT) was inadequate. . The percentage of trainees who felt that their training was good or very good in preparing them to work with pupils with English as an additional language has remained static at 34% in 2007 and 2008(Hendry, 2009). This is due to EAL not being a main subject specialism and also as it requires no mandoatory specialist qualification (Haworth 2008; Butcher, Sinka & Troman 2007). (10 case studies) Via the case studies they found that teachers who did one year of PGCE did not have enough time for reflection as most of the emphasis was “ doing it by the book” reducing the input on EAL. With the increased population of EAL learners it is important to note “ the demand for different types of EAL provision” with the new pattern of immigration. the mismatch in the system between the demand and the available specialist workforce is shown via the figures from NALDIC;; between 2004-2008 the number of EAL pupils rose by approximately 25% to stand at 824, 381 but the number of EAL/EMA teachers had just increased by 8% during the same period.

Socially perceived boundaries such as subject specialisation and hierarchial roles within a school setting can lead to a lack of collaboration (Haworth 2005). Coplllaboration has not historically been associated with class

teaching (Lortie 1975). This is a downfall in the develepoment of EAL pedagogoy as teaching practice may benefit from collaboration on a personal level, through providing moral support and confidence; a professional level, enhancing reflective learnin; as well as on a practical level, resulting in increased effieciency and reduced workload (Hargreaves 1994). All teachers develop an individual self identity (Nias 1989) this then develop into self- efficacy beliefs which is an interweaving of the " cognitive factors and affective dimensions (dufva 2003; Marland, 1986). Once self efficacy is achieved teachers are said to have strong beliefs about their ability to impart knowledge and enhance learning outcomes (Haworth 2005). But in a setting with a high population of EAL pupils the confidence/ self-efficacy is said to be challenged " as teaching unpredicatibilty is often heightened and appropriate schemas many not be available" (Pajares 1992). In these cases teachers may then become reluctant to seek help even when they need it (Young & kram, 1996) as " their competence may be judged on their own ability to solve problems on their own(Lortie 1975). Other issues around this context is the status levels of support teachers and class teachers. Class teachers usually hold more powerful positions than support teachers (Haworth 2005) this can lead to a lack of communication on a childs progress. It is empirical that both sides are communicating effectively to discuss any problems or notes that have been made and to combine the curriculum work that the class teacher is focusing on (butcher et al 2007). Class teachers have also been reported to have unrealistic expectations of support teachers; they are expected to hold multiple roles and have cultural awareness in all cultures that each child brings into the setting. All of this is expected out of sometimes non-qualified volunteers. Other teachers fear to

show that they have specialism in the field of EAL as once established they are given the label of EAL specialist and expected to handle all children learning EAL. Hargreaves (1994) ideal vivison of a moving mosaic would be ideal where all professional contributed and discussed ways of Improvements.

A lack of clarity between SEN and EAL is also a major concern. the (case studies ref) states the reason for this to be the lack of ‘ clearly – identified criteria for identifying the language needs of pupils’. Without clear assessment it is difficult to tell whether the delay is caused due to confidence issues using the language or because they have “ real” learning difficulties independently of the language difference (cline 2009) As a pupil has further exposure to English, special educational needs may become apparent. It may be appropriate to follow both courses of action for some bilingual pupils. All answers should be based on good evidence collected in a variety of circumstances over a period of time. Children should only be involved with the SEN co-ordiantors if there is an actual need that needs to be dealt with. The SEN framework works completely differentlt to the EAL one, the wrong diagnosis could lead to the cognitive ability of the child to be supreesed due to the lack of challenge.

Over the main issues pointed out by researchers that have been a cause for concern are; the roles and reponsibilties over staff and support members, the staus of each member of staff and the crossover with specialists and mainstream teachers, the use of first language, community links and the teaching of English itself. Theories and frameworks have been developed (reference all above) but an international framework that will relate to all

settings has yet to be created. Different approaches and methods are used by different settings but they are all costumly accomadeted to suit each setting, one approach that may be successful in one setting may not work at all in a different one. It all dpends on the geographical location of the settings and the particular outcomes it needs to reach.

Methodology:

The topic was chosen due to personal experience and an innate interest. At the age of 8 I was moved to the united kingdom and was considered to be an EAL learner. With no previous experience of English I was enrolled in a mainstream primary school setting. The main central research question is to look into how effectively pupils learnng EAL are intergrated within mainstream school settings. This was then broken down into 3 categories; to research current frameworks and theories, how interaction amongst peers effect the development and what kind of provision teachers/members of staff provide in supporting children learning EAL.

The research was conducted in the manner of a case study. A Case study can be described as a spotlight on one instance/ situation or “ an in depth study to uncover what is happening and to shed fresh light” (Aubrey et al 2000). The concept of EAL is a rapidly increasing area of interest and as set rules and regulations have yet to be adapted the process of a case study allows the opportunity to focus on all aspects of relevant research. The advantage of conducting one is; that it is richly contextualized allows for plenty of detailed descriptions and gives a better sense of what is being studied (Roberts-Holmes, 2005). This is contradicted by Flyvbjerg (2006) who

pointed out the misunderstandings of case studies. The claims included One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case and, therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development ; and The case study contains a bias toward verification, i. e., a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions.

The overall aim of the case study was to focus on children learning English as a second language. With the use of internet serach engines and the universities library resource the process of filtering journals and information that was already produced began. As journals were read it became very apparent that there were no set guidelines for teachers to follow. Members of staff were facing a number of issues that hindered their ability to enable children learnig EAL to achieve their full potential. As the overall EAL issue was very wide the central research question (CRQ) was then refined to ‘ How are children learnig EAL intergrated into mainstream settings’. First hand information is to be gained by looking into the interactions amongst pupils and how much supported is provided by the teacher. This is to be gained by the use of a semi- structured interview with the EMA/ EAL coordinators of each setting and an observation of 2 children within their natural classroom setting focusing on the interactions amongst peers and how the teacher’s expertise supports the children.

As per the London government website (ref) London has the highest population of people from an ethnic minority background. With this information the search for two appropriate settings with a high number of EAL pupil began. With the use of the OFSTED report’s the settings were narrowed down and then chosen according to proximity and access. First

contacts were made via e-mail (see appendix ?) this outlined the aims of the research my intentions and what I would require. Both schools were content with the intial information that had been provided and requested to meet in person for further details to be discussed. The brief meetings with each head-teachers allowed me to be put in contact with the right members of staff and for them to provide me with children learning EAL in the appropriate class/age group. Two criteria's were empirical in this research one was the chosen age group; 4-5 as an appropriate level of cognitive and language development is essential for any developments in acquiring a second language to be noticed. the second is the ethnicity/ first language. The requirements were for 2 tamil speaking (as a first language) pupils. As I also have the ability to speak and understand the language it would allow me to gain first hand information on the discussions and thoughts amongst the peers. Once permission was granted to enter the school premesis the head teacher's briefly introduced me to the class teachers that were in charge of the allocated classrooms and to the EAL/EMA co-odinators of each schools. The teachers allowed me to get aquainted with the class before the observation process had began enabling children to accept my presence and getting a chance to understand the purpose of why I was there.

Ethical consideration was empirical as the research method consisted of first hand contact with children. Concerns have been related to the appropriateness and desirability of involving children directly in research, in terms of their competence and vulnerability as research subjects (manon et al 1996).

The day observation commenced, a CRB had to be presented to both schools for security reasons before access was given to work with children. On the day of observation the teachers had pre- allocated two children as per the request and gave me a brief background. This included how long they had been in the u. k, when they joint the setting and what their current level of EAL was (see appendix?). as the children arrived at school the class teacher pointed out the parent of the pupils of interest. This enabled me direct contact in order to gain parental consent. A consent letter (See appendix 4) was also handed to them giving them a brief explanation of what my research consisted of and how their child would be involved allowing objection at anytime. Verbal consent was gained from the children to avoid deception. Further ethical evidence was specified (See Appendix 2).

One of the chosen research methods was observation " looking at day-to-day events within a setting without altering anything" (Clough & Nutbrown cited in Roberts-Holmes. 2009). This was considered to be the most suitable for acquiring information on the interactions amongst peers and witnessing exactly what kind of support was given by the teachers if any

" it involves first hand evidence collection and real-life situations" (Roberts-Holmes, G, 2005, P92). This was extremely important as the children would need to behave exactly as they would in their daily lives without the researchers presence influencing the outcomes. The downfall to the method was that it was only conducted for a day hence the data collected may not have been be a true reflection of real life situation, as participants may know they are being observed. (Robson, C. 2002). this should always be kept in mind when analysing the results. That said observation is the only method

provides the closest representation of real life situations (Robson, C. 2002 It allows a researcher to be a part of their everyday life at school, seeing how they interact, play and learn, also allows observer to take account of emotions, tensions and behavior. (Bell, 1999).

This was conducted as a mixture of structured observation and unstructured observation. The purpose was kept in mind, hence anything in relevance to how teachers facilitated children and the interactions between the peers was noted down as reflective diary notes (Holmes P. 97). As soon as the initial raw observations were noted certain aspects specifically realted to the main focus were elaborated on, including the details of how the members of staff used materials and techniques to aide children learning EAL. The aim was to observe from an outsiders' point of view but when working with children the nature is always unpredictable. At times participant's would ask direct question or help which had to be responded to, at this point the role of a participant observer would be taken on. Although it disrupted the validity of the research it his allowed a deeper understanding through clarifications of their behaviour or actions that were at times unclear.

To gain the information that was required from the EAL/ EMA co-ordinator a semi structured one on one interview was conductuded. This allowed information from the direct source, the researcher to ask the participant to elaborate, confirm and clarify what they are saying (Roberts-Holmes, 2005: 110). Due to the close proximity the use of follow-up questions can be used to clarify something that has been said, or to expand on something raised by probing (Mac Naughton, 2001). The questions were prepared using the information that were highlighted as key areas in the literacy review and

based onf current frameworks and policies. The interview was recorded via the use of a