

Research Paper

Leading increasingly linguistically diverse London schools

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Abstract: *Engaging with bilingual parents, students and teachers with little awareness of the benefits of bilingualism has initiated a search for factors resulting in the low value attached to certain types of bilingualism. Working on the hypothesis that prevalent practice is influenced more by attitudes to bilingualism rather than relevant research and pedagogical theory, this research focuses on attitudes. This small-scale qualitative study conducted with a group of London headteachers provides an insight into the attitudes to bilingualism and how they impact on policy and practice in schools with significant proportions of multilingual learners. It also raises the question if schools which claim to support multilingual students in realising their full potential can achieve that without including home languages as an integral part of learning.*

Contextualising the study

In my practice I have observed a consistent dichotomy in terms of research findings and their pedagogical implications and the reality of mainstream practice. Research findings from highly multilingual settings such as the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada (Gregory 1997; Kenner, 2000; Thomas, Collier and Abbot, 1993; Cummins, 2001; Corson, 1992), strongly suggest not only the beneficial effects of first language (L1) maintenance, but also negative personal and academic consequences where loss of L1 is encountered.

The existing dichotomy between research and practice has motivated me to look for reasons and explanations. By the dichotomy, I mean that the research findings have provided evidence that: bilingual children will do better in terms of second language acquisition, their overall academic achievement and their personal development, if the conditions are provided for them to use both of their languages in learning (Hammers and Blanc, 1989; Swain and Lapkin, 1991; Bialystok, 2006), while in my experience of London schools L1s are given very little or no space within the teaching and learning of bilingual children. In my work with mainstream practitioners, children, communities, families and parents I have identified personal values and attitudes as the key factor in the process of L1 maintenance. Hence, I aim to address the following hypothesis: Attitudes towards bilingualism and first language maintenance have more of an influence on practice and policies than research and pedagogy.

Attitudes are being defined as follows:

Attitude is a state of readiness, a tendency to act or react in a certain manner when confronted with certain stimuli. Attitudes are reinforced by beliefs (the cognitive component) and often attract strong feelings (the emotional component) that will lead to particular forms of behaviour (the action tendency component). (Oppenheim, 1978, pp 105-106)

Introduction

This small-scale qualitative research, conducted as an Institution Focus Study (IFS), focuses on a professional community, rather than an institution. I have opted for focusing on the professional community of London headteachers for the following reason: being a Local Authority adviser means working for a fluid establishment that has been for several years undergoing continual changes, underpinned by Every Child Matters legislation (2003), which crucially impact on the power structures, resulting in decreased power of the Local Authority and increased autonomy of schools.

Under the new strategy of devolving money to schools, headteachers have almost unlimited autonomy to decide how to utilise funds allocated to schools for raising the achievement of bilingual and/or ethnic minority pupils. Also, headteachers play a key role in terms of initiating, creating and implementing school policies. In terms of the ethos of the school, headteachers play an even more important role: *“As a consequence of the formal authority, the headteacher symbolises the school both to people inside it and to members of the community. As the highest status person in the school, the head’s position has a figurehead function and symbolises the values to be upheld. The ethos set gives important meanings about what the school stands for.”* (Hall, McKay and Morgan, 1986, p 15)

Headteachers of increasingly linguistically diverse London schools provide key messages to their staff, pupils, parents, carers and communities about the values of languages used in their homes and communities by including or not including these languages in the school life and ethos.

Key statistics

Research on English as an Additional Language (EAL) students used by the London Challenge (2007) indicates that 52 per cent of students in inner London secondary schools are bilingual or students with EAL, where bilingual is defined as being exposed to or living in two languages (City of Westminster, 2002). A figure used by the Greater London Authority (GLA) based on the data collection of inner and outer London local authorities indicates that one third of the London school population has English as an additional language (GLA, 2006).

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has not so far published data on minority languages, even though many individual authorities collect this type of data on an annual basis. For example, the City of Westminster recorded 143 languages spoken by its pupils, with Arabic and Bengali each featuring as the home language of over 11 per cent of Westminster’s school population (City of Westminster, 2006). Figures that are frequently quoted for London are based on a study by Baker and Eversley published in 2000. According to this study, which is in need of an update, there are 360 languages spoken by children in London schools. Language Trends, a study published by CILT, uses the figure of ‘at least 300 languages’, but again considering the return rate of their survey, this must be substantially below the actual number (CILT, 2005). With the introduction of the new DfES Guidance on the collection and recording of data on pupils’ languages (DfES, 2006), it is expected that more authorities will be collecting individual languages data from January 2007. However, the collection of languages data remains voluntary for schools and local authorities. Therefore, complete data returns are not guaranteed even under the new guidance, especially during the initial period.

Collecting Data

The main body of the data was collected in four in-depth interviews. For this purpose I have developed a type of interview which has no initial questions as such, but participants are given five statements taken from the literature and press to comment upon. One of the statements is in fact a question, but it is referred to as a 'statement' on the basis of being a quotation rather than a question asked by the interviewer. Once the participants agree to be interviewed they are sent the interview protocol with the statements and the explanation that the statements originate from the literature or press, but the source is deliberately omitted for the interview purposes to avoid its influence.

Why statements rather than questions?

Being aware that this research aims to gain an insight into very complex, not easily defined or measured categories such as attitudes towards bilingualism that are again rooted in even more complex cultural, personal and professional backgrounds, my intention is to create a strong initial impulse at the start of the interview that would motivate interviewees to expose their strong agreement, disagreement or another attitude. It is based on the judgement that to ask a politically or emotionally charged question may put the participants into a defensive position, because of the researcher's ownership of the question, being further complicated by the fact that this is an IFS and therefore there is a professional relationship as well between the researcher and interviewees. Statements from anonymous sources give more freedom and carry less intimidation, but allow the researcher to use extreme positions and thus trigger a response that has a higher level of personal value system engagement. Also, statements do not directly expose either agreement or disagreement on behalf of the researcher.

However, each statement is selected for a specific reason:

"Why is it uncommon for educators to encourage bilingual students to maintain and develop their first languages?" (Cummins, 2001, p 6)

This statement-question aims to stimulate the interviewees to reflect on the level of encouragement, awareness and interest in L1s in mainstream schools. By saying it is uncommon to use L1 makes it more acceptable to agree with it or to say that it does not happen in the respondent's school either.

"Only maximum exposure to English could remedy children's linguistic difficulties in that language on entry to school." (Opponents of bilingual education in California, in Cummins, 2001, p 32).

This is one of 'the extreme statements'. Its extreme position is identifiable within its first five words 'only maximum exposure to English' – it leaves no space to argue or negotiate the benefits of bilingualism. It also projects its 'deficit' approach to bilingual children by focusing on 'linguistic difficulties', rather than observing these children as being at the early stage of second language acquisition.

"Immigrants should speak English at home. It would help them overcome the schizophrenia that bedevils generational relationships." (David Blunkett, British Home Secretary at the time, press release, September 2002)

This statement by David Blunkett calls for extreme action not only in schools, but in families as well. It uses exceptionally strong language mixing in psychiatric concepts.

Therefore this statement is included as an extreme statement in the public arena that exposes the attitudes towards minority languages of a leading politician. However, it should be acknowledged that this statement has been taken out of the context, which makes it more extreme.

“Mother tongue education should not be supported, it increases social barriers between groups.” (Tollefson, 1991, p 54)

Mother tongue classes organised mostly by community groups are the key support for bilingual families in the process of L1 maintenance. Regular attendance of supplementary mother tongue schools for many children means the only access to structured learning and literacy in their mother tongue. Having been involved with establishing and supporting a Bosnian mother tongue school in Essex I am fully aware of its role in the education of Bosnian children, its core place within the community and its uncertain existence due to insecure, short-term funding. The aim of including this statement is to find out if there is an awareness of these issues amongst mainstream practitioners and again what the attitudes are.

The research points to first language literacy and then biliteracy as a strong source of cognitive and curriculum advantage for bilinguals: more diversified cognitive abilities; increased abilities to process and manipulate ideas and symbols: increased fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration in thinking, increased orientation to language; higher awareness of the needs of the listener. (Swain and Lapkin, 1991)

The last statement, in contrast to the rest of the statements, lists a whole variety of cognitive advantages that bilingual children are in a position to develop. Familiarity with, and acceptance of, these ideas paves the way for the treatment of bilingualism as an intellectual resource.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) point to a frequent feature of qualitative research, which is the combination of different methods. The use of multiple methods has been introduced as a strategy of facilitating broader and deeper understanding of the researched phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, in this particular study the main body of data is collected through the interviews as described above. In addition to that and for the purposes of triangulation, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) reports and relevant school policies will be analysed. Referring back to Oppenheim's (1978) definition of attitudes it is expected that the cognitive and the emotional component of the respondents' attitudes will be identifiable in the interview data, while the action and tendency component will be more visible in the Ofsted reports and school policies.

Pilot

The main purpose of conducting a pilot, in this case, is to establish if the innovative interviewing technique of using statements rather than questions is going to have the desired effect of: triggering responses that have high personal engagement in terms of expressing one's own attitudes and generating a wider exploratory discussion that could develop in different directions depending on the weight that is given to different issues by the interviewees. For example, one interviewee rated the use of L1 in mainstream lessons as '*Nonsense!*', which led into exploring this issue in depth since that was the point where he provided clear information on the value relationship he had with this type of practice. This type of insight is precisely what the study aims to gain.

The pilot interview was conducted with a deputy headteacher of a school that was selected as one of the schools for the study itself. The analysis of the pilot confirmed the interviewing technique as successful, with one concern. The interview lasted for almost two hours. Even

though the advantage was that it provided details and examples from practice, it was unrealistic to expect that amount of time from the selected headteachers. The decision was taken to request an hour for each interview.

Sampling

The nature of this study requires considering sampling issues on two levels: personal background, where the personal experience of bilingualism is the key feature, and the type of schools that the interviewees manage. The decision made places the sampling technique into a cross category between 'extreme case' sample and 'heterogeneous' sampling (Robson, 1996). The extreme cases being: a purely *monolingual* headteacher and a bilingual headteacher, a school with a beacon status and a school that has just stepped out of special measures. However, since my sample does not only include extreme cases, but also the variety that bridges the extremes, it can be argued that the sample is actually heterogeneous but includes the extreme range ends of the professional community in focus. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) refer to this type of sampling as 'maximum variety sampling'. Maximum variety sampling is expected to provide two types of data:

"The first is high- quality case descriptions, useful for documenting uniqueness; second, significant shared patterns of commonalities existing across participants may be identified." (Patton, 1990, p 74)

Schools' Profiles

Selected schools represent a variety of inner and outer London schools in terms of their status and size. However, their common feature is a high proportion of students with English as an Additional Language (EAL):

- a secondary Roman Catholic school that has recently come out of special measures; roll 450, 60 per cent EAL;
- a secondary comprehensive school causing concern; roll 1000, 40 per cent EAL;
- an achieving Roman Catholic primary school; roll 400, 34 per cent EAL;
- a secondary comprehensive school with a beacon status; roll 1229, 72 per cent EAL.

Interviewees' Profiles

All four interviewees are male, within the age range of mid-forties to late-fifties. In terms of their ethnic background they represent a variety including the following: White English, White Irish, Asian and Polish-Scottish, as identified by themselves.

Professionally, all of the interviewees have National Professional Qualifications for Headship (NPQH), one of them has an MA in policy studies and one an EdD in beacon schooling. None of them has had any specialist training or in-service training (INSET) on Ethnic Minority Achievement or bilingualism.

In terms of their personal experience of bilingualism there is a more complex picture. The headteacher of White English origin has had no experience of bilingualism either in his family or personally. Even though the headteacher of White Irish origin was born and educated in England, he recognises Gaelic as a part of his background. The deputy head of Asian origin was born in South America and educated there until the age of 14, when he came to England. He has lost most of his Spanish that was actually his L1 and he has never learnt any Asian language. The headteacher of Polish-Scottish origin has a personal experience of bilingualism, which is very common amongst the current population of London bilingual school children. His first language, Polish, had been the language of

communication at home and it had been the only possible way of communicating to a senior family member (grandfather), who had never acquired English. This headteacher has never acquired literacy in his first language, since his schooling had been in English only.

Ethical Issues

Having familiarised myself with the BERA (2004) guidelines, I identified a number of general and particular considerations that apply to this study as an Institution Focus Study. In regards to the general considerations I am aware of my obligation to: inform participants of the aim of my research and its use, obtain their consent to interview them and record interviews on audio-tapes and guarantee their anonymity.

Particular issues for this study arise from the fact that my intention is to interview two headteachers in the same Local Authority where I work as an adviser on Ethnic Minority Achievement. My role is to monitor, support, advise and challenge schools on: the use of funding, staff deployment, support for ethnic minority students, INSET for staff and relevant policies. I have been working in my role for three academic years. While approaching headteachers as a researcher I need to demonstrate that my research protocol covers all the issues that may be of concern, such as:

- confidentiality that relates to the content of the interview and its transcription;
- the use of the collected data: only for research purposes or for wider dissemination, if done anonymously;
- my engagement with the headteachers in the context of research, as an independent researcher rather than a Local Authority representative.

Apart from looking at BERA guidelines, I have also considered the relationship between researcher and researched in terms of the classification: *research on*, *research for and research with* as given by Cameron, 1994 (in Graddol, Maybin and Stierer, 1994). Comparing my research against this classification I can identify all three aspects: I am looking to gain an insight from the 'researched', which qualifies as *research on*. I also hope that by doing this research I will direct the attention of headteachers to issues related to valuing and promoting bilingualism. Sharing research findings and expert knowledge should lead to empowering practitioners, which is clearly a case of doing *research with*. The fact that this is not a value neutral study, but one that advocates the use of first languages in the education of bilingual children, places it also in the *research for* category.

Finally, another consideration discussed by Cameron (in Graddol, Maybin and Stierer, 1994) is the fact that ethical research outside of the positivist tradition needs to recognise that the researcher is by definition in a more powerful position than the researched since the researcher is the one making the decisions relating to the focus, methods and activities within the research process. The researched, in many cases, will have their own questions and agenda. In order, to make research ethical from this aspect the research design needs to accommodate the possibility of input from the researched in terms of agenda. The interviewing technique designed for this study, as previously detailed, has been developed with this consideration in mind. The nature of it allows each respondent to develop the discussion in the direction of their own agenda. The particular importance of this consideration is directly related to the fact that in this case the researcher and the researched have a professional relationship as well, which is based on partnership.

Interview data presentation

In this paper I will present summaries of two interviews.

Interview Summary: School 3

Background of the interviewee

Ethnicity: Polish-Scottish

Personal experience of bilingualism: bilingual; dominant language English; Polish was the main home language while growing up; little literacy acquired in Polish due to the absence of formal teaching and learning in that language.

Specialist professional qualifications: National Professional Qualification (Headship)

Gender: Male

Age range: 50 – 60

(Text in italics below is the transcript of what the interviewee stated. Underlined texts are the statements as given in the research design. Comments and exploratory questions made by the researcher are marked DM.)

Why is it still relatively uncommon for educators to encourage bilingual students to maintain and develop their home language?

I don't know. Why is it? Is it power control? Is it to do with the English colonialism and domination? Is it that people feel they are not in control if a language is used that they do not understand.

DM: You told an anecdote in the Literacy INSET last year. It was about a teacher who told you that you couldn't spell because you spoke Polish at home and how this motivated you to learn spelling, never to be told something similar.

Yes, I was a very conscientious learner. I don't have many scars, but this one I definitely have. Being publicly humiliated in front of the whole class, made to stand and look at everybody else while being told off by the teacher...

I've never grown up to be fully bilingual. I'm half Scottish. Most of my family are in Scotland, but that part of my identity was never recognised. Because of my name – I was always seen as Polish and linked to the Polish community.

DM: Have you ever received a positive, affirmative message in regards to bilingualism?

Never, but in a boys' grammar school that was very unlikely.

Only maximum exposure to English could remedy children's linguistic difficulties in that language on entry to school.

Yes – I think maximum exposure is good. I remember being completely immersed in a French speaking environment as a student. Eventually you start understanding what people are saying. But if there are skilled bilingual people who can work with children bilingually that is surely beneficial especially in the early stages.

DM: Do you have any bilingual staff?

We have many teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds who speak a variety of languages – they use their languages when working with EAL children.

DM: Do you personally, as the head, encourage the use of first languages as your code of practice or within your policies?

It is more than a code of practice or a policy – this has grown as the culture, as the ethos of the school. Just walk down the corridor and count how many languages you'll hear. I personally – if I know that a child speaks French, I'll speak French to him. We want to communicate. For me the bigger message is about ethos, welcoming, inclusion.

Immigrants should speak English at home. It would help them overcome the schizophrenia that bedevils generational relationships.

I don't see where the schizophrenic aspect lies. The Polish community has schools, churches, service in Polish, Polish children achieve well. Would we expect British ex-patriots living in Nepal or Mongolia to speak in their homes the languages of the countries they are living in?

DM: Do you recognise this statement?

Yes, something to do with the English domination.

Mother-tongue education should not be supported, it increases social barriers between groups.

I don't see why. In my case being able to speak Polish meant that I was able to talk to granddad J. I wouldn't have had that relationship. He lived with us and could only speak in Polish. He lived within the Polish community and never learned English.

DM: How do you promote mother-tongues in your school?

We enter our students for exams in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic and Polish.

The research points to cognitive advantages linked to bilingualism...

I'm not aware that there is firm research evidence – but I have seen the evidence of it in practice. Scientifically it raises many questions about the brain functioning and development.

DM: What is the essence of an EAL policy?

For EAL students to achieve their full potential, to flourish.

DM: Have you had any training in this area?

20 years ago there was nothing. You learn from people who have expertise. You learn if you are interested.

Interview Summary: School 4

Background of the interviewee

Ethnicity: English

Personal experience of bilingualism: None

Specialist professional qualifications: National Professional Qualifications (Headship), MA in Education Policy

Gender: Male

Age range: 50 – 60

Why is it still uncommon for educators to encourage bilingual students to maintain and develop their languages?

Is it? I didn't know it was. I'm not sure that is the case. I mean I'm not aware of discouraging people to develop and maintain their home languages, quite the opposite. If people want to speak a different language that's not really my purpose...

Is language primarily cultural or is it communication? If you are saying language is a cultural feature then fine, you can have as many different languages as you like going on. If you are talking about language for communication then the fewer languages you have the better. I mean it's, it's not for no reason for example that airline pilots world wide all speak English, because if they were all speaking in their own language nobody would understand what they were talking about. You would have air crashes all over the place. So they obviously take the view that language is there for communication. Now in the school situation in a particular country, not this country, but any country in the world, clearly you can't expect the teacher or the people doing the educating to have knowledge or an understanding of all the wide range of languages that go on. So therefore from the communication point of view it is essential that there is a basic understanding of a common language whatever that is. If you are saying, if you are moving away from the communication thing and saying well communication doesn't matter at all, it doesn't matter if nobody understands what anybody is saying, let's all keep our own culture – that's fine. We can make up our own language, if you like, and then we've got our own culture.

DM: But do you think it's possible to negotiate these two aspects in some way, so that we recognise: yes, we need one language which is going to be common and which we use in order to communicate and to pass on the content, but also there is this cultural aspect, that...

There is a clear place for saying: the language of this situation, be it a classroom or whatever else, the language of this situation is English. And we will strive to make sure that everybody in this environment has a working knowledge of English. If you say, once you move outside of that environment you can speak whatever language you like...So to talk about negotiation – yes, this is what we expect. You know, this is the language that we expect.

Only maximum exposure to English could remedy children's linguistic difficulties in that language on entry to school.

Children being pragmatic understand that and adapt very quickly. So, in that sense they get maximum exposure and that obviously helps them. It can't do anything other than help them. Again in the classroom, my feeling is, that it could potentially be confusing to children who come to the school knowing or at least having an implication that the school is where English is spoken to find that the people are trying to speak in their language or trying to communicate in their language. I can't quite honestly see that. Although we do it here in sign form (welcome signs), I'm not sure ... I think it's playing the game. We have notices all around the school saying welcome in different languages – well they could say anything to be honest. They could be rude words, for all I know. Nobody is saying you can't speak another language or that we don't respect your other language, but when you come to school that's the language you expect to hear, that's the language you expect to use. And that way they would develop their bilingualism I think.

DM: What is the essence of the EAL policy?

EAL policy recognises children who have difficulties or obstacles to learning caused by insufficient knowledge of English, making sure they are receiving support to access the curriculum. You can't do that by pretending that you can speak their language.

DM: The KS3 Literacy Strategy has published a video showing children writing and reading in their first languages as part of a mainstream lesson recommending it as an example of good practice. What do you think about that?

That's a lot of nonsense! If somebody can see the point of that, I cannot see the point. There probably is one, but it escaped me. I hope that I haven't given the impression that I'm unicultural. I would like to move to the point where lots of different identities are seen as the strengths to the society. That adds to the colour of the society. But language – that has a primary function and it's clouding the issue. Food and art can be varied, but everybody has a need to communicate. We need to separate these two issues.

DM: What about practices... for example I work in Westminster and in lots of our schools common practice is when there is a new arrival we provide bilingual assistants to go to schools to work with children in their lessons.

I think that can help, if it's done properly with people who are proficient in their languages. The resourcing and the wisdom of that when you've got a tremendous range of languages, like here, where you've got almost as many different languages as you have children, I think the resourcing is a nightmare, to provide people to do that and you may think that money is better spent doing something else, given what I've already said. My experience and judgement is that children pick up a language very quickly, I think you might actually be impeding them. Now, we've got a lot of African children here, albeit, they speak a range of different languages. There isn't one common language, but supposing there were and supposing a group of those community people came to me and said: 'Look, we've got a lot of African children in this school. We would like to provide you with a teacher who would speak their language and teach them bilingually.' I would say, probably: 'No, I don't think that's acceptable.' If they choose to take their children and put them in their own school and provide their bilingual education there, that's up to them. But within the resourcing and facilitating that we have here, I don't think that's our brief. It's not our brief to teach children their own native languages, it's our brief to teach them English. That's what we have to do.

Immigrants should speak English at home. It would help them overcome the schizophrenia that bedevils generational relationships.

Schizophrenia, strong word. Well, I'll go back to say, what they do at home is their own business. If they like to speak whatever they like at home that is their own business, it's not for us arrogantly to say: 'You mustn't speak French or Italian or Spanish or Chinese at home.' You speak what you like at home, of course you do. I'm not sure about schizophrenia...

If I were to go to a foreign country and to work in a foreign country and my children were of an age when they were growing up and going to school, I wouldn't speak a foreign language to them. I would speak the language that I felt was the best means of communicating. It comes back to what language is for. Language is for communication. Otherwise you end up like the Welsh speaking the language that nobody else in the world understands, simply to keep it going.

Mother tongue education should not be supported, it increases social barriers.

Now, that comes back to what I said, why language is there. I've got a view about this. That is, if you accept the view that human beings are basically tribal every aspect of human behaviour right up to international laws, I suggest, is often tribalism. In other words, our tribe is better than your tribe or we don't mix with your tribe.

Linguistic differences highlight tribalism. If somebody in the playground, for example, speaks a different language than the majority of people, that indicates to those other people that

somebody comes from a different tribe. That's an outer demonstration of tribalism. You are not one of us, you are a different tribe. I think that's a part of human behaviour. I think anything that reduces that indication must be helpful. Anything that reduces the indication that you are different somehow than other people helps to reduce tribalism.

Data categorisation

Having engaged with the relevant literature in this field I adopted Ruiz's (1984) classification of attitudes towards bilingualism. This classification has become one of the key frameworks in the analysis of bilingual settings (Cummins, 2001; Baker, 1996). According to Ruiz there are three main categories of attitudes towards bilingualism: as Problem, as Right and as Resource. Therefore, I will be approaching the stage of identifying common themes across all the interviews with a set categorisation.

The framework: Problem, Right, Resource will also be used in the process of document analysis. As mentioned before, the interviews are being complemented with the analysis of the most recent Ofsted reports for the relevant schools and school policies, such as, EAL policy or Racial Equality. The analysis of these documents will focus on identifying references to bilingualism in relation to Ruiz's framework, but also in relation to the interview data. Relating the interview data to the document analysis will help expose the extent to which the attitudes held by the interviewed headteachers are reflected in the practice and ethos of their schools.

Cohen and Manion (1994) point to the difficulties of using two different sets of qualitative data such as relating incongruent sets of data. Therefore, having a common framework applicable in the analysis of the different sets of data will provide a sound basis for a meaningful relating of the data.

The last point to be made before the data interpretation is presented is that I would like to remind the reader that the study is based on the principles of qualitative research, which claims that:

"There is no single interpretive truth. There are multiple interpretive communities, each having its own criteria for evaluating an interpretation. The interpretive practice of making sense of one's findings is both artful and political."
(Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p 30)

Interpreting data

The data collected for this study provides a rich base for the exploration of the research question: What value do headteachers attach to bilingualism and how does that reflect on the practice in their schools, as evidenced in school policies and Ofsted reports?

Key findings

The data classified under the theme *Language as Right* shows a split in attitudes relating to the place where the right is exercised. While the interviewees have a strong, united view that at home, in family and community settings everybody has a right to speak the language of their choice, when it comes to the school context there are opposing views.

At one end of the spectrum is the attitude that the language of mainstream schooling in this country is English only:

There needs to be clarity that the language of schooling is English. Our brief is to teach English. It is not acceptable to teach bilingually in mainstream British school, even if a community was providing funding. (School 4)

The other end is that the recognition and the inclusion of first languages are essential for an inclusive curriculum and inclusive school:

Inclusive curriculum means recognising language (home language), respecting differences. (School 1)

One explanation for such diverse interpretation of the same government policies is that practitioners are not using the same knowledge base and expertise in this area to interpret relevant policies therefore the interpretations are very different. The expectations of one interviewee (School 1) is that new Ofsted framework (2005) will provide schools with clear expectations of what kind of practice reflects the interpretation of policies within the requirements.

However, it cannot be expected that the shift in attitude towards other languages will happen instantly. Also, schools and headteachers will be starting from different positions. For example in this study one headteacher is coming to terms with welcome signs in his school, which are the only demonstration of multilingualism in his school (School 4), while another headteacher supports regular multilingual activities, projects and drama productions (School 1).

In the category *Language as Resource* there is a clear recognition, by everybody interviewed, of language as a cultural resource that provides access to families, friends, communities, access for children themselves, but also for schools in their outreach work. In terms of recognising first languages as a linguistic resource all four interviewees are in agreement that is a valuable skill to have as an individual outside of school.

However, when it comes to utilising first languages for the purposes of second language acquisition in a school situation (Cummins, 1991), interviewees have stated that they are not familiar with any benefits. Faced with an issue that requires professional knowledge, which is lacking, the interviewees often rely on personal experience. Being a monolingual person, this interviewee says:

It is hard to know, if you don't speak another language. I don't know. (School 2)

Again, there is a basic principle of good practice with bilingual children over which these key practitioners have split views that vary:

From:

First languages can only confuse children and impede their progress in English. (School 4)

To:

I don't know, I've never thought about it. (School 2)

To:

Yes, we use first language at the beginning and their use decreases over time. (School 1)

Neither of these attitudes can create conditions in which bilingual children can develop their full linguistic and cognitive potential. Even the third approach where it is recognised that it is very helpful for children new to English to use their first language and to have support in their first languages, use of first languages is only seen as a transitional phase. This type of approach leads to subtractive bilingualism (Baker, 1996), meaning that minority language has its extent of use and competency decreases with the progress of the dominant language

acquisition. The only attitude that fully promotes bilingualism is the one that perceives first language as a skill that can encourage bilingual children to achieve in other subjects. This is the approach promoted by the headteacher who has developed expertise in achievement and who is successfully applying this expertise to the bilingual population of his school (School 1).

Valuing bilingualism as a cognitive resource is exceptionally lacking. None of the interviewees have any knowledge of it. Again attitudes vary:

From:

It can be confusing to use two languages. (School 4)

To:

I don't know. (School 2)

To:

It sounds logical and it feels right. (School 1)

And even:

I have seen the evidence of it in practice, but I'm not aware of any research evidence. (School 3)

One of the interviewees reflects on the wider professional community recognising that practitioners are not aware of the advantages of bilingualism and its impact on learning (School 2).

Another important issue was acknowledged under this theme. The belief that encouraging first languages will mean that children will not achieve the best results in exams. Again this widely spread view, not only amongst practitioners, but also amongst children and parents, is linked with the lack of knowledge on first language as a cognitive resource (Ben-Zeev, 1977; Cummins, 1976; Bialystok, 1988; Ricardelli, 1992; Eviatar and Ibrahim, 2000).

Two interviewees discussed the role which first languages have in terms of identity outside the school and in school. The structure of the interview did not include any reference to language and identity, but it was addressed on these two particular occasions. One interviewee focused on the importance of first languages in maintaining a conflict free bicultural identity and acquiring a sense of 'belonging' to a community (School 2). The other interviewee, focused on raising achievement, perceives first language as an important aspect of one's identity and overall success (School 1).

In terms of support for first languages within mainstream schooling, it seems that secondary schools have engaged more with the issue, mainly because there are GCSEs exams available for most minority languages. Good results in these exams will benefit individual students, but they will also improve the profile of schools. In School 3 the best results achieved are in exams in first languages, even though the school does not provide relevant GCSE courses. Positive and similar responses from the secondary practitioners have been secured in this case by giving first languages a place within the mainstream system that leads towards recognised results and qualifications.

The visible presence of first languages in schools has been introduced and developed in these schools to various degrees - from a school where the head is reluctantly tolerating welcome signs in other languages, while questioning if they are perhaps rude words and where bilingual books are not in the school's library and classrooms, but locked in a cupboard (School 4), to the school where there are multilingual displays, multilingual month, drama performances in community languages, bilingual classroom assistants (School 1).

Two of the schools have EAL policies in place (School 1 and School 2) while the other two are currently developing EAL policies. The policy, which is about ensuring that EAL children achieve their full potential, as identified by the headteacher (School 3) provides a sound foundation for including, supporting and encouraging first languages. It provides the basis for developing awareness among practitioners that first languages are an important aspect in achieving full potential in the context of bilingualism.

The approach to EAL policy that takes as its starting point insufficient English as an obstacle to learning communicates a deficit picture of EAL learners (School 4). Even though a child new to English in the classroom easily comes across as somebody with difficulties and obstacles to learning, understanding needs to be there that this child is going through a natural process of second language acquisition.

Defining EAL children through their lack of English has often led to equalising EAL with Special Educational Needs (SEN) or, in some cases, to placing EAL children in the bottom sets. This attitude often translates into terms that are used in reference to EAL learners. In one of the schools, *severe EAL* was used regularly for beginners in English – mirroring the category of severe learning difficulties. Contrary to the very uneven attitudes towards valuing multilingualism, there is a consistent recognition and enthusiasm for promoting and celebrating different cultures, praised in the relevant Ofsted reports. However, languages remain a separate issue to cultures that have not been significantly promoted within the ethos of multiculturalism.

One of the interviewees reflects on his personal experience of being a bilingual student more than twenty years ago. He describes his experience as *a scar of humiliation* (School 3) that he has carried and his experience is not an isolated case. The video used for the EAL training of teaching assistants produced by the Teaching Training Agency (2002) features adults who have had similar experiences as children and who have consequently rejected their first languages.

The issue of dismissing recommendations to include other languages in teaching and learning (School 4) is put into perspective by the interviewees who have questioned the links of such attitudes with colonialism and English domination at the macro level and teachers feeling out of control, when other languages are used, at the micro level (School 3 and School 1).

Key practice implication

There is one consistent message coming out of this data, which is that: the interviewed headteachers have been appointed to manage schools with large proportions of bilingual children, between 30 to over 70 per cent, without any requirement in terms of training or insight into the experience of bilingualism and its implications on one's education. Interviewees list different strategies they use to overcome the lack of training, knowledge and expertise: doing what feels right (School 1), learning from colleagues (School 3) and transfer of expertise from another area – achievement (School 1).

This raises a number of important questions for Local Authorities:

1. Are most or even perhaps all headteachers unfamiliar with research and good practice relating to bilingual students?
2. What strategies need to be put in place to ensure that headteachers make decisions informed by research and relevant pedagogy rather than intuition, common sense and attitudes formed without an insight into the relevant knowledge base?

3. Would research evidence such as this form a basis to argue that a module on bilingualism needs to become compulsory for headteachers doing their NPQH aspiring to be working in multiethnic/multilingual schools?

Recommendations

School Practice

The language diversity in London, further complicated by the uneven and fluctuating numbers of speakers of particular languages, represents a real obstacle to developing provision for minority languages in terms of tuition. However, I argue that an awareness of the issues linked to the benefits of bilingualism and the importance of language diversity and language maintenance should be built into the mainstream curriculum. The type of awareness and respect towards other religions currently communicated within mainstream education can be used as a starting point in developing language awareness. Alternatively, if schools engage with the ecological approach to language diversity, these issues can be taught alongside environmental awareness.

Marginalisation of diverse linguistic profiles imposes a fallacy that not only is monolingualism the norm, but that everything else is undesirable. The argument that children just want to fit in and be like the others, which I encounter in London schools, is at odds with the growing number of schools where the 'others' are predominantly also bilingual or multilingual. Bilingual children, who choose to self-identify as monolinguals, are more likely trying to fit in with the only affirmed profile in their learning environment: the monolingual one, which is underpinned by 'normative monoglot ideologies' (Blommaert, Creve and Willaert, 2005).

The crucial question is: how do schools that have speakers of 40 or more languages represented provide 'an affirmative mirror' (term after Cummins, 2003), to all of them? How do they communicate to bilingual children that their bilingualism is a resource? First of all, bilingual children and their parents need to be given a clear, affirmative, consistent message by the school and their teachers in terms of a healthy bilingual linguistic diet. It should be a part of the Healthy Schools Initiative, currently implemented in schools focusing on healthy eating and lifestyle. As well as using every opportunity to say: 'It is good for you to eat fruit and vegetables every day', it should also be said: 'It is good for you to speak, read and write in other languages'.

This basic principle became clear while doing a focus discussion group with a group of Bangladeshi boys in Pimlico School. One boy identified bilingualism as the reason for their underachievement, while another stated: *'I don't think having two languages is a problem. I read in a scientific journal that it develops your brain.'* (Hanoman and Mehmedbegovic, 2004, p 14). Schools should not leave 14 year old students to take their own initiative while looking for answers whether bilingualism is good for them or not. Pupils (and parents) should be explicitly told. Relevant printed information should also be available for families in health centres, nurseries and schools.

Teacher training

Currently, there is significant provision for new headteachers and London teachers (DfES, 2004) on race, ethnicity, culture and religion, although language is not identified as a category in its own right. One can argue that it can be assumed with certainty that language will feature and be covered under culture and possibly ethnicity. Based on the research findings of this study, I would like to challenge this assumption and suggest that culture and language awareness and appreciation do not develop jointly. Fostering positive and

informed attitudes to bilingualism and linguistic diversity, in general, needs to be addressed as an area in its own right with sufficient time allocation.

Continuing with the focus on cultural awareness only may result in an even bigger culture-language dichotomy than we currently have. Therefore an explicit focus on language within the training for headteachers and the initiative for Chartered London Teacher status (DfES, 2004) would be an opportunity to move into a more balanced approach to multilingualism alongside multiculturalism.

In addition to making explicit language awareness a part of the compulsory modules for headteachers' training, I would suggest that requirements in terms of understanding bilingualism and its implications in education should be built into the recruitment process and person specification for headteachers applying for headships of schools with one third or more bilingual children on roll. It should be a reasonable expectation that candidates can demonstrate knowledge and commitment to the specific needs of such a significant proportion of their school roll.

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