

2 Bilingualism and learning English as an additional language – history, research and politics

Introduction

Attitudes to bilingualism and the way that children with EAL should be supported in English primary schools are issues that have been debated and contested for many decades. Knowing and appreciating this historical, political and research background enables us as practitioners to understand the context in which we work and the challenges that might present themselves. In this way, more sense might be made of policies, curricula, planning materials, professional development opportunities and specific materials and resources that are marketed. More than this, though, a good knowledge and understanding of the timeline of events and of the range of views and standpoints on this complex subject can empower us as teachers because we are able to question and critique from an informed perspective. In this way, a sense of integrity and autonomy can be maintained – something that is not always easy in an educational climate of surveillance and accountability.

This chapter provides an overview of how attitudes to bilingualism and ideas about teaching children with EAL have changed since the mid-twentieth century. It examines this from historical, research and political angles, all of which interlink and lead to the current situation in English primary schools. I hope that, by the end of the chapter, it will be clear why certain practices are adopted in primary schools and why others have been abandoned. The practical suggestions at the end of the chapter are designed to enable you to capitalise on the wealth of information that has been gathered in relation to supporting children with EAL in the primary classroom.

History, research and politics

Theories and viewpoints pertaining to the link between bilingualism and intelligence levels have undergone radical transformation since the mid-twentieth century. Beliefs prior to the 1960s were based on the idea that learning more than one language could be detrimental to the learner and might have adverse effects on intelligence levels (Baker, 1988). From the 1960s onwards, however, opinions began

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to change. Research and policy began to reflect the idea that access to more than one language could induce more positive traits, including:

- flexible thinking;
- an ability to grasp abstract concepts and develop these at a higher level;
- well-developed social skills, enabling the learner to adjust to unfamiliar environments and prosper within them;
- an ability to identify similarities between languages and to use existing linguistic knowledge to develop the use of other languages.

At this time, theories were still heavily influenced by a cognitive-psychological approach to language learning whereby learning was perceived as residing within the individual, regulated by the individual's personal traits and characteristics.

In the late 1960s, Section 11 of the Local Government Act recognised the migration of peoples from 'new Commonwealth nations' (Safford and Drury, 2013: 71), and funding was provided for teachers and resources to support children with EAL. This support, until the mid-1980s, generally took the form of removal of children with EAL from the classroom to be taught within intervention groups. There was also, however, in the 1970s and 1980s, a belief that children should be permitted to use their first language in the classroom, reinforced by the Bullock Report which stated that 'no child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of the home as he crosses the school threshold and the curriculum should reflect those aspects of his life' (Department of Education and Science (DES), 1975: para. 20.5).

Research around this time reflected different perspectives, all of which influenced later research and practice. The psycholinguistic approach focused on how EAL learners use their first language to support their learning of the second language. There was a growing focus on this use of 'contrastive analysis' and studies began to investigate to what extent children could be seen to be making these connections. Other research, taking a cognitive-psychological approach, focused more on the significance of the characteristics of language learners and why some children and adults appear able to pick up a language more easily. The third perspective – a sociocultural approach to learning a second language – was rapidly gaining ground as the twentieth century drew to a close. This entailed an acknowledgement of high- and low-status languages and attention to the concepts of additive, subtractive and transitional bilingualism. This sociocultural approach moved the emphasis away from language teaching being all about vocabulary and grammar, towards a focus on the social nature of learning (Leung and Creese, 2010).

A significant event in government policy-making occurred in the 1980s with the publication of the Swann Report (DES, 1985), 'the last major government report on linguistic and ethnic diversity in education' (Rampton et al., 2002). This report proposed that emphasis should be on the learning of language to make up for the *disadvantage* of not having English as a first language; that cultural diversity should be respected by all; and that children with EAL should be integrated into the mainstream classroom and be schooled in English. Although superficially positive in some of its recommendations, of more significant import was the fact that the

report rejected the idea that minority languages should be taught or seen as useful. In fact, the promotion of biliteracy was seen as a threat to social cohesion and all efforts became focused on making up for the perceived deficit of children who did not have English as their first language. From this point on, rather than recognising the knowledge, experience, cultural difference and language ability of children and families with EAL, the education system 'sought in effect to nationalise them' (Rampton et al., 2002). This is still reflected in classrooms today, where, in the main, a monolingual, monocultural approach to teaching and learning prevails.

From 1988, power shifted away from local education authorities and budgets were increasingly controlled by schools. As a result, rather than being able to access free professional development and support in relation to EAL from local authorities, schools had to *find* and *fund* support (Bourne, 2001). Financial pressure and competing priorities often meant that it was the EAL provision that suffered. Concurrently, education was centralised and a National Curriculum introduced combined with statutory national tests, the reporting of school results in public league tables and parental choice over schools. These three elements had a profound effect on provision and practice for children with EAL and how schools perceived them. The importance of results and the perceived potential of children with EAL *lowering* those results meant that these children were not always welcomed. Schools were put in the position of competing with each other, and certain parents and children were more 'prized' than others (Kenway and Bullen, 2001: 139), depending on what they offered the setting. In a climate such as this, if parents or children did not fit the 'norm' they might be seen as adding '*negative value*' (p. 139; emphasis in original).

The unfortunate effect of this was that it promoted the deficit model where what could *not* be achieved was highlighted and those who were unable to reach the required standards were undesirable. Individual competence and success became the priority rather than collective and collaborative endeavours, with the potential that 'authentic social relations' were supplanted by a culture of judgement 'wherein persons are valued for their productivity alone' (Ball, 2004: 146). Within this context, the focus on acquisition of Standard English inevitably tightened, further ensuring the devaluing of other languages. This was not improved in the 1990s with the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 1998) and the Literacy Hour, both of which were designed to accommodate the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of those with English as their *first* language. Within these structures, there was little attention to the needs of EAL learners, coinciding at this time with specialist language support systems being disbanded.

Despite this dismal devaluing of a multicultural, multilingual approach, in the research world the positive effects of bilingualism continued to be highlighted and new ideas promoted. The concept of multilingualism emerged, which might be defined as where more than one language is present in a particular setting, with no dominant hierarchy, and where those living within the setting might speak one or more of the languages present (Garcia, 2009). Within this idea, translanguaging might occur, with children and adults using languages in different ways to suit their

needs. Garcia writes about ‘translanguagings’ which she defines as ‘multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds’ (p. 45). Garcia has built a theory of learning relating to bilingual education.

Which I hope will permeate

School practice. She argues that the concept of translanguaging allows for an examination of bilinguals’ language practices in different settings. Garcia’s research highlights that, within children’s homes, translanguaging might be essential for families as some members will speak two or more languages while others may be monolingual. Some may be able to read and write in more than one language while others might only be bilingual in spoken language. There might be times when children translate for their parents and move between languages to ensure effective communication. In school, children might use one language during play, but then recognise the need to change language for more formal classroom activities. Children and adults will use the language most suited to them for particular situations and practices. They are never ‘two monolinguals in one person’ (p. 48) – in other words, it is not simply about learning one language and then adding another. It is about.

Language use and need

Other twenty-first-century research has emerged through technologies such as the use of neuroimaging, which has found that bilingual children have a ‘more highly developed linguistic and social awareness as well as a cognitive and intellectual flexibility’ (Gregory and Williams, 2000: 6) exceeding that of monolingual peers. This potential for high levels of performance in a second language demonstrated by many bilingual children has been found to be due to ‘the plasticity of cognitive systems in response to experience’ (Bialystok, 2011: 233). In this way, executive functions – those relating to memory, problem solving, reasoning and task flexibility – which are required to fix attention on two languages ‘become integrated with the linguistic circuits used for language processing’ (p. 233), thus creating a more efficient system promoting higher levels of functioning. Because learning a second language is conscious and deliberate, the process has the potential to promote metacognitive and metalinguistic strategies and EAL learners may have greater understanding of how language can be chosen and used to great effect in a range of situations.

Alongside this research based on neuroimaging, more and more studies, particularly in relation to primary-age children, are now focused on a sociocultural approach to second language learning. Here, movement is away from the individual nature of learning, dependent on personality and the ability to learn language-related rules, towards a Vygotskian view of language learning as ‘intricately related to the construction of social roles, cultural affiliations, beliefs, values, and

behavioural practices among participants in a community' (Lam, 2004: 46). Many common and recognisable classroom pedagogies and practices have emerged from this focus on a sociocultural approach to learning and teaching – talk partners, group work, guided reading and writing, for example – and these have the potential to provide invaluable support for children with EAL.

From their research, Mcnamara and Conteh (2008: 204) differentiate between genuine dialogic teaching and learning, where children and teachers co-construct an understanding, and 'interactive' teaching 'popularised by the literacy and numeracy strategies', often dominated by teacher talk and questioning. Genuine dialogic interaction, where teacher, learner and peers work alongside each other, enables learning to be socially mediated and then internalised in order to provoke a transformation of some kind (Johnson, 2006). For children with EAL, this transformation might involve making essential connections between their existing experience of language and new knowledge and to learn to see their own language 'as one particular system among many'

(Vygotsky, 1962: 110).

Research indicates, however, that this sociocultural approach, in relation to EAL learners, needs to have a specific language focus and that the first language of the child needs to retain prominence. This is not reflected in government policy and guidance which has emerged in recent years. On the surface, these publications appear to recognise the importance of promoting bilingualism. In *Aiming High*, teachers are exhorted to: 'Be an advocate for ethnic minority pupils, celebrating the achievement of bilingualism and highlighting achievement of all kinds' (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2005: 21). However, despite the growth of research and theory development in the area of bilingual learning, and some positive government rhetoric, much of the language used when talking about children with EAL continues to reflect the deficit model, where the children are perceived as lacking something fundamental (Rodriguez, 2013). Without explicit acknowledgement of the benefits of bilingualism outside research settings, children will not have the platform from which to recognise 'their own power, and the potential for learning that bilingualism gives them' (Conteh, 2012: 38).

The scenario above might be familiar to those of us who work in primary classrooms, where whole-class activities are often led and dominated by the teacher with questions requiring brief answers which are either right or wrong. For children with EAL, the efficacy of this pedagogy might be questioned. Historically, the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies encouraged interactive teaching and learning, but as discussed earlier, this did not necessarily promote genuine dialogic interaction. The extent to which Reeta and Bimala were able to participate and use mathematical language was restricted by the pedagogy. This might be the reason why Bimala then struggled with her independent problem solving. Collaboration and discussion were not actively encouraged; success was measured by what the children could achieve working alone.

CASE STUDY 2.1

At the start of the lesson, the teacher asked the whole class a series of questions. The children responded by either raising their hands or writing the answers on their whiteboards. No interaction was encouraged between the children, and the questions posed were closed and required a non-negotiable numerical answer. Reeta and Bimala listened carefully and repeatedly raised their hands to answer. They were not selected to answer any questions. At one point, Reeta completed a maths problem on her whiteboard. The answer she arrived at was incorrect. When the answer was provided by the teacher, Reeta changed her answer on her whiteboard, seemingly without thinking about her own working out or conferring with anyone. The teacher then asked if anyone could explain how they arrived at their answer. Bimala tentatively raised her hand and then put it down again.

Towards the end of this twenty-minute introduction, Reeta was asked once by the teacher to provide an answer which she did, correctly, using just one word. Bimala was not asked to respond to any questions. She often looked around the class before writing an answer on her whiteboard. Once the whole-class activity was finished, the children were asked to complete word problems. Bimala struggled with the task and Reeta did not offer to help (although she was sitting next to Bimala). Instead, she kept her board hidden and worked alone. The children were encouraged to work independently.

Use the questions below to consider what has influenced this particular approach to teaching and learning and the implications of this for children with EAL:

- What might be the benefits of using L1 to problem-solve in maths?
- What is the rationale behind requiring children to work independently rather than collaboratively?
- What types of assessment have you observed in schools and what has influenced these?

The prevailing theme within policy and guidance materials is how to support children with EAL towards more proficiency in the English language, both oral and written. This tends towards the notion of ‘transitional bilingualism’ (Conteh, 2012: 39) whereby the English language gradually replaces children’s L1, rather than ‘additive’ which celebrates and builds upon linguistic diversity. This book attempts to counter this by suggesting ways by which children’s existing linguistic and experiential repertoires might be effectively utilised to promote exciting learning opportunities.

So where are we now?

The above discussion demonstrates how knowledge about and perceptions of bilingualism have undergone radical and fluctuating changes in the past sixty years. So what is the current situation for children with EAL and their teachers in primary schools in the twenty-first century?

The proportion of children in primary schools whose first language is not English increased from 10.4 per cent to 18.1 per cent in the ten-year period between 2003 and 2013. From the 1950s until the last two decades, migrant populations were predominantly associated with Asian and Black families (Alleyne, 2002) and diverse school communities were aligned with inner-city settings. Since 2004, however, with the arrival of ‘citizens from EU accession states’ (Flynn, 2013: 336), the ethnic constitution of immigrants has changed. Many children in primary schools come from eastern European backgrounds and their families are



Figure 2.1 Different backgrounds and experiences of children with EAL.

often settling in locations other than major cities. As a result, primary schools outside urban settings are increasingly involved with supporting children whose first language is not English. Some families from minority groups move into areas where there are many people who share their language, while others may be more isolated. Isolated learners in schools (Flynn, 2013), who are the only children with a particular first language, may need specific support, socially, academically and linguistically.

Schools in some areas may have groups of children from certain countries due to their proximity to military bases or sea ports. Other bilingual groups might include Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, service children, children of seasonal workers and asylum seekers. These very different situations demand innovative and flexible approaches to teaching and learning (Leung and Creese, 2010), to ensure that children are able to engage with the whole curriculum and develop their understanding of English to the point that they are able to learn in this new language, while retaining their L1.

The DfES (2005: 5) in its publication *Aiming High* identifies three groups of children who might be most particularly at risk of academic underachievement:

- new arrivals with little or no previous educational experience;
- those who are acquiring English with limited exposure to first language;
- more advanced bilingual learners (pupils with a number of years' exposure to English) whose specific needs have been overlooked.

Diverse approaches are required for each of these groups of children. Case Study 2.2 describes one such group – very young children with EAL with little or no previous educational experience. This group of children are learning to learn in a second language right from the start of their formal education. The benefits of this are that, because they are so young, there is less language to 'catch up on' and the early years curriculum provides them with plenty of opportunities to talk and experience life. The potential disadvantages are that they might have fewer opportunities to use cross-linguistic transfer because of their limited experience of L1 or L2. The case study is taken from a Physical Education lesson with Reception children (age 4). The children with EAL are Nepalese.

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This example seemed to be fairly typical of practices in early years classrooms which are particularly suited to those with EAL, as they are based on practical activities and have their foundations in play (DfE, 2013). The teacher's modelling of the activity, accompanied by his actions and repetition of key vocabulary, enabled the children with EAL to participate successfully in the lesson, their actions uninhibited by their level of language proficiency. All the children were engaged in the same activity, which had a twofold advantage: no child felt isolated and they could

CASE STUDY 2.2

Observing this lesson, it was clear that there were varying levels of understanding of English. At least three of the Nepalese boys appeared to have limited comprehension. After leading a warm-up, the class teacher modelled an activity, showing the children how to put one hand or one knee or one finger on a mat. His actions were exaggerated and the instructions were all accompanied by relevant demonstrations – he jogged around the room, blew the whistle, called out a part of the body and pointed to it and then touched the mat with that part of his body. The Nepalese children were all happy to engage in the activity and appeared to have a good idea of what to do. Occasionally, when they were not entirely sure, they watched each other and then imitated the actions. The session was lively, interactive and the children appeared to be having fun.

Now consider the following questions:

- Why does the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum tend to support the learning of children with EAL?
- In the scenario in Case Study 2.2, what more might the teacher have done to promote a bilingual approach to learning?
- In what ways do the practices in the Physical Education lesson described above reflect a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning?

imitate each other if necessary. Although there was no attempt to translate key vocabulary for the children, or to pre-teach the words that were likely to occur in the session, the repetition of basic terms alongside the modelling of physical actions supported the children with EAL, allowing them to make associations between words in their own language and the English equivalents.

The next section in this chapter will focus on practical ideas for the classroom which reflect historical, political and research developments over the past decades. A better understanding of why particular policies and curriculum materials are adopted in school allows for a flexible and questioning attitude to such documentation. This enables us as practitioners to adhere to the requirements imposed by a prescribed curriculum, while maintaining professional integrity in terms of responding to the needs of the children we teach.

One of the key changes in relation to knowledge about and attitudes towards bilingualism occurred when it was realised that, rather than being in any way detrimental, learning an additional language had the potential to enhance social skills, promote metalinguistic awareness and stimulate cognitive growth and flexibility. Here are some ways you might promote a bilingual approach in your classroom.

Table 2.1 How it is and how it might be

How it is	How it might be
Homogenisation and labelling	Successful interculturality (Aman, 2015)
A monolingual education system	A bilingual approach: 'a repertoire of related language practices' (Palmer and Martinez, 2013: 277)
An individualist cognitive-psychological approach to learning	A sociocultural approach to learning: 'human learning as a dynamic social activity' (Johnson, 2006: 237)
A 'pedagogy that silences and denies' (Dadds, 2001: 48)	A pedagogy of possibility: teachers as 'transformative intellectuals' (Kumaravadevelu, 2008: 8)

Practical ideas for the classroom

- ✓ Learn a new language yourself, thereby raising your awareness of what it is like to be immersed in an environment where you do not speak the dominant language.
- ✓ Learn key words and phrases in the languages of the children in your class. Even if you are only able to greet the children/parents or use the words 'please' and 'thank you' in their language, this shows a respect for and a knowledge of their L1. You will often be amazed at the level of response, particularly from parents who might feel extremely intimidated when they are required to come into school to discuss their child's progress.
- ✓ With older children, encourage examination of semantic differences in translations and the way that words are interpreted. Because words often do not directly translate, children have to think more deeply about the meaning they are trying to convey, leading to a genuine dialogic discussion about language and a deeper level of thought. Certain concepts will be better understood in L1, so once the child has understood, this can then be explained in L2.
- ✓ Gain a better understanding of how children use L1 and L2. When do they switch and for what purpose? Children are often keen to switch between languages in the playground but not in the classroom, and subtle observations of how language is used in social situations might provide you with some ideas about how to extend this into more formal lesson times.
- ✓ Overtly encourage children to use L1 during discussions, practical tasks, problem-solving and reading and writing activities. Children soon perceive English as the dominant and powerful language in the classroom and

take the decision to abandon L1. Research indicates that cross-linguistic transfer (where children can be encouraged to make links across languages) and contrastive analysis (where the focus is on similarities between languages and connections being made, with an emphasis on language structure) allow children with EAL to utilise what they know from their L1 and substitute into this a growing knowledge of L2. Using existing knowledge of language structure has the potential to support an EAL learner as they recognise familiar features; it may of course also hinder them if the rules for the new language are not the same. Clearly, the closer the two languages are in structure, the greater the potential for cross-linguistic transfer, although even if two languages are not linguistically similar, the learner will still be able to utilise their existing knowledge. The effectiveness of cross-linguistic transfer is contingent on a number of other factors, including the child's level of competence in L1, their attitude to learning and their own cognitive ability. Identifying opportunities for cross-linguistic transfer and contrastive analysis as support mechanisms is unlikely to occur naturally and independently for children with EAL. These concepts may need to be made explicit so that they are able to recognise that their existing knowledge can help their new learning. A vital element of this is that we as teachers and also the children and their parents recognise the importance of L1 and how this can be capitalised on for both the learning of basic communication skills and more advanced academic language.

- ✓ Do not feel intimidated or undermined because you cannot understand what children are saying when they use L1 in their learning. It may well be the case that they have gone off task, but at least they are having the opportunity for some respite from learning to learn in English and, through communication and social chatter, they might be refreshed to then re-engage with their learning. Imagine yourself in their shoes: if you were with a friend in an environment where only you and she spoke English, would you not take every opportunity for a quick chat in your home language in order to protect both your identity and sanity? Children and adults need to have such respect for other languages that they do not feel threatened or excluded because they do not understand a conversation. Instead, these opportunities need to be embraced and language knowledge shared.
- ✓ Challenge the idea of classrooms and schools as monolingual settings, by taking every opportunity to promote the learning of different languages. Ask children with EAL to teach their English peers key words and phrases. Build word banks for all children which reflect the languages spoken in your classroom – children and parents can help with the creation of these resources. Ensure that children have access to dual-language texts (audio and written), dictionaries, displays, lexical sets (words connected with a theme), translation websites and so forth.

- ✓ Ask parents to contribute by coming in and reading stories in L2, reciting poems, sharing favourite books and stories from their own culture, cooking, creating dual-language texts and resources. Send bilingual homework home, so that parents are reminded of the benefits of children retaining L1.
- ✓ Work with senior leadership to organise events where bilingualism and its benefits are promoted to both parents and children. Often parents believe that the most important part of their child's education is to learn English and, while this is of course essential in terms of engaging with the curriculum, a realisation that retaining L1 and making links across languages is extremely beneficial can reassure parents and endorse the idea of using L1 in the home and at school.
- ✓ Where possible, encourage the employment of bilingual teachers and teaching assistants. Try to displace the typical hierarchy of the classroom by engaging in team planning and teaching with bilingual colleagues. Research indicates that bilingual assistants are often under-utilised in the classroom, and this can have several effects. Firstly, the opportunities for bilingual teaching and learning are lost. Secondly, children soon realise that it is the monolingual English teacher who holds the seat of power in the classroom, reinforcing a monolingual approach with English as the all-powerful language. And thirdly, invaluable opportunities for assessment of children in both L1 and L2 are lost if bilingual assistants are not encouraged to work side by side with the teacher in the classroom.

Conclusion

So much has changed in recent decades in terms of knowledge and understanding about the benefits of learning languages and how best to support children with EAL in the primary classroom. Despite this, English primary schools and teachers are predominantly monolingual and, with a curriculum and assessment system which demands a high level of spoken and written English, prevailing attitudes reflect the deficit model which perceives children with EAL as fundamentally lacking in something. That 'something' is the English language. It is undoubtedly true that if children are to be successful within the English education system, they need an excellent understanding of English and the ability to speak, read and write fluently. What is *not* true, however, is that the best way to achieve this is by abandoning their first language and replacing it with English. The social, linguistic and cognitive advantages of being bilingual are well documented.

Lantolf and Poehner (2008), who have written extensively on sociocultural theory and second language learners, believe that the reason for Vygotsky and others' theories being marginally represented in schools is that 'their effectiveness promises to disturb the status quo' (p. 1). In other words, an authentic, sociocultural,

bilingual approach to teaching and learning would require a flexible, creative attitude to teaching and learning, moving practitioners and learners beyond the curriculum. It would require more risk taking, and an innovative approach to assessment (mirroring some of the best practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage). There would need to be a recognition that all learners benefit from a bilingual approach (although the benefits might not be immediately visible); a commitment to raising the profile of all languages represented in the classroom; and a recognition that authentic, collaborative dialogue, within relationships of respect and trust, is essential for children with EAL.

All of this is possible while still adhering to the requirements of the curriculum, and would only serve to enhance the learning experience of all the children in our classrooms. Changes do not need to be radical or time-consuming. Small alterations and considerations can make a substantial impact and, over time, these individual changes can lead to fundamental modifications in pedagogies and practices. More importantly, though, by taking these first steps towards a more innovative and exciting approach to supporting children with EAL, we can embrace and capitalise on the existing language skills and life experiences of the diverse community of learners we encounter in our classrooms. Each chapter in this book serves to suggest ways in which this can best be managed.