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Supporting Home Language Maintenance among Children with English as an Additional Language in Irish Primary Schools

Supporting Home Language Maintenance among Children with English as an Additional Language in Irish Primary Schools

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Children speaking a home language other than English who have recently immigrated into the Republic of Ireland are expected to engage with the primary school curriculum in English, with which they may or may not be familiar, as well as learning an additional language (Irish) as a beginner. In recent years, the Republic of Ireland has hosted high numbers of immigrants relative to other countries. The Council of Europe acknowledges that while this increases the language resources on which Ireland can capitalise, the new demand for English as an Additional Language is transforming many mainstream schools into plurilingual micro-communities. This paper explores the degree to which Home Language maintenance among children with English as an Additional Language is supported in Irish primary schools. Findings are presented from a mixed methods study conducted between 2007 and 2010 regarding the support of L1 maintenance by the Whole School Community in its widest sense (parents, teachers, community). Overall the study has shown many positive aspects of an education system that does advocate for children with English as an additional language in the early years of primary school at the macro level. However, this system requires a more consistent approach to supporting opportunities for professional learning among the mainstream classroom teachers who are ultimately responsible for implementing policies and practices at the micro level.

Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the maintenance of the home language among learners of additional languages in the early years of primary school. Emphasis will be placed on the policies currently in place to support this concept, leading on to a review of the literature pointing to the benefits of actively promoting this type of plurilingualism. Findings from a study conducted between 2007 and 2010 regarding the support of L1 maintenance by the Whole School Community in its widest sense (parents, teachers, community) will then be presented, followed by conclusions and recommendations advocating for the promotion of global literacy.

Children speaking a home language other than English who have recently immigrated into the Republic of Ireland are expected upon entry to primary

school to engage with the curriculum in an L2 (English) with which they may or may not be familiar as well as learning an additional L2 (Irish) as a beginner. The advent of newcomers to Ireland is a relatively new situation. The main influx of children has come within the last ten years, and the Republic of Ireland has hosted high numbers of immigrants within this timeframe, relative to other countries experiencing a high level of immigration.

Children in Irish primary schools who speak languages other than English as their first language are commonly known as “EAL children” or “newcomer children.” The definition of English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the Irish context is presented as follows:

The phrase ‘English as an additional language’ recognises that English is the language used in teaching the child and that, where possible, the child will also learn Irish. The teaching of English will build on the language and literacy skills which the child has attained in his/her home language to the greatest extent possible. (NCCA, 2006, p. 5)

This increased migration has contributed significantly to the “broadening of cultural diversity spanning traditions and languages from around the world,” according to the Department of Education and Science (DES). The Council of Europe (2008) acknowledges that while this increases the language resources on which Ireland can capitalise, the new demand for English as an Additional Language is transforming many mainstream schools into plurilingual micro-communities.

Language Policy

There is currently no formal languages-in-education policy in place in the Republic of Ireland, although it is one of eleven countries which has availed of the opportunity to reflect on and consider recommendations regarding the drafting of a language policy (Baetens Beardsmore, 2009; Council of Europe, 2008). However, Irish and English are compulsory subjects for all pupils in primary school, excepting cases where an exemption from Irish may be requested. Both languages have constitutional rights and are the official languages of the country. Furthermore, the Official Languages Act passed in 2003 protects the rights of citizens to access materials bilingually or in Irish alone. There is an absence of policy surrounding languages other than English and Irish.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment¹ (NCCA) provides a wide range of strategies for assisting the child with language development and engagement with the curriculum. Two documents of note in this area are *English as an Additional Language in Irish Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers*, hereafter referred to as the *EAL Guidelines* (NCCA, 2006), and *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools*, hereafter referred to as the *Intercultural Guidelines* (NCCA, 2005). The *EAL Guidelines* are aimed at providing information regarding language acquisition so that the whole school community may attain a greater understanding of language acquisition and the implications it has on the learning needs of the child. They are also aimed at identifying how school and classroom planning contribute to the language and learning needs of the child.

¹ This is the agency with responsibility for curriculum development in Ireland.

Guidelines for the use of appropriate methodologies, including the use of ICT, are at the core of the aims of the document, as is the identification of appropriate assessment strategies.

In the *EAL Guidelines*, one of the few references to the child's home language is as follows:

Children who are literate in their home language should be encouraged to sustain the development of this literacy. It is important for the child to continue to develop his/her language and literacy skills in the home language. (NCCA, 2006, p. 9)

Upon examining this document, Wiley's (2002) model of educational language policy would seem to place Ireland between an expediency-oriented model, which is not intended to expand the use of the minority language, a tolerance-oriented model, where there is a noticeable absence of state intervention in minority language usage, and null, where there is a significant absence of policy recognising minority languages.

Home language use is also referred to in two of the document's exemplars (Exemplar 2 – A guided reading exercise; Exemplar 7 – Moving to music) and as an area to be included as part of pupil portfolios for assessment purposes. Teachers are urged to encourage parents to continue promoting literacy in the home language. These examples are the extent of the suggestions regarding home language maintenance. As the definition of EAL in an Irish context includes recognition of the child's home language, more references to supporting home language maintenance would be expected in the main document regarding EAL in primary schools.

Mac Naughton's (2006) model also provides issues for consideration in planning whole school policies regarding newcomer children. Ireland would appear to lie somewhere between the *laissez-faire* school of thought and the *critical understandings* school of thought. The *laissez-faire* or assimilationist approach wishes to promote equity. However, diversity is managed in favour of the dominant group and a culture of silence towards issues of diversity is promoted. The expectation is that children should be able to behave following group norms and values and children are not encouraged to share experiences that fall outside of this norm. With regard to policy, "by assuming that no specific initiatives are necessary to promote respect for diversity, the *laissez-faire* approach creates a policy vacuum" (Mac Naughton, 2006, p. 31). Tollefson (2002) refers to one definition of a policy of assimilation, which encourages minority groups to adopt the language of the dominant ethnolinguistic group as their own. He also says that these policies are often rationalized by a discourse of national unity and a discourse of equality. The terms that Mac Naughton uses to describe the approach are "colour blind," "gender neutral," "business as usual," "conforming approach to equity" and "liberal multiculturalism" (2006, p. 32).

The *Intercultural Guidelines* (NCCA, 2005) complements the *EAL Guidelines* (2006) in the areas of language and interculturalism. The aims of this document are far-reaching, and include:

- supporting the aims of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) in the context of a growing cultural and ethnic diversity in a way that will maximise and enrich learning for all children;

- making the curriculum as accessible as possible for children from minority ethnic groups;
- addressing the curriculum needs of all children which arise in the context of growing cultural ethnic and cultural diversity;
- facilitating schools and teachers in creating an inclusive culture and environment; providing an overview of assessment in an intercultural context; and
- raising awareness within the educational community of issues that arise from increasing linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity.

The *Intercultural Guidelines* refers to the child's first language a number of times. In the context of school planning, this includes the idea of teachers knowing a few key words in the child's L1 and a reminder to teachers that it is normal for people to be multilingual in many countries. With regard to classroom planning, teachers are encouraged to seat children who have the same L1 beside each other at the beginning of the year.

In terms of creating a supportive classroom environment, the guidelines acknowledge that people generally find it easier to engage in higher-order thinking in their first language, and teachers are encouraged to communicate positive attitudes towards linguistic diversity (NCCA, 2005). In identifying intercultural education opportunities across the curriculum, the guidelines encourage teachers to make shared reading opportunities available in English where a child who has reading abilities in a different L1 may share this with others. With respect to oral language, children with EAL may teach some of their L1 phrases to children in the class. Assessment is mentioned as an area which may present challenges, particularly written assessments which may not fully reflect the ability level of a child with EAL.

After this, there is a full chapter dedicated to "Language and Interculturalism," where reference is made to sensitivity around introducing a child with EAL to the class, being careful to refer to their language abilities in an additive sense, and encouraging children speaking English as L1 to support their language learning peers (NCCA, 2005). In offering suggestions for recognising the child's first language, five suggestions are given, including the inclusion of the languages of the school community on signage and text around the school, particularly at school events, and encouraging the use of languages of the school at intercultural events such as graduations.

Based on these final suggestions, what seems to be more common is the "cultural understandings" or "you're different from me" approach, which aims to create understanding among groups of children and is widespread and prevalent in many Western multicultural countries. Villegas and Lucas (2002) critique what according to Mac Naughton (2006) may represent cultures in simplistic and stereotyped ways" (p. 37). So-called "soft" intercultural education is often referred to as "saris and samosas syndrome," a phrase coined by Uzma Shakir (in Villegas and Lucas, 2002). Soft intercultural education is criticised for celebrating the differences between cultures at a surface level while avoiding challenging the root causes of racism and bigotry. Other terms used to describe the approach are "tourist approaches," "tokenistic approaches," "cultural additive approach," "multicultural" and "black awareness" (Mac Naughton, 2006, p. 38). Although the

above categories are focused mainly on culture, it is of course noteworthy that language and culture are inextricably linked (Tang, 1999). Therefore, understanding these different approaches to interculturalism is of importance to an exploration of the support provided by the Whole School Community to children and families speaking home languages other than English (HLOTE).

The presence of documents such as the *Intercultural Guidelines* confirms Ireland's commitment to intercultural education on one level by stating that this approach to interculturalism expresses

a belief that we all become personally enriched by coming in contact with and experiencing other cultures, and that people of different cultures can and should be able to engage with each other and learn from each other. (NCCA, 2005b, p. 3)

One may argue therefore that classifying Ireland as lying on or near the spectrum of *laissez-faire* may be unfair. However, the lack of in-service and pre-service training that has been provided to teachers in this area does not lend itself to the belief that intercultural education has been meaningfully promoted by the state. Harte (2009) has found that undergraduate student teachers spoke of insufficient preparation in terms of intercultural education in one of the colleges of education in the Republic of Ireland, even when taking into consideration the initiatives of the Development and Intercultural Education (DICE)² project in Initial Teacher Education. Dillon and O'Shea (2009) found that the interest and commitment evident among the teachers consulted during a review of the impact of work undertaken during the first phase of the DICE Project (2004-2007) augurs well for the future of development education and intercultural education in the primary classroom. However, this accounts only for a small proportion on teachers actively involved in DICE in the classroom.

The distribution of the *Intercultural Guidelines* also coincided with other in-service training being provided to schools at the time, meaning that "in practice, many practitioners did not attach adequate attention or priority to intercultural concerns in a very crowded, if not overloaded, professional renewal, school improvement agenda" (McGorman & Sugrue, 2007, p. 16). Furthermore, the findings of Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne (2009, p. 172) show that the majority of Irish teachers find that the curriculum and textbooks do not take adequate account of diversity and that pre-service and in-service training do not adequately prepare teachers for facing the challenges of teaching in multilingually diverse classrooms. Therefore the analysis of documents such as the *Intercultural Guidelines* and *EAL Guidelines* must be tempered by an awareness that many teachers may not have been and still may not be aware of the resources and advice available for facilitating newcomer children meaningfully in the classroom.

Advantages of Plurilingualism

Lambert (1974) was the first to differentiate between additive and subtractive forms of bilingualism. Briefly, *additive bilingualism* is a situation where the L1 is valued and is not replaced by the L2; indeed, they may support each other.

² <http://www.diceproject.ie/>

Examples include the coexistence of English and Irish in Ireland currently, or the coexistence of English and Welsh in Wales. However, subtractive bilingualism is a situation where the L1 is a minority language and the sole purpose of learning the L2 is to replace the L1. Examples include past histories of colonialism in African countries, whereby many African languages were suppressed in order to promote the language of the conquering country, for example, French in Morocco. The suppression of Scottish Gaelic in Scotland during the 15th and 16th centuries is also an example of a conquering nation promoting its own native language, to the detriment of the indigenous language. "This variety of subtractive bilingualism has been associated with negative cognitive consequences, where the former has been associated with positive cognitive consequences" (Dillon, 2005, p. 40).

Baetens Beardsmore (2008) points to UNESCO's findings of 2003 that learning through the L1 is not the most common model of learning throughout the world, and that there is no necessary handicap through bilingual education. He also states that being plurilingual brings intellectual benefits and that there has been much evidence in the past of the connection between plurilingualism (including bilingual education) and creative thinking, communicative sensitivity, metalinguistic skills, self-regulating mechanisms and spatial skills. According to the *EAL Guidelines* (NCCA, 2006), research illustrates that children who have literacy skills in their home language are able to transfer some of these skills to the learning of an additional language (e.g., Lindholm-Leary, 2005). Other primary language advocates include Thomas and Collier (1997), who say that the longer, more intensively and more effectively students learn cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)³ skills in their home language, the better their eventual attainment will be in English.

Jeon (2008) refers to the wishes of Korean parents and guardians in the United States to have an English-only policy at home because of their belief that learning two or more languages confuses their children, an assumption that Shin (2005) characterizes as one of the many "myths surrounding bilingualism." Grosjean (2010) acknowledges some of the other myths that perpetually surround bilingualism, including that bilingualism delays language acquisition in young children, that children raised bilingually will always mix their languages, and that bilingualism negatively affects the cognitive development of bilingual children. He maintains that in a European context, society sets a high standard for bilingualism that may contribute to the lack of recognition of the positive aspects of developing bilingualism among young children including the development of interlanguage.

The NCCA (2005, 2006) acknowledges the fact that children who are literate in their home language should be given opportunities for sustaining and developing this literacy. In terms of language awareness, it is accepted that whatever the child's home language, the skills learned already will be transferable to learning English. However, there may be great differences between the grammatical conventions, phonological system, script and directionality in English and the home language (NCCA, 2006). Therefore, the first language has a significant role in the acquisition of additional languages, as well as a significant role in identity and maintaining

³ The terms BICS and CALP will be of relevance throughout the study. BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) refers to manifestations of language proficiency in communicative interpersonal situations, whereas CALP (cognitive/academic language proficiency) refers to "the dimension of language proficiency that is related to literacy skills" (Cummins, 1984, as cited in Baker and Hornberger, 2001, p. 112).

positive family interactions. The Primary National Strategy (PNS) in the UK (2007) recognises the importance of bilingual support for newcomer children. Some of the reasons given are as follows:

- to deny children the opportunity to use their home language and to learn through it is to disregard the importance of the home language in their education;
- support in home languages assists teachers in finding out information about a child's competency in that language, allowing teachers to inform their expectations of the child's learning outcomes.

Bialystok (2001), however, points to the reality that while children may have either formal or informal opportunities to learn or maintain written proficiency in their L1, "children whose first language is the minority language [...] need to learn literacy skills in the majority language which they may or may not speak well," and that "the social and cultural pressures that define these situations are considerably more intense than they are for immersion education." Brisk (2005) cites a ground-breaking study carried out by UNESCO which revealed that children educated in their second language experienced difficulties in school and that the home language is critical because it is the vehicle through "which a child absorbs the cultural environment" (UNESCO, 1953, p. 47). She also states that "when the native language is vulnerable, achieving literacy first in that language is essential" (Brisk, 2005, p. 18), and acknowledges that some parents and educators question the usefulness of native language instruction as counter-productive for literacy initiation. Tabors (2008) notes the importance of the development of the L1 "as a necessary basis for later literacy and consequently later school success" and also that "young children are highly susceptible to losing their first language if the first language is not strongly maintained during the preschool years" (p. 4).

All of the evidence presented above provides substantive support for the benefits that bilingualism and indeed plurilingualism can bring, but only if due recognition is given to the L1 as a valuable part, if not the most valuable part, of the child's repertoire of languages.

Methodology: Understanding the Language Ecologies of the Setting

This study was carried out using a mixed methods approach including classroom observation (three children in one Junior Infant classroom over 10 weeks), focus group interviews (four interviews carried out with 15 teachers) and a questionnaire (administered by post; 99 respondents). Junior Infants is the equivalent of Kindergarten and is the first year of formal, compulsory schooling in Ireland. Therefore most of the children concerned were approximately five years old. All of the data collection was carried out by the researcher. Focus group interviews were carried out in large, urban schools while the classroom observation took place in a large urban school reporting 24% of the population as children with EAL. Each child who participated in the study has a linguistic repertoire of at least three languages: their home language (HL), English, and Irish. However, each child's home and school environment ensures that the linguistic environment of one child is never the same as another's.

Questionnaire data highlighted the languages spoken in Junior Infant classrooms in particular. Over half of classes (58.6%) had between one and 20% of children who spoke HLOTE. One-third of classes had between 21% and 49% of children who spoke HLOTE, and a further 8.1% of classes had over 50% of children speaking HLOTE. In three cases this number ran up to 76.9%. The experiences of children in each type of classroom would obviously be quite different, based on the influence of the diversity of linguistic ecologies present in and beyond the classroom.

These differences form part of the ecological context which for van Lier (2002) should be an important focus of study. Classroom tasks and activities may be seen as the ecosystem in which the growth of language skills takes place (van Geert, 1998). Of particular relevance to the present study is the concept of affordance, explained as follows: "Language arises from affordances brought forth by active engagement rather than from processed input. These affordances then enable further action and interaction" (van Lier, 2002, p. 146). By using the metaphor of ecology of language, according to Edwards (2004) we have "a view of the world in which there is room for all languages, where the goodness of diversity is a given" (p. 469).

Smyth et al.'s (2009) report did focus on the whole school rather than on Junior Infant classes, but it found that primary schools tended to have either a high proportion of newcomers or none at all, and that almost 10% of primary schools had over 20% newcomers. Their report and the present study also showed that disadvantaged schools were almost twice as likely to have newcomer students, and that Catholic schools were slightly less likely than multi- or inter-denominational schools to have newcomer children.

Smyth et al.'s (2009) study showed that "there is no strong evidence of segregation by nationalities in Irish schools; in fact, there is a variety of nationalities in many schools with newcomers" (p. 57). Their study did find that Eastern European nationals were most likely to be the dominant group in 40% of primary schools, which corresponds with the findings from the present study where Polish was spoken by over one quarter of speakers of HLOTE in Junior Infants and Lithuanian was spoken by almost 10% of speakers of HLOTE overall.

The above-mentioned findings have implications for the diversity of language ecologies present in classrooms countrywide, including the present case, because this type of wide variation in cultural and linguistic backgrounds presents a particular type of challenge to the Whole School Community. Furthermore, the rights of children to maintain the HL (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995; Phillipson, Rannut & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995; Wiley, 2002) may well be challenged in situations where the languages present in one classroom do not constitute a homogenous grouping.

While it is acknowledged that each child's linguistic environment is different, and therefore generalisations are made cautiously, one national group worth highlighting with regard to language ecology is the largest group of newcomer children in all Irish schools: the Polish community. The tendency for some cultures to be more language-centred than others has implications for the sustenance of language ecologies, and Polish speakers have been found to have a particularly language-centred culture (Janik, 1996). This has implications for language shift and language maintenance; cultures that are more language-centred will tend to be slower to engage in language shift (Holmes, 2001). In the Irish context, the Polish community have been found to be proactive in maintaining their language and culture, even when it is the intention of newcomers to remain in the country

long-term (Debaene, 2008). The prevalence of Polish-language classes, forms of media, and services available shows the commitment of that group to language maintenance. These types of activities result in greater harmony between the language and its physical environment (Mühlhäusler, 2002). However, more consideration of the importance of real-life HL experiences is needed in education at the macro and micro levels to ensure avoidance of Mühlhäusler's *greenspeaking*, which involves a tokenistic approach to catering to linguistic diversity.

Support of L1 maintenance among children with EAL by the Whole School Community

The Whole School Community, in this context, includes issues relating to home-school links, school planning for inclusion, and training and resources for teachers. During focus group interviews, many of the teachers commented on the fact that they had noticed how much the parents appreciate what is being done at school and commented on the level of support they received from parents. A number of teachers commented on language and cultural differences causing a breakdown in communication at times, and stated that cultural differences often occurred, depending on nationality, due to a lack of understanding on the part of the teacher and sometimes the parent. These misunderstandings were sometimes avoided where a translator or translated documents were available. Many of the parents mentioned by the teachers during focus group interviews seemed to have much less English than the children themselves, although comments were made about the high levels of English some parents seemed to have in comparison with their children. It is acknowledged by Smyth et al. (2009) that at present, very little is known about the involvement of newcomer parents in their children's education in Ireland. However, their research has shown that in general, the language barrier between educators and parents makes it very difficult to develop good communication links between home and school.

Some teachers interviewed commented on the parents' wishes to have English promoted in and out of school, and to have the school provide English classes for parents of children with EAL. The vast majority of teachers surveyed felt that HL maintenance is the responsibility of the parents, with over 80% of teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing with that statement. Sook Lee and Oxelson (2006) also found that strong attitudes were present among teachers regarding the perception that HL maintenance is the responsibility of the parents, not of the school or the teacher, particularly among teachers with no training in ESL as is the case with most of the teachers surveyed. Responses also show that 72.8% of teachers surveyed felt that parents are interested in their children's maintenance of the HL. The child language profiles showed that 50% of teachers were unaware of the child's L1 literacy experiences.

This indicates a lack of information being transferred between school and home. However, of the other 50% of teachers, just over one quarter did state that the children sometimes had experience of L1 literacy and another fifth of respondents indicated that the children often had these experiences. Again, curriculum overload may be a factor here as there is minimal time formally allocated to meeting with parents. The NCCA points out the irony in this:

that the relationship with parents adds to teachers' workload and experience of curriculum overload, given the possibilities of collaborating with parents in ways that support both parents and teachers in their respective roles and ultimately, support children's learning. (2010, p. 21)

Kelly-Laine (1998) highlights the importance of building partnerships in education, and that member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development are increasing parents' involvement in education for a number of different reasons. The reason most pertinent to this research is tackling disadvantages and improving equity, which refers to raising individual children's performance by working with parents to support students more effectively at home. She states that "this is particularly important when there are cultural differences between the education system and the family" (1998, p. 342). Ireland is highlighted by Kelly-Laine as being one of the countries where the benefits of parental support, particularly in the early years, is harnessed. The NCCA document *Curriculum Overload in Primary Schools* (2010) states that parental involvement in education is a relatively new feature of Irish education. It also refers to the *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (1999), which recognises the parent as the child's primary educator and calls for close cooperation between home and school for children to receive the maximum benefit from the curriculum.

Upon interviewing teachers, they were found to be spending a lot of time after school planning for inclusion, and on an ad hoc basis doing so in conjunction with the Language Support teacher. Over 60% of teachers surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed with a statement regarding the importance of planning for children learning English and maintaining their HL with parents. Questionnaire data shows that some teachers regarded the Language Support teacher as a vital resource in their toolkit for planning for inclusion. Language Support teachers have been seen as having the most responsibility for the language development of children with EAL since they were introduced in 1999, and they have been the professionals provided with in-service training and to whom most handbooks are directed (IILT, 2006). Furthermore, the issue of language support is worth highlighting bearing in mind that this resource is usually available to children with EAL for a maximum of two years, despite advice from the research which warns that it may take five years or longer for CALP to develop among learners of EAL (Cameron, 2001; Cummins, 2008; Grant, 1995).

Most of the teachers who participated in focus group interviews reported not having received any training in the area of EAL. Similarly, questionnaire data showed that 87.9% of teachers had not received any pre-service training and 90.9% of teachers had not received any in-service training in facilitating learners with EAL. Those who had received in-service training had done so voluntarily by engaging with online DES-approved summer courses, something which was also found by Smyth et al. in response to a similar interview question in 2009. All of the teachers surveyed who had received pre-service training had been teaching for ten years or less, with a great majority having taught for five years or less. With regard to in-service training, again the majority of those who had received in-service training had been teaching for five years or less. All of the teachers interviewed who referred to any type of training had qualified in the last five years or so. Many of the teachers interviewed had not used any of the NCCA documents such as

the *EAL Guidelines*, the *Intercultural Guidelines*, or *Up and Away* (a resource book for English language support), although a minority of them had. Questionnaire data revealed that 56% of respondents reported having used the *EAL Guidelines* as a resource for planning activities, while only 42.9% of respondents reported having referred to the *Intercultural Guidelines* when planning classroom activities. Principals and teachers were found by Smyth et al. (2009) to see Initial Teacher Education or on-going professional development as not providing adequate preparation for teaching in a diverse society.

Other in-school resources were mentioned by teachers during focus group interviews, and the EAL school plan was specified once in the questionnaire as a resource. As one teacher said during an interview: "We have so many policies! To be honest you go into your room and you close the door and don't think about policies—I don't know whether we have one or not." Skilton-Sylvester (2003) notes that teachers, in a way, create policies of their own within classrooms, and that language teaching can be seen as language policymaking, thereby highlighting the importance of looking at teachers as the prime implementers of language policies. Indeed, these issues around policy have implications for children's linguistic human rights (McGroarty, 2002; Phillipson et al., 1995; Toolan, 2003), and lack of adherence to such policies, whether teachers are aware of them or not, may result in some students being marginalized and inequalities being created (Tollefson, 2002). All of the evidence presented above points to a willingness in theory to advocate for the linguistic human rights of children, but a lack of know-how regarding how to achieve this. This leads to a further discussion where children in Junior Infant classrooms may be in the process of being colonised linguistically (Dillon, forthcoming), unbeknownst to those teachers who are implementing policies at the micro level within their classrooms (Mac Naughton, 2006; Viruru, 2005). This will have implications for children's identity formation at the level of microsystem and a possibility of language shift in their mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fishman, 1985; 1991), which exists at the interconnections between systems, that is, the home, school and community (Higgins, 2008, p. 23).

Conclusions

Parents, planning, and resources were the main themes highlighted in the area of home language maintenance during this study. Strong attitudes were noted regarding HL maintenance being the responsibility of the parents, although the parents' wishes to have English and not the HL promoted at school were also highlighted by teachers, along with their acknowledgement of the existence of home/school support. These home/school links appear to be used on occasion but perhaps not to a degree that would be of most benefit in the classroom, due to a lack of time and on occasion a language or cultural barrier being present. For example, half of the teachers surveyed were unaware of the child's L1 literacy experiences, something which research shows is crucial in the L2 and L3 development of children with EAL (Cummins, 2008; Kenner, 2000; Krashen, 1999). Curriculum overload seemed to be an issue regarding planning with parents, planning with the Language Support teacher and familiarisation with policies.

An overwhelming majority of teachers who participated in this study indicated that they had received no training, either pre- or in-service, in using some of the

core documents for including children with EAL in mainstream classes such as the *EAL Guidelines* (NCCA, 2006), *Intercultural Guidelines* (NCCA, 2005) and the resources on the NCCA's ACTION website.⁴ This did indicate perhaps an over-reliance on the Language Support teacher in this regard, although brief meetings between the mainstream and Language Support teacher did take place, most often on an informal basis. Familiarisation with guidelines in school policies was not seen by teachers as a major concern in planning for inclusion.

Recommendations

Home/school links do need to be reinforced in order to plan more effectively for the education of children with EAL. If these links were reinforced and highlighted, more teachers would become aware of the children's L1 literacy experiences, as well as the languages spoken in the home. In this way, parents could work more effectively in partnership with teachers. However, this study has shown that there can be cultural and linguistic barriers to this partnership. One way of ensuring parental inclusion is to provide interpreting and translation services to schools. One such initiative that has been implemented in the past is the Schools Cultural Mediation Project (SCMP)⁵, especially as it applies to terminology such as "newcomer" or "ethnic linguistic minority children." Although funding was stopped after one year due to general budgetary cuts in education, the project found that there was a better turnout at parent/teacher meetings because of the translator being available, that it was worthwhile to organise follow-up meetings to discuss parental concerns, and that there was a successful referral to other services if the need arose. It was also noted that parents often became emotional as it was the first time they had been able to communicate with a professional about their child's progress (Yacef, 2008). These initial observations would surely have led to significant improvements in home/school communication in time. It is unrealistic to expect in current recessionary times, when Language Support teachers are in fact being further restricted as announced in the recent Budget for 2011,⁶ that translation and interpreting services would be provided to schools. It is also unlikely in the interim that resources be acknowledged such as the documents available on the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) website⁷ and the website of the Irish National Teacher's Organisation (INTO).⁸ This is an issue which warrants further research.

Curriculum overload has been mentioned as an issue preventing time spent on planning with parents, planning with the Language Support teacher and familiarisation with policies. These are also factors identified by the NCCA in contributing to curriculum overload (2010) and in fact many of the documents referred to during this study are listed as aspects of the expanding curriculum contributing to curriculum overload: *EAL Guidelines* (NCCA, 2006), *Intercultural Guidelines* (NCCA, 2005b), and *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009). Assessment procedures were also listed as a contributing factor in that document although the European

⁴ www.ncca.ie/action

⁵ <http://www.nccri.ie/news/mar07.html>. Amel Yacef who was the project co-ordinator won the European Languages Ambassador award for 2008.

⁶ <http://www.into.ie/ROI/Downloads/Education%20Measures%202011.pdf>

⁷ www.jrs.ie

⁸ www.into.ie

Languages Portfolio (a tool used for pupil self-assessment of ML in the classroom) was not specifically mentioned. In 2010 the Department of Education and Skills (DES) was providing one school development planning day per year (2010). Currently, all school planning must take place within the framework of the *Croke Park Agreement* (DES Circular, 2011⁹). In order to support teachers in delivering excellence and trying to minimise the effects of curriculum overload, the NCCA (2010) offers a range of strategies including:

- the promotion of professional development among teachers, for example through creating learning communities;
- allowing teachers time to adopt new ideas and practices by presenting them visually and by not being forced to respond to change too quickly;
- expanding the range of assessment tools and teaching methodologies, as can be seen on the ACTION section of the NCCA website;
- improving the resourcing of teaching and learning materials, again with a focus on centralising these;
- encouraging teachers to rely less heavily on the textbook by employing more ICT resources; and
- giving greater autonomy to schools and teachers by taking local needs into account while planning learning.

While teachers may interpret some of these suggestions as adding to curriculum overload rather than reducing it, these strategies certainly offer ideas for reconceptualising the way teachers and schools work. The suggestion of creating online learning communities or communities of practice (Wenger, 2006) would serve as an effective way for teachers to share good practices. Although it is certainly an investment of time outside of school hours, either through meetings in Education Centres or blogging, it would create a space for teachers to become familiar with their relevant school policies and NCCA or DES guidelines as well as to share resources.

While curriculum overload is a legitimate problem in catering to children with diverse needs including linguistic needs, the issue again returns to the need for pre-service and in-service training. It has been seen that in this study most teachers did not receive any pre- or in-service training in the main guidelines supplied by the NCCA for facilitating children with EAL. Language Support teachers have received some training for using *Up and Away* (IILT, 2006) and other resources produced by Integrate Ireland Learning and Training (IILT)¹⁰, but this study is only concerned with the mainstream teacher, each child remaining the responsibility of the mainstream teacher (DES Circular, 2009; DES Circular, 2007). The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree has already been mentioned in terms of being a good place to start with helping teachers to develop proficiency in languages other than English. At present, most courses related to the themes identified in this study come under the umbrella of Development and Intercultural Education (DICE). The DICE project which is underway should go some distance toward ensuring that the delivery of courses and programmes within schools and colleges of education is well-informed by their research.

⁹ www.education.ie

¹⁰ www.ncca.ie/action

The *Report of the Review Panel to the Teaching Council*, following the review of the B.Ed. at Mary Immaculate College, recommended mainstreaming critical areas which are currently on offer as elective subjects (Teaching Council, 2010). The panel recommends either increasing the number of electives that a student may pursue or examining the list of electives to identify those which should be mandatory for all students. In particular, it noted that the College should have regard to students' evolving professional development needs because some electives are of critical relevance to Initial Teacher Education. I concur with the recommendations of the Teaching Council and suggest that these be applied to all colleges of education, as long as electives in DICE and EAL are deemed as being of critical relevance to Initial Teacher Education. These two areas integrate well in practice and some space could be found within such an elective for students to participate in basic language courses, in the languages most likely to be spoken in the classroom such as Polish, Lithuanian and Romanian.

In-service training must also be noted here, whether in the form of postgraduate degrees, summer courses or evening classes, or indeed in-school training. In this study any teachers who had received in-service training had engaged voluntarily with DES summer courses and one teacher surveyed also made reference to her Master's in Teaching and Learning a Second Language. Attending any form of continuing professional development such as summer courses or pursuing a Master's or other postgraduate degree—such as the Postgraduate Diploma in Intercultural Education at the Marino Institute of Education¹¹—involves a conscious decision on the part of the teacher who must be highly motivated. However, the best way of reaching teachers who feel overloaded by the curriculum and cannot seem to find time to attend any form of continuing professional development is for the DES to provide in-school in-service training, similar to that provided by the Primary Curriculum Support Unit when implementing the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) over a number of years. It would also be interesting to look at modes of provision and which modes would suit teachers best at certain times of the year—direct contact, mixed-mode including web-based components, or solely web-based—and who the providers of such in-service development would be—from higher education, other teachers as tutors or mentors, or national authorities including inspectors or regional or local authorities.

Furthermore, the current provision of language support to limited numbers of children with EAL for a two-year period does not take into consideration research previously discussed, which warns that it may take five years or longer for learners to develop more academic language skills (CALP) (Cameron, 2001; Cummins, 2008; Grant, 1995). This is certainly an area which needs to be brought to the attention of the DES because BICS skills may help children with EAL to survive in the classroom, but may not provide sufficient depth of language to engage meaningfully with the curriculum, especially at higher levels.

Summary

The lack of a formal languages-in-education policy in Ireland will continue to have an impact on the ability and willingness of mainstream class teachers to advocate for linguistic human rights among newcomer children in Irish primary

¹¹ www.mie.ie

schools. The 2011 national budget included a further reduction in the provision of language support to those children speaking Home Languages Other Than English (HLOTE). This has already had and will continue to have implications for the mainstream classroom teachers who are responsible for facilitating every child in fulfilling their potential, regardless of variabilities in the HLOTE spoken by the children in their classes.

This paper has explored issues around the support of L1 maintenance among children with English as an Additional Language by the Whole School Community. Data were gathered using a mixed methods approach. Focus group interviews were carried out with teachers of Junior and Senior Infant classes and questionnaires were administered to mainstream class teachers. Classroom observation was also carried out in a Junior Infant classroom with significant numbers of children speaking HLOTE. It was found that teachers do have positive attitudes towards the maintenance of HLOTE among newcomer children, and that while attitudes inform practice, practical application of home language inclusion was rare. It was also found that while documents exist to support teachers in this endeavour, they are most often not consulted due to lack of awareness stemming from a lack of pre-service and in-service training in this regard.

Overall the study has shown many positive aspects of an education system that does advocate for children with EAL in the early years of primary school at the macro level. However, this system requires a more consistent approach to supporting opportunities for professional learning among the mainstream classroom teachers who are ultimately responsible for implementing policies and practices at the micro level. Furthermore, the benefits of plurilingualism must not be ignored, not only from a 'diversity' point of view but also from a pragmatic point of view in terms of the advantages active bilingualism confers on the acquisition of additional languages.

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