English as an additional language in undergraduate teacher education programmes in Ireland

A report on provision in two teacher education colleges

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Introduction

This report is of a collaborative research project carried out during 2008-2009, by Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education, Dublin and St. Mary's University College Belfast, with assistance from the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS). The purpose of the project was to carry out a comparative study of provision for the teaching of English as an additional language (EAL) in undergraduate programmes in the two colleges.

Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education is a primary teacher education college established in 1904 by the Congregation of Christian Brothers. Its population comprises approximately 450 students, of which some 320 are undergraduates pursuing a B.Ed. degree, and just over 100 are post graduates taking an 18-month Higher Diploma in Education (Primary). All qualifications are accredited by Trinity College, Dublin [TCD], of which Coláiste Mhuire is an associated college.

St. Mary's University College is a college of Queen's University, Belfast which formally came into existence in 1985 following the amalgamation of St. Mary's College and St. Joseph's College. The origins of St. Mary's however, can be traced back to 1900 when the Dominican Sisters opened St. Mary's Training College for women teachers. The college provides initial primary and secondary teacher education in English and Irish; a Master of Education programme for qualified teachers; a post graduate programme in Education for teachers wishing to work in the Irish Medium sector; and a degree in Liberal Arts. The mission of the college is to make a distinctive contribution in the Catholic tradition to higher education in Northern Ireland and to widen access and participation to promote economic and social development.

The report is in four sections. It opens with an overview of the educational contexts of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. This is followed by a chronological review of policy documents with a particular focus on interculturalism and language education. Section three commences with an overview of EAL provision in undergraduate courses in both colleges, followed by a description of the design and implementation of the research instruments. A detailed analysis of the research findings is then provided. The report concludes with recommendations for future provision in the area of EAL within the colleges concerned. These recommendations may have implications for other teacher education colleges on the island of Ireland.

Educational contexts in Ireland – north and south

Two significant aspects of education are addressed in this section of the report. At the outset there is an outline of the structure of educational provision in both the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. This is followed by a consideration of the changing demographic patterns which have impacted on teaching and learning in teacher education colleges and schools throughout the island of Ireland.

The structure of the school system in the Republic of Ireland

The current provision for education in the Irish Republic has its roots in the denominational system which was established in the country in the 19th century. Following Independence, there was no change in the patronage of national schooling:

> In the context of postcolonial Ireland, education was regarded as a most important and sensitive vehicle for the transmission of religious beliefs and values (Sugrue & Gleeson, 2004:294).

Education is compulsory in the Republic of Ireland from the age of six to sixteen, although in practice, children generally start school at the age of four or five. According to the Department of Education and Science (DES), there were 3,284 primary schools in the State as of September 2008, with 457,889 pupils and 27,515 teachers (Department of Education and Science, 2008). Rowe (2008) outlines the various denominations involved in the management of schools, indicating that 98 per cent of all primary schools are denominational, of which 93 per cent are under the patronage of the Catholic Church, and 5 per cent are under Church of Ireland patronage. A further 1 per cent of primary schools is managed by Educate Together, an organisation established in 1984 with an aim of setting up multi-denominational primary schools in Ireland. An additional 1 per cent of schools is demarcated under 'other' management. This last grouping includes two new multi-faith schools opened in Dublin in September 2008 under the management of the Vocational Education Committee (VEC). That development saw the State involved in primary school patronage for the first time. Two primary schools in Dublin under Muslim patronage are also part of this 'other' grouping.

The denominational nature of the primary school system is reflected in the structure of primary teacher education in the Republic of Ireland. As Sugrue and Gleeson (2004:298) state, 'denominational education is the key to understanding contemporary arrangements'. There are currently six teacher education institutions that prepare students to teach in primary schools. Four of these are

traditionally linked to the Catholic Church: St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin; Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; Coláiste Mhuire, Marino, Dublin; and Froebel College, Blackrock, Dublin. The Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines, Dublin, prepares student teachers for working in schools under the management of the Church of Ireland and other Protestant denominations. Hibernia College, which offers a Graduate Diploma in Primary Education, is not affiliated to any particular denomination.

The structure of the Northern Ireland school system

Although the initial intentions for the education system in Northern Ireland following its establishment in 1923, were for a state school system providing education for all children together, the heady mix of history, culture, politics and religion conspired to create a system which, even to the present day, is characterized by division. Present structures have been well documented (Smith, 1999; Holt, G., Boyd, S., Dickinson, B., Loose, J. and O'Donnell, S., 1999) and from them, it is clear that the school system continues to be divided primarily upon religious and academic dimensions.

Current figures from the Department of Education [DENI] (2009c) indicate that 44 per cent of the school-going population in the primary, secondary and grammar sectors attend Catholic Maintained schools, or schools under Catholic management in the case of the grammar sector. This is mirrored by 47 per cent of pupils attending Controlled (state, or non-Catholic) primary and secondary schools and schools under 'Other' management in the case of the grammar sector. Only 6 per cent of pupils attend Controlled or Maintained Integrated schools and a further 0.75 per cent attend Irish Medium schools. As such, it is clear that the vast majority of pupils in Northern Ireland attend schools which are reflective of their particular religious background.

Since 1947, academic division has also been a feature of the Northern Irish education system. In the 1980s, concerns were raised as to the overall impact that academic selection was having on individual pupils and also on society and the economy in general (Sutherland and Gallagher, 1986; Sutherland and Gallagher, 1987; Gallagher, 1988). Research by Gallagher and Smith (2000) equated socio-economic divisions in society with opportunity to obtain a place in the grammar school system. They suggested that the selective system was a significant factor in the enhancement of class inequality and educational disadvantage.

These concerns culminated in 2001 with the publication of the Burns Report (Post Primary Review Body, 2001) which called for the abolition of the transfer tests at age eleven for pupils moving into secondary education. Following the publication of this report, there was much public and political debate, with two entrenched camps unable to come to any agreement or consensus of opinion.

In a recent development, the Education Minister, Catriona Ruane made a statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly (DENI, 2009d) in which she stated that the under Article 30 of the Education (NI) Order (2006), there would be no Transfer Test provided by the Department in 2010. In addition, her guidance recommended that schools should not use academic admissions criteria and that all schools should give proportionate priority to children entitled to free school meals [FSM]. As far as the Minister of Education is concerned, academic selection has come to an end. Since her statement however, the debate has continued; it seems that the issue has yet to be resolved.

As is the case in the Republic of Ireland, another layer of division in education relates to teacher education, which is largely reflective of the school system in general. There are five providers of initial teacher education in Northern Ireland: St. Mary's University College; Stranmillis University College; Queen's University; the University of Ulster; and The Open University. The vast majority of primary school teachers graduate from either St. Mary's University College or Stranmillis University College. St. Mary's is a Catholic college, which in large part, prepares teachers for work in the Catholic Maintained sector. Stranmillis University College, although non-denominational, has a student population largely coming from the non-Catholic perspective and preparing for work in the State (Controlled) school sector.

Changing demographic patterns on the island of Ireland

While registering a significant increase of 8 per cent in Ireland's population over a four-year period, the 2006 census also recorded a dramatic shift in the country's migration patterns, with an estimated net immigration flow between 2002 and 2006 of 109,000 people, one in ten of whom were children under the age of fifteen (Office of the Minister for Integration [OMI], 2008:70). Ireland, traditionally a country of endemic emigration, had, in a relatively short period of time, become a 'receiving society' (Mac Éinrí, 2006:106) with immigration on an unprecedented scale. A marked improvement in the country's economic fortunes from the mid 1990s followed by EU enlargement, saw nationals of the new EU accession states in particular, together with asylum seekers and refugees, accounting for much of this demographic transformation. As the potentially conservative count of such migrants facilitated by the census data indicated:

> Of the 4.17 million usually resident persons present in the State on 23 April 2006, 420,000 (or 10 per cent) had a nationality other than Irish – up from 224,000 (or 5.8 per cent four years earlier (Office of the Minister for Integration, 2008:69).

The country thus experienced an accelerated pace of economic, social and demographic change within a relatively short time frame compared to most developed countries (Coolahan, 2003). The current economic downturn will undoubtedly reduce the rate of immigration into the State. Indeed, the 2009

report from the Economic and Social Research Institute [ESRI], indicates that, between 2007 and 2008, net migration fell to just under 40,000 from a peak of 72,000 in 2006 (Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne, 2009). However, society in the Republic has now become multicultural, and one of the features of the immigration trends over the decade has been language diversity; an estimated two-thirds of immigrants have a language other than English as their first language (ibid:10).

In Northern Ireland, society has traditionally been perceived as fractured and bi-cultural, comprising a majority, Protestant, Unionist population at odds with a minority, Catholic, Nationalist one. Although in large part, this may have been the case, throughout history small numbers of minority ethnic groups have also settled and established a position within the population. These include the indigenous Irish Travellers; the Jewish community since the early part of the last century; the Indian community since the 1920s and 30s, and the Chinese community since the 1960s.

In addition, since 1998, a series of events has served to transform Northern Ireland into a more ethnically and culturally mixed society. The signing of the Good Friday Agreement (1998) initiated a process of change with the intention of moving society away from the traditional divisions towards greater pluralism and inclusivity. Broader world events including the 'Autumn of Nations' in 1989 (Triandafyllidou, Gropas and Vogel, 2007:14) and the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007 have also had a profound effect upon the demographic, cultural, ethnic and linguistic composition of the population. This has led to Filipino, Portuguese, Eastern European and people of many other nationalities settling in Northern Ireland from 2001 to the present (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, Racial Equality Unit [OFDFM], 2005b).

The 2001 census (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency [NISRA], 2003) saw a question on ethnicity included for the first time. The results showed that out of a total population of 1,685,259, 14,271 (0.85 per cent) identified themselves as belonging to a minority ethnic group other than white. These figures do not take into consideration members of ethnic groups who identify with the 'white' category and the significant increase in migration, particularly from Eastern Europe, since the census data was collected. In May 2004, ten new countries joined the European Union. Figures from the Department for Social Development [DSD] (2005), indicate that National Insurance Numbers allocated to nationals arriving in Northern Ireland from these new EU accession countries increased from 145 in 2003/04 to 1,572 in 2004/05, with Polish nationals being the largest group represented (52 per cent). Although establishing definitive figures is difficult, more recent estimates (National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism website) suggest that the minority ethnic population could comprise up to 45,000 individuals or 2.5 per cent of the total population.

From these figures, it is clear that Northern Ireland is gradually becoming an increasingly diverse and multicultural society. This demographic change in social, cultural and ethnic blend has the potential to build on existing diversity and facilitate a move away from the traditional, 'two traditions' (OFMDFM, 2005a: paragraph 3.5) mentality towards a society richer in its socio-cultural composition and more pluralist and tolerant in its outlook. The Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-2010 (OFDFM, 2005b:paragraph 3.5) states:

> They (minority ethnic people) make an important contribution to the social, public and cultural life of Northern Ireland. They also have a genuinely leavening effect on a society that has long been frozen in its "two traditions" divide.

Realising this aim of a shared future is of course not without its difficulties. There is also a considerable body of research which addresses the more contentious issues surrounding the question of multiculturalism, such as; discrimination, racism and racial equality (Connolly and Keenan, 2000a; 2001; 2002; Jarman and Monaghan, 2004); language and access difficulties (Irwin and Dunn, 1996; Mason, 1998; Leong, 2000); and lack of service provision, information and advice (Northern Ireland Housing Executive [NIHE], 1995; Northern Health & Social Services Board [NHSSB] 1995; Connolly and Keenan, 2000b).

Whichever perspective on multiculturalism is adopted, there can be no doubt that ethnic diversity presents immense challenges for policy makers and service providers in seeking to ensure that the needs of the whole population are met, and that the difficulties experienced by other multicultural societies are avoided. The Racial Equality Strategy (OFDFM, 2005b: paragraph 3.15) recognizes that,

> The speed and extent of the increase in the numbers of migrant workers in Northern Ireland – and the sheer diversity of people involved – pose complex challenges for Government and society alike.

The implications of this situation are explored in the following sections.

EAL: An overview of policy and provision:

This section of the report addresses legislative and policy frameworks within both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. In the first instance, a chronological overview of developments in the area of EAL is provided. This is followed by an overview of current educational provision for pupils in the area of EAL.

The legislative and policy framework for the Republic of Ireland

Significant shifts in migration patterns in the Republic of Ireland during the last decade have belatedly drawn welcome attention to the heterogeneous composition of the population and the matter of how cultural diversity might most appropriately be addressed. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is the agency with overall responsibility for developing the policy and legal framework to advance equality in the Republic. Its Equal Status Division is charged with the task of promoting greater respect for the person and hence for diversity and cultural difference. Legislation designed to address inequality and racism has been drawn up relatively recently by this department, within the framework of EU and international conventions and policies. The first of these legal statutes, the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act, 1989, made it an offence to incite hatred against any group of persons in the State or elsewhere on account of their race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, or membership of the Travelling community.

The Employment Equality Act, 1998, followed by the Equal Status Acts of 2000 and 2004, provide for a range of protections which prohibit discrimination in the workplace and in the provision of goods and services. These pertain to gender, age, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, race (including skin colour, ethnicity, and nationality), religion, disability and membership of the Travelling community. A further line of protection against such discrimination is provided by the Equality Authority and the Equality Tribunal – two independent bodies which were established under the Employment Equality Act, 1998. The Authority, which has been described as the 'guardian of equality legislation' in Ireland (Watt and McGaughey, 2006:134), seeks to stimulate and support a commitment to equality as a key dimension of organisational systems and practices, society's cultural values and individual attitudes and actions. The Tribunal is a quasi-judicial entity, which serves to enable easy access to redress in cases of alleged discrimination or victimisation, by investigating and making legally-binding decisions on the basis of such complaints.

EU and broader international developments in the area of equality protection have also impacted on the Irish context. The UN International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1969 [CERD] which is widely recognised as the principal international instrument relating to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, was ratified by Ireland in

2000, following the institution of the Equal Status Act of that year. The Equal Status Act of 2004 gave effect to a number of EU directives which set minimum standards for legal protection against discrimination in all EU member states. 2005 brought potential for further progress with the publication of the National Action Plan Against Racism: 'Planning for Diversity' [NPAR] (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005). Objectives outlined under the education focus of the plan over the four year period 2005-2008, were as follows:

- to develop a national intercultural strategy with reference to equality/diversity policy;
- to develop a more inclusive and intercultural school practice environment through the whole-school planning process, admissions policies, codes of behaviour, and whole-school evaluation;
- to accommodate cultural diversity within the curriculum;
- to enhance the participation of refugees and asylum seekers in education up to 18 years of age, as well as the participation of refugees and those with humanitarian leave who remain in the State;
- to enhance access and education service delivery to unaccompanied minors;
- to enhance provision of English as a second language. Language and literacy proficiency has long been recognised as playing a key role in the integration process (ibid:112-113).

While these developments are recent, the concept of 'interculturalism' in the context of accommodating cultural diversity, is not new in Ireland. It is reasonable to argue however, that it is one which has been most unevenly embraced at official level. It first emerged in public discourse, particularly in educational circles, in the 1990s (Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995). In 1998, during the European Year Against Racism, the term came to greater prominence with the establishment of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism [NCCRI]. This independent body, core-funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, comprised a partnership of government departments, non-governmental organisations, State agencies and social partners. While defining interculturalism as essentially about interaction between majority and minority cultures, the key aims of the NCCRI were to provide expertise and advice on matters relating to racism and interculturalism; to inform policy development; to promote understanding and celebration of cultural diversity; and to develop relevant linkages at a European and wider international level. The NCCRI worked in partnership with the Irish Human Rights Commission which was established in 2000. With specific reference to education, the NCCRI played a central role in the development of the NPAR. However, national budget cuts announced in October 2008 resulted in the withdrawal of all government funding for the NCCRI.

1999 saw the establishment by the DES of the Refugee Language Support Unit [RLSU]. This two-year pilot project under the auspices of the Centre for

Language and Communication Studies at TCD, had as its primary function the coordination of English language support for adult refugees in Ireland. By 2001, having fulfilled its terms of reference, the RLSU was reconstituted as Integrate Ireland Language and Training [IILT], a not-for-profit campus company of TCD. The terms of reference for this project, agreed with the DES, were as follows:

- To analyse the linguistic demands of the primary and post-primary curricula and identify the language needed by non-English speaking, non-national pupils in order to participate fully in the educational process;
- To develop materials to support the learning of English as a second language in schools;
- To present materials, methodology and supplementary aids via an ongoing inservice training programme for language support teachers (IILT, 2007:30).

IILT developed and widely disseminated two resource books, a 'toolkit', and a range of web materials designed to provide support for the management of diversity and the teaching of EAL. In addition, schools requested and received almost 5,000 copies of an assessment instrument, the European Language Portfolio [ELP] for primary-level EAL learners. This portfolio was piloted with language support teachers throughout Ireland, and validated by the Council of Europe in 2001 and 2004. Inservice support was provided for teachers, while in accordance with IILT's remit, language classes for adult refugees were ongoing. IILT was discontinued in July 2008. In announcing its impending closure, the DES stated that access to IILT teaching materials would be made available through the website of the NCCA, and that language tuition for adult refugees would be re-located to the Irish Vocational Education Authority [IVEA]. During the academic year 2008-09, the provision of inservice training for English language support teachers at primary level, came under the remit of the Primary Professional Development Service [PPDS] of the DES.

Meanwhile, as the concept of 'interculturalism' had increasingly come to feature in discussions relating to Traveller children's education (Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995; Department of Education and Science, 2002a, 2002b), the publication by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation [INTO] in 2002, of guidelines for intercultural education (INTO, 2002) served to underline the need for an intercultural approach to the development and delivery of educational programmes for all children. In progressing this agenda the NCCA also developed guidelines for both primary and post-primary schools (NCCA, 2005, 2006a). The inclusion in the NCCA primary school guidelines of a short chapter on 'Language and Interculturalism', and within it a section on teaching 'children from a range of different backgrounds [who] are learning English as a second language in Irish schools' (NCCA, 2005:164) was a welcome if tardy response to what was by then a dramatically changed cultural landscape in those schools. However, having acknowledged that the provision of appropriate support for such learners is 'one of the main challenges facing teachers and

schools' (ibid:162) and that 'teachers who find themselves in this situation for the first time may find it very daunting and a little overwhelming' (ibid:165), relatively general suggestions for providing such support were outlined (ibid:164-165) together with 'some simple guidelines for establishing a multilingual climate in the classroom' (ibid:166).

In 2006 the NCCA published guidelines pertaining specifically to the teaching of English as an additional language in primary schools (NCCA, 2006b). This development held promise for curricular innovation in the area. The guidelines explore language learning and the implications for supporting it in primary schools. They also describe school and classroom planning requirements as well as methodologies and modes of assessment. While these and the aforementioned guidelines were distributed to all schools nationwide, the extent to which they have been employed by mainstream teachers undoubtedly varies, not least as a consequence of the lack of accompanying inservice training programmes for these teachers.

In 2007, a DES Circular entitled 'Meeting the needs of pupils for whom English is a second language', was issued to all first- and second-level schools. The document aimed 'to assist schools in providing an inclusive school environment to meet the needs of pupils for whom English is a second language, and outlines the resources that are available to assist schools in this task' (DES, Circular 0053/2007). As such, it focused on school policies and procedures, provision of additional teachers and teaching hours and on assessment procedures and materials for these pupils.

In July of the same year, a new Statutory Office, the Office of the Minister for Integration [OMI] came into being. It was established under the auspices of a Minister of State at the three government departments regarded as having a central role in relation to migration into the Republic of Ireland; the Departments of Justice, Equality and Law Reform; Education and Science; and Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. All integration functions such as the resettlement of refugees and the management of relevant EU funding, were transferred to the OMI. In relation to education, the Minister for Integration is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the range of education policies across different areas of the DES and the bodies under its aegis take account of the need to integrate immigrants and their families;
- Co-ordinating the work of the department on the integration of newcomers with the related work of other relevant departments and State agencies (OMI, 2008:59).

October 2007 brought a further development with the establishment of a dedicated Integration Unit within the DES. This unit was charged with liaising with all of the interested parties and co-ordinating policy development on integration. In May 2008, almost a year after the establishment of the OMI, the first, and to

date, only official policy statement on the management of migration to Ireland, was issued by the Minister for Integration (OMI, 2008). In presenting 'integration' as the strategy of choice, the statement defers to the EU's Common Basic Principles of Integration (Council of Europe, 2005) which, it maintains, 'have been, and continue to be, a major influence on Irish integration developments' (OMI, 2008:30). The principles referred to include the following:

- Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States;
- Basic knowledge of the host society's language, history and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential to successful integration;
- Employment is a key part of the integration process and is central to the participation of immigrants, to contributions immigrants make to the host society, and to making such contributions visible;
- Efforts in education are critical to preparing immigrants and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more active participants in society (ibid:31).

While the ostensible commitment to such principles is to be welcomed, the extent to which they will be realised is questionable, following budgetary cuts announced in October 2008 which saw funding for the Office of the Minister for Integration reduced by 26 per cent.

In February 2008, the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe in conjunction with the DES published a Language Education Policy Profile for Ireland (COE/DES, 2008). This analysis of language education in the Republic of Ireland pays particular attention to the needs of immigrants. Observing that the school-going population is becoming increasingly 'multinational, multilingual and multi-ethnic' (ibid:9), it suggested that 'there is a real need to adapt to the linguistic demands of these new populations' (ibid:25). Three main issues are delineated. These refer firstly to the need for provision of essential language skills for children from minority language backgrounds. The question arises, 'Should there be a specific curriculum for English as an Additional Language?' (ibid). Secondly, the matter of appropriate mother tongue support for these children is considered. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, the need for, and potential of, appropriate language provision in facilitating educational and social integration from an 'inclusive' intercultural perspective, is highlighted. However, as reiterated in the report, the underlying obstacle to progress in the area is the lack of, and necessity for an overarching language policy in Ireland. In the report's conclusion 'action priorities' (ibid:51-54) are identified which refer to the need for the development of such a policy, together with appropriate professional development of teachers in the area and a focus on language education at primary level.

The legislative and policy framework in Northern Ireland

The Good Friday Agreement (1998) recognizes 'the right to freedom and expression of religion' and 'the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity' (p. 16). The Agreement further proposes that,

> all participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish Language, Ulster Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland. (Rights, Safeguards and equality of Opportunity, Section 3).

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 paved the way for the establishment of a number of significant initiatives to support the aspirations of the Agreement. Sections 68-72 of the Act supported the development of The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. This is an independent, statutory body which was established in 1999 with a view to promoting awareness of, and protection for human rights in Northern Ireland. Part of the Remit of the Human rights Commission was to draft a Bill of Rights to supplement the European convention on Human Rights. Sections 73-74 of the Act established The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the stated mission of which is,

> to advance equality, promote equality of opportunity, encourage good relations and challenge discrimination through promotion, advice and enforcement (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland website).

A significant aspect of the work of the Commission is to promote good relations between people of different ethnic and racial groups. However, this remit is not specific to the Equality Commission. Section 75 of the 1998 Act placed a statutory duty upon all public authorities to promote equality of opportunity and positive relations between people of different racial or ethnic groups. Supporting this, the stated aim of Government as outlined in 'A Shared Future' (OFDFM, 2005a:paragraph 1.2.1) is that, over time, Northern Ireland will become,

> a shared society defined by a culture of tolerance: a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere and where all individuals are treated impartially. A society where there is equity, respect for diversity and recognition of our interdependence.

In relation to education, throughout the 1990s the Department of Education for Northern Ireland [DENI] developed a policy agenda which emphasized the role of educators in contributing to the creation of a more plural and tolerant society. The publication of a number of key policy documents (DENI 1999a, 1999b; Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment [CCEA] 2002a, 2002b) drove momentum for change. These documents reflected similar perspectives on educational policy across the European Union and internationally (Barber, 2001). More recently, The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 gave effect to the framework for the revised curriculum, which was introduced on a phased basis from 2007-08. A specific aspect of the curriculum relates to the issue of inclusion. One of the key dimensions of this is the provision made for pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, pupils who come from the travelling community, those who are asylum seekers and refugees and pupils who need support to learn English as an additional language.

The curriculum states that inclusive education,

> is about providing opportunities for all children and young people in the community to learn together and where schools nurture learners by providing inclusive systems which are open, participatory and flexible. Inclusive systems work to remove barriers to learning and address issues that relate to all individuals who are vulnerable to exclusion from education (Partnership Management Board, [PMB] 2009).

Another significant dimension of the curriculum is that of 'Personal Development and Mutual Understanding [PDMU]' for pupils in the primary sector and 'Learning for Life and Work' [LLW] for pupils in the post-primary Sector. PDMU is one of the six 'Areas of Learning' for primary schools. Strand 2 of this area is concerned with Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community and the associated themes of:

- Relationships;
- Rules, rights and responsibilities;
- Managing conflict;
- Similarities and differences;
- Learning to live as members of the community (PMB, 2007a:5).

It is intended that this foundation work in the primary schools will be developed for pupils in secondary education through the dimension of LLW. Under this area there are two specific aspects which are concerned with promoting positive attitudes to multiculturalism and diversity and the promotion of human rights and equality. 'Local and Global Citizenship' is based on the themes of human rights and social responsibility, diversity and inclusion, equality and social justice and

democracy and active participation. Secondly, 'Personal Development' is concerned with,

> encouraging each child to become personally, emotionally, socially and physically effective, to lead healthy, safe and fulfilled lives and to become confident, independent and responsible citizens, making informed and responsible choices and decisions throughout their lives (PMB, 2007b:27).

There is a strong focus in this element on personal relationships and helping pupils to address challenging relationships and conflict situations in a positive manner.

In April 2009, DENI launched its new policy for school improvement in Northern Ireland; 'Every School a Good School' (DENI, 2009e). The policy builds on previous legislation and serves to recognise a rapidly changing society in Northern Ireland, and the need to provide young people with the necessary skills to take their place in an increasingly global economy. One strand of this policy (DENI, 2009b) is specifically concerned with enabling schools to make adequate and appropriate provision for children whose first language is not English.

Educational Provision in the Republic of Ireland

The presence of children from linguistic minorities in schools in the Republic of Ireland has placed considerable pedagogical demands on teachers who are required to possess an understanding of the educational needs of these children as well as the competence to meet their specific language needs. According to the Minister for Integration, by 2008, 1,500 language support teachers had been appointed to primary schools to meet the increased need brought about by immigration (Lenihan, 2008). However, provision for children learning English as an additional language has been one of the areas affected by recent economic cutbacks in the Irish Republic. The DES Circular, 0015/2009, which was issued following the budget of October 2008, reduced the number of these EAL support teachers to a maximum of two per school, while stating that there would be 'some alleviation for the position of those schools where there is a significant concentration of pupils learning English as an additional language as a proportion of the overall enrolment' (DES, 2009:1).

These developments are of significance not least in view of findings that concomitantly emerged from the first national study on 'newcomer' students in Irish schools (Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne, 2009). The questions posed in this study centred on how schools provide for relatively recently enrolled school students for whom both parents come from outside Ireland. Data was obtained from 1,200 questionnaires returned by principals of the schools involved and from twelve case studies of schools with different levels of provision for

pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. The diversity of language needs within this school population was a notable finding, as was the perception that linguistic proficiency had a significant impact on academic progress and on social integration, particularly at the initial stage of this integration process. Dissatisfaction was reported with the number of trained teachers available, with the time allotted for teaching in this area and with resources and materials. Furthermore, almost all respondents felt that more inservice training was needed to promote inclusion.

These findings point to a variety of implications for government policy in the area. The training needs of both mainstream and language support teachers are apparent, as is the need for flexibility in resource allocation and for greatly enhanced provision of appropriate teaching materials. In tandem with these, it is advised that measures to promote social integration and intercultural awareness in schools be prioritised and supported, on the basis that a positive school climate promotes academic and social development amongst minority and indigenous pupils alike. Moreover, in accordance with Government policy (DES / OMI, 2008) the diversity of needs and issues highlighted indicates that a heterogeneous rather than a 'one size fits all' response is called for in practice also.

Educational provision in Northern Ireland

Connolly, (2002:63) outlines a range of issues which have a negative impact upon the extent to which ethnic minority people can fully integrate into society. One of the main areas of difficulty is in relation to language. Language, when viewed as a 'complex challenge' can be no more apparent than in the education system where schools and teachers must not only provide access, understanding and accommodation to those from a range of different ethnic groups, but must also celebrate diversity if the aspirations of 'A Shared Future' (OFDFM, 2005a) are to be realized.

DENI, (2009a), indicates that the number of children and young people for whom English is an additional language has risen from 1,366 in all school sectors in 2001/02 to 6,995 in 2008/09. The highest concentrations are found in the primary sector, followed by the post-primary sector. DENI (2009b) indicates that over forty languages, other than English and Irish, are currently represented in schools in Northern Ireland. Furthermore some of the category languages can be sub-divided by dialect which, when considered along with those recorded in the category *other* could then represent the potential of sixty different languages. To meet this challenge, DENI has chosen to follow a two-pronged approach.

In the first instance, there is a regional support service called the Inclusion and Diversity Service [IDS] managed by the North Eastern Education and Library

Board [NEELB]. This was established in April 2007 with a view to providing consistency in support and specialist advice in relation to newcomer pupils, and to building capacity in schools to support them. Services provided include diversity coordinators to support schools, interpreting and translating facilities, an information website, a diversity toolkit for use in primary schools and continuous professional development for teachers to help schools develop expertise in pastoral, curricular and language support. Specific aspects of support for schools included the 'Primary Schools Support Programme' based on the 'Together Towards Inclusion –Toolkit for Diversity in the Primary School' (Integrate Ireland Language and Training [IILT] and the Southern Education and Library Board [SELB], 2007) and a post-primary programme entitled 'Post-Primary Schools Support Programme', based on 'The Way in: Accessing Language and the Curriculum in the Post-Primary Context' (IDS, 2008).

Secondly, extra funding has been allocated by DENI to enable schools to provide the most appropriate support required for their new pupils. In the 2008/2009 financial year, a total of £6,545,000 was provided to support newcomer pupils. This comprised earmarked funds for the IDS of £1,015,000; funding of £983 per pupil (a total of £5,500,000) through the common funding formula for grant-maintained schools to support newcomer pupils; and £30,000 allocated to special schools (DENI, 2009b). This funding can provide for the appointment of a coordinator for newcomer pupils, for bilingual classroom assistants or for accessing other programmes or schemes which the school feels is most appropriate, e.g. the Comenius Language Assistant scheme, funded by the British Council which provides language assistants to support classroom teachers in developing literacy and communication skills in newcomer pupils.

DENI clearly recognises the significant demographic changes which have taken place in Northern Ireland in recent years, and also the difficulties which children experience when their first language is not the language of instruction in the school. To help address these difficulties, DENI has adopted this policy to provide the necessary support for all pupils whose first language is not English, to fully access the curriculum and achieve their potential.

Provision for EAL in both colleges of education

Year 2 students in Coláiste Mhuire take a ten-hour module entitled *Development and Intercultural Education* as part of their course in Inclusive Education. Two of the lectures on this module specifically address EAL teaching and learning, while further aspects of EAL practice are infused into other lectures on the module. Other topics addressed on this course include diversity, race and inclusion in the classroom and school, human rights education, and elements of global education.

Students are given the option of taking a twenty-hour elective course in *Teaching English as an Additional Language* in either Year 2 or Year 3 of their B.Ed.

programme. This course was first offered in September 2007. It includes seminars, guest speakers, and a school visit aimed at enabling students to work alongside a language support teacher. In 2008-2009 the course also included a pilot on-line component. In addition, students are offered a twenty-hour elective course entitled *The World in the Classroom*, and three to four hours of this course specifically address EAL. Other topics covered include development education, and the issues of race, ethnicity and identity in school settings. An annual *One World Day* is held in Coláiste Mhuire prior to Spring Teaching Practice. Workshops and seminars offered typically address issues of race, ethnicity, inclusion, and aspects of development education. Some seminars directly address language diversity and language education.

Throughout the four-year B.Ed. programme in St. Mary's, EAL is infused in all literacy courses. Course materials contain the following statement: 'The themes of citizenship, PSHE, DMU and teaching EAL are embedded in the topics explored in this programme.' The core theme of the second year of the programme is 'Inclusion'. In one of the modules provided, general issues in relation to diversity, race and ethnicity and multiculturalism are addressed in the form of lectures and follow-up seminars. In the academic year 2008-09, a new course entitled 'Working with Pupils who have English as an Additional Language' was introduced. This compulsory course comprises one semester of classes (twelve hours). Its aim is to help students to develop competence in working with pupils who have EAL needs. The classes take the form of a series of lectures, workshops and tutorials. In Year 3, a module on 'Personal Development and Mutual Understanding' is offered, which addresses issues of race, prejudice and stereotyping. In the final Year of the programme, as part of the literacy component, there is a session on 'Narrative as a Catalyst for Raising Cultural Awareness', and another session on 'Making Contexts Supportive for Children Learning English as an Additional Language'. Also in this final year, students are offered an optional module on multicultural and intercultural education, although this does not contain a specific EAL component.

Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the research data were deemed appropriate to the aims of the study. The research instruments employed were a questionnaire and a series of semi-structured, focus group interviews.

Research instrument design and administration

A twenty-one item questionnaire was designed. This sought to establish a profile of the respondents, particularly in terms of relevant courses and school placements undertaken, and to elicit their perceptions of preparedness to teach

in contexts of linguistic diversity (Appendix 1). A mix of likert-scale, categorical and open-ended items were included. This questionnaire was piloted with eighty-six Year 2 B.Ed. students at Coláiste Mhuire in February 2009. An amended questionnaire was distributed to students in both colleges – Year 3 (final year) students in Coláiste Mhuire in March 2009, and Year 3 B.Ed. students in St. Mary's in May 2009. In Coláiste Mhuire, time for questionnaire distribution and completion was allocated as part of an Inclusive Education lecture for all Year 3 students. A total of eighty-nine students completed the questionnaire in Coláiste Mhuire, representing a return rate of 85 per cent. In St Mary's, seventy-one completed questionnaires were received, which represents a return rate of 45 per cent.

Focus group interviews were conducted with a selection of student teachers in each college. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed (Appendix 2) which helped to ensure that the same lines of enquiry were pursued with students in both jurisdictions (Robson, 2002; Patton, 2002).

The central endeavour of the interview is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Kvale, 1996). Thus, the interviews aimed to provide the opportunity for the student teachers to reflect and comment upon their preparedness for teaching in a diverse setting; their attitudes towards diversity in the classroom; their knowledge about pedagogical practice in the area of additional language learning; and their views about the need for continuous professional development in this area, with the emphasis upon how students themselves framed and understood issues and events (Bryman, 2004; Willig 2008). As interviews enable researchers to enter into the other person's perspective and life experience (Patton, 2002), these discussions held potential to provide illuminating data on student teachers' experience of, and attitudes towards, teaching and learning in the area of EAL.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, allowing for detailed analysis of the data, and ensuring that interviewees' answers were conveyed in their own terms (Bryman, 2004). Researchers also noted their own reflections as they arose during the course of the interviews, adding to the 'thick description' generated (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Rossman and Rallis, 2003).

The interviews in Coláiste Mhuire targeted two separate groupings – students who had completed the elective in EAL (Coláiste Mhuire, Group 1) and students who had not taken this programme but who had received lectures on EAL in Year 2 as part of their course in Inclusive Education (Coláiste Mhuire Group 2). Interviews took place as the lecture term drew to a close in March 2009, and prior to students beginning their final Teaching Practice placement. The first group interviewed consisted of those who had not taken the elective, and of the eight students invited, five attended this focus group interview. Ten students who

had completed the elective were invited for interview and of these, all attended and participated.

One group of ten students from B.Ed. 3 was interviewed in St. Mary's College in May 2009. This group had not experienced the B.Ed. 2 course on 'Working with Pupils who have English as an Additional Language', as this course was only introduced in the academic year 2008-09.

Ethical Considerations

Anonymity was promised to student teachers at the outset and was maintained throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent at each stage. Students were given comprehensive information as to the purpose and scope of the research, and were offered the option of not completing the questionnaire and of not participating in the interviews.

Limitations of the research

As in any research undertaking, it is recognized that there are certain limitations to the present study findings, which should be noted:

- The involvement of just one college within each of the jurisdictions may place limitations on whether and to what extent the findings may be generalised to all teacher education institutions on the island of Ireland;

- The limited nature of the focus group sessions in terms of numbers of participants involved, and the time available for interviewing them;

- The different background and professional development experiences of the students;

- The study findings provide a snapshot in time rather than a longitudinal insight into the students' experiences.

Research Findings

The first part of this section provides an introduction to one of the most significant findings of the research. This has a bearing on how subsequent findings are presented and oriented. Thereafter, data is analyzed and discussed according to students' perceived levels of knowledge, skills and beliefs in teaching contexts in which EAL needs are a feature of school life. There follows a brief discussion which considers how a small minority of student teachers may be informing their practices by adopting a deficit model of EAL provision. Also outlined are student teachers' suggestions as to how initial teacher education might be improved with a view to enabling teachers to better support the learning of pupils with EAL requirements.

Introduction

In general, there was strong consistency in the findings across the teacher education colleges. Item 9 of the questionnaire provided a key insight on students' personal perceptions of preparedness. The prompt *'I am competent in teaching methodologies specifically designed to support EAL learners,'* addressed all overarching constructs of knowledge, skills and beliefs. On a likert scale which measured items across five points, with a score of 1 for strongly agree and 5 for strongly disagree, the mean score in response to this item was 3 for Coláiste Mhuire and 2.96 for St. Mary's. As these scores indicate, to a large extent, the students in both institutions did not feel competent in their capacities to employ teaching methodologies required to enable EAL learners to access the curriculum. The marginal difference between the scores would suggest that students in St Mary's feel slightly more able to do so.

This finding is supported by an analysis of the responses to one of the focus group questions, which asked, *'If a pupil came into your class with no English what strategies would you consider?'.* Students who had not availed of the EAL elective in Coláiste Mhuire were less confident in presenting appropriate teaching methodologies.

An overview of the data generated from the questionnaire is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: College comparison of means on opinion items
Survey Questionnaire Analyses

	Coláiste Mhuire Mean	St. Mary's Mean	Coláiste Mhuire - St. Mary's	t	Sig.
1. I learned enough to prepare me to start teaching in a class with children who are learning English as an additional language	2.89	2.58	+0.31	1.997	0.048*
2. I feel adequately prepared to teach in a classroom where there are diverse nationalities and languages	2.63	2.56	+0.07	0.529	0.597
3. The presence of EAL learners in a class can negatively affect the learning and progress of other children	3.81	3.63	+0.18	1.353	0.178
4. I am familiar with appropriate resources for classrooms which are linguistically diverse	2.84	2.85	-0.01	-0.15	0.988
5. It is reasonable for teachers to have lower learning and behavioural expectations for students who don't speak English as their first language	3.6	3.66	-0.06	-0.448	0.655
6. Individual classroom practices are more important than whole school policies for the inclusion of children from EAL backgrounds	3.07	3.17	-0.10	0.585	0.559
7. Good EAL teaching should only be concerned with the development of children's English language	3.98	3.96	+0.02	0.156	0.877
8. An important part of the teacher's work is to foster and encourage a pupil's home (first) language	2.3	2.52	0.22	-1.636	0.104
9. I am competent in teaching methodologies specifically designed to support EAL learners	3	2.96	0.04	0.316	0.752
10. Teachers should incorporate examples / materials / images from a range of cultures into all subjects	1.58	1.49	0.09	0.945	0.346

Means are presented using a Likert scale which measured responses on a 5-point scale, with 1 for strongly agree and 5 for strongly disagree.

Knowledge

Knowledge and understanding of the role of the teacher in professionally addressing children with EAL learning requirements were addressed in both the questionnaire and focus group interview. In considering the statement *'I learned enough to prepare me to start teaching in a class with children who are learning English as an additional language'* there was close agreement between the mean scores of the St Mary's students (2.58) and the Coláiste Mhuire students (2.89) demonstrating a degree of dissatisfaction with their initial preparation.

However, in responding to the prompt, *'to what extent do you feel you are prepared to teach in a context where children speak English as an additional language',* students who participated in the focus group discussions appeared to be relatively comfortable with their perceived competence. It was unclear whether this resulted from their experience as students of the relevant courses, or from experiences during school placements. As one student explained:

> *I taught in this school where there was a large Polish community and there was this boy who only came to the school in P7 and they were trying to get him involved in lots of extra curricular activities. I took him for Gaelic. He didn't know English at all. So I spoke to the teacher about what to do. You learn how to incorporate those children the more you teach them.*

It is fair to argue that ITE alone cannot suffice in addressing all of the learning required of prospective teachers to teach effectively in such complex and changing environments. However, it is questionable whether and to what extent 'on-the-job' learning in this respect is the most effective way of promoting the inclusion of EAL pupils and advancing their curriculum learning outcomes. It is possible that the existing level of satisfaction may well reflect a current lack of knowledge with regard to what is required.

There was some absence of feedback to the prompt question *'If a pupil came into your class without English, what strategies would you consider?'.* However, the comment of one student was insightful:

> *That is what it would take for me. Knowing that I was put into that situation that is when I would start to look at my notes to see what I have to do. It is one of those situations that until I am faced with it I would brush it off and now that am in it that is when I would deal with it.*

This perspective appeared to be prevalent among students who had not participated in an EAL course. Thus, a relative lack of knowledge regarding how to address pupils' needs was more apparent for the groups of students from St. Mary's and Coláiste Mhuire Group 1 (students who had not availed of the

elective course on EAL) than Coláiste Mhuire Group 2 (students who had opted to participate in the EAL elective course). The responses indicated a need for the provision of developmental teaching and learning methodologies. As one student who had completed the EAL elective course suggested:

> *The first reaction I would have, would be to welcome them in, sit them down, introduce them to the class and give them an activity to do while you set the rest of the children the lesson you have planned. Then you start to informally assess them and just get used to them and help them getting used to you. It is just common sense really. That might be because I have had the EAL training, I am not sure.*

This student appears to support the view that an EAL pupil is not simply locationally integrated within the class, but rather should be fully included. In adopting a professional approach, the teacher will engage in assessment for learning. Thus s/he will be required to be professionally grounded in systemic knowledge in order to assess, plan, differentiate and sequence learning experience and to ultimately contribute to raising pupil outcomes. Another student who had also received specific support as a consequence of the EAL elective course added that s/he would,

> *encourage them to use their own native language at home so as to transfer the language skills from the first language to the second language. There might be a tendency to speak English all the time to learn it better.*

Evidently, this student has identified the potential for transfer of literacy and language skills from the home language into the target language of English.

Skills

Matters relating to practical teaching and learning methodologies, classroom management and resources were addressed in statements on the survey questionnaire and in interview format. In response to the statement *'I feel adequately prepared to teach in a classroom where there are diverse nationalities and languages',* the mean scores of 2.56 for St. Mary's students and 2.63 for students in Coláiste Mhuire, indicated a degree of dissatisfaction with their perceptions of their preparedness. This finding was further supported with the respective mean scores of 2.85 and 2.84, in response to the statement *'I am familiar with the appropriate resources for classrooms which are linguistically diverse'.* As indicated, there was unease in terms of familiarity with accessing and using appropriate pedagogical resources.

Yet, the students were positive in responding to the suggestion that *'Teachers should incorporate examples/materials/images from a range of cultures into all subjects'*. The response means in this regard were 1.49 (St. Mary's) and 1.58 (Coláiste Mhuire). While the evidence therefore suggests that the students do not feel professionally competent or confident in terms of the specific skills required, it is clear that they value these and the use of appropriate resources, as well as the provision of access for the pupils in question, to all curricular areas. Data from the interviews support this standpoint. As one student responded in relation to the group question *'to what extent do you feel prepared to teach in a context where children speak English as an additional language?'*:

> *Last year I had a pupil who came for a week who had come from Somalia who didn't speak any English and he was in 'silent phase' and I wasn't sure… the day seemed very long for him, not to be doing anything and I know they are absorbing the language but I did have him on my conscience the whole time. I felt a bit sorry for him. Also for the aspect of him not having any friends and the boys were quite mean to him. And that is something you don't always think about that if you don't have the language you are left out and that is something I am not too sure how you deal with.*

This student's professional values are informed by a concern for learner centredness. However, the student also appears to be challenged in attempting to include the recent arrival. She comments on the child's isolation, and mentions uncertainty regarding how to address a complex series of factors which arise including; the initial language learning of the child, the child as a target for bullying and his lack of engagement within the class. The experiences of this particular student could be contrasted with the student who has assimilated some skills and claimed to be,

> *fairly confident because I did the course in second year. I had fifteen EAL learners in my class. I was thrown in at the deep end and survived as I had a few strategies.*

This view was reiterated by a fellow student, who reflecting upon the EAL elective course offered in Coláiste Mhuire, remarked that; *'we are probably more confident than most other students as we did the elective'*.

When asked to consider specific strategies they would employ for pupils arriving in their classes with no English, students from St. Mary's identified basic strategies, which included:

- Using signs on doors and windows;
- Displaying items about their country and including some of their language;
- Giving instructions;
- Providing physical examples in addition to explaining.

The student teachers concerned appeared to be unable to tap into an appropriate skill set to address the problem posed. Rather, the students tend to employ more generic strategies which in themselves may not pave the way for developmental sequencing. In contrast, students from group 2, who had undertaken the EAL elective, appeared to be more focused. Strategies suggested by this group included:

- The buddy system
- The cognitive framework designed to develop academic language
- Use of visual aids, simple text, pictures and symbols
- A print rich environment
- Role play
- Repetition and use of new words in familiar contexts with their friends and in relevant situations
- Use of their own language

The greater detail in the strategies suggested above, points to the existence of a more informed set of skills among this cohort. These could be built upon developmentally and grow with the pupil in the school context. Students from Coláiste Mhuire group 1 who had not undertaken the EAL elective course also indicated some strategies that could be implemented and built upon. For example, this group identified the practicality of using *'lots of visual aids, songs, poems and action rhymes with young children'*. Other strategies suggested included:

- Using other children from the same language group with a better command of English to translate for them;
- Using a buddy system to "help out" EAL pupils;
- Considering ways to help the pupil become familiar with the environment;
- Finding out common words and phrases of their own language from their parents;
- Using "trust games" and other activities that are low in terms of language usage;
- Using some resources that had been mentioned in class "I downloaded my first English book" from NCCA;
- Support from home;
- Getting to know their names, talking about friends and family and their hobbies, using stories that interest them, displaying common words around the classroom, using "word-walls" and going back to basics before starting to learn to read.

Furthermore, some students from the group in Coláiste Mhuire who had received professional enhancement of their skills through the EAL course, made some positive suggestions in response to the focus group question, '*What are some*

ways you might use to support the pupil's parents or caregivers in strengthening the pupil's education?'. One student mentioned that,

> *if they have different cultures and religions maybe they could be invited in to Circle time to share different artefacts etc., as you might not know too much about the different cultures in the school.*

In this response, the student suggests employing the strategy of Circle Time with a view to developing the concept of sharing culture and thus enriching the experience of all within the classroom. This suggestion also incorporates the idea of language being taught across the curriculum, enhancing the curriculum experience. Similarly, another student suggested that,

> *you can have maybe a website that is really good at differentiating for EAL for Science and for Maths, and those resources could be provided for us through each subject.*

In these instances respondents are thinking laterally, visualizing literacy and language in the wider context, and recognizing the role of opportunities for learning across the curriculum.

Students' beliefs

While the research questions were not specifically designed to measure students' values and attitudes with respect to children who are learning English as an additional language, the data may provide some insights in this respect. Responses to questions in the survey instrument, as well as to those which addressed issues of children's identity and home / first languages in the focus group sessions, illustrate that the student teachers were generally positively disposed towards the children concerned.

When prompted in the survey instrument to respond to the statement as to whether, *'The presence of EAL learners in a class can negatively affect the learning and progress of other children'*, mean responses of 3.81 from students in Coláiste Mhuire and 3.63 in St Mary's College were recorded, indicating that, by and large, students disagreed with the statement. They believed that these pupils did not hinder the learning and progression of others. This is noteworthy, as much of the popular discussion regarding children for whom English is an additional language, tends to focus on the negative impact that their presence has within regular classrooms, and the perceived additional workload of the teachers involved.

However, when students were requested to respond to the question as to whether, *'It is reasonable for teachers to have lower learning and behavioral expectations for students who don't speak English as their first language'*, mean

findings of 3.60 for Coláiste Mhuire and 3.66 for St Mary's emerged. This underlines the findings that while students in both colleges are indeed willing to engage with the children, many may also be unaware of how best to address their teaching and learning requirements.

There were divergent views as to whether pupil's first language should be included in teaching and learning processes in the classroom. One student from St Mary's College commented that,

> *if you fully immerse them, if you ignore their own language then you are taking away their individuality as well. PDMU tells us to focus on the pupil - their identity. You have to focus on who the pupil is. It is part of their identity.*

This student had transferred knowledge from the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) professional development class to inform his/her opinion. It was felt that schools should encourage children to maintain learning links in the language spoken in the home, so that the pupil's identity and thus capacity to develop holistically, are enhanced. However, another student, also from St. Mary's, felt that efforts to maintain the pupil's first language are problematic and challenging. According to this student, *'there would be too may problems. If you have too many different languages, it can lead to a lot of difficulty'.*

This view was reiterated by one of the students in Coláiste Mhuire who had not undertaken the EAL elective course. The argument put forward is that there should be an overwhelming concentration on the language of instruction, which is English. The student concerned also expresses her opinion of what parents who speak a different language at home should expect:

> *If they are sending their pupil in to be educated in a school in Ireland and the first language in the school is English . . . that is how they are going to learn. Obviously their own language should be supported, like 'hello' just different flags and whatever, like that, but if they are not . . . the teacher can't be expected to teach, she's not going to teach geography or other subjects in their language. If they want their children to go through Irish Education and achieve everything that Irish nationals can achieve, then they must … it is the only way their pupil is going to get through it.*

This may appear to be a reasonable standpoint, particularly where students are not aware of effective strategies or resources which might assist them in working in contexts of multilingualism and cultural diversity.

A student teacher who had completed the EAL elective course articulated an alternative view. According to this student teacher, there are ways in which the

pupil's linguistic heritage can be recognized as an asset within the classroom. As s/he observed, *'the other children are just dying to learn words in another language, and then the EAL pupil could feel more at home'*. A 'different' rather than 'difficult' or 'problematic' perspective is evidently employed. It might be suggested therefore that once student teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to meet the teaching and learning requirements of the children concerned, their views and beliefs also become more inclusive.

Deficit model

As indicated above, the views of a small minority of student teachers seemed to reflect a deficit view of children for whom English is an additional language. In the words of one such student, a particular pupil,

> *definitely distracted the class and needed more one-on-one teaching experiences. Even the dedicated classroom assistant did not have adequate time or resources to cater to this pupil's needs.*

While it is not clear that the student concerned believed that all children who are learning English are likely to have a negative impact on teaching and learning in the classroom, his/her views give cause for concern. However, there is a possibility that had the assistant been adequately provided for in terms of time and resources, there might have been a more favourable response. From a similar perspective, another student commented:

> *I would expect learning standards not to be high; however I would have the same behavioural expectations for EAL.*

By intuitively lowering learning expectations, there is a danger that future teachers may be employing a deficit view of children who are accessing the curriculum through their additional language of English. A different viewpoint was adopted by one of the students who had completed the elective course in Coláiste Mhuire:

> *We shouldn't rely on keeping everything simple because it is an EAL student. We shouldn't be afraid to make it more challenging for them.*

As this student teacher recognized, while the pupil's level of spoken, or indeed academic English, may not be advanced, it is appropriate to set high learning expectations with a view to facilitating the pupil in realising his/her full learning potential.

Additional comments

Some twenty-three respondents out of a total of eighty-nine (25.8 per cent) in Coláiste Mhuire provided additional information in this section of the survey. Of these respondents, twelve, or just over half, were of the view that their current skills were inadequate to meet the learning requirements of children for whom English is an additional language, and felt that they should be provided with additional professional support in this area. The views expressed were quite diverse and can be located on a spectrum from those who wished to see EAL provision embedded in all areas of the curriculum for initial teacher education, to those who wished to see it as a stand-alone core subject within that curriculum. One student was of the view that, *'EAL preparation should not be a major part of the course, instead more ideas and resources for teaching EAL should be provided in our other lectures'.* Such provision would necessitate a certain level of competence among all teacher education staff, and an additional seven students specifically mentioned the need for such training. Three of these suggested that what was required was the provision of TEFL skills.

Similar views were expressed by students from St Mary's College. In all, nine of these students identified the need for additional training in the area of EAL. According to one such student:

> *We should do TEFL in college as part of the course as I feel it is very important nowadays. It would also be a huge benefit to us when looking for jobs. I feel that if it was part of the course it would be of more benefit to us and we would understand it. I do not feel prepared at all to teach English as a foreign language.*

As this student argues, the provision of such training in ITE should reflect the new teaching and learning realities on the ground. It is also seen as providing for the development of a marketable skill which will assist student teachers as they seek employment on the island of Ireland or beyond. TEFL courses may indeed provide participants with skills to impart knowledge about the target language of English, in a context where it is not the dominant host language. However, such courses may lack the depth and rigour provided in dedicated EAL courses, where there is an emphasis on the development of academic language proficiency as well as on progressing children's social and conversational fluency. Furthermore, as well as developing strategies for classroom-based pedagogy, such ITE courses should enable participants to engage positively with linguistic and cultural diversity.

Another student teacher believed that there was a need for, *'an increase in EAL provision, not only for pre-service, but for in-service teachers'.* As this student recognized, pre-service courses cannot suffice in fully supporting teachers with the complex challenge of mediating curriculum in diverse school settings.

Learning to cater for a variety of needs begins at the pre-service phase but of necessity, extends into continued professional development.

A total of seven student teachers across the research sites expressed the view that it would be difficult for them to articulate the extent to which they were appropriately prepared for the reality of an EAL classroom, until such time as that reality was encountered. In one student teacher's opinion:

> *It is difficult to estimate how well prepared we are for teaching children for whom English is not their first language when our experience in the classroom is limited. I feel I will be in a better position to decide once I have taught children for whom English is a second language for a year or more.*

The views of students who participated in the focus group interviews, regardless of whether or not they had previously been provided with professional support in EAL, were less ambiguous. All of those from St Mary's College agreed that the provision of EAL training should form a core element of initial teacher education. Respondents from Coláiste Mhuire also agreed that the provision of initial teacher preparation in the field of EAL needed to be more robust. The rationale provided for this view was voiced by one student:

> *I think it should be compulsory. It is inevitable that we are going to have at least one EAL pupil throughout our whole teaching career. That is at the very least. Twenty years ago it wasn't so common and it wasn't done, but these days I think it should be done in the college from first year up until third year and an option to further it in fourth year.*

Students in both jurisdictions noted that in addition to a theoretical grounding in EAL preparation, there should be opportunities provided for practical interaction with children for whom English is an additional language. Once again, the student teachers had considered views as to how professional learning might be facilitated. As a student teacher from Coláiste Mhuire recalled:

> *I remember in a lecture we suggested a block of four weeks working with EAL children in small groups even a day or a week, either out in schools or they come in to the College. That would be really beneficial.*

A similar view was shared by a student teacher in St Mary's College who suggested that:

> *If by Year 4 you haven't had any (school) experience with EAL children then you should have the option to go out to a school maybe in Belfast close to the College so you can experience it.*

Conclusion and recommendations

In light of these research findings it would appear that student teachers in both jurisdictions feel that they lack the required competencies to effectively address the learning needs of children for whom English is an additional language. The students are keen to ensure that more frequent and better opportunities are offered during ITE to equip them with the necessary skills. How this might be realised in the colleges concerned is a matter for consultation and debate. There are arguments for up-skilling all staff in this respect. There may also be scope for the provision of further optional courses specific to the area. These courses might complement a strengthening of core courses which feature an EAL dimension. Choices available to individual teacher education colleges will be dependent upon commitment to reviewing existing college curricula, expertise in the field and the accessibility of additional teaching and learning resources.

In light of the overall finding that there is significant need to strengthen student teacher capacities in providing for the teaching and learning of pupils with EAL requirements, the following recommendations are put forward:

➢ All student teachers should be provided with more than a basic introduction to the knowledge and skills which inform good practice in contexts of linguistic diversity. This enhanced provision might be incorporated from the first year of teacher education programmes and strengthened as students progress through their college courses.

➢ A small minority of the students surveyed viewed the academic standards of children for whom English is an additional language as not measuring up to those of children from native English backgrounds. These student teachers may have lower academic expectations for those pupils. Such a perception has the potential to negatively impact on the general educational progression of children for whom English is an additional language. Enhanced pre-service provision in EAL would help to ensure that all graduating teachers are aware of the importance of maintaining high academic expectations for children from diverse language backgrounds.

➢ The research data indicates that many student teachers were unable to apply knowledge from other programmes on the B.Ed. to the teaching of children from minority language backgrounds. For example, many strategies and

approaches from literacy courses relevant to EAL learners were not mentioned by the students concerned. A more integrated approach to course content design and presentation in this respect, may enhance students' abilities to transfer relevant knowledge and skills from one curricular area to another.

➤ The professional capacities of all academic staff within the colleges should be strengthened so that all of those involved in lecturing, professional development and in the assessment of teaching practice are better equipped to incorporate aspects of EAL pedagogy into their own courses, where relevant.

➤ Student teachers have indicated that they would welcome further practical opportunities to apply their skills and / or to increase their knowledge base by gaining informed insights into good pedagogy in contexts of linguistic diversity. This might be addressed by providing greater opportunity for school visits and placement experience. Alternatively, it could be achieved through the provision of virtual learning opportunities, and by utilising language support teachers more extensively as guest speakers in colleges.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire for students on English as an Additional Language (EAL) in undergraduate teacher education programmes in Ireland

This questionnaire is part of a joint research project being undertaken by Coláiste Mhuire, Marino and St Mary's University College, Belfast, into the provision of programmes in EAL in undergraduate teacher education programmes in Ireland.

SECTION 1

1. Please tick whether you are male or female
   Male ☐   Female ☐

2. What age were you at your last birthday?
   _____ years

3. Have you ever lived abroad for longer than a 3-month period?
   Yes ☐   No ☐
   If yes, state where and for how long, and which language(s) were spoken in that country.
   _____
   _____

4. What additional languages (if any) do you speak?
   _____

5. I took part in a student exchange programme when I was in post-primary school
   Yes ☐   No ☐
   If yes, state which country, and which language(s) were spoken there.
   _____

SECTION 2

6. I have had a teaching practice placement in a setting in which there were children from a range of ethnicities / languages / cultures / religions
   Yes ☐   No ☐

7. I have had other experience of working with children form different nationalities and language backgrounds (e.g. summer school teaching, TEFL work etc.)

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, please specify

_____

Coláiste Mhuire only

8. I took part in the Réalt programme (or another similar programme) while I was in Coláiste Mhuire, Marino

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, state which programme, which country you visited, and which language(s) were spoken there.

_____

9. I have taken an elective course in (please tick):

Teaching English as an additional language   ____
The World in the Classroom   ____
World Religions   ____

St. Mary's University College only

10. I was involved in an overseas student exchange programme while I was in St Mary's University College, Belfast

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, state which programme, which country you visited, and which language(s) were spoken there.

_____

11. I elected to study the Elective option 'Multiculturalism and Intercultural Education' in St Mary's University College, Belfast

Yes ☐   No ☐

SECTION 3

Please take time to read each of the following statements, and then circle the number which you think is most appropriate, where:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

12.

   a) **(Coláiste Mhuire only)** I learned enough in Marino to prepare me to start teaching in a class with children who are learning English as an additional language

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

b) **(St Mary's University College only)** I learned enough in St Mary's to prepare me to start teaching in a class with children who are learning English as an additional language

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

13. I feel adequately prepared to teach in a classroom where there are diverse nationalities and languages

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

14. The presence of EAL learners in a class can negatively affect the learning and progress of other children

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

15. I am familiar with appropriate resources for classrooms which are linguistically diverse

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

16. It is reasonable for teachers to have lower learning and behavioural expectations for students who don't speak English as their first language

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

17. Individual classroom practices are more important than whole school policies for the inclusion of children from EAL backgrounds

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

18. Good EAL teaching should only be concerned with the development of children's English language

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

19. An important part of the teacher's work is to foster and encourage a pupil's home (first) language

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

20. I am competent in teaching *methodologies* specifically designed to support EAL learners

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

21. Teachers should incorporate examples / materials / images from a range of cultures into all subjects

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Any additional comments:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Appendix 2

Semi structured focus group interview questions:

Provide overview of the research project / address ethical issues first.

1. To what extent do you feel prepared to teach in a context where children speak English as an additional language?

2. In the event that a pupil was to arrive in your classroom who did not have English as a first language, what are some strategies you might be able to use to include this pupil in the teaching and learning?

3. Have you any ideas about how you might support the pupil in their development of what is called 'academic' language, in other words, so they can access the language of text books and exams at school, rather than just talking to their friends fluently?

4. What are your views about whether the pupil's first language should be included in the teaching and learning process?

5. What are some ways you might use to support the pupil's parents or care givers in strengthening the pupil's education?

6. In terms of teacher education, where would you suggest the teaching of EAL should happen? For example, should this be optional or core?

7. How relevant is providing professional development for teachers in this area?