

This project was completed with the support of funding from SCoTENS

Project team-Ken Wylie project co-ordinator, Dr. Carol Dunbar, Dr. Ken Gibson (Stranmillis University College)

The development of North/South Case Studies Identifying Key Features of Good Practice in the Teaching of Pupils from Ethnic Minorities

Introduction

Northern Ireland has been home to minority ethnic people for centuries. Irish travellers are an indigenous minority ethnic group. The Indian community have been here since the 1920's and there have been significant numbers of Chinese people here since the 1960's. More recently there has been an influx of migrant workers from Portugal and from Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, Lithuania and Romania.

A 2001 census put the size of the minority ethnic communities at 14279, however some minority ethnic representatives have suggested that the non-indigenous population is closer to 45000 (A Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland, p.27). The issue of how best to educate children who do not have English as their first language has become a more urgent question for schools over the past decade. Equally important is the need for schools to encourage pupils from the indigenous population to accept, respect and befriend newcomer pupils who may not have English as a first language. There have been important curricular initiatives which have been designed to help young pupils have a better understanding of people from different cultures and traditions and to have respect for people who are different for whatever reason. For example at primary level, Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (CCEA) in Northern Ireland and Social, Personal Health Education (NCCA) in the Irish Republic address some of the issues around diversity. Both jurisdictions also run a programme of citizenship education at post-primary level. Curricular initiatives alone are not sufficient however to meet the specific needs, linguistic, social and emotional, of newcomer children

Schools in Ireland, North and South are currently catering for growing numbers of pupils from ethnic minorities. Anecdotal evidence from students on school based work suggests that some teachers are struggling to deal with pupils who do not have English as a first language and the children can spend long periods of the day without support. Even where resource teaching and other supports are offered, there is a wide diversity in models and approaches employed within the primary school systems in both jurisdictions. There are examples of very good practice where newcomer children are made to feel welcome and secure and where there is a lot of day to day support for each child but there are other schools which are barely making any provision for these pupils. In particular, schools which have very small numbers of pupils from different ethnic groups often do not see the need for specific strategies or staff training for situations which haven't arisen, although they may arise in the future. Such attitudes are short sighted in that although the pupils may not meet many newcomer children in the school, they may well be meeting them outside the school. Inconsistencies in approach by schools and inconsistent patterns of training for teachers and classroom assistants to deal with the learning needs of ethnic minority children highlights the need for centralised policies to ensure a more coherent approach to teaching newcomer children and to the training of both serving teachers and student teachers for such a task.

The policy debate on diversity was given impetus by the Good Friday Agreement (1998) where all parties to the Agreement committed themselves to “partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between these islands (Declaration of Support). Later on in the document all parties recognised “the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity” (The section on rights, safeguards, and equality of opportunity, para 1). Since the Agreement was signed, in Northern Ireland, a number of initiatives have addressed the issues surrounding diversity, ethnic, cultural as well as religious, specifically how to promote a more inclusive, tolerant and equal society in the midst of increasing diversity. The proposed initiatives are much wider in scope than the strictly educational domain but education remains at the core of the vision for such a society to emerge.

In 2010 the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) produced a “Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-2010. It identified the following educational priorities (p. 80):

- The need for additional support for children who have English as a second language;
- A multicultural and anti-racist curriculum;
- Relations between teachers and parents (difficulties of language and meeting times); and
- Serious underachievement of Traveller children.

The strategy encapsulated the following vision (p.32);

“A society in which racial diversity is supported, understood, valued and respected, where racism in any of its forms is not tolerated and where we live together as a society and enjoy equality of opportunity and equal protection.”

Also in 2010 a “Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Consultation document was produced by the OFMDFM. It claims that

“All sections of our community should feel comfortable expressing and sharing their cultural identity. We recognise that there needs to be greater sharing and understanding of the diversity within our community and respect for cultural manifestations where they are compatible with human rights norms” (p. 29).

Although the aims of the programme are worthy, there has been much criticism of it for its lack of detail. With regard to education, the Consultation document acknowledges that the Department of Education has a “statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education” (p.16) but there is no strategy outlined for bringing this about. It is anticipated that the Programme will be revised in the light of comments and criticisms coming from the public responses to the Consultation.

Another recent document which has important implications for education is the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education (CRED) consultation (2010), produced by the Department of Education. The proposed aim of the revised policy is to “contribute to improving relations between communities by educating children and young people to develop self-respect and respect for others, promote equality and work to eliminate discrimination, and by providing formal

and non-formal education opportunities for them to build relationships with those of different backgrounds and traditions” (paragraph 6.2).

The objectives of the revised policy will be to:

- Ensure that learners, at each stage of their development, have an understanding of and respect for the rights, equality and diversity of all without discrimination;
- Educate children and young people to live and participate in a changing world, so that they value and respect difference and engage positively with it, taking account of the ongoing intercommunity divisions arising from conflict and increasing diversity within our society; and
- Equip children and young people with the skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to develop mutual understanding and recognition of, and respect for, difference (paragraph 6.3).

The revised policy is designed to place community relations and diversity at the core of education, integrated into the formal and informal curriculum of education settings, with guidance provided by the Department of Education and the implementation potentially monitored by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). This would be a marked departure from the present situation where community relations work is perceived by some schools as an optional extra and not part of their core business. The CRED document also raises important questions about the training of the existing teacher workforce and student teachers. The issue of how to prepare student teachers adequately for culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse classrooms was the main motivation behind this project. It is clear that a significant aspect of the work of teacher educators now and in the future, is to prepare students to teach in diverse classrooms. This is a problem shared by institutions across Ireland, North and South. The two institutions involved in this project, Stranmillis University College, Belfast and St. Patrick’s College of Education, Drumcondra are major centres for teacher education and share a common concern to prepare students effectively for such classrooms. Conscious of the need to review and revise current approaches to diversity education, both institutions agreed that an important foundation was to establish clearly what constituted good practice in schools in integrating newcomer children into the school community and teaching them effectively. It could not be assumed that good practice was obvious, given the varied range of approaches evident in different schools.

Some research has already been carried out in this area. In Northern Ireland, two reports have recently been produced for the Department of Education. In both cases, the research was positivistic in approach, mainly concerned with objective fact finding. One report (2006) "English as an Additional Language (EAL)" summarised a series of principal and teacher interviews which focused mainly on resources and support services available to schools. There were no case studies and little specific comment about classroom based strategies. The Final Report (2005) " Review of English as an Additional Language" did contain some case studies but these focused mainly on resources and support available to the school. There was some classroom observation but the report does not identify specific classroom strategies which were considered effective in assisting the learning process.

In the Republic of Ireland, a number of reports have also been commissioned or published by the Department of Education and Science and by others but with a similar emphasis on policy and

perspectives rather than classroom practice. McGorman and Sugrue (2007) offer a very valuable insight into the challenges and opportunities brought about by significant ethnic diversity in West Dublin. The research design relies heavily on focus group interviews with teachers and pupils as well as case studies of parental experiences rather than focusing on classroom practice. Although, the Department of Education and Science has prioritised the provision of English language support teachers in its response to growing ethnic diversity, significant budgetary cutbacks to this provision were announced in late 2008. (DES 2008). This will have significant implications for policy and practice in primary schools, which warrants monitoring and investigation from the outset.

Aim of the Project

The main aim of this project is to develop case studies identifying the key characteristics of good practice in the teaching of pupils from ethnic minorities. The case studies will inform and provide a resource for College based courses on Citizenship, Multi-cultural Education and the teaching of children with English as a second language.

There were a number of pivotal questions which interested the research team.

- Did the school have a clear policy on the teaching of newcomer children?
- How were the children welcomed to the school when they first arrived?
- How did the school create an inclusive environment?
- How did the teachers encourage friendships and relationships between the newcomer children and the indigenous pupils?
- Were there specific learning/teaching strategies employed in the classrooms to support the newcomer children?
- What kind of individual support was given to the pupils socially and emotionally as well as linguistically?
- How did the teachers communicate and interact with the parents?

The school sample

In the North, two primary schools were selected. Two criteria were applied when selecting the schools, they had to have at least 30% of their pupils from non-indigenous families and they had to be deemed outstanding in the provision of an inclusive learning environment for all children as evidenced by inspection reports carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate. One of the primary schools chosen, (school B), was located in Belfast. Fifty per cent of its pupils were from ethnic minority backgrounds. The other primary school, (school D), located in Dungannon, currently has thirty six per cent of its pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. The two schools had different profiles in that in school B the largest ethnic groups were Chinese and Roma, originating in Romania, whilst in school D the largest groups were the Polish and Portuguese with small numbers of Lithuanian, Russian, Romanian and Chinese. The Polish and Portuguese formed a settled community, some of them having been there for 10 years or more. The Romanian group in school B, by contrast was a more transient group and these differences in the populations of each school had a significant impact on the policies and strategies adopted by each school.

The Department of Education (2010) issued guidelines for schools "Supporting Newcomer Children". The document recommended a change in terminology from 'EAL pupils' to 'Newcomer pupils' on the grounds that the term EAL seemed to focus on language difficulties and didn't cover pastoral or cultural issues. Some teachers and Principals do question the term 'newcomer' because many of the

families are established in the area for some time. This was the case in school D, one of the schools used for the research. For the purposes of this report, the researchers have used the terms EAL pupil and newcomer pupil interchangeably. Many of the school policy documents continue to use the term EAL pupil.

Another initiative by the Department was to fund a regional support service across the Education and Library Boards called the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) to strengthen and improve support to newcomer pupils. Both schools investigated in this project made extensive use of this service.

Methodology

The methodology was mixed but was predominantly qualitative using an interpretive paradigm. Initially there was a desktop study of relevant documentation (from the Departments of Education, area boards as well as specific school policies. Inspection reports were consulted to ensure the quality of the provision in each of the schools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the schools with key informants, the principal, language assistants and or SENCO or EAL co-ordinator where appropriate. There was a focus group discussion with a small group of EAL pupils from different ethnic backgrounds. There was some informal classroom observation which took the form of participant observation where the researcher worked with a small group of pupils on some literacy tasks. The researchers were aware of the risks in participant observation of the researcher unduly influencing the responses of the pupils but it was decided that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages in that it enabled them to interact one to one with the pupils while they worked and discover what the pupils found easy or difficult and also who their friends were in the class.

The interview schedule included questions which were open and some which were closed. The closed questions were largely designed to ascertain basic facts about the school, resources and the background of the pupils. More open questions were used to encourage judgements, assessment and evaluation of current practice in the school.

Ethical considerations

The research ethics committees of the two participating institutions gave their consent to the research proposal. Letters were sent to the principals of the participating schools requesting their permission to undertake research in their schools. Approval was given by all the participating schools. Parental letters were sent to the schools to be forwarded to parents. Only those children whose parents had given written consent were used for the focus groups. Assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given to all participants and the data was stored in a computer protected by a password. The pupils in the focus groups were assured that they could leave at any time if they did not wish to participate. Interviews and focus group discussions were digitally recorded and the teachers and pupils were asked if they consented to have their views recorded. A laptop was used, with the consent of the teachers, to make notes on the classroom observations.

Results

In school B there was no one currently fulfilling the role of EAL co-ordinator so the Principal had taken over responsibility for ensuring that policy was implemented.

Principal Interview School D

Question – Is there a school policy that outlines provision for EAL pupils?

Principal – A school policy has been in place since 2005 and we are currently in the process of

updating it. Staff were involved in drafting and setting up the original policy which has been disseminated to parents. The Inclusion and Diversity Service have been involved in helping them to redraft the policy.

Question - What do you think has been the impact of EAL pupils on other pupils?

Principal – I think that it is two-fold. In the community the impression is that a lot of the resources are being used to help these children and particularly with the SEN resources, that the money and the time has to be spent with those children. Well I have really found the opposite. The focus that we place on language, on speech and language, on written communication, oral communication and so forth has really benefitted our indigenous children here, and we think that focus has raised the standards of literacy, language and communication throughout the school, and because the staff have had to develop particular skills to teach older children the English language and the written language, those skills are then being used for the other children as well so I certainly see that it has had a very positive effect.

Question – Are the parents convinced of this or is it a work in progress?

Principal – It is a work in progress and I did notice on open night and the staff would confirm that it is a common question from parents “How many EAL children are in the class and what impact will this have on the teaching?” This year I was able to say with confidence that I felt it was having a very positive impact as we have been through an inspection very recently and we got outstanding in our literacy. So there has been an external assessment to back up our claims.

Question – Who carries out the initial assessment of the EAL pupil?

Principal - Until this year it has really been the teacher who has done that but we are now going to use the European framework for assessing newcomer pupils which is recommended by the Department of Education. A link officer from the Inclusion and Diversity Service will be coming into the school to work with each teacher and take them through the framework. In future the assessment will be made by the class teacher in consultation with the SENCo, using the European framework.

Question – Would the EAL pupil be placed immediately on the Special Needs Register?

Principal – We are currently discussing this issue with senior management. The children who have language difficulties will be put on the SEN register, but they are going to be coded that it is purely a language issue. We use the term additional needs rather than special educational needs for these children. We have a language support teacher and I want to identify the children that she will need to work with immediately. I then want to assess the level of English, if any, that they have when they come in and track how long it takes them to acquire the English language. After that I have to decide at what stage we can say they have acquired the language and no longer need the support. When that stage is reached they are taken off the register. Some of our EAL pupils do of course have underlying special needs and they would remain on the SEN register.

Question – What resources do you have in the EAL pupils’ mother tongue?

Principal – We do have a range of posters, bi-lingual dictionaries and books but because this school has become so familiar with teaching these children over a 10 year period, perhaps these resources

have been put to one side and not used as often as they could be. These children are settled here and do speak very good English, their families are settled, the resources may not be needed. In foundation stage, where we have the children coming in without English, it is part of our action plan for this year to look at these resources and possibly re-introduce them where we see the need.

Question – Is there a mentoring scheme in operation in this school, and if not, how is the EAL child helped to integrate?

Principal – There is an official buddy scheme in the school where we would pair up a pupil with a newcomer and that works very successfully, but informally our pupils are so accustomed to having newcomers in school that the whole class will welcome them and look after them. The responsibility doesn't rest on one or two pupils in the class.

Question – Do you hold culture days to encourage cultural awareness?

Principal – The school hasn't held culture days in the past because the newcomers and their families are so well integrated into the community and school. But some parents have suggested cultural evenings where parents from different countries including Northern Ireland could prepare food from their country and bring it to the school. I am very keen on this idea but it would not have been a feature in the past.

Question – Are any of the EAL children granted time off to observe religious festivals?

Principal – Yes, if they request it we would certainly give them time off. We have a range of religions in the school, we have some Jehovah witnesses who do not take part in any religious festivals but a lot of our EAL children would be Roman Catholic and we do accommodate that by bringing in a substitute teacher who takes them through the P4 and the P7 and all the necessary preparations.

Question – What support have you received from your Education and Library Board?

Principal – The Inclusion and Diversity Service have given excellent support. An overall officer came to meet me to find out what our needs were and she assigned a link officer who comes into the school once a week. The support is very practical, they don't come in just to give advice but will make posters and signs and help the teachers to produce key words for play activities.

Question - What type of support do you need?

Principle - At the moment we need to refocus what our EAL provision needs to be, because it really has changed since the initial provision 10 years ago. Because many of the children have gone through the school and some have moved on to post-primary, the school is reviewing how our school needs to provide for these children. Is the priority language provision, or cultural provision, do they need to know more about Northern Ireland and our local history and geography, do we need to immerse them more in our culture? So it is a review of where we stand at this moment in time. The whole community issue is important, we need to raise awareness in the community, to build confidence in the community that these people really do have something to add to our community and education system and dispel the myth that they are actually taking away.

Question – What sort of in-service training do you think that teachers need?

Principal – I believe new teachers need to understand the pedagogy of how these children learn. In conversation with an experienced teacher the other day, she spoke of how she talks to the children about how they feel coming into a new school with no English, how they cope through the day. She also asks them, when they hear a question in English, do they hear it in English and then translate it into Portuguese and then translate the answer into Portuguese and speak it in English. If they do have to go through all of these processes then they obviously need thinking time and answering time. I would assume that young teachers would need to have these conversations, that there is going to be a model of how these children are taught and they would need to be immersed in that. As well as the language, the pastoral and emotional side is very important as well. We need to put ourselves in their place and understand how they cope through the day and ascertain whether any of our systems work, or whether they are what the children want.

Question – Should pre-service teachers be trained to teach in multi-ethnic classrooms?

Principal – As every child is so different with different strengths and difficulties, I would say that to be within a classroom with different ethnic backgrounds is really the only way to do it. It would need to be built in to part of their teaching practice, perhaps become part of a module.

Question – Do you think that there should be designated training schools which have a significant proportion of EAL pupils and appear to be dealing effectively with them?

Principal – Absolutely yes! Then the students would have hands on practical experience guided by experienced teachers and they would also learn to deal with parents of children from different backgrounds. That is another skill which has to be acquired.

Question – What are your views on one to one teaching? Do you use one to one teaching?

Principal – We use our language support teacher to support a small number of pupils. We would have small withdrawal groups for SEN pupils. The language support teacher would introduce them to key words and phrases from the topics which the teachers are about to start with their class. These words would then be sent home to the parents along with the topic books. In the past more withdrawal teaching would have been used but I am changing that. I want the language assistant to be more immersed in the classroom, for example at Foundation stage during structured play so that the pupils are learning the language in the context of the activities in which they are engaged. Similarly I want the language assistant to be with the P. 5's when they are doing their independent writing. The EAL pupils can write very imaginative well structured stories but tense is a particular problem for them.

Question – What are your views on an initial six week immersion in English at the beginning, on entry to school?

Principal – I think that it is a marvellous idea. I can see those children who come to school with no English benefitting enormously because many of them are very able but language is a barrier for them. That is why I am so keen to use the language assistant in order to reduce and eventually remove this barrier.

Question – What are the advantages to the school and the pupils of having EAL children present in your school?

Principal – I have already mentioned the focus we have on English and how it benefits everyone, equally so in mathematics. We had a discussion recently in a staff meeting about how difficult it was

for children to understand the language of mathematics and for us to ensure consistency in the language used in different classrooms, for example whether to use 'naught' or 'zero', how to speak about decomposition. We agreed that the language was difficult for indigenous pupils but a member of staff pointed out how much more difficult it was for EAL pupils. I can see from being here just a short time how important and interesting the multi-cultural dimension is to the school. I talk to the children one to one and they tell me about their home and homeland, granny and grandad. They are doing scrapbooks at the minute about who I am. They have lovely pictures and photographs and it just gives a whole new and very personal dimension about the role these people play in the children's lives. I think that it enriches our whole curriculum.

Question – How do the indigenous children react to the EAL children?

Principal – They embrace them. The children from the same country would be very close to them and there is that kind of community feeling in Dungannon but the wider school group just embraces them, they have never known anything else.

Question – Is there an induction process for the new arrivals?

Principal – Yes, we would have an initial induction where we would speak to the parents, we glean as much information as possible about the background of the children, where they are from. We would make contact with schools in other countries to try and get information from them. We do have, especially in primary 1 a new welcome book which is for children and parents. It is very visual and tells them about the main features of the school in a visual way. It is part of our action plan this year to review it in the light of parent and pupil comments to see if there is anything more we can do to help these children.

Question – How much contact would you have with parents?

Principal – We would have two parent interviews per year and we would follow up on any parents who didn't come for the interview. We have an open door policy for parents, so all are welcome to come in at any time to see management or teachers. A lot of the EAL parents leave their children to school and pick them up in the afternoon. The teachers would speak to parents as they leave in the afternoon. Its lovely to see the dads coming as well and we try to build up a relationship with them. Some of the parents do not speak much English but they will bring a daughter or neighbour with them to translate. We would use the language assistant a lot to communicate with the parents either on the phone or at the school gate. The parents have a very good attitude to school and want their children to succeed. The children have a very good attitude as well better than some of our own children.

School B

The interview in school B was a joint interview with the Principal and the EAL co-ordinator

Question- Is there a school policy that outlines provision for EAL pupils?

Principal – Yes there is a specific policy for the school. It was drafted by myself and is available to staff through shared documents on the compute system. It can be made available to parents on request. The policy has not been reviewed but it is probably timely now to look at it again.

Question –How do other children in the school react to EAL pupils?

Principal – Generally speaking in this school, the ethos of the school is of sharing and caring and we do get on well with each other but there are instances in any school where children are children and there is a bit of bullying.

Question – Who carries out the initial assessment?

Principal – The baseline assessment is done by myself and the EAL co-ordinator.

Question – Would the EAL pupil be placed immediately on the SEN register?

Principal – We need to ascertain whether the child is EAL or special needs or both and that takes a little time to ascertain. We have criteria which we use to ascertain that and we work closely with the SENCo.

Question – What resources do you have in the EAL pupil's mother tongue?

Principal – With regards to valuing the mother tongue we do have our dual language books. Those are books the mother can read for example in Cantonese and it is also written in English. With our dual language books we also have dual language dictionaries. We also have dual language software, a wealth of that actually, so it is important that we do value the mother tongue of each and every child.

Question – Is there a mentoring scheme in operation in the school and if not how is the EAL child helped to integrate?

Principal – There is a buddy scheme in the school but it is mainly done informally and it is left to the discretion of the class teacher.

Question – Do you hold culture days to encourage cultural awareness?

EAL co-ordinator – We are working on the international school award at the moment. We achieved our intermediate last year and we are receiving our full award this year, so that involves a European languages day in partnership with another school and we run projects on other countries. We had our Chinese event last year. Everyone in the school participates in these projects.

Principal – And when we say everyone we include parents, the inclusion of parents is extremely important. We have adult classes for parents who want to learn English.

EAL co-ordinator – I have adult classes on a Thursday morning. We have a core group of Chinese mothers who come and they love it and they are great to work with. They use a lot of our dual language resources.

Principal – It certainly is valuable if you can build up the parents' confidence so that they are happy with the school environment. Secondly they are learning a little bit of English themselves in a nice relaxed atmosphere. Thirdly it also helps the child, it is a partnership between teacher, parent and child.

EAL co-ordinator – You will find that the parent who comes to class is more inclined to come and talk to us about their child and mention things when they are in and maybe borrow a book. I have a slot

from 9.00 to 9.30 where I am available just for the parents. They are liable to just walk into my room, talk to me if they want to or select a dual language book. We are one big happy family.

Question – Are any of the pupils granted time off to observe religious festivals?

Principal – Yes, some of the Muslim children will have their Ramadan and Ede. Some will actually fast, not the young ones but at Key Stage 2. We do allow them to take time off for celebrating.

EAL co-ordinator – Then they come in the next day and tell us about it so that it becomes part of our cultural awareness programme. Sometimes they bring in little gifts which is enlightening for the other children.

Question – What type of support do you need?

EAL co-ordinator – The Inclusion and Diversity Service have been very helpful. They don't simply give advice, they come in and help with resources and ideas for culture days. We have another lady who is Chinese speaking and she has been extremely valuable with regards to the Chinese children.

Question – What sort of in-service training do you think that teachers need?

EAL Co-ordinator – I think that it would be great to have a great deal more training. At area board level, you go for your days training, your professional development and you go on your assessment day, your behaviour support day, wouldn't it be great to have an English as a foreign language day, an EAL day. Had I not spent time here as a student, an EAL student, I would not have had a clue what I was doing to be honest so I think that especially for new teachers some input on how to teach English as a foreign language in mainstream classroom settings would be important.

Question – Should pre-service teachers be trained to teach in multi-ethnic classrooms?

EAL Co-ordinator – Hands on experience is essential.

Principal – I think that most people learn a lot quicker if they get hands on experience. At this school what I usually do is throw them into the deep end of baseline assessment, how a class should be organised with regards to EAL. Self esteem and self-confidence need to be there from the outset before any formal education can take place, once a child is happy then the learning process begins. A lot of teachers do panic when they get a foreign child, there is a 'what do I do?' response. Normally what we would say is don't panic, let the child settle in, smile, make sure the child has some survival language, that is all it needs from the outset. The inclusion of parents is very important, make sure that they are happy and that creates a happy environment.

Question - What are your views on one to one teaching?

EAL Co-ordinator – Where and when appropriate it is valuable, it depends on the child and on the classroom situation. I know that when I have children withdrawn with me for some of them it is a break because the language, all the talk and the work can be overwhelming for some, especially in the first few weeks.

Principal – It can be a cocktail of confusion and they need a quiet environment where they are given the time to learn some language and it is quality time.

Question – What are your views on the idea of an initial six week immersion in English at the beginning, on entry to school?

Principal – Well the theory is good, the practicality of that may not always materialise, the logistics in this school may be difficult. In our school we have a lot of Roma children and the strategy of getting them all down into one room regardless of language level and ages does seem to work because a lot of them have had no formal education, they don't know about rules and regulations so all of that has to be taught in a formal way, so in that instance it is helpful but you have to look at the logistics.

Question – What are the advantages to the school and the pupils of having EAL children present in your class?

EAL Co-ordinator – It is the enrichment of other languages and cultures that they bring and how easy it then becomes to do your big topics because every term we take a different country and study it as a whole school, each class takes a project to do with that country. In the second term last year we had a big push on China due to the Principal being away with the British Council and he was in China the previous year. We had the welfare association coming into the school with their dragon and they did a dragon dance, it was brilliant. It becomes so much easier when you have a personal interest or if some of the children in the class are Chinese, then it makes it so much more real for all the pupils, it is not just some far away country you are talking about. We also had the Romanian ambassador last year come to visit us and the Romanian children loved it but it also made it a bit more real for the non-Romanian children.

Principal – If you are going to value a child's life and culture by celebrating and indeed embracing their culture, it lifts the child, it empowers the child to develop self-esteem and confidence. It is this whole business of empowering children which I feel is so important.

Question – How do the indigenous children react to the EAL pupils?

Principal – Generally speaking in this school, the ethos of the school is of sharing and caring and we do get on well with each other. That is why our buddy system is informal, because all the children will buddy up to them anyway. Whether they are EAL or not, if there is somebody new in the class, everybody wants to be their friend. We look after each other, not just the children but the staff also, we are very supportive. Of course as in any school there are instances of bullying but we have an anti-bullying policy and it is nipped in the bud immediately.

Question - Is there an induction process for new arrivals in the school?

EAL Co-ordinator – There is an induction programme. Interpreters from the Inclusion and Diversity Service are available if needed. We try to make the family feel welcome and comfortable by using mother tongue greetings. There is a school tour where basic information is provided such as times,

uniforms, lunch, teachers' names. We try to answer any questions the families may have. With the help of an interpreter, the parents are asked to complete a profile form to ascertain details such as languages used at home, previous educational experience with evidence and general issues including any special needs.

Question – How much contact would you have with parents?

EAL Co-ordinator – We have a policy of welcoming parents into the school. They have half an hour (9.00-9.30am) in the morning to talk to the EAL teacher, look at resources and borrow books. We also have three open mornings for parents, one for parents of Romanian children, a second for Chinese parents and a third for all other nationalities. In these open mornings we try to explain how we can help their child with reading, for example at home. We also run adult EAL classes for parents.

Focus group discussion

The focus group discussion took place in school D, unfortunately it wasn't possible to hold one in school B. The four pupils chosen were all in primary 7. Fabio was from Portugal, Kamil from Poland, Leon from Poland and Emmat from Lithuania. Kamil started school in primary 1, the others started in primary 3. All spoke English fluently and had received considerable help from the language assistant. When asked whether their parents were learning to speak English, all of them said yes. All of them said that they had friends from Northern Ireland. Fabio said "I like it here more than Portugal because in Portugal the teachers are very bad to us, they smack us with rulers." When asked whether they had been bullied at school, Fabio said yes and the others said no. Fabio is black so there may have been an element of racist bullying involved. The bullying happened mainly in primary 6 and seemed to centre around one boy who was disruptive in school. Fabio also expressed fears about being bullied in the big school (post-primary). Some of the others also expressed fears about being bullied in the big school. Kamil for example said that he had heard "if it is your first day in the big school you will get bullied, they will put your head into the toilet or put it in the bin".

The pupils were asked "*what is your favourite subject?*"

Fabio-"my favourite subject is Art".

Kamil-"my favourite subject is probably Art too and PE".

Leon-"my favourite subject is Art, ICT and PE.

They were also asked "*Are there any subjects that you find difficult?*"

Emmat-"I am not very good at time".

Kamil "sometimes I find literacy difficult".

Fabio-"Comprehension is difficult. Some words we do not understand we get stuck with them because we are not very good at English".

Kamil-"I just hate comprehension, it is really hard".

Discussion

Both schools have created a very positive and welcoming ethos with families including the new pupils being given a guided tour of the school and an opportunity to meet the staff. There are buddy systems in place in both schools but they have become almost redundant with every pupil encouraged to welcome and support the newcomer. The approach to teaching and learning is very much child centred, with the needs of each child clearly identified. There is no assumption made that all Polish children entering primary one will have the same needs linguistically, socially and emotionally. Teaching/learning strategies are activity based with pupils working together in groups. The groups are mixed, with newcomer pupils working alongside pupils from the indigenous population. It was clear from classroom observation as well as from the focus group discussion that friendships had formed across different ethnic groupings. It was interesting that when one of the researchers worked with a group of pupils, a very articulate Polish girl was supporting and explaining things to her friend who was a local girl. The support and help was not always one way with indigenous pupils helping newcomers. Visual timetables and dual language resources were much in evidence with key locations identified by multiple language signs. Both schools acknowledged the help of the Inclusion and Diversity Service in creating these resources. In addition to group work, there were some one to one sessions organised for pupils experiencing difficulties. In each school the language assistant was often used to give one to one assistance.

There was a difference in emphasis in each school on 'culture days'. School B really focused strongly on culture days with the whole school engaged on project work on a specific country at the same time. Invited guests and parents were occasionally used to support these projects. School D by contrast did not focus much on culture days, the rationale being that the families had been in the area for ten or more years and had become integrated into the community. The Principal did indicate however that she was rethinking this policy in the light of comments from parents. Both schools agreed that there should be an important focus on local Northern Irish culture, it couldn't be taken for granted that even well established groups had a good understanding of local practices or even the Northern Ireland Education system.

Both schools employed an open door policy for parents with schools B going further and organising consultation time for parents every morning and adult classes in English. Parents were encouraged to borrow dual language books. This was an important initiative in helping parents converse with their children in English and support them at homework time.

Difficulties encountered by the pupils

It was interesting that when asked about their favourite subject all of the primary seven favoured activity based lessons, Art, PE, ICT. This may have been at least partly because they were all boys but all of them identified problems with English. Many of the newcomer pupils made rapid progress in oral English and all of the primary seven group were fluent English speakers but written English and comprehension seemed to present difficulties to them. These difficulties translated into problems with reading. Such problems are understandable with English being a complex language where one word can have multiple meanings or two words which sound the same mean something entirely

different. Other difficulties involve understanding time and tense. It is clear that many of these pupils, even at Primary seven stage, still need a lot of help with reading and comprehension. Bullying emerged as an issue for some but it appeared to be based more on anticipating bullying in the post-primary school rather than the actual experience of bullying. There is a case for close liaison between the primary and post-primary schools in an area to reassure pupils about their safety and well-being with appropriate visits to the 'big school' to meet pupils as well as staff.

Issues for Teacher Education

The research does reveal some significant issues for teacher education. The principals and EAL Co-ordinator all stressed the importance of hands on experience working with EAL pupils. They suggested that student teachers need to spend some time in a school which has significant numbers of newcomer pupils, to observe the teaching learning strategies. Some of this time could be spent doing one to one work with a newcomer pupil, talking to them listening to them, finding out the process the child goes through when responding to a question in English finding out whether they translate it into Polish, think of the answer in Polish and then translate it back into English or think of the answer in English. Unfortunately at the moment it is a matter of chance whether a student gets the opportunity to do a placement in an EAL school. Some schools have significant numbers of newcomers, others have hardly any therefore much depends on where a student is placed for teaching practice. One solution would be to designate certain schools such as those in the case studies as training schools and plan for all students to do one practice or part of a practice in these schools.

The EAL Co-ordinator in schools B suggested that all student teachers should have to complete an English as an Additional Language course. At the moment in the College hosting the research, this course is an option, some do it but many do not. The case for integrating it into a training programme is very strong.

Within universities there is a case for utilising existing resources more fully in support of a diversity training programme. In the host institution, many of the indigenous students do placements abroad, some in Europe, others in Africa or the United States of America. The University College hosts a range of visiting international students, some recently from China. Some of these students do give presentations but they could contribute more fully to a diversity course examining the cultures, beliefs and traditions of their home countries. Greater collaboration between the universities and the Inclusion and Diversity Service would also strengthen the university training programmes.

References

Department of Education (2005) *Review of English as an Additional Language (EAL) Final Report.*

Department of Education (2006) *English as an Additional Language (EAL) Consultation Final Report.*

Department of Education and Science (2008) *Response to EU Green Paper: Migration and Mobility; Challenges and Opportunities for EU Education Systems.*

Department of Education (2010) *Supporting Newcomer Pupils.*

Good Friday Agreement (1998) Northern Ireland Office.

McGorman E. and Sugrue C. (2007) *Intercultural Education: Primary Challenges in Dublin 15, Dublin: Department of Education and Science*

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Consultation (2010) OFMDFM.

Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-2010, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).

The Northern Ireland Curriculum (Primary) (2007) CCEA, Belfast.

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) NCCA.