Exploring the Views of Mainstream Primary Class Teachers supporting Children Learning English as an Additional Language

Elma Shalloo
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Why?

- Explore how current primary school systems support our EAL learners
- Central contributor to second language development
- Better understand the educational experiences for pupils learning EAL through their class teachers perspectives
- Equality of opportunity  Equality of outcome
Aims of research

- To identify their knowledge base in relation to second language acquisition
- To explore what factors they felt supported or impeded the learning and development of English for these learners
Literature Review

2 overarching themes

1. Extent to which EAL learners are accommodated within the mainstream classroom

2. Greatest areas of challenge in engaging with EAL learners
1. EAL learners accommodated within mainstream classroom

- How class teachers position their practices relative to the curriculum
- Negotiating interactions with Language support specialists
- Pedagogical considerations for EAL learners
2. **Areas of greatest challenge in supporting EAL learners in mainstream**

- Practice lacking theoretical grounding
- Lack of suitable resources
- Discerning delays in language development from learning delay
- Assessment: Individual, class testing
- Communication with parents
Unique contribution

• Looking at the language development of Advanced Learners of EAL

Particular context of the Republic of Ireland

• Class teachers all have experience of acquiring and teaching an L2 (Irish) as a fundamental part of the primary curriculum

• The dramatic changes in patterns of migration observed in Ireland over the past 20 years.
The Irish context

- Shift from a country of net emigration with limited experiences of cultural diversity

  - Celtic Tiger
  - Unemployment low of 3.9% in 2001
  - Issuance of work permits soars
  - Increased numbers of asylum seekers
  - May 2004, EU largest single expansion
How did the Irish Education system respond?

- Jan 2000 initiated funding schemes
- Temporary posts of English Language support teachers
- Limited one-time start up grant
- English language support strictly limited to 2 years
- IILT to devise strategies and resources
Additional Language Learners

- EAL

- Bilingual

- Advanced learners of EAL
Linguistic diversity

Prevalence of EAL learners in school populations

Ireland: 10% of Primary population (2008/09)

England: 1 in 6 primary pupils

Scotland: 3.2%

Wales: 6.7%

Northern Ireland: 3.2%

(NALDIC, 2013)
What do we know about Second Language Acquisition?

- Language Acquisition Device & Universal Grammar (Chomsky, 1957; 1965)
- Inter-language System (Selinker, 1972)
- No empirical evidence of a ‘sensitive period’; rather monotonic decline with age (Chiswick & Miller, 2008)
- Implicate more centrally socio-linguistic factors resulting in observed differences
3 Crucial Variables associated with SLA

- Language Input
- Language Transfer
- Socio-linguistic considerations
Language Input

- Krashen (1981)
- Comprehensible input
  - input they can comprehend structured at a level just beyond that with which they are currently familiar
- Comprehensible output (Swain & Lapkin, 1995)
  - need or desire to communicate intrinsic. Pushed in terms of production
Language Transfer

- Connection between the first and second languages

- CUP: base between languages that supports tasks requiring greater cognitive resources
Language Transfer

- 2 distinct aspects of Second Language Proficiency
  - BICS  Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
  - CALP  Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
- Understood to follow different developmental patterns
Cummins Threshold Hypothesis (1979)
Language Transfer

How long?

‘fully competitive in the academic uses of English with age-equivalent native English-speaking peers’ (Hakuta et al., 2001, p.1)

4 to 8 years of English instruction across all subject areas
Language Transfer

Thomas & Collier (2001)

Examined attainment of EAL pupils relative to their monolingual peers based on

- Length of residence
- Point of entry into English-medium schooling
Socio-linguistic Considerations

• At Individual level
  Krashen (1981) socioaffective filter

• At the level of groups
  Ogbu (1992) culturally patterned educational strategies
Thomas & Collier (1997) Prism Model
The Current Research

Aims

Unique aspects
- Advanced Learners of EAL
- Dramatic change in levels of linguistic diversity during teaching careers
- Grounding in SLA of Irish teachers required to teach a heritage language
- Limited or no training related to supporting English as an additional Language. Reactive planning from DES
Method

- Critical Realist Stance
- Qualitative Interviewing
- Semi-structured interviews
- 5 Participants; Purposive Sampling
# Key Participant Information

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<th>Teacher</th>
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<th>Ethos</th>
<th>EAL</th>
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<td>Faith-based</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>11 years</td>
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Data Analysis

- Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
- Scrutiny Techniques (Ryan & Bernard, 2003)
- Processing Techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)
- 8 Superordinate Themes: 5 to discuss
Language Learning Processes

- Language established; or Inferential capacity still developing
- Models of provision
- Drawing parallels with Irish
- Drawing on own experiences
- Role of L1
Within-child Factors & Place of Origin impacting on SLA

- Drive
- Sociability
- Reason for move & Priority gain from School
- Distinguishing based on perceived strengths or expectations
- Trust in systems
Academic Progress

- Written expression & understanding lagging oral fluency
- Maths
- Special Educational Need
- Achievement going forward
Interface between Language & Identity

- Primacy of L1
- Family’s role for English; Investment in English
- Recognition of attachment to and value of L1
Us & Ours/ Them & Theirs

- Early assimilation
- Irish; its role and its value
- EAL pupil as useful
- They are separate
In Conclusion…
Limitations

- Small-scale research
- Small sample size
- Distinct context of Republic of Ireland
- Examination of the system from the perspective of one group of stakeholders
Implications

- Insufficient grounding in principles of SLA/
  Faulty models
- Model of provision
- Extends considerations of language, identity
  and perceptions
Thank you for your attention

Any questions?
References & Bibliography


IILT (Integrate Ireland Language and Training), (2002). *English Language Teaching Materials based on units of work of the Primary Curriculum*. Dublin: IILT.


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