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Examining EAL policy and practice in mainstream schools

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While internationally there is a growing body of work investigating mainstreaming of English as an additional language (EAL), this topic has not featured strongly in research in the United Kingdom, and there are only a few studies that focus on the extent to which government policies and prescriptions concerning EAL students are actually being implemented in everyday practice. Addressing this gap, the current paper gives an account of the findings of a study which involved 22 student-teachers reporting on their observations concerning EAL policies and practices, across 66 placements in 47 schools in eight local authorities and in five independent schools. These student-teachers had taken part in an EAL course which sensitised them to issues surrounding EAL learners in mainstream classrooms and positioned them as informed observers. Their reports appear to reveal that the needs of EAL learners across Scotland are not being met to a sufficient degree, despite the fact that legislation is in place which requires local authorities and schools to ensure that all learners have appropriate access to the curriculum. Possible reasons for this state of affairs and ways in which progress could be achieved are considered in the concluding discussion.

Keywords: EAL; mainstreaming; secondary schools; policy and practice

Introduction

There is a growing body of literature that focuses on the needs of, and challenges faced by, English as an additional language (EAL) learners, and this has strengthened considerably our understanding of how to support school students who are learning EAL (e.g. Hall 1992; Bernstein 1996; Mohan, Leung, and Davison 2001; Colombi and Schleppegrell 2002; Statham 2008; Edwards 2009; Leung and Creese 2010; Hawkins 2011). Internationally, the body of research into mainstream schooling for EAL students has increased significantly over the past decade (see Andrews 2009 for a detailed review of current research) but within the United Kingdom there is a dearth of relevant studies, particularly within the Scottish context. In addition, existing research has tended to focus on primary rather than secondary schooling (Andrews 2009). In the United Kingdom, secondary school teachers must be qualified to degree level, undertake an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) qualification and then complete a period of one year as a probationary teacher. We are not aware of papers that explore the conceptual underpinnings of EAL courses on ITE programmes. Crucially, for the focus of this current paper, there is a paucity of information on the extent to which government policies and prescriptions concerning EAL students are actually being implemented in everyday practice.

The present paper addresses this gap by reporting on one element of a wider study. The participants in this study selected an optional EAL course as part of their Professional
Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary) (PGDE[S]). This course, by sensitising student-teacher participants to issues surrounding EAL learners in mainstream classrooms, positioned them as informed observers as they undertook their mandatory school placement experiences. This therefore allowed an exploration of the degree to which EAL policy was being implemented, and into the nature of EAL practices, across a wide range of schools. A detailed account of the particular conceptual frameworks that shaped and informed the EAL optional course and the ways in which student-teachers were employed as observers of policy and practice will be provided in later sections of the paper.

Setting the study in context, the paper begins by examining past and current national legislation for EAL provision before turning to local authority (LA) and individual secondary school arrangements. This is followed by a brief account of how EAL specialist teachers and Bilingual Learning Assistants (BLAs) are trained in Scotland. An outline of the university-based PGDE(S) programme and a more extended description of the conceptualisation and design of the specialist EAL Curriculum Extension are provided. These set the scene for the presentation of key features of the study’s design and methods. Findings from the study are then reported, and implications of these findings are considered.

Background

In Scotland (following the Education [Scotland] Act of 1981), as is also the case in England (following recommendations from the Swann Report 1985, and the Calderdale Education Authority review of EAL provision 1986), the key principle that guides the education of EAL students is that: ‘they should be educated in the mainstream classrooms alongside their peers to avoid segregated provision and to guarantee equal access to the curriculum’ (Harris and Leung 2011, 251). In the last decade, a series of policy guidelines has been published setting out how LAs, schools and teachers are expected to take ahead the mainstreaming agenda. However, as Andrews (2009) notes, despite this series of successive legislative, curricular, advisory and quality assurance documents over the past two decades, successful mainstreaming of EAL students has not been achieved.

The Standards in Scotland’s Schools Act (Scottish Executive Education Department [SEED] 2000) places duties upon LAs to ensure that schools meet the needs of all their pupils, encourage them to achieve their full potential and raise educational standards. The right of children and young people to receive additional support, should they require it, is enshrined in legislation and in a series of subsequent publications and curricular arrangements. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (HMSO 2004), which offers a wide definition of additional support, notes that: ‘bilingual learners can be included if they require additional support to that which might normally be provided in a school to ensure that they make good progress in their learning’ (27). The 2004 Act argues that: ‘schools have a key role to play in maximising the potential of bilingual learners . . . and should be proactive in addressing the learning needs, and raising the achievement of bilingual learners’ (27). The Scottish Executive’s Supporting Children’s Learning: Code of Practice (SEED 2005) offers advice to schools and others on implementing the terms of the Act. In the same year, when the 2004 Act became legislation, the education system in Scotland began a series of major curricular reforms known as Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). CfE stresses that, ‘the curriculum should enable all young people in Scotland to develop as: successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens; and effective contributors’ (SEED 2004). The report Learning in 2(+) Languages (Learning and Teaching Scotland [LTScotland] 2005), when advising on how best to implement CfE in ways that support bilingual learners, recommends that:
In implementing CfE, schools should build on pupils’ learning and achievements, within and beyond school. Bilingual learners have a number of particular strengths including their experience of different languages. However, some will require additional support if they are to maximise their progress in school and achieve to their fullest potential. (LTScotland 2005, 8)

This report identifies the following key issues as important when working with bilingual learners: effective teaching and learning, communication with parents, valuing and promoting home language and staff support and development. We turn now to review the training of mainstream, specialist EAL teachers and BLAs in Scotland.

Training of mainstream teachers and EAL specialists in Scotland

Striking current lacunae in policy guidelines are the omission of EAL as a required area of attention in the training of mainstream teachers, and the lack of set standards concerning the training of EAL teachers and normative specifications of the role of the EAL teacher. Looking first at the training of mainstream teachers, EAL in Scotland and England is not regarded as a subject in its own right in ITE and thus does not feature as a formally required element of the ITE curriculum.

In Scotland, mainstream secondary school teachers must first complete a specialist degree in a particular subject, usually lasting four years, and then undertake a one-year PGDE(S) in secondary education. (At the time of writing, only one university in Scotland offers a degree in which students study both a specialist subject and education concurrently and can qualify as secondary teachers after four years.) In contrast to mainstream teachers who must meet the benchmarks for ITE at the end of their initial training year, and for the Standard for Full Registration at the end of the probationary year, there are no specific benchmarks within the Scottish educational system that specify the competencies that an EAL teacher, or those working with EAL students, should have. However, universities offer qualifications at either certificate or diploma level for mainstream teachers who wish to become an EAL teacher. This is the LAs’ preferred route for those teachers who wish to work with EAL students, although it is not mandatory. There are also many BTAs who work to support EAL students and teachers within mainstream classroom contexts. There are no formal qualifications required by LAs for BTAs, but most LAs require a high level of competency in both first and second languages, along with experience of teaching in educational contexts. BTAs possess a wide range of qualifications and experience, and some hold teaching qualifications from their own country. Each LA is responsible for providing induction and preliminary training for BTAs once they are recruited; in other words, there is no mandatory national training or detailed specification of the role.

Monitoring of quality and progress

Quality of provision in schools in Scotland is determined by Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Education (HMIE) and, prior to such inspections, schools are required to complete the self-evaluation document How Good is Our School (SEED 2006). To help with the completion of Part 4 of this document, Inclusive education: Evaluating educational provision for bilingual learners, a guide is provided for head teachers, senior managers, teachers, specialist EAL staff and education authority officers. This guide highlights effective ways in which schools can fully support bilingual learners. A series of what are termed Quality Indicators are used to evaluate provision: overall quality of attainment; pupils’ learning experiences; meeting pupils’ needs; assessment as part of teaching; links with LA or other managing body,
other schools, agencies and employers; partnership with parents, the school board and the community; and staff review and development.

Within the new Scottish CfE framework, the same curriculum specifications and assessment criterion statements are used for both learners for whom English is their first language, and students for whom English is an additional language. A few schools provide separate classes for students studying for English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) qualifications. To monitor and record the progress of EAL learners, each student must have an EAL Profile of Competence for each line of development of language at each age band and stage of English. Copies of the relevant recording sheet should be made for each student who is learning EAL. It is recommended that Profiles be updated at least twice each year at a liaison meeting between the EAL teacher and class or subject/support teacher. The timing of this process should be arranged to coincide with other school additional support for learning (ASL) planning processes. Progress should be monitored on the basis of observations and formative assessments made of the student’s language development. The Profile is intended to be passed on each year to the student’s next class teacher and should also follow the student at points of transition to other stages and locations of schooling, for example from primary to secondary, typically at the age of 11 in the United Kingdom. A central thrust of the current study in the interviews with participants following their three school placements was to determine the extent to which legislative and curricular imperatives were apparent in the day-to-day experiences of the mainstream teachers and EAL students with whom they were working.

**The PGDE(S) programme**

The PGDE(S) programme on which the student-teacher participants in this study were matriculated is structured using three key strands: Curriculum Studies (which includes school placement experiences), Professional Studies and Curriculum Extension courses. As part of the Professional Studies strand, all PGDE(S) students attend four Literacy Across the Curriculum lectures in which the linguistic demands of their specialist subjects are analysed. Thereafter students attend cross-subject seminars where they have the opportunity to examine a wide range of genres of texts and to identify the complex demands they make on readers.

While attention is given to literacy demands across the secondary school curriculum, it has been noted that EAL in Scotland and England is not regarded as a subject in its own right in ITE. However, within the PGDE(S) programme described in this study, a Curriculum Extension is offered as one of a group of optional strands to develop further student-teachers’ knowledge and understanding of educational issues beyond their main specialist subject areas (Leung 2003). In these courses, more generic educational issues are explored with student-teachers from different subject areas. Students who take the EAL Curriculum Extension are therefore making a deliberate choice to learn more about this particular area of education. This is the first year that the PGDE secondary programme has offered a Curriculum Extension that enables student-teachers to consider the challenges and opportunities related to teaching students who are learning EAL within mainstream classroom contexts.

**Framing of the EAL Curriculum Extension**

Before we outline key areas of recent research in EAL that informed the course design and set out its underpinning conceptualisations of learning, language and literacy, it is necessary...
to highlight how the design was actuated by a concern that participants engaged with issues related to social justice. In particular, it was important to sensitise student-teachers to the experiences that students from ethnic minority backgrounds often face in school settings where deficit views of them (language) learners may limit their opportunities and potential for achievement (Kubota and Lin 2009). Providing the opportunity to explore critically such sensitive issues and to develop inclusive pedagogies creates the conditions for, ‘students and teachers to confront racism and other kinds of social injustice not only individually but ... collectively’ (Kubota and Lin 2006, 485).

Clearly it was important that the course was informed by key current areas of research and debate in EAL and that students were directed to central readings within this body of literature. Areas that were addressed here included the following:

- the challenges that many EAL students face in coping with a new – and often baffling – educational context with its different pedagogies and expectations (Colombi and Schleppegrell 2002; Leung and Creese 2010);
- issues which prevent inclusion (Bearne and Marsh 2007);
- important cultural differences and expectations of both EAL students and students who speak English as a first language (Hall 1992);
- EAL learners’ loss of identity within contexts where their lack of power and visibility is evident (Bernstein 1996; Statham 2008);
- issues related to equity and policy in terms of access to the curriculum (Edwards 2009; Hawkins 2011); and
- whether EAL students learn more readily in specialised EAL classes or in mainstream schools (Bernstein 1996; Franson 1999; Cummins 2001; Mohan, Leung, and Davison 2001; Leung 2003; Murakami 2008).

While it was essential that the course was appropriately informed by influential EAL literature, there was a need to avoid adopting an overly narrow EAL-centric approach. Accordingly, it was seen as necessary to establish the course on defensible theoretical understandings of the nature of learning and of literacy that were in turn clearly articulated to the student-teachers. EAL learners and learning were viewed from sociocultural perspectives on learning (Colombi and Schleppegrell 2002; Johnson 2009) that derive from the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981). Student-teachers were alerted to the nature of *linguistic/semiotic* tools and to their powerfully mediating effects on learning and action (Wertsch 1991, 1998); to the social processes that shape learning; to the intricate relationships between cultural tools, specific contexts and individual agency; and to the ways in which these cultural tools are imbricated in relationships of power.

The acquisition of literacy and critical literacy for EAL learners was not defined in narrow terms but rather drew upon wider conceptualisations in line with these sociocultural views of learning (Dozier, Johnstone, and Rodgers 2006; Provenzo 2006; Vasquez 2008). Consonant with sociocultural theories of learning, literacy was conceptualised not as a single set of global skills but rather as a set of *literacy practices* which were differentiated in relation to purpose, context and genres of texts (Gee 1990; Cairney 1995). In line with these broader definitions of literacy, the term *text* was defined in its widest possible sense to include both print and non-print texts. *Reading* a text and making meaning from it thus were viewed as a complex interaction between the producer, the reader and the text, with the reader drawing upon both linguistic and semiotic tools, often in collaborative social contexts (Cooper and White 2008). This focus on the development of literacy and critical literacy helped student-teachers to explore the kinds of pedagogic practices required to teach
their school students about how language is used to communicate particular worldviews; to engage critically with particular discourses operating within societies; and to understand the ‘intricate relationships between [language], text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture’ (van Dijk 1997, 253).

**The EAL Curriculum Extension**

The preceding paragraphs have delineated the key bodies of research which informed the development of the Curriculum Extension course and have outlined how sociocultural perspectives on learning and literacy shaped both conceptual framing and content. A key pedagogical strategy was to ensure that insights from research and theoretical perspectives were not simply presented to ‘raise awareness’ but were actively deployed to analyse texts, at the levels of lexis, grammar, meaning and genre, and explicitly drawn on in constructing content, activities and strategies for use on placement. To take this strategy ahead, the following overarching aims were devised:

- to sensitise and alert student-teachers to the ways in which their own specialist subject areas are encoded in language – as indeed are all subjects;
- to enable student-teachers to explore how sociocultural perspectives and practices inform and shape the use of language to convey meaning within particular school subjects and contexts; and
- to enable student-teachers to learn how to make effective use of this theoretical knowledge and to apply it to classroom pedagogic practices.

The EAL Curriculum Extension takes place in two-hour sessions in each of the 18 weeks the student-teachers are in the university. The emphasis on connecting theory with the specifics of textual analysis and practice in individual subject areas is pursued by means of:

- **gapped lectures** where theory is presented and students are then divided into groups to carry out tasks linked to the theoretical input;
- **debates** concerning EAL issues where students are asked to form arguments for and against the topic being explored; and
- **specific case studies** which students are expected to analyse through different ‘lenses’, such as the needs of the EAL pupils, of the classroom teacher, factors that will mediate the processes of linguistic acquisition, issues of teacher and pupil identity linked to support structures, etc.

Central to the course is the interlinked sequence of activities that feature in **workshop groups**. In these workshop groups, students first engage with readings on specific theoretical perspectives on second language acquisition and literacy and have to present a summary of the theory in a few slides. Then they are required to team teach an activity that addresses EAL matters within a specific subject, such as maths or history, and to demonstrate a direct link with the theory they have presented. This is followed by reflection on the teaching episode, where consideration is given to a range of factors in assessing its effectiveness, including what sociocultural, linguistic and general knowledge is needed for EAL pupils to engage successfully with the tasks they devised and the degree to which these tasks might enable EAL pupils to draw on first language literacy skills.
This approach provides opportunities for student-teachers to engage actively in collaborative group discussions, class presentations and microteaching. These activities allow them to explore and demonstrate ways in which they can bring together their theoretical understanding of language development of students who speak English as a first language, EAL learners and appropriate pedagogical approaches in integrated mainstream classes. There are two parts to the assessment of the EAL Curriculum Extension. The first is the formatively assessed group presentation of a classroom-based task, linking theory and practice that has been described in the preceding section on workshop groups; the second is a summatively assessed essay based on a detailed lesson plan for a clearly specified group of learners in a multilingual classroom context. This plan needs to:

- relate to their specialist subject area;
- be appropriately informed by a theoretical framework or frameworks encountered on the course;
- engage with a major substantive focus of the course (e.g. vocabulary development, literacy practices);
- have a focus on at least one of the skills of reading, writing, speaking or listening; and
- display an integrated treatment of the preceding elements in this list.

Students need not only to provide a rationale for this plan but also to evaluate it, supporting their discussion of the plan’s rationale, activities and evaluation with appropriate reference to the academic literature. The evaluation of the plan is expected to display an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed texts and activities, and of their appropriateness to the specified context.

It is the intention to give a detailed picture of students’ evaluation of the EAL Curriculum Extension in a following paper. Here it is sufficient to note that there were high levels of expressed satisfaction with the course. Seventeen of the 22 (77%) student-teachers rated the EAL Curriculum Extension as ‘very useful indeed’ and five rated it as ‘useful’ (23%). The participants noted the many approaches they had learned during the course which they had used successfully while on placement, and a significant number recognised that such pedagogies were equally useful for mainstream as well as EAL learners and, with appropriate support and differentiation, these pedagogies could be adapted effectively to be used with all learners in mixed-ability multilingual classrooms.

Method
The research reported here took place in a Scottish university with a long tradition in preparing both primary and secondary school teachers. The research questions addressed in this paper focused on delineating the student-teachers’ perceptions of:

1. their EAL-related experiences during three placements over the academic session and the EAL practice they observed in schools;
2. factors that facilitate/constrain mainstream teachers in their efforts to support EAL students; and
3. mainstream teachers’ awareness of national and LA policies on EAL provision.

A separate paper is under construction that gives a fine-grained account of the EAL course, its pedagogy and students’ evaluation of its usefulness. (It should be noted that
respondents will be interviewed again on two further occasions: after six months in post and after 12 months. These interviews will focus on their developing practices in relation to EAL learners.)

**Student-teacher participants**

From a possible 25 student-teachers who opted for the EAL course, 22 agreed to participate (88%), 17 female (77%) and five male (23%). There were seven student-teachers studying English (32%); four mathematics (18%); five modern languages (23%); one geography (5%); and five history (23%).

**Placement experiences**

The student-teachers’ three placement experiences are evenly spread across the academic session, and a central driver of placement choice is to ensure that over the course of the year student-teachers work in schools which serve contrasting socio-economic communities. Given that the study involved students providing their perceptions of how EAL policy was being implemented, and that such implementation could potentially vary between LAs and across individual independent schools, it is necessary to present the distribution of placements by LA and independent schools. The first two placement experiences last for six weeks, and the third lasts for five weeks. Table 1 shows that in total, students were placed in eight different LAs and five independent fee-paying schools (all five were in the same geographical area). Overall there were 47 different schools involved. In total, there were 66 placement experiences. Only one student-teacher returned to the same school in a subsequent placement. Tables 1 and 2 show the placement distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local authority (LA)</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Maths</th>
<th>Modern languages</th>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Total number in each authority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>53</td>
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</table>

Table 1. Placement distribution by authority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent school (IS)</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Maths</th>
<th>Modern languages</th>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Total number in each independent school</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
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</table>

Table 2. Placement distribution by independent school.
Student-teacher interviews

Semi-structured interviews of between 35 and 45 minutes were conducted during June 2011. These interviews addressed the research questions set out in a preceding section. The student-teachers’ role as observers on practice and policy in the schools where they were on placement requires some comment. It is recognised that gaining a picture of policy and practice in these schools by these means could not provide the rigour of investigation that a closely focused set of observations in a selected number of schools could achieve, and we have been alert to this fact in analysing and reporting the findings. At the same time, however, gaining participants’ perceptions of EAL policy and practice in the schools where they were based did allow a strong sense of how EAL policy was unfolding in quite a large number of schools (47) of contrasting types.

Interviews were conducted in private staff offices using an agreed set of questions, with additional prompts and probes developed through a piloting process with one interviewee. There was thus a substantial corpus of interview data to analyse. Interviews considered: participants’ views on the usefulness of the university-based EAL course, and suggestions for improvement; taking each of the three placements in turn, student-teachers’ awareness of an authority/whole-school/departmental policy on supporting EAL learners and how such policies were being used to structure learning and teaching; good practice in relation to EAL learners; factors which facilitated/constrained mainstream teachers; support from specialist EAL teachers; participants’ views on who was responsible for EAL provision in mainstream schools and on how well each school was fulfilling these responsibilities; strategies and approaches covered in the EAL course that they used successfully/less successfully in their own teaching; and particular issues that arose as a result of the specific subjects they were teaching.

All interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed for analysis. When transcribing the interviews, we remained very alert to issues surrounding transcription highlighted in the methods literature (e.g. Atkinson 1992; Riesmann 1993) and we returned regularly to the recordings themselves to ground our interpretations. Analysis involved the researchers in individual repeated reading and re-reading of the transcripts, before coming together to discuss emerging themes in order to enhance inter-coder agreement or ‘interpretive convergence’ (Saldana 2009, 27). Constant comparison was used to identify areas of similarity and difference (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Charmaz 2006). The interview questions were used as the analytical frame, supplemented by additional open coding. Regular meetings were held to explore convergent and divergent patterns observed in the responses.

Ethical considerations

Close attention was given to issues of anonymity and confidentiality at the stage of analysis and reporting and to ensuring that participants, LAs and individual schools could not be identified. Further, although the student-teachers had agreed to be involved in this research, we did not feel that, given the unequal relations between students and academic staff and that these students’ assignments for the EAL course were being assessed, this sufficiently dealt with the question of consent. Accordingly, we ensured that the timing of the interviews meant that all the student-teachers’ assessments had been completed. We also heeded Macfarlane’s (2004, 2008) advice on the importance of foregrounding the relationship between the researcher and the participants, and considered carefully the qualities that the ethical researcher should seek to exhibit in such relationships.
Findings

Local authority, whole-school and departmental policies on EAL

On the 53 different placement experiences across different authorities, only five student-teachers’ attention was explicitly drawn to the LA’s policy on the support of EAL learners. Three student-teachers placed at different times in one independent school (IS2) were made aware of how the school sought to meet the legislative requirements. Six in total were made aware of whole-school policies (three in state school placements and the remaining three in IS2). No student-teacher reported that they had been given copies of departmental policies, though several explicitly sought them. However, although the student-teachers were not given school or departmental policy documents, a number reported exchanges with teachers which suggest that several departments did indeed have policies in place but these did not appear in formal documentation. It may also be the case that such documents existed, but for some reason were not shared with student-teachers. Whatever the explanation, it was certainly the case that the student-teachers were allowed to complete many of their placement experiences without being familiarised with the formal arrangements that had been put in place at LA, school or departmental levels for working with the EAL students in their classes. Apart from student-teachers placed in IS2, the remainder were not made aware of who in the school had overall responsibility for EAL learners, and the accepted wisdom of schools in a significant majority of cases appeared to be that their needs were the responsibility of the Support for Learning department (SfL). Thus, in the minds of teachers, the needs of students with additional learning needs were conflated with those students for whom English was an additional language.

SfL and EAL

Student-teacher 3 captured neatly the frequently expressed opinion that almost ‘by default’ responsibility for EAL learners’ progress in their placement schools lay with the SfL department: ‘... [they were] kind of lumped in together with ... dyslexia issues ... it was definitely kind of left to Support for Learning’. In other words, linguistic needs were associated with learning difficulties and lack of overall school policy appeared to result in little understanding of what the needs of such students actually were. When asked about arrangements in the schools for supporting EAL learners, student-teacher 20 noted that: ‘how [she] understood it, it was attached to Learning Support ... it was just addressed as a need’. It was also the case that some student-teachers observed EAL students being placed with students with behavioural difficulties: ‘they were in mainly the ... rougher classes ... I definitely do think that ability-wise and behaviour-wise they were probably at the top end of the class’ (Student-teacher 5).

The responses presented in the preceding paragraphs reflect clearly the concerns and unease expressed by many student-teachers either that EAL and special educational needs (SEN) were erroneously viewed as the same thing or that many schools and teachers made little or no effort even at the most basic of levels to find out what the needs of EAL learners actually were. This is expressed succinctly in the following extract where the participant shares his anxiety that inaccurate assumptions on the part of the teacher can cause difficulties for EAL learners: ‘because the EAL learner can speak a bit of English that means they are going to cope with the language and their subject content area’ (Student-teacher 11).

Several participants expressed anxiety that although EAL students may have little or no knowledge of English when they arrive in mainstream schools, this does not mean that they know nothing at all about language, and effective teaching should find ways to draw upon
the language knowledge that EAL learners bring to the classroom. The need to move away from a deficit model of viewing EAL learners, and to ensure appropriate EAL provision that focuses on language acquisition and bilingual development, has been discussed by several key writers and in recent reports (Institute of Education [IoE] 2009). Summarising their 2009 case study research, the IoE concluded that:

often EAL is understood to be part of the work of the SEN team and is often managed by the SENCO (special educational needs co-ordinator). There seems to be a lack of clarity in distinctions between EAL and SEN with the consequence that there are often no clearly-identified recent criteria for identifying the language needs of pupils. (IoE 2009, 13)

Reports on practice

While a few student-teachers reported that they had encountered some good – and in very few cases some excellent – pedagogical practices when observing mainstream teachers, the majority described a situation whereby there appeared to be little or no specific and focused support given to EAL learners. What they characterised as good teaching was almost always expressed in terms of the ability of the teachers to differentiate; to scaffold students’ learning; to use teacher modelling and models of how to approach certain tasks; to provide differentiated worksheets; to use simple – though not simplistic – language; to create collaborative rather than individual tasks which offered peer support; to provide targeted teacher support, a wide variety of stimuli including both print and other media, flexibility in pacing; and genuinely making an effort to include and involve the EAL learners in the class. Many participants were well aware of the fact that they were drawing extensively on their subject specialist pedagogies covered in university to supplement and complement the specialist input they had received from the EAL course, and they did not understand why practising teachers were not similarly making more effective use of their existing expertise. English and modern language student-teachers in particular expressed such views, though social subject teachers also highlighted what they viewed as transferable skills.

In interview, participants indicated that although there were BTAs or EAL teaching assistants in many schools, and in some, there were visiting EAL specialist teachers, they seldom came across any member of these three groups and there were few if any opportunities to discuss the EAL students’ progress with them. Student-teacher 7 described her distinctly contrasting experience within School A:

An EAL assistant came in [to class] once a week . . . of twenty students six of them were EAL. I didn’t have EAL support in any of my other three classes though there were lots of EAL kids. Whenever I asked any questions she had lots of information about strategies for me to employ. The EAL assistant seemed to have quite a close relationship with the pupils . . . she knew their needs . . . there was parents’ night coming up and she actively sought to get all of their parents in . . . she sat beside them and ensured they understood what was happening . . .

Only two students were placed over the year in this LA, both in the same school, and this quotation from one of them represents the most positive response from the 22 interviewees regarding support from, and interaction with, BTAs/EAL teaching assistants across the 66 placements.

In stark opposition to her positive account of one of the four classes in school A, student-teacher 7 described her subsequent placement in a school in LA 1 (where more than 50% of the total number of placements were):

. . . [there were] loads and loads of EAL students throughout the school . . . all levels . . . and absolutely nothing. No help whatsoever. And then funnily enough an inspection was coming
up and all these people started coming out of the woodwork and the kids had no idea who they were . . . we’d have e-mails coming through with learning plans for EAL students . . . they were supposed to have arrived at the beginning of the year and this was February . . . some of them were two years out of date . . . I had one class for six weeks and the EAL assistant arrived on the second last day and the kids said they’d seen her maybe a couple of times in their whole school career so from the first year they’d had no input.

While provision may indeed be thin on the ground in many schools, it would seem to be the case that provision can be found when there is an imperative to do so. When inspections are on the horizon, it appears to be possible to be markedly more visible, involved and useful. The facts here speak for themselves.

**Inhibiting and facilitating factors for mainstream teachers working with EAL learners**

For many participants, responses to this question centred around mainstream teachers’ lack of knowledge and confidence: ‘the teachers simply don’t know what to do’ (Student-teacher 14); ‘the professional knowledge that I’d been getting from the course . . . just wasn’t being implemented’ (Student-teacher 4); and ‘they pretty much gave them work and left them to it with absolutely nothing’ (Student-teacher 7). Lack of in-service training (continuing professional development [CPD]) was viewed as a major problem: ‘there was nobody who seemed to be particularly clued up’ (Student-teacher 3) and ‘I mean it’s just lack of knowledge. If there was a bit of CPD on EAL then I’m sure it would all click into place’ (Student-teacher 19). Other themes centred around lack of LA, whole-school or departmental policies; teachers’ reported feelings of inadequacy; lack of time for planning; teachers’ unwillingness to take responsibility for either their own or EAL learners’ lack of understanding; and lack of regular contact with EAL specialists: ‘the EAL specialist was working with X, giving her some really good tools and I was learning from that . . . but it’s just not filtering through to classroom staff’ (Student-teacher 16).

**Whose responsibility?**

Every participant believed that all teachers have responsibility for EAL provision, and that the school and the LA have responsibility for ensuring that adequate CPD is in place. A significant majority noted that leadership is required and that this should start with the head teacher:

> It should start at the top and then filter down. I think . . . the school . . . all schools have a duty to have a defined policy whether that’s local authority policy and then filters down into schools and then into departments, and then into individual classrooms and teachers. (Student-teacher 17)

Such statements support Creese’s (2003) and Leung and Creese’s (2008) conclusion that national policy needs to be interpreted locally. Many participants articulated their responses in terms of social justice and the unequivocal rights of all learners, while others also highlighted the central importance of an appropriate school ethos in ensuring that the needs of all learners, including EAL learners and those with additional support needs, were met.

**Discussion**

We have noted earlier the need for a degree of caution in analysing and reporting these student-teachers’ observations on practice and policy in the schools where they were placed.
Nevertheless, their reports do seem to reveal that the needs of EAL learners across Scotland are not being met, despite the fact that legislation is in place which requires LAs and schools to ensure that all learners have appropriate access to the curriculum. That is not to say that there were no examples of ‘good practice’ observed in these placement schools, but rather that these student-teachers have completed their training year, with three different placements across a total of eight LAs, five independent schools, 47 different schools and 66 placement experiences in five subject areas (including English and modern languages), and have moved into their probationary year feeling that provision is patchy at best and non-existent at worst.

There could be several reasons for this situation. It may be, as Franson (1999) concludes, that national curricular documents which are meant to be for all learners have allowed LAs, mainstream schools and departments to abdicate responsibility for EAL learners and assume that SfL or EAL teachers, or EAL or bilingual teaching assistants, will take over and fill the void. It may be that ITE programmes need to be completely revised to ensure that all student-teachers understand at least something about how to support EAL learners. It may be that there should be a requirement that all EAL teachers are formally qualified to teach EAL at secondary levels. It may be that we need much more systematic training for bilingual and EAL assistants to ensure that they have a good basic understanding of language learning and how a second language is acquired. It may be that we need to reconsider mainstreaming in its current form and accept that for many EAL learners immersion without appropriate curricular frameworks is not working. And finally, it may be that there needs to be an extensive long-term mandatory in-service training programme for existing mainstream teachers which recognises that, apart from those in English and modern languages, few teachers are confident in their ability to be responsible for mainstream learners’ language and literacy development let alone EAL learners’ language acquisition and development. We require to heed Bernstein’s (1996) caution that if we continue with current practices, we are perpetuating a situation whereby large numbers of learners are simply rendered invisible.

In summary, it is necessary to acknowledge that this is an ever-growing challenge in our schools and that we need to do something about it. Such conclusions concur with the main findings reported in the recently published European Core Curriculum for Mainstreamed Second Language Teacher Education (European Core Curriculum for Inclusive Academic Language Teaching [EUCIM-TE] 2010) report.

The success of the 36-week EAL curricular extension described very briefly in a preceding section is testimony to what can be achieved in a densely packed ITE programme over a relatively short period of time when close attention is given to conceptualisation, design and delivery. It is desirable that such a course is taught by an enthusiastic specialist in the field who crucially can bring together theory and practice in ways that make sense to student-teachers from different subject specialist backgrounds. As a cautionary note here, however, these positive reactions came from student-teachers who had opted for this course, and there might have been a wider spread of reactions had the course been a mandatory element for all members of this PGDE(S) cohort. Johnston and Goettsch (2000) argue that one reason for the perceived failure of some ITE programmes and courses is that they are structured in such a way as to be unhelpful to student-teachers, who struggle to make useful connections between component parts. These researchers recommend: ‘a significantly more integrated approach to the . . . teacher curriculum . . . in which connections are made across . . . knowledge, methodology and articulations of how learners learn’ (463). Within this EAL course, these connections were clearly made for the students who rated it so highly. However, as we have just noted, this was an optional Curriculum Extension and 25 students from a possible 168 in the entire PGDE(S) cohort opted to take it, which means that the
other 143 student-teachers from the 2010–2011 PGDE(S) programme completed their ITE year having had only one one-hour lecture on supporting EAL learners. As Andrews (2009) reports, this situation is replicated in many other PGDE(S) programmes across the United Kingdom.

Hadjioannou and Hutchinson (2010, 92) propose that what is required is: ‘long-term theoretical coursework combined with authentic, hands-on experiences, such as [in]-service learning . . . to prepare teachers who have both adequate content and methodological knowledge to teach [language] effectively’. This bringing together of pre-service and in-service preparation, and theory and practice, is also supported by Swick and Rowls (2000) and Buchanan, Baldwin, and Rudisill (2002). Such conclusions resonate with the recommendations of the recently published Teaching Scotland’s Future – Report of a Review of Teacher Education in Scotland (The Donaldson Report) (Scottish Executive Education Department 2011), which states in Section 3: Recommendation 3 – Continuum of Teacher Education, that:

Teacher education should be seen as and should operate as a continuum, spanning a career and requiring much better alignment across and much closer working amongst schools, authorities, universities and national organisations. (SEED 2011, 9)

Although ITE could certainly have a positive impact on pre-service and in-service teachers’ understanding of how to support EAL learners, and on their understanding of effective pedagogies, in real terms there is only so much that can be achieved in an already over-packed ITE curriculum. LAs, school head teachers and departmental heads need to work closely together with ITE providers to try to find a way of establishing a continuum of provision for pre-service and in-service teachers to help them to acquire and develop the skills, knowledge and understanding required to support the increasing number of EAL learners in our schools, make them visible and give them a voice to participate and a voice that is heard. Just as Hawkins (2011) argues, so do the participants in this study believe, that this is a matter of fairness, equity, inclusion and social justice.

Note

1. In Scotland, there are currently several ESOL qualifications: Access 2, Access 3, Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2 and Higher (see Scottish Qualifications Authority [SQA] website http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/5398.html). However, few schools are able to offer them as discrete subjects because of demands on time, because ESOL is not viewed as a ‘subject’ in the same way as English or Science is and because there are difficulties finding appropriately qualified staff to teach the ESOL courses at certificate levels. In England, there are adapted Level 1 assessment descriptors, and pre-level 1 assessment descriptors (see DfES 2003), but no formal external examinations.

References


Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED). 2006. *How good is our school? The journey to excellence*. Livingston, UK: HMIE.


