SCHOOL POLICY RESPONSES TO NEWLY ARRIVED BILINGUAL PUPILS -A TALE OF TWO MADEIRAN PORTUGUESE PUPILS

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1. Introduction

Outline of article

This article is a case study of an action research project focusing on developing responses to the language and learning needs of two Madeiran Portuguese EAL pupils in a primary school in the South Coast of England. It reports the outcomes of an observation study designed to investigate and develop school policy responses towards provision for bilingual pupils.

Why action research?

An action research approach was taken to the project, as this was felt most appropriate for participants who recognise the existence of shortcomings in their educational activities and who would like to adopt some initial stance in regard to the problem, formulate a plan, carry out an intervention, evaluate the outcomes and develop further strategies in an iterative fashion (Hopkins, 1985: 45). In short, action research was chosen, as it is intended to be a workable technique for practising classroom teachers.

Action research can be carried out by individuals or by teams of colleagues. The team approach is called *collaborative inquiry*. The study was a collaborative one, which involved me as a researcher; three class teachers and a learning support assistant (LSA).

According to Carr & Kemmis (1986) in McNiff (1988: 2):

> Action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants (teachers, students or principals, for example) in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations (and institutions) in which these practices are carried out.

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Although I was not normally a "participant" in this school and classroom context, I became one as my research developed. It was through my classroom observations and my role as a participant in collaborative research and informal interviews with teachers and the LSA that I developed "hunches" as to why the focus pupils behaved as they did and what "action" could be undertaken to respond to this. My research, therefore, became action research.

As action research has the potential to generate genuine and sustained improvements in schools, the collaborative study attempted "to improve the educational practice" of the teachers and the LSA "by means of their practical actions and by means of their own reflection upon the effects of those actions" (Hopkins, 1985: 44). It aimed to give educators new opportunities to reflect on and assess their teaching of newly-arrived EAL pupils; to establish their language development and learning needs; to explore and test new ideas, methods, and materials; to assess how effective the new approaches were; to share feedback with fellow team members; and to make decisions about which new approaches to include in the team's curriculum, instruction, and assessment plans.

This article is a case study of the action research project. The case study method focuses on holistic description and explanation. Case studies can be categorised by the epistemology of the researcher and research framework. Whatever the researcher's epistemology, "a case study is an appropriate strategy for answering research questions which ask how or why and which do not require control over the events" (Robson, 1993). Gall *et al*. (1966) "classify case studies by purpose, which they differentiate as description, explanation, or evaluation". When the purpose is descriptive, the researcher looks for constructs to organise the data and relate it to other research findings and for themes, which identify the salient features of a case. Robson (1993) defines the purpose of descriptive research as:

> The portrayal of an accurate profile of persons, events, or situations: this in turn requires extensive knowledge of the research subject in order to identify appropriate aspects on which to gather information.

Yin (1994: 23) cautions that "descriptive case studies should not be used simply to describe everything". The researcher has a responsibility to be selective in order to focus on answering the purpose of the study, including a full but realistic range of topics, which could be considered a complete description of what is being studied. This

study, though essentially descriptive, was also to some extent explanatory (see Gall *et al*., 1966), as one type of observed variation was systematically related to the other-the two pupils were related by virtue of their cultural and educational background. My personal judgements at the end of the article, based on my observation, also establishes an evaluative purpose to the study.

Yin (1994: 23) defines case study in terms of the research process as

> An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

Others focus on defining the unit of study, an entity around which there are boundaries that delimit what will be studied from what will not. Stake (1994, 1995) calls the case an integrated system, Smith (1978) uses the term "bounded system", and Miles & Huberman (1994: 25) refer to the case as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context".

In this study, there were specific teachers and LSAs who could be interviewed and the study was limited to the two Madeiran Portuguese pupils in the school. Considering the number of subjects involved, this case study is not generalisable but the outcome might give insights on school policy responses to newly-arrived EAL learners, their language development and learning needs, and put the ideas generated by the research to the test of practice. It reaffirms Sjoberg *et al*.'s (1991) assertion that "case studies of various strategic groups could provide insight into social change going on below the surface and among subgroups that may shape future events".

My action research was focused on two Madeiran Portuguese pupils, who I shall refer to as Carlos, aged five and in Year One, and Catarina, aged six years and in Year Two (for ethical reasons, not their real names), in an infant school on the South Coast of England. Both moved to England three years ago from Madeira.

Carlos' parents hail from the town of Camara de Lobos in the Madeira archipelago. Despite urging from the LSA at the school, his mother did not want him to come to school, explaining that she thought that he was still too young. She felt rather protective about him, mainly because he is an only child. However, it is also not normal experience in Portugal for five year olds to go to "mainstream" school, as they do not generally start compulsory schooling until the age of six, though some attend nursery school before this. As a result, Carlos had not gone to the reception class and Year One

was his first experience of school. In Madeira, Carlos' parents were peasant farmers. In UK, both Carlos' parents work in the vegetable nurseries found along the south coast. They work long hours, hence friends help with babysitting and bringing Carlos to school. The parents can still not communicate in English.

Catarina was, as indicated above, six years old and in Year Two. She had started school two years ago. The teachers at the school have described her as an 'elective mute', as she remains very quiet in the classroom and will only answer in a whisper if prevailed upon. Her competency in English is of a higher standard as compared to Carlos'. She had joined the school in the reception year and her parents had some limited competence in spoken English as her mother attended the Adult literacy classes that were conducted by one of the LSAs, who is also a teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

These pupils were "incipient" bilinguals –"the early stages of bilingualism where one language is not strongly developed" (Baker, 2000: 202). They had not acquired a sufficient level of proficiency in the second language (L2) to be regarded as fully bilinguals. They had acquired an age-appropriate competency in their L1 but were still in the rudimentary stages of English as their L2. They had acquired *basic interpersonal communicative skills* (*BICS*) (see Cummins, 1996: 58) in Portuguese (*almost certainly categorisable as their L1*) though with low levels of *cognitive/academic language proficiency* (*CALP*) (*ibid*.). English as their L2 was also at the first of the threshold stages, as described by Baker (2000: 166). As Baker (*ibid*.) points out:

> The thresholds theory partially summarises the relationship between cognition and the degree of bilingualism. It was first postulated by Toukomaa & Skutnabb-Kangas (1977) and by Cummins (1976).

For ethical reasons, which I shall explain further in the third section, I will call the focus school Shady Garden Infant School. The school has a total of 140 pupils and seven teachers. The pupils range from ages 4 to 6 years and the school has year groups from reception class up to Year 2, with an average of 25 pupils per class. The school consists of predominantly monolingual English speakers with isolated cases of bilingual pupils who are British-born and are fluent English speakers.

Main themes of the article

In this section of the article, I outline the background of the pupils under study. In the following section, I define the problem I faced as a non-participant observer and as a participant observer and highlight my own reflective intuition on my first visit to the school with reference to the kind of action I took to try to integrate Carlos (the younger of the two focus pupils) into the classroom activity.

The third section contains a general observation of the other children in the classroom to judge their response in lessons and make comparisons with Catarina (the second target pupil) and Carlos' progress. Results of interviews with teachers and Learning Support Assistants (LSA) are also discussed in this section.

According to Elliot (1973: 227) in Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000: 227):

> Action research combines diagnosis with reflection, focusing on practical issues that have been identified by participants and which are somehow both problematic yet capable of being changed.

Zuber-Skerritt (1996b: 83) suggests that "the aims of any action research project or programme are to bring about practical improvement, innovation, change or development of social practice, and the practitioners' better understanding of their practices". Hence in the action plan, arising from the initial stage of such research, the key issue is to integrate the insights derived from basic research with the development of practice. This is discussed in the fourth section and an effort is made to show how research was designed to carry forward and test these insights in a more applied programme of work.

The evaluation of the action's effectiveness, even though inconclusive, is synthesised with the conclusion in the last section of the article.

2. Background to the study

This section focuses on the two Madeiran pupils –Carlos and Catarina– as case studies. It attempts to give a detailed description of the integration of the two pupils into the school system with some comparisons between their individual responses.

2.1. Carlos

When he first started school, Carlos was very naughty and aggressive with the other children in the playground. The teachers and the LSA attributed this to the fact

that he had never been to school hence did not know how to behave with the other children. My own reflection was to the contrary. There were other children who were attending school for the first time and of the same age or older than Carlos but who had successfully integrated into the school system with other children without exhibiting such aggressive behaviour. These children were bilingual British-born and English monolingual children. Carlos' behaviour could have been as a result of culture shock: "the anxiety which results from losing all familiar signs of and symbols of social intercourse" (Oberg, 1960 in Kim, 1988: 23). Sears (1998) in her description of the adjustment processes of EAL pupils to new circumstances mentions the period of excitement, which she refers to as the honeymoon period, which is often followed by a sense of loss and lack of identity:

> There may be a time of depression, frustration and even aggression, as they (sic) come to terms with the reality of their new lives. This aggression typically surfaces when they are faced with a situation where lack of language and knowledge about the system place them at a disadvantage. Suddenly, everything about the new location is foolish, misguided and, above all, different. And, of course, not like home where everything was efficient and user-friendly.   (ibid. 12)

Despite having been in England for three years, Carlos could not speak English when he first started school. He could only speak Portuguese. The teachers' ideas may have been misconceived and there may have been a need for them to recognise and learn that such aggressive behaviour is likely among immigrant or EAL pupils during the adjustment process, especially if such pupils are "newly-arrived" in the UK school system.

In class, Carlos still had difficulty identifying letters and words. He could still not differentiate between colours even though he could spell the first three letters of his name. He was an active boy and was always willing to ask for assistance. However I noticed he was very fidgety and impatient to wait for the teachers' acknowledgement whenever he happened to know an answer to a question. It was no surprise that on several occasions the teacher or the LSA had to remind him to sit down or to stop shouting out possible answers. Carlos' lack of integration into the classroom and his response to the teachers and the other children was an indication that he had not adapted to the possibly unfamiliar educational ethos he was now in.

2.2. Catarina

Catarina could recognise words and letters without any difficulty. She could also recognise colours and her numeric skills were of the same level as most of the pupils in her class. I found out from the LSA that the moment Catarina stepped across the school threshold, she would be heard talking in a loud voice and occasionally she would even talk in her normal voice to the LSA so long as they were outside the school gates. As noted above, however, in class she was described as an "elective mute". The LSA was of the opinion that the Madeira Portuguese were generally very shy people and did not like communicating in English as they were embarrassed by their incompetence coupled with the fact that most of them had limited literacy skills. She further asserted that it had been instilled in the children that they had to speak English in school, not Portuguese hence they were reluctant to use their L1 in instances where they could not comprehend the word or sentence in English.

There are many factors that might influence the status accorded to minority languages. The general attitude in British schools and society in general towards particular languages can be extremely strong and there is a marked preference for some foreign languages over others. The status of minority languages is influenced by the socio-economic status of those who use them. As Alladina & Edwards (1991: 5) comment, "the bilingualism of the Gujarati or Panjabi or Hakka-speaking child is often undervalued or ignored". This contrasts with children speaking any of the major Western European languages like French, German, Spanish or Italian who ironically are encouraged to maintain fluency in those languages. The Portuguese language does not, however, seem to be accorded the same status, despite Portugal being a member state of the European Union. Martin-Jones & Santarita in Alladina & Edwards (1991: 229) observe that the Portuguese language has "a low profile, not only in countries where there are considerable numbers of Portuguese settlers, but also in Portugal itself". This is compounded by the types of work done by and consequent low socio-economic status of Portuguese migrant workers, especially those from Madeira. The Linguistic Minorities Project (LMP 1985: 107) which outlined the historical and sociolinguistic background of linguistic minorities in Britain reported that the 1960s saw an influx of Southern European migrant workers and that "the bilingual children of these workers were not perceived as a resource for the predominantly monolingual schools". According to Romaine (1994: 194):

> Bilingualism was, and still is, often cited as explanation for the failure of certain groups of children. It has been argued that it is counter-productive to the child's welfare to develop and maintain proficiency in more than one language.

Much of the early literature seems to show that bilingualism only exerts a negative influence on children's development. This conviction was for a long time *conveniently* (my emphasis) used to support policies of monolingual instruction in British schools.

My experience, in this study, however attributed these pupils' behaviour to the teachers' negative attitude, though this may, of course, in turn have been influenced by these wider variables. Teachers' attitudes towards their minority pupils' L1 have been identified as of crucial importance to the child's overall educational development and as Edwards (1983: 1) observes "[…] the linguistic diversity to be found in British schools rarely constitutes an educational problem but attitudes towards this diversity are of critical importance".

From the onset it was apparent that the teachers had low expectations of these pupils' progress. I could not elicit any important information about Catarina's progress from her class teacher. Her only response was:

> I wouldn't know of her performance as I only meet them in the afternoons and she never utters a word. But she seems quite happy on her own and the other children seem not to mind her presence. (MA 02/02)

This response from the class teacher triggered many questions in my mind. Why was Catarina reluctant to speak in class? Why was she only resigned to whispering to specific people (the LSA, myself and the EAL support teacher)? Did she feel intimidated in the presence of the other children? Was it a lack of self-esteem as claimed by the LSA? Was it attributable to the indifferent attitude of the teachers? Had she been a victim of cultural and linguistic discrimination by other children? These questions revolved around the cognitive, social and language needs of these pupils, which are important elements in strategies for supporting bilingual learners in schools. Catarina's reluctance to speak is mirrored in many bilingual pupils at the early stage of L2 acquisition. According to Ellis (1994: 83), "Many learners especially children opt for a silent period though (like Carlos) not all learners go through a silent period". It is also interesting to note, however, that:

> In many of the studies Krashen cites as providing evidence of a silent period, the learners were not, in fact, completely silent, but often produced some formulaic expressions right from the beginning. (Ellis, 1994: 83)

On the occasions I had worked with Catarina during Numeracy and Literacy sessions, she had responded in whispers without any persuasion. She was not completely silent as claimed by the class teacher, therefore.

Catarina's docile nature contrasted with Carlos' who actively participated in all the class activities despite his L2 acquisition being in its embryonic stages as compared to Catarina. He did not demand attention but his active participation made his presence felt among the teachers, LSAs and the other pupils, hence he could not fail to draw the attention of the class teacher, as Catarina had.

3. Defining the problem

The Head teacher introduced me to Carlos and Catarina on my first visit to the school. Although my first visit was intended to be a familiarisation tour, I ended up being a non-participant and subsequently a participant observer. It was during the literacy hour. Years One and Two were mixed together for the session. I was thus able to observe both Catarina and Carlos at the same time. I noticed that Carlos could not identify the words and letters written on the board and depended on what the other pupils said. He would wait until they had read out the letters and words and then repeat after them. He was still learning by observation. Catarina on the other hand had blended quite well and appeared to be following the session without difficulty.

During the second stage of the lesson, I was asked to work with Carlos on a one-to-one basis. The book I was given to assist Carlos with reading was of a higher level than he was capable of. I had the impression that it was a means of keeping Carlos occupied while the rest of the pupils continued with the required task. In this session there were no classroom assistants available to assist the "slow" learners hence my presence was an ideal opportunity to "*quell*" the difficulties such learners might cause. One of Kemmis & McTaggart's (1992: 22-5) in Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000: 229) summaries of the key principles of action research is that it *starts small*, by working through changes, which even a single person (like myself) (sic) can try,

> and work towards extensive changes-even critiques of ideas or institutions which in turn might lead to more general reforms of classroom, school or system-wide policies and practices.

It is a continuous process which involves observation as well as responding to children's work and echoes McNiff's (1988: 4) observation that:

Applied to classrooms, action research is an approach to improving education through change, by encouraging teachers to be aware of their own practice, to be critical of that practice, and to be prepared to change it. It is participatory, in that it involves the teacher in his (sic) own enquiry, and collaborative, in that it involves other people as part of a shared enquiry.

In this research, I was a participant observer, in that I was involved in the course of the action. Spradley (1980: 54) defines the participant observer as someone who:

[…] comes to a social situation with two purposes: 1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and 2) to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation.

In this study, I was an "insider" in the research context as well as an "outsider". Psychologically, I am an insider, as I am personally multilingual, a teacher and like the group under study a member of a minority. I am an outsider, however, as I am not British, I am not a Portuguese speaker and, as I am black, a member of a far more "visible" minority than the focus pupils. The dual role of participant observer combines the advantages of acting, responding and experiencing as an "insider" with the detachment provided by being an "outsider". The study thus yielded a description and analysis of teachers and LSA practices in this infant classroom. In the process, it explored the extent to which teachers and pupils shared an understanding of the nature and purpose of learning, drawing on and integrating a number of different theoretical perspectives.

In a bid to make learning more accessible, I decided to use a simple approach with Carlos by using the letters of the alphabet to ascertain which letters he could easily identify. I reinforced the letters by using familiar pictures of a dog, cat and rat to support understanding and memorisation of the letters. He could not identify most of the letters and the ones he correctly identified appeared to be through sheer guesswork. This I confirmed when I tried to revise the letters without the pictures and he could not read them. He was more interested in discovering what the other pupils were doing.

To ensure a supportive and stress-free environment in which language and learning can take place as, for example, Krashen recommends in Schutz (2001: 1):

The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the L2, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready' recognising that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input and not from forcing and correcting production.

Thus, I released Carlos to join the other groups when he became restless. I observed that he did not settle in any group but moved from one group to the other trying to impose himself in the activities to the chagrin of the other children. When the protests grew, he disappeared to the toilet. In later weeks I noticed this to be the trend whenever the going got tough for him. "A combination of the stress in an unfamiliar language is draining and it is important to give the L2 learner time to relax", Gifford (2000: 39). It turned out that on this occasion, the teacher had placed him in my "care" with a hope that he would be *kept busy* during the lesson whilst using my EAL training experience in providing learning support. As teachers we need first to assess what pupil are capable of in order to provide adequate support, however.

We also, though, need to be aware that any assessment is susceptible to bias. If a pupil is not able to perform as expected there could be a number of reasons. The concepts might be in place but the language may still be inadequate to express them. Learning might have been impeded by lack of understanding of the task or the explanation. A learner may not yet have the cognitive background to develop the new understanding, or have experiences and learning styles that lead him/her to approach it in a different way. So matching learning to need is a flexible and developing process. It was with this in mind that I carried out the task of providing support despite not knowing Carlos' own strengths and weaknesses or of those of the class in general. In situations like this, there is a need to analyse the learning and language demands of the classroom and activities we plan in order to organise and adapt them for our pupils. This being my first visit to the school, other than the sketchy information I had acquired from the head teacher concerning Carlos and Catarina, I had no knowledge of the general level of these two children or of the rest of the class to enable this process.

4. Focusing on action

I had no difficulty in choosing my sample for observation as the pupils under study were the only two Madeiran Portuguese children in the school. As I was mainly interested in investigating and developing school policy responses for such "bilingual pupils", I had to find out the kind of provision that was available for these pupils; whether they were conversant with the language used in delivering this provision; and what stage of English language acquisition they were at.

I had to select with care what to look at in order to identify the most useful and informative data for the study. In planning my investigating, I was aware of the complexities of social situations, which would not be of direct relevance to the study, hence I tried to focus on those aspects which were important as far as the issues raised above are concerned.

The pupils were seated in the classroom according to the ability levels of the children. According to McNiff (1988: 5):

> Action research is not just teaching. It is being aware and critical of that teaching, and using this self-critical awareness to be open to a process of change and improvement of practice. It encourages teachers to become adventurous and critical in their thinking, to develop theories and rationales for their practice, and to give reasoned justification for their public claims to professional knowledge.

In this regard, I was interested to discover whether the seating arrangement had any impact on pupil response in the classroom. The class teacher concentrated on the children with high ability whereas those with low ability worked with the LSAs. However, all pupils derived a sense of satisfaction when they got compliments from the class teacher rather than the LSA.

I tried to identify any significant objects or illustrations depicting the presence of other bilingual pupils in the school other than the Portuguese children under study. Of the objects that were displayed, did they convey messages to all pupils and teachers alike or only to a cross-section of pupils?

The interviews conducted with the teachers and LSA were informal and unstructured. They took place during coffee breaks, in the playground and in between conversations in the classrooms, corridors or staff room. My initial plan to arrange formal interviews with the teachers proved fruitless as they all pleaded lack of time.

4.1. Carrying out and recording the action

My classroom observations and interviews with teachers and LSA suggested some interesting findings. To avoid distortion or misinterpretation of data, I have used a descriptive method to provide a sound argument by relying on describing the events and the interviews for a more interesting and informative result.

In a literacy session, the pupils were mapping out the places they had visited within the school grounds. The teacher had gone round the school with the children the previous day pointing out all the places of interest. They had been reminded that they

would be required to remember them the following day in class. The words were written on the board as the pupils named them. Catarina could read and write the words in their appropriate places, whereas Carlos appeared quite helpless. As compared to a fortnight before, he could write his name without difficulty and was able to identify the colours red and green. Even though he couldn't write the words, however, he was not unusual. Most pupils in the group could not write them either. In Religious Education (RE) creativity sessions, I realised Carlos could not create anything out of the learning aids like other children, however. When I tried to encourage him with a foundation to build up on, he did not seem interested and was intent on trying something different. I paired him up with one of the other children for encouragement but this did not work either. Earlier on the teacher had expressed pessimism, because, unlike other children in the class, he had never managed to produce or create anything during the creative hour. My own observation was that he lacked the initiative and the patience. It is not clear whether it was due to uncertainty or lack of confidence. He still copied other pupils but was becoming more coherent in his speech. He was speaking in full sentences –with errors– and asking questions well. He also used common idioms and contractions such as "I'm sad". In a science lesson where they were required to draw themselves sleeping or sitting down as signs of "relaxation", he drew himself sleeping and added a picture of his mother watching over him. My own perception was that he regarded his mother as the centre of his life and the "protective" figure he would turn to when school ended in the afternoon. It reflected his lingering sense of uncertainty about the school environment.

In the later stages I had to change my style of observation and focus on more than just Carlos and Catarina. I moved around the groups assisting the other pupils in the classroom. However, this was not before two of the other pupils had asked me whether I was Carlos' mother, or whether I was his teacher. The fact that they associated me with Carlos and not with the other children led me to reflect on the issue of segregation. In a preliminary study in a different school a pupil had asked me whether I lived with one of the pupils, also a pupil of Portuguese origin. These questions highlighted the fact that the other children in the class found them "different".

In relation to the research strategy it is important to refer back to my personal background. Being an outsider, not being a member of staff, being a member of a visible minority and having been born, bred and educated in a different country could

all have influenced my respondents. Though I communicated in English with the monolingual and bilingual pupils alike, the questions that my presence drew from the pupils was a clear indication that they found me different. This underlines one of my initial questions as to why Catarina was reluctant to speak out in class. According to Houlton (1986: 39),

> traditionally, teachers have maintained that children in the early years of the primary school are not themselves aware of differences. They play together quite happily, the argument runs, without any regard for skin colour or cultural variation. It is only as they get older and come under the influence of the outside world that race becomes a factor in their relationships with others.

Comforting as it may be, however, this "colour blind" image of children bears little resemblance to reality. Mary Goodman (1952) in Houlton (1986: 39), using evidence from a study of four-year olds concluded that:

> […] little children sometimes pay a startling amount of attention to race…they are ready to pay attention to race just as soon a they pay attention to other physical and socially significant attributes like age and sex.

Carlos and Catarina were reluctant to use their L1 to describe objects during a learning support session. This is where I questioned the reluctance they exhibited. I could not deem it to be lack of self-esteem as in situations where there were older children and a larger group; I had seen the L1 used without inhibition in a previous study in a different school. In Carlos and Catarina's situation there were only two of them in the entire school who spoke the same language and in most cases they were in different classes other than in the Literacy hour. I was bound to revisit my initial speculation that the school policy had not provided a positive and receptive framework for multilingualism and hence being bilingual, instead of being seen as a societal resource, was considered to be detrimental to educational development. Could it be that the school's self-image was predominantly monolingual? As Alladina & Edwards (1991: 1) reaffirm:

> It is a well-established tenet of folk linguistics that multilingualism is a bad thing and that for efficient human communication we need to work towards a monolingual norm.

4.2. Help me Miss! Help me!

A video was shown to the pupils about light and an example given of the various religious festivals like the Hindu festival of Diwali and the Jewish festival of lights (Hanukkah). A candle was used after the video and the children were required to

describe the characteristics of the flame. Carlos happened to be in my group and as we were on the verge of beginning the task, he was withdrawn for ten minutes for learning support. On his return he could not reintegrate with the group. Instead he kept following me pleading "help me, help me Miss". Despite my efforts to make him write the words describing the candle flame, he could not write them down. His eyes only lit up when I allowed him to colour the candle and the flame-but he could not identify the colours. He abandoned his work and moved from group to group hitting out at the other children as he went to seek refuge in the toilet. I perceived this plea for help as a means of seeking attention. His actions were a means of trying to cope with the classroom situation. In a group he was always fidgeting and I discovered he occasionally raised his hands to answer questions though he did not know the answer and had nothing to say, though the same often happened with most children in the class.

5. Evaluating the effectiveness of the action

I started this research with the aim of investigating and developing school policy responses towards provision for bilingual pupils. In my role as a participant in this collaborative research, my focus encompassed all pupils –bilinguals and monolingual alike– though my primary focus was on two Madeiran Portuguese bilingual pupils. As I assisted the teacher and the LSA in offering help to the "slow" learners, I developed a particular knowledge of these pupils

My action with Carlos was successful insofar as I was able to provide other ways through English to make learning comprehensible for him by using real objects, pictures and practical activities whenever he abandoned the group activity as a sign he could not cope anymore:

> Action research highlights the need for democratic participation, no matter what the preferred theory or strategy, in the implicational phase of educational research.
> (McNiff, 1988: 6)

The emphasis was on organised listening activities in pairs or groups and the teacher organised a visit to one of the Portuguese households for all the children to see the family's Nativity shrine. This elicited more active participation from Carlos and Catarina's whisper became louder than usual. It reinforced understanding of the Christmas Nativity story to the entire class and Carlos and Catarina showed signs of elation perhaps due to the fact that a familiar cultural practice could be used to teach

members of their class. How is it, then, that teachers could, on the one hand, be in favour of reflecting cultural differences in certain curriculum areas, whilst, on the other, not see any need for a broader review of policy and practice? Brittan (1976) explains the anomaly in two ways. For some teachers, she argues, "it is not so much a question of being resistant to the school taking greater account of cultural variation but rather of being unsure of how to set about doing this". With other teachers she is less charitable:

> […] the implication might be drawn that when faced with a suggestion that something rather more fundamental than merely imparting information about the religions and homelands of minority groups is required then there is considerably greater reluctance to change, notably, if this might affect the ethos of the school or be seen as a threat to its traditional cultural identity. (103)

I happened to meet both types of teacher in my study. During my classroom observations as a participant in the literacy sessions, the teacher attempted to include stories derived from different cultures. One very popular one with the pupils was "*the story of Hanumann the monkey man*" from India. However other than reading the story and extracting sentences for the pupils, there was no explanation of the origin of the story. The EAL pupils in the class were not given any extra provision and in most cases I worked with them (Carlos included) on the slow learners' table, which included monolingual pupils. One teachers' response to my query about the delivery of the content at least indicated a desire to learn:

> I've never in my 10 years teaching career been exposed to such a helpless situation of not knowing what to do with children who cannot speak any English. We need to be specially trained for this kind of exposure lest we lose direction. (JM 03/02)

The same attitude was not, however, exhibited by a colleague in the same setting who attended a seminar on SEN and EAL provision but left early before the EAL session begun claiming that the methods of provision were the same.

In Maths lessons, teaching young bilingual pupils Maths is like teaching monolingual pupils; "it is frequently a case of finding the mode of learning that works for the particular pupil: verbal, spatial, formulaic, practical" (Gravelle, 2000: 41). Using supportive material helped to develop Carlos and Catarina's conceptual grasp of the topic. When learning the number of days of the week we used the story of "a hungry caterpillar" to count the number of fruits it ate per day. Carlos had no difficulty counting up to ten. He enthusiastically participated in the lesson and was the one to put the caterpillar in its cocoon at the end of the seven days. Catarina's Maths session of differentiating between even and odd numbers demonstrated her growing L2

understanding, as she was able to work collaboratively in a group of six with minimal support from the class teacher and me. It implied that despite her silence, she had begun to grasp the concepts and transfer these to the L2. According to Zuber-Skerritt (1996a: 3) in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000: 232):

> Action research is emancipatory when it aims not only at technical and practical improvement and participants' better understanding, along with transformation and change within the existing boundaries and conditions, but also at changing the system itself or those conditions which impede desired improvement in the system/organisation […]

5.1. Interviews with teachers

I managed to carry out interviews with five teachers who were Catarina and Carlos' class teachers and Maths and literacy teachers respectively. The length of time that these teachers had taught varied between ten to over twenty-five years. All were 'white English' and until recently had not had any experience of teaching EAL pupils.

The themes explored in the interviews included:

- The teachers' attitudes towards and relationship with the Portuguese pupils;
- Language issues for Portuguese pupils;
- The behaviour and self-esteem of Portuguese pupils.

The questions were open and unstructured. Of the teachers interviewed, those that displayed a degree of understanding towards EAL pupils appeared to be succeeding and establishing and maintaining a more constructive relationship with the Madeiran Portuguese pupils and other EAL pupils. The comment of three teachers that "Carlos and Catarina had come to the school with no language" (CA, BW, RP 01/02) did not escape my notice, however. Did this imply that their L1 was not a language or did the teachers perceive the Portuguese language to be of low status? Levine's (1990: 13) account of the prejudice experienced by minority ethnic pupils in schools in UK schools came to mind and I realised that her comments that "*diversity* was seen as a threat; not knowing English perceived as having no starting point for learning" was still common in some schools. In general the teachers were optimistic about Carlos and Catarina's progress in L2 acquisition despite them not having experienced the "normal" cognitive development in their L1. They argued that they were still in their early years of schooling hence had ample time for language development.

5.2. LSA interview

I only interviewed one LSA. The rest were not keen and this one was a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESOL) for the Adult literacy group. She talked of her experience in working with the Madeiran Portuguese parents and the role she had played in encouraging parents to send their children to school at the age of five. She gave me a clear picture of the Madeiran Portuguese children's experiences in schools as she lived among the community, although she was herself English. She also assisted the parents with school letter translations and letter writing once a week. She highlighted the negative attitude that had been prevalent in schools at the influx of the Madeiran Portuguese children three years ago. Head teachers and Class teachers had been sceptical and pessimistic about their lack of English knowledge and had categorised them as Special Education Needs (SEN) cases. It has often been the case that policy makers and educators assume 'that poor English-language proficiency is "the cause" of low academic achievement rather than considering or exploring more complex alternatives' (Macias, 1993: 236). As an ESOL teacher, the LSA attributed this to ignorance, which can lead to the "wrong" kind of provision given to the pupils, and which later can prove detrimental to their future academic and English language achievement. However, she was positive about the progress made by Carlos and Catarina together with the other EAL pupils in the school, which she attributed to the positive change of attitude among the staff and the Head teacher.

5.3. Ethical issues

Prior to beginning the study, letters from the team responsible for the support of EAL pupils in the school and from my Supervisor had been sent to the Head teacher of the school explaining my role and the nature of the research. She had briefed the staff prior to my first visit and on the day of my visit there was a large notice in the staff notice board in the staff room reminding the staff to welcome me to the school. Hence I did not need any more informed consent from the participants. I did not have to attempt to persuade the teachers to take on a research role and they did not seem particularly interested in the data I was collecting. Perhaps they may well have temporarily forgotten that I was a researcher. However, I had no intention of writing notes about any conversation that might be damaging to the teachers. I wanted the research to be as

natural as possible and the collaborative arrangement of sharing roles in the classrooms was an ideal arrangement for the pupils and us.

I have used pseudonyms for the school and pupils in this case study for ethical reasons as I had assured my respondents that I had no intention of revealing their identity.

6. Results

6.1. School policy responses

This study, in which I was a collaborative action researcher, enabled me to investigate, participate in and contribute to the development of practices for bilingual pupils in this school. Even though there were only two pupils as a focus for the study, it turned out that all the pupils benefited from the support I gave with the class teacher and the LSA. I was able to suggest changes in practice from my observations. A significant factor was the lack of classroom charts and displays signifying Madeira or Portuguese culture. There were no "Welcome" posters displayed in the school, though there were signs written on the toilet doors in Portuguese and Bengali. In the school hall, there were posters displayed about the Diwali Festival. Other than that, there were no displays even in the classrooms representing any of the minority languages or cultures present in the school. There was need for a map of Madeira depicting the towns in the island like the town of Camara de Lobos to make the pupils have a sense of belonging. Although the charts displaying the Diwali festival were a step in the right direction, they were commercially published. Custom made posters, responsive to local conditions might be better. As Mulvanney (1984) in Houlton (1986: 154) states, "teachers must become aware of the cultures from which children come, and the customs and attitudes within them". They can encourage positive ethnic/cultural self identity by initiating activities which reflect a multicultural society. They should aim to give broad-based information and images about each cultural group, drawing as much as possible from the children's experience in a way that avoids the risk of stereotypes.

In his advice to primary heads Patrick Whitaker (1983: 54-55) posits that:

> […] there is likely to be an improvement in the quality of decisions made if all those involved in the life of the school have the opportunity to participate in solving problems relevant to them. If there is a genuine desire to share power and also to accept the responsibility that goes with it, decision making can become a positive and dynamic force in the school, not only increasing the job satisfaction of all those involved, but

helping to raise the level of identification of individual needs with those of the school as a whole.

Evidence presented to the Swann committee by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) (1982) stressed on a more responsive approach to cultural diversity in relation to school policies:

> In the Union's view the most effective way to implement a multicultural curriculum will be through consultation and discussion involving all members of staff of a school so they can work out together an effective policy and strategy based on local needs and resources available to the school.

We see similar sentiments being voiced by the Swann Report itself:

> It is essential that if any meaningful progress is to be made in bringing about the orientation of the curriculum along the lines we have suggested, individual teachers are actively involved (…) in reviewing and, where necessary, revising their own work.
>
> (Chp 5 para 4.8)

This kind of practice may change the indifferent and negative attitude of some teachers as their inclusion in decision making would give them a sense of professional responsibility towards the EAL pupils.

The rationale behind the current mainstreaming and integrationist approach for EAL pupils is found in various government policy statements which present mainstream as providing the best opportunities for L2 learning (DES, 1985: 426), cognitive development (DES, 1989: 10.10), meeting pupils' affective needs (DES, 1985: 420), developing societal equality (DES, 1985: 319). The main provision for enacting this policy is through the teacher collaborative professional relationship; multilingual assistants or language specialists working alongside subject specialists in mainstream classrooms. Carlos' aggressiveness may be attributed to the culture shock and there was need for the teachers to try and guide Carlos towards a peaceful co-existence with the other children. The presence of a multi-lingual assistant who spoke his language at least once a week could help steer him towards a more settled behaviour. However, one should not ignore the fact that employing an LSA or multilingual assistant with the necessary linguistic skills is no simple matter. Active support targeted at enabling pupils to access the 'mainstream' curriculum tends to face staffing consequences.

The opportunity for communication offered by the teachers to Catarina is ideal for her situation. She will communicate when she needs to and is ready to do so.

Even though the school policy at Shady Garden Infant advocates for equal provision for all children in English, there is need for extra EAL support to these EAL

pupils other than the weekly provision. Efforts should be made to provide more support in the mainstream with the help of LSAs and multilingual assistants if possible. The situation at Shady Garden reflects the gap between rhetoric and reality that bedevils school policies responses towards EAL pupils in the UK.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to explore policy responses in practice in response to the needs of two newly-arrived Madeiran Portuguese pupils through an examination of strategies used by the school and teachers in meeting their needs.

Although the school's rhetoric is equality of opportunity, if the newly-arrived EAL pupils cannot access the main curriculum with this then there is need for a review of the current policies in practice. The EAL support teacher provided half-hour weekly provision for each EAL pupil in the school. This only takes place on the same day once a week during the Literacy hour. There was a need to increase the time to at least three hours on different days of the week to start with to ensure maximum support in other subject areas as well.

There is therefore a need for the school to embark on a review of their policy and practice where discussions involving the entire staff would identify key areas that need modifications. It would be useful to begin with the books in the school library and those used by pupils in the classrooms. The books could be drawn from different cultures; there is need for some basic background knowledge about the different cultural groups represented in the school. The staff could attempt to create an awareness of cultural differences and educate both monolingual and bilingual pupils in the school on the importance cultural integration. All these issues could be drawn up and specifically discussed in an In-service Day, which could include all members of staff including LSAs and some representatives from the school governors. My research experience revealed that LSAs were seldom included in School In-service days even though they play major roles in the educational development of pupils especially slow learners and EAL pupils.

My role as an "insider" in this research has pushed me to suggest strategies for change and it is my hope that these highlights may provide some insight into the way schools implement policies and practice that can adequately provide for both EAL and

monolingual pupils. There is need for further funding to enhance EAL support and cope with the demand of ever increasing numbers of newly-arrived EAL pupils in schools, even though the Ofsted reports (1993: 44,52) consistently show that the current provision is effective. There is always scope for development if this continuity is maintained, particularly if increased and long-term funding can be secured.

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