Epistemological conundrums and the muddle of definition

Sign Bilingualism in Education Policy and Practice

How do trainee teachers perceive the QTS numeracy test?

The Use of Storytelling as pedagogic tool in the ESOL Classroom

Key factors in the promotion and obstruction of simulated learning in practice

Approaches to the teaching and learning of English as an additional language in early years settings

'I think, therefore I am' and I'm a postgraduate researcher. Epistemological conundrums and the muddle of definition

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“I think, therefore I am” and I’m a postgraduate researcher.

Epistemological conundrums and the muddle of definition.

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The names given to stages of educational provision infer some sort of deepening of engagement: primary, secondary, further and higher. Within ‘higher’, postgraduate and research levels suggest a further upwards level. But how is this measured or defined? What delineates this supposedly deepest learning from undergraduate study? This conundrum of ordering learning into hierarchies is not a new one, the 1902 Act confirming two systems of state-aided secondary school: the endowed grammar schools, which received grant-aid from LEAs; and the municipal or county secondary schools, maintained by LEAs. The grammar schools were confirmed via the 1938 Spens Report as places for a presupposed educational elite and the die was cast for grammar schools for the academically able, technical schools for those with a practical bent and new ‘modern’ secondary schools for the rest, a position confirmed by The Norwood Report, Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools. It is worth quoting parts of the report to appreciate the hierarchy and how humankind was to be arbitrarily categorised into divisions of educational status reflecting the assumption of higher and lower states of learning and inherent intelligence.

Grammar schools were to attract those who are:
‘interested in learning for its own sake, who can grasp an argument or follow a piece of connected reasoning, who is interested in causes, whether on the level of human volition or in the material world, who cares to know how things came to be as well as how they are, who is sensitive to language as expression of thought, to a proof as a precise demonstration, to a series of experiments justifying a principle.’ (Norwood 1943:2)

Technical schools catered for:
‘the pupil whose interests and abilities lie markedly in the field of applied science or applied art. The boy in this group has a strong interest in this direction and often the necessary qualities of mind to carry his interest through to make it his life work at whatever level of achievement. He often has an uncanny insight into the intricacies of mechanism whereas the subtleties of language construction are too delicate for him.’ (Norwood 1943:3)

As to the third group - the majority, which were to become the secondary moderns:

The pupil in this group deals more easily with concrete things than with ideas. He may have much ability, but it will be in the realm of facts. He is interested in things as they are; he finds little attraction in the past or in the slow disentanglement of causes or movements. (ibid)

In such a structure, only the grammar school pupils have the potential for ‘higher’ learning and therefore university study, the definition swaying towards providing opportunities for those with an innate intelligence to explore the intricacies of the world which other groups are incapable of. Levels of learning and those able to connect to ‘higher’ forms became ingrained into the education system and it is fascinating that such myths are still accepted and socially divisive grammar schools remain. In such an argument, postgraduate students could only be a minority group, they somehow are able to connect to ideas escaping the majority. In terms of our theme of separating levels of learning, such arbitrary divisions based on speculation and supposition are unhelpful, especially given that the vast majority of present university students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, did not attend a grammar school.

Another angle, connected to presumptions of intelligence and aptitude but this time from a more cultural approach is provided by Peters (1966). His arguments are complex but include the pursuit of understanding as an educative experience defined in normative terms or relativity as to judgements that determine what is of value. Higher learning therefore reflects engagement with cultural priorities which he argues are transient but thematic in that an appreciation and awareness of, for example, an artefact requires appreciation beyond the simple competencies of its production which would be training and framed as a skill and be lower learning. There is then, in such a stance, some sort of hierarchy based upon aesthetic determinants reflecting perhaps a balance towards the assumed or perceived superiority of humanist values above pragmatism or practicality. The challenge is how these are to be
decreed or measured and their values ordered. Unsurprisingly, Peters is unable to quantify such traits except in general terms but the arguments teasingly suggest deeper learning to be part of an intangible process leading towards what he would describe as an ideal.

A major influence in suggesting hierarchies of learning was that of Bloom (1956) and his team which created a taxonomy of learning based around cognitive (mental skills), affective (growth in feelings or emotional areas) and psychomotor (manual or physical skills) domains though the latter was never completed. It was a brave attempt but suffered from the arbitrariness of categorisation which invites simplification and the inevitable subjectivity of interpretation. The model moves towards higher cognition from basic knowledge through comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation which is measured as: assessing theories; comparison of ideas; evaluating outcomes; solving; judging; recommending and rating. Interestingly, it's not unusual to see Bloom's verbs used to determine levels in learning outcomes in higher education modules. Some of the issues include the tacit assumption that learning is sequential, logical, linear and ordered; clearly, this is not the case. A simple example that undermines the view that knowledge needs embedding before evaluation could be the wonder of language discovery of a 5 year old child. Children absorb language like an efficient sponge and begin to make some sort of sense of the wonder and complexities of the world and who they are. Names (knowledge) of objects are arbitrary and imagination supplements reality and the supposed higher order of reflection is actually the process of self-realisation and knowledge creation. Also, why can't there be reflection based on supposition, presumption, vague conceptualising or an inkling without clear knowledge? The model is overtly simplistic, little more than a speculative skill set, and resonates to the dominance of the Behaviourist stance of the 1950's. Such a taxonomy again moves towards assuming higher orders of learning and infers reverence for the successful minority. However, some of the terminologies are useful in framing semantic fields of learning discourse

In searching for some sort of understanding as to what separates postgraduate and research study from preceding stages, the arguments presented so far are formulated through hierarchies reflecting the assumption that higher education represents the highest learning and the esteemed pinnacle. Such a view invites the idea that we humdrum beings should leave the complications of society to those best equipped via qualifications to lead and solve on our behalf, a short step to fascism or even eugenics. Hierarchies then appear an inadequate approach and unable to capture the essence of the experience. Better perhaps to begin from the concept that it is the uniqueness of the unravelling of an issue that creates the distinction, the usual 'contribution to knowledge' definition for doctoral study, rather than an arbitrary construction of a learning order? It is interesting to note that almost half of doctoral candidates fail to claim that their theses have contributed to knowledge (Gibney, 2013). The uncovering of the research process has an inevitable aspect of insularity and an expectation from supervisors of increased independence (Gardener, 2008). Grover (2007) sees this as a developmental process of stages of exploration, engagement, consolidation and the final exit of entry (unfortunate term. He means entry as transition to career outcomes). This is a revealing model in that the emphasis is less on subjective interpretations of engagement to one of enhanced self-awareness within an uncovering process informed by insight however determined. Green and Macauley (2007:317) refine this to ‘acknowledging when information is needed, acquiring and assessing information, and converting information to knowledge all distinguish essential performances expected of postgraduate students’. Again, the emphasis is upon process informed by self-determination and responsibility coupled with management (Phillips and Pugh, 2010). The student is the catalyst, leader and force in the passion of explaining a new contribution to knowledge which inverts the Bloom cognitive domain, it is knowledge that is at the fore rather than as the starting point. Lastly, as Lovitts (2005) notes, successful undergraduate students don't always make successful research students, many find the transition problematical. This is largely because the balance has shifted from reflecting and exploring the works of others to producing one's own work. It is an important difference.

Each of the papers following have their own style, reflect deep passion and interest, are the result of enquiry and 'contribute to knowledge'. I hope in some way they contribute to yours. Oh, and don't overlook Socrates' observation, 'True knowledge exists in knowing that you know nothing'. That's that then..................
References


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Abstract

The document ‘Sign Bilingualism: A Model’ (1998) by leading proponents Pickersgill and Gregory described sign bilingual education (SBE) and clarified definitions and principles for those working in the education sector (Swanwick, 2006). The goals of SBE are that deaf children become linguistically competent, have a wider access to curriculum, facilitate literacy skills and provide a positive sense of identity (Gregory, 2006). This report focused on relevant theories proposed by Pickersgill, Gregory and Swanwick, seeking to identify and demonstrate how the move to SBE has positively made a difference to the education of deaf pupils and identify any weaknesses that remain. Key findings were that whilst their original model laid out the idea for educating deaf pupils within mainstream, giving equal status and access to English (spoken and written) and British Sign Language (BSL), the application was challenging. Their model presented extensive explanations and guidance to the education community of how best to support, teach and communicate with deaf pupils but this failed to take place. Variances in practice from the SBE model (1998) were partly due to medical advice, instructing parents of deaf children with CI to avoid using sign language believing it would hinder the development of oralism/auralism (Nussbaum and Scott, 2004). An updated model explained what was occurring at ground level and how to continue practice using Sign Supported English (SSE). It ignored research showing that the acquisition of BSL is as easy as spoken language if access is equal and available (Swanwick, 2000) and that deaf children with deaf BSL-using-parents achieve academically higher than deaf peers with hearing parents. This is due to well established pre-linguistic skills demonstrating that sign language is of benefit for the education of deaf pupils (Gregory, 1996).
Introduction

‘Sign Bilingualism: A Model’ (1998) compiled by Maranda Pickersgill and Susan Gregory described sign bilingual education (SBE) clarifying definitions and principles for educators (Swanwick, 2006). The goals of SBE are that deaf children become linguistically competent, have a wider access to curriculum, facilitate literacy skills and provide a positive sense of identity (Gregory, 2006). Previous to this publication, the biggest events for bilingual education in the United Kingdom (UK) were the introduction of cochlear implants (CI) (1989) and the first Local Education Authority (LEA) to adopt SBE (Gregory, 2006). This report focuses on relevant theories proposed by Pickersgill, Gregory and Swanwick, seeking to identify and demonstrate how the move to SBE has positively made a difference to the education of deaf pupils and identify any weaknesses that remain.

Sign bilingual is the fluent use of two or more languages, one of which is a signed language (Swanwick, 2006). SBE is an approach to the education of deaf children, which in the UK, uses British Sign Language (BSL) and English. It is based on the fundamental recognition that as deaf children can potentially acquire sign language more easily than spoken language they should be afforded the opportunity to develop a signed language more easily than spoken language they should be afforded the opportunity to develop a signed language (Gregory, 2006).

BSL has a vast lexicon of established signs to describe concepts and distinct grammar system, which with distinct regional variations mean translations require a skilled language user (BSL and English) who can select the appropriate English words to convey accurate meaning (Sutton-Spence and Woll, 1998). It can be beneficial in enabling deaf pupils’ expression and ease of communication. Some mainstream schools use different manual systems such as Signed Supported English (SSE) or Signed English (SE), which produced at the same time as spoken English facilitates learning of the English grammar system. A drawback is that signs selected for use with SSE or SE can be contextually incorrect misconstruing information.

Language Acquisition

Swanwick and Gregory (2007) stress the importance of recognising that deaf children have the same potential of acquiring language as their hearing peers. Sign language is as easy to acquire as spoken language and if access to two languages is equal and available, the development of one does not interfere with the other (Swanwick, 2000). Achieving age appropriate language development relies on early intervention to avoid delays in development and in accessing education (Gregory, 1996). Working with hearing parents to facilitate their own support development is also pivotal to supporting their deaf children.

The principal of linguistic knowledge of a first language (L1) supporting the understanding and development of a second language (L2) is known as the linguistic interdependence model (LIM) (Cummins, 1989). Mayer and Wells (1996) argue it is not accurate to claim that the LIM stands true for the case when L1 is well established BSL and L2 is English (literacy) as there is no exposure to speech or English-based signs (due to deafness) thus the conditions do not match the conditions laid out in the LIM.

There are namely two common situations that need to be addressed, children of deaf signing-adults (CODA) and deaf children of non-signing hearing adults (DofH). Should one parent have hearing and one is deaf it may be expected that for ease of initial communication sign language would be L1 and spoken language L2. A third but quite rare situation to be discussed is where deaf children have hearing parents who are fluent signers. Studies suggest that deaf CODAs where L1 is BSL achieve better academically than those DofH due to the early establishment of pre-linguistic skills (Gregory, 1996). One study (1987) exploring the effect of sign language (Italian) as L1 on the development of spoken language in deaf children aged 2-4 showed that although the onset of spoken language was slower than their acquisition of sign language their sign language was a necessary support of spoken language acquisition (Swanwick, 2000). Maxwell (1989) found the same result with an older deaf child (1.6-7.5 years old). This crucial identification together with the argument that BSL does not inhibit intellectual and linguistic development, leads to the conclusion that the use of BSL in education maybe beneficial (Swanwick, 2000).
Children exposed to two simultaneous languages where one is sign language, usually only occurs in CODAs. However, this may happen with a deaf child if both hearing parents are fluent in sign language but is quite rare. Research conducted by Collins-Ahlgren (1974) where two hearing parents, fluent in sign language, signed and spoke to their deaf child from birth resulted in secure language acquisition and comprehension equivalent to the child's hearing peers.

Sign Bilingual Education Model into Practice

SBE entered mainstream education when Pickersgill and Gregory (1998) published their Sign Bilingualism model (1998). It was hoped that professionals would welcome the recommendations facilitating greater inclusivity but enthusiasm was short lived due to inconsistent practice and training standards (Gregory, 2006). In 2006 Swanwick proposed that the 1998 model needed updating to match changing attitudes towards SBE and the popular use of CI. Gregory (2006) notes that historically and in some cases to date, those who support the use of CI feel that the use of sign language can inhibit a child’s ability to learn aural/oralism (Nussbaum and Scott, 2004) when in fact it should be recognised as a supportive measure to language acquisition. Pickersgill and Gregory (1998) tried to pinpoint that deaf children should attain sufficient competence and proficiency in BSL and English to support their needs in adulthood (Pickersgill and Gregory, 2008).

The SBE model (1998) can be broken down into the following: language and communication; curriculum and assessment; staffing; parents and the community. Pickersgill and Gregory (1998) explain that both spoken and signed languages should be given equal status and regarded as a language of the educational process. Problems arise in that 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents meaning DofH children have limited access to a range of communication methods, which can result in stress and frustration on both parts (Sign and Mental Health Foundation, 2013). Access should be planned from pre-school ensuring opportunities for early acquisition and promoting language preference. However attending a mainstream school and choosing to use BSL could result in social exclusion from non-signing peers. It must be noted that BSL is not part of the curriculum for either deaf or hearing pupils so their only access is from support staff. To ensure classroom cohesion as well as access to the ‘hidden curriculum’, pupils should have access to BSL classes to enable signed communication between hearing and deaf peers. A hindrance to achieving Pickersgill and Gregory’s ideal is that the Government does not recognise BSL as a full language. This means that any BSL lessons would have to be extra-curricular.

The SBE model (p.4) clearly states ‘the level of cognitive demand or challenge in teaching should reflect the child’s preferred language level and not that of the second language’. Pickersgill and Gregory (1998) recognised that if a child prefers BSL then teachers should ensure that tasks are appropriately devised for them. The difficult logistics of carrying out curriculum and assessment in a bilingual manner is oft-overlooked, although if carried out successfully they would certainly be beneficial and more inclusive. Realistically, changing assessments for a minority is both non-inclusive and time-consuming. It could be argued that modified assessments should be offered to both hearing and deaf children to maintain equality or preferably begin with a fully inclusive technique. Pickersgill and Gregory (1998) recognised that assessment should take into account the preferred language of the child, if this is BSL a competent (at the child’s level) signer should produce appropriate assessments.

Pickersgill and Gregory (1998) make several references to BSL, Deaf culture and Deaf history being taught to deaf children in the hope of establishing a positive identity and empowerment. Unfortunately this would again be classed as an extracurricular activity. Restrictive timetables at secondary level provide minimal opportunities for this, meaning deaf pupils only receive extra support out-of-class, which is hardly inclusive. They also argue that employment opportunities should be made available for deaf and hearing staff. Native users of both BSL and English should be employed and essentially staff should be bilingual but in reality this is easier said than done due to funding restrictions. Research shows that deaf people working in education who are resources to deaf pupils (instructor, role model, BSL tutor etc.) are only 5% of the total resources available and only 25% are hearing who have some degree of sign language (CRIDE, 2012). Lack of deaf staff does not promote this ideal proposed by Pickersgill and Gregory (1998). Ignoring the difficulties deaf people face finding employment in
general (due to lack of deaf awareness in organisations), many simply do not have the skills required by industry to apply for the posts needed to support the SBE model. Employed deaf people generally (65%) have unskilled or semi-skilled occupations, which is over double the 25% of hearing employed people (The Open University, No Date).

Despite the lack of employment of inappropriately skilled deaf staff there is a plethora of inadequately skilled hearing support staff working within educational settings. Communication support workers (CSW) rarely possess an appropriate learning support worker’s qualification or more than a level 2 BSL qualification (Deaf Education Support Forum, 2010). Knowing the BSL curriculum for levels 2 and 3 (Signature, 2013) the vocabulary for supporting the content of the National Curriculum is beyond the signer’s ability yet seems to be in their remit suggesting that pupils are learning a ‘dumbed down’ version of the curriculum, impeding development (Lang, 2003).

Pickersgill and Gregory (1998) assert that links should be established between the Deaf and hearing community preferably peer groups of both deaf and hearing outside of school such as Deaf social and youth clubs. They make specific comment of how all members of the deaf children’s families should also have interaction with the Deaf community. This seems to be something oft-forgotten; families should learn as a unit to improve communication supporting the ethos of Genie Networks, a charity in Greater Manchester who aims to support deaf people and their families (Genie Networks, 2014).

Finally, evaluating the effectiveness of Pickersgill and Gregory’s (1998) SBE model presents many difficulties due to the variance of provision and children experiencing it. There is also some evidence that the research carried out is polemic in regards to proving the effectiveness of SBE rather than reporting on what is actually occurring (Gregory, 1996). Evaluations of SBE in the UK is limited but in countries where similar models have been used for longer periods suggest that it is successful in developing both literacy skills and sign language skills (ibid). Swanwick and Gregory (2007) state that the changes that needed to be recognised within an updated SBE model include greater research into BSL linguistics, the recognition of BSL by the Government (2003), the greater acceptance of the use of sign language within education, evidence suggesting improved attainments of deaf pupils using sign language in schools and the greater number of CI users within schools. The main significant difference was the assertion that SSE should play a significant role within the education of a deaf child and become the main form of curriculum delivery. Although this may seem like one small factor, the implications are huge when compared to the effect it would have on Pickersgill and Gregory’s 1998 model.

Although the use of SSE can contribute to a greater understanding of the English language it removes understanding of BSL functions and structure and therefore creates problems of understanding between proficient BSL users and those using SSE thus creating a new subgroup of deaf sign language users separate from the BSL using deaf community. The effects of which results in BSL and English no longer having equal status within education and therefore changes the ethos set out by Pickersgill and Gregory (1998). In addition it affects their intent on creating a positive deaf identify and empowerment through links with the Deaf community. The difficulty is created where deaf children who use SSE try to communicate with children who use only BSL and fail.

Whilst some deaf students may acquire a good standard of BSL not all are developing the complex structure required for use in higher education (Gregory, 1996). Considering most deaf children are exposed to BSL by hearing educational workers who have learned the language and mainly use SSE this really does not surprise (ibid). It is also apparent that the suggestion of SSE use in schools removes the ability of choice to use BSL. Deaf parents who use BSL may not be happy about their deaf children being educated in SSE resulting in a communication breakdown within the home. The new document (2007) states that parents should remain informed and their views should be respected. Schools should facilitate opportunities for hearing parents to interact with the Deaf community and enable them to further understand the deaf identity and develop their skills of BSL. It could further be argued that SSE is not a language in its own right and therefore its usage does not make a pupil sign bilingual (as per the definition) and therefore the 2007 paper by Swanwick and Gregory should be a proposal in its own right rather than an update of the previous model.
The Effects of using Sign Bilingual Education

It is important that deaf pupils are supported in accessing the hidden curriculum irrespective whether it is of educational value or just a classroom occurrence. To achieve this, support workers would need to feed information to the deaf pupil about everything that is happening (just as a BSL Interpreter should do) or their peers would need to keep communication to a method understood by the deaf pupil. Unfortunately, SBE is not offered to hearing pupils unless they have learning difficulties. Over 90% of deaf parents have hearing children (Children of Deaf Adults International, 2001); so perhaps an overlooked issue of SBE is that it is not offered to hearing CODAs suggesting that SBE is linked to the medical model of disability. However, hearing CODAs who only have access to BSL at home may not be able to have support for schoolwork due to their parent’s deafness. An example could be learning to read through phonics. Hearing parents could easily support this method but a deaf parent may have no concept of what a phonic is. If hearing CODAs were given SBE it could facilitate the growth of communication with parents and other significant deaf adults in their life in addition to improving their support system for schoolwork.

Conclusion

Pickersgill, Gregory and Swanwick have all made extensive contributions to education for deaf pupils. All are respected theorists and therefore their models are worthy of consideration. Difficulties arise in application, which have led to models being changed to fit the current climate and financial restrictions. The original model laid out the idea for educating deaf pupils within a mainstream setting giving equal status and access to English (spoken and written) and BSL as ways to both communicate and learn. Whilst it presented an extensive explanation and guidance to the education community of how best to support, teach and communicate with deaf pupils, this however failed to take place.

Swanwick and Gregory (2007) acknowledged variances in practice from the SBE model (1998) due to medical advice, which instructed parents of deaf children with CI to avoid using sign language believing it would hinder the development of oralism/auralism (Nussbaum and Scott, 2004), and thus published an update. This explained what was occurring and how to continue practice focusing heavily on SSE, which as previously stated is not a language in its own right nor fully utilises the lexicon of BSL and therefore the use of which does not make a person sign bilingual.

Establishing a positive deaf identity is difficult without the access to the deaf community Gregory and potentially leaves deaf children feeling ‘broken’ compared to their hearing classmates often leading to feelings of frustration and withdrawal hence giving restricted access to the hidden curriculum. This focus on SSE ignores research showing that sign language is as easy to acquire as spoken language if access is equal and available (Swanwick, 2000). Research highlights that deaf BSL using CODAs achieve academically better than DofH oral/aural peers due to well established pre-linguistic skills demonstrating that sign language is of benefit for the education of deaf pupils (Gregory, 1996).

Pickersgill and Gregory’s input (1998) seems to have been overlooked, possibly due to the problems of implementing their suggestions through lack of understanding, funding and appropriate bilingual staffing resources. Their ideal of deaf children attaining sufficient competence and proficiency in both BSL and English (each having equal status) to support their needs as an adult becomes near impossible without correct resources in place (Pickersgill and Gregory, 1998, 2008). The lack of Government recognition of BSL only acts as another barrier to achieving Pickersgill and Gregory’s goal. The 2007 paper does offer support for educational staff and a way of educating and supporting deaf pupils, however it is the author’s view that this is not as effective as the original paper ‘Sign Bilingualism: A Model’ by Pickersgill and Gregory (1998).
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‘How do trainee teachers perceive the QTS numeracy test?’

An examination of the perceptions of the numeracy test required for the conferral of Qualified Teacher Status from trainee teachers.

Jane Kay

Jane Kay - I am a fellow of the IfL and have gained QTLS status, have completed an MA and am now working on a PHD by research, due to be completed in 2015. I have worked as head of maths and programme leader for 19+ basic skills at Accrington College, Assistance Curriculum Manager for GCSE maths at Bury College and will be moving to the Bolton Wanderers Free School this year to head up Maths and English for their first cohort of students. I have published online resources for functional skills mathematics at three levels and am currently working on more texts for learning in GCSE and functional skills mathematics. I am passionate about the positive impact of developing numeracy skills for individuals, and the need for this kind of learning even at the post-graduate level.
Abstract

The compulsory UK education sector (primary and secondary) or schools sector requires trainee teachers to complete a numeracy skills test in addition to holding a GCSE in mathematics at a minimum grade C. This article centres on the perception of the QTS numeracy test from the standpoint of those who undertake to be tested. Anecdotal evidence suggests that numeracy within teacher education programs is not favourably received or welcomed by trainee teachers. The research reported here primarily investigates the opinion and perception of numeracy tests presenting data collected from educational forums. These forums are online, open to public scrutiny and allow comments to be collected and analysed without the requirement for researcher participation. The researcher does not need to elicit responses and has no control over the comments produced, allowing for naturalistic data to be presented. The forum postings are treated as conversations or elements of conversational comment. Although analysis of conversation can also examine other elements, emphasis, for instance or body language, this is for the most part absent from forum postings. Trainee teachers have presented perceptions which are made up of different proximal and situational as well as personal factors. As trainees they must be supported to address their own level and depth of numerical comprehension whilst also examining the factors that surround the acquisition of this knowledge for their own students in the classroom to be successful as educators.

Key words

Numeracy, Mathematics, ITT (Initial Teacher Education), QTS (Qualified Teacher Status), Perception, Trainee teacher
Introduction and outline

The compulsory schools sector (primary and secondary schools) in the UK requires specific qualifications of trainee teachers on entry to training courses. These entry qualifications include a minimum of a GCSE grade C in mathematics. In addition to these requirements trainee teachers are expected to complete qualified teacher status (QTS) which includes compulsory skills tests in literacy and numeracy. The numeracy test can be the subject of much angst amid trainees, providing something like the same level of stress as a driving test.

Mathematics is a specific skill which has been in short supply, leading to criticisms that teachers are not sufficiently numerate or qualified to be able to support their learners (Hudson, 2006). The numeracy test has had very bad press in the past. An article in the Guardian newspaper (2010) revealed that: ‘The majority of primary school staff cannot answer simple arithmetic questions’. Frankel, Morison and Sheil (2009) writing for the Times Educational Supplement (TES) on QTS numeracy tests, proffered the message that although trainee teachers found it difficult to pass the numeracy test, it provided evidence of skills that would ‘come in handy’ during a professional career in teaching and that the test was a necessary hurdle. Here we are asking: is the ‘bad press’ justified? What do the people who have to actually take the numeracy test, think about it?

The 2014 Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove) outlined plans to reform teacher education, currently being implemented, including changes to the QTS tests to redevelop the tests themselves and make them act as entrance tests for the profession. This goes hand in hand with a review in curriculum for those aged 14 – 16 and new further education and training standards published by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) (2014) which place an emphasis on supporting mathematical and English skills in the classroom.

The research

People’s opinions and attitudes are difficult to classify as a quantifiable element, in the sense that if we want results that are meaningful to people, or from people, we must break down what it is that people do and examine the elements that relate to them and their practices. The probable extent to which knowledge that can be applied in practice derived from traditional research would be useful in a situation where people and their actions, practices opinions or values are important, is an issue (Markless, 2003). The opinions of trainee teachers on the numeracy test are likely to be more clearly audible and meaningful in their representation if they are collected directly and maintained as qualitative data.

Here, data is presented in its original format which a wholly quantitative study may miss altogether, or not take into account. Although a strong indication, numbers alone may not tell us the whole story in primary research (Dey, 1998) and are criticised for their tendency to ignore from the outset questions that do not necessarily benefit from a scientific style of enquiry (Charmaz, 2006).

To ascertain the opinions and feelings about the numeracy QTS test of trainee teachers and capture their voices in their own words, without constriction or any sense of reactivity (the process that occurs when subjects respond to the presence of an observer or researcher) (Berg, 2001) the conversation of trainees has been captured from online education forums. Their postings form a type of online narrative that indicates elements of their experiences and opinions of the QTS numeracy test.

This method allows unquantifiable facts about real people to be collected and observed though traces of conversation that they leave behind them and in doing so, let us share in the understandings and perceptions of others, allowing us as researchers to: ‘obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality’ (Berg, 2001) attempting to define a situation ‘as it is’ (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005).

Flick (2009) argues that internet examination of discussion provides a greater amount of anonymity for individuals who may become ‘participants’ in research via the use of avatars as identifiers. This utilisation of
online ‘postings’ is gaining momentum as a method of enquiry. The Times Educational Supplement, for example now has a regular report in its hard copy, dedicated to publishing opinions gathered via the online TES forums (Shaw, 2010).

Words are seen as the most common form of qualitative data (Robson (2002) which here are examined in an electronic form. These ‘electronic conversations’ represent a form of ‘trace measure’ or: ‘the physical effects of interaction that remain after that interaction.’ Robson (2002) race elements are also known as ‘accretion measures’ or the evidence of the usage of something being a popular way of measurement, so in this instance, these unobtrusive observable indicators allow us to investigate information that may not be wholly accessible through other means: ‘through traces people either intentionally or inadvertently leave behind’ (Berg, (2001).

Studying elements like speech or conversation strings in forums that have already been produced, avoids the desire of individuals to present themselves in a socially acceptable light, or to respond to what they think a researcher wants, leading to data which is naturalistic, unobtrusively obtained and self – disclosing (Lee, 2000) this eliminates volunteer characteristics from participants, documented by Parker (2006) who investigated the phenomenon that those who volunteer have certain characteristics which will skew any data collected from the outset. It should be noted however that those who participate in online forum debate may also exhibit certain types of characteristic.

One of the advantages of employing this method is that no interaction has to take place between the researcher and those participating in online forums, for the researcher does not have to be present, or be part of the virtual group to observe any phenomena (Flick, 2009) (Lee, 2000) thus leading to greater spontaneity. This also has the advantage of providing data that although self-disclosing in nature, is not subject to bias in the population studied through the desire to give favourable responses (Lee, 2000) and has the advantage of providing data which doesn’t necessarily contain non-verbal semiotics or paralinguistic elements of communication, ‘body language’ for instance, which is difficult to translate accurately in context (Flick, 2009).

The forum data was processed initially to remove individual names or avatars and any details that didn’t form part of the conversational text. The data must be prepared beforehand, which means removing all the date and time information and individual posters details, turning the text into a continuous dialogue.

This collation of the comments allows for a fuller context to be taken into consideration, forming a type of cognitive anthropology, (Silverman, 2004) taking account of the way that people communicate fully or the fuller context of language, rather than simply taking incoherent parts of conversational text and drawing inference from them. Taking account of this fuller context of language used in the data is ‘crucial’ to understanding (Wodak & Meyer 2009). Using information which may not necessarily be the product of objective and reasoned thought, but is based more on opinion, emotion or belief (for example from internet forums) is clearly subjective in nature (Pears and Shields, 2009) and this must be taken into account from the outset.

How trainee teachers feel about the tests

The consensus observed: is that numeracy is an unpopular subject and is enough to make some trainee teachers believe that they are taking the wrong course. It evokes the same fears as school mathematics and for those who have been unsuccessful in this subject already, there is no desire to repeat this failure again especially with so much at stake (future career) at this high level and in front of their peers. In this respect, trainee teachers are similar in their attitude and approach to the subject as more traditional adult mathematics and numeracy learners.

Mathematics, (especially at any ‘higher’ level) is associated with occupations that require lengthy study and higher levels of cognitive development, for example doctors, chemists, engineers and anything related to science requires a higher level of mathematics qualification. Evidence for the perception of difficulty in this subject is provided by the fact that mathematics provision has declined at a higher level (level 3 or ‘A’ level).
Higher mathematics has become an unpopular study choice generally, even though the deferred reward for studying the subject is likely to be high. Trainee teachers are not a breed apart from other human beings. These individuals are likely to suffer proportionately within the population from the same anxieties and struggle with the same difficulties in numeracy or mathematics as any other adult learner. These fears stem from the perceived difficulty of the subject and the lack of understanding as to why this subject has reared its head again at this later point in life.

• ‘I think i will be a great teacher but think i may fail my course because I can’t pass the English and Maths tests’
• ‘I don’t understand why all teachers are supposed to be fast in numbers’
• ‘Hi i’m doing secondary french and german and i still cannot understand the mental arithmetic section is of use to me i already have a GCSE in Maths which was a requirement of the course and i wont have to work out any of the questions in my head that are on the test. So i wont be getting year 6’s asking me any maths questions thank god.’
• ‘I really would hate to think that I could not become a teacher in a subject that hardly ever uses maths!’
• ‘schools could lose out on perfectly good teachers (and i’m not meaning myself here, per se) because they struggle with numbers.’
• ‘why should you need to pass your Maths skills test when you’re teaching English or Languages?’
• ‘since I am training to teach Secondary English, I really don’t see what being able to do mental arithmetic in a timed situation has to do with my ability to teach my subject.’
• ‘before mt PGCE i re-took my maths gcse 4 times before i passed. I have revised lots online but still havnt passed i re-took the test last week and failed by 1 mark!!’

(The comments above are trainee teachers, taken from conversation posting in online forums)

Many teachers have expressed that they do not feel wholly prepared to teach any kind of numeracy especially, since they feel that they themselves are lacking in mathematical attainment. This negative self-perception attributed to the self image of a teachers own ability in mathematics has an effect on the teachers entire emotional state and may then influence in turn the way that individuals perceive themselves (Jacoby, 1997). This negative influence on the ego for the teacher may lead to avoidance of numeracy or mathematics learning altogether.

When faced with mathematical or numerical instruction, a student has two choices, controlled by cognition and emotional response. They can either; ‘control emotion and put effort into cognition’ (described as a learning intention) ‘or limit cognition and put effort into preventing “distortions of well-being”’ (described as a coping intention) (Boekaerts, 1995). The theory of social cognition (Bandura, 1997) examines achievement (in terms of successful task completion) as being made up of several inter-related factors within the individual. These factors include elements of an individual’s behaviour; environment and personality, controlling the emotional or cognitive response, which may not be an entirely conscious action on the part of the individual. Malmivuori (2000) stated that these factors created a ‘filter’ through which people create a ‘self system.’ This system is built up from new and past mathematical experiences (Hauk, 2005), exemplified by Swain et al (2005): ‘Learning mathematics can change who people think they are, and in some cases, how they see the world’. For many learners this is true in a negative sense, their mathematics lessons have left them with a negative perception of their abilities that does not correspond with their actual ability.

The way that we learn mathematics, may be related to the feelings that are associated with mathematics (numeracy). At primary levels, methods for teaching mathematics are often hands on, practical, kinaesthetic and make full use of collaborative work or ‘circle time’ (Taylor 2003) and most pupils do not have the negative perception that will follow them later. In contrast, secondary methods are often characterised by ‘chalk and talk’ and textbook learning (Wadsworth, 1996) which provides a classroom experience that tends to be ‘boring and uncritical’ (Apple 2004).

• ‘I was petrified about my numeracy test’
• ‘Hi I have complete sympathy with anyone taking or struggling to pass the stupid numeracy QTS Test’
• ‘for me the QTS numeracy was a horrible mixture of stress and boredom’
• ‘I was very anxious because I have never considered maths to be my strong point.’
• ‘The numeracy skills test is seriously upsetting me.’
• ‘I’m also really really scared about the numeracy test’
• ‘but the maths was horrendous!’
• ‘Mental calculations can be quite difficult’
• ‘I’m dreading Numeracy!’
• ‘when it came to Num I was a nervous wreck,’
• ‘really worried about numeracy.

(The comments above are trainee teachers, taken from conversation posting in online forums)

Wadsworth (1996) saw students in mathematics as passive and as recipients of knowledge rather than active participants in learning, a common view held by students themselves in relation to mathematical or numerical subjects. Pupil attainment is still the main indicator of success or failure, hence ‘passing the test’ is still the most important feature of learning and instruction (Papen (2004). Again a negative view commonly ascribed to mathematics and numeracy, taking a mathematics test can lead to a huge amount of anxiety, which in small amounts is useful in a test situation, but for those who have failed several times previously in this subject, that anxiety is an expression of our knowledge of our own weaknesses and threatens the ego’s autonomy for an individual (Jacoby, 1997).

Students often blame the teachers for their dislike of maths. Baker (2003) refers to the teaching of mathematics as “…boring and irrelevant”. There are many people who struggle, sometimes daily with even the simplest mathematical operations (including teachers) with more complex analysis or conceptual understanding evading many individuals for the whole of their lives (Parsons & Brynner, 2006). This universally perceived difficulty inherent within the subjects mathematics and numeracy, promotes the concept that it is almost socially acceptable to be bad at maths (Tout 2005). Although students may see themselves as being failures in mathematics, this perception is often unfounded. They have not been successful in the ‘formalised’ mathematics engaged in during school years. In reality, students may be proficient or functional; ‘they may be doing mathematics with their hands and in their heads rather than on paper’ (Coben, 2000). Crossing a road is an example of skills in practice that may not be as easy to get down on paper: here a person must judge speed and distance simultaneously in three different directions, those individuals who are still alive, are clearly effective in the application of practical numeracy.

Misinterpreting even a small piece of essential information can have detrimental effects for the learner, where a fear of failing and of being ‘turned off’ is present. Due to the nature of learning in mathematics being hierarchical, and requiring foundational concepts to be thoroughly embedded into the schemata before more advanced concepts can be engaged with effectively (Kahn & Kyle, 2002) missing the foundations, or fatal errors in their execution (for example errors in the computation of standard algorithms) leads to a compounding of errors in any further processes. Attempting to calculate a mean average when the ability to divide has not been thoroughly mastered, for instance, sets the learner up to fail. Processes that promote mathematical understanding for learners’ must be preferable to processes that simply allow a person to pass a test. Where teacher intervention in the classroom is appropriate and relates to the student directly, rather than emphasising the need to complete the ‘correct answer’, learning outcomes can be ‘crucially’ positively affected (French, 2002). Being ‘lost’ in the subject and ‘hating maths’ can create a fear which adversely effects the ability to learn effectively, with a background fear ever present (Schloglmann, 2006) when the individual is clearly capable of addressing the mathematical problems presented:

• ‘I have recently taken the numeracy skills test for the 7th time and FINALLY passed it!!!!!’
• ‘It took me many times to pass my numeracy test,’
• ‘I finally passed after six tries.’
• ‘I am really struggling with the Numeracy skills test, I have taken it 8 times now and stil not passed!’
• ‘finally passed the bloody thing today i sat the numeracy skills test 4 times.’
• 'I can't pass this stupid numeracy test'
• 'I have had a number of attempts. Today I have passed my Numeracy Skills Test. It was my 18th attempt.'
• 'I am on my third attempt at the moment to pass the numeracy test,'
• 'I took a few times to pass my numeracy test'

(The comments above are from trainee teachers, contained in conversation posting in online forums).

Political influences

Evolution and implementation of numeracy in programmes of initial teacher education is directly related to social and economic policy developments. The ‘Lisbon Agenda’ (2000) defined plans to create a European Union with a strong and competitive economy. The pivotal aspect of the plans for the Euro-economy: the development of skills in the lifelong learning sector (DfES, 2005). Using an integrated approach to education through economic policy development, allows rationality in a political sense, to be applied to govern problematic aspects of social and economic existence (Rose 1992). The importance of central government (and so of policy) as opposed to local authority and individual teachers, was enshrined in England through the Education Reform Act (1988) ensuring universal notions of numerical learning through state control and prescription (Johnson et al, 2007).

It is possible that these elements are self-fulfilling rather than underpinned by an essential need. Concerned with the ideological and political functions of education within the restricted school environment, Apple (1990) pointed to the ideological function of education being circular and self-fulfilling or self-justifying, in terms of removing conflict. Pointing to the way science is taught as an example of a set of technical knowledge, divorced from true application. From this standpoint it would be possible to see that the overlaps in the requirements at different levels for numeracy teaching and learning simply justify the need for the teaching of the subject. Apple expressed the currently popular viewpoint that a ‘normative’ and ‘legitimised’ curriculum (Apple, 1990) adversely affects the development of creativity for instance. It is likely that Apple is able to argue from a position of someone who has an appropriately well-developed set of numeracy skills and therefore has the ability and the tools to develop creativity and more than adequate self-expression.

Creativity and the development of ‘free thinking’ are reliant in many instances on cognition and self-expression which requires the ability to manipulate abstract concepts. Without numeracy skills, trainee teachers are unable to develop realistic levels of cognition that would allow them to be creative, conflicting or free thinking, basic numeracy being the most important tool to develop cognition through the manipulation of abstraction. Tammet (2009) and Newby (2005) both provide support for this proposition by indicating people actually need these numerical, reasoning and communication skills to function effectively at all, especially in the ‘modern’ twenty first century environment.

• 'I think something seriously needs to be done about this test in particular because there must be others out there like me that just aren't mathematically minded but good teachers!'  
• 'These tests are pointless. They should make them a lot longer and harder and carry individual marks so they actually mean something. Passing a numeracy test that a Year 7 could do doesn't exactly prove much.'  
• 'If I was in any kind of position of power I'd abolish the tests, I think their pointless'

(The comments above are from trainee teachers, contained in conversation posting in online forums).
Conclusion

Mathematical skills in particular have a strong influence on the development of more generalised learning and higher cognition. Numerical learning provides the tools for analytical thought and can develop the ability to conceive quantitative descriptions of the world (RAND Mathematics study panel, 2003).

A teacher that has a fund of knowledge to draw upon is likely to be more successful than a teacher who does not. Teachers are human, and are subject to the same previous mathematics experiences or ‘histories’ as other adult learners. They too may have avoided maths at all costs, and so teaching elements which rely on mathematical concepts and methods of reasoning and logic or teaching maths and numeracy itself, may prove difficult for them without support. Despite many arguments to the contrary presented in teacher forums, most subject areas contain elements of embedded numeracy, including sequencing an essay or report for any subject with a beginning, middle and an end.

From the information presented here, the direct words of the trainees themselves indicate that the overall perception of the numeracy test for QTS is negative. It is interesting to note that the literacy level of the trainee teacher’s comments is low – this may be due to a genuinely low level of literacy, poor ability in terms of self-expression (indicating lower levels of numeracy skills) or a change in the way people input information in an informal environment, like a forum.
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Abstract

There is an Indian proverb which states: Tell me a fact and I’ll learn. Tell me a truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever. ESOL learners bring stories to the classroom in the form of life experiences from their own cultures, based on their beliefs, customs, and language identity. Storytelling traditions are vital in many discourse communities where the spoken word is relied on to communicate, as access to other forms of literacy are not possible or do not exist. Storytelling is therefore an essential communication tool which can be transferred to the language classroom to generate creativity and imagination in teaching and learning. This paper analyses storytelling as a teaching technique in the English as a Second Language (ESOL) classroom. It discusses the advantages of using storytelling as a pedagogic tool in learning and teaching to enhance learners’ language and literacy skills and to encourage learner engagement and learner interaction in the language classroom. It explores how storytelling activities can be used as a vehicle for improving understanding, motivating oral discussion and increasing and promoting interesting language usage in all four skill areas.

Key words

Storytelling, ESOL, Pedagogy, adult learners
Storytelling

The novelist Philip Pulman (2014) imparts that after nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world. Isak Dineson cited by (Gaita, 1998) states that all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them. It is by telling stories that human beings try to make sense of our lives, sorrows and joys.

Many ESOL learners bring transferable skills from their own cultures, based on their beliefs, customs, and language identity. Oral communication and storytelling traditions are essential in some communities where the spoken word is relied on to communicate, as access to other forms of literacy is not possible. ESOL learners learn through their own schemata, “members of communities and the wider society participate in events and practices in which they frequently use oral language drawing on skills that are both personal to them and cultural or social in origin. Many are good storytellers, eloquent speech makers or good listeners’ (Hughes 2010:265).

Nelson (1989) states that the storytelling experience is a vehicle for enhancing understanding, both literal and inferential: motivating oral discussion; increasing and promoting interesting language usage. Storytelling can indeed be an effective teaching and learning tool to aid learners in becoming more proficient in speaking and understanding a new language, as before students can achieve proficiency in other skills such as reading and writing, oral language is one of the most important means of learning and of acquiring knowledge.

As an experienced teacher trainer I have found that ESOL Teachers in language classrooms, often hesitate to include storytelling into language teaching because of an already overloaded and restricted curriculum. The current UK ESOL provision is restricted by a very prescriptive approach to delivery and Curriculum content, with rigid learning objectives assessed by government target setting, with a strong focus on employability skills. Recent government cuts to ESOL funding have resulted in more limited teaching hours and a product model of curriculum in which learners are viewed in terms of economic commodities. This programmed approach to learning is measured in terms of behavioural learning outcomes with little space for teacher creativity.

This existing educational climate leaves very little flexibility or opportunity to explore alternative models of curriculum, or to investigate alternative pedagogic tools to enhance language development. De Bono (2014) highlights the importance of developing creativity in every possible aspect and states what great motivator creativity is when engaging the teacher’s interest. There is no doubt that creativity is the most important human resource of all. Without creativity there would be no progress, and we would be forever repeating the same patterns. Creativity is an essential component of lesson planning in any language classroom.

Storytelling as a stimulus for Creativity and Imagination

In my experience effective stories can create and recreate places, far away and near; they can inspire and engage, grow imagination and expand students’ schemata of the world. Narrative stories tell the story of who we are, where we came from and where we would like to go. Storytelling is an interactive process which can encourage ESOL learners to be active participants rather than passive recipients in the process of language learning. It can engage them to contribute more fully to the language acquisition process by bringing their own experiences, knowledge and expectations of life and work. Storytelling can also encourage spontaneous authentic communication when learners speak without preparation, or worrying about how to say something correctly. This often occurs when learners tell a story, adding in their own opinions, emotions, ideas and perceptions. Authentic communication between ESOL learners will cross different cultural barriers, the communicative approach encouraging ESOL learners to become more confident and natural communicators. Morgan and Rinvoluci,(1983: 1) champion storytelling, ‘as a favourable ‘communicative’ alternative to traditional language teaching methods which engages learners and facilitates learning through ‘unconscious’ processes. ‘Stories, tales, folklore and myths may hold the key to a world of languages. Stories are everywhere, ‘hidden inside everyone’ (Morgan and Rinvoluci, 1983: 3)
Storytelling as Art and Culture

Storytelling is the one of the oldest of arts passed down from generation to generation, as a means of explaining and understanding the world. Families use stories to transmit principles, social history and cultures; it is used to entertain and to instruct, to moralise and warn, and to ensure the cultural survival of memories. New members marry into families and bring varying interpretations and historic perspectives. Fairy stories and legends are a part of every culture, in addition to love stories, adventure stories, ghost stories and bible stories, all of which can express information about different countries and cultures.

Storytelling offers opportunity to widen awareness and respect for diverse cultural backgrounds, developing learners’ schema. Linguistic scheme theory was first applied to linguistics by Bartlett (1932). He noted that when an American Indian story was told to British people, they adapted the details when retelling it to fit with their own schemata, adding in familiar frameworks and leaving out unfamiliar ones. Nair (2003:5) notes how stories appear to have evolved across cultures, “A good story is one that can be ‘taken away’ by listeners and/or tellers and repeated in other conversations, other contexts, other cultures”.

Storytelling widens our awareness and understanding of our own culture as well as other cultures, offering a sense of shared belonging to a group. Collaborative storytelling tasks can be socially interactive as well as individual. It encourages students to work in cross cultural groups on more complex tasks, encouraging a pooling of knowledge and offers multiple perspectives. Savvidou (2010) explores the use of storytelling, as reflective dialogue to encourage professional development in English lecturers sharing and responding to stories.

The Aims of using Storytelling in the ESOL Classroom

The aim of using storytelling activities in the ESOL classroom is to encourage a shared social practice through which explicit and tacit knowledge can be transmitted and identities acquired (Boje, 2001). The objective is to engage students’ interest, allowing learning to take place more readily and more naturally, in a meaningful and interactive communicative context (Fitzgibbon and Wilheim,1998).

Storytelling can offer language practice in the safe and relaxed environment of a classroom, encouraging friendly and co-operative interaction between classmates. This will lower learners’ affective filter (Krashen, 1981) so that learning acquisition place more easily. In a comfortable learning environment students are more likely to develop language from their participation as both speakers and listeners and learn to respect the opinions of others. As a result this will promotes turn taking and encourage students to generate dialogue and develop ideas by listening to and telling stories from a variety of cultures, identifying the similarities and differences. Dialogue can be defined as ‘a conversation informed by a narrative’, in this way language will be used to encourage the concept of ‘dialogue’ within storytelling activities, highlighting its function as a tool for seeking knowledge and consensus (Abma & Widdershoven,2005: Abma and Widdershoven,2005).

Storytelling as a pedagogic tool in the ESOL Classroom

Storytelling is teaching technique that has stood the test of time (Chambers 1970). Using a range of storytelling activities in the ESOL classroom can enhance learner engagement and interaction and promote language communication skills, developing interactional language by encouraging learners’ socialization in literacy learning, which is one of the primary goals of language learning as learners need the ability to competently interact in social situations, engaging in social practices both inside and outside of the classroom. This competence is achieved through socialization into in the language classroom; interactive storytelling activities can be used to promote English literacy and language skills and engage learners in ‘language socialization’. Hellerman ( 2006) found evidence that post-reading story re-telling, can develop learners’ interactional competence and increase engagement in a classroom setting through their socialization into a literacy event e.g. reading a book silently and
retelling the story to a partner. This research suggests that socialization during literacy events in the classroom, leads to increased participation in literacy outside the classroom. This theory is supported by (Morrow, 2001) who purports that almost as important as storytelling itself are the follow-up activities after storytelling, such as story recollection which allows learners to revisit the story and enhance their understanding, to recycle new vocabulary, as well as allowing teachers to assess students’ current language levels.

Many ESOL learners are working adults who bring shared life experiences and understanding of the world to the classroom from home languages and cultures, this providing an important contextual resources for storytelling which are salient to the learners. Savvidou (2010) states that storytelling is a way of thinking about experience valuing the individual’s view of the world. Boje (2001)) goes further, stating that storytelling is a shared social practice through which explicit and tacit knowledge can be transmitted and identities acquired.

Storytelling is a feature of language interaction which includes not only productive skills (speaking and writing), but also receptive skills (listening and reading). However the main focus of ESOL teaching is to develop learners’ speaking and listening skills so they can communicate effectively to function in work and society. The specific educational and social benefits of using storytelling with second language learners are numerous and well researched, especially with regard to children. According to Wilson (1997) including storytelling in the curriculum can improve the level of learning in all four language skills. The concept of storytelling is grounded in theories of speech communication; storytelling is inherently dialogic, so that whenever a story is told it provokes a response. (Bakhtin, 1984:1986). Hibbin (2014) proposes that the use of oral storytelling in primary schools promotes speaking and listening skills, but that storytelling is under-utilized within Primary Education in the UK; children with poor oral language skills being disadvantaged in school as a result. She champions the use of oral storytelling as a pedagogic tool used for creative and dialogic teaching methods.

It can certainly be argued that storytelling can engage the cognitive processes of learning, encouraging learners to question, examine their own assumptions, beliefs and knowledge, or those expressed by other storytellers. Savvidou (2010) examined a group of English language lecturers using storytelling as a form of professional dialogue. It identifies five dialogic processes: connecting, echoing, developing, questioning and constructing. Many of these values are applicable to adult language teaching, such as helping adults recognise patterns in language, stimulating creativity, developing skills in social dialogue and cooperative interpersonal behaviour. (McGuire 1992) states that it can specifically enhance learners’ awareness of semantics, syntax, and phonology, skills we use naturally in our first language without thinking.

Halliday (1985) describes language as a social phenomenon with a purpose or function behind all communication. Learning a foreign language is about communicating and interacting with other people e.g. finding out personal information, expressing feelings, giving opinions and sharing experiences and news; a system of language choices for making meaning. This oral communication is often communicated via questioning, narrative, reported speech or storytelling. The storyteller becomes the source of language, and the listeners are actively involved in understanding (Morgan 1983). Authentic communication consists of different speech acts and discourse events which are both socially and culturally reflexive. Announcements, declarations, promises and requests all invoke stories (Langellier and Peterson 2004), Bejamin (1973) claims that storytelling comes from the realms of living speech and experiences reported by others, as it is the narrative of daily life and human communication practice. Telling one’s stories invites reciprocation of people’s own stories (Geissner 1995). Hoffer (1955) suggests that stories give meaning to life. Connelly and Clandin (1990) state that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Storytelling and its related activities are based in humanistic language learning, integrating communication, building knowledge and developing skills and attitudes conducive to emergent literacy (Fogarty, 1997).

Storytelling and Listening Skills

Ellis (1979) suggests that storytelling is an effective way to develop listening skills. Storytelling develops ‘active listening skills’ as it promotes exposure to more complex language, offering an ideal format for natural listening material and useful contexts in which to explore language. Krashen (1981) states that one who hears no language speaks no language. Zhao (2005) agrees that the input the learner receives from being exposed to
the target language becomes part of the learner’s knowledge, if they are not exposed, they do not develop proficiency. Storytelling has the capacity to facilitate dialogue and empower learners by giving them a voice to express emotion or create meaning. In everyday social interactions, personal experience stories are not presented as monologues; rather storytelling is part of an interactional event, a conversation, in which stories are mutually constructed by storytelling participants roles interchanging (Schegloff, 1997).

Listening which takes places during storytelling is different from the more usual classroom listening comprehension tasks, such as listening to a CD. Listening to a live story is much more engaging, especially if it is followed up with questions the listener wants answered, as opposed to comprehension questions. Storytelling can mean the difference between listening passively and listening actively. Nelson (1989) maintains that the combination of language, story, and metaphors heightens listeners’ awareness. She states further that through the listener’s emotional involvement, literal and inferential comprehensions are increased. Through listening to stories told in the target language, learners are exposed to the target language in a natural way and therefore become more proficient in speaking and understanding it. (Ray & Seely, 2004).

Conclusion

In an educational climate which promotes a more restrictive and prescriptive ESOL curriculum in the Further Education Learning and Skills Learning sector, it is important to explore and investigate the use of creative techniques such as storytelling in the ESOL classroom, in order to extend knowledge and understanding of second language acquisition theories in order to improve practice of language teaching and to promote the use of meaningful and communicative language learning, in a relaxed and enjoyable environment which is conducive to learning.
References


Key factors in the promotion and obstruction of simulated learning in practice: an overview

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Abstract

Background: Simulation has been part of clinical skills education since 1950s. However the use of simulated learning as a popular educational methodology is becoming widespread due to several drivers aimed at improving patient safety and learner competence. The aim of this study was to firstly examine the best available evidence on the critical factors promoting simulated learning in clinical practice. And secondly, to identify and analyse the perceived barriers hindering the effect of simulated learning.

Methods: A quasi experimental pre-test post-test design was employed to compare learner perception of barriers hindering the simulated learning experience. A total of eighty two post registration staff attending a clinical skills training programme participated in the study.

Results: Pre- test findings revealed that the following barriers were perceived as significant by more than half the sample population; identified lack of familiarity with the equipment (65.4%), fear of looking foolish (62.2%), inaccurate reflection of ability (57.3%), time pressures in undertaking the skill efficiently (56.1%), deficient knowledge in undertaking the skill correctly (54.3%), intimidating environment due to practice being observed (53.6%), lack of realism (51.8%) and fear of peer judgements (50%). The post- test results interestingly revealed significant changes in perception scores for most of the identified barriers. The success of simulated learning as an educational methodology relies on a carefully planned and appropriately implemented learning experience featuring the key characteristics that promote its effectiveness.

Conclusion: The success of simulated learning as an educational methodology relies on a carefully planned and appropriately implemented learning experience featuring the key characteristics that promote its effectiveness.

Key words

Factors, promotion, obstruction, simulation, learning.
Background

The use of simulation in clinical skills education is becoming more and more popular and increasingly recognised to enhance acquisition of clinical skills prior to clinical exposure proving advantageous over traditional methods of teaching. Despite better understanding of the factors promoting simulation based education in healthcare, research evaluating perceived barriers of simulated learning is lacking. Thorough understanding of these barriers is essential to facilitate effective learning and augment acquisition of clinical skills. The main aim of this study is to determine the factors which promote and hinder the use of simulated learning in clinical practice through two specific objectives. Firstly, to identify and provide evidence to substantiate the use of simulation in clinical skills education by exploring the key drivers facilitating simulated learning. And secondly, to examine the learners’ perception of potential barriers impacting the effectiveness of simulated learning.

Literature Review

The search was conducted in the following databases MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL, AMED and BNI using the search command simulat* AND learn*. The articles were limited to English and accessed for the period 2000-2013. The search criterion was not restricted to any one particular health care profession and included literature in all areas of health care education. For the purpose of this review, in relation to clinical skills training the simulations that were reviewed included low to medium fidelity simulations.

Benefits of simulated learning

Simulated learning enables learners to practice clinical skills and acquire competence without posing risks to patients (Wilford and Doyle, 2006; Decker et al., 2008; Prescott and Garside, 2009; McCaughey and Traynor, 2010); can offer learners individualised educational experiences promoting active learning through participation (Issenberg et al., 2005); increase in the degree of retention of what has been learnt when using simulation along with transfer of acquired skills to the real life situations Kuduvalli et al. (2009); integration of theory with practice leading to improved learning and acquisition of skills (Maran and Glavin, 2003; McCullum, 2007; Prion, 2008); facilitates opportunity for both formative and summative assessment of competence (McGaghie et al. 2010) along with opportunity for standardisation in assessment for all learners using reliable outcome measures (Issenberg et al., 2005). Simulated learning involves a complex set of learning features that are both active and passive such as observation, deliberate practice, cooperative learning, dialogue, debrief and feedback that can be explained through the various frameworks of learning theories. However it is the combination of a variety of approaches used that is likely to increase the chance of learning occurring. Students learn in three ways: through participation in the simulated experience, observation of the experience and debriefing, which strengthens student's progression and mastery of learning (Seropian et al., 2004). The growth of simulated learning in practice over the last four decades have been endorsed by key drivers from a strategic and political perspective (NIHR, 2011), (Donaldson, 2009), professional regulations (NMC, 2005), (DoH, 1999) as well as changing societal expectations. In addition to the national and international drivers a number of key factors have promoted the widespread introduction of simulated learning in health care education.

Critical factors leading to successful simulated learning

Deliberate practice is identified as a key characteristic of simulated learning involving intense skill repetition within a controlled domain through appropriate learner engagement and feedback resulting in improved skill performance. Engaging in repetitive practice for intended cognitive and psychomotor skills can result in the acquisition of skills over shorter periods of time as compared to exposure from routine clinical experience (Wayne et al., 2006). Likewise the discussion between the educator and the learner is crucial for critical reflection where the learner is able to make sense from the learning experience. The Best Evidence Medical Education (BEME) simulation review by Issenberg and colleagues in 2005 identified debriefing as one of the critical factors for promoting learning
Debriefing which focuses only on positive aspects of a learning experience has been recognised by learners to be less beneficial (Lasater, 2007). However, critical to the reflective process is the use of non-judgemental debriefing which allows the learner to derive meaning from their assumptions and understandings (Rudolph et al., 2007) without the fear of looking foolish in front of others. In instances where learning experience produces such negative effects for the learner, facilitators have a vital role to guard negative learning (Hertel and Millis, 2002) by providing immediate correction following the error.

Key characteristics of faculty therefore desired for an effective simulated learning experience should encompass personality, teaching ability, competence, interpersonal skills, evaluation methodology and integration of realism. Correspondingly, the quality of higher education learning environments to a large extent is dependent on the educational design. Therefore emphasis should be placed to design the learning methodology on principles of learner centred approach facilitating deep learning. Another key factor entails the availability of appropriate equipment and resources for facilitating effective simulation (Seropian, 2004).

Several components of the simulated learning environment such as the physical space, equipment, personnel can all have an impact on the participants experience hence careful consideration of these factors should be undertaken prior to the learning experience. Another key feature includes the use of simulator fidelity due to the perceived ability to generate cognitive and behavioural responses as seen in the real world. Research commends the use of simulators as a useful adjunct to clinical skills education in enhancing learning (Issenberg et al., 2005; Lasater, 2007a). There is a wide range of simulator fidelities which are accessible for the teaching and learning of clinical skills such as part task trainers, screen based systems, virtual reality, and standardised patients. Another unique characteristic of simulated learning is the flexibility in adapting various learning strategies for clinical skills education. The strategy is often defined by identified learning outcomes and availability of resources and can be designed to include large and small instructed led group teaching or independent individual learning (Issenberg and Scalese, 2007).

Methods

A quantitative structured quasi experimental methodology using pre-test-post-test study design was employed due to the practical difficulty in randomly assigning the participants to experimental and comparison groups. The study was conducted at the Clinical Skills Training Unit within a large Acute Teaching Hospital in the North West. Following approval by the local NHS Research and Development department and review by the Research Ethics Officer a 15 item questionnaire was distributed to 82 staff attending peripheral cannulation training. Requirement of the training for all learners to participate in simulated learning ensued in the adoption of convenience sampling. The questionnaire was developed by the author and piloted with eight learners from another cohort to ensure lucidity and absence of ambiguity of the items. The survey was self-administered and anonymous and participation was voluntary. The questionnaire was designed to gather information about demographics, previous experiences and perceived barriers of simulated learning. The questionnaire was designed using a 4 point Likert scale. Data was analysed using the SPSS Version 20.0 software. The Wilcoxon pair wise signed ranks tests were used to compare the difference between pre and post simulation responses. Changes in perception scores were summarised as the direction of change, including participants with non-missing responses at pre and post training. Scale item with p values of less than 0.05 was considered to be statistically significant.

Findings

A total of 60 nurses, 14 healthcare support workers and 8 allied health professionals returned the questionnaire indicating a response rate of 100%. Out of the eighty two participants, the vast majority were female (95%). Most of the participants (43.9%) were in the age range of 20-29 followed by (24.4%) in the age range of 30-39. The number of participants without prior experience of simulated learning was comparatively more (60.5%) than participants with prior experience of simulated learning (39.5%). Table 1 summarizes the demographics.
Table 1 - study demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>95.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (Years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24.4</td>
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<td>40-49</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Title</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing staff</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care Support Workers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied Health Professionals</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous experience of simulated learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall for the general questions, key barriers perceived on the pre-test included time pressures in undertaking the skill (56.1%, n=46), deficient knowledge in undertaking skill correctly (54.3%, n=44), intimidating environment as practice observed (53.6%, n=44), hesitancy in clarifying doubts in front of peers (52.4%, n=43) and inadequate feedback from educator due to group size (30%, n=24). Interestingly (68.8%, n=22) of participants without prior experience of simulated learning perceived the deficiency of knowledge in undertaking the skill as a barrier in comparison to 45.8%, n=22) of participants with prior experience. Among the responders in the age range of 50-59 years (72.7%, n=8) of participants perceived deficient knowledge in undertaking the skill and likelihood to feel hesitant in clarifying doubts in front of others (72.7%, n=8) as a key barrier. Likewise participants in the age range of 30-39 years perceived the environment as intimidating due to practice being observed (63.6%, n=7) as well as time pressures in undertaking the skill (61.1%, n=22). Overall, participant’s perception of barriers for the general questions in relation to job role presented mixed results. Deficient knowledge in undertaking the skill (75.0%, n=6) and time pressure (62.5%, n=5) was perceived as the main barrier by majority of Allied Health Professionals (AHPs). Nursing staff identified intimidating environment (60.0%, n=36), time pressures and likelihood to clarify doubts in front of peers (55.0%, n=33), and inadequate feedback from trainer due to group size (32.8%, n=19) as the main barrier for simulated learning. Principal barriers perceived by healthcare workers included deficient knowledge (78.6%, n=6), likelihood to feel hesitant in clarifying doubts in front of peers (57.1%, n=8) and time pressures in undertaking the skill efficiently.

Overall for the fear of questions on the pre-test identified the fear to look foolish (62.2%, n=51), fear of inaccurate reflection of ability (57.3%, n=47) and fear of peer judgement (50%, n=41) as the key perceived barriers. Interestingly participant’s with prior experience identified fear of looking foolish (59.2%, n=29), inaccurate reflection of ability (57.1%, n=28), and peer judgement (49%, n=24. Participants without previous experience of simulated learning also identified three of the barriers in the same sequence; looking foolish (65.6%, n=21), inaccurate reflection of ability (56.3%, 18) and peer judgements (50%, n=16). Overall, the majority of the participants who perceived barriers in relation to fear of questions were in the age range of 50-59 years. Interestingly the fear to look foolish (66.7%, n=40) and fear of educators judgements (32.2%, n=19) was perceived as the main barrier perceived by nursing staff. Whereas the fear of inaccurate reflection of ability (75.0%, n=6) and negative transfer of learning (50.0%, n=6) was identified as the main barrier by Allied Health professionals. The fear of peer judgement and inaccurate reflection of ability (57.1%, n=8) was perceived as the main barrier by the Healthcare support workers.

Overall for the lack of questions the key barriers identified by the learners included lack of familiarity with the
equipment (65.4%, n=53), lack of realism (51.8%, n=42) and lack of opportunity for practice on simulator (43.2%, n=35). The findings were concurrent in relation to participants with and without prior experience of simulated learning. Overall, the majority of participants who perceived barriers in relation to lack of question were in the age range of 50-59 years. Among the responders both nursing staff and allied health professionals identified the lack of familiarity with equipment (62.7%, n=37) and lack of adequate opportunity for practice (42.4%, n=25) as the main barrier. The lack of realism was perceived as a barrier by allied health professionals in contrast to the health care support workers who perceived the lack of sufficient resources as the principal barrier.

Discussion

Out of the 82 participant's majority of the respondents were female (95.1%) in comparison with their male counterparts (4.9%). With nursing being a mainly female dominated profession the sample was found to be representative of the sample population in terms of gender. The participants were primarily in the age range of 20-39 years (64.3%) which is typical of the current workforce within healthcare due to large numbers of experienced staff either retiring or moving to new roles. Most of the responders were nursing staff (73.2%) in comparison to healthcare support workers and allied health professionals. This could be explained due to increase in the number of nurses assuming a range of clinical skills as extended roles.

From the list of fifteen potential barriers divided in three different categories, eight were perceived as a major barrier by more than half of the participant population. About two thirds of the respondents (65.4%) identified lack of familiarity with the equipment (simulator) as a common barrier. Two fifths of the sample population perceived barriers including feeling hesitant to clarify doubts in front of peers (43.4%) and lack of sufficient opportunity for adequate practice on simulator (43.2%). The barrier identified by less than one fourth of the responders included lack of sufficient resources (24.4%) in undertaking the simulated learning. The post-test responses showed significant drop in percentage for all identified barriers with lack of realism perceived as the key barrier. The fidelity of simulation is often reliant on the skill and the method in which the simulator is used and essentially influences skill transfer (Druckman and Bjork, 1994). Several studies have highlighted that transfer of skills can be achieved for procedural skills using basic simulators (Teteris et al., 2012). However it is vitally important to ensure that skills learned on a simulator are transferred effectively from the simulator to clinical practice. Participants in this study perceived the negative transfer of learning as significant barrier in the pre-test response. Yet, the post-test perception scores were markedly reduced following the simulated learning experience which demonstrates the effectiveness of deliberate practice and appropriate feedback. Fear of looking foolish was perceived as a major barrier by significant proportion of the sample for both pre and post-test responses. Interestingly no significant statistical difference was found in the pre-test response for this barrier based on prior experience of simulated learning. This could be explained due to the fact that most participants undertaking the skill might be junior staff with a lack of experience or in case of senior participants may feel worried about looking less knowledgeable in front of the juniors. Familiarity with the simulator is also important for the learner to be motivated in engaging with the learning experience and relates to the notion of a comfortable learning environment. The findings for the lack of familiarity question revealed a significant change of perception scores from pre-test to post-test. A possible explanation for the change in scores could be the result of a well facilitated pre briefing session introducing the participant to the simulator prior to the simulation encounter thus reducing participant's apprehension of this perceived barrier.

Analysis of barriers identified by participant characteristics

Compared to other staff groups the allied health professionals perceived time constraints as a significant barrier. This observation is however limited due to the limited number of allied health professionals participating in the study. There was no substantial difference in findings based on participant's prior experience for the time pressure question. There might be a need to evaluate the participants feedback around timing allocated in relation to group size to lessen this barrier and provide a valuable learning experience. Surprisingly, participants in the age range between 20-29 years and 50-59 years perceived the lack of time as significant barrier when
compared to participants in the age range between 30-49 years. This could be elucidated owing to the fact that middle age participants form the bulk of the existing workforce within the organisation. Deficiency in knowledge was yet another significant barrier identified by majority of participants mainly within the healthcare support worker group. This could be attributed to the lack of underpinning knowledge in relation to the skill along with the fact that intravenous cannulation is still classed as an extended role for many non-medical staff groups. There was no significant difference in perception scores based on participant’s prior experience of simulated learning. Scores in relation to age revealed that older participants perceived the knowledge deficiency as a barrier in comparison to the younger participants. Interestingly, the findings also did not reveal any statistical difference in the perception scores for lack of willingness to engage in simulation question between experienced and non-experienced participants. Nonetheless in relation to age, older participants perceived this as barrier more than the younger participants. It was remarkable to note that none of the allied health professionals perceived this as a barrier in comparison to the other staff groups. Possibly this could be explained from the need to learn the new skill as cannulation is undertaken by a limited number of allied health professionals depending on their role in comparison to nursing and healthcare support staff. Barriers such as lack of opportunity to practice, inadequate feedback from the educator, hesitant to clarify doubts in front of peers, lack of sufficient resources were perceived as insignificant following the simulated learning experience. This could be explained due to the possibility of being offered ample opportunity for practice. Analysis of the data for post-test responses reported significant changes in perception scores following the simulated learning experience for all of the perceived barriers. The results were encouraging to find that with a properly designed simulated learning environment the perceived barriers could be markedly reduced which in turn can provide a meaningful learning experience for the learners. These results also highlight the importance of recognising and addressing these barriers in order to optimise the effectiveness of the simulated learning methodology.

This research has few limitations. Due to lack of a control group, the quantitative findings did not allow further exploration as to whether the direction of change in perception scores was secondary to the simulated learning experience. It was conducted in a single site and included only three of the staff groups participating in the clinical skill training. Hence the generalizability of the findings to other disciplines or practitioner groups undertaking the skill may be obscure. Furthermore, the study relied on a convenience sample of participants enrolled on the training programme as it was not possible to recruit participants due to logistical reasons. The use of pre and post questionnaire to assess learner perception of barriers is also open to random error though every attempt was made to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument. Thus an improved method of evaluation might improve the confidence in the findings. Largely, however the findings have provided a good overview of the factors hindering simulated learning in practice.

Conclusion

Simulated learning is an educational methodology proven to help learners transform the manner in which they acquire knowledge as established from the review of literature. This however involves ensuring an apt curriculum design featuring the key factors promoting learning using this methodology. Equally, factors highlighted as perceived barriers must be considered for future development of simulation training programmes within clinical skills education to establish a positive learning experience for the learners.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor for the valuable guidance and academic support and to all the research participants for their participation in the study.
References


Approaches to the teaching and learning of English as an additional language in early years settings

Linda Withey

The author is by background and training an early years professional with experience of teaching in primary, further, and higher education. After initial teacher training she left education and worked in housing management for ten years until the arrival of twins. Spending the next five years at home with her own children impressed on her the value and importance of those early formative years; consequently she returned to work in primary education, specifically to work in early years. It was during her time here that the need for highly qualified and experienced early years staff became apparent and initiated her move into FE, and later into HE. She currently holds a post as a senior lecturer in early years.
Abstract

The work investigates the approaches to the teaching and learning of English as an additional language in primary education, and identifies the most appropriate and effective means of achieving this. Appreciating that the ethnic diversity within individual schools may result in a varying range of strategies, the objective was to identify a consistency of approach. Additionally there is an examination of the role of learner support in classrooms, and the strategies employed by schools to develop effective communication with parents. The study is longitudinal in design and tracks a cohort of children from reception to year 2. Data collection draws on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative paradigms and combines observations of children and staff, interviews with staff and, focus groups with parents. Alongside, are assessments of children, a review of records and policy documents, and an analysis of guidance and literacy strategies. The catalyst for the study came from comments made by practitioners, that parents from different ethnic backgrounds held differing views about how their children should be taught English as an additional language. Added to this, the researcher had observed the increasing numbers of children in local schools from differing language groups, and the concerns expressed by staff about the best way to tackle what at times seemed to be, an overwhelming problem in everyday practice. The one clear aim throughout the study was to throw useful light on effective teaching. Indeed, Evans (2002, p.228) raise the questions, ‘What use is educational research if it does not inform and impact upon what goes on in schools?’

Key words

Classroom support, Creative teaching strategies, Developing positive parental relationships, English as an additional language, English language skills, Early literacy

ACRONYMNS

BLA – bi-lingual assistant
EAL – English as an additional language
EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage
L1 – first language
L2 – second language
TA – teaching assistant
Background and introduction

Increasing numbers of children are entering education with little or no ability to speak English. Since this is the language for both education and assessment, this raises important questions in terms of children’s attainment and achievement. In 2006, the Department for Education and Skills identified that 21.9% of UK children were from ethnic minority backgrounds and did not have English as a first language; this figure is projected to rise nationally to 23% by 2018.

The longitudinal study conducted from September 2008 to July 2011, set out to investigate the teaching and learning of English as an additional language by following a cohort of children, from reception to the end of year 2. The sample group in the study included a cohort of 150 children aged 5 to 7 years, drawn from 5 primary schools from differing socio-economic backgrounds (see table1, page 13). Children were observed in the classroom environment and progress was identified initially against the Early Learning Goals for Communication, Language and Literacy from the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (DfES, 2008) followed later by The National Curriculum (DfEE, 1999) requirements for English at KS1. 15 teaching staff where observed in their normal classroom environment during literacy sessions. Interactions and interpersonal communications between staff (teachers and teaching assistant) and children, children and peers were recorded; and in order to represent the parent’s voice, focus groups were established with 60 parents participating.

Results and findings from EYFS

The emphasis in all settings was on social and personal development with children actively encouraged to respond in English. This ability to express personal feelings and understand those of others is important as children develop. Weare (2004,) refers to this as emotional literacy. The main approach adopted by all staff was identified as a dialogic style, which is based around the concept (Alexander, 2008) that high quality talk enhances children’s all round development.

In all settings literacy underpinned the entire curriculum whilst also having specific slots throughout the day. During such sessions the emphasis was on every child becoming a confident speaker, in recognition that this is the first and most important step in gaining literacy skills (DfES, 2009).

Staff, both teachers and assistants worked and planned co-operatively to ensure that children met age-appropriate outcomes. There was a huge emphasis on free play and child-initiated activity, which recognises that cognitive and social development are complimentary. The relationship between play-based pedagogy and high quality provision are significantly effective where there is a high level of interaction between children and practitioners (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2001). This was clearly observed in all settings. There was a strong emphasis in all settings on the use of song and music and a clear recognition from all staff that this is a positive means for children to learn language in a way that is enjoyable, repetitive and reinforcing (Booth Church, 2006). It is therefore, of particular use in supporting language acquisition and development for second language children (Huy Le, 1999). All settings were laid out in large open plan spaces with areas of learning identified by words in English, pictures, and symbols. Children were however, allowed to freely use and move equipment across these areas (McNaughton and Williams, 2009). Discussion between staff, about changing and placing materials and resources was on-going in nature and suggested a flexible and responsive approach to planning (Curtis and Carter, 2005). Resources, displays and artefacts in all settings were reflective of a multi-cultural perspective, though did not necessarily reflect the cultures of those children present.

Early years practitioners mindful of the intensity of daily interactions with young children, were observed to be pro-active in establishing constructive and supportive relationships. There was a strong emphasis on guided participation with staff working alongside children in their learning (Rogoff, 2003). In relation to the interaction between children, it was observed that where L2 children were in the majority the tendency was for children to communicate in L1, since there may be no perceived need to do so in L2. However, where there was a greater balance between numbers of L1 and L2 children there was a greater tendency for L2 children to use English for communication. Since children at this age are developing socially and emotionally and beginning to understanding
about friendship they may therefore be motivated to use L2 in order to develop such friendships (Smith, 2010).

Whilst it was apparent that the play-based approach to learning of the EYFS was practiced in all settings, the results (see table 2, page 14) for schools 4 and 5 at the end of reception year are lower than the other three. The main differences being the percentages of EAL children, with schools 4 and 5 being exclusively EAL, and the corresponding levels of parental literacy skills with again, schools 4 and 5 having a high percentage of parents who themselves have little English and low levels of educational attainment. In general, the home languages represented here are predominantly oral, with few parents able to read/write; children are therefore only subject to an oral pattern of speech and do not have the opportunity to establish a range of language skills that incorporates an awareness of how those sounds look, and are formed. In terms of Bruner’s approach to language development (Bruner, 1983) they may appear to be lacking the iconic and symbolic stages until they encounter formal education.

Kabuto (2011), regards children to use three languages; for instruction, in the community, and in the home. It is clear that in these two schools, the language of the home and community are not that used for instruction, which may offer some explanation for the difference in results. With reference to such ‘ethnic enclaves’ Massey (1999) and Per-Andrews et al (2003) discuss high levels of self-sufficiency and latency in learning the host language, which, whilst enabling members to function well within the community can also be a hindrance to social involvement in the mainstream of society. This may be one of the underlying reasons for the apparent reluctance to progress into English language speaking.

Children make sense of the world through their active engagement with it, and develop a socio-cultural perspective on language through interaction with their peers (Gee, 2002). It must therefore be highlighted that in schools 4 and 5, children do not have the opportunity to actively engage with English speaking peers from differing backgrounds, but rather, continue with those from the home, and community who are also EAL. There is therefore no natural opportunity for children to learn their English language skills directly through interaction with peers. It is clear that all settings make good considerations for the children in terms of developmental needs, for the individual and, with regards to what is also culturally appropriate (Gonzalez-Mena, 1998). Likewise, is their common intention to working positively with parents, however, this is made more difficult for staff in those settings where a translator must be relied on for communication. This may be an indication that in settings such as schools 4 and 5, a different approach to working with parents is required. This could ensure that a greater level of co-operation from parents is fostered, in order to establish a base for language that supports the transition of children into education.

Results and findings at the end of KS1

In all schools the teaching style moved progressively towards a more formalised and directive approach, although some elements of the play-based learning of the EYFS remain incorporated into literacy e.g. the use of resources. Literacy now took the form of a dedicated session with very clear learning objectives set; this was generally an overarching theme which became incorporated into other aspects of the curriculum throughout the day/week. What was also clear was the extent to which teachers experimented with creative ideas e.g. structured learning/role play areas, writing back-packs, dens and secret writing spaces, talking tables, hot-seating, the talking shop, and the ‘5-minute box’. Children were encouraged to develop literacy beyond the traditional means of reading and writing, with staff clearly recognising and valuing a multi-sensory approach to learning. What still remained evident was the dialogic approach of Alexander (2008), with teachers recognising that high quality talk not only enhances children’s learning holistically, but more so where the development of language itself is concerned.

In all schools it was the teacher who took responsibility for supporting L2 learners, through daily planning, by building relationships, through personalised learning, and by having a clear commitment to spend time throughout each week with every child. Additional support was provided by TAs working within the planned framework, and by again adopting the same personal approach as the teacher. In those settings where the cohort consisted of both L1 and L2 learners there were opportunities for peer learning to occur, and it was
clear this happened not just through natural socialisation, but also, because teachers took advantage of this means of learning and allowed time for it to happen. Although settings employed BLAs they did not support all L2 children, in the study only those languages from south east Asia were provided for; those L2 children from other language communities had no such support. Thus, in those settings where cohorts were made up entirely of L2 children speaking Asian languages, the role of the BLA was to translate and interpret between teacher and child. The role of adult learner support for L2 children appears therefore to be inconsistent, and might suggest that some children are being disadvantaged by a lack of support in the home language. The results (see table 3, page 15), however, may indicate otherwise. That in fact, those children who are not provided with BLA support in the home language are advantaged, because in not being able to rely on support they actively seek out other opportunities to learn, both from teachers and peers.

All schools set out to establish and develop strong links with parents, and acted in response to perceived individual and local need. This was based on the underlying recognition that parents are the first educators in children’s lives, which is now firmly enshrined into practice through existing government policy such as the Every Child Matters agenda (DfES, 2003) and the Every Parent Matters agenda (DfES, 2007). The role of BLAs became significant as part of communicating with parents, particularly in those schools with a high percentage of EALs, where they were required to act as translators between parents and staff, whilst in the first instance this removed the language barrier its continued use throughout early years eventually became a barrier in itself, to successful direct two-way communication.

By the end of KS1 children across all schools were in the majority, achieving the expected level 2 for speaking and listening. This showed significant improvement for schools 4 and 5, which may suggest that once EAL children begin to develop confidence in their use of English the rate of development continues. It is clear that these children already know what language is, they are merely now discovering what the English language is (Tabor, 2004). What was common across all schools, was the practice from all staff of using English at all times, since they are concerned with the quantity, and quality of exposure of the language. They are to some extent also under pressure from parents, and head teachers for children to be making observable and quantifiable progress.

Whilst oracy is the basis for all language development it is not unsurprising then that children in all settings perform better in the speaking and listening elements of the curriculum. In terms of the results for all components of English those schools with better outcomes appear to have some aspects in common; a higher number of children in the group who are native English speakers, a creative approach to literacy, and a higher percentage of parents who can support their children at home. Kabuto (2011) discusses the need for children to develop language practices at home, such as understanding that graphic forms carry meaning. Where the home language is merely used in a spoken form there is no encouragement for this to happen. Likewise where parents do not read/have low levels of literacy there are few opportunities if any, for children to develop this skill either. Parental education has been identified as strong indicator in determining how well a child’s potential may be released in adult life (Fields, 2010). Evidence drawn from the parent focus group shows that all parents, regardless of their own literacy skills, are keen for their children to become proficient in their use of English.

What has become apparent from the study, is that those families living in English-dominant communities feel that learning to read, write and speak in English is necessary for school and future economic stability, there is not the same ‘necessity’ shown from those living in EAL-dominant communities. (The same findings are revealed in Martinez-Roldan and Malave, 2004). An interesting point discussed by Billet et al (2003) suggests there may be a link between starting to learn an additional language at an early age and a perceived weakening of national identity. Similar comments emerge from those parents from Moslem cultures who regard the maintenance of their home language inextricably linked to their religious identity. Interestingly too, is the view that whilst parents and home remain important influences throughout childhood, it is the influence of friends and peers, school, and the wider community that becomes of increasing significance as a child grows older (Sutton et al, 2004). For children then who live in homes, and communities where English is an additional language (as in school 4 and 5) and, where it is possible to continue without this, there is perhaps less motivation and encouragement to do so. The influence then, of the school may be seen to be at a tangent to the other dominant influences of
friends, peers and the wider community. The study clearly identified that all settings worked competently within
the guidelines of the EYFS and National Curriculum, with individual setting also incorporating various strategies
aimed at promoting literacy. However, throughout such current guidance is the assumption that EAL children are
the minority within any group, and as such have the opportunity to hear and use English amongst their peers.
The research (to date) has been unable to identify any guidance that adopts the opposite approach, that of,
supporting groups of children where EAL is the majority or, as with those cohorts identified in the study which
consist entirely of EAL children. For staff working in such settings then there is no specific guidance available.

In conclusion, one main theme to emerge is the extent to which creative resources and activities are used to
underpin literacy. There is a clear link identified between a creative approach and levels of attainment; where
creativity is increased attainment levels are higher. The quality of professional working relationships between
staff is identified as important, since this clearly sets the tone for co-operation and learning in the classroom.
The issue of working in partnership with parents is clearly high on the agenda for teaching staff who understand
how this strengthens children’s learning. It is therefore a matter of concern where this is difficult to establish,
yet alone maintain. One very clear aspect that emerges from the study is the difference between schools, and,
therefore the educational experiences of children. Children (as in schools 4 and 5) who are taught in a cohort
of 100% EAL speakers who are from the same heritage background, have a very different experience to those
in schools (as in schools 1, 2 and 3) where cohorts consists of diverse cultures and languages. It has to be argued
that this cannot be viewed to be the ‘multicultural’ face of education though it is often presented to be so.
Children in some settings are not being allowed to develop social interaction in its fullest sense and the process
of enculturation is sadly lacking. Such educational experiences actually work against a secure sense of identity, do
not encourage a clear understanding of the host nation, and culture, militate against social integration and hinder
the process of second language development. If this stance appears overly critical, then it should be viewed
in the wider context of British education which would define itself, as having an approach, which regards all
children as those who matter (DfES, 2003).

Acknowledgements

The study would not have been possible without the kind permission of Headteachers and the willingness of
staff to have me involved in the life of their schools; this has certainly included plenty of shared laughter. And,
to the children who have allowed me to participate in their learning experiences, in the way that only children
can. I big thank you also to the parents who contributed so openly about their experiences and aspirations, this
process was certainly eased by the warm support of bi-lingual staff.
References


### Table 1: Description of individual schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Class size</th>
<th>Number of children with English as L1</th>
<th>Number of EAL children</th>
<th>Majority language/s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Large faith school in town centre location. Large numbers of travellers, refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Urdu, Bengali, Portuguese, Farsi, Serbian, Polish, Romanian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Newly built community school co-located with a nursery for under 3s and a Sure Start Centre. Central to a large council estate with high levels of unemployment.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Urdu, Bengali, Hindi, Farsi, Polish, Romanian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small CofE school in catchment area of newly built private housing amid open countryside. Many parents are professionals.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Urdu, Bengali, Hindi, Ssyleti, Croatian, Farsi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Large dual-form entry, old Victorian building set in rows of old terraced houses. Central to large SE Asian community.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very large Victorian building kerb-side to main road. Located central to area deemed to be of social deprivation. Local population is entirely SE Asian.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Urdu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Results for CLL for all schools at the end of reception

Results for EYFS end of Reception year CLL scales (7-9)
Table 3: Overall levels of attainment for English for all school at the end of KS1