Language Support for Immigrant Children: A Study of State Schools in the UK and US

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In recent decades, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers have sought a new way of life in large numbers, often leaving their countries of origin behind in search of places that offer a better way of life. The purpose of this study was to investigate how elementary and middle school students in state schools in Reading, England (primarily speakers of Asian languages), and Richmond, Virginia (primarily speakers of Spanish), were supported academically, when most children's first language was not English. The authors were interested in exploring whether or not there were cultural or structural differences in the way each country helped or hindered these students as they progressed through the school systems. Three UK schools in a district of approximately 100,000 and three US schools in a district of approximately 250,000 were the focus of this exploration from 2000 to 2003. Findings indicated that there were cultural and legislative differences and similarities. Teachers and administrators in both countries attempted to provide services with limited and sometimes diminishing resources. Community support varied based on resources, attitudes toward various ethnic groups, and the coping strategies adopted by these groups in their new environments. Marked differences appeared with regard to the manner in which assessments took place and how the results were made available to the public.

Keywords: language support, United Kingdom, United States

Theory and Background

Countries where migrants, refugees and asylum seekers have travelled and settled are expected to uphold the UNESCO constitution, which maintains that nations should collaborate 'to advance the ideal of equality of educational opportunity without regard to race, sex, or any destinations, economic or social . . .' (UNESCO, 2002). This study provides a preliminary analysis of the extent to which this entitlement relates to language support, and specifically, whether it has been maintained for recent immigrant and refugee young people in the UK and the US.

Social justice and challenging inequality in education are the foundation on which this investigation is based. By social justice we mean children's basic right to an education which respects their linguistic and cultural heritage, while enabling them to acquire the English language which can help them access educational and social opportunities in the UK or US. This is particularly

relevant for those families who may not be in a stable socio-economic position, but who nevertheless have a language and a rich cultural heritage they would like to maintain. It can be argued that not knowing the English language can place children in the UK and the US at a particular disadvantage, and if the situation is not rectified, children can become disempowered. This can in turn lead to a continued downward spiral of disempowerment, educationally, economically, socially and politically.

Social justice, in this paper, refers to the extent to which school programmes provide language support to students who do not speak the mainstream language of the country. Studies in the US (Chu-Chang, 1983; Fernandez & Nielsen, 1986; Hakuta *et al.*, 2000; Porter, 1997) and the UK (Baker, 1993; Bhatti, 2004; Khan, 1980; Rassool, 2004; Smith, 1982) provide useful insights into language support and these will be briefly summarised.

UK: The Education Reform Act 1998

Through the Education Reform Act in 1998, the UK has a mandated National Curriculum which instituted Welsh, within Wales, as either a core or foundation subject according to the type of school. The core subjects are English, mathematics, and science (and Welsh, in Welsh-speaking schools). Foundation subjects include art, history, geography, music, physical education, technology, a modern foreign language (for pupils aged 11 to 16 years), and Welsh, in schools in Wales that are not Welsh-speaking (Docking, 1996). Thus, according to Baker (1993) the National Curriculum in Wales raises the status of Welsh in contrast with all other community languages in England (e.g. Bengali, Urdu, Punjabi, Chinese, Greek, Turkish) for which there is typically little or no provision as a teaching medium.

Assistance for maintaining these community languages was historically sought through Section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act. There was a time in the UK, a period between 1966 and until early 1980s, when many local education authorities in Britain had access to central government funding, which helped them maintain teacher resource centres catering to the 'multicultural' needs of school communities (Docking, 1996; Stubbs, 1985). This language-specific and targeted resource is no longer available in many cities. Much of the funding has now been devolved to individual schools, which may or may not choose to spend resources on language support in view of competing demands on limited resources. Thus, interpreting the literature about effective schools takes on a complex meaning in the context of multilingual and multiracial settings (Smith & Tomlinson, 1989; Vincent, 1996). In effect, the student need for language support might not have diminished, but the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) and subsequent demands on teachers have made schools concentrate on their overall literacy and numeracy strategies which affect the position of the schools in local league tables. The particular focus on English language acquisition has replaced first language maintenance where the first language is other than English.

US: Title VI and Civil Rights Act 1964

In the United States, Title VI of the US Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination on the basis or race, colour, or national origin in programmes

and activities that receive federal financial assistance. The Act underscored the need for public schools to examine the potential discriminatory nature of curriculum and instruction. In 1968, The Bilingual Education Act, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1968, established federal policy for bilingual education for economically disadvantaged language minority students. Six years later, a landmark decision by the Supreme Court in *Lau vs. Nichols* stipulated that special language programmes were necessary if schools were to provide equal educational opportunity for limited English proficient students, although it did not mandate bilingual education. Title VII was reauthorised in 1994 as part of the Improving America's Schools Act, giving grant priority to applicants seeking to develop bilingual proficiency, while at the same time increasing the role of the states (Crawford, 1999; McEachron, 1998).

There is an ongoing debate in academic and community circles between multilingualist bilingual policies and monolingualist versions of language policies (Hakuta *et al.*, 2000; Varghese & Stritikus, 2005). McEachron (1998) summarises the historical pros and cons of multilingual perspectives in the US by examining the academic, instrumental, and pluralistic arguments up to the controversial 1998 decisions in California to attempt to eliminate bilingual programmes. Essentially, decisions to try to abolish bilingual programmes in California were the result of the failure of many programmes identified as bilingual. In practice, however, many of the programmes were problematic in the way they were implemented, and in the overall conceptual understanding of the intended goals of an effective bilingual programme. In addition, monolingualists advocated 'English only' in the schools.

With the symbolic changing of the name of the Office of Bilingual Education to the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) and the creation of the *No Child Left Behind Legislation* (NCLB), more attention has been devoted to the systematic documentation of the performance of limited English proficiency (LEP) learners. Federal funding for these efforts has been legislated through the Title III *LEP Subgrant and Immigrant Youth Subgrant* as well as the *Refugee School Impact Grant* (Crawford, 1999).

NCLB performance assessments have been mandated for grade levels three through eight, thus creating for elementary teachers the challenge of providing language instruction and assessment. The language instruction requirements vary from state to state, and district to district, depending on the demographics in each region. The NCLB has been criticised by state legislators because of the federal intrusion into state sovereignty as well as the lack of federal resources needed to bring about the stated reforms (Dillon, 2004). Despite these limitations, performance data is now public information and is disaggregated based on economic background, race and ethnicity, disability, and English proficiency. Making such performance data public allows researchers and educators to monitor relationships between legislation, curricula, demographics, and performance.

There is no equivalent language-specific legislation currently in existence in Britain. The over-riding mandatory demands are those exerted by the Education Reform Act (ERA) and implementation of a National Curriculum. Matters concerning community language acquisition are largely left in the

hands of local ethnic communities and headteachers. The main emphasis is on helping students gain proficiency in the English language as soon as possible. With budgets delegated to schools and the decentralisation of education, the administrators' previous support to local education authorities organised around a county-wide provision has given way to increased competition between individual schools based on schools' published academic results in league tables. This means that schools, with the help of their governing bodies, are at liberty to spend their resources as they see fit. Without specific legislation stipulating community language maintenance, competing demands on school budgets, and the consequent deployment of diminishing resources, schools are at liberty to direct their resources away from community language development and maintenance should they so wish. This is something the present research explored in relation to three schools in Britain.

The Study

As many researchers have asserted, in a just and democratic society it is important that social justice is pursued (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Siraj-Blatchford, 1994). Potentially, all schools are in a position to provide language support. However, each school is unique in the way it interprets and puts into practice its stated objectives. We investigated such similarities and differences in three UK and three US schools with a view to highlighting different ways in which each addressed its students' linguistic needs.

Both researchers had lived and worked at universities in their respective communities for more than 20 years. While the actual recorded observation time in the schools may seem brief, both researchers had the benefit of studying long-term trends. When visiting the schools, the researchers asked open-ended questions to principals, headteachers, teachers, aides, and itinerant teachers. They were introduced throughout the school as educators who were interested in observing language programmes. When the researchers visited the schools together, one was always associated with a regional teacher preparation programme and the other was an international guest. We felt that the presence of the international guest contributed positively to the dynamics because educators at the host schools were curious about the educational practices abroad and willing to exchange information.

Research questions

Initially, we separately constructed research questions. This exercise was valuable for a variety of reasons. First, it revealed the most common salient interests. Second, through discussion, political and historical differences unique to each country were revealed. Third, it revealed professional biases based on the areas in which the researchers taught and conducted research. And fourth, it revealed personal biases based on one's own cultural history. From these discussions two primary research questions emerged:

(1) What are the leadership challenges in a school that has children who are refugees, asylum seekers and migrants?
(2) What are the teachers' perceptions of language support?

Participants

Six elementary schools were identified after matching profiles based on socio-economic levels, geographic location, size, multilingual populations, and ethnic minority populations amidst a predominantly English-speaking population. The schools enroll a significant number of recent immigrants from mostly working class families. In addition, ESL/EAL students included a small minority of middle class families.

In the summers of 2000 and 2002 the authors visited three elementary schools (Schools A, B, and C) in two urban locations in southern England, UK. In the spring of 2001 and summer of 2003, we visited three schools (Schools D, E, and F) in Richmond, Virginia, US. In addition to interviewing principals and headteachers, interviews were conducted with teacher assistants, SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Coordinators; one is assigned to each school), staff with special responsibility for language teaching, other ancillary staff, and, wherever possible, parent helpers.

Richmond

The Richmond community is situated in a suburb of a metropolitan area whose population is approximately 1,000,000. The school district, whose county population is approximately 250,000, is ranked fifth in the state in terms of the number of children receiving ESL services. In 2001, 1,280 students were identified as LEP throughout the district. In the elementary schools visited, 123 (39%) of the 315 students had been identified for ESL services in School D, 67 (16%) of the 423 students had been identified for ESL services in School E, and six (less than 1%) of the 841 students had been identified in School F. Based on observations and conversations with ESL teachers, the majority of elementary students were Spanish speakers from Latin American countries but also included French, Hindi, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Croatian, and Portuguese speakers from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Brazil. The middle school students were from Russia, Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan, and Pakistan.

Reading

In the summers of 2000 and 2002, we observed three elementary schools in the vicinity of Reading, UK. The schools included a population of recent and second-generation migrants some of whom received English as an additional language (EAL) services. The Reading school community is situated in a suburb of a metropolitan area whose population is approximately 250,000. The school district, whose county population is approximately 100,000, is a typical middle-ranking urban setting in terms of the number of children receiving EAL services. According to local education officers, in 2001–2002, 716 students, rising to about 1000 students in 2003, were identified as LEP. In elementary School A, 150 EAL students had been identified for services. The numbers of EAL students for Schools B and C have not been provided. Based on observations and conversations with EAL classroom teachers and a regional EAL coordinator, the majority were Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu speakers

from South Asian countries but also included Patois-Creole speakers from different countries in Africa and the Caribbean.

From a comparative standpoint, it became evident that it would be impossible to have identical profiles for the ethnic population of ESL/EAL students in the UK and US. However, there were certain patterns that displayed comparative characteristics. The elementary and middle schools identified were located in urban and suburban environments. Each elementary school had a dominant (based on numbers) minority population, although between countries the dominant group was different. In the UK, South Asian immigrants were the dominant group; in the US, Hispanic immigrants were the dominant group. However, within those categories, there were broad language and cultural differences. The South Asian immigrants, for example, were from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, speaking a variety of languages. The Hispanic immigrants were from Mexico, Columbia, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Spain, speaking Castilian Spanish and Spanish.

In the case of the dominant cultural ESL/EAL groups in each elementary school, the majority emigrated to the US and UK for economic reasons, though during the last decade there have been more asylum seekers and refugees. Previously, migration to the UK had mostly been from countries that were once British colonies. In the UK, the Asian diaspora has been present for at least 50 years. In the US, the Hispanic migration patterns had demonstrated an increase for approximately 20 years or more in the southwestern states, but in Virginia, more so in the past 10 years.

In addition to these patterns, some ethnic groups left their homeland for political reasons or because their countries were ravaged by war. In the Virginia community, ethnic neighbourhoods were characterised by Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and more recently, Croatian, Afghan, and Sudanese immigrants. In the UK, refugees and asylum seekers came from Somalia, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iraq, and Croatia.

Findings

(1)   *What are the leadership challenges in a school that has refugees, asylum seekers and migrants?*

UK

Local education authorities

In the context of primary schools, learning English is dominated by the literacy hour where the whole class participates in language-related activities including phonic skills. We observed that a teaching assistant was asked to work intensively with a group of students who needed additional English language support. There were instances of students being withdrawn from the class for extra help outside the classroom. We did not come across any mainstream class teacher who was bilingual. One Year Two teacher had spent six years teaching English to EAL learners and felt confident to share her worksheets and lesson plans with us.

Teachers did not feel that professional development for language support was very high on the school's agenda. They were nevertheless expected to

keep themselves informed of the latest developments in the field. Reduced funding also had an impact on the resources available to teachers. In two schools where there were 40% EAL learners, a language support teacher was provided to each school. We observed that these teachers designed their own teaching materials for language support. Where previously language teachers may have gone to the local multicultural centre, this resource for social and cultural interaction with other teachers in similar situations had disappeared.

In terms of leadership, we found that the responsibility for looking after the day-to-day linguistic needs of EAL students was mostly delegated by the principal to the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). This implied that EAL learners' needs were seen not as an asset but as requiring special needs help. Attitudes of the headteachers and the SENCOs were influenced by policy changes. The dismantling of language specific Section Eleven funding was blamed for the unsatisfactory realities facing teachers in state-funded schools.

One head teacher was supportive of language learning, but she lamented the fact that her school was not succeeding in keeping language teachers for long because of the rising house prices in the south of England in 2003 and 2004. Given the low teacher salaries, she felt that well-qualified and experienced teachers moved out of the area within two years, making it extremely difficult for the school to feel stable and plan ahead.

Community leadership

Two out of three schools were located near a mosque, where there was occasional provision for extra help with homework for students. Students went there mainly to learn Arabic for religious instruction. They were also able to communicate with each other in their first language (Punjabi/Sylhetti) in a pedagogical setting. This was something they were not encouraged to do at their normal school. We were told by the language support teacher that this type of instruction was either done on a voluntary basis or the local community met the costs from its own resources. For example, on weekends and after school, the students received language support for their home literacies at home, at community centres, and places of worship. In many instances these resources remained invisible to the mainstream teachers in state-funded schools. Williams (1997) points out that if teachers were aware of the ways in which children were exposed to language skill development, they could build on this foundation.

University students who enrolled in a teacher-training course also helped school students learn English as a second or an additional language as a part of their practicum requirements. In addition, a Reading Centre, which provided teaching materials was available at the university for use by school teachers, but this was not free. The onus was on the school to pay for teachers to use the centre's facilities.

National leadership

In the UK there is a National Pupil Database (NPD) for students who have a Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) record. Bhattacharyya *et al.* (2003) report key findings for EAL students as follows. There are approximately 600,000 pupils who are identified as EAL, representing about 9% of all pupils in England. EAL students are more likely to come from low-income families

than non-EAL students; non-EAL students are also more likely to be white. Over 90% of Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils are registered as EAL, 82% of Indian, 75% of Chinese, and 65% of Black African. This compares to less than 2% of white pupils and less than 7% of Black Caribbean pupils.

The performance of EAL students attaining above the expected level (QCA, 2000) at each key stage (Key Stages 1–4; GCSE English) varies across ethnic groups, with Chinese and Indian pupils doing better than other ethnic groups of EAL learners. The lowest achieving EAL students by ethnic status are white, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean, Black African, Black other, and other. Gypsy/Roma and travellers of Irish heritage are considered to be one of the most disadvantaged groups in the education system; they are being included for the first time in the 2003 PLASC reports; the figures reported above precede the 2003 data. While EAL pupils are often at a lower starting point than non-EAL pupils, they appear to make greater progress than non-EAL pupils as they catch up.

Bhattacharyya *et al.* (2003) report that little information is available on the performance levels of refugee and asylum seeking children. They cite estimates that there were 82,000 refugee and asylum-seeking children in UK schools in 2001, mostly living in London. Six thousand unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arrived in the UK in 2002, of which 2160 were registered as under 16 and entitled to a school place. Local authorities report that in 2002 they were supporting as many as 8500 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who had arrived in recent years, of whom 41% were under the age of 16 when they first arrived.

The increased number of asylum seekers has lead to national debate within the UK House of Commons regarding how best to treat the requests of the asylum seekers in both a humane way and a manageable way. Interpreting whether or not social justice has been maintained and supported requires an examination of national legal policy in addition to policy at the school level. Publishing the number of asylum-seeking children and refugees in each school is one way to track whether they have been treated in humane and manageable ways.

Compiling student performance statistics at the national level is useful for assessing performance levels on a grand scale. For a researcher, it is more difficult to obtain statistics at the school level in the UK. For political reasons, schools often prefer to address the results at the school level internally. That is, when performance results published in the league tables are less than favourable, headteachers tend to be protective of their schools and may try to minimise publishing the results.

US

Local education authorities

Within the two elementary classrooms, two ESL teachers and one aide were employed. They applied their training through various ESL methodologies while reinforcing the state guidelines *Virginia Standards of Learning Objectives.* ESL students received separate instruction for portions of the school day and participated in mainstreamed instruction for the majority of the day. At the middle school there were only six students who needed ESL classes, not enough to justify an ESL teacher, so they were taught by the foreign language

instructor who had been hired to teach French. He applied some of the same principles in foreign language instruction to teaching English as a second language.

The State of Virginia has an assessment system that has been evolving for the past 10 years. Assessments are administered to all students enrolled in public education throughout the state for grades three, five, and eight, and the results of these assessments are made available to the public through the Virginia Department of Education website. As stated previously, data is disaggregated by school, grade level, and ethnicity. With the recent *No Child Left Behind Legislation* in 2001, additional changes have been made in the way records are kept. Now records are kept for ESL students to demonstrate average yearly progress in maths and reading/language arts. It is projected that records for ESL students' performances in science will be available by 2007.

The data collected for each of the three US schools is presented in Table 1. For school C, the performance data indicates that the LEP students performed above the state and district mean in maths, just below the district mean in reading/language arts, and above the state mean in reading/language arts. The number of students providing assessment data in schools D and E were below the state definition for reporting personally identifiable results and therefore were not reported.

Table 1 Percentage of students passing Virginia assessments 2002–2003 in mathematics and reading/language arts at three schools

USA	*Students*	*Subject*	*School*	*District*	*State*
School C	All	Maths	82	87	78
		Reading/LA	75	87	79
	Black	Maths	85	76	64
		Reading/LA	63	76	65
	Hispanic	Maths	80	84	72
		Reading/LA	57	80	67
	LEP	Maths	84	80	70
		Reading/LA	68	72	58
School D	LEP	Maths	<	80	70
		Reading/LA	<	72	58
School E	LEP	Maths	<		

The percentages displayed on this table reflect performance of students at or above the proficient level on statewide assessments administered in this subject area. Percentages for achievement at the division and state levels reflect performance of students at or above the proficient level on state-wide assessments administered in this subject area at all grade levels

Key: <=A group below state definition for personally identifiable results;

Source: Virginia Department of Education website, retrieved March 2004; http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/src/index.shtml

Community leadership

The principals played key leadership roles in supporting second language learning. One important way in which the principals broadened the opportunities for ESL students included participation in a partnership with colleges and universities located in the area. The university students preparing to be teachers fulfilled practicum requirements by designing multicultural lessons for the ESL students. Another way in which the principals supported ESL students was to encourage the Parent Teacher Associations to organise international fairs that were designed to highlight the cultural traditions of the student population at the school. Parents and students shared cultural traditions such as food, clothing, artifacts, and games in a festive atmosphere.

One principal encouraged community participation in support of ESL students through the Rotary Club. Each year on Veteran's Day, students were selected for awards from the Rotary Club based on their essays describing what it meant to be an immigrant in the US. Often these essays were designed to show their appreciation to the veterans who had fought in American wars. As such, they displayed a strong patriotic element. Positive recognition was given to students who had demonstrated a certain level of expressive, written competence. Parents, teachers, and classmates applauded their efforts during a special Veteran's Day assembly. In the case of refugees, the *longed-for* cultural elements that were left behind were underplayed given the nature of the essay contest. This occasion illustrates the mixed messages that elementary children face when adjusting to a new culture. Teachers need to guard against individuals receiving the message that their former culture is to be ignored or to be rejected outright. It is important, in the case of an Afghan student whose family willingly left Afghanistan, to distinguish between cultural traditions, family heritage, and the rejection of specific political leaders and regimes (Trueba & Bartolome, 2000).

State leadership

In addition to the state-wide assessment system described above through which to access performance data at the local levels, the State of Virginia has an organisation called the Virginia ESL Supervisors Association (VESA), a professional organisation that works closely with the State ESL and Foreign Language Supervisor for the purpose of addressing the language learning needs of students throughout the state. Through this organisation, ESL teachers and supervisors respond to state policy issues and examine the interface between state and federal guidelines. In keeping with social action approaches, the author and her students who developed multicultural lessons for ESL students gave presentations at the annual VESA conference. Members of the audience, who collectively served 60,306 LEP students and 2,249 refugees in 2003, expressed their desire to design similar partnerships in other districts across the state of Virginia.

National leadership

The role of the federal government has been outlined above. The most recent changes have been the *No Child Left Behind Legislation*.

One area of leadership that seemed to be diffuse or vague was a position statement regarding what the attitude toward second language learning was.

Given the current debates about second language learning, it would seem that a school principal or ESL supervisor or state representative would cite the current debates and indicate where the school or community stood in relation to those debates. We did not find this explicit form of leadership. On the contrary, one of the ways in which administrators seem to be responding to the current debates on second language learning is to avoid labels that would pit one advocate group against another. Thus, policy is implicit in the way the school organises language instruction. Furthermore, attention is not drawn explicitly to it. For research purposes therefore, it becomes difficult to pinpoint specific theoretical and pedagogical positions backed by hard evidence. One wonders if this is a policy of evasion or just political posturing.

(2)   *What are the teachers' perceptions of language support?*

UK

Teachers who work with bilingual students said that they would like more support on a daily basis, both in terms of practical resources to be used in multi-lingual classrooms, and also opportunities to meet other teachers in a similar situation. They feel more could be done in both of these areas. Teachers are only too aware of balancing the needs of the students in their care, on the one hand, and maintaining a positive public image about their own school, on the other. Quite often it is the SENCO who feels the pressure to provide support for student needs most intensely. SENCOs then have to balance this demand against the needs of other students with special needs such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and autism. It would be fair to say that there is a discrepancy between what is available to students in terms of their entitlement, and what can actually be managed on a day-to-day basis in school. In the long run, this can lead to unintended inequality (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000).

Constantly changing expectations from OFSTED/government bureaucracy in the UK, including demands of the national curriculum, sometimes makes it difficult for teachers to prioritise the needs of EAL students over and above other demands placed on them. Newly-stated policies by themselves do not help teachers; policies should also release funding to make them a reality.

It is difficult to track both student progress and policy implementation without statistical evidence and without the availability of student records. Where records are available, they tend to be held in schools' confidential files. They tend to be sporadic and not published in a manner that would yield useful ways forward through a critical scrutiny of targets achieved. Headteachers are wary of making information like this open to public scrutiny because they do not wish to be misrepresented, especially if their school is named.

We also found that teachers want acknowledgement and support for what they do achieve and not criticism for what they are unable to do due to lack of adequate resources and training opportunities. Teachers welcome opportunities to learn about the linguistic needs of their students, provided that it is done in a professional manner. Bilingual teaching assistants (Punjabi/English; Bengali/English) who had over eight years experience of *helping* in class felt they were disadvantaged financially. They lamented the fact that

they did not have teacher training opportunities offered to them on a part-time basis so that they could keep their jobs and upgrade their salary status. One of the teaching assistants remarked that she often helped newly qualified teachers. In ten years that she had worked in school, three of those teachers had been rapidly promoted, whereas she stayed where she was 'with no way out.' In addition to helping in class, she home visits children on the school's behalf and organises class activities on festival days. Examining the social mobility of teaching assistants such as these suggests that there is variability in their access to higher paying jobs. This access is based on their level of education prior to entering the UK in addition to whether or not the country they came from had post-colonial status.

Teaching styles also contributed to differences in language learning. Teachers had varying abilities to respond to student-initiated dialogue by an EAL speaker. Some teachers welcomed student contributions to extend positive dialogue with students. Other teachers preferred to stay focused on the learning objectives for each lesson and appeared to perceive student-initiated responses as interruptions.

The notion of inclusion and peer acceptance was constructed differently in different groups. For example, African-Caribbean children, and boys in particular, are at greater risk of exclusion (Cork, 2005). Likewise, newly arrived students are frustrated by not being able to communicate with others who seem to be of the same ethnic make-up. For example, two children of Bangladeshi heritage were totally different from each other given the length of their parents' residence in the country of migration. Similarly, newly arrived children from Ghana were not naturally drawn to children who were disruptive and happened to be third-generation of African Caribbean descent. There was one instance of a newly arrived child from Kenya who was placed in a class where many children had special needs. He was ten years old and felt no one else was serious as he had been 'top of the class' in Nairobi. The experiences of these children reflect how notions of peer acceptance are tied to the different social and educational experiences these children bring to school and that teachers' attempts to be inclusive would be better informed with knowledge of these cultural differences.

US

In the Virginia county, ESL teachers expressed a commitment to teaching the ESL students English and were enthusiastic about community programmes that supported cultural heritage and multicultural education. Most of the references to language instruction focused on teaching students English in the classroom. The maintenance and support of culture received greater attention in the context of school-university partnerships, parent-teacher associations, and community activities, e.g. religious organisations. Although teachers were not asked directly to describe a pedagogical approach to language instruction, they also did not volunteer distinctions such as total immersion, two-way immersion, or partial immersion (Curtain & Pesola, 1994).

The ESL teachers at school D did have a description of their approach posted to their website, indicating that they were currently serving over 120 kg-5 students from 22 countries; students received three hours of English language

immersion each morning. For those who had mastered basic communication skills and had developed some fluency, there were 30-minute classes for continuing English language and vocabulary development.

Some of the ESL supervisors noted that while teachers and aides in the Richmond area would like to become certified as ESL teachers, access to such programmes is limited geographically. In fact, they encouraged the author to start such a programme so that adults in the local community could become licensed.

When this need was discussed with an ESL teacher and her assistant who had taught in Bosnia and was helping the ESL teacher translate for the Bosnian students, it was pointed out that the time and expense it took to complete the course requirements for ESL licensure was commensurate with the time and expense it took to complete course requirements for a Masters degree. However, once a teacher completed a Masters degree, he or she would be in a position to receive a higher salary. The classroom teacher and her assistant stated that they would like to see an ESL certification programme at the Masters level. This observation points out that commitment to teach in certain areas is weighed along with personal financial benefits and that in some areas ESL licensure is not commensurate with other areas.

The authors noted similarities and differences between the UK and US teaching assistants with regard to their professional ambitions. The teaching assistants interviewed in both countries wanted advancement and were confident that they had the skills to achieve the status of a classroom teacher. In the case of the UK teaching assistants, the researchers felt that not only were they somewhat challenged in terms of achieving advancement, but they also expressed the attitude that they were under-appreciated.

In the case of the US teaching assistant, while challenged by the system in terms of advancement, she expressed that she felt valued and, based on observation, appeared to be in the role of a team teacher rather than a teaching assistant. The researchers propose that her previous level of education and the fact that she left Bosnia for political reasons may have had an impact on her overall sense of acceptance. It is important to note these differences in adult attitudes because the individuals who offer language support to pupils bring with them a spirit of collaboration or hierarchy that can affect attitudes toward learning and their role in the educational system.

Conclusions
Classroom context

In both the UK and US, in varying degrees, teachers sought to address the challenge of teaching children from different linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Teachers' understanding of their role might have displayed differences in personalities, teaching styles and methods; but what is remarkably similar across the sample is their commitment to their students and their wish to reach out to children in an effort to make the curriculum in English more accessible. It is this commitment to the welfare and educational needs of students that seems to have kept the individual teachers focused in their daily tasks. This commitment was evident despite mounting pressures

to do well on school inspections through the Office for Standards in Education and produce good *Standard Assessment Tests* in the UK, and *Standards of Learning Objectives* results in the US.

While teachers on both sides of the Atlantic demonstrated a shared commitment to increase student performance, differences were noted with regard to each country's efforts to monitor and publish performance levels among immigrant and refugee students. In addition, while individual teachers may have expressed a desire for students to succeed, the notion of an overall programme linking socio-cultural contexts to classroom practice was less explicit. For example, studies have shown that conveying an explicit message to language minority children that their first language is an advantage and that they will be successful (in contrast to sending messages that they might fail, are at risk, and need to ignore or minimise aspects of their home or first culture), demonstrates that home, school, and community are in synchronisation (Gersten & Faltis, 2000).

What transpires in schools is also linked to resources. Although policy can guide positive changes, this cannot happen without some form of policy-linked tracking of funding for language teaching rather than merely policy-linked tracking. If teachers feel enabled, they will feel more confident about helping all their students. This includes resources allocated for professional development. There is a lot of interest among teachers who want not only to improve their own professional skills, but also want to pass on the language knowledge they already have to students. The relationship between teacher perception, programme support, and the climate of student acceptance is a delicate one. According to Greathouse (2001: 116), the phrase *benign neglect* is often used when discussing language programmes wherein the individuals on 'both sides of the coin, the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and the non-ESOL, have learned to internalize their placement in the arena of school.' The non-ESOL student learns that his or her position is superior. Greathouse maintains that because of the hidden curriculum 'the policy of equality in education belies the reality of the practice of "equality" in education.'

Community levels

Support from local communities for student learning and adult careers diminishes in areas of relative unemployment and illiteracy in English. Community empowerment will lead to youth confidence. This is where wider social policies beyond education (i.e. that of housing and health) can have an impact on the academic and work achievements of youth. Agencies offering community support were identified in both the US and UK. Community performance comparisons for language minorities were possible in the US for one school, indicating levels above the district mean. Recalling the comment from the principal that the parents of LEP students sometimes moved into the community because they knew of the success of previous families' children at his school, it is evident that community reputation matched student performance. While evidence of community support was identified in the UK, performance data was not available to suggest that perhaps the community support networks were having an impact.

   Without making performance data available, it is not possible to evaluate comprehensively the relationship between community and school-wide efforts. Important studies have been conducted to document the success of individual students who have had community support. For example, Williams (1997) conducted case studies with language minority students in a London school where immigrants had been educated for more than three centuries – French Huguenots seeking work in textiles, the Irish escaping the potato famine, the Jews fleeing pogroms, and recently, immigrants from Bangladesh, Jamaica, and Nigeria. Williams discovered successes among individual children where support came from one source or a combination of sources (e.g. adult/child or sibling/child interactions, observations of others using written language, independent explorations of written language). The ethnographic approaches of Williams and others (Callahan *et al.*, 2000; Dentler & Hafner, 1997; Johnson, 1997; Spring, 2001; Soto, 1997), along with quantitative performance data are necessary to better understand school and community partnerships, whether formal or diffuse.

State/national levels

   The area of language support is a pressing issue both in the US and the UK, and it will remain so for the foreseeable future. On the basis of the research reported here, it is clear that progress has been made in terms of recognising the need to collect performance data. However, disaggregating the data based on multilingual ability is, in most cases, only a recent phenomenon. In cases where disaggregation of performance results takes place, it is only done for certain subject areas (e.g. maths and reading) and when there is a designated percentage of English language learners.
   Performance levels by English language learners in maths and reading tell only part of the story of students' abilities to succeed. When success is defined only in terms of academic achievement without regard to the person's identity in relation to family members and fellow citizens, a student can become marginalised. Denying children access to and respect for their home language(s) and culture curtails their development and their ability to make a significant contribution to their communities and society (Wallace, 2001). Without a systematic approach to curriculum planning across grade levels there is a lack of congruence between good educational practice and what has been espoused to support linguistically diverse students (Miramontes *et al.*, 1997). Equally, multilingual youth need to be equipped with the facility to communicate adequately in the English language so that they are able to live successful lives in the wider communities in the UK and the US. Our findings demonstrate that while there is a level of human commitment within classrooms, teachers and administrators struggle to have an impact without explicit policy guided by pedagogical principles, resources and performance data.

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