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MAKING THE DIFFERENCE: TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES IN MULTI-ETHNIC SCHOOLS

Summary of presentation

1. Why the focus on mainstream structures and processes?

- What we know about second language learning;
- Diversity in levels of language competence among language learners (BICS and CALP)
- Problems of separate special provision, seen as low status, even discriminatory
- Parents' and students' perspectives of schools

2. What have we learnt about successful multi-ethnic schools?

- leadership crucial;
- high expectations of students and teachers;
- monitoring student progress by gender, socio-economic background and ethnic group; exploring reasons for underachievement, setting targets for improvement.
- close contact with local communities, representative staffing;
- procedures for addressing bullying and harassment, avoiding exclusions;
- culturally sensitive curriculum;
- support for the language of the curriculum in mainstream classroom;
- teaching of heritage languages where possible;
- shared and understood procedures for bilingual support in mainstream;
- any special provision has clear objectives, agreed with students and parents, and preferably outside school time to avoid missing subject lessons.

3. What we are learning about bilingual support for subject learning:

- peer collaboration;
- partnership teaching;
- addressing unequal status of class and bilingual teachers and assistants;
- shared understanding of purposes and benefits;
- strengths and limitations of bilingual assessment.

4. What are we doing about teacher training for ALL teachers?

- Standards for Qualified Teacher Status
- The National Strategies
- Inspector training

5. Problems:

- lack of specialist training for experienced teachers and for teacher trainers
- low recruitment of bilingual teachers
- continual battle to stop the clock going backwards!

The focus of this paper is on how the mainstream school and classroom needs to adapt to meet the needs of ALL its students, including those from linguistic minority backgrounds. There is no doubt that raising the attainment of students from linguistic minority background requires attention to the language of the curriculum and classroom. This is vital. However, I shall argue that in order for this detailed work on language and academic content to be successful, attention needs to be paid to

establishing the right context for learning in multi-ethnic and multilingual schools, one which recognizes, values and responds to the diversity which exists among its students. As the psychologist George Kelly (1963) argued: children never just fail to learn; the question is, what are they learning when they are not learning what we want them to learn?

In this talk I report on the findings of research in the UK which looked at a number of primary and secondary schools which had 'bucked' the national trend towards low academic attainment with students from otherwise low achieving groups, but on the contrary were achieving high rates of attainment with these students. As a result of the study, in England student attainment in national tests is now monitored by gender, poverty (measured by uptake of free school meals) and also by ethnic group. We recognize this is controversial, but it enables us to identify schools which are more and less successful with different groups, and to explore the reasons why this is. It also enables us to counter the arguments of schools which have low expectations of their students because of their particular backgrounds, showing them that schools with similar student intakes are doing better. The focus is on showing schools can make a difference.

Key Findings:

Successful schools established an ethos of respect in which adults spent time listening to students and tried to see things from students' point of view, and tried to adapt school practices in the light of these. We called these 'listening schools'.

Successful schools established high expectations of both teachers and students, and had clear systems in place for tracking and monitoring the progress of students, and for targeting support to those found to be underachieving.

Successful schools created careful links with the local communities. Schools made efforts to recruit a school staff representative of the community they served, in some cases supporting the training of teachers from specific groups.

They had clear procedures for responding to bullying and harassment. They also worked hard on strategies to avoid and prevent exclusions of students from school.

Effective schools were sensitive to the identities of students, and made efforts to include in the curriculum appropriate reference to their histories, languages, religions and cultures.

Secondary schools offered a broad range of modern languages in the curriculum, including languages spoken in the local community. The most effective secondary schools had well-trained language support teachers who worked alongside subject teachers to develop greater awareness of the language demands of subject lessons, and to encourage a range of teaching strategies which would be supportive to all learners, such as co-operative group work, structured writing frames, visual support materials, etc.

Primary schools in particular were strongly aware of the role and importance of language in learning for all children. Most effective schools employed bilingual teachers and classroom assistants to support learning in the classrooms. The most effective had clear policies for using bilingual strategies in the mainstream classroom (as the mere presence of bilingual staff is no guarantee that other languages will in fact be used to support learning, or indeed, used at all). Children's first languages were given status in the classroom and used in collaborative group learning. Where the first language is given status in the classroom:

- *children are found to gain in self-esteem, increasing their chances of success;*
- *new arrivals settle in more readily;*

- *children participate more actively and confidently in classroom activities as they feel able to draw on all their language and literacy knowledge across languages and scripts in order to learn, to understand, to make their own meanings;*
- *teachers are able to recognise children's full range of strengths and teacher assessment and planning is therefore improved;*
- *parents and community are encouraged to participate in their children's education;*
- *the status of languages other than English is raised in the school and classroom, contributing to personal, social, moral and citizenship education, with the potential to improve understanding between different ethnic groups;*
- *ALL children gain in developing language awareness.*

A strong and determined lead on equal opportunities was given by the headteacher, who gave clear vision and direction to staff.

Now work continues on supportive structural change including requirements for the initial training of all teachers to include training in English language support and an understanding of the benefits of bilingual approaches to learning in the classroom. Such understandings are now also included in the training of government school inspectors.

References and further reading:

www.multiverse.ac.uk (Website für Lehrer in der Ausbildung und für ihre Betreuer)
www.qca.org.uk/newarrivals (Lehrplanhinweise für alle Lehrer)
www.naldic.org.uk (Website für die lehrplanübergreifende sprachliche Entwicklung)

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Collier, V. and Thomas, W. (1997). *School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students*. <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/resource/effectiveness/>