

## **Underneath the Band-Aid: supporting immigrants in Irish schools**

### **Introduction**

Irish society has undergone rapid, unprecedented change in recent years, with dramatic economic growth, globalisation and increasing migration as major factors. Public services and institutions have been acutely affected, as they attempt to cater for a population which is both increasing and increasingly diverse. For schools the significant population change which has occurred in the last fifteen years coincides with major changes in management structures, curriculum and legislation and catering for a significant number of students who are not Irish is a relatively new challenge for most schools.

Just as society is changing, the education system needs to change in order to ensure that the schooling provided to all people prepares them for life in an increasingly pluralist society. The needs of all students must be met, including those who are not from the majority ethnic group, i.e. Irish, white and Roman Catholic. The largest group of immigrants in 2005 and 2006 came from countries in Eastern Europe and many of the increasing number of international<sup>1</sup> students in schools have languages other than English or Irish<sup>2</sup> as their mother tongue. These children may have difficulty accessing education without support because of a limited command of the language through which the curriculum is delivered. This is likely to be the case for those who have recently arrived in Ireland, but may also apply to children who were born in Ireland or are living here for a longer time whose home language is not English or Irish. Together these students are referred to here as bilingual students<sup>3</sup> and the language support provided for them is the subject of this paper<sup>4</sup>.

The paper is based on research which was carried out in Irish post-primary schools in 2006. The theoretical framework underlying the research and the context are first discussed. Then the methodology is outlined and a brief summary of relevant results is presented. Finally the findings are discussed and conclusions drawn.

### **Bourdieu's Concepts of Capital, Habitus and Field**

A great deal has been written about the role of cultural capital in the reproduction of educational inequality (Bourdieu and Saint Martin, 1974, Bourdieu, 1983, Lareau, 2001, Robbins, 2005). This

---

<sup>1</sup> The term 'international' is deliberately selected here, rather 'non-national' or 'non-Irish'. These terms, often found in official documents, including those from the Department of Education and Science, are seen to define people from minority ethnic backgrounds in negative or deficit terms. It should also be noted that some international students are native English speakers.

<sup>2</sup> The dominant language in Ireland is English and while there are some Irish (Gaelic) medium schools in Ireland the majority teach through English.

<sup>3</sup> 'Bilingual' in this context refers to people who are learning the dominant language of a country and use one or more other languages. It does not necessarily imply full fluency in two languages and may imply fluency in more than two languages.

<sup>4</sup> The selection of language support as the principle focus here is by no means a suggestion that there are not many other salient issues in schools' adaptation to increasing cultural diversity and migration. Intercultural education, racism, religious education, and even the structure of the Irish education system, which has traditionally been organised along religious denominational lines, also need to be examined in this context. Indeed all of these factors are relevant here.

concept originated with Pierre Bourdieu, and draws on neo-Marxist sociological theories. Put simply, Bourdieu argued that society was stratified according to the possession of cultural as well as economic capital. Cultural capital includes assets such as cultural and linguistic knowledge and its possession allows children of the dominant group to gain advantage over others. Different forms of capital have different value in different 'fields'. Possession of the particular cultural capital which has value in the academic setting, such as language codes and manners, is rewarded by the school system, but these attributes are not explicitly taught, but are acquired in the home (Bourdieu and Saint Martin, 1974). In this way those who are not from the dominant group in society, such as minority ethnic and migrant students, are discriminated against by the education system itself. Particularly relevant to this paper is the fact that the language spoken in the home of bilingual students generally has little or no value in terms of cultural and linguistic capital in the institutional field of the school.

The research outlined in this paper examines language support through the lens of teachers' and principals' perceptions. While attempting to understand the manner in which research subjects might be influenced by their interactions and surroundings is always important, it is of particular interest here since teachers and principals have been shown to be a vital factor in the effectiveness of schooling for students from ethnic minorities (Blair, 2002). Bourdieu's concept of habitus is useful in reaching this understanding. Connolly interprets habitus as "the way we have developed and internalised ways of approaching, thinking about and acting upon our social world" (Connolly, 1998:78). The education professionals involved in this study approach not only their language support roles, but also their responses to the research questions posed, from within their own habitus. This habitus continues to evolve as they interact with their students, colleagues and schools and with society in general. This is also true of the students receiving language support and, indeed of all students and stakeholders in schools. Social actors influence and are influenced by their surroundings, and their habitus disposes them to think and act in certain ways. This understanding underlies the research carried out.

### **Discourse, Policy and Practice**

The concept of discourse is essential to understanding the relationship between teachers' perceptions and practices, education policy and broader societal values and norms. Discourse includes what we hear and what we say, what we read and what we write. It is language as we use and understand it.

Particular discourses not only shape our beliefs and knowledge but also influence the way we interact with one another, shaping our education, where we live, what work we do (Connolly, 1998:14).

Discourse can be defined as "a multi-faceted public process through which meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved" (Davies and Harré, 1990:45) Discourse is not static; we shape it, and it in turns shapes us. Connolly argues that discourses "reach into the very hearts of individuals and come to shape their sense of identity"(Connolly, 1998:14). This paper aims to provide some insight into school discourses on language support. However, these must be interpreted in terms of their interrelationship with national discourses on language, culture, 'race' and the role of education in ethnically mixed societies. The theoretical framework through which this research was developed reflects Foucault's assertion that discourses are fundamental to the manner in which power circulates (McCarthy and Dimitriadis, 2000, Devine, 2000). Society's definition of what, or who, is 'normal', as opposed to 'other' is fundamental to the manner in which power is distributed in a society.

Power is exercised through discourses in the capacity to define what is 'normal' and in the subordinate status typically accorded to those who are outside the 'norm' (Devine, 2005:51)

In this analysis national, educational and popular discourses are seen to be inextricably linked and influenced by history and by each other, following Foucault's theory that "power is a matter of the subtle and meticulous control of bodies rather than the influence of ethical and judicial ideas and

institutions” (Gutting, 1994:20). Underlying discourses which convey meanings to people at all levels of society can be more influential than legal documents or political rhetoric.

Racialised discourses are an important means by which dominant ethnic groups gain and maintain power and status (Said, 1978, Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). Educational inequalities affect and are affected by national discourses, serving to perpetuate stereotyped and racialised views of those who differ from the norm. Underlying this examination of the provision of language support is the understanding that discourses surrounding ethnic identity, immigration and Irishness affect and are affected by school practices and interactions.

## **The Irish Ethnic Context**

According to the 2006 census, 15% of people normally resident in Ireland were born outside the State and 10% are of foreign nationality, including nearly 130,000 people between the ages of 0 and 24 (Central Statistics Office, 2007). The population remains predominantly white, with 95% of respondents choosing ‘white’ to describe their ethnicity, with small numbers in each of the other categories; Black, other (45,000 each category), Asian (52,000) and Traveller<sup>5</sup> (22,500). It is impossible to trace the history of Ireland’s ethnic make-up accurately, as the 2006 census was the first to include a question about ethnicity. However, minority ethnic groups such as the indigenous Traveller community as well as relatively small immigrant Jewish, Italian and Chinese communities, for example, have been part of Irish society for a long time (Fanning, 2002, Lentin and McVeigh, 2002, Lodge and Lynch, 2004, Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2005). In addition, a small number of programme refugees<sup>6</sup> from Hungary, Vietnam, Bosnia, Kosovo and other countries have arrived in Ireland since 1956 (Reception and Integration Agency, 2003).

More recently, coinciding with the ‘Celtic Tiger’ economic boom which started in the early 1990s, Ireland has experienced increased immigration of migrant workers and people seeking asylum. This, along with an increase in the excess of births over deaths, a drop in emigration and the return of many Irish emigrants, has resulted in significant population growth. Statistics compiled by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) show a constant and accelerating increase in net inward migration between 1991 and 2002 (Central Statistics Office, 2003) and between 1995 and 1999 Ireland’s annual net migration rate was the second highest in the European Union (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2005). CSO population and migration estimates, which are compiled from a range of sources, measure the increase in population between 2000 and 2006 as nearly 12% and the proportion of this increase which is due to immigration of people who are not Irish has risen each year (Central Statistics Office, 2006).

Figure I illustrates the increase in the number of people immigrating to Ireland in the past six years, the total figure rising from 52.6 thousand in 2000 to 86.9 thousand in 2006; a dramatic increase of over 60%. Also visible here is the recent trend towards a higher proportion of male immigrants and the slower increase in the numbers of both females (all ages) and children (both sexes) aged 0 to 14 immigrating.

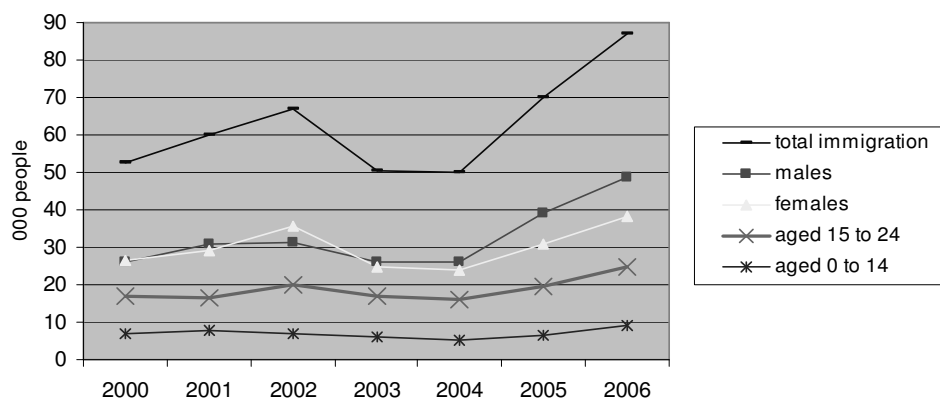
---

<sup>5</sup> Travellers make up an indigenous, nomadic ethnic group which has been present in Ireland for hundreds of years at least.

<sup>6</sup> Programme refugees are those people who are offered refugee status, usually as part of a numbered group, while still in their country of origin as part of an agreement between states.

**Figure 1. Immigration Trends, 2000 – 2006: Total, Male, Female, School-going age bands**

Source: Central Statistics Office (2006)



The following table shows the same data classified by nationality.

**Table 1. Immigration Classified by Nationality 2000 – 2006**

Source: Central Statistics Office (2006) (figures in 000s)

Nationality	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Irish	24.8	26.3	27.0	17.5	16.9	19.0	19.7
UK	8.4	9.0	7.4	6.9	5.9	6.9	7.5
Rest of EU 15 <sup>a</sup>	8.2	6.5	8.1	6.9	10.6	7.1	9.6
(new) EU 10 <sup>b</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	26.4	37.8
USA	2.5	3.7	2.7	1.6	1.8	1.6	1.3
Rest of World	8.6	13.6	21.7	17.7	14.9	9.0	11.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>52.6</b>	<b>59.0</b>	<b>66.9</b>	<b>50.5</b>	<b>50.1</b>	<b>70.0</b>	<b>87.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> Countries before enlargement on 1st May 2004, i.e. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Portugal.

<sup>b</sup> Accession countries on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004, i.e. Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia. Before 2005 data relating to these countries are included with Rest of World.

The table shows that over half of the immigrants who were not Irish in the last two years were nationals of the 10 newest states to join the EU. In fact 26% of all immigrants in 2006 were Polish and 7% Lithuanian (Central Statistics Office, 2006). Amongst those normally resident in Ireland Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian are the second, third and fifth most represented foreign nationalities respectively (with the UK as the largest group and Nigeria fourth). These three Eastern European nationalities represent over 100,000 people. While some of those with foreign nationality may have been native or fluent English speakers and may have been born in the State or present for a length of time, the high representation among recent immigrants of people from varied linguistic backgrounds suggests a high demand for language support services.

Historically, Irish society can be described as assimilationist in its approach to cultural diversity. Despite stated intercultural aims, the State's approach to diversity continues to reflect a hegemonic

Catholic, nationalistic culture which emerged at the time of the foundation of the State (Fanning, 2002).

A culture of manufactured homogeneity developed that became almost incontestable; daring to name differences was seen as a challenge to authority, a deviant act, rather than a statement of fact (Lodge & Lynch 2004:3)

National and localised discourses on race, ethnicity and 'Irishness' continue to position those from ethnic minorities as 'other' (Devine, 2005). Perhaps the most extensively documented racism and exclusion is that experienced for centuries by the indigenous Traveller population (Kenny, 2001, Fanning, 2002), but there is also evidence of diverse forms of individual and institutional racism (UNCERD, 2005, McGinnity et al., 2006, Kropiwiec, 2006, Wang, 2006, Lentin and McVeigh, 2006), as well as anti-semitism (Lentin and McVeigh, 2002, Fanning, 2002).

The education system was a key tool in the cultural revival which was pursued on gaining independence from Britain and it remains largely ethnocentric (Lodge and Lynch, 2004). Educational inequalities affect and are affected by national discourses, serving to perpetuate stereotyped and racialised views of those who differ from the norm. There is a danger, therefore, that discourses which position immigrant pupils in need of language support as 'other' will result in their needs being seen as less important or urgent than those of 'our own'.

### **Supporting Bilingual Students – why and how?**

All children present in the Irish State have equal rights, both under the Irish Constitution (Government of Ireland, 1937) and under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989), which Ireland ratified in 1992. Furthermore the European Union's racial equality directive has effect in Irish law and clearly upholds the rights of people from ethnic minorities in Irish society (European Commission, 2000). Schools have a myriad of legal obligations arising from the Equal Status Act, 2000 (Government of Ireland, 2000) and the Education Act, 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1998). Specifically, schools must "promote the language and cultural needs of students having regard to the choices of their parents" and "have respect and promote respect for the diversity of values, beliefs, traditions, languages and ways of life in society" (Government of Ireland, 1998).

Social and academic language skills are particularly important in terms of the linguistic capital they represent (Galindo, 1997). Schools therefore have a legal and moral obligation to ensure that all pupils are supported effectively in acquiring these skills. There is, however, more to supporting bilingual students than simply teaching them to get by in the dominant language of the school. An approach which has the achievement of linguistic competence in the dominant language as its sole aim runs the risk of devaluing the learner's first language. This may impact his or her ethnic identity as well as the status of the minority linguistic community with which he or she is associated. When the cultural and linguistic practices of certain powerful groups are valued over others, minorities are marginalised in education and in society. Language and culture are closely linked and the diminution of minority languages has negative effects not only for the individual student but for the minority culture in question (Smolicz, 1981, Cummins, 2000, OECD, 2004, Cable, 2004).

So what constitutes good practice in supporting bilingual students? As stated earlier, there are many theories as to how additional languages are acquired. Similarly, there is much debate on bilingualism and language teaching and support, and many theories have been put forward as to what constitutes good practice. However, a review of research and theory in the area highlights some features which are widely held to contribute positively to meeting the educational needs of bilingual pupils and linguistic minority communities. This is by no means a comprehensive analysis, but some common elements arising from the literature are presented here.

OECD data suggest that foreign-born students are more likely to perform poorly than their peers (Schleicher, 2006) and a great deal of research points to a relationship between ethnic identity or ethnic group membership (regardless of place of birth) and educational achievement (e.g. Gillborn and Gipps, 1996, Ofsted, 2005a, Archer and Francis, 2007). On the grounds that inequalities cannot be counteracted unless they are detected, there is a clear need for data regarding educational outcomes to be disaggregated for different ethnic, linguistic, gender, social class and ability groups (with due care to avoid pathologising particular groups). The effectiveness of support programmes and interventions should be evaluated and monitored. This should be done at both national and school level, especially at transfer between schools, and data should be used to reveal inequalities, to identify specific needs and to highlight good practice (Blair, 2002, Ofsted, 2005a).

It is important that the mainstream curriculum reflects ethnic and linguistic diversity and that minority cultures and languages are promoted within the school and in the broader community (Smolicz, 1981, Cummins, 2000, Blair, 2002). The principles of interculturalism and anti-racism should be at the heart of the school's ethos and the whole school should be engaged in an on-going project to promote language and literacy (Martin and Miller, 1999, Blair, 2002, OECD, 2004, Ofsted, 2005a, b, NCCA, 2006). In relation to this, intercultural and language awareness should form a part of pre-service teacher education and regular in-service training should also be provided (Lewis and Wray, 2000, Ward, 2004). This whole school approach should be coordinated and planned and students, parents and minority ethnic communities, as well as teachers, should be involved in this process (Blair, 2002). Effective communication between teachers and minority ethnic parents is essential and this can be aided by the use of bilingual assistants, interpreters or cultural mediators.

Bilingualism can contribute positively to linguistic, cognitive and academic development, as long as both languages are encouraged to develop (Cummins, 2000, Cable, 2004, Hansson et al., 2002, Ofsted, 2005b). However, language has been found to contribute to underachievement in some contexts, particularly for immigrant students (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996, Schleicher, 2006). In developing strategies to ensure that bilingual students reach their potential, a balance should be achieved between; on the one hand allowing schools the flexibility to adapt solutions to the needs of particular communities and individuals and, on the other, coordinating services to ensure consistency and facilitate the sharing of good practice (Hansson et al., 2002, Schleicher, 2006).

Any specific language support provided to students should be based on a thorough initial assessment of his or her oral, aural and written language skills and should take into account his or her educational background and literacy skills in his or her first language (Martin and Miller, 1999, Ward, 2004). There is a need for long-term strategies and support provision beyond the achievement of an initial level of fluency and bilingual learners should be encouraged to continue to develop their first language skills (Cummins, 2000). Language support should be provided in the mainstream classroom as far as possible (Lewis and Wray, 2000, Hansson et al., 2002). Following broad principles of inclusion, differentiated, individualised teaching methods should be the norm so that students with varying needs and from diverse backgrounds can benefit. Continued development of the bilingual student's skills in his or her mother tongue should be encouraged (Cummins, 2000, Ofsted, 2005b, NCCA, 2005).

Language ability should not be equated with academic ability and the placing of bilingual students in inappropriate age or ability groupings should be avoided. A clear distinction should be made between Special Educational Needs provision and language support provision for bilingual students (Troyna and Siraj-Blatchford, 1993, Tomlinson and Craft, 1995). Bilingual students should not be viewed in deficit terms; instead schools should value minority languages and bilingualism, and promote them at all levels of society.

## **Bilingual Students in Irish Schools – rationale for research**

While very little research has been published in the area, there is broad recognition that the current provision for minority ethnic students in Irish schools is far from ideal. Problems have been identified with levels of funding, the scale of support provision, coordination and planning, teacher allocation, the curriculum, training and resources and racism (Lodge and Lynch, 2004, Keogh and Whyte, 2003, Ward, 2004, Devine, 2005, Pavee Point, 2005).

While many specific issues arise, the provision of language support for students who have languages other than English (or Irish) as their first languages emerges as a major priority for two principal reasons. Firstly, the literature highlights language as a vital aspect of learning for minority ethnic students, as well as for integration for minority ethnic communities as a whole. A need to examine whether the provision for support for bilingual students is adequate therefore emerges. Secondly, the limited research which has been conducted suggests that the provision of language support in Ireland is minimal in comparison with neighbouring countries, and that there is much room for improvement, in terms of the quantity and quality of the support available (Ward, 2004, Devine, 2005).

The post-primary (secondary) level was focussed on for three main reasons. The first is the lack of previous research into educational provision for minority ethnic students in Irish post-primary schools. Secondly, most would agree that the demands of second level schooling require a wider range of more developed language skills than those of primary (Cummins, 2000, Ofsted, 2005b). The provision of language support is therefore vital for students at this level, especially those entering the Irish system for the first time. Thirdly, research, as well as preliminary interviews carried out in the context of the research, suggested that the support being provided at post-primary level in Ireland compares unfavourably with that provided at primary level (Inner City Organisations Network, 2005, Integrate Ireland Language and Training, 2005).

## **Research Methodology**

The objective of this research was to examine teachers' and principals' perceptions of language support in post-primary schools. It should be noted that there are many more questions which should be asked about the experience of minority ethnic students in Irish schools, and that language support issues are only a small part of the picture. Information was not sought as to the experiences of minority ethnic students themselves in receiving language support. This does not imply that students' experiences are not important. In fact the quality of the support being received could only be evaluated using students' experiences and perceptions as a starting point. However, this study will not attempt to draw any conclusions in this respect. Instead the aim was to focus on the education professionals who are involved in language support; their qualifications and training, their experiences and their perceptions of the support provided.

Because of a limited timescale, the use of efficient research tools was necessary so as to obtain the optimum results. Two tools were chosen; questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The use of a questionnaire was chosen as a means of reaching a number of EAL (English as an Additional Language<sup>7</sup>) teachers. The interview method was chosen because of its more interpretive nature; offering a more detailed picture of provision and deeper insights into participants' perceptions. The interview as a research tool has been criticised as subjective and open to bias. However, the interviewees' "human embeddedness" was seen here as a valuable means of accessing not just

---

<sup>7</sup> English as an Additional Language has come to replace the term English as a Second Language in the UK and Australia in recognition of the fact that many students may already speak two or more languages when they are learning English.

information, but participants' "own interpretations of the world" (Cohen et al., 2000). The use of both tools, as well as extensive supplementary interviews with key personnel in governmental and non-governmental organisations, was considered important in order to generate richer data. The range of sources also helped to ensure validity, since it offered an opportunity for triangulation, through the cross-checking of interview and survey data.

Piloting was carried out in order to refine research tools. Purposive sampling was then employed in order to select a geographical area where a number of schools were ethnically mixed. An inner city area was selected in which approximately one fifth of the population are not Irish. This area has been experiencing huge demographic change in recent years and has a history of socio-economic disadvantage. Despite including some schools which either are or were prestigious historically, the area is generally one of educational disadvantage with students achieving below the national average academically. 11 schools in the area were found to be providing language support. Questionnaire data was obtained from at least one language support teacher in 9 of these schools and this was followed up with interviews with teachers, coordinators and principals in 5 schools so that ultimately data was obtained from each of the schools in the sample frame.

## Results

A large number of bilingual students were found to be attending the schools in the area and these students were unevenly distributed among schools. Students were drawn from a wide range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds; 28 mother tongue languages were represented in the sample. 53% of the students taught by teachers participating in the survey had an Eastern European language as their mother tongue, reflecting recent migration patterns. Practices in relation to language support varied widely between schools, but generally teachers were found to be struggling to meet the needs of their bilingual students in the context of limited information, training and resources.

Responses to the presence of immigrant students in the schools were generally positive. One principal referred to the "richness" brought to the school by recent newcomers, saying: "they do add great hunger for learning, and ambition." However, concerns were expressed by a number of teachers about ethnic integration. A teacher in one school with a high proportion of minority ethnic students described lunch-time practices as follows:

The problem we do have is trying to get them to mix. Lithuanians play football there (*pointing*), the Chinese boys stand down there, you know, the Polish lads are out in the yard over here.

Although this has limited relevance to this study, it raises interesting questions about integration and about relationships between territory, status and ethnicity which should be explored in future research.

The support and resources provided by the Department of Education and Science were strongly criticised by principals and teachers. Most described an overall lack of planning and coordination on the part of government bodies, as well as difficulties experienced in accessing the limited resources which were available. Student entitlement to language support (effectively 2 hours per week for two years) was widely held to be inadequate and the temporary and inconsistent nature of teacher allocation were also criticised. Views expressed are characterised by remarks made by a principal in a pilot interview, who said:

If you were to pare it all back to what is actually paid for by the department it's really pretty paltry. If the aim of it is to make somebody capable of being integrated into a subject area, it's nonsense.

Also identified as problematic was a lack of recognised second language teaching qualifications and training among teachers involved in language support. Only two of the 12 teachers surveyed had any

specific ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages<sup>8</sup>) qualifications and all stated that they would like further training in the area. While the Department of Education and Science provides funding to an organisation to provide training for language support teachers, this training consists of one-off day long seminars and is generally perceived as limited (Ward, 2004). Only a quarter of the teachers surveyed had attended this training.

Initial assessment and placement of bilingual students emerged as questionable in many cases. A wide range of procedures for initial assessment were reported, none of which represented the breadth and depth of assessment recommended as international best practice. 57% (n=84) of the bilingual students taught by teachers in the survey were in transition year; a year which students generally complete aged around 15, after completing their first state examination and before embarking on their senior cycle studies. While age data was not available on these students, it is extremely unlikely that all 84 would coincidentally fall into this age group. This is more likely to reflect a reluctance to place bilingual students in examination classes; teachers in the study referred to practices whereby bilingual students were placed in classes below their age groups.

There was evidence in teachers' responses of confusion between language support and support for students with special educational needs. One school reported using assessment tools designed for use with native speakers with learning difficulties to assess bilingual students' language levels, for example. It was common for language support to be coordinated by the special needs coordinator and in at least one school bilingual students were placed in "remedial" classes rather than receiving specific EAL support. The issue of bilingual students who were identified as having special educational needs or literacy difficulties in their first languages also arose as problematic. The delays and difficulties experienced in accessing supports such as psychological assessments generally appeared to be exacerbated in the case of bilingual students, reflecting previous research (Maher, 2005)

## Discussion and Conclusions

Emerging clearly from this study are the huge disparities between policy, provision and practice in the education of bilingual and minority ethnic students. Educational policy, in keeping with international best practice, recommends a whole school approach to cultural and linguistic diversity which incorporates the principles of equality, pluralism and interculturalism (Government of Ireland, 1998, NCCA, 2006). Language support should be provided in an inclusive environment, involving differentiated and individualised learning. Failure should be avoided and early intensive intervention is recommended (Department of Education and Science, 2000).

The reality of provision, in contrast, constitutes a "Band-Aid solution", revealing an underlying deficit view of bilingual students for whom a "quick fix" will suffice. This Band-Aid involves a limited number of temporary language support teaching hours for schools and minimal in-service training for the teachers providing this support. Practices vary widely and some schools do not receive the allocation of teaching hours to which they are entitled. Language support teaching remains a temporary, low status occupation. Assessment of bilingual students' needs is often inadequate and sometimes stressful, and students are often placed in inappropriate age or ability groups. Students are generally withdrawn from the mainstream classroom to receive help, usually from non-specialist teachers.

While the teachers engaged in this work can be enthusiastic and resourceful, provision falls far short of the holistic, comprehensive support suggested by international best practice and implied in policy rhetoric. The ideal of the whole school approach to cultural and linguistic diversity could not be further from the reality, with provision for bilingual students perceived as peripheral and problematic. There is no doubt that this ad hoc provision has already failed some students, as evidenced by the girl described by one teacher in this study who "just copied out the questions" in her Leaving Certificate

---

<sup>8</sup> English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) encompasses English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Second Language (ESL) and Additional Language (EAL)

examination<sup>9</sup>. This is unacceptable on a number of levels. Clearly the result for the individual bilingual students concerned is devastating, especially in the Irish non-industrial context, where educational credentials are a crucial determinant of social position and opportunity (Drudy and Lynch, 1993, Clancy, 1995, O'Connell et al., 2006).

The underachievement of bilingual students, however, also has farther-reaching consequences. Provision for bilingual students has remained poor for the past seven years, since the service was first offered, despite criticism from a range of stakeholders, including a joint party government committee (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2004) and the Department of Education and Science itself (Inner City Organisations Network, 2005). There is, therefore, a serious danger that underachievement will become the norm; that it will become taken for granted among teachers and students that bilingual students do less well than their native speaker peers.

The consequences of this would be to position bilingual students as less able and less important in school discourses. Bilingual students' linguistic abilities are not valued as cultural capital in this scenario. Since bilingual students' habitus, as well as that of teachers, is framed by these discourses, self-perpetuating stereotypes will inevitably emerge, resulting in lower expectations on the part of both students and teachers, perhaps not just for bilingual students but for all students associated with the ethnic groups from which bilingual students are drawn.

A simple increase in the number of language support hours provided for each bilingual student will not address the heart of this issue, although there is clearly an urgent need for this. A structured re-examination of the entire education system is necessary. This should encompass everything from a reconsideration of school admissions practices<sup>10</sup> to an audit of the curriculum. Teacher education must be developed so that all teachers are equipped with the linguistic and cultural awareness, skills and confidence which are currently lacking. There also needs to be a coordinated effort to share and develop expertise in the teaching of English (and Irish) as an Additional Language. Principals must be supported in leading their schools towards real reform, in collaboration with teachers, students and parents from all ethnic groups. Only by undertaking all of this in a planned and coordinated manner can the State ensure that schools provide children with an education in which cultural and linguistic diversity are not just coped with but valued.

The picture that emerges from this study is one in which bilingual students are marginalised in the education system. They are denied the support they need in order to reach their educational potential and discourses which portray them in deficit terms are perpetuated. At the heart of the practices described are racialised discourses which construct 'Irishness' in narrow terms, therefore positioning all those outside the norm as 'other', and therefore less important than 'our own'.

---

<sup>9</sup> The Leaving Certificate is the State examination which students complete at the end of their secondary schooling.

<sup>10</sup> Bilingual students in the study were clustered in a small number of schools in the geographical area

## References

- ANTHIAS, F. & YUVAL-DAVIS, N. (1992) *Racialized Boundaries: race, nation, gender, colour and class and the anti-racist struggle*, London, Routledge.
- ARCHER, L. & FRANCIS, B. (2007) *Understanding Minority Ethnic Achievement*, Abingdon, Routledge.
- BLAIR, D. (2002) Effective School Leadership: the multi-ethnic context. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23, 171-191.
- BOURDIEU, P. (1983) The Forms of Capital. *Soziale Welt*, 2, 183-198.
- BOURDIEU, P. & SAINT MARTIN, M. (1974) Scholastic Excellence and the Values of the Educational System. IN EGGLESTONE, J. (Ed.) *Contemporary Research in the Sociology of Education*. London, Methuen.
- CABLE, C. (2004) I'm going to bring my sense of Identity to this; the role and contribution of the bilingual assistant. *Westminster Studies in Education*, 27, 207-222.
- CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE (2003) Principal Demographic Results. Cork.
- CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE (2006) Population and Migration Estimates. Cork, Central Statistics Office.
- CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE (2007) *Census 2006: Principal Demographic Results*, Dublin, Stationery Office.
- CLANCY, P. (1995) Education in the Republic of Ireland: the project of modernity? IN CLANCY, P., DRUDY, S., LYNCH, K. & O'DOWD, L. (Eds.) *Irish Society: sociological perspectives*. Dublin, Institute of Public Administration.
- COHEN, L., MANION, L. & MORRISON, K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London and New York, Routledge.
- CONNOLLY, P. (1998) *Racism, gender identities and young children: social relations in a multi-ethnic, inner-city primary school*, London, Routledge.
- CUMMINS, J. (2000) *Language, Power and Pedagogy - Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*, Buffalo, Multilingual Matters.
- DAVIES, B. & HARRÉ, R. (1990) Positioning: the Discursive Production of Selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20, 43-63.
- DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE (2000) *Learning Support Guidelines*, Dublin, DES.
- DEVINE, D. (2000) Constructions of Childhood in School - power and practice in Irish education. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 10, 23-41.
- DEVINE, D. (2005) Welcome to the Celtic Tiger? Teacher responses to immigration and increasing ethnic diversity in Irish schools. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 15, 49-70.
- DRUDY, S. & LYNCH, K. (1993) *Schools and Society*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan.
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2000) Council Directive.
- FANNING, B. (2002) *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- GALINDO, R. (1997) Language Wars: The Ideological Dimensions of the Debates on Bilingual Education. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 21, 103-141.
- GILLBORN, D. & GIPPS, C. (1996) *Recent research on the achievements of ethnic minority pupils*, London, HMSO.
- GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND (1937) Constitution of Ireland. Irish Statute Book Database.
- GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND (1998) Education Act. Irish Statute Book Database.
- GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND (2000) Equal Status Act. Irish Statute Book Database.

- GUTTING, G. (Ed.) (1994) *The Cambridge companion to Foucault*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- HANSSON, U., MORGAN, V. & DUNN, S. (2002) *Minority Ethnic Groups in Northern Ireland: Experiences and Expectations of English Language Support in Education Settings*. Belfast, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
- HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS (2004) *The Provision of Educational Services in a Multi-ethnic/Multi-cultural Society*. IN SCIENCE, J. C. O. E. A. (Ed.).
- IMMIGRANT COUNCIL OF IRELAND (2005) *Background Information and Statistics on Immigration to Ireland*. Dublin, Immigrant Council of Ireland.
- INNER CITY ORGANISATIONS NETWORK (2005) *Report on the Seminar and Recommendations from the Foreign National Young People at Risk Subgroup*. Dublin.
- INTEGRATE IRELAND LANGUAGE AND TRAINING (2005) *Annual Activities Report 2004*. Dublin, IILT.
- KENNY, M. (2001) *Traveller Childhood in Ireland*. IN CLEARY, A., NIC GHIOLLA PHADRAIG, M. & QUIN, S. (Eds.) *Understanding Children: Changing Experience and Family Forms*. Cork, Oak Tree Press.
- KEOGH, A. & WHYTE, J. (2003) *Getting On: the experiences of immigrant students in second level schools linked to the Trinity access programmes*, Dublin, Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin.
- KROPIWIEC, K. (2006) *Polish Migrant Workers in Ireland. Community Profiles Series*. Dublin, NCCRI.
- LAREAU, A. (2001) *Linking Bourdieu's Concept of Capital to the Broader Field*. IN BRUCE, J. (Ed.) *Social Class, Poverty and Exclusion*. London, Routledge.
- LENTIN, R. & MCVEIGH, R. (2002) *Situated Racisms*. IN LENTIN, R. & MCVEIGH, R. (Eds.) *Racism and Anti-racism in Ireland*. Belfast, Beyond the Pale.
- LENTIN, R. & MCVEIGH, R. (2006) *After Optimism? Ireland, Racism and Globalisation*, Dublin, Metro Eireann Publications.
- LEWIS, M. & WRAY, D. (Eds.) (2000) *Literacy in the Secondary School*, London, David Fulton.
- LODGE, A. & LYNCH, K. (2004) *Diversity at School*, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration.
- MAHER, C. (2005) *Cultural Diversity and School Practice: an Exploration of Interculturalism in a Second Level Community School in Ireland*. *School of Education and Lifelong Learning*. Dublin, University College Dublin.
- MARTIN, D. & MILLER, C. (1999) *Language and the Curriculum: practitioner research in planning differentiation*, London, David Fulton.
- MCCARTHY, C. & DIMITRIADIS, G. (2000) *Governmentality and the Sociology of Education*. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21, 169-185.
- MCGINNITY, F., O'CONNELL, P., QUINN, E. & WILLIAMS, J. (2006) *Migrants' Experience of Racism and Discrimination in Ireland*. Dublin, Economic and Social Research Institute.
- NCCA, N. C. F. C. A. A. (2005) *English as an Additional Language in Primary Schools*, Dublin, NCCA.
- NCCA, N. C. F. C. A. A. (2006) *Intercultural Education in the Post-primary School*, Dublin, NCCA.
- O'CONNELL, P., CLANCY, P. & MCCOY, S. (2006) *Who went to College?* Dublin, Higher Education Authority.
- OECD (2004) *Integration of non-native students and students with foreign-born parents*. IN OECD (Ed.) *What makes school systems perform? Seeing schools through the prism of PISA*. OECD.
- OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. IN NATIONS, U. (Ed.).
- OFSTED (2005a) *Race Equality in Education: good practice in schools and local authorities*. Ofsted.
- OFSTED (2005b) *Raising the Achievement of Bilingual Learners*. London, Ofsted.

- PAVEE POINT (2005) Travellers and Education. Dublin, Pavee Point.
- RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION AGENCY (2003) Integration - Programme Refugees. Refugee Integration Agency.
- ROBBINS, D. (2005) The origins, early development and status of Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital'. *British Journal of Sociology*, 56, 13-30.
- SAID, E. (1978) *Orientalism*, London, Penguin.
- SCHLEICHER, A. (2006) Where immigrant students succeed: a comparative review of performance and engagement in PISA 2003. *Intercultural Education*, 17, 507-516.
- SMOLICZ, J. (1981) Culture, Ethnicity and Education: multiculturalism in a plural society. IN MEGARRY, J., NISBETT, J. & HOYLE, E. (Eds.) *World Yearbook of Education 1981 - Education of Minorities*. London, Hogan.
- TOMLINSON, S. & CRAFT, M. (1995) Education for All in the 1990s. IN TOMLINSON, S. & CRAFT, M. (Eds.) *Ethnic Relations and Schooling: policy and practice in the 1990s*. London, Athlone Press.
- TROYNA, B. & SIRAJ-BLATCHFORD, I. (1993) Providing Support or Denying Access? The experiences of students designated as 'ESL' and 'SN' in a multi-ethnic secondary school. *Educational Review*, 45, 3-11.
- UNCERD (2005) Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Ireland). International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination.
- WANG, Y. (2006) Chinese Students in Ireland. *Community Profiles Series*. Dublin, National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI).
- WARD, T. (2004) Education and Language Needs of Separated Children. Dublin, City of Dublin VEC, County Dublin VEC, Dun Laoghaire VEC.