Investigating the impact of a specialist CPD training programme for Teaching Assistants, related to supporting children with English as an Additional Language

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This research emerged from education practice, specifically from the experiences of one local authority area within the North East of England. Akin to experiences across Europe (Koehler & Schneider, 2019), increasing numbers of economic migrants and asylum seekers in the area presented schools with a variety of new challenges, for which many felt ill equipped. Not only were schools required to support an increasing range of language repertoires and the needs of vulnerable groups, but specialist provision and training was sparse for teachers and even less for Teaching Assistants, who were regularly expected to care for, and educate, these children. There were also concerns over equality of opportunity in education for these children who had English as an additional language (EAL). The local authority area reflected the national pattern of a reduction in such specialist provision for schools. In response to a request for partnership working, a university in the North East of England developed a specialist Certificate of Education Practice with a focus upon offering continuous professional development (CPD) to Teaching Assistants to support EAL learners. This CPD was followed up by a real-time work-based project which aimed to consolidate the learning and effect relevant change within the area. To determine the impact of the programme, a small-scale evaluation was conducted by way of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, aiming to glean responses from course attendees, their work-based advisors and Head Teachers or

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managers. The findings identified three themes: motivation, personal and professional development and impact on school. While the impact of the CPD from the perspectives of the teaching assistants is now more clearly defined, the wider impact from the perspectives of colleagues in other school roles remains anecdotal and unconfirmed.

Introduction and background

Every child has the right to an education (UNICEF, 2021) in order to develop their full potential. They need to be supported, without discrimination, to improve life chances. Yet, the focus on accountability and performativity in the English education system means that many children do not have the same opportunities to succeed (Biesta, 2010). Children who are learning English as an additional language (EAL) are among those facing challenges.

EAL learners, categorised by the UK Government as those 'exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English' (Department for Education (DfE), 2020a:4), are a diverse and heterogeneous group (DfE, 2019). They may be bilingual or multilingual, having home experience of one or more of over 300 languages (The Bell Foundation, 2021a). These learners range from those recently arrived into the UK to second generation, namely those born in the UK to parents who were born overseas. Leung (2016) highlights the policy and terminology changes from the 1950s to present day, while NALDIC (2021), the National Subject Association for EAL, refer to English as an additional language (EAL) and bilingual learners in schools. As NALDIC deem EAL to be a neutral term, and one which recognises that some children may be multilingual rather than bilingual, it is the term adopted by the authors of this study.

The most recent school census data for England, which considers schools, pupils and their characteristics (DfE, 2019), suggests that children with EAL represent 21.2% and 16.9% of pupils in primary and secondary schools respectively. However, evidence suggests that such data is weak and that EAL learners are not accurately represented (Hutchinson, 2018). In

addition, the North East of England, where this study took place, is often viewed as an area with low numbers of EAL pupils. School data (DFE & ONS, 2018) identifies 7.8% and 5.8% of the North East of England's primary and secondary school population respectively are EAL learners. However, these figures mask the wide variations within the North East as a whole. For example, the local area where this programme was undertaken is currently within the top 10 per cent nationally 'according to the size of increases in their proportions of pupils with EAL' (Hutchinson, 2018: 42). Within the local authorities who became involved with this CPD programme, data indicated a variation between 15.3% and 1.9% (DFE & ONS, 2018). However, 'town centre' schools involved from these same local authorities had up to 80% of their cohort identified as EAL learners. The data often lacks the detail required to reflect the diversity of this cohort in terms of languages spoken, socio-economic background, English language proficiency and place of birth. EAL ascription, that is the identification of a pupil as having EAL, arises from the Department for Education's broad definition (DfE, 2020b) for school census purposes which, it could be argued, lacks nuance and potentially fails to recognise that 'pupils with English as an additional language are not a homogeneous group' (NALDIC, 2012). Whilst recognising the diversity that exists within EAL learners, it is not our intention here to reproduce this idea that children with EAL are a homogenous group, and therefore we will justify why our initial focus was upon a specific group, namely children who are asylum seekers or members of families who are economic migrants.

Whilst the need to provide for the needs of multilingual pupils within the English education system is certainly not a new one, over recent years many local authorities have been faced with increasing numbers of economic migrant and asylum-seeking families, resulting in associated provision demands across all aspects of their services (Bulman, 2019). Since 2006, the number of EAL pupils in English maintained schools has doubled (The Bell Foundation, 2021a). In this respect, the northern local authorities involved in this programme were reflections of a pattern which has unfolded nationally in England. Running parallel to this, there is a picture of incrementally reduced support from specialist local authority EAL teams across the UK, impacting upon provision for learners (Gladwell & Chetwynd, 2018), resulting in a degree of urgency for schools to increase their own capacity to support EAL learners. This is set against wider national policies that can 'reproduce,

extend and legitimise inequalities' (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000: 1). Researchers also acknowledge that EAL learning is situated within a much broader debate around inclusivity of curriculum content within English schools, including decolonisation of the curriculum. Whilst this debate has recently gathered apace within the higher education (Begum & Saini, 2019; Arday, Belluigi & Thomas, 2021), the school system's focus is largely on decolonisation of the primary and secondary History curriculum (Moncrieff, 2019). Undoubtedly this will evolve as schools understand their own role in developing 'transformative approaches' across their whole curriculum (Arphattananon, 2018: 4).

There are a number of risk factors which may affect the academic achievement of EAL learners (The Bell Foundation, 2021b). In addition to social class, economic status and academic ability which may affect all learners, their proficiency in first or additional languages and ethnic or cultural backgrounds, together with their point of arrival in the UK education system and life experiences, including structural inequalities and the effects of racism, all contribute to the risk of these learners not having an equitable education. Furthermore, it is recognised that although specialist support should be available for EAL learners there is limited training for teaching and support staff regarding diversity in the classroom (NALDIC, 2012), a situation similarly reflected across Europe (Crul, 2017: 7).

In recognition of these circumstances, prompted specifically by the rapid increase of pupils in their local school system, guidance and training was sought by the local authority, which eventually led to the development of the EAL Professional Practice Award (PPA) programme.

Professional Development of EAL Educators

The recipients of this CPD programme were teaching assistants, specifically those who worked with pupils ascribed as being EAL learners. These teaching assistants were all female. Some were white or black British, while others had themselves been born outside the UK. Some were bilingual or multilingual and all brought a range of expertise and experiences with them. Within the authority where the research originated, teaching assistants were often expected to undertake a wide variety of roles, including general

classroom and SEND assistance, as well as act in a key support role, specifically for newly arrived children with EAL. Yet, apart from sometimes having a shared linguistic or cultural heritage with some students, or personal experience of being a bilingual learner, they often had no experience or prior training in the pedagogies of teaching children with EAL, a situation by no means unique to this local authority (Masdeu-Navarro, 2015; Wardman, 2012). As the CPD programme developed, it was ascertained that neighbouring authorities were experiencing similar issues and they were invited to participate in the programme.

When attention is turned towards the professional development of educators in our schools, in relation to enhancing EAL pedagogy, there is evidence from across the field of education of limited opportunities for specialist professional development (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019), perhaps exacerbated by the reduction of specialist EAL teams in local authorities (Gladwell & Chetwynd, 2018). This in turn, can be traced back in its origins to the abolition in 2011 of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), government funding ring-fenced to 'support the learning of EAL and bilingual pupils and the achievement of ethnic minority learners' (NALDIC, 2020).

Issues of capacity, in relation to meeting the needs of EAL learners, extends also to a lack of opportunity for professional development for teachers themselves, from the outset of their career. The Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2013: 12), outline that teachers should 'have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils… including those with English as an Additional Language (EAL)'. It is recommended that, alongside supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), from the start of their career, teachers should be able to 'use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support' children with EAL [ibid: 12]. Awareness-raising and training and inclusive pedagogies may be taught in the already tightly packed pre-service curriculum, but specialist knowledge in schools is rare (NALDIC, 2015) and it has become an area in which many teachers feel insecure as they enter the profession (Anderson et al., 2016).

Nationally, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinators (SENDCos) are often asked to also take strategic lead in supporting children with EAL, leading to a conceptual conflation of EAL and SEND which, it could be argued, leads to EAL learners being viewed as

having a learning difficulty. Such an assumption has the potential to create unnecessary barriers for pupils learning EAL (Tangen and Spooner-Lane, 2008). However, despite this conflation in practice, EAL does not form part of the National Training Award for SENDCos (NCTL, 2008) nor is specialist training often offered to SENDCos (Murphy & Unthiah, 2015). As a result, those SENDCOs leading on EAL provision may not have had access to professional development in relating to best practice EAL pedagogy and are also unlikely to be specialists in identifying the needs of EAL learners, some of whom who may also have SEND. Furthermore, the independent inspectorate of schools in England, Ofsted, no longer explicitly refers to the needs of EAL learners, instead capturing their needs under the SEND umbrella, stating that school leaders should deliver 'a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or high needs, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life' (Ofsted, 2019: 9). Whilst it could be argued that Ofsted's focus on improved curriculum design is a positive one for EAL learners, its inclusion of the notion of cultural capital is a troublesome one and has the potential to pitch each pupils' own cultural capital against that which Ofsted deems valuable. Ofsted's problematic use of the term implies that it is a commodity that can be acquired, a significant divergence from Bourdieu's concept of life experiences, knowledge and values developed over time in networks that consist of family and community (Schirato & Roberts, 2018; Huang, 2019). Recent research suggests that the cultural capital that EAL learners possess can, if promoted and valued by schools, have a positive impact on the learning outcomes of EAL learners (Duarte, 2011; Gazzard, 2018). Such approaches, based upon bilingual or multilingual maintenance within the classroom, have been shown to deliver stronger outcomes than approaches which place the school's language at the top of a linguistic hierarchy (Reljić et al., 2015; Krashen & McField, 2005). Such 'Funds of Knowledge' approaches embrace and value 'culture as lived experiences of students' (Gonzalez, et al., 2005:40).

When attention is turned to teaching assistants, research (Anderson et al., 2016: 82) has shown that pre-service teachers identify classroom assistants as having a 'responsibility' in meeting the needs of EAL learners in the classroom:

> *Student respondents appeared to acknowledge the role that classroom assistants may play in supporting EAL learners. 57.5% of student respondents saw classroom assistants as having 'very large' or 'large' responsibilities towards EAL learners, and 36.8% some responsibility*

Thus, teaching assistants are positioned, even by early career teachers, as central to EAL provision. The roles of teaching assistants have become increasingly 'blurred' (Saddler, 2013:144); roles are varied (Hammersley-Fletcher & Lowe, 2011) and they are often asked to undertake roles commensurate with a teaching role (Hancock et al., 2010:100; Blatchford et al., 2009).

Research acknowledges that, in some schools, there may be 'well-trained EAL teaching assistants' (Demie, 2018: 650) but notes that in 'many schools, particularly where there are few EAL learners, rely on general teaching or learning assistants with no specialist skills on knowledge in assessing EAL pupils' (2018: 650-651). Similarly, within the authorities where the study took place, teaching assistants were often expected to undertake the bulk of care and education of children with English as an additional language (EAL), even as numbers of EAL learners increased. Moreover, research shows (TDA, 2009; Arnot et al., 2014), that these are often the colleagues in school who receive the least amount of training, in any area, and especially in EAL provision (Masdeu-Navarro, 2015; Wardman, 2012). These experiences mirrored those of Foley et al. (2013) who, when exploring policy and practice in mainstream schools, found there were scant opportunities for professional development in the subject area. The local authority areas reflected the national pattern of a reduction in specialist provision for schools (Muller, 2019). Skipp and Hopwood's (2019:45) report for the DfE also identified that teaching assistants receive little training, have little time for planning within their contracted hours and are increasingly used to 'effectively cover the needs of increasing proportions of pupils with SEND in the school - which schools report can mean deploying TAs in ways they know may not be the most effective'. This concurs with the Education Endowment Foundation's report (Sharples et al., 2018) on the deployment and effectiveness of teaching assistants in school. It notes that whilst teaching assistants make up over a quarter of the school workforce in England, only 7% have achieved higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) status. The report goes on to state that 'TAs are not adequately prepared for their role in classrooms' [ibid: 9], despite many taking on the role of the primary pedagogic contact for some of the children with the highest level of needs in the school, including language needs.

Acknowledging Arnot et al.'s (2014) recommendations that there should be enhanced professional development for teachers and support staff, to secure robust provision for EAL learners, together with Hansen-Thomas and Cavagnetto's (2010) view that training should be 'long term, not just one day or one hour in service sessions' (2014:112), the EAL Programme sought to address these concerns relating to workforce preparedness, to meet the needs of EAL learners.

Context

The CPD programme at the centre of this study was made possible a result of a successful bid under the UK Government's Controlling Migration Fund (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2018). Under the terms of the bid, there were strict parameters and the CPD programme was designed to meet local authority identified needs within a particular area of the north-east of England where asylum dispersal had increased considerably over recent years. Whilst it is acknowledged that many families use alternative languages, for example including British-born families and European Union citizens or professional migrants, these families were not targeted by the funding.

Despite the relatively narrow focus of the funding, the programme was an opportunity to explore multilingualism within schools, ranging from newly arrived children arriving with a mother tongue(s) other than English, through to British born bilingual/pluralingual children. The needs of unaccompanied young people, arriving in the UK without parents, were also considered. Course content also examined the definition in the DfE's School Census document and asked TAs to examine the views of their staff, (as a post session activity) in relation to bilingualism. Thus, a more nuanced understanding of the needs of learners, with a wide range of linguistic repertoires emerged as well as a greater awareness of the contested nature of defining 'EALness'.

The university that was part of this study already had in place a work-based learning (WBL) framework. This was deemed suitable for the delivery of a specialist CPD programme for practitioners who educate and care for EAL learners. Using this framework, an award-

bearing course was developed in the shape of a Level 4 Certificate of Education Practice, targeted at teaching assistants who support EAL learners. Of those who enrolled, levels of qualifications varied greatly, with many teaching assistants being qualified to levels 2 or 3, whilst others were graduates or had post-graduate qualifications. On entry to the course, none of the participants had any specific EAL training or qualification. The EAL specific content and the opportunity to apply the learning within the school context were of paramount importance and it was vital that the learning experience was relevant to all so that they could use their knowledge and be deployed effectively (Farrell et al., 2010). A prerequisite requirement for a work-based advisor (WBA) was established with those undertaking this role being given an overview of expectations of students, themselves and the school. This is a model used within the university's work-based learning framework and had previously been seen to add value to the learning process and provide leverage within the workplace.

An underpinning expectation of the professional development programme was to develop an understanding of the nature of plurilingualism. This was crucial since we explored a range of multilingual pedagogies which depended upon this. We, therefore, examined different models of cognitive theories, (Baker & Wright, 2017), including balance theory, thresholds model and Cummins' (1980) Common Underlying Proficiency model bilingualism (Cummins, 2016). Engagement with a chronology of research informed a shared understanding of the nature of bilingualism (Baker & Wright, 2017). In contrast to more traditional approaches that look at one language at a time, the programme sought to acknowledge 'a holistic approach that takes into account all of the languages in the learner's repertoire' Cenoz & Gorter (2011:1). In addition, participants were encouraged to explore multilingual practices, such as codeswitching and translanguaging. Using case studies, these models were critiqued, enabling reflection upon the 'Funds of Knowledge' (Conteh, 2015) that learners bring to the classroom with their L1 (Conteh, 2015). In addition, the nature of bilingualism (a discussion of the contested definitions emerging within school settings in relation to linguistic repertoires), specifically additive and subtractive bilingualism (Cummins, 2000; Baker & Wright, 2017) was examined. For clarification, additive bilingualism refers to a learner continuing to develop their first language alongside their second language, while subtractive bilingualism means that a second language is learned to the detriment of the

first. In turn, this led onto an examination of the distinctiveness of EAL learners and an exploration of research informed EAL strategies and approaches a pedagogy for EAL.

The first module of the course, therefore, focussed upon specialist knowledge about language acquisition, how children learn and inclusive pedagogies. In the subsequent module, students undertook individual (or small group) work-based projects which consolidated, and enabled application of, this learning and aimed to effect change (Miller & Volante, 2019; Furu et al., 2018) within schools and early years settings in which they were working. The content and the opportunity to apply the learning were of paramount importance and it was vital that the learning experience was relevant to all so that they could use their knowledge and be deployed effectively (Farrell et al., 2010). In addition, the allocated WBAs were provided with an overview of expectations of students, themselves and the school. This mirrored the model used with the university's Education Practice WBL programme and so was seen as an important element required to facilitate the students' application of learning within school. Students attended twilight training sessions every week, term-time only, for the nine-month-long duration of the course. These sessions took place in a local authority training centre.

Designing the content and structure in this way it was anticipated that the programme would not only allow teachers to be supported by a teaching assistant with growing EAL pedagogical expertise within the classroom, but would also support language acquisition and development for all learners who are developing English. Furthermore, it was hoped that the learning of practitioners could enhance the provision of education for their children which could develop their 'personality, talents and abilities to the full' (DFE, 2010: 121), as indicated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child, article 29.

The programme was delivered twice over a two-year period, with the initial pilot of the scheme running from January to November 2018. It recruited 12 teaching assistants onto the first course and 16 on the second, all of whom worked in either Secondary, Primary and Early Years (3-5 years) settings from four neighbouring local authorities. Though the first course received positive evaluations, no formal evidence of the potential impact was collated. For the second cohort, which ran throughout 2019, ethical approval was obtained,

and a formal evaluation of the programme was undertaken. The research set out to investigate the impact of the newly developed Certificate of Education Practice for teaching assistants which focused upon supporting children with EAL.

Research Methodology

Ethical considerations permeated this research and at all times researchers adhered to the ethical principles for work-based learners (Durrant, Rhodes & Young, 2011) and there was no coercion to participate (UKRI, 2021). Ethical approval was granted by the university and consent was gained from the organising local authority to proceed.

The study itself was conducted in English, not the first language of some of the participants, and we were aware of the sensitivities involved of gathering data on colleagues who might feel vulnerable about lack of expertise. Although we appointed an independent colleague to collect the data as a way of addressing these sensitivities, we remain alert to the power imbalances between the participants and course leaders/researchers.

The key research questions were:

1. What are the benefits, if any, of delivering a bespoke CPD programme with a focus on supporting EAL learners?
2. What are the barriers and enablers experienced by teaching assistants in delivering their interventions?
3. What lessons can be learned from the CPD partnership?

This was a small-scale study, an evaluation of a CPD programme, which intended to gain the views of all participating teaching assistants, their WBAs and the management of the schools in which they worked. In the first instance, a paper-based questionnaire was distributed to those enrolled upon the programme, as well as their WBAs. The questions for this initial questionnaire were:

- Why did you embark upon/support this specialist CPD programme?

- What do you hope to gain/ what do you hope the participant will gain from this programme?
- What do you consider the barriers are to successful completion of the programme?
- What support network do you have/provide in order to engage fully with this programme?

Seven responses to the initial questionnaire were obtained. Six of the respondents were teaching assistants who had undertaken the programme and one was a WBA. The research team acknowledge that response rates to questionnaires are often low (Bell, 2005:148), particularly when it is not distributed personally. A thematic analysis of the qualitative responses helped to determine a broad set of open questions for the interviews in the next phase. These were:

- What has your involvement been on the specialist EAL focus programme?
- Since completing the programme, what impact has it had on: your personal and professional development? pupils and their families? colleagues and their practice? the wider school (leadership /systems/ processes)?
- What challenges have you faced since the programme finished?
- To what extent have your expectations been met/exceeded?
- What lessons can be learned from the development of the programme? What recommendations would you make if it was repeated?
- What are the next steps for you?

Following successful completion of the course, all participants were invited to take part in a follow-up semi-structured interview which aimed to further interrogate the questionnaire responses using the questions above. Four participating teaching assistants agreed to this and there were no responses from WBAs or managers. Acting ethically and respectfully (Bell, 2005), interviews were conducted at a time, and mode, convenient to the interviewees.

Open questions were posed during the telephone interviews, which each lasted up to thirty minutes, and the responses were recorded by a member of the research team. At the end of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to select their own pseudonym for dissemination purposes, as advised by Allen and Wiles (2016). Data interpretation was inspired by Bazeley's (2013: 101-111) 'pathway to analysis'.   A coding process was applied to the initial questionnaire data and significant themes emerged as a result, which helped to answer the research questions. These themes were then used to inform the questions for the follow-up interviews. Once data had been collated from these interviews, themes across both sets of data were reviewed, refined and named.

Findings and Discussion

Emerging themes from the initial questionnaire centred around the participants' own learning during the programme itself and their ability to implement what they were learning within their workplace. These themes were used to inform the follow-up interviews, in particular the factors which influenced each participant's application of their learning within their school context on completion of the programme. The themes which emerged from the initial questionnaire and follow-up interviews fell into three main categories; motivation, personal and professional development and wider impact on the school in which the participant was working.

Motivation

The theme of 'motivation' arose from scrutiny of the initial questionnaires, both from the participating teaching assistants themselves and from the respondent in the work-based advisor role. It included both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

It was apparent that respondents to the initial questionnaire yearned to learn more about the subject of EA), for their personal and professional development, (discussed further in theme 2). In line with Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation (Vroom, 1964; Parijat & Bagga, 2014; Miner, 2015) the respondents felt that the course would bring just rewards and they believed in their own ability to complete the course of study. Though most had

been encouraged to attend by their employing school, each ultimately had the freedom of choice to undertake the course, they were motivated by the opportunity to learn a relevant subject and the course was provided for them in a local area.

What is more, respondents seemed to be intrinsically motivated to help others and were not exclusively motivated by self-interest. Their desire to better support EAL learners in school and their eagerness to share knowledge with others in school were paramount. Giving a reason for this one questionnaire respondent wrote, 'I know mentors and teachers struggle with differentiation for EAL learners' while another said, 'I hope to gain skills to help EAL children'. Amongst those surveyed, the overarching motivation was to improve outcomes for EAL learners, largely expressed in terms of the impact they hoped they would have in school as a result of the programme, 'I would like to be able to help my EAL students to enable them to access the curriculum'. Furthermore, the WBA who took part in the survey appeared to point towards motivation aligned to helping others and the impact upon others, rather than focusing upon self-interest and gain. Rewards were not financial ones, but rather her desire to see 'these strategies shared across school so that the impact on the learners is widespread'.

In the initial questionnaire, all respondents (QRs) identified professional and personal motivation to sign up to the programme. They saw it as a means to improve their own learning. All identified different levels of knowledge and experience of EAL prior to commencing the programme. Whilst some had an existing personal interest in the subject matter, at the time of the programme all were working with EAL learners and recognised the relevance of the course to their role.

This notion of relevancy underpinned the theme of motivation, also reflected in work-based learning in wider literature (Zepeda et al., 2014; TDA, 2009; Fogarty & Pete, 2004). Adult learners are 'relevancy orientated' (Zepeda et al., 2014: 295) and where learning starts outside the workplace but 'continues at the worksite' (Fogarty & Pete, 2004:61;) relevancy is foregrounded (Zepeda et al., 2014) and as a result has more impact upon practice.

This was echoed by respondents to the semi-structured interviews (IRs). Gemma commented that 'having worked with EAL learners for 2 years I felt training was lacking in this area', despite 'the school [where she works having] 80% EAL pupils'; while Sheila hoped to be able to 'gain knowledge… and influence the school's policies and planning for such children and thereby influence decision making'. Some saw the course as important professional development in its own right, for example two of the IRs identified future career aspirations as an EAL specialist, while one was immediately inspired to apply for initial teacher education.

Despite their current roles, some with several years' experience, most QRs felt inexperienced in the field with the majority expressing their desire to improve both their knowledge and skills around supporting EAL learners within school. This proved a key motivating factor for engagement with the course in the first place, as well as for their continued commitment as the course progressed. This was despite a number of barriers identified by the QRs during the programme itself. The issue of 'time constraints' (Lizzy) was noted again by all IRs, while Lizzy also explained how 'everything was done in my own time'. This included managing the demands of the course, which took place after school, with their role within school and their personal life. As many also had caring responsibilities, time pressures proved challenging, yet all highlighted how the course had 'exceeded expectations' (Sheila, Gemma, Sal and Lizzy), at least in part. Despite the course being highly relevant to each school's context, none of the IRs identified being given any additional time by senior leaders during their working day to plan and implement some of their new learning or to undertake their project, a requirement of the course. Sheila felt that being unable to 'gain the support of senior leadership' was a barrier and that 'no one could give me the time', yet she remained positive and valued the learning gained. Two of the QRs commented specifically on the perceived lack of systemic support from the school where they worked.

Despite this, QRs saw their own personal motivation as crucial to their success on the course. Many commented on personal and professional networks which supported and validated this engagement. These networks ranged from family members to both formal and informal support from colleagues at school to peer and tutor support on the course. Of

the seven QRs, four identified such peer support networks as being crucial to their learning experience and ongoing motivation. Almost all of these saw this emerging community of practice in a positive light, both during sessions themselves but also through the social media group established. This enabled participants to keep in touch and support each other's learning. In the follow-up interview, one IR noted that this had extended beyond the duration of the programme itself, 'we have a WhatsApp group, we still have it' (Gemma). Wider support networks were also identified as important in enabling the participants to undertake the course. Whilst this support network was largely a professional one, some did identify family support, as well as tutor support. Though not all participants had a work-based advisor, a recommended model for all those on the course, all QRs were able to identify some colleagues at school who were able to offer support.

For some, their motivation extended beyond the life of the programme itself as the learning community enabled them to draw support from a network of colleagues which has continued beyond the life of the course (Harris et al., 2010; Ferrandez et al., 2016). Whilst some of the participants maintained contact and developed a virtual support network, the wider engagement of the schools themselves and the local authority who commissioned the course was highly limited post course completion.

Personal and Professional Development

The perceived impact, that participants felt the programme had on their own development, fell into the following categories: professional development, including subject specific knowledge and pedagogy, and personal development. All acknowledged that the programme had significantly improved their knowledge and understanding of EAL and equipped them with strategies to better enable EAL learners to access the curriculum. They recognised that their professional knowledge had improved in a number of ways, specifically in understanding ascription, assessment of language proficiency, reading development, as well as an underpinning inclusive pedagogy.

Participants came to recognise the contested definitions associated with EAL and identified that, initially, there was not a shared understanding of this term amongst the group or

within their schools. Reviewing the definition identified within the school census guidance (Department for Education, 2019) it became clearer that this definition captured a broader group of learners than previously considered. As Lizzy commented, 'I hadn't worked with EAL children, well I had but didn't realise'.

Ascription was a key concept that IRs noted as part of their professional development. For example, Lizzy noted that, by developing a deeper understanding of ascription, she was able to identify and amend protocols: 'I thought here's an opportunity. We did have EAL children in school'. Some IRs reflected upon underpinning parental concerns linked to ascription and another considered the way in which the school admission protocols may have inhibited capturing the linguistic repertoires of bilingual (or multilingual) learners, due to admission protocols which fails to capture detail relating to children's languages. Three IRs noted that ascription protocols had changed as a result of their attendance at the course with a deliberate attempt to secure data relating to home language. However, one IR noted that her attempts to improve ascription were not recognised by the school's senior leadership team.

One noted that protocols had not been sufficiently understood or explained to parents, who themselves had a first language other than English:

> *When I looked at the database a lot of them said they were English and weren't down as EAL cos parents weren't putting them down cos they were born in England. So, they wouldn't be flagged up but their first language wasn't English, either Punjabi or Urdu*
>
> *(Lizzy)*

Arnot et al. (2014:12) identify this 'ambiguity' and 'limitations' in use of term 'EAL' (2014:12), in turn leading to inaccurate or non-existent records being kept by schools (Braken et al., 2017; Matras & Robertson, 2015) ultimately impacting on the quality of provision. The views shared in this research reflected these wider concerns around contested definitions.

QRs recognised the course had improved their understanding of assessment and enabled them to recognise prior learning more effectively. Some were able to make changes in existing protocols to enhance the formative nature of the assessment of EAL learners.

QRs also identified that the course had enabled them to identify barriers to pupils' reading development, and were able to implement strategies to facilitate support their access to texts, differentiating according to need:

> *using the strategies to help them with comprehension, a lot about putting the words into context, children will put their hand up and we'll put it into a real-life context. have the meaning behind what they are reading (Sal)*

One QR undertook an after-school reading project with parents and children, which has been so successful she was asked to share her approaches with colleagues:

> *I know that they have started looking at reading more, the project was about reading. Different year groups now have reading with parents in the morning. Lots of parents come for 5-10minutes. I was asked pointers about reading with parents. After school reading project, across 3 classes in the library*

> (Gemma)

Whilst their subject knowledge improved as a result of the programme, at the same time QRs and IRs acknowledged that they developed a greater understanding of inclusive pedagogy as a principle, as well as specific pedagogical approaches to apply. They aspired to improve their own professional impact, as well as having a wider influence on school polices and processes. Comments from one QR included a desire to 'embed what I have learnt into my school', with others stating, 'I hope to have a positive impact on EAL… an advocate for all EAL pupils to be treated and respected equally within school' and a wish to 'help the school I work in, create more of an understanding of EAL pupils'. What also emerged as part of their own professional development was their own changing views on what effective support for EAL learners actually meant. Participants were able to reflect upon what support looked like in their own school and, in some cases, challenge the efficacy of that practice. A number of the QRs felt that what they had learnt about assessment and planning enabled them to more fully enable pupils to engage with the content of their lessons. As one QR stated, this learning helped her to more effectively 'assist EAL learners to access the KS3 and KS4 English

curriculum'. Gemma stated, 'I have a better understanding of what children know and (therefore) how to support them'. Lizzy commented on how her understanding of support changed after she had completed the course:

> *We had a couple of children enter our school who spoke Spanish and they didn't have much English, a little but not a lot. I was straight on that to help them, making table mats. But I really needed to know how much they could speak rather than going full on. I used the framework (from the course) to do that to see how much they knew and progressed from there*
>
> (Lizzy)

When unpicking the notion of support, it was clear that QRs had commenced the course with contested views of what support looks like. This corresponded with wider research which examined the roles of TAs and identified the ambiguous nature of this concept (Bosanquet, Radford & Webster, 2016; Webster, Russell & Blatchford, 2016). Against this background of an already unclear concept, for a number of QRs, the course represented their only training on EAL. It became apparent that most came from schools where mainly monolingual approaches were used and where EAL pedagogies were mostly not being considered. One IR recognised that previous practice in her school was monolingual, thereby excluding many learners and their families. She explained how she had proactively sought to eliminate exclusionary linguistic practices. As a result, she had developed approaches to enable translation of the school webpage for parents, using available resources:

> *I had google translate put on the website so the parents could use it. I also had it put on the ipad, I know it's not precise but it's better than nothing*
>
> (Lizzy)

Lizzy also adopted a bilingual approach when supporting learning in the classroom, for example she created 'a mat with polish words and English to see if that helps her'.

Nevertheless, on the whole, respondents did not expand their notions of intervention or support beyond that of accessing the school curriculum by means of improving their English skills.

In addition to the impact on themselves as professionals, the participants' personal development, in terms of their attitudes and attributes, were also affected. The participants' use of phrases relating to feelings of confidence and positivity when discussing their learning from the course, show that the course had an impact on them beyond the acquisition and application of specific knowledge. The structure of the course facilitated high levels of self-reflection and challenge to their own current beliefs and understanding. It was at the point when Sal recognised how other colleagues were seeking her advice and that the school wanted to utilise her skills and resources, that she made the decision to enter the teaching profession. Despite her having an interest in teaching and already being qualified to degree level, she had previously felt concerned about the workload. By engaging in this CPD activity and being encouraged and supported, her confidence had grown. Gemma reflected upon the impact in school and upon the development of initiatives such as 'reading with parents'.

In their own study of teacher CPD, Burchell, Dyson & Rees (2002: 228) recognise these 'affective, motivational and value-based dimensions that suggests to us a more sustained and secure shift in professional development'.

However, as well as a noted positive impact on knowledge, understanding, levels of reflection, confidence and passion, the course also produced a degree of dissatisfaction from the participants. In the follow-up interviews, regardless of the perceived level of impact the course had had on the school, IRs identified some levels of dissatisfaction with their own ability to apply their new knowledge and influence practice further in school.

> *I'm not sure what I want to do myself with the information I have. I feel quite a passion to be honest and sometimes the passion is allowed to come out but only allowed to come out so far and because of my role*
>
> (Gemma)

Referring to Gustavs and Clegg (2005), Lester and Costley (2010: 569) argue that work-based learning can often 'act as a catalyst for learners to move out of their organisations', citing 'inflexible' work environments or because learners have 'developed beyond what their work contexts could reasonably be expected to offer'.

Impact on school

The role of senior leaders in school appears to be key to ensuring that the course had greater impact beyond that of the individual. In their initial questionnaire, all QRs referred to the role of key people within the school during programme itself. This became more prominent in the follow-up interviews, when participants discussed their perceived impact within their school environment.

Three IRs noted that ascription protocols had changed as a result of undertaking the EAL course, with a deliberate emphasis on securing data relating to home language. However, one did comment that her attempts to improve ascription had not been acknowledged by senior leaders in school. Although ascription itself is no guarantee of effective provision for EAL learners (Demie, 2018), nevertheless, the role of leaders in school in effecting change is widely recognized (Day & Sammons, 2014).

Two QRs commented on projects which involved parents of EAL learners. They felt that these had an impact on the school and attracted the attention of school leaders. For example, Sal chose to undertake a project focussed on parental engagement. This, she felt, had enhanced her own involvement with parents beyond the duration of the course:

> *my work based project was about parental participation. Now I work quite closely with the parents eg parents evening, meet and greet. (Sal)*

Gemma's after-school reading project with parents and children improved her ability to build relationships with the school community commenting, "I am probably more confident about talking to parents, approaching parents". Her project was deemed to be so successful that she was asked by senior leaders to share her approaches with colleagues.

Three of the four IRs were able to identify a level of impact on the wider school and its systems and processes, ranging from small changes in data collection on pupil entry to

enhance ascription, to improved assessment with 'better target setting systems, half termly. That's a good change' (Sheila).

IRs also identified a sense of achievement and satisfaction when this was the case. One commented:

> *Through the information I have passed on, I have heard that things are going well. It's almost like it's not for nothing, it's going to be used 'cos quite often you go on a course and it's for nothing.*
>
> (Lizzy)

Another commented:

> *I know that the programme I used last year is being used in school. With us having such a high number of EAL (learners) there were times when people came to me and said oh you've done the course can you advise what I could do, sometimes it was the teacher (who came to me) because of the course.*   (Sal)

Despite the comments above, wider school impact was sometimes perceived to be limited or non-existent. In these cases, respondents felt that the responsibility for this lack of impact lay with school leaders, as they perceived themselves to often be outside a sphere of influence.   For example, Sal commented, 'I would like to implement my project, but I would need to ask my line managers' (Sal) and 'I can't do it 'cos I'm only a TA, I don't have the authority'.

When asked about impact on colleagues in school, another commented 'not really no, I mean there's a few that if I talked to, they would listen but it's the school, a lack of respect, that's the school' (Sheila).

However, where advocates were in positions of authority, for example being a member of the school's senior leadership team, all IRs felt that they could have a greater impact. For example, Gemma commented:

> *I was asked to talk about the project with the EAL co-ordinator and Deputy Head about the project explained to other colleagues about the project. I was asked to tell teachers about it. Now the reading takes places more in different classes.*

Clearly, in this case, the relevance of the programme had been recognised by a senior leader, who was then able to influence the wider application of the participant's project. This, in turn, led to the implementation of a whole school approach.

Conclusion

This small-scale research project set out to evaluate a CPD programme, designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of educators working with children exposed to languages other than English at home, and responding to an identified need within the local education system. This funded opportunity was offered to teaching assistants who were regularly expected to care for and educate these children yet had little or no relevant training. The teaching assistants attended CPD sessions in their own time, demonstrating a motivation to enhance their personal and professional development as well as altruism to support others.

Feedback from the participating teaching assistants suggest that the EAL CPD programme itself a was not merely a training course to upskill them. Rather, it was able to explicitly support 'the development of 'meta-skills' or capabilities that enable people to become self-managing practitioners and self-directed learners' (Lester & Costley, 2010: 562). Furthermore, Biesta's (2010) elements of a good education were in evidence: qualification (a credit-bearing award at level 4), socialisation (TAs become visible within their schools and a network was developed which extended beyond the programme) and subjectification (Biesta, 2010; Biesta, 2020), where the individuals had the freedom to identify need, choose a relevant project and consult with others to develop aspects of practice, all building upon their prior strengths and utilising their new learning.

Whilst some of the schools involved had implemented changes to their practice, it remains clear that full and sustained impact on school policy and practice remains beyond the reach of a one-off CPD programme, albeit one that clearly had significant impact on the individuals who attended. Without a continued commitment from the schools, the commissioning body themselves (in this case, the local authority) and national Government, impact which is sustained and reaches beyond the individuals directly involved is unlikely to be achieved. In their study of a teacher CPD programme, Burchell, Dyson & Rees (2002: 228) suggest that

'the need for tutor and peer support does not necessarily end with the taught programme' and indeed a small social media network, created by the TAs themselves, began to address this. However, it can be argued that, in addition to tutor and peer support, institutional impact requires sustained and systematic structures to support and disseminate the learning. In this case, a knowledge exchange forum, such as a local authority or schools led EAL network, may have been a useful way to extend the influence of the course. As Lester and Costley (2010: 565) argue, 'the practice and theorisation of work-based learning need to continue evolving in order for the field to become more mature and confident in integrating learning for the immediate context with learning that develops underlying capacity as a capable practitioner and builds capacity within learners' organisations or communities of practice'. A lack of long-term coherence for continued professional development for teaching assistants (DfE, 2019), specialist or otherwise, risks the valuable skills learnt being lost and the impact of this expertise becoming further marginalised.

Limitations of the study

This was small scale study with a small sample size. Whilst the initial questionnaires were anonymous, they were distributed by one of the research team who had also taught on the programme. This could be seen as a potential influence on respondents so to address this, an independent researcher was recruited for interview and analysis purposes. Both teaching assistants and work-based advisors were invited to undertake the initial questionnaire and the follow-up interview. However, only one work-based advisor chose to participate. As a result, the perception of relevant colleagues in school have not been taken into account, as had been planned. In addition, the research did not seek the views of EAL learners and their families.

Implications for Practice and Further Research

Effective and specialised provision for EAL learners is too important to be left to chance opportunities for practitioner CPD. The programme that was the subject of this study seems to have made a significant impact on those who took part, not only in terms of their personal learning, for example relating to an understanding of funds of knowledge and

multilinguistic maintenance, but also upon the impact on their practice. Ultimately, this began to address any disparity of educational experience for these children. In addition, some of the schools involved made changes to their policy and practice, as a result of a staff member attending the course. However, the study has also raised other important questions. Longer term impact needs to be measured both in terms of impact on the participant but also, and perhaps more crucially, impact upon the EAL learners. Though outside the remit of this study, the need to hear the voice of learners and their families in future research will provide a deeper insight into how to sustain impact and what sustained impact actually looks like. In addition, without a sustained regional or national drive, these school level changes are will most likely depend on the attitudes and priorities of the individuals leading each school, regardless of the enthusiasm and motivation of those who participated in the CPD.

Notes on contributors

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Joanne Clifford Swan spent 26 years in primary education, with leadership roles at school and local authority level. Since joining the higher education sector, she has undertaken a range of responsibilities, most recently as Head of Education, Childhood and Early Years at Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK. Her responsibilities included initial teacher training quality assurance and school partnerships. Joanne's research projects include educational partnership working, as well as the use of pre-service teachers to impact on pupil progress, with a focus on primary literacy. Joanne currently leads a literacy project which supports non secondary English specialists in school to improve pupil outcomes. She also leads a consortium of regional schools and training providers to deliver CPD to early career teachers.

Kay Heslop

Kay Heslop has worked with people of all ages in her roles as Early Years Professional, Teacher, Youth Leader and Police Officer over the past 35 years. Throughout this time, Kay has endeavoured to develop inclusive, authentic and motivational educational activities which meet personal interests and build upon current skills. Kay's current role is Director of Education (CPD) and Programme Leader at the University of Northumbria (Newcastle) where she leads part-time programmes for work-based learners. Kay's recent doctoral research, completed at the University of Sheffield, involved Early Years Practitioners as co-researchers. Together, Kay and her co-researchers investigated the inclusion of older adults in the lives of young children in an urban Forest School environment. In doing so, they explored interactions, knowledge exchange and the benefits of such activity.

Fiona Ranson

Fiona Ranson qualified as a primary school teacher in 1990 and worked in schools across the North East of England. She has also worked in further education, teaching English as a second language. Fiona led a team of advisory teachers within the Ethnic Minority Achievement Team in a local authority and worked as an advisor within a school improvement team, specialising in English as an additional language (EAL), Equalities, Inclusion and Literacy. Fiona has a MEd in Bilingualism in Education and is currently undertaking PhD at Northumbria University entitled *Identifying 'best interests' provision for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, who are trafficked: finding 'home.'*

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