

The ESL teacher as ‘productive’ pedagogical mentor

by Jackie Coleman

Abstract

Given the prevailing conflation of literacy with English language learning, strategies for achieving educational equity between learners of English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) and their mainstream peers in Australian schools have been the focus of much recent educational discussion. However, differences in equity also exist between metropolitan and non-metropolitan EAL/D students, due to differences in the availability of professional learning for their mainstream teachers. Accordingly, in the absence of other options, non-metropolitan specialist English language teachers – currently known as English as a second language (ESL) teachers in New South Wales – may need to assume the crucial role of pedagogical mentors to their mainstream colleagues. This article draws on the results of a small study of non-metropolitan mainstream teachers of EAL/D students. It suggests a practical way in which specialist ESL teachers might use the correspondence between existing mainstream pedagogical frameworks, such as the NSW Quality Teaching Framework and the Curriculum Cycle, and second language acquisition (SLA) research outcomes, as a starting point for mentoring their colleagues in order to enhance educational equity for EAL/D students.

Introduction

In non-metropolitan Australia professional learning for working with EAL/D students may not be prioritised (Allard, 2006) at the district or school level. As a result, mainstream teachers in these areas may not have the same opportunities to become as ‘EAL/D-informed’ as their city colleagues. In this context, the role of the school ESL teacher as pedagogical mentor for mainstream colleagues can become a crucial site-specific means of enhancing educational equity and curricular access for EAL/D students. This article draws on part of a small study of the responses of mainstream primary teachers in non-metropolitan Australia to their EAL/D students, to suggest one practical way in which, in the absence of other professional learning opportunities, non-metropolitan ESL teachers may be able to frame and carry out this mentoring role. It highlights the potential which exists in mainstream pedagogical practices widely known in Australian schools and considers how ESL teachers may tap

into these potentialities and relate them to second language acquisition (SLA) research outcomes as a means of mentoring their colleagues and assisting them to become more 'EAL/D informed'.

The commonalities between the literacy learning needs of native English speakers and EAL/D learners (Gibbons, 2002) and the prevailing conflation of EAL/D with literacy in Australia (Hammond & Derewianka, 1999) and internationally (Leung, 2001) can engender among teachers a reductive view that 'good teaching is good teaching' (Leung, 2001). Such a view fails to recognise the specific learning needs of EAL/D students, or the pedagogical practices needed to meet them, as indicated by SLA research. A brief overview of some key outcomes of SLA research relevant to EAL/D students' learning needs follows.

Overview of relevant SLA outcomes

The 'comprehensible output hypothesis' (Swain, 1985, 2000) is a key SLA research outcome. It contends that a learner's production in a target language constitutes an integral part of the process of learning that language. There are three functions of the hypothesis: noticing/triggering, hypothesis testing and the metalinguistic, or internalising, function. Accordingly, by producing language in meaningful contexts, that is, hypothesis testing, a learner can receive feedback on her performance from peers and teachers. This feedback assists her to 'notice' form in meaningful contexts, internalise improved form, and thus improve language proficiency.

The distinction between two types of language – sometimes referred to as 'basic interpersonal communicative skills' (BICS) and 'cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) as postulated by Cummins (1979, 1981) – is also of relevance. BICS 'represents the ability to carry on a conversation in familiar face-to-face situations' (Cummins & Yee-Fun, 2007: 799) and can be achieved by EAL/D learners usually within two to three years (Thomas & Collier, 2002). CALP is 'the degree to which an individual has access to and expertise in understanding and using the specific kind of language that is employed in educational contexts' (Cummins, 2000: 66). It is widely accepted as taking around seven to ten years to develop (Cummins, 2000). An understanding amongst teachers of these distinctions and their developmental timeframes is essential to supporting EAL/D students' language learning, and thus, their academic development in mainstream classes.

Another pertinent SLA principle is the 'common underlying proficiency' (CUP) hypothesis (Cummins, 1981) which contends that literacy and cognitive skills developed in an L1 are transferred to an L2. According to this hypothesis, there is a cognitive proficiency or 'central processing system' (Cummins, 2000: 191) that underpins academic performance in both languages which is formed through experiences and learning in the student's L1 (Bialystok, 1991).

The ‘identity affirmation hypothesis’ was first suggested by Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995). It posits that for minority students (including EAL/D learners), acknowledgement and validation of their cultural identities and knowledge systems is a necessary precondition for them to be able to achieve academic success in mainstream settings (Nieto, 1996). Identity affirmation, along with the preceding principles and hypotheses, offer significant theoretical and practical support to mainstream teachers of EAL/D students in that they foreshadow the types of pedagogies that promote educational equity for EAL/D learners in mainstream content classes.

The context of the study

Recent changes in settlement patterns in Australia have seen new arrivals increasingly settling outside metropolitan areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). While concentrations of EAL/D students in these areas are still comparatively low, they are increasing (NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2011). Consequently, non-metropolitan mainstream teachers now may have to meet the needs of EAL/D learners in their classes, often without being professionally trained or prepared to do so. In this context, a small-scale qualitative case study was carried out in non-metropolitan New South Wales to investigate the nature of the pedagogical responses of two mainstream primary teachers to the EAL/D students in their classes.

Teacher participants

Two mainstream primary teachers, Irene and Bettina (pseudonyms used), both of whom have over 25 years of teaching experience, participated in the study. Irene’s school had a very low EAL/D student enrolment and Bettina’s a relatively high one (for the particular non-metropolitan area). There were three EAL/D students in each teacher’s Year 3 class. These students all had a mother tongue unrelated to Standard Australian English (SAE). Both teachers were asked during the study whether they had had any professional learning for working with EAL/D learners. Their answers were as follows:

Bettina I have attended a couple of one-day sessions but they were quite a few years ago – so not very current.

Irene Not really.

Methodology

As this study focused on the responses of the teachers to their EAL/D students in the course of their daily teaching and the meanings which they attached to these interactions, the overall methodology can be described as a qualitative case study with an ‘ethnographic perspective’ (Pahl & Rosswell,

2010) where ethnography is understood as ‘the study of people in everyday life ... [which] focuses on culture, that is, people making meaning of their experiences’ (Anderson-Levitt, 2006: 290).

Within this case study model, data were gathered over a ten-week school term through classroom observations, field notes and semi-structured interviews. Field notes covered the setting, the participants and the events observed. Semi-structured interviews sought to identify the ‘meanings’ that teachers attached to their EAL/D students and to their interactions with them. These interviews employed a theory-informed interview guide which addressed issues arising from the classroom observations, and the SLA research outcomes identified previously.

The data drawn upon in this article are from the classroom observations which were conducted four days per week during the ten-week term in an attempt to identify the nature of the pedagogical responses of these teachers to their EAL/D students. Two instruments, the New South Wales Quality Teaching Framework scoring scale and the Curriculum Cycle, were employed. These are described in the following sections.

New South Wales Quality Teaching Framework scoring scale

The New South Wales Quality Teaching Framework (QTF) (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003) guided most of the observations. The QTF is derived from research conducted internationally into ‘authentic’ (Newmann & Associates, 1996) or ‘productive’ (Lingard et al., 2001) pedagogies. Other similar state-specific frameworks, such as Productive Pedagogies (State of Queensland, Department of Education, 2002) and Teaching for Effective Learning (Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Children’s Services, 2010), are also based on this research. The QTF seeks to support teachers and schools to implement these research-supported pedagogies which are linked to improvements in student outcomes. While developed within a mainstream framework, the QTF was selected as an instrument of data collection because a number of recent studies (Gibbons, 2008; Hammond, et al., 2005-7; Rushton, 2008) have noted the correspondence between the QTF and pedagogies which meet EAL/D students’ learning needs in mainstream classes.

The QTF consists of three dimensions comprising different pedagogical elements. (The other state-specific frameworks adopt a similar organisational structure). The first dimension of the QTF is Intellectual Quality. This is defined as ‘pedagogy focused on producing deep understanding of important, substantive concepts, skills and ideas’ (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2006: 10). The second dimension, Quality Learning Environment, is ‘pedagogy that creates classrooms where students and teachers work productively in an environment clearly focused on learning’ (NSW

Department of Education and Training, 2006: 10). Significance, the third dimension, is ‘pedagogy that helps make learning more meaningful and important to students [and which] ... draws clear connections with students’ prior knowledge and identities’ (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2006: 10).

The QTF Classroom Practice Guide (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2006) contains descriptions of observable behaviours associated with these dimensions and a scoring range from 1 to 5 (where 5 is the highest score). For the classroom observations, particular elements from each of the three dimensions were chosen on the basis of their correspondence to SLA research outcomes relevant to the education of EAL/D students described in the earlier overview. Table 1 below identifies the QTF elements from each dimension chosen for observation, and corresponding SLA outcomes.

QTF Dimension	Selected Elements
Intellectual Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher order thinking • Substantive communication • Metalanguage <p><i>Corresponding SLA research outcomes</i> BICS/CALP, CUP, comprehensible output</p>
Quality Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High expectations • Social support • Explicit quality criteria <p><i>Corresponding SLA research outcomes</i> CUP, identity affirmation, BICS/CALP, comprehensible output</p>
Significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural knowledge • Inclusivity <p><i>Corresponding SLA research outcomes</i> CUP, identity affirmation, BICS/CALP, comprehensible output</p>

Table 1 – Selected QTF elements and corresponding SLA outcomes

Teachers’ pedagogies were coded according to the observable behaviours outlined in the QTF Classroom Practice Guide. After careful consideration of field notes focusing on the selected QTF elements, a score was assigned to the highest instance of each of these elements observed on that day. Scores were subsequently averaged for the term.

Curriculum Cycle pro forma

A pro forma based on the Curriculum Cycle (CC) (Derewianka, 1990) was employed as an observation instrument to supplement the QTF. The CC comprises broad stages of field building, deconstruction, joint construction and independent construction. It is widely recognised as a means of scaffolding learning for both mainstream students and EAL/D learners (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). The CC provides opportunities within the paradigm of mainstream instruction to support EAL/D

students towards full curricular access, and thus educational equity, when productive, SLA-supportive pedagogies are employed in its implementation. The observation pro forma used the CC's broad stages to allow for recording of detailed descriptions of teachers' implementation of each stage.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data aimed to develop a pattern or theory which incorporated a consideration of existing research principles. That is, it aimed to move beyond producing a list of data (Silverman, 2005) to describing and explaining those data (Punch, 2006). Data analysis began before all the data had been gathered and then continued concurrently with the collection of the remaining data. As such, it was a recursive process in which the scores and descriptions generated during classroom observations (using the NSW QTF and the Curriculum Cycle pro forma) and field notes were studied repeatedly in their totality. In this process, 'patterns and relationships' (Seidel, 1998) in the data gathered using the different instruments emerged both within and between sites. The key results – or 'patterns and relationships' – which emerged between the QTF elements, the CC and SLA research outcomes, and the potentialities they represent, are presented in the following section.

Results and discussion of potentialities

The scores of both teachers for the selected elements of the QTF (averaged over the term) are presented in Table 2 below.

QTF Dimension and Elements	Bettina	Irene
Intellectual Quality		
• Higher order thinking	1	1
• Substantive communication	1	1
• Metalanguage	1	1
Quality Learning Environment		
• High expectations	1	1
• Social support	3	3
• Explicit quality criteria	1	1
Significance		
• Cultural knowledge	1	1
• Inclusivity	5	4

Table 2 – Bettina's and Irene's average scores by QTF element

Table 2 indicates that the overall quality of productive pedagogical practices associated with Intellectual Quality, and consistent with SLA research outcomes such as CUP, BICS-CALP, comprehensible output and identity affirmation, was low in Bettina's and Irene's classes. What is striking are the much higher scores for the elements of Social support and Inclusivity. These elements create a positive learning environment. In such an environment, students would potentially be

receptive were a teacher to implement productive pedagogical elements associated with Intellectual Quality and Significance.

In terms of the CC, analysis of interactions and classroom talk during the unfolding of its stages can take many forms. For example, it could be articulated as a description of regulative and instructional registers within the framework of curriculum genres and macrogenres (Christie, 2002: 3). However, analysis of the CC in this study (represented in the following Transcript A) focused on the ways in which this overall pedagogical framework provided affordances for the implementation of the QTF elements identified earlier as having correspondence to key SLA research outcomes. In this respect, there were both strengths and significant points of challenge within teachers' observed implementation of the CC. The main strength, or point of potential, was that teachers were familiar with, and implemented in some form, most of its stages. This provided opportunities for the implementation of the QTF elements. However, points of challenge, specifically in respect of the relevant SLA outcomes, were evident in that these opportunities were generally not taken up. These point of challenge included lack of field building, lack of explicit teaching of texts' social context and language features and no teacher scribing during joint construction.

The following transcript provides excerpts from Irene's implementation of the CC when teaching an Information report. It exemplifies the observed points of challenge and of potential (in terms of the stages implemented) in both teachers' practice. In the right hand column the CC stages are indicated. At different places under the heading 'Points of potential in this CC stage', QTF productive pedagogies that could optimally be employed to support EAL/D students and their corresponding SLA outcomes are noted. (Note: T = teacher, S/s = student/s)

<p>27 T: <i>And if you're doing an animal you have to have ...?</i></p> <p>28 Ss [reading]: <i>Appearance.</i></p> <p>29 T: <i>What does that mean?</i> [asks various ESB children by name]</p> <p>30 S: <i>What it looks like.</i></p> <p>31 T: <i>Exactly. The next thing is</i> [habitat, movement, behaviour, life cycle – answers as to meanings given orally by ESB students, but none is written on the board]</p> <p>32 T: <i>The very last bit of your information report is the ...?</i></p> <p>33 T: <i>Conclusion where you've got a summary or a comment. And it says that's optional so you don't always have to have a conclusion, but it's always good.</i></p> <p>34 S: <i>Thanks for reading?</i></p> <p>35 T: <i>Now. Do you say that sort of thing? Not in an</i></p>	<p>27-33 Modelling [all oral] [Teacher does not scribe but provides evaluation of the students' contributions.]</p> <p><i>Points of potential in this CC stage</i> Substantive communication, Higher order thinking, Cultural knowledge, Metalanguage (sentence level grammar, e.g., expanded noun groups)</p> <p><i>SLA – BICS/CALP, CUP, comprehensible output</i></p> <p>34-41 Joint construction [all oral – no teacher scribing]</p>
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<p><i>information report. They won't give you marks for doing that. So what sort of comment would you make if you've written all about spiders? At the end, a short comment?</i></p> <p>36 S: <i>Spiders bite.</i></p> <p>37 T: <i>All spiders?</i></p> <p>38 Ss: <i>No.</i></p> <p>39 T: <i>Who can give us one?</i></p> <p>40 S: <i>Some spiders are venomous and some aren't.</i></p> <p>41 T: <i>Yeah, that's fine to say something like that, 'Watch out spiders bite'. Now we're going to have a look at an example of somebody's report about Humpbacks.</i></p> <p>[Students read out text in unison.]</p> <p>[T points out that the sample has headings.]</p> <p>42 T: <i>That's a really good example of an information report ... Later we'll be writing an information report with a partner about either a man-made or natural site in Australia. Do you remember we saw, looked at all those pictures, images last week?</i></p> <p>43 Ss: <i>Yes</i></p> <p>44 T: <i>Today you're going to write an Information report for me about dinosaurs, but you're going to use this sort of a format for it [example text]. So we start with an ...?</i></p> <p>45 Ss: <i>Capital.</i></p> <p>46 T: <i>We always start with a capital. How do we start?</i></p> <p>47 S: <i>We start with the title and with a comment.</i></p> <p>48 T: <i>Right and it's going to be on dinosaurs. So you're going to start with the title and the introduction where you make a statement about dinosaurs. Now the middle part is where you have your ...? What do you have?</i></p> <p>49 S: <i>Information?</i></p> <p>50 S: <i>Facts?</i></p> <p>51 T [while walking to answer telephone]: <i>Go back to your seat and get out your draft book.</i></p> <p>[Students start talking to each other at their desks about dinosaurs and the task while T responds to telephone.]</p> <p>52 S [to other Ss]: <i>Is the [indistinct] a dinosaur?</i></p> <p>53 T: <i>I want you to use information out of your head.</i></p> <p>[Students continue speaking.]</p> <p>...</p> <p>54 T [to class]: <i>You don't need to talk about what you know about dinosaurs. Will you listen please? You are not going to be talking about it! Your draft book, please!</i></p>	<p><i>Points of potential in this CC stage</i> Substantive communication, Explicit quality criteria, Metalanguage (sentence level grammar)</p> <p><i>SLA – BICS/CALP, CUP, comprehensible output</i></p> <p>42-43 Introduction of field</p> <p>44-50 Deconstruction – Revision of text type features [all oral – no teacher scribing]</p> <p><i>Points of potential at this CC stage</i> Cultural knowledge, Substantive communication, Explicit quality criteria, Metalanguage (sentence level grammar)</p> <p>51 Independent construction</p> <p>51-2 Ss seek to build field. <i>Points of potential at this CC stage</i> Substantive communication, Explicit quality criteria, Cultural knowledge <i>SLA – CUP, identity affirmation, BICS/CALP, comprehensible output</i></p> <p>53-54 [Teacher does not allow children to build field together.]</p>
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Transcript A – Excerpts from Irene's implementation of the Curriculum Cycle

Examination of the transcript indicates the correspondence which exists between the data gathered using the CC pro forma and those using the QTF scale. For example, the weakness of the field building stage is consistent with the low QTF scores for Substantive communication, Cultural knowledge and Higher order thinking, given that effective implementation of these elements would construct a high level of field building. Similarly, the lack of explicit teaching of language in deconstruction is consistent with the low result for Metalanguage, as use of metalanguage is fundamental to the explicit teaching of language at this stage. Similarly, lack of teacher scribing in joint construction is consistent with the low scores for Explicit quality criteria, given that teacher scribing makes Explicit quality criteria visible to students.

The small scale of this study necessitates that extreme caution be exercised in making generalisations based upon its results. However, the correspondence between QTF and CC results is suggestive of affordances offered by these paradigms (and by other state-specific pedagogical frameworks) which ESL teachers, in the absence of other professional learning opportunities, and in the interests of educational equity for EAL/D students, might use to frame the mentoring of their mainstream colleagues.

Potential-based mentoring

Significant potential for the learning of EAL/D students in Irene's and Bettina's classrooms was evident primarily in the high scores for the QTF pedagogical elements of Social support and Inclusivity. These scores reflected both teachers' conscious efforts to meet their EAL/D students' psychosocial needs and, in contrast to reports in the literature from other sites (e.g., Verplaetse, 2000), to include them fully in all curricular activities. The two teachers took pains to create classroom conditions that were conducive to their EAL/D students' learning. However, these efforts were unfortunately not capitalised on through implementation of other pedagogical elements, principally those of Intellectual Quality and Significance. ESL specialists may be able to tap into this potential by validating their colleagues' current 'productive' practices (Necochea & Cline, 2000) of Social support and Inclusivity, that is, 'the known', and then mentoring teachers in the development of the elements of Intellectual Quality and Significance, 'the new'. Such mentoring is thus a means of extending and transforming the mainstream teachers' evident 'general concern for supporting students ... further to become supportive of learning' (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003: 13), by showing them how to achieve this extension of their current practice through the implementation of concrete pedagogical actions. For example, the ESL mentor might demonstrate how the potential existing in EAL/D students' inclusion in all curricular activities can be transformed into curricular access, and thus educational equity, through the implementation of pedagogies such as Substantive communication, Metalanguage and Higher order thinking. Where these pedagogies are employed, the

QTF contends that ‘the outcomes demonstrated by students will be enhanced’ (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003: 130). Strong justification for these new practices could be provided by exposure to SLA research outcomes and reference to the specific learning needs of EAL/D students.

The various resources of the QTF and other state-specific frameworks, such as videos and classroom practice manuals, might also be employed in the mentoring process. Additionally, the ESL teacher might draw on collegial networks beyond her own school. A study of mainstream teachers of EAL/D students in the U.S. reported that the majority of the teachers ‘expressed a desire and need’ for repeated opportunities to observe and interact with other mainstream teachers with experience of achieving successful outcomes for EAL/D learners (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005: 15). Creating links and opportunities for their mainstream colleagues to observe and interact with other more ‘EAL/D-informed’ colleagues within, or outside, their non-metropolitan area, could thus be a powerful component of successful mentoring.

Both school-based and off-site mentoring could be situated within the overall ‘known’ paradigm of the Curriculum Cycle and teachers’ existing knowledge of its stages. As indicated in Transcript A, ‘productive pedagogies’ could be discussed and modelled in relation to the different stages of the CC and simultaneously related directly to SLA outcomes. For example, in field building, the QTF element of Cultural knowledge and the SLA outcomes of CUP and identity affirmation may be the focus, and in deconstruction, Explicit quality criteria and Metalanguage could be linked to BICS/CALP. If there is conscious and explicit emphasis on SLA outcomes and the learning needs of EAL/D students, that is, mentoring of mainstream colleagues towards becoming more ‘EAL/D informed’, then the reductive dangers inherent in mentoring using a framework of existing mainstream pedagogies may be minimised.

While discussions of theory, modelling of pedagogy and opportunities for observing and interacting with more experienced colleagues are, of course, no guarantee of behaviour change in the classroom (Freeman, 1993), they provide a practical starting point for a non-metropolitan ESL teacher to assume the role of productive pedagogical mentor. (Other considerations, such as accurate assessment of EAL/D students’ language backgrounds and resultant specific learning needs relative to SAE, are beyond the scope of this article). The exact form of the mentoring process would depend on the ESL teacher’s knowledge of her school, its prevailing culture, and of her colleagues and the possibilities for building critical friendships (Swaffield, 2002) with a strong pedagogical focus. To be effective for Irene and Bettina, ‘productive’ pedagogical mentoring would need to dovetail with their existing teaching commitments and be underpinned by a commitment from school leadership to provide them with adequate release time to undertake professional learning, reflect upon it and adapt its content to

their particular situations and ‘insider knowledge’ of their EAL/D students (Janzen, 2008). In-class, point-of-need situations and staff meetings, for example, may afford contexts for mentoring.

Whatever the precise form that mentoring by the ESL teacher takes it would optimally be ongoing or ‘continuous’ (Leung, 2005) rather than ‘one-shot’ (González & Darling-Hammond, 2000) if it is to truly support mainstream teachers to open up curricular access for their EAL/D learners. Such mentoring would be in stark contrast with the ‘one day’, one-off and ‘not very current’ training for working with EAL/D students that Bettina reported having received, and which did not result in the observable use of EAL/D-supportive pedagogical actions in her classroom during the course of the study.

Conclusion

This article has cautiously drawn on the results of part of a small study in non-metropolitan Australia to suggest that ESL teachers may be able to act as ‘productive’ pedagogical mentors for their mainstream colleagues by building on the potentialities existing in those colleagues’ current practice. By linking existing, known mainstream pedagogical frameworks and practices with SLA research outcomes, the ESL teacher may be able to support mainstream teachers to extend and transform their pedagogical practice and to open up greater curricular access for the EAL/D students in their classes. In the absence of other professional learning opportunities, such mentoring may play a crucial role in addressing the educational equity of non-metropolitan EAL/D learners, by supporting their mainstream teachers to become more ‘EAL/D informed’.

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