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Teaching through the language of feelings

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of
Psychoeducational Implications for Young EAL
Children

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(11596 words)

Abstract

This study aimed to enquire into the teachers lived experiences of teaching pupils known as learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) and get an insight into how it is like to teach in multilingual classrooms.

The data for this study has been collected through semi-structured interviews with six Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Teachers* working in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings and mainstream schools based in three of London's most culturally diverse boroughs: Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney.

The study adopted an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, and found that despite considerable challenges and frustrations, participants described teaching EAL children as rewarding when they reflected on the significant impact they had in helping children feel welcome and confident in the new learning environment and in supporting them to rapidly acquire the English Language. This indicated an overwhelmingly assimilative teaching practice and possible implications on children's learning and identity formation were discussed.

In line with previous research findings, this study highlights a number of significant issues surrounding teaching this particular group of children such as inadequacy of EAL teacher training (prior and in-service), as well as lack of awareness of cultural and linguistic heritage importance. Therefore, possible ways to overcome these shortcomings are explored, seeking to contribute to the debate surrounding the future of EAL teaching and learning in the UK.

(223 words)

*here the term 'teacher' refers to and encompasses the broad range of qualifications covered by the early years sector, from Level 6 Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and Early Years Teachers (EYT) to Level 3 Early Years Educators and all other recognised qualifications in between Level 6 and Level 3

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of EAL policy and practice in the UK

Globalisation is one sign of the time we are living in and one of its domino effects is population migration from one country or region to the other. This has significant implications for education systems around the world, as teachers are faced with an ever increasingly cultural and linguistic diverse pupil population. Kan and Kohnert (2005) looked at this phenomenon and concluded that the number of young children schooled in a language other than their home language has seen the most rapid growth in demographic trends around the globe.

The UK firstly encountered children new to British educational system in the 1950's, with the first afflux of immigrants from the West Indies (Leung, 2016). Since then, the approach to teach this group of children has gone through three significant stages at policy and practice level over the years (Costley, 2014).

Firstly, the education approach to EAL children was to assimilate them as rapidly as possible, based on the presumptions that immigrant 'children would pick up English in the playground' (Edwards, 1984, p. 50) therefore, teaching would go back to "normal" (Levine, 1996, p.12) in the classroom and this group of children will be no different from their "white contemporaries" (Swann, 1985, p.3).

Further increase in EAL children numbers was concomitant with the development of fearful attitudes amongst some teachers and policy makers (Leung, 2016) regarding the possible threat this group of children represented not only for maintaining good standards of education in schools with large proportion of such learners, but also, with regards to the impact they might have on the attainment of white native pupils. This led to the introduction of schools' intake limits of EAL children, and a new approach to teaching, the withdrawal from the classroom of children new to English (Derrick, 1977) which aimed at ensuring more focus on language teaching strategies until English language skills were sufficiently developed to join the class.

However, in the context of emerging discussions around social and racial division in Britain (Leung and Franson, 2001) and the widespread support for equality of opportunities for all, (Swann, 1985) have led to yet another change to the policy and

teaching of EAL children, policy makers dictating teachers to ditch the withdrawal method and return EAL pupils to the mainstream classroom. It is significant to note, however, that this change came about following fears of the withdrawal approach being perceived as racially discriminatory towards EAL children, and was not driven by the desire to better respond to and more appropriately address the learning needs of this particular group of learners.

The official statistics currently available and published in UK by National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC, 2015) appear to support Kan and Kohnert assertion of an increasing trend in EAL demographics. According to NALDIC, the number of EAL children learning in UK schools has more than doubled since 1997. Over a million EAL children under the age of fifteen, who speak more than three hundred and sixty languages between them, are learning in UK schools at any one time. This figure does not include the EAL children under the age of five.

Furthermore, according to official statistics, the biggest increase in EAL children appears to have been recorded in England, top of the list being a number of London Boroughs – such as Newham, Tower Hamlets, Brent and Ealing – where the EAL children account for more than fifty per cent of the school population.

In recent years, the policy underpinning EAL teaching and learning in UK, however, appears to remain at least contradictory, maintaining itself focused on assimilation, even though 'less than appropriate withdrawal sessions' (Ofsted report cited by Vardman, 2013, p. 647) are still employed by some schools.

As official statistics show, the number of EAL children in UK schools has increased steadily since the 1950's, significantly reshaping the school demographics in England in the last three decades. In contrast with the significant increase in EAL learners, EAL is not yet a specific subject or area in the curriculum at any stage (Leung and Fraser, 2001); teacher training appears inconsistent across UK providers, comprising mostly optional modules on teaching English as a second language which often compete with other –better recognised- curricular areas such as Information Technology or Special Education Needs and Disabilities (Cajkler and Hall, 2009; Grieve and Heining, 2011).

Moreover, the policy rhetoric surrounding EAL teaching and learning appears to be in stark contrast with classroom realities. For example, the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2017, p. 9) places a legal duty on early years education providers to 'take reasonable steps to provide opportunities for EAL children to develop and use their home language in play and learning' however, 'when assessing communication, language and literacy skills, practitioners must assess children's skills in English'.

In addition, the government guidance for practitioners and teachers working in the Early Years Foundation Stage makes a remarkable stance towards EAL children's home languages. Such languages are being described as having 'a continuing and significant role in identity, learning and the acquisition of additional languages' hailing bilingualism as "an asset" (DfCSF, 2007, p.4) and advocating for teaching methods that would not see English language 'replacing the home language' of the child. The policy contradiction regarding the best language for teaching and the compulsory language for assessment has led early years teachers across UK to focus on English language development only, completely disregarding the government guidance which clearly encourages teachers to maintain and develop EAL children's home languages in the classroom.

1.2 Literature review

A growing body of research evolving around other contradictions relating to EAL policy and practice has emerged in the last three decades (Leung, 2014) albeit it is recognised that the field remains one of the most under-researched in UK education (Flynn, 2007; Conteh, 2015).

Nevertheless, the existing research also builds paradoxical pictures around EAL teaching and learning policy and practices, perhaps mirroring the contradictions entangled in the UK education system.

Some studies reveal worrying attitudes towards EAL children. Even though the teachers who participated in Grieve and Haining's (2011) study recognised EAL children's abilities to adapt and progress quickly, they seemed to be far from recognising the same children as a possible resource and an asset for the classroom. Other teachers were taking the indelicate view that EAL children are simply 'not very bright' (Sood and Mistry 2011, p.207) therefore, they were seen as

being responsible for the decline of some schools' performance in national league tables (Murakami, 2008).

In indubitable contradiction, other studies seem to uncover a picture of remarkable teaching and learning successes based around schools where EAL children are a majority.

Park et al., (2002), Cameron and Besser (2004) Flynn (2007) Safford and Drury (2013) looked at the evidence provided by a significant number of highly performing inner-city schools where EAL children make up to eighty or ninety per cent of school population, and concluded that in most cases, success is driven by the fact that teachers see this group of children as being highly able learners, a resource and an asset for the classroom rather than a problem to overcome.

Logically, a number of important questions arise from this debate: are there the teachers, school leaders and policy maker's perceptions and attitudes towards this particular group of children a significant factor in how they are expected to perform? Historically and politically, EAL children have been stereotypically linked with socio-economic deprivation, (Flynn, 2007; Tomlinson, 2008; Bower, 2017) and this led to another stereotype, that EAL children are disadvantaged, somehow of diminished abilities in school compared to their counterparts.

For example, the language used by DfCSF (2007, p. 5) to describe EAL children as being 'as able as any other children' can be seen as a statement of the obvious which appears to acknowledge the existence of perpetuated preconceptions and stereotypes regarding this group of pupils, hence the need to address it.

From this, another question arises. How these attitudes and expectations are likely to shape the young EAL children emerging sense of self?

From a socio-psychological perspective Augustino, Walker and Donague (2014) argue that preconceptions and stereotypes such as those mentioned earlier have the huge potential to influence judgements, attitudes and behaviour not only towards others but towards ourselves.

From a developmental psychology perspective, theorists agree that most children develop a fairly clear understanding of self-worth by the age of three and this is acquired by constructing the self-image through the language used by the

'significant' people in their lives (Vygotsky 1978 cited by Lawrenson 2017, p. 273), therefore, other's views and comments become the 'inner evaluative speech' of the child. Furthermore, Stainton-Rogers (2011, p.290) agrees with Vygotsky's theory, pointing out that 'ideas about personhood are taken from the external world of parents and teachers, (...) and internalised' by children, further supporting the argument that teachers have a significant role in constructing a positive social identity of children.

Therefore, from both socio-psychological and developmental psychological perspectives, the role of early years teachers' personal views, preconceptions and attitudes in shaping young children's positive sense of self becomes a crucial one.

1.3 Rationale for this study

It is clear that the early years teacher role in young children's lives is pivotal in laying the foundations for 'later personal, social and cognitive functioning' (Howard and Melhuish, 2017, p.255) and it is highly likely that teachers have the means to influence performance and outcomes for young EAL children.

A strong argument for the crucial role teachers have in a child's performance was offered by Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968 after concluding their 'Pygmalion in the Classroom' experiment (Eden, 1990). Their study supported the idea that changing the way teachers perceive their pupils and raising their expectations leads to raising pupils' attainments. This study's findings have had a massive impact in education psychology over the years (Wang and Lin, 2014; Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup, 2013) and appears to be even more significant in the current context of EAL education in UK.

UK teachers have been the ones voicing the need for a different approach to EAL teaching and learning for decades (Flynn, 2007), whilst policy makers are yet to respond in accordance with the teachers' views. Saxena and Martin-Jones (2013) analysed socio-political discourses around multilingual classrooms teaching and brought forward the argument that more studies into the lived experiences of EAL teachers are needed, as they are the ones who could provide first-hand accounts of their experiences. This could provide valuable insights into how teachers are currently managing EAL learning in the classroom and what the implications are for children's development (Montrul, 2008) which could lead to a radical re-evaluation and re-development of the EAL policy and practice.

Giving the importance attached to the issue of EAL education and in order to address the existent gap in research, this study sets to add data to the growing body of qualitative research on the topic and engage the sector's attention in constructive discussions about EAL teachers experiences in classrooms, suggesting possible ways for moving forward.

Therefore, the current study aims to: a) explore self-disclosed feelings and attitudes towards EAL children teaching by looking at how teaching and learning are perceived in the context of working with this particular group of children in the early years; b) identify themes which could contribute to the discussion and re-evaluation of EAL teaching and learning.

(1902 words)

2. Method

The purpose of this study is to 'enter the world of' teachers (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016, p.170) trying to unpick and explicate the meaning of first-hand experiences of teaching EAL children, as they were individually described and presented (Wood, Giles and Percy, 2009). Therefore, a qualitative phenomenological analysis approach was deemed fit to be employed in conducting this study.

2.1 Methodology

Giving the study aims, semi-structured interviews were selected as the only method for data collection due to their conferred flexibility in allowing participants to describe in a free and open way a particular experience (Willig, 2013) and allowing researchers to assume a naïve approach when interviewing in order to enhance participant self-disclosure (Lemon and Taylor, 1997).

The semi-structured interview questions have been devised in a way that firstly allowed participants to ease out any possible nervousness caused by traditionally perceived balance of power between interviewee and interviewer or by the fact that interviews were voice-recorded. They were invited, therefore, to introduce themselves, to talk briefly about their qualifications and experience and then describe how a typical working day looks like for them. After this, participants were gradually encouraged to describe their personal experience of teaching EAL

children, share teaching strategies used in the classroom and discuss aspects relating to managing communication with learners who had a home language other than English.

Throughout the interview participants were encouraged to engage in discussion being gently and unobtrusively prompted towards the next question, interviewer's intervention being kept to the minimum throughout.

2.2 Recruitment

Following University of East London (UEL) Ethical Approval (Appendix A), recruitment of participants commenced through two methods: contacting schools, nurseries and early years centres by email and phone calls and by word of mouth in the university campus, especially amongst programme colleagues.

Giving the study topic, the aim of the recruitment strategy was to engage with as many schools and early centres as possible in an attempt to reach out and hopefully sign up for interviewing a number of teachers who had different levels of qualification, experience and expertise in working with EAL children. Due to time constraints on our part, recruiting participants from outer London was not considered for this study.

A number of eighty-six emails containing an outline of the study (Appendix B) and an invitation letter (Appendix C) have been sent to schools and nurseries in three neighbouring London boroughs.

During the time scale for participants recruitment, only five expressed an interest to participate in the current study. Another participant has been recruited through the word of mouth, in the UEL campus.

Once an expression of interest to participate has been registered, a follow up email has been sent formally seeking permission (Appendix D) to conduct the study in their premises as well as a consent form (Appendix E) which was signed by every participant prior to the interview taking place. Participants' right to withdraw was clearly stipulated in the invitation letter and was verbally reminded of prior to interview taking place.

2.3 Participants

Following recruitment, a total number of six qualified early years teachers and professionals have been identified as study participants. Aged between thirty-one and fifty-three, participants shared considerable work experience amongst them, ranging between ten and twenty-two years. At the time of the interview all of them were working in Inner London early years centres and schools, based in classes registering very high percentage of EAL pupils.

Out of six participants, three identified themselves as bi-cultural – having an ethnic and cultural background other than British - only two participants identified themselves as bilinguals, growing up in a home where first language was other than English. Only one participant has had a one day EAL teaching training course provided by the Local Authority.

The following table is an illustration of the anonymised study participants and their professional credentials.

Table 1. Description of study participants

Participant Pseudonym	Qualification	Experience In years	% of EAL pupils in their classroom	Language(s) spoken	EAL Training
Alba	EYT (L6)	12	75-80%	English & Greek	none
Sarah	QTS (L6)	10	80-90%	English	none
Anne	EYT (L4)	20	100%	English	none
Daisy	QTS (L6)	22	82%	English	1 day (a one-off)
Eugenie	EYT (L3)	22	85%	English	none
Fatima	EYT (L5)	18	100%	English & Bangla	none

2.4 Procedure

Five participants have been interviewed in their work place, during a time slot which was pre-arranged with their line-manager. One interview took place in one of UEL library study rooms. All participants have given signed consent prior to interview being recorded.

All interviews began with a reminder of participants right to withdraw without giving a reason and giving them the opportunity to ask as many questions as they might have. The interviewer then continued by clearly explaining the practicalities involved in the voice recording of the interview.

All interviews have been recorded on a password protected device and then converted into verbatim transcripts. In order to anonymise names and locations in the interviews transcripts, these have been replaced with expressions such as *anonymised town* or *anonymised name* included in square brackets.

Participants were offered the opportunity to verify the content of the transcript once they were available, however, they declined this offer due to time constraints on their part.

All participants were offered a Debriefing form (included as Appendix F) at the end of their interview, including UEL study supervisor's names and contact details as well as sources of further information or support in case it was need it.

The interviews provided between thirteen and eighteen minutes of voice recorded data which has been anonymised during transcription, in accordance with the IPA data processing principles and as stipulated in the UEL Ethics Approval.

2.5 Data analysis

Once all interviews have been transcribed, the transcripts formed the data to be analysed. The analysis started with an in depth reading of the text which was subsequently read and revisited a number of times in order to establish sound familiarity with the transcript (Willig, 2013; Smith, 2004).

Throughout this process, relevant points of interest have been written down on the right-hand side of the page whilst commonalities or emerging themes which were perceived to reflect the concepts and essence of the meaning have been recorded on the left-hand side of the transcript. Similar ideas and concepts have been written down in different colour ink in order to easily identify and group themes across all six transcripts.

Care and consideration has been given when grouping the emerging themes in order to ensure that the study remains truthful to participants' subjective accounts as well as remaining objective when illustrating and interpreting its findings.

Researchers' own prior knowledge, expectations, opinions and preconceptions have been carefully reflected upon (Parker, 2005) so the likelihood of interference with the text analysis was at least minimised if not entirely avoided.

However, on researcher personal involvement with the study it is important to acknowledge that even though notable efforts have been made to remain objective

throughout the whole process, it is likely that personal affinities, professional interests and prior knowledge would have played some role in interpretation of findings and, subsequently, in discussing their implications.

As a result of the analysis a number of three significant themes have been identified. For the purpose of clearly illustrating the results of the analysis, the themes were grouped in three master themes and their convergent themes (Willig, 2013) as follows:

Master theme 1. From heart-break to soul-stirring: a continuum of feelings

Convergent themes:

- Child's progress in acquiring English language as sources of pride and rewarding feelings
- Power, control and perceived inability to comfort and reassure as sources of frustration

Master theme 2. Empathy and respect for the EAL learner underpinning all principles of teaching

Convergent themes:

- Prioritising emotional wellbeing over standardised learning goals.
- EAL children seen as creative and resilient learners.
- Children setting the pace in their own learning.

Master theme 3. Assimilation as the ultimate, unwritten teaching goal

Convergent themes:

- Home language as the key for successful transition and fundamental basis for new language learning.
- Children's heritage cultures and languages as safe havens and burnt bridges

(1343 words)

3. Results discussion

Teachers' experiences of teaching EAL children yielded responses that revealed a continuum of strong feelings and provided invaluable insights into their teaching practices. The three master themes identified are presented and illustrated with relevant transcript quotes. Results are discussed in light of the literature review, previous research and theory, reflecting on possible psychoeducational implications on young EAL learners.

3.1 Master theme 1. From heart-break to soul-stirring: a continuum of teacher feelings

'Trying to teach what the child or young person is not ready to learn is frustrating and ineffective' (Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup, 2013, p. 68)

When asked to describe her experience of teaching large numbers of EAL children in her classrooms, Alba quickly replied: *It's amazing, so much to learn about people and cultures* (Line: 34). She did not dwell on challenges: *in time it becomes second nature, really* (Line: 43). Anne replied in a similarly confident way, saying that working with EAL children was a gradual learning process for her over the years; she states that she *learnt to adapt to this* (Line 24), *it's instinctive now, I don't feel it's hard* (Line 96). These examples illustrate the possible link between significant working experience with EAL children and the confidence that comes along with it.

However, one of the most striking commonalities of the interviews was the participants' choice of words used to describe their feelings with regards to EAL teaching experience: frustrating and rewarding.

Undeniable pride and the feeling of a job well done have been described consistently by the study participants when they reflected on the perceived impact they had on EAL children's progress in English language learning in particular. Anne, who has over twenty-two years of teaching experience in multilingual classes, briefly considers some of the challenges encountered each September, when a new academic year starts, then speaks with undeniable pride about her work towards the end of the academic year:

It feels great to look back at their progress and seeing them so changed, in

their confidence, in their play, how they begin to put small sentences together, or you can even have a proper conversation with some of them. I must say, this is the time I like the most. And if you think about it, over the years, how many children I must have helped, it really is heart-warming, yah, pretty pleased. (Lines: 107-113).

Even though, the same as Anne, she puts in balance the challenges of the role, the feelings of a rewarding job are clear in Sarah's account too:

It is very challenging but really rewarding in the same time if you think of the way some of them come in with nothing and leave being able to speak perfect English in nine months with you, is just incredibly rewarding. (Lines 118-120)

Daisy's account offers a more nuanced view with regards to the multitude of feelings that are experienced by a teacher whilst teaching large numbers of EAL pupils. Even though she indicates how frustrating the job can be at certain times, she also acknowledges children's small steps in English language progress as a source of joyful feelings:

Depends on the day, really...some days you feel you are banging your head against a brick wall (...) but other times feels really joyful, really, just because a child that never said a word to anybody suddenly comes out with a small sentence in English, perfectly formed, or even just one word (...) so it can go one way or the other and all the other days in between are all the other feelings in between. (Lines: 84-85/90/92-94)

Reflecting on challenges, Daisy continues her account explaining why teaching young EAL children can be *quite frustrating at times* (Line 23):

the biggest challenge is to ensure that they all know where they should be, what they should be doing and how they should be doing it. (Lines: 29-30)

Daisy's reflection on challenges appear to indicate that teaching EAL children could place considerable pressure on the class teacher due to perceived lack of power and control.

In Sarah's account, frustration is also a significant factor underlying EAL teaching. However, she recognises that frustration *can be at both ends* (Line:117) affecting not only teachers but equally affecting pupils. In her empathic account, Fatima draws on her own experience as a new EAL pupil in her classroom many years ago, and highlights that *it is quite daunting when a child doesn't understand what the teachers are saying or what is going on in the classroom.* (Lines: 40-42)

Fatima and Sarah's views appear to be supported by Chen (2007) and Bower (2017) who found that EAL children can easily mirror their teachers' feelings of frustration because they are likely to feel lost, isolated and misunderstood when they first join the classroom.

If for Daisy and Sarah frustration appears to be springing from their perceived lack of power and control in the classroom, for Alba, Anne and Eugenie frustration seems to be largely associated with their declared inability to comfort and reassure young EAL children when they go through settling-in time.

Eugenie states that for her, *the biggest challenge is when the child comes through the door, really distressed and I find it hard to comfort, to reassure, (...) because you can have a child crying for most of the morning, not accepting comfort, I find this really hard; but when you finally get to break that barrier, it is incredibly rewarding.* (Lines: 62-66)

For Alba, frustration appears to have different and more complex connotations. In her current role as qualified Early Years Teacher, Alba broods over how hard it is for her to deal with the perceived anxiety and distress some newly arrived EAL children can display:

It is hard to see how insecure and how lost some of them seem to be when they start, and I mean, it is really hard for some, they cry and refuse comfort, refuse to play. (...) this is really hard to work around, especially when they refuse comfort, things like that really upset me, but luckily, situations like this are quite rare. (Lines: 93-98)

Alba then reflects on her previous experience of working as a Teacher Assistant and describes frustration as being derived from a strong feeling of injustice that she felt was done to the newly arrived EAL children in the classroom. She describes that the usual practice was to assign all EAL children to the lowest sets of abilities and knowledge because assessment could not be carried out according to the standardised requirements:

It was heart-breaking because I could see some of them would be extremely bright children, really well behaved and with such positive outlook given the circumstances, but they would be assigned to the lowest sets, the groups of low achievers, of additional learning needs

children or children with behavioural issues, simply because we could not assess them as we had to. (Lines: 76-85)

In wider context, frustration appears to be a very often used descriptor when it comes to teaching EAL children.

Skinner (2010, p.82) researched on teachers self-disclosed challenges in the classroom and summarised that the two biggest issues faced by the teachers involved in her study were difficulties in bonding with EAL children due to language barriers and communication with EAL children's parents.

The importance of being able to communicate and building positive teacher-child relationships is also highlighted by Fumoto, Hargreaves and Maxwell (2007) study, which argues that EAL children are often at a disadvantaged point when compared to fluent English speakers' counterparts because of teacher's inability to bond with them.

Moreover, Hamilton (2011) reports on similar teachers' views, frustration being the word choice in describing difficulties with differentiation required by EAL children in the classroom and the lack of resources appropriate for their linguistic needs.

Taking a view similar to Daisy, Anne and Sarah, Gershon (2013, p.13) argues that 'one ought to expect periods of frustration, annoyance and irritation' when having to teach EAL pupils. He confesses how frustrating it was for him when, as a newly qualified teacher dealing with EAL children, he felt that his own language, the most important tool of teaching, was disempowered, completely useless.

In the same way as Fatima, Sarah and Eugenie, Gerson also empathised with students who can feel equally frustrated because of their inability to express needs and emotion in the classroom, but also fully empathised with teachers who might feel confused and powerless. Frustration may appear as a result of feeling unable to do the very job they were employed to do, and in which traditionally, teachers take so much pride.

Concluding, it is undeniable that a multitude of intense feelings are evolving around teaching of young EAL children at a critical time in their development. The full extent to which such feelings are influencing teacher's attitudes, and subsequently, the language used when interacting with EAL children are yet to be fully ascertained by further studies. However, the possible psychoeducational implications on EAL

children as well as on other children with under-developed expressive vocabularies, are well documented. For example, Giddan et al., (1995) draw attention to the fact that extreme caution must be exercised around children who are still acquiring language in order to ensure that they make clear sense of others feelings as well as making meaning of their own feelings and learn to express them appropriately. Otherwise, children can experience confusing affective states at an early age (Lewis and Rosenblum, 1978,) causing a negative impact on their emerging concept of self and possibly leading to emotional dysfunctionalities later on in life.

Contrasting to Skinner (2010), Chen (2007) and Murakami (2008) findings, the current study participants appeared to be incredibly perceptive of EAL children's feelings despite experiencing frustration and disempowerment in the early stages of teaching a new cohort. Moreover, the current study participants appear to rapidly overlook negative feelings of frustration and disempowerment in order to positively reflect on and proudly acknowledge their role in supporting EAL children's progress in acquiring English language.

3.2 Master theme 2. Empathy and respect for EAL learners underpinning all principles of teaching

'Female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy'

Baron-Cohen, 2013 cited by Child (2013, p.34)

Teachers' ability to relate and empathise with EAL children in their classrooms pervaded throughout the interviews. Reflecting on her own experiences and placing these in the context of EAL pupils in her class, Anne emphasised that:

It must be difficult for them as well, actually coming into a place where you can't communicate, I mean I have been in countries where I could not speak the language and felt so alienated, I can imagine how they feel'.

(Lines: 68-71)

The ability to empathise is taken to a whole new level by Eugenie, who offers a very personal and an extremely powerful example which reveals not only how well she can relate to the newly arrived EAL children in a classroom but also clearly translates how proud she is for teaching large groups of EAL pupils now:

Touching on my own experience, I am of Caribbean descent, as I said, I was born in [anonymised town] in the late 1960, my family was the only black family in the village, I was the only black person at school, I was brought up this way, I know how it feels, and working now with children who are new to the community is second to nothing really, I love all children, you know, but I understand well how these newcomers feel, I relate to them. (Lines: 89-94)

A similar stand point is shared by Fatima, who illustrates her empathy with children and their parents by reflecting on her and her own family experience of relocating to the UK approximately thirty-five years ago:

I can understand what parents are going through because obviously, I came in this country when I was very young, and everything was different, the culture, the food, the way they dressed and lived, (...) and was hard for me to adapt, a big difference to live in London with me growing up in a village in Bangladesh, the school looked strange to me, the environment, the language, and I didn't have the opportunities these children have nowadays here. (Lines: 55-61)

Fatima also shares personal memories relating to her school experience as an EAL child herself and briefly compares the provision available then with what she perceives to be a very good provision for EAL children in the setting she teaches:

I am glad things have changed, children are getting so much support now, books, nursery rhymes, multicultural toys, dressing up items from different cultures, diversity is being promoted by celebrating different festivals, different cultures and food. (Lines: 64-67)

The need to compare and contrast her own experience as EAL pupil with what she perceives as very good provision for the children currently attending her setting could be seen as a subconscious desire to be perceived as an effective teacher who works in a pre-school which provides the right support for this particular group of children. In Alba's account, empathy for children is almost interchangeable with high respect for their cultures and their home languages. Inevitably, she draws on her own bicultural background to offer not only a strong example of her willingness to have a positive impact on children's lives but also, a deeply rooted desire to be perceived as a role model for the children in her class:

I grow up in a bilingual home, mum is English, dad is Cypriot. When I read,

I prefer books in English but I speak Greek really well and I am really proud of this. (Lines: 120-122)

Being part of their [EAL children] lives deeply honours me and I hope that through teaching I am making some sort of difference for them.

(Lines: 136-138)

It is noteworthy that these three powerful accounts of empathy with EAL children have been revealed by study participants who were themselves EAL children at some point in their childhood. As for Eugenie, even though she spoke the same language with her new school peers, she still shared that experience of being a newcomer of a different cultural background, hence her ability to fully empathise with EAL children.

Citing Carl Rogers, Cullen (2011, p. 147) states that empathy, in general, is a 'key ingredient in any psychologically ideal, functional relationship', pointing out that empathy during early years of life is fundamental in ensuring that an individual can make use of their own experiences in an ongoing process of personal growth and positive development.

Zajonc (1980) advanced the idea that the sense of familiarity can bring about a change in attitude, unconsciously translating it in a developing preference for what is perceived as similar, familiar. It is understandable therefore why some teachers, as those participating in Skinner's study for example, felt that the biggest challenge is to build a bond with EAL learners.

Zajonc's idea of familiarity could be of help when trying to understand why some teachers have negative perceptions and low expectations from EAL children (Murakami, 2008; Sood and Mistry, 2011). Equally, Zajonc's ideas could explain the empathy showed to EAL children by the current study participants. It is plausible that through their ability to empathise, and through their significant working experience with this group of children, they developed sound understanding of particular learning needs encountered by children who are new to English language. In time teachers mastered teaching strategies required to support EAL children, and consecutively, developed a sense of familiarity with them.

In wider context, teachers' ability to tune in into pupils' feelings and emotions is seen as key factor of teaching success. In order to develop positive feelings towards their

pupils, teachers ought to experience some sort of familiarity and intimacy, which, in EAL children's case, appears to be highly unlikely, at least in the beginning (Skinner, 2008; Chen, 2007). This aspect is recognised by some of the participants in the current study, Anne, Sarah and Daisy referring to how difficult it is for them to deal with a new intake of EAL children at the beginning of the academic year.

In this regard, Fumoto, Hargreaves and Maxwell (2007) suggested that it is of crucial importance for teacher to show sensitivity towards EAL pupils' non-verbal communication in order to develop an understanding of their feelings and emotions in the classroom. In addition, Cajkler and Hall (2009) elaborate the need for teacher training development that includes awareness of inclusion, cultural and linguistic differences in order to ensure more empathic teaching practices concerning EAL learners.

Gordon (2012) argues that only through empathy children enable themselves to observe commonalities and appreciate each unique individual for what they are, becoming in this way, less likely to discriminate or marginalise others. Such moral ideals should underpin teaching at all levels and teachers, first and foremost, have a duty to focus on mastering this skill themselves in order to subsequently support their pupils developing it.

Unfortunately, in times where teaching became a highly accountable and a centralised domain of activity, teachers are often focusing on ensuring children's progress in the core subjects, (English, Mathematics and Science) regardless of their personal circumstances or challenges and therefore, overlooking other significant aspects of learning such as empathy. Reflecting on these very aspects of teaching and learning, Illingsworth (2015, p.3) points out that teachers must remember that they are 'working with children (not the little exam-takers who must reach the 'level' ascribed by the data monkey)' and subsequently, advocates for teachers to place greater emphasis on developing the 'ability to listen with empathy and sympathy' which, in his view, should be clearly reflected everywhere in their lesson plans and in the classroom.

Another significant value that emerged as commonly upheld by the current study participants was their self-declared unconditional admiration and respect for children, seeing them as competent, creative and resilient learners and allowing them to take a lead in their learning.

In Sarah's account, it is clearly reflected how highly she speaks about the children's ability to learn in her class:

It was amazing how quickly children picked up the English language and how quickly they start speaking it. (Lines: 47-49)

For Eugenie it comes as no surprise that EAL children pick up a new language very quickly; she highlights the children's ability to code switch, learning to differentiate between the language they use in the nursery and the language they use when interacting with their family members:

They are so quick to pick up the new language [English], even more so, learn very quickly to use English words in the nursery, but I can hear them talking in their home language with their parents. (Lines: 53-56)

When speaking about her teaching experience, Daisy recalls how a one-off EAL teaching training day she attended a few years ago helped her re-evaluate the expectations she would have from EAL children and from her own teaching when it comes to this particular group:

It does put it into perspective a little bit more, that actually, you should not expect wonders, and if you have a child who comes with no English and leaves being able to communicate with you in English, no matter how basic that communication is, actually you've done a good job. (Lines: 105-109)

Unfortunately, this was the only reference made throughout the interviews to a training day specifically designed to support teachers working with large numbers of young EAL learners. This appears to indicate a huge gap in appropriate in-service training for teachers, especially for teachers working for a good number of years in schools or early years centres where the intake of EAL children has been traditionally higher than average in the country, illustrating an educational system which is yet to catch up with realities of teaching and learning in the mainstream classrooms (Cajkler and Hall, 2009; Sood and Mistry, 2011; Leung, 2016). Perhaps the aspect of appropriate EAL teacher training – or the lack of it – has a role to play in the widespread feelings for frustration teachers expressed throughout the interviews. After all, mainstream teachers are trained to teach concepts and the vocabulary necessary to think and talk about these concepts to native speaking pupils, (Conteh, 2012) they are not trained to teach language to learners new to the

English curriculum, which, according to Bower (2017), is a skill that requires different type of knowledge and practice.

However, when Daisy reflects on the EAL children's abilities in learning, she gave an example that clearly illustrates how highly she thinks of them as able, creative and resilient learners.

Daisy refers to an episode from her practice about a little girl who would refuse to talk at all in the nursery even though she was observed being able to hold a fluent conversation in her home language with her parents. After a few weeks of attending the nursery regularly, nursery teachers observed this girl playing alongside a friend in the home corner and appearing to having a conversation with, therefore, teachers decide to non-obstructively video-record the conversation and show it to the girl's parents. Daisy recalls that to her surprise, the parents confirmed the language they were comfortable using to communicate was, in fact, a made-up language, was neither their home language nor the home language of the other child. Daisy concludes:

They literally made up their own language to talk to each other. This is how clever they are, they would find a way, if they want to communicate, they would find a way. (Lines: 141-143)

At first sight, Daisy's account appears to suggest similarities with the silent period, a time of listening and negotiating meaning many EAL learners typically go through (Drury, 2013), however, after a more in-depth analysis of the text, it becomes clearer that it has more complex connotations.

Firstly, by being able to create a new language-like system through their imaginative play, the girls described in Daisy's story seem to emulate Chomsky's description of Language Acquisition Device (Harley 2014, p. 111). Chomsky argues that children are born with the ability to produce language and this is what the little girls are observed to do, copying a similar form of speech heard from adults, the 'surface structure' of language they could hear around them but could not understand.

Secondly, this episode could be interpreted as children's way of coping with the social situation they found themselves in. Their unwillingness to communicate with teachers could be an indication that the girls were still going through the settling-in

period, therefore, not ready to accept the change in their daily routine, parting from parents and coming to the nursery. In addition, the little girls' reluctance to talk with adults around them seems to indicate that imaginative play offered them the means of escaping the reality they found themselves in due to an innate predisposition to succeed (Jerome Singer cited by Cullen, 2011) which helped them make sense of the difficulties encountered and find a way to cope with them.

Whichever the meaning the little girls attached to their language behaviour, it is no doubt that it was, for Daisy at least, the hallmark of intelligent and resilient children which gained her recognition and respect and was noteworthy of sharing.

Another significant aspect which was transparent in the current study participants accounts was the respect and deep understanding they had for children's emotional needs. They all appeared to be primarily concerned with EAL children's well-being rather than being overly concerned with their progress towards standardised learning goals.

Anne unequivocally states that for her, children's emotional wellbeing comes first and foremost:

This is the most important thing, their emotional wellbeing, because if they are not happy or they don't want to be in this environment, then they are not going to do anything, they can't learn, they can't make progress.

(Lines: 43-45)

Eugenie's account describes similar priorities:

The emphasis is to get the settling-in time right, helping them feel secure and confident, so they want to come to the nursery and want to be here throughout the day. (Lines: 41-43)

Teaching in a Reception Class seems to come as a relief for Sarah, who acknowledges the opportunities offered to children by a play-based curriculum and recognises the challenges EAL children might face if they join the educational system later on, when much more is demanded from them right from the beginning:

I think being in Reception where they do a lot of choosing, a lot of playing a lot of creative things, and they have a lot of time to play games and build things together that opportunity for language learning is much more than when they get older, it's much harder if they come in year three or four when

they are eight and have no English, that's much much harder.

(Lines: 51-56)

Working without having the pressure of meeting strict or nonflexible targets seems to be a significant aspect of teaching that notably benefits EAL children in the Foundation Stage of the UK educational system. With the help and support of skilful teachers, EAL children are allowed to take ownership in play-based activities and set the pace in their own learning.

Anne makes this point very clear:

We don't pressurise them (...) we give them the time and space they need (...) we let them lead us in a way'. (Lines: 35-40)

Alba also touches on this aspect of teaching and learning. Whilst recognising the benefits of children learning at their own pace, especially when language learning is concerned, she brings into discussion that not only prescribed learning goals can exercise pressure on EAL children. Alba reflects on the pressures children and teachers might face from parents:

Some are so worried about the child not being ready for school or not fitting in so they put pressure on the child and on us to help them learn English as soon as...and it is so unfair for a child, (...) Rushing children from one language to the other ought to have an impact on their well-being, on how they see themselves. (Lines: 104-110)

Alba acknowledges parents' anxiety regarding school readiness, and after all, this idea is obsessively presented in most of UK policy papers concerning early years education. She also reflects on how young EAL children might perceive themselves if they feel they are not making progress quick enough and how this could impact on their self-esteem and confidence not only on short term, but later on in life as well. Nevertheless, as many other teachers in the sector, Alba appears to stick to her principles and to rely on her professional expertise, making a clear point about what matters most:

Anyway, we do what we think is best for the child and try to reassure the parents, that's all I can say. (Lines: 111-112)

For the teachers involved in the current study, the well-being of the children appears to be paramount in their practice. They entangled empathy with respect for children's learning needs whilst ensuring children make progress in learning English language

and supporting them throughout this process in a knowledgeable, experienced and confident way. However, after a more detailed analysis of the text, a significant teaching and learning trend was clearly visible.

3.3 Master theme 3. Assimilation as the ultimate unwritten teaching goal

‘To be effective, teachers must treat the culture, heritage, and language of all their students *con respeto*’. (Midobuche 1999, p. 80)

The dedication and commitment to teaching children according to their learning needs and stage of development was exemplified by all teachers participating in this current study. Nevertheless, a number of important issue started shaping up alongside the other themes.

All teachers interviewed took great pride in the rapid progress made by the children in their classrooms in acquiring English language. They described making use of EAL children’s home languages as the very first teaching strategy used in order to lay the foundations for teaching English language.

Whilst recognising the importance of being proficient in their home language before EAL children are introduced to English language, Sarah’s account appears to have similar goals to those described by the other teachers: swift acquisition of English language. She describes the teaching strategy for helping children acquiring English starting with her and her teacher assistant learning a small number of words in children’s home languages in order to ensure minimum functionalities in the classroom, and then continue by moving to an all English language learning environment:

We would learn a few basic words to ensure children can answer the register.

(Line: 102) (...) *but all playing, all singing, all talking happened in English.*

(Lines: 67-68)

Putting in balance her own experience and considering the provision currently available in the pre-school she works, Fatima ponders about the multitude of multicultural resources available and appears to believe that offering a rich provision will speed up children’s learning process towards an all English communication:

It feels really good, makes me want to do more, I didn’t have all these and I know that if support is given early, they will be willing to learn and progress

quicker, they feel they belong here (...) we use the home language when engaging with children and parents on a daily basis, until they feel confident to switch to English. (Lines: 72-74;77-78)

There is no question that Fatima, as a former EAL pupil herself, fully understands the value of home languages in the classroom, however, it appears that in her practice, she also strictly adheres to the common strategy of using the home languages only until EAL children are switching to an English only communication.

In a similarly described practice, Alba, a bilingual individual herself, states that her and her colleagues are making use of EAL children's home languages in the setting, but only *until they build a basic vocabulary in English* (Line: 53). Drawing on her bilingual background, Alba also states how proud she is of her ability to speak Greek, her father's language, and describes how this ability helped her construct a very positive image about herself:

I feel that being able to speak another language only enriches me as a person. (Lines: 126-127)

It's not only about language as such, is about learning to really value who you are, the whole you, and language is a big part of who we are, isn't it?
(Lines: 138-140)

With this insightful account, Alba taps into the discussion surrounding the link between young EAL children's home languages and their emerging sense of identity. The relationship between the two has seen a surge of academic interest in recent years and was documented in a wealth of studies.

Bateman (2016, p. 271) argues that young EAL children not only bring their heritage culture and language as valuable resources in the classroom, but they also bring along a 'developing identity'. The way their home languages and heritage cultures are being perceived and received in the classroom ought to have an impact on how the child perceives these resources and subsequently, ought to impact on their developing understanding of who they are and their self-worth.

Highlighting the dangers of EAL children easily forgetting the home languages in the early years of life if not appropriately supported to maintain them, Cummings (2001) goes even further, and claims that if an EAL child receives the implicit message to

leave his home language at the classroom's door, they will automatically leave a significant part of who they are, of their identity, at the same door.

Canagarajah and Silberstein (2012) discuss the idea that identities are somehow fluid, emerging and developing in relation to different locations, experiences and languages. Therefore, by encouraging EAL children to bring their prior language knowledge to the classroom (Montrul, 2008) they would be likely to nourish their identities by perceiving themselves as 'language experts' Leeman, Rabin and Román-Mendoza (2011, p. 492)

Teachers' cultural and linguistic awareness –or the lack of it- ought to have an impact on their teaching practice and, subsequently, on their pupils learning (Orange and Feryok, 2013; Midobuche, 1999), and the long-term effects are yet to be fully understood.

In this study however, an insightful and extremely moving example of how it is for a child to be schooled in a class where the heritage culture is neither acknowledged, nor visibly valued is given by Eugenie. She reflects on how she was perceived by her extended family and close friends after relocating to London:

*I was called a coconut, white in the inside and black on the outside (...)
because I knew nothing about my own culture. (Lines: 98-99)*

Eugenie's account provides not only some understanding about how it feels for EAL children to be absorbed in a new culture, but also, provides an understanding of how teachers' personal feelings and experiences underpin the ability to empathise with this group of learners.

This aspect was again exemplified by Eugenie whilst talking about an EAL child who recently joined her class; she confessed how strongly emotionally engaged she was in the child's English language progress, showing, once more, the multitude of feelings teachers go through in their classrooms:

*When she said her very first words in English I wanted to cry, I really did,
you know? (Lines: 35-36)*

From EAL children's perspective, an important issue arises here. Seeing their teachers displaying such strong emotions associated with pride in their English language progress, EAL children are highly likely to take this as an 'incentive factor' in their learning and have this linguistic behaviour positively reinforced (Bandura,

1977 and Skinner 1978, cited in Maltby, Day and Macaskil, 2017, p.85) affecting in this way their choice of language in the classroom and in the wider community to the detriment of their home languages (De Luca, 2017).

EAL children's choice of language is likely to be reinforced not only by the emotional response of their teachers, it is also likely to be reinforced by teachers implicit or explicit transmitted messages, that English is the only language welcomed in school. The next two accounts discussed, Anne and Daisy's ones, seem to support this argument.

Even though she fully recognises the vast emotional and cognitive value of children's home languages, Anne, as all the other teachers interviewed, prioritise English language acquisition; she appears to associate it with successful social integration of both EAL children and their parents:

They are here to learn English, it benefits them. (Line: 28)

This blunt approach to teaching English language is taken one step further by Daisy. She offers a strong and seemingly contradictory account illustrating the value attached to the home languages of children, as well as priorities and limitations in her job. When discussing how often, if at all, children's home languages are used in the setting, Daisy replies:

not as much as I would like it to be' (Line: 58)

However, Daisy does not dwell much on this and continues:

but if a child is happy and secure and they don't need that reassurance that home language provides, then English is used, all English. (...) to be honest, these families have come here for a reason, they live here now, English must be a priority, children must be helped to engage with teachers and their peers and this will happen only by developing good command of English.

(Lines: 67-68/70-72)

As she goes further into discussion about children's home languages, Daisy feels the need to clarify her position:

Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against home languages, I know is beneficial to speak more than one language, but this is what it is in the end, home language, I see it as a parent responsibility or choice, whatever; as I said, we have limitations. (Lines: 73-76)

At first sight, Daisy's opening statement on the use of home languages appeared to be in flat contradiction with the second part of her statement, which undoubtedly emphasised the necessity of acquiring English language and keeping the home languages out of the classroom. Even more so, Daisy's apparent contradictory presentation of her views and the need to clarify her stance in respect to the home languages could be interpreted as her way of saying what she might perceive as being desirable or expected to say as a professional, to be politically correct.

However, after taking a naïve approach and more dispassionate analysis of the views expressed by Daisy, it emerged that perhaps, there was little or no contradiction at all in her account. The key to better understand her views was to look closely at the choice of words used, especially the words associated with the home language – which she would have *liked* it to be more used in the setting - and the words associated with English language acquisition, especially the use of the verb *must*, which can be interpreted as a distinctive indication of how conscious she is of her job role and the responsibilities it entails.

Once more, Daisy's account appears to mirror the contradictions surrounding EAL policy in UK. In contrast with the government guidance issued by DfCSF, 2007 which appears to commend and honour the EAL children home languages, Arnot et al., (2014, p. 14) found that the more recent government official strategy explicitly calls for 'rapid English language acquisition' and places a clear duty on teachers to ensure EAL pupils can actively participate in the classroom. It illustrates the unquestionable assimilative approach to EAL teaching and learning, which, in all fairness, is no different from the government's approach took in the 1950's.

It is important to understand all angles of such assimilative policies. Traditionally, adopting a unique language policy was seen as a way of building a unitary nation whereas pluralistic approaches to languages have been associated with divisive societies (Clots-Figueras and Masella, 2013). From this perspective, the imposition of a sole language seems to be paved with good intentions, however, social psychologists widely recognise that, in the end, not languages are those who divide nations or societies, but rather prejudice and discrimination (Hogg and Vaughan, 2013) caused by lack of education and empathy (Gordon, 2012).

De Luca (2017, p. 1) takes the argument towards a different route of the debate, advancing the idea that EAL children have the right to self-expression through their heritage languages, therefore, such language should not be exiled from mainstream classrooms. Moreover, Cummings (2001), Canagarajah and Silberstein (2012), Leeman, Rabin, and Román-Mendoza (2011) strongly advocate for teaching strategies that would avoid EAL linguistic and cultural erosion in the early years of education. They argue that by avoiding the loss of proficiency in their home languages, children will be more likely to contribute to positive social change later on in life.

It is clear that a very common, well embedded teaching practice is to build on the foundations offered by the home language in order to ensure rapid progress in English language learning. It is also hard to miss how common the practice of incisively stopping the use of children's home languages as soon as they show signs of language use shifting towards English. Home languages can become, whilst used this way, not only missed opportunities for truly embracing multilingualism in the society (Bateman, 2016) but they can also become burnt bridges, lost avenues in EAL children's holistic education.

Given that this assimilative strategy is unanimously reported by the current study participants as standard teaching practice in the classrooms, this could be interpreted as a strong indication that acquiring and speaking only the English language in classrooms acts as the ultimate, unwritten learning goal when it comes to EAL children. Even though this is, in the end, what the policy demands from teachers and this is what is expected from EAL children in the UK education system, we cannot suppress the heavy feeling of possible erosion if not irremediable loss when it comes to home languages and the cultural heritage of these children.

3.4 Implications of the current study

Teacher training is considered first and foremost as questions surrounding effective EAL teacher training have been raised by teachers and researchers alike (Gershon, 2013; Sood and Mistry, 2011; Cajkler and Hall, 2009; Leung, 2016). However, training providers and local authorities are yet to make relevant and consistent training available to the workforce. Given the realities of today's classrooms and in

the context of globalisation, we argue for compulsory EAL teacher training and relevant placement.

We also make the case for Local Authorities to ensure that schools, especially those with high percentage of EAL intake, plan and deliver at least one EAL inset day every year in order to support teachers regularly and effectively. We argue that teachers working with EAL children benefiting from appropriate training, would be less likely to experience frustration in their classroom and would be more likely to develop awareness of the importance of heritage languages and cultures in children's learning.

Comparing and contrasting current EAL provision with other curricular areas of the educational system, such as the provision for Special Education Needs for example, evidence shows that extremely important steps forward have been made towards a much more equal, dignified and a more socially-cohesive provision. It appears that EAL teaching is still waiting for its long overdue recognition, despite significant demographic growth amongst schools' EAL population over the last three decades.

In times of tensions and divisions within Britain's society, it could be argued that such calls for EAL policy changes are out of touch with social and political realities; we argue that especially in testing times education must fulfil its quintessential purpose, that of educating the minds and the hearts of the young. Thus, we believe this is a good time for policy makers to finally listen to the teacher's voices, to pay attention to the growing evidence highlighted in academic research and to take bold and innovative steps in order to move the current EAL practice towards a more cohesive, respectful and dignifying approach, more fitting for the twenty-first century.

One possible way to move forward is to learn from the successful dual language programmes (Gort and Pontier, 2013; Hamman, 2018) or two-way immersion programs already in place in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada or the United States of America. Such programs are devised and successfully implemented by local governments working in close partnership with communities they serve, (Molyneaux, Scull and Aliani, 2016) engaging with qualified bilingual professional in promoting academic achievements in both dominant and minority languages of a community (Christian, 2008; Leung, 2016).

Evidence to suggest growing interest in how two-way immersion programs can be implemented in the UK is already emerging. Bower (2017) reports on a 2008 case study carried out in a Reception class based in Islington, North London, where EAL children were encouraged and supported to use their home language in the classroom, with the support of a bilingual EAL support staff. The study highlighted that children benefited from speaking and hearing their home languages being used in the classroom and teachers reportedly benefitted from a better understanding of children's learning needs.

Bower (2017, p. 31) also reflects on a study carried out in 2007, in London Borough of Tower Hamlets by Charmian Kenner from Goldsmith University. The study highlighted the need for schools to reach out and build bridges with local communities and found that when EAL children were encouraged to use home language alongside English language at schools, sharing their knowledge of different cultures, they 'developed deeper understanding of concepts, activated metalinguistic skills and generated new ideas which enriched their learning'.

Even though encouraging, these two examples appear to be sporadic and more research is needed to develop a sound understanding of this matter. Thus, we argue that policy makers should engage with the academic sector in conducting thorough and consistent studies in order to build an accurate picture of the possible implications such programs could have on the UK early years and primary education.

3.5 Evaluation of the current study

Critically evaluating the current study, it is important to acknowledge that it does not claim to have made revelations about EAL teaching and learning in the UK. It aimed to look at teachers self-disclosed experiences of teaching EAL children and find meaning in them. Being a small-scale study, it is bound to be difficult to generalise its findings. After all, this was never intended. Nonetheless, it draws attentions to a number of ongoing issues surrounding EAL provision in the UK.

Reflecting on strengths, the study findings provide an understanding of how EAL teaching is being perceived by the six study participants. Their accounts offered powerful statements of commitment to children's learning and pride in their work. In

addition, teachers accounts helped us give some meaning to their self-disclosed feelings and understand their choice of teaching strategies applied when teaching EAL learners.

This study gave us the opportunity to meet a number of truly passionate early years teachers who took time from their daily demanding routines to share powerful examples from their experience. Some teachers have made the choice to go beyond the interview questions and shared insightful, deeply moving personal experiences. We consider this as the biggest strength of this study.

Similar to other studies, a number of important issues have been highlighted as a result of this enquiry. Thus, we argued for a re-evaluation of the training provided to teachers in UK and we called for a long-overdue policy shift from 1950's assimilative teaching methods towards tried and tested dual language immersion programs, where EAL children's home languages could be maintained and equally developed alongside English language in schools.

The following limitations of this study are addressed. Recruitment of participants was concentrated amongst a number of London boroughs well known for their high levels of EAL intake. This resulted in a homogenous group of six participants (Smith and Eatough, 2012) who shared depth and breadth of knowledge and experience on the topic.

Evaluating this aspect, two issues appear to arise. First, we argue that the study might have gained even more insights into teachers self-disclosed experiences if we would have managed to recruit Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) or if we would have considered recruiting teachers working in Outer London schools with lower intake of EAL learners. Secondly, it is well-worth of reflecting on the possible reasons why, throughout the recruitment process, we failed to attract NQTs or teachers with significantly less experiences than those recruited. However, these are in themselves, new avenues for enquiries which could be analysed in future studies.

Another area for critical analysis emerged when reflecting on participants' gender. Recruitment somehow yielded interest to participate in the study from an all-female teacher group. This could have impacted on the study findings, as one of the main themes evolved teachers' ability to empathise with their children. According to

Baron-Cohen cited by Child (2013, p. 34) female brains are essentially built-in 'for empathy' whilst male brains are wired towards 'systemising', 'exploring' and 'constructing'. In the light of Baron-Cohen's argument, one could only question if and how the findings of the current study could have been influenced by male teachers' accounts if they would have been successfully recruited to participate in this study.

Reflecting on other possible weaknesses of this study, two main ones have been consecutively identified: the researcher's lack of experience in conducting interviews for academic purposes (and subsequently, in conducting IPA) and the type of methodology employed to gather data.

First of all, having carried out this type of enquiry for the first time ought to highlight the features of a novice in the field. For example, when critically analysing the discussion section of this study, it appears that it contains detailed descriptions of participants accounts and perhaps, more than the necessary transcripts quotes. They have been included with the initial aim to provide good evidence of the findings, however, it is recognised now that some parts of the discussion of results section could have been more succinctly presented, concentrating efforts on interpretation backed up by theory and research and only include the very relevant supporting quotes in the text.

Secondly, difficulties have been encountered in engaging with early years centres and primary schools for participants recruitment. A particular deterrent appeared to be that fact the interviews were voice recorded and, for those willing to take part, this appeared to have had an impact on the way they perceived the interviews. For example, in one occasion, the discussion had with the participant before the interview appeared to be more insightful, more open and more powerful than the account actually given during the recording. In another account, the participant seemed more focused on exemplifying the multitude of resources the setting has and highlight the perceived good practice, rather than to talk about her personal experience of teaching.

This could be seen as an indication that some participants were tempted to say what they might have perceived as being widely accepted and expected to say rather than what they might have actually thought. Combining this aspect with the researcher's

lack of interviewing skills, it is argued perhaps, the study has missed out on collecting more relevant, more insightful data. We conclude therefore, that for similar academic enquiries, a more naturalistic approach to data collection such as informal discussions and/or observations should be considered as it could provide ways of collecting data which are not heavily relying on constringent language and text.

(7688words)

4. Conclusion

Despite a significant increase in academic research around EAL teaching and learning in the UK, only a very small number of studies have attempted to unpick teachers' feelings and attitudes when it comes to teaching this particular group of children.

This study attempted to address the gap in research and aimed at gaining better understanding of how teachers perceive EAL teaching through their self-disclosed accounts; also, it sought to find meaning in teachers lived experiences and address possible implications for the profession and some psychoeducational implications for EAL children.

The current study findings appear to suggest that teaching EAL children can be an emotionally brimming profession. Whilst feelings of frustration and disempowerment tend to take centre place at the beginning of an academic year, feelings of pride and reward are voiced as soon as the children settle in the new environment and begin to make progress in acquiring English language.

Significant experience in teaching EAL learners and the ability to empathise with them appear to be a prerequisite for perceiving them as intelligent, adaptable and resilient learners. Having had no specifically designed and relevant EAL teaching training, the study participants have unanimously and confidently revealed that working for a long time with large numbers of EAL learners enabled them to master a set of unique skills that made teaching this group of children become conventional, commonplace practice and this helped establishing a level of familiarity between teachers and EAL learners.

Moreover, a sound understanding of how children learn appears to have helped teachers develop strategies that kept the child at the centre of their practice. Teachers shared that they allow children to set the pace in their learning, prioritising their well-being over standardised learning goals. They appear to perceive EAL children as bright, creative and resilient resource in the classrooms, which provide opportunities for learning about other cultures. Teachers own cultural and linguistic awareness varies amongst participants, however, they all appeared to be able to fully empathising with EAL children's feelings, emotions and learning needs.

Teachers clearly expressed strong feelings of pride and joy associated with children rapid progress in acquiring English language, however, they appear to overlook the fact that this rapid progress seems to take place at the expense of children's home languages. In addition, teaching strategies described during the interviews were exclusively and aggressively assimilative, despite some teachers' seemingly bland examples of how much diversity is being encouraged and celebrated in their classrooms.

Despite being conducted with a small sample of participants, we argue that there is scope for this study's findings to contribute to wider discussions regarding the re-evaluation of the UK provision for EAL children.

(440 words)

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Appendices:

Appendix A: UEL Ethical Approval

Appendix B: sample of participant recruitment material

Appendix C: Invitation letter

Appendix D: Permission to carry out the research form

Appendix E: Participants consent form

Appendix F: Debriefing form

Appendix A: UEL Ethics Approval

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

REVIEWER: anonymised

SUPERVISOR: anonymised

STUDENT: Nicoleta Lazar

Course: MSc Psychology

Title of proposed study: Exploring Early Years Teachers' experience of working with children identified as having English as an Additional Language.

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.
3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES

Minor amendments required (for reviewer):

Please amend the response to Q.17 – gaining informed consent is clearly applicable in this study. You have recognised this with the inclusion of a consent form (p. 13), so this needs to be reflected in your answer to Q.17.

Please add the contact details of the Samaritans (as mentioned in response to Q.22) to your debriefing form (p. 14).

Major amendments required (for reviewer):

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments (for students):

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name (*Typed name to act as signature*): Nicoleta Lazar
Student number: 1034754

Date: 12/03/2018

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER (for reviewer)

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

YES / NO

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).

Reviewer (*Typed name to act as signature*): anonymised

Date: 12/03/18

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UELs Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard

Appendix B: Sample of participants recruitment letter/email

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: research into early years teachers' experience of teaching EAL children

I am an MSc Psychology student at the University of East London and I am involved in a research project looking at early years teachers experiences of working with EAL children. I would be very grateful if I could get your consent in approaching your Early Years and/or KS1 teams, kindly asking if any teacher(s) will be willing to take part in the project.

This will involve an approximately 40 minutes semi-structured interview, encouraging teachers to share their experience of teaching EAL children and reflecting on opportunities and challenges encountered whilst teaching this particular group of pupils. Teachers will also be encouraged to share an example of their practice regarding the possible use of children's home language in the classroom, if and how this is encouraged or supported and what possible implications this may have for the child(ren) and for the teacher.

All data collected will be securely kept under University confidentiality guidelines and will be accessed by me and my academic supervisor, for validation purposes only. Participants' names will be anonymised and no school, or its location, will be identified in the study. Data gathered will be used for the purpose of this study only, will not be shared with any third party and will be destroyed after my research thesis will be marked by University. All participants will be informed about their right to withdraw without providing any reason; in such circumstances, data collected up to the point of withdrawal will be destroyed and disposed of securely.

I would be happy to provide any further information or to discuss this further before you make a decision. Once consent is given, I would be taking the opportunity to agree with you the practicalities involved in arranging the interviews in such a way that will allow for little or no disruption at all to the teacher and/or classroom.

In order to avoid adding to the teachers' workload, I hope to be allowed to arrange for the interviews to take place in the school, perhaps towards the end of the school day. Even though no direct contact with children is required at any point, for safeguarding purposes please note that I do hold valid DBS clearance.

Look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Nicoleta Lazar



Appendix C: Invitation letter



PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree it is important that you understand what your participation would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Who am I?

I am a postgraduate student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London and am studying for a MSc Psychology degree. As part of my studies I am conducting the research you are being invited to participate in.

What is the research?

I am conducting research into Teachers' experience of working with children identified as having English as an Additional Language. The study aims to get an insight into teachers' perspective on teaching pupils who have English as an Additional Language (EAL). This research project has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that my research follows the ethical research standards set by the British Psychological Society.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been invited to participate in my research as someone who fits the kind of people I am looking for to help me explore my research topic. I am looking to involve Teachers from inner and outer London schools who are willing to share their experience of working with children whose first language is other than English.

I strongly emphasise that I am not looking for 'experts' on the topic I am studying. You (or your practice) will not be judged or personally analysed in any way and you will be treated with all due respect. You are free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel coerced.

What will your participation involve?

If you agree to participate you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview. This is more likely to feel like an informal chat rather than a formal interview. It will last approximately 30 minutes and will take place in the school, at a date and time agreed with you.

The interview will be audio recorded and it is only I and my supervisor (Dr. Dominic Conroy) will have access to recordings. Data gathered will be stored on a password protected laptop.

Your taking part will be safe and confidential

Your privacy and safety will be respected at all times. Your identity will be anonymised by changing your name and the schools or its location will not be included in any material resulted from data collection or in the write-up of the study. You will answer only the questions you want to answer and you have the right to stop the interview at any time.

What will happen to the information that you provide?

The interview you will take part in will be recorded on my devise and will not be accessed by anyone else. Signed consent forms will be securely kept for validation purposes only and will be destroyed after my study will be marked. Participants names will not be linked with interviews provided and the anonymised transcripts might be seen only by my research supervisor and /or an examiner in exceptional cases. The recordings of the interviews, their transcripts and signed consent forms will be deleted/destroyed and disposed of securely after my research thesis will be marked.

What if you want to withdraw?

You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, within two weeks of the interview date.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me: Nicoleta Lazar, [REDACTED]

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact my research supervisor:

Dr [anonymised]

School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: [anonymised]

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr [anonymised], School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: anonymised)

Appendix D: Permission to carry out the research in nursery/school premises



Permission slip (to be signed by Headteacher or Deputy Head)

This is to confirm that UEL student Nicoleta Lazar is granted permission to carry out the small-scale study and consent is given for this study to be carried out by interviewing early years teachers working at (please insert school/early years centre name & post code)

I understand that:

- ✓ Permission can be withdrawn at any time without the need to provide a reason.
- ✓ all data collected will be anonymised in order to ensure that the name of the school or teachers' names cannot be identified.
- ✓ all data collected is to be used for the purpose of this study, and consequently in research articles and/or conference submission.
- ✓ data will be kept according to Data Protection Act 1998 requirements and UEL confidentiality guidance.

Full Name:

Position:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix: Participants consent form



UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to participate in a research study

Exploring Early Years Teachers' experience of working with children identified as having English as an Additional Language.

I have read the invitation letter relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher(s) involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. This consent extends to my anonymized data being used in journal articles, conference submissions, presentations or training materials.

Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I also understand that should I withdraw, the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data **after** analysis of the data has begun.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date:

Appendix C: Debriefing form



DEBRIEFING FORM

Thank you for participating in this study.

This research was designed to explore teachers' experience of supporting bilingual learners in classroom. In doing so we hope to clarify some of the opportunities and challenges teachers might encounter in their work. We hope that this work will contribute to understanding of good practice relating to EAL teaching methods and teachers' views and opinions regarding EAL children's home language.

All interview data will remain confidential and will be kept securely during the research process. After the research process your data will be destroyed.

Should any aspect of study participation have caused distress and you would like to discuss any matter relating to this study further, please contact the Education Support Partnership free line: 08000562561 or National Education Union (NUT) helpline: 02073806369. You may also wish to contact The Samaritans' free line for further support and advice: 116 123.

If you have questions now about the research, please ask. If you have questions later, please e-mail Nicoleta at: [REDACTED]

Thank you again for your sharing your teaching experience; your views and opinions are highly valuable and may have the potential to inform and enhance good practice in early years education.