Short-circuited cosmopolitanism

The marginalisation of English as an Additional Language

This article discusses the conditions for the subject area English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the English school system. The research evidence (e.g. Tomlinson 2008) shows how the subject area has become marginalised since the 1980s. Against this background, I argue that EAL currently is not in a position to contribute to the creation of cosmopolitan imaginaries among students, parents and education professionals. In addition, I highlight that the paradigm of inclusion, including the increasing use of teaching assistants, has further undermined EAL. With regard to Danish as a second language in the Danish school context, it is therefore worrying that a similar paradigm of inclusion and teaching assistants is becoming prominent in the Danish *folkeskole*. The themes of this article are inspired by observations made at two secondary schools (years 7-11) in East London, where I worked as a teaching assistant for EAL students for three months in early 2012.

Multiculturalism in English school policy

Rather than taking the entire United Kingdom, this article focuses on England since the education systems of Scotland, Wales and

TORE BERNT SØRENSEN
PhD student (Education), Graduate School
of Education, University of Bristol, UK
t.b.sorensen@bristol.ac.uk

Northern Ireland differ to varying degrees from the English system. From a Danish perspective, English school policy is relevant to consider because a range of initiatives in Denmark are inspired by English policies, both generally and in relation to lingual minority students (Kristjánsdóttir 2006, Sørensen 2011).

Historically, the emergence of EAL and its subsequent marginalisation in the English school system is intertwined with the debate on multiculturalism. In the English context, this debate began in the mid-1960s, as it became clear that public services were not adapting well to the increasing cultural diversity of the population. In the field of education this was apparent from lower educational performance and alarming levels of students being referred to special needs education, especially among the black ethnic minorities (Tomlinson 2008, Vertovec 2007). From the beginning of the 1970s until the end of the 1980s, the emphasis on multicultural policies was relatively strong, as local policy-makers, specialist teachers and advisers – prompted by pressures from parent groups affiliated with ethnic minorities – began to develop, for example, English as a Second Language (later relabelled EAL) as well as mother tongue tuition for lingual minority students. However, the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher (1979–1990) were opposed to such initiatives. Accordingly, the major Education Reform Act of 1988 ushered in a new era with extensive marketisation of the school system, driven by a statutory national curriculum, summative assessment framework, the publication of league tables and school choice. As a result, multiculturalism in education was sidelined from public sector school education (Tomlinson 2008).

The combination of national conservatism and liberal market ideas underlying the 1988 reform still forms the basis of English school policy (Ball 2008), despite the fact that the country continues to be characterised by increasing levels of cultural diversity, not least in terms of languages. In schools, the diversity is apparent in a number of ways (NALDIC 2013):

- Nationally, students in English schools speak around 290 different mother tongues.
- Nearly 15% of students (i.e. 950,000 students) speak EAL. In 1997, the number was 500,000. In Inner London, the average is 52%, reaching 80% in some authorities.
- Nationally, 25% of students belong to another ethnic group than White British. In Inner London more than 80%.

Vertovec (2007: 1025) argues that cultural diversity in England has changed character because the variation among immigrants in terms of socio-economic background, citizenship status, place of residence and income means that statistics on ethnicity and countries of origin do not provide an adequate picture of the cultural complexity evident in English society. Vertovec uses the term 'diversification of diversity' and labels social reality in London and other English metropolitan areas as being characterised by superdiversity. On this basis, Vertovec criticises research and policies which do not take this emergent complexity into account. By focusing on EAL policies and the current status of the subject area, I show the relevance of Vertovec' critique below. On the one hand, multiculturalism is declared obsolete. On the other, society is characterised by super-diversity.

EAL and the lost potential for cosmopolitanism

Drawing on Delanty's (2009) concept of cosmopolitanism, my key argument is that in terms of language learning the English school system does not educate its students to become world citizens. My argument is based on the analytical point that the superdiversity apparent in English society is not reflected in EAL policy, and that the subject area itself remains so marginalised that it cannot challenge the nationalistic idea that English is the natural mother tongue in England.

For Delanty, cosmopolitanism is related to the creation of a common public culture that recognises cultural diversity as a reality as well as an ideal. Cosmopolitanism thus entails challenging the traditional perception of congruence between nation-state and culture, a perception European societies in particular have relied on in coping with fundamental issues with regard to identity and the status of social and cultural groups in society (Delanty 2009: 11-17, 132-156).

In principle, EAL could serve the development of cosmopolitan imaginaries among students and education professionals by enabling communication between individuals with various social and linguistic backgrounds. However, current EAL policy does not promote such forms of communication. The subject area remains so marginalised in the school curriculum and the target group and so diminutive that it does not have any substantial role in terms of recognising all students' language resources. This is not a new development, since the conditions for EAL have worsened since the

1980s (Tomlinson 2008). However, the absence of a cosmopolitan imaginary becomes increasingly remarkable with the deepening of the incongruity between the superdiversity in parts of English society and a monolingual school policy.

It is thus symptomatic that national EAL learning objectives have never been published in a school system characterised by a tremendous quantity of curricular policies. The closest attempt is an 'extended scale' from 2000, where two pre-steps were added to the National Curriculum objectives for English, meant to capture EAL students' initiate basic language learning in English (QCA 2000). This reflects the fact that EAL is based on a deficit view where only the most needy students are offered support. More advanced EAL learning thus depends on teachers' particular interests and competences. Despite this, EAL is not part of teacher education but only offered in specific master programmes. Not surprisingly, newly educated teachers have since 2003 pointed out the EAL area as the one they felt the least prepared to consider in their practice (TDA 2011).

Moreover, the EAL area was in 2010 subject to serious cuts as the current Liberal-Conservative government abolished the ring-fencing of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant. The immediate result was a reduction in EAL staff in nearly 70% of local authorities (NUT & NALDIC 2011).

Inclusion and teaching assistants

From a language-educational perspective, the debate on EAL and ethnic minority students has been further sidelined by the emergence of an inclusion paradigm which since the late-1990s has prompted more students to be taught in mainstream classes. This has resulted in an explosive growth in the number of teaching assistants in English schools. Earlier, teaching assistants were mainly employed in special schools, but with the New Labour governments (1997–2010) they also became widely used for the support of students with special needs in mainstream classes. Subsequently, some teaching assistants later came to provide more general classroom support, for example with regard to literacy (Alborz *et al.* 2009: 3-4). Between 1997 and 2008 the number of teaching assistants thus increased threefold, from 50,000 to 150,000 (NALDIC 2013).

The inclusion paradigm effectively means that EAL students are predominantly taught in mainstream classes by subject teachers. If there are resources allocated, an EAL teacher might also be present, or more often, a teaching assistant offering support to students.

Only as an exception are newly arrived students who need basic English instruction withdrawn from the class and offered short intensive courses. The number of teaching assistants focusing on ethnic minority students in England thus increased during the period 1997–2008 from 1,200 to 2,900 full-time posts. The number of EAL teachers has been more stable, with a small increase amounting to 260 full-time posts between 2004 and 2008, from approximately 1,450 to 1,713 posts (NALDIC 2013).

To sum up, the combination of the inclusion paradigm and the low political priority given to EAL results in a situation that EAL students are taught in mainstream classes by teachers and teaching assistants without specialist EAL knowledge. Subject teachers and teaching assistants are expected to cooperate, but the former are responsible for content and methods. So, in the exceptional case of the teaching assistant knowing something about EAL learning, the distribution of responsibilities might impede the application of this knowledge in practice.

In the East London schools where I worked as a teaching assistant, I furthermore experienced the aggravating effects of setting. In English secondary schools, test-based setting is the norm in the core subjects of English, Maths and Science. Secondary schools often cater for 1,000-1,500 students, and there can thus easily be four or five sets. In practice, the paradoxical combination of inclusion and setting can result in the worst possible learning conditions for especially newly arrived EAL students with basic English language learning needs. They are often allocated to the lower sets, where they are not offered appropriate opportunities for language and subject learning because the teaching – despite the presence of perhaps three or four teaching assistants – is primarily devoted to reducing the noise level. These EAL students are thus put in a situation where the teacher's objective is to prevent any interplay among students rather than to try to create a communicative learning community.

The combination of the inclusion paradigm and the low political priority given to EAL therefore short-circuits any coordinated step toward cosmopolitan language learning. This argument highlights the fact that the English school system has not proved capable of adapting to the superdiversity of the society it is part of and meant to serve. So, even though EAL students as a group in many schools constitute a majority, the political framework undermines the very recognition of their plurilingual resources that could challenge the misleading perception of English as the natural mother tongue in England.

The Danish public sector *folkeskole*

During the 2000s, Danish school policy converged with English policy with an emphatic turn towards liberal market ideas and the retreat of multiculturalism (Sørensen 2011). The arguments above are therefore worrying in relation to the future of the subject area of Danish as a second language and the general learning opportunities for plurilingual students.

The paradigm of inclusion is also being promoted in the Danish *folkeskole*, with plurilingual students as a particular target group (Ministeriet for Børn og Undervisning 2012). Moreover, the number of teaching assistants is growing due to a pilot project undertaken by the Danish Ministry of Education (Rambøll 2011, Undervisningsministeriet 2008). Although Finland is usually stated as the source of inspiration for the pilot project, its launch recalls the English model by referring to teachers' experience of '*the number of students with a disruptive behaviour is growing tremendously*', and that the focus should be on children from *'socially and culturally vulnerable families'*. Furthermore, the clear distribution of responsibilities between teachers and teaching assistants is very much in line with the English model (Undervisningsministeriet 2008, my translation):

> 'The teaching assistant arrangements mean that teachers are able to concentrate on providing their instruction while the teaching assistant for example may provide support for homework as well as pastoral care for vulnerable children and support children who find it hard to concentrate and be silent and listen during parts of the lessons.'

These official thoughts about inclusion and teaching assistants in Denmark reflect the increasing incongruity between the cultural complexity of Danish society and the absence of any political will to recognise this fact when it comes to education. Therefore, the promotion of the inclusion paradigm is worrying as it might effectively direct the debate on plurilingual students and pluralingualism further towards behaviour and socialisation rather than the recognition of linguistic resources and the associated potential for cosmopolitanism.

Conclusion

The key argument presented in this article is that students in the English school system are not educated to become world citizens

with regard to language learning. The system is based on the misleading perception that the English language is and should be the norm when it comes to the students' mother tongue. The marginalisation of EAL exposes a deepening incongruity between the emergent superdiversity of urban communities and the lack of cosmopolitan imaginaries in the school system. However, the trenchancy of the inclusion paradigm and the increasing number of teaching assistants working with EAL mean that this incongruity is not widely debated. So, as during the British colonial period, where the English language was spread to large parts of the world, the language in our contemporary postmodern era of superdiversity prevails as a key tool for the reproduction of social order (Graddol 2006: 20). In response to the English school system's failure in contributing to a common public culture, the long-standing tradition of complementary schools run by ethnic minority groups and offering language and religious education continues to exist (Issa & Williams 2009). In the Danish context, given the convergence between English and Danish school policy during the last decade, the effects of the inclusion paradigm for Danish as a second language should therefore be closely and critically monitored.

Literature

Alborz, A., Pearson, D., Farrell, P. & Howes, A. (2009). The impact of adult support staff on pupils and mainstream schools. Technical Report. *Research Evidence in Education Library*. London: University of London. Accessed on http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=2438

Ball, S.J. (2008). *The education debate.* Bristol: Policy.

Delanty, G. (2009). *The Cosmopolitan Imagination: The Renewal of Critical Social Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University.

Graddol, D. (2006). *English Next: Why Global English may mean the end of 'English as a Foreign Language'.* British Council.

Issa, T. & Williams, C. (2009). *Realising Potential: Complementary schools in the UK.* Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.

Kristjánsdóttir, B.S. (2006). *Evas skjulte børn: Diskurser om tosprogede elever i det danske nationalcurriculum.* PhD thesis. Copenhagen: Danish School of Education, Aarhus University.

Ministeriet for Børn og Undervisning (2012). *Inkluderende undervisning for tosprogede.* Accessed at http://www.uvm.dk/Aktuelt/~/UVM-DK/Content/News/Udd/Folke/2012/Mar/120314-Inkluderende-undervisning-for-tosprogede

NALDIC (2013). *EAL Statistics.* Accessed at http://www.naldic.org.uk/research-and-information/eal-statistics

NUT & NALDIC (2011). *National Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant Survey. A Summary of Findings.* Accessed at http://www.naldic.org.uk/Resources/NALDIC/Home/Documents/NUTNALDICSurveyreport060211.pdf

QCA (2000). *A language in common: Assessing English as an additional language*. London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

Rambøll (2011). *Evaluering af Undervisningsassistentordningen*. Accessed at http://www.skoleudvikling.uvm.dk/sitecore/content/Skoleudvikling/Forsoeg/~/media/Skoleudvikling/Pdf/Evaluering/Eksterne%20evalueringer/Endelig%20rapport%20UA.ashx

Sørensen, T. B. (2011). *The bias of markets: A comparative study of the market form and identity politics in English and Danish compulsory education*. Copenhagen Studies in Bilingualism, vol. 60. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.

TDA (2011). *Results of the newly qualified teacher survey 2011*. Manchester: Training and Development Agency for Schools. Accessed at http://www.tda.gov.uk/training-provider/itt/data-surveys/~/media/resources/training-provider/data-surveys/nqt_survey_results_2011.pdf

Tomlinson, S. (2008). *Race and Education: Policy and Politics in Britain*. Maidenhead: Open University.

Undervisningsministeriet (2008). *1.2. Forsøg med lektiehjælp/undervisningsassistenter*. Accessed at http://www.uvm.dk/I-fokus/95-procent-maalsaetning/~/media/UVM/Filer/Aktuelt/PDF08/081106_globalisering_assistent.ashx

Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 30(6), 1024-1054.