Teachers’ discursive constructions of ethno-linguistic difference: Professional issues in working with inclusive policy

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ABSTRACT
In recent years British education policy for school-aged children has stressed an inclusive agenda for all. For pupils from ethnic/linguistic minorities this means that they are to be included in the underdefined but unproblematically imagined ‘mainstream’ educational processes, where all students should be enabled to benefit from the publicly funded educational provision. (For a collection of policy statements, see for example, DES 1985; SCAA 1996; TTA 2000 and QCA 2000.) At the same time there is also recurring anxiety over persistent racism and ethnic minority ‘under-achievement’; these concerns are seen as a manifestation of ‘exclusion’ of minority groups from the rhetorically constructed accessible inclusive whole. And yet, minority languages and cultural practices are often sidelined (for instance, the very peripheral curriculum status conferred on minority community languages). In other words, the mainstream curriculum and educational practices are selectively inclusive and ambiguously exclusive at the same time. This reflects an unresolved tension in both policy discourse and policy analysis.

Against this backdrop we discuss how this policy (and discourse) of inclusiveness works out in specific instances of teachers addressing issues of ethnic diversity and language pedagogy for minorities. We focus on two specific aspects of school education policy: multiculturalism and English as an additional language (EAL). The discussion will first look at policy as an interpretive process (and not as a fixed meaning). We then adopt this perspective to discuss some of the ways multiculturalism and EAL policies are interpreted and taken up by teachers involved in two studies (Creese 2001; Davies and Leung 2001). We will reflectively comment on some of the epistemological reasons for the interpretive approach we have adopted at appropriate points in the discussion. We conclude by making some brief comments on professional responses to policy and their implications in terms of future professional development.

Policy in practice
In this discussion we use the term policy to refer to formal policy and quasi-policy statements as well as other discursive expressions found in relevant
official curriculum documents. We will not attempt a comprehensive listing of all policy statements on ethno-linguistic matters; the official documents cited here have been selected to highlight the policy tendencies under discussion.

We would argue that an educational policy, such as inclusion, which is indirectly concerned with making decisions about cultural values, the uses of languages, and the users of languages is, among other things, a policy on cultures and languages. The educational policies of inclusion have emerged from a constellation of views which has coalesced into sets of ideological perspectives and policy/professional discourses. In this discussion we are principally interested in the interaction, indexically represented by their discourses, of two groups of professional participants: policy makers and teachers. The discourses of these participants support, maintain and undermine the ideologies of inclusion and the policy documents which purport them. In looking at the ways teachers’ discourses index the concept of inclusion and its policy documents, we attempt to consider some of the political and educational dimensions of this policy with reference to teachers and their views on language/s and ethnic minority children in English schools.

The link between educational ideologies and language policies has been made explicit elsewhere. Tollefson (1991, 1995), for one, has explored the connections between ideologies of power in the modern state and the development of language policies. He has shown how the Swann Report in Britain, by projecting the need to construct a ‘mainstream’ society based on a conflict-free notion of social and ethnic pluralism, argues that the role of mainstream education ‘cannot be expected to … reinforce the values, beliefs, and cultural identity which each child brings to school’ (DES 1985: 321). The Report accepts a monolingual ideology which regards the English language as a central unifying factor in ‘being British’. In a similar vein, Ricento (1998, 2000a: 205) argues that:

… the evaluation of the relative effectiveness of bilingual education policies in US public education varies according to the operating assumption and expectations of different interested constituencies, but that the underlying and nearly universally shared goal of education policies – the cultural and linguistic assimilation of non-English speakers – reflects ideologies of language and American identity that have become hegemonic, especially in the wake of the Americanisation campaign, 1914–1924.

Within the language planning and policy literature there is now a realisation that concepts such as inclusion, bilingualism and multilingualism are conceptually complex and ideologically laden (Ricento 2000a, 2000b; Ager 2001; May 2001) and that language planning is not a neutral problem-solving process. Moreover, ideologies of language are linked to other ideologies
that can influence and constrain the development of language policies. Ricento (2000b) argues for a paradigm which considers the political and the economic dimensions of the social and cognitive in language behaviour.

In more or less liberal democracies we can expect a huge variability of views in the ways teachers talk about and respond to the notions of inclusion, diversity and difference. The belief that it is possible to ‘deliver’ a strategy or a policy in the public arena in a straightforward way is increasingly being called into question (Ball 1997; Ricento 2000a). For instance, Ball (1997: 270) argues that we need a much more localised understanding of how policy works:

The prevailing, but normally implicit view is that policy is something that is ‘done’ to people. As first-order recipients ‘they’ ‘implement’ policy, as second-order recipients ‘they’ are advantaged or disadvantaged by it. I take a different view … That is, as noted earlier; policies pose problems to their subjects, problems that must be solved in context. Solutions to the problems posed by policy texts will be localised and should be expected to display ‘ad hocery’ and messiness. Responses indeed must be ‘creative’. Policies do not normally tell you what to do; they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do is narrowed or changed or particular goals or outcomes are set. A response must still be put together, constructed in context, offset against or balanced by other expectations. All of this involves creative social action of some kind.

We see here policy presented as an interpretive and potentially messy process. As Yanow (1996) observes, the relationship between policy and implementation outcome is not necessarily linear and straightforwardly top-down. Participant mediation in the implementation process involves, among other things, interpretation and negotiation of policy meaning; at a local level policy meaning is often filtered through institutional and individual experiences, values and perceptions. Another way of saying this is that, in relation to education, policy positions and goals are cultivated in the particular social realities of policy makers which may not be shared by those outside the decision-making process. As a result, we might expect policy meaning to be understood and interpreted differently in school communities. Thus, individually and collectively teachers within their school communities will operate policy according to their local contexts, experiences and values, even where there is a strong element of statutory compliance. They will interact with policy not in a one-to-one reading of what ‘is required’ but in an interactive frame which involves their own interpretation within localised communities of practice1.

One possible benefit of this kind of conceptual approach to the relationship between policy and teacher discourses is that we can begin to see teachers’ responses to and representations of policy as situated within a particular
ideological environment. This is important because it allows us to see that teachers are not to be held solely responsible for the variations and inconsistencies in their ‘takes’ on policy. We explore this in the second part of this paper.

**Inclusive society: From difference to commonality**

One of the recurring themes of domestic politics in contemporary Britain has been the need to find a way of living with ethno-linguistic diversity. According to the current statistics, about 4 million (6.7 per cent of 58.7 million) of the total UK population are from ethnic minority backgrounds. And this figure is likely to grow rapidly because of the combined effects of natural population growth and accelerating immigration projected for the next twenty years.

![Figure 1: The ethnic minority population (percentage of total population in UK)](source: The Guardian, November 2002)

In the school population it is estimated that 10 per cent of the students are of ethnic minority heritage and over half a million students come from homes where English is not the first language. (DfEE 1997)

Ethnic and linguistic diversity is celebrated in social and educational policy statements. For instance, in a speech made to an audience of black teenagers, the Home Secretary is reported to have made the following statement:

> Wherever we come from, whatever our roots or our faith, we have a stake in being British and we can be proud of that. Celebrating diversity and building a fairer, more confident multicultural nation with a fresh, strong sense of national identity is an important and timely project. Having confidence in yourself and holding on to a dream of what you can achieve is so important. Nothing should hold you back in reaching your full potential. I want a society that gives you these chances, a society where each of you, regardless of colour or race or religion has an equal opportunity to succeed. It is your future and we need to hear from you. (TTA 2000: 7) (Emphasis added)
This statement reflects a view of society where the construction of a fairer and multicultural nation is a two-way affair based on equal worth: ‘society’ will give everyone, irrespective of racial and religious difference, an equal chance to succeed and ‘minorities’ are invited to make an active effort to participate in this new nation-building project. There is an implicit partnership in this formulation which can be traced back, at least, to the Swann Report (DES 1985: 5) which was charged with a specific brief to address educational issues for ethnic minorities:

We believe that a genuinely pluralist society cannot be achieved without the social integration of ethnic minority communities and the ethnic majority community within a common whole. Whilst we are not looking for the assimilation of the minority communities within an unchanged dominant way of life, we are perhaps looking for the ‘assimilation’ of all groups within a redefined concept of what it means to live in British society today. (Original italics)

Like the Home Secretary’s statement quoted above, the report explicitly acknowledges the existence of ethnicity as a key consideration and argues for a particular kind of inclusive and active pluralism. Thus it can be seen that in the past two decades there has been a fairly consistent policy direction.

Educational inclusion: The construction of an open-access mainstream

The sentiments concerning social inclusion seen earlier are very much reflected in the more specifically education-oriented policy statements. For instance:

Many children in English schools regularly speak a language other than English and about 200 different languages are used by pupils in the classroom. Such linguistic diversity is an asset. It provides an opportunity for pupils to gain first-hand experience, knowledge and understanding of other cultures and perspectives. It also helps to prepare pupils for life in a multicultural society by promoting respect for all forms of language. Variety of language is a rich resource which schools should use as they implement the National Curriculum. (NCC 1991: 1)

The majority-minority coming together view of society is clearly reflected in this perspective of school education. Linguistic diversity is presented as an asset in the creation of an inclusive multicultural society. That is, other languages are promoted for their role in fostering a deeper understanding of cultural diversity, not for their role in teaching and learning processes. The English language predominantly maintains this function. Perhaps it is not surprising then that all teachers are expected to take on the responsibility of teaching English to those ‘bilingual’ students who are more or less new to English:
Language teaching is the professional responsibility of all teachers … The National Curriculum is for all pupils except the few for whom modification and disapplication is appropriate … Providing access to the curriculum for bilingual pupils means planning and implementing schemes of work which meet individual needs. The pupil’s own level of language development should provide the starting point for work. (NCC 1991: 1)

The ‘access’ to the curriculum referred to in this advice has been largely interpreted to mean the use of classroom strategies such as the use of visuals and realia to convey meaning, hands-on activities to encourage direct participation, and the use of matrices and true/false exercises to bypass some of the more complex language demands. In other words, the focus of attention is on classroom process. With the possible exception of grammar (DfES 2002), there has been little explicit and disciplined discussion on the systematic development of EAL and students’ L1 language learning, that is, language curriculum issues (see NCC 1991; SCAA 1996; QCA 2000 and DfEE 2001 for official curriculum statements; for a discussion see Leung 2001).

While the official statements on multiculturalism and EAL are technically advisory, in practice they form a prominent and unavoidable part of teachers’ professional environment because many of the ideas embedded in these statements are operationalised in key working documents such as the inspection criteria used to evaluate teaching quality (for example, OFSTED 2001).

**Method**

This discussion makes use of two sets of teacher interview discourse data. The first set is drawn from a year-long ethnographical study in three London secondary schools in which the aim of the project was to look at the policy of inclusion in classroom practice through the eyes of collaborating teachers (Creese 1997). The ethnographic and semi-structured interview data comes from 26 teachers in total. Twelve of these were EAL teachers and fourteen were curriculum subject teachers. Of the twelve EAL teachers, six teachers were bilingual Turkish-speaking EAL teachers. The remaining EAL teachers were not bilingual in a classroom community language other than English.

The second set is drawn from a project which was an evaluation study of an EAL in-service training course. The data reported here are part of a corpus of interviews with 25 class or subject teachers who participated in this training course (Davies and Leung 2001). The teacher quotes are drawn from the semi-structured interviews with the participants at the beginning of the training course; the purpose of these interviews was to establish the teachers’ professional views on EAL-related issues.

Both sets of data were selected and analysed in the same manner. First,
the individual researchers selected interview transcripts which touched on
issues of inclusion. These data sets were then exchanged with the second
researcher. Next a process of interpretation began as each researcher sepa-
ratelty offered their interpretation of the transcripts to one another. Finally
several themes were settled on as being salient across the two different sets of
teacher interview data. These themes resonated with the themes emerging
from the policy documents. Two of the themes are discussed in this paper:
first, notions of linguistic difference and its place in the mainstream class-
room; and second, the conceptualisation of EAL and its perceived impact
on students’ intellectual/language development.

Linguistic difference: The role of other languages in the
mainstream classroom

We have argued above that a certain continuity exists in the policy direction
taken by successive British governments toward developing a particular view
of multicultural Britain. Inclusion in Britain today incorporates differences
in race, religion and roots (see earlier Home Secretary quote). The absence
of linguistic differences incorporated into this view is marked. Speaking
another language is not a difference included in the current nation-building
agenda. However, this absence also tracks a continuity in past and present
policy documents. Support for other languages in public policy has never
moved beyond a minimal transitional endorsement with the expectation of
 eventual full acquisition and use of English in the public domain. The use
of languages other than English in England is seen as the remit of the home.2

Within education policy documents we see a similar ‘under’ endorse-
ment of other languages. They are viewed as providing a rich resource for
the learning of English language and their use is transitional only.

The National Curriculum recognises that variety of language is a rich resource
which can support learning in English. Where appropriate, pupils should be
couraged to make use of their understanding and skills in other languages in
learning English. (SCAA 1996: 2)

However, there is an increasing criticism of this ‘rich resource’ view of
other languages as it does little more than ‘celebrate’ bilingualism to indicate
moral and social approval (Bourne 2001; Creese 2000, in press; Martin-Jones
and Saxena 1996, in press). It is rarely translated into systematic curriculum
action. The point made is that minority languages are, as a rule, not used in the
classroom by teachers or students in arguably the most important of schools’
aims, the guided construction of curriculum knowledge (Mercer 1995).
Therefore, the marginal use, if at all, of minority languages functions in ways which lower their status within the school setting. The inclusive rhetoric of government policy towards linguistic difference, then, is held at the level of a celebratory discourse without any real bite. Now let us turn to consider how some teachers talked about linguistic diversity in their classrooms.

As we would expect, teachers express a huge variety of views regarding the use of other languages in mainstream classrooms. These include an endorsement of the ‘rich resource’ and transitional view of bilingualism put forward in policy documents.

Teacher data Extract 1

Yes it [students’ first language] can be a great support, it can be a great pastoral support. I don’t know whether sometimes it stays too much part of the classroom. I don’t know. I mean, this is a vague observation, but when sometimes a lesson is accessed by translation, I don’t know whether that is terribly helpful ... I think there is a bit of a risk in terms of too much use of mother tongue from teacher to pupil within the classroom. Outside the classroom, yes, for different purposes, but within the classroom it can be risky.

(Deputy head, secondary school)

This deputy head puts forward a general position very similar to the policy documents above but with qualification. The utterances ‘… sometimes it stays too much part of the classroom …’ and ‘… when sometimes a lesson is accessed by translation, I don’t know whether that is terribly helpful …’ seem to question the value of minority first languages for teaching and learning purposes. Other languages have a place in schools for pastoral purposes but not for classroom work. And indeed we can see the construction of the school classroom as an English only zone in some teacher discourse.

Teacher data Extract 2

I think it should be used as rarely as possible. And I am not sure if that is because I cannot use it and I am jealous. Maybe it is that slight ego thing, that the way I do it is best and because the way I do it is in English, there is that side of you that thinks this is the best way of doing it.

(EAL teacher, secondary school)

A similar sentiment to Extract 1 is expressed here. However, the teacher offers a set of even more complex personal and professional views. The sense in ‘… I am not sure if that is because I cannot use it and I am jealous’ seems to point to a perceived futility of promoting the use of minority languages when teachers do not have the expertise and, at the same time, there appears to be an acknowledgment that knowing another language is a good thing in itself. This EAL teacher presents his work as supporting the acquisition of
English through curriculum learning. Like many teachers working in primary and secondary schools, the belief is that learning English can best happen in the rich input context of the mainstream classroom. And yet teachers also express a dilemma and uneasiness with this view. In the following quote, the teacher is responding to the question, ‘Do you think bilingual children learn best in the mainstream classroom?’

Teacher data Extract 3

It depends on their language ability. Where we have complete and utter beginners, no I don’t think they should be in the classroom. They are just so demanding in terms of time, you either teach them or you don’t and if you teach them nobody else gets a look in, or the amount of time they have from me is so minimal that it is not fair on anybody. Yes, I am always conscious that they want more time … On the other hand you are aware that the lesson is coming to an end in five minutes time, you want to do an overall summary for everybody and often it is much quicker to say well, that is the answer, and do it for them.

(History teacher, secondary school)

In this quote we can see the overall pressure and responsibility the subject teacher feels towards the curriculum and the lack of responsibility that he feels towards teaching English. However, such is the pressure for curriculum transmission, that we can see an interesting endorsement by subject teachers for the use of minority languages in the classroom beyond the limited minority language as ‘rich resource’ function.

Teacher data Extract 4

I don’t discourage the use of the first language if people need to communicate in it. I am quite happy if it clarifies. I mean, I can’t use it myself because I have no idea. But if somebody said yes, he could understand this if we translated it, then yes. Because as I said, my aim is to get them to understand. I don’t care if they understand in English, Turkish or whatever.

(Geography teacher, secondary school)

This teacher, in contrast with the other teachers cited above, seems to take an instrumental view of language as a medium of instruction; this view seems to say: if using Turkish gets the job done, then let’s use it. The pressures of delivering the statutory curriculum content may be linked to this instrumental view.

The use of minority languages for curriculum learning in secondary schools was fairly consistently endorsed by subject teachers in the ethnographic data (Creese 1997, 2002). This went hand in hand with the request for bilingual EAL support or the subject teacher expressing an interest in teaching the subject area bilingually. Below three teacher transcripts from different schools are given.
Teacher data Extract 5

I wish I could have a Turkish-speaking member of staff, who could come in and help. But obviously that is not possible, because of lack of resources. But yes, sometimes I come out of lessons and I feel I’ve failed in my job to try to get to all the children, you know, I’ve failed to help kids who couldn’t understand what I was saying because of the language barrier and I do wish I had Birgul (bilingual EAL teacher) in the class. And I’m sure that sometimes the pupils also feel that ‘I wish Birgul were here so that they could understand what Sir was trying to tell me.’ But I do see that as part of the teaching process, you know, having to struggle to get to a pupil’s understanding and level.

(Mathematics teacher, secondary school)

Teacher data Extract 6

We do not do enough about different cultures, about their cultures, getting them involved, bringing their culture into the classroom. I would love to do teaching technology in another language, things like that. I would love to make it more cultural because it tends to be very, very, white, middle-class teaching that happens, certainly within the food area, I’ve noticed. Perhaps you could come in, you could have a technology lesson, look at it in another language, look at it in another culture. (Technology teacher, secondary school)

Teacher data Extract 7

If I were head here I would employ a few more Turkish teachers without a doubt and I would have them in the class. You know in different classes ... I think first and foremost support and I would have a very clear program of what I wanted to do. You know I’d maybe attach a Turkish teacher to every big department and have them working with that department. You know something like that could be real and it could work. But I don’t think there is any urgency, I don’t think they see that ... I mean this is all to do with money ... definitions of success are dictated by league table and I mean Turkish kids are not going to show well in the league tables no matter what you do, so you know they are going to take a back seat. (English teacher, secondary school)

These teacher quotes suggest that there is a body of opinion that, in addition to adopting an instrumental view of language (that is, it doesn’t matter which language you use, as long as the students can learn through it), values a curriculum that is more permeated with multilingual practices. The point made in the utterance ‘... definitions of success are dictated by league table and I mean Turkish kids are not going to show well in the league tables no matter what you do, so you know they are going to take a back seat’ seems to reflect this teacher’s cynical appraisal of the assumptions and priorities operating in the education system.

In this section we have tried to present a composite view of teachers’ discourses on minority languages in the mainstream. We see traces of
top-down policy discourse in the local discourses of teachers, particularly in respect of the views of other languages as transitional rich resources. However, we also see a bottom-up discourse on linguistic and cultural diversity not presented so obviously in policy documents. Our data show teachers endorsing the instrumental use of minority languages for curriculum learning, an approach which until now has not been addressed professionally but may be understood in relation to the pressures teachers are under to deliver the curriculum.

EAL as a curriculum issue

The data in the following section are drawn from a study of a professional development program (Davies and Leung 2001). Under the current initial teacher training arrangements, EAL is not a main subject option, and trainee teachers cannot gain a qualified teacher status by studying it. Some local education authorities organise in-service courses on EAL to extend teachers’ knowledge and skills. The teacher participants on this particular course were secondary and primary subject or class teachers without previous formal training in EAL. We will focus on two of the recurring themes that have emerged from the data. The first is concerned with how the teacher participants construed EAL as a discipline. Responding to questions in a semi-structured interview on why they joined the in-service course and what they might wish to gain or learn from the in-service course on EAL issues, the following extract of teacher discourse represents a broad direction in the data:

Teacher data Extract 8

It has always been my belief, my philosophy, that if every student is given the chance even though we have different levels, we will all be able to develop the potential that we have. So that is one of my main aims of entering this course … First and foremost I want to see that they love the subject. There are some individuals who like to be there but some of them think, you know, because they are very weak in English they feel that they don't want to come, not that they don't want to come because they think I'm going to be harsh on them or something but I'm not, but what I want them to note is that we are just here to help them so they will be able to know that it is because of them that I'm here to help them and therefore they will be able to enjoy the lesson as we go along. (Secondary teacher)

Teacher data Extract 9

Well, I think fundamentally being a teacher our business is educating children and the most important part of that business is our relationship, that is, if you
have got a teacher who hasn’t got a good relationship, who doesn’t understand the children, then they are not going to be able to gain the children's confidence or be able to teach the children. The children aren’t going to have any respect for them. Where else if you have got a teacher that has got their confidence and understands them and understands how they work and how their background works, then in terms of pushing the children on and producing not just academic standards but social standards and behavioural standards is a really, really important thing. (Primary teacher)

These remarks were made at the beginning of an in-service training course, so it would be unreasonable to expect the participants to have an insightful and detailed view on the content of the in-service program. But what is interesting is the conceptualisation underpinning these remarks in terms of what EAL is. It would seem that the participant teachers here were expressing professionally responsible but highly generalised and cross-disciplinary views of the importance of being helpful and approachable to students, the need to motivate students, and the need to build good relations with students. These qualities, arguably, are equally important in the teaching of all curriculum areas and for all students. We would suggest that these remarks reflect a perception of EAL as a highly diffused curriculum process directly concerned with the humanistic aspects of schooling and teaching. The fact that (non-EAL) secondary subject teachers and primary class teachers appeared to hold such a view is quite telling. We might ask ourselves, were these teachers to be taking an in-service course in another curriculum area in which they were non-expert, such as the teaching of science or mathematics, would they show a similar concern with just the humanistic aspects of teaching? Or, could we expect that at the start of such a science or mathematics ‘taster’ or ‘familiarisation’ course, teachers would express a desire to receive some specific subject content input in the disciplinary area under study? Put differently, it would be reasonable to expect that in any discussion on the teaching of, say, mathematics, there is likely to be at least some reference to the subject content such as ‘number’ and ‘measure’. And yet, when EAL is discussed this does not seem to be the case. In Extracts 8 and 9 above, the absence of any mention of the content of EAL is noticeable. The two teacher quotes focus on pedagogy in the widest possible sense. They are focused on the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’ of learning. Obviously, the ‘how’ is a concern for all teachers in all subject areas. What is missing in these quotes is the ‘what’ of EAL, the absence of which suggests that the teaching of EAL is being constructed as a ‘content-free’ aspect of teaching. EAL is represented as a kind of ‘sensitive’ encounter and engagement between the teacher and EAL students, rather than as a subject area with its own knowledge base of
educational/applied linguistics and language learning. In a sense we can see the influence of the policy discourse on teachers. When there is little sustained and systematic discussion on the learning/teaching content of EAL in policy documents, then this process-oriented conceptualisation is perhaps unsurprising.

When invited to say something about their individual concerns about EAL in general, we found two main types of expressed opinions in the data, which can be exemplified by the following two quotes:

**Teacher data Extract 10**
Well, there is one thing I feel quite bad about it is that when sometimes the children speak in their own language in the class … but they are not really [encouraged] to communicate really in class with their own language …

(Secondary teacher)

**Teacher data Extract 11**
Yes, children where their parents are not helping. I’m talking about in the sense of parents who can’t read or write, not English per se, but any other language and I have interviewed some of them and you would be surprised most of these students that I have parents (unclear) speak even Urdu or in their local dialect they speak but they can’t read or write themselves, and the children therefore have this very weak background because they are very weak in English and also because their parents can’t even speak English, their grammar and construction is not good enough. And therefore they are lost in two worlds, they come to school, we help them, but once they are in the home, homework is not done because there is nobody to explain … so I’m worried that they are being left out, these children are being left out.

(Secondary teacher)

The first of these two teacher quotes represents a personal response to linguistic diversity which is consistent with the official policy position. The second is indicative of a particular concern among some teachers that EAL children are, in a fundamental way, suffering from the lack of support because the home situation is so very different from what the school or the teachers themselves would consider to be a supportive environment. The idea that ‘[the students] are lost in two worlds’ seems to suggest the diglossic situation these students live with is not conducive to development in English. The difference between the home language (and cultural) practices and the school’s expectations is seen as a difficulty or a potential problem.

From the point of view of this discussion, we note that the first of these two quotes raises questions about school-based institutional ethos and practices which may suggest a collective local disposition which is divergent from the public policy stance. Here the teacher was expressing a concern about the
negative evaluation of EAL students’ other languages in school. The second is indicative of a view that cultural and linguistic diversity is a deficit from an ethno-linguistic-majority perspective. The students in question are seen to have the wrong kind of cultural and linguistic capital. This perspective is at variance with the official construction of a multiculturalism that is based on an assumption of equal worth of all parties involved. These examples indicate that divergence from a central policy may occur at an individual teacher level as well as at the level of institutional practice.

**Policy as issue-raising and problem-solving**

The teacher discourse reported here strongly supports the view that educational policy, just like any other area of public policy, in a society such as Britain cannot be regarded as a blueprint for straightforward interpretation and implementation. Yanow (1996: 8) points out that ‘[t]oo much of policy analysis, implementation studies, and descriptions of policy process is shaped by the assumption that all human action is literal and instrumentally rational’. In reality policy statements tend to represent an expression of a developed and articulated position based on a particular point of view. Educational policies are no different from any other kind of public policy in this respect. As Ball (1997) argues, the first-order participants, in this case teachers and schools, have to work out a local response based on their interpretation and evaluation of policy meaning.

The British inclusive education policy acknowledges linguistic diversity among the student population, and at the same time endorses a form of transitional bilingualism that privileges English as the preferred language. It promotes active majority-minority participation in the mainstream educational arena which appears to place a premium on projecting a two-way process of majority-minority interaction, and to underplay the differentials in participants’ (majority or minority) background or current readiness for such engagement. The teachers in our studies appeared to have interpreted and responded to policy in ways which reflect a mixture of personal and professional concerns. When one of the teachers said ‘I cannot use [students’ L1] … maybe it is that slight ego thing, that the way I do it is best …’, it was a highly personal response. When another teacher said that ‘my aim is to get them to understand. I don’t care if they understand in English, Turkish or whatever’, it was a professional response invoking the concern of a subject teacher to help students understand content.

It is not suggested here that the current inclusive education in Britain is a ‘failed’ policy in the sense that the key tenets of this policy are wrong-headed or ill conceived. What we are suggesting is that if we are to understand
what a policy means, and how it works out, we need to pay attention to the ways policy meanings are understood and taken up by practitioners/teachers. The implementation of a policy clearly does not entirely depend upon individual teacher interpretations and responses. However, for an educational policy to be something that teachers can work with productively, and not just a requirement to be carried out as a kind of ‘performativity’, then it has to resonate well with teachers’ perceptions and concerns. This means that policy makers and planners may have to take note of the ways the rational and the cognitively known elements of policy interact with teacher values, and local practices and concerns. Conventionally policy-oriented professional development activities tend to assume universal teacher complicity and to focus on practical implementation issues. Our analysis and empirical findings would argue that professional development activities should pay a great deal more attention to explicating and developing policy meanings at a local level, taking into account prevailing teacher values and institutional practices. An open top-down and bottom-up interaction between central policy and local responses will assist effective policy analysis and evaluation; it will also help promote a consciousness of the need for continuous rethinking and updating of central policy and local practices.

NOTES
1 The recent experience of the implementation of Proposition 227 in California is a good case in point; accounts provided by Maxwell-Jolly (2000) and Garcia and Curry-Rodriguez (2000), among others, show the complex interaction between policy and local realities.
2 Even the home context as a place to use other languages has recently been called into question. See the Home Secretary’s recent remarks on using other languages at home (Guardian Unlimited, 2002)
3 Key: (unclear) = unclear audio recording

REFERENCES


