HISTORICAL VIGNETTE

Tracing the path of ESL provision in international schools over the last four decades.

Part 1

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This article will trace trends in the provision of pedagogical programmes for non-native speakers of English in international schools and worldwide; suggest why particular programme models – or lack of them – were chosen; and point to a viable model for schools in the future, with a carefully argued justification. The focus will be on the middle and upper school as this is my speciality. References will be given for those who care to follow the arguments in more detail.

The period under review happens to coincide with great advances in various aspects of language, including second language acquisition and bilingualism. These are both disciplines that have generated and continue to generate a truly massive amount of professional literature which can be daunting to those who wish to establish manageable models of practice in schools. In contrast to this positive aspect is the way in which the national systems of the countries of the English-speaking world have themselves chosen models for non-English speaking immigrants.

The time-span happens to coincide with my own professional life: I graduated with a degree in modern languages in 1967; I completed a PGCE with a special focus on English as a Second Language (ESL) in 1970; did an MA in Linguistics for English Language Teaching in 1979; and tied it all together with a doctorate on aspects of bilingualism in 2010. Throughout this time I was teaching English to non-speakers of English in various parts of the world, and from 1981-2009 headed the ESL & mother tongue department at the Vienna International School, secondary.

In the 1970s and early 1980s the preferred model in many international schools was to pull ESL students out of some classes and give them English language instruction in small groups. The focus was on the four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – and grammar and spelling: a traditional approach. ESL teachers were seen largely as an adjunct to English departments, and peripheral to the traditional subjects taught by the main departments: maths, science, humanities, English, foreign languages, arts, and PE.

In 1983 a group of ESL teachers met at the autumn ECIS conference in Rome and formed a subject committee specifically for ESL. There was growing recognition that there were increasing numbers of ESL students, and those of us who had studied the field in depth recognised that current models were not taking into account latest research.

In 1987 the committee organised its first subject conference, in Vienna, and Professor Jim Cummins was invited as the keynote speaker (see Baker and Hornberger, 2001, for an overview of his writings). ESL teachers came from many international schools, and were able to hear about: the time needed for students to learn English; the importance of maintaining literacy in the mother tongue as skills learnt there transferred to the second language; the distinction between conversational English, learnt in up to two years, and academic English, requiring up to seven years; the importance of 'empowering' ESL students so that they had a sense of self-worth which led to more successful progress.

The committee built on this breakthrough in 1989 where, at the second ESL subject conference, Professor Virginia Collier was invited as the keynote speaker. She and her partner, Professor Wayne Thomas, had undertaken a massive project of 'number-crunching' vast amounts of data of ESL students in the USA (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Their results showed the benefits of certain types of programme over others, shown opposite. However, they focused on the benefits of bilingual models, which in the USA implies English/Spanish. In international schools there are generally small groups of speakers of many different languages, so a bilingual model is not possible. Collier wrote:

> When the demographics of a school population include a multilingual student group with small numbers of each language represented, then mother-tongue literacy development for each language group, combined with ESL taught through academic

content, may be the best choice for support of non-English-speakers' needs (Collier, 2003: 8).

Having such a statement from such a respected expert in the field gave added impetus to those who could see the potential of ESL students, and what they could bring to international education, as opposed to the increasingly peripheral model obtaining in some national systems. In the chart shown below 'ESL taught through academic content' is 'program 7', but if the student's mother tongue is in addition taught individually it is likely that the type of programme advocated in this article would equate at the very least to 'program 3'.

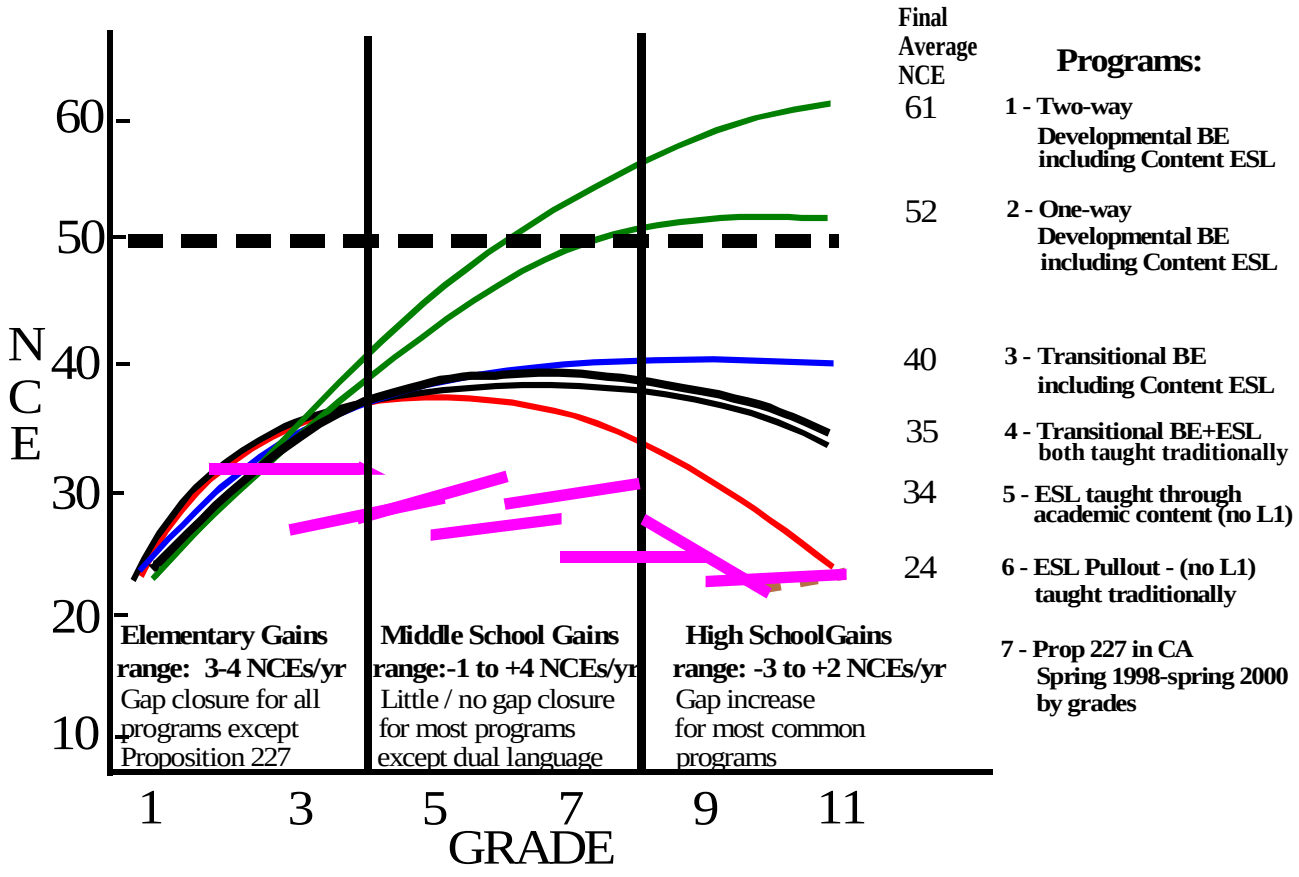
Certainly, I have found over many years that the second language students I taught were 'high fliers', a fact borne out by Frank Monaghan, a senior lecturer in education and language studies at the Open University, who said recently that 'some of the highest achieving pupils in British schools were those not having English as a first language' (*The Times,* 26.04.2014).

However, although unaware of it at the time – the early 1990s – those of us in international schools who saw a positive future for ESL students in increasingly better programmes did not realise or anticipate the pervasive role of politics in education. Whereas on one hand researchers were producing evidence that showed the many benefits of carefully-constructed programmes for ESL students, the nature of such students in national systems as immigrants had led to politicians reacting with characteristic knee-jerk fashion to demands from some sections of the voting public.

ENGLISH LEARNERS= LONG-TERM K-12 ACHIEVEMENT IN NORMAL CURVE EQUIVALENTS (NCEs) ON STANDARDIZED TESTS IN ENGLISH READING COMPARED ACROSS SEVEN PROGRAM MODELS

(Results aggregated from a series of longitudinal studies of well-implemented, mature programs in five school districts and in California from 1998-2000

Program 1: Two-way developmental bilingual education (BE), including Content ESL
Program 2: One-way developmental BE, including ESL taught through academic content
Program 3: Transitional BE, including ESL taught through academic content
Program 4: Transitional BE, including ESL, both taught traditionally
Program 5: ESL taught through academic content using current approaches with no L1 use
Program 6: ESL pullout - taught traditionally
Program 7: Proposition 227 in California (sequential 2-year cohorts, spring 1998-spring 2000)



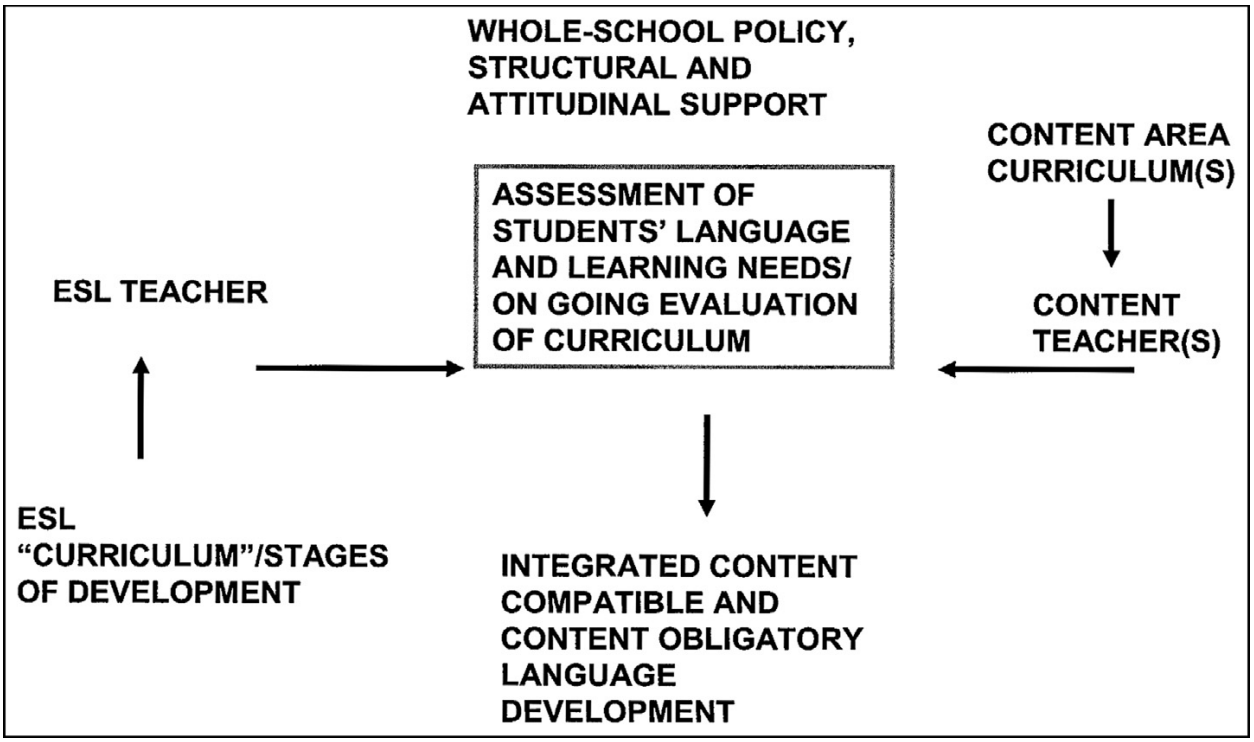
The history of this politicization has been documented by various authors (Crawford, 2000, Mohan *et al*, 2001) and summarized for the international school sector (Carder, 2008, Carder 2013). Crawford and Krashen wrote (2007: 10):

> Educators must learn to cope with external pressures and become strong advocates for the programs that best serve ELLs [English language learners]. Perhaps no other area of education has been more politicized in recent years. Immigration has become a stormy controversy and language a frequent lightning rod.

Also (op.cit: 14)

> What are the worst mistakes schools make in serving ELL students? Three common responses can be summed up as denial, delegating, and remediation. None of them is beneficial to ELLs.

It is necessary to note the importance of immigration in national debates about ESL, a factor which should not be an issue in international schools. Some 25 years ago research was indicating that more collaboration between ESL and content teachers was the way forward, input and feedback taking place along the lines shown in the diagram below.



A conceptual framework for integrated language and content instruction. In Davison (2006: 457), adapted from: Snow *et al* (1989: 205).

Since then ESL teachers have been working in collaboration with mainstream teachers in their various content areas in secondary schools. In national systems the model has varied: in the USA and Canada there are sheltered or content-area curricula for ESL classes; in England there is partnership teaching where the ESL teacher is referred to as the 'language support teacher' and works together with the class teacher on planning, teaching and assessment; in Australia there are separate ESL classes and also ESL teachers working with mainstream teachers.

Terminology changed over time in response to various national perceptions (see Carder, 2013). In England, Rampton (1997) proposed the term 'EAL – English as an additional language' as various government edicts, produced as the result of fears of allegations of racism over separate ESL classes, had tainted the use of the term 'ESL'. In the USA, at a time when more attention was being paid to politically correct language, and litigation was in the air in some states about the denial of access to language programmes, various terms evolved. 'Limited English Proficiency - LEP' became the term required in order for schools to obtain government funding.

'English Language Learners – ELLs' is in vogue at present to refer to the students learning English. A newer term, perhaps preferable as it embraces various aspects of students' identities, is 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse students – CLD'. However, misconceptions abound about the suitability or preferability of these terms. Schools organise debates about whether to call themselves the EAL or the ESL department. This can easily detract from what should be the true focus of any debate on the area: what are we actually doing for the ESL students?

Block (2003) writes about the term 'ESL', and suggests that he prefers 'EAL' as it 'captures the notion of the ongoing accumulation of linguistic knowledge' (op.cit: 57). However, he admits that since the discipline on which it is based is 'SLA – second language acquisition' – 'changing SLA to ALA (additional language acquisition) would be the kind of seismic shift that academic fields seldom, if ever, impose on themselves' (op.cit: 57).

These 'terminology wars' do more to show up divisive politics and academic in-fighting than help the students who need effective programmes. Critics of the term 'ESL' might find it useful to dwell on the expressions 'second nature' or 'getting your second wind' in order to give a parallel to the idea of learning a language so well that it comes naturally, or brings a benefit. And 'secondary education' describes a progression, just as 'tertiary education' is the term for university study: 'Tertiary' could easily be demolished for relating to 'third class', but no such allegation has occurred. Metaphor as a way of expressing our true needs has been extensively documented by, for example, McGilchrist, (2009).

It thus seems apparent that 'ESL' was 'disappeared' for political reasons. I shall use the term 'ESL' throughout as it reflects the academic discipline, SLA, on which the pedagogy is based, and it is interesting to note that the term is gaining renewed credence in England, where the BBC recently (25-03-2014, bbc.co.uk) wrote that:

> a City of Leeds School is to teach English as a second language to all its pupils, including native English speakers, in an attempt to tackle poor grammar. The head teacher said that the children who are native English speakers have not got a formal enough level of English that will get them that A-star grade in history or that A-grade in science'. ESL is

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Chronically, 'EAL' students in England, as reported by Mehmedbegović (2011) are now in the following situation: 'Secondary bilingual pupils often self-identify as monolingual due to deficit models attached to bilingualism in mainstream schools', a disturbingly 'self-harming' reaction. The focus of additional language teaching has been about 'Remedying deficiency: descriptions such as "children with problems or difficulties in English", "children with no language", "severe EAL", and "children with bilingual problems" are not uncommon. Frequently 'EAL learners are mentioned in the same sentence with SEN pupils' (DFES, 2004).

An interviewee said that 'referring to bilingualism as "a barrier to learning" undermines a natural process of new language acquisition and can perpetuate attitudes to bilingualism as a problem rather than a resource' (Mehmedbegović, 2011:6*)*.

The failure of schools to identify gifted and talented EAL learners and include them in suitable programmes could be linked with a deficit model of EAL learners and inappropriate links of EAL with SEN' (Mehmedbegović, 2011:13*)*.

Thus in the home country of 'EAL', ESL students are not taken seriously, which makes even more questionable why so many schools have been subjected to attempts, many successful, to change the name of ESL programmes to 'EAL', and EAL being proclaimed, willy-nilly, as a better model. Equally disturbing is the status of 'EAL' teachers in England: Mehmedbegović (2011) reports that:

'An interviewee said that "Over 70 percent of new teachers do not consider themselves prepared for working with EAL learners; specialist EAL teachers are increasingly being replaced by Teaching Assistants; the EAL community of teachers is increasingly becoming an ageing professional community, because younger colleagues view this field as unstable employment with an uncertain future and with limited career opportunities" (NALDIC, 2007)' (Mehmedbegović, 2011:2),

which is interesting, as colleagues in international schools have reported a similar scenario. 'The decrease of specialist staff in schools, replacing qualified with unqualified staff, is because the focus of additional language teaching has been about remedying deficiency' (Mehmedbegović, 2011:4). 'Newly Qualified Teachers in England mostly arrive in schools having often had only one lecture on working with EAL learners (IOE, 2008)' (Mehmedbegović, 2011:5); this seems to be a widespread factor in the present educational climate in England.

One interviewee 'Has never encountered an EAL specialist teacher in the schools she visits. EAL children in these schools mainly work with a TA in a low ability group' (Mehmedbegović, 2011:9). The absence of EAL curricula and programmes was seen by one interviewee as 'Having led the practice into the kind of *ad hocery* that we have had for so long' (Mehmedbegović, 2011:10). 'Providing in-class support once a week to a new arrival is a prime example of mainstreaming EAL when the number of staff is insufficient to make that model efficient' (Mehmedbegović, 2011:11).

It was recognised that 'EAL teachers were perceived to have *second tier status'* (my emphasis); all interviewees agreed that 'An EAL module needs to be compulsory for all PGCE students' (Mehmedbegović, 2011:14). 'The main gaps are knowledge of bilingualism and applied linguistics, missing from the standards for QTS (Qualified Teacher Status); currently no national standards and qualifications are required for EAL teachers'. Those in international schools who are rushing to change from 'ESL' to 'EAL' might have pause for thought after reading the above.

In England 'language support teachers may end up (Leung and Franson, 2001b; in Mohan et al., 2001: 170) mediating between the class teacher and the pupils often in hushed voices at the back of the classroom. Even in well-managed classes the ESL support teacher role, under such circumstances, is reduced to a teaching assistant. In lessons where the teaching and learning activities and the work materials are disorganised, the contribution of the ESL support teacher may be reduced further'.

Similar 'downgrading' of ESL programmes and teachers took place in Canada, Australia (Mohan et al, 2001) and the USA (Crawford, 2000, Harper and de Jong, 2009).

There was therefore a situation for many ESL teachers in England that working as an 'ESL support teacher' was likely to carry 'a pervasive aura of impermanence and lower status' (Leung and Franson, 2001: 211), leading in many cases to ESL teachers taking up mainstream

classroom positions to ensure more permanent employment. The bland statement that: 'all content teachers are also teachers of language' is one that resonates throughout schools today.

However, without ensuring in-depth knowledge and deliberate training programmes it could be compared to saying 'The role I envision is one where the principal is not the expert with all the answers but the head learner and teacher who guides his or her colleagues through example' (Shaw, 2003: 110) without taking any steps to ensure such practice ensued. As Shaw, himself a school principal, notes (op.cit: 104-105):

> Almost every study on successful schools acknowledges the important role of collegiality among teachers. Notwithstanding the rhetoric, in my own research I have found little evidence of teachers working collegially. Indeed, I have found that the traditions of professional privacy and teacher isolation are alive and well.

Many academics have not worked in schools and are not in any way cognizant of the daily tensions in school life, especially in secondary schools. Block himself writes (2003: 11) that there is 'a sneaking tendency in the field to disengage from practical teaching matters'. However, two researchers have looked into the issue of relations between ESL and content teachers, and their results are revealing.

Arkoudis and Creese (2006) write about 'Teacher-teacher talk' revealing the potential pitfalls of ESL teacher/subject-teacher collaboration. They write (op.cit: 411) that

> Central to teacher collaboration is the relationship between the ESL and content teacher. Within policy documents this has been represented as a simple relationship, where ideas are shared in planning for the ESL students within mainstream classes (Arkoudis, 2003; Creese, 2002; Leung, 2004). Yet within the same policy documents we have a framing of ESL curriculum as adjunct to the mainstream curriculum. The ESL curriculum is offered as a strategy-based methodology. It is used to supplement the mainstream curriculum, but is not considered to have a content area of its own (Arkoudis, 2003). The subjects do not have equal status and ESL is in effect an adjunct to the mainstream curriculum.

They also point out that many researchers have indicated that discourse between content teachers and ESL teachers is a key element in developing appropriate 'linguistically responsive' teaching for ESL students. However, anyone who has worked in an international school knows that asking for more time for discussion of important pedagogical matters is frequently at the top of teachers' 'bucket lists' and is just as frequently rejected by directors.

As Arkoudis writes (2006: 417), 'Educational policy on collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers has assumed that the professional relationship is unproblematic and uncomplicated'. She states

> ESL as a pedagogy has claims to content such as knowledge about the English language, knowledge about first- and second-language development, and knowledge of relevant language-teaching methodologies. These are substantial areas of expertise, yet within the institutional context of secondary school education, ESL is positioned as strategy-driven and does not have the same authority as subjects such as mathematics and science within the secondary curriculum. Therefore ESL is perceived as being lower in the subject hierarchy of the school. This institutionalized positioning of the subject has an impact on developing collaborative practices between ESL and mainstream teachers.

This sums up precisely the status of ESL in schools, and is why it has to be completely turned on its head in international schools with the same type of positive discrimination seen in the fight for race, gender and sexual equality.

Arkoudis (2006) goes on to write about her research in schools and document the relationship between an ESL teacher and a science teacher. 'The ESL teacher does not have the epistemological authority in the school to force the science teacher to reposition the science curriculum in ways more appropriate for ESL students, whereas the science teacher has a high status subject' (op.cit: 428). After many conversations the ESL teacher makes some headway. However, in international schools there is a constant flux of staff, and for every ESL teacher to devote great amounts of time and energy to individual content teachers would possibly be beyond their powers, and in any case wasted as the science teacher might soon leave the school.

I have seen this happen. ESL teachers spent much time developing worksheets on content area materials for ESL students and for specific teachers, then the teachers left, the curriculum

changed, the new head of school did not understand the process, or the number of ESL teachers was reduced as they were 'support', therefore peripheral, therefore subject to budget cuts.

Davison (2006: 458) writes that

> Teacher collaboration is promoted as a panacea for many ills, from breaking down the professional isolation of the classroom to compensating for inadequate professional development to salving the wounds wrought by overly ambitious curriculum reform (Corrie, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Hargreaves & McMillan, 1994; Little, 1990). To some critics teacher collaboration is yet another poorly conceived but increasingly popular imposition on teachers from above, a contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1994: 208).
>
> In contrived collegiality, collaboration amongst teachers was compulsory, not voluntary; bounded and fixed in space and time; implementation rather than development-orientated; and meant to be predictable rather than unpredictable in its outcomes. The literature suggests, however, that effective collaboration between teachers is not only rare, but extremely difficult to sustain. As Little (1990: 180) comments: The closer one gets to the classroom and to the central questions of curriculum and instruction, the fewer are the recorded instances of meaningful, rigorous collaboration.

This robustly stated description of the reality in schools is a pre-eminent justification for having a strong ESL department staffed by experts in their field to be responsible for 'all things ESL'.

Davison (2006: 456) also writes that

> There are a number of essential elements for effective collaboration between language and content-area teachers, which have been discussed elsewhere (see, for example, Davison, 1992; Hurst & Davison, 2005), including the need to establish a clear conceptualisation of the task, the incorporation of explicit goals for ESL development into curriculum and assessment planning processes, the negotiation of a shared understanding of ESL and mainstream teachers' roles/responsibilities, the adoption of common curriculum planning proformas and processes, experimentation with diversity as a resource to promote effective learning for all students, the development of articulated and flexible pathways for ESL learning support, and the establishment of systematic mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and feedback.

The last of these would be welcome indeed.

The work of the above researchers has been added to by Harper and de Jong (2009: 137) who write that in the USA the amount of specialist time devoted to ESL students by ESL teachers has shrunk from 32% to near zero in a mere ten years, due to a 'history of legislation to ensure equal educational access for ELLs, and a policy of full-time placement of ELLs in mainstream classrooms', largely due to the consequences of the 'assumption that ELLs' language and learning "problems" are best addressed through (monolingual) mainstream approaches, and when ESL specialist teachers are considered redundant and are replaced by mainstream teachers who are minimally prepared to teach ESL'. This echoes my perceptions of the situation in international schools.

Part 2 of this article will be published in ISJ April 2015 and will describe the policies adopted by the IB and the CIS towards ESL, discuss assessment, and propose a practical and professional solution for enhancing the high potential of ESL students.

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