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English as an additional language (EAL): Decolonising provision and practice

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Abstract

This paper examines ways in which approaches to English as Additional Language (EAL) can be decolonised in schools. In an attempt to break traditional divides between academic research and pedagogical practice in this area, this article adopts a collaborative perspective, between an EAL advisory and support teacher and an academic member of staff working in university. Drawing on dialogues and co-analysis with EAL practitioners, this article reflects on limitations of current provision and practice and suggests alternative, decolonial and anti-racist approaches to the education of EAL students. At both school and university level, 'one size fits all approaches' tend to negate the deep historical, social and political roots and contexts which underpin the experiences of 'EAL students' at different levels of education. Issues related to equitable assessment, inclusion, linguistic support and anti-racism tend to be side lined in favour of a focus on language proficiency and attainment, which most often overshadows the complex experiences and needs of students labelled 'EAL'. In this respect, the questions of relevant, decentred and decolonised curricula and forms of assessment that can promote inclusion for students who have experienced migration and are placed in monolingual educational environments in the UK are crucial. Through a decolonial perspective on the curriculum, language and pedagogical practice, inspired by postcolonial studies and Critical Race Theory, this paper discusses three main areas that emerged as crucial to a deeper and critical engagement with English as an Additional Language

and the experience of students: (1) the need for a critical reflection on ideas of inclusion and mainstreaming; (2) active anti-racist work in schools and initial teacher training; and (3) decolonising assessment.

KEYWORDS
assessment, decolonising the curriculum, English as Additional Language, inclusion, initial teacher education

LANGUAGE, MIGRATION AND EDUCATION

The question of how to best support newly arrived migrants in school has been a contentious one for decades, made all the more complex when students do not speak the language of the host country (UNESCO, 2019). Educational policy and practice with regard to language and migration vary across different countries, and there is little agreement in terms of academic research. In a number of Western democratic contexts,[1] marked by a rise of xenophobia, racism and the electoral success of populist and extreme right political parties, language and education have featured centrally in polarised debates around immigration. Indeed, the relationship between language and education is far from neutral. In a majority of Western democracies, such as the US, Australia and many European countries, monolingualism in schools is the dominant norm against which educational success is measured. A legacy of colonialism and modernity, inscribed within 19th-century nationalism and political constructions of the 'nation-state', monolingualism in Europe is firmly embedded within educational systems, which have failed to adapt to new forms of linguistic diversity brought on by increased migration and mobility (Barbour & Carmichael, 2000; Mignolo, 1992; Mbembe & Mabanckou, 2018). In school systems in which a single, standard form of language is established as legitimate, newly arrived students who do not speak the language of the host country tend to be viewed as 'less competent', and multilingualism is seen as a problem or a barrier to successful learning (Evans et al., 2020). This 'deficit' view of newly arrived migrant students is inscribed within nationalist and imperialist ideologies, rooted in colonialism and white supremacy, in which the linguistic practices of young people from immigrant backgrounds are constructed as illegitimate and 'Other' (Kroskrity, 2021; Welply, 2022a). This symbolic domination of legitimate linguistic norms (Bourdieu, 2001) is apparent in many Western countries, supported by educational policies that have been strongly criticised as discriminatory, divisive or in some cases a '21st-century linguistic apartheid' (Combs et al., 2014). Practices and policies in England are no exception to this. Research in the last few decades has shown how educational approaches to students with English as an Additional Language (EAL) oftentimes mask forms of inequalities and discrimination, whilst perpetuating monolingual ideologies and deficit models towards children for whom English is not their first language (Cushing & Snell, 2022).

Although there is increased recognition in academic work that the experience of migrant students is located at the intersection of race, religion and culture, inscribed within colonial legacies and histories of oppression, there is still limited research on migration, language and education in schools that explicitly adopts a decolonial perspective. This paper aims to address this gap by examining approaches to English as Additional Language (EAL) in England through a decolonial and anti-racist lens. Drawing on previous research by the author with EAL students and teachers (Evans et al., 2020; Welply, 2022a) this article offers a novel perspective through dialogue and co-analysis with EAL practitioners, with the aim of reflecting on these issues and suggesting alternative, decolonial and anti-racist approaches

to the education of EAL students. Building on extended dialogues between the researchers and EAL practitioners, this article aims to amplify the voices of those who have everyday experience of education in EAL contexts, Through a decolonial perspective on the curriculum, language and pedagogical practice, this paper discusses three main areas that emerged as crucial to a deeper and critical engagement with English as an Additional Language and the experience of students: (1) the need for a critical reflection on ideas of inclusion and mainstreaming; (2) active anti-racist work in schools and initial teacher education and (3) decolonising assessment.

EAL STUDENTS IN ENGLAND

Whilst anti-immigrant discourses have been apparent for decades in England, in the last twenty years particular media and statistical narratives have fuelled a 'moral panic' around language, migration and education, echoed in policy discourse. Alarmist titles by tabloid media created a strong negative narrative around newly arrived migrant youth, portrayed as 'swamping' schools, draining resources and destroying the 'British character' of schools (Welply, 2022b). This negative narrative has endured despite evidence that EAL pupils tend to achieve higher exam scores at age 16 than their non-EAL counterparts (DfE, 2018). Paradoxically, this heightened focus on language and migration as a 'social problem' and a challenge for schools has been met with a dearth of educational policy around language for newly arrived migrants/EAL pupils in schools (Leung, 2016). Limited guidance on EAL teaching or support is offered to schools or teachers, and the emphasis remains on *mainstreaming* and meeting the linguistic needs of *all* pupils (Bourne, 2007; Costley, 2014; Murphy & Unthiah, 2015). Upon arrival in England, EAL students are placed within mainstream classrooms instead of being taught in separate classes or by specialist teachers, as is the case in a number of other countries (Evans et al., 2020). In this context, schools and teachers are responsible for meeting the linguistic needs of students, which requires the support of EAL coordinators and/or bilingual specialist teachers/assistants. The notion of mainstreaming draws on a specific understanding of inclusion, defined as the full participation of *all* students in school, regardless of specific characteristics (language, religion, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation …). Central to the idea of inclusion is the aim of fostering school environments in which 'difference' is embedded within school culture and pedagogical practices (Slee, 2009; Welply, 2020). However, although mainstreaming and inclusion feature in principle in educational policy in England, they are heavily constrained in practice. EAL provision is highly dependent on the availability of funding, which varies strongly between localities. The suppression of ring-fenced funding for ethnic-minority students (EMAG) in 2011 led to more decentralised funding structures and unequal provision across the country, and has put pressure on mainstreaming practices in England. Professed commitments to inclusion have been criticised for remaining superficial and not actually challenging power inequalities and hierarchies inscribed in national and colonial history (Evans et al., 2020; Tikly, 2022; Welply, 2020). The term EAL itself carries strong limitations. It has been used as an umbrella concept which masks huge heterogeneity, student experiences and language proficiency (Strand & Hessel, 2018). In this article, whilst the term EAL is used for clarity and for analytical purposes, it is understood not as a fixed category but as a multiplicity of linguistic and social backgrounds, proficiencies, perspectives, identities and experiences.

At both school and university level, 'one size fits all approaches' tend to negate the deep historical, social and political roots and contexts which underpin the experiences of 'EAL students' at different levels of education. Issues related to equitable assessment, inclusion, linguistic support and anti-racism tend to be sidelined in favour of a focus on language proficiency and attainment, which most often overshadows the complex experiences and needs

of students labelled 'EAL'. In this respect, the question of relevant, decentred and decolonised curricula and forms of assessment that can promote inclusion for EAL students is crucial. This article aims to address these questions by examining curricular and pedagogical approaches to support EAL students in schools in England through a decolonial and anti-racist lens on language.

DECOLONISING LANGUAGE

Monolingual ideologies permeate and shape educational systems, policy and practice. In Western countries, these inequalities and forms of linguistic domination are inscribed within (post)colonial imaginaries, in which the 'linguistic Other' is constructed as deficient and illegitimate, and measured against implicit norms of standard language, embedded in the symbolic domination of whiteness (Fanon, 1952; Mbembe & Mabanckou, 2018). Such imaginaries emerge from a dual movement of coloniality and modernity, which establishes the legitimacy of written European colonial languages over others (Mignolo, 1992). The languages of the coloniser were constructed as 'civilising' languages which disregarded other languages as 'undeveloped', negating other knowledge systems and 'colonising the mind' (Fanon, 1952; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1985, 1988). As argued by Spaëth, the relationship of language to history is shaped by a dual temporal and spatial movement:

> Relationships between languages, power, subject, cognition and representation in their mode of circulation within historical regimes often desynchronised (colonisation, decolonisation) and in a dynamic of permanent deterritorialisation-reterritorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972), which counteracts national histories. (Spaëth, 2020, p. 27, *our translation*)

One particularity of English-speaking countries is that there is a dual form of linguistic domination: it is both the dominant national language, which determines who belongs and who is Othered, and the dominant global language, a legacy of colonialism and capitalism: English as a lingua franca. As such, the domination of English carries the history of colonialism and white supremacy, inscribed within different times and space (past/present; global/national).

For Mbembe and Mabanckou, however, it is important to distinguish between the idea of 'language' and the 'institutional *dispositif* of language' to understand how boundaries between 'them' and 'us' (the colonised and the coloniser) have become blurred in relation to language. Colonial languages are no longer only the language of the coloniser, but have become, to some extent, the language of the oppressed, the colonised, through processes of de-territorialisation and the re-invention of new language imaginaries. This warns us against false dichotomies when adopting a decolonial approach to language, and calls for an understanding of the multiple linguistic, cultural and technical processes that frame the symbolic position and daily usage of languages across the world (2018, *our translation*).

Whilst an increasing number of scholars have advocated for decolonising language learning (e.g., in foreign language classes), they remain the minority (Kramsch, 2019; McKinney, 2017; Phipps, 2019; Prax-Dubois, 2019; Von Esch et al., 2020). This article argues that there is a need to look at provision and support for EAL learners through a decolonial lens in order to unearth the deeply entrenched forms of Othering and oppression that shape understandings of language, migration and education in Western and monolingual educational systems.

The notion of 'decolonisation' is polysemic and a discussion of the multiple meanings and interpretations of this term are beyond the scope of this review. It is helpful, however, to reflect

on the specificities of our understanding of decolonising language and education for EAL students in England. Decolonising education aims to dismantle forms of oppression inherited through colonialism by interrogating dominant forms of knowledge and the ways in which they perpetuate inequalities by privileging certain groups over others. This builds on the recognition that the epistemic violence of colonialism persists today and shapes dominant beliefs about the legitimacy of certain forms of language over others. Decolonising language and education requires a critical examination of the implicit relationship between colonial languages (English, French, Portuguese, Spanish …), whiteness and power (Mbembe & Mabanckou, 2018; von Esch et al., 2020) and how these assumptions underpin the way language is framed discursively in policy and in the curriculum (Cushing & Snell, 2022; Kroskrity, 2021). In the English curriculum, the privileging of standard English over non-standard forms of English—and other 'foreign' languages- needs to be interrogated. Standard English is not just about academic attainment or 'correct' forms of language but carries implicit assumptions about what counts as literacy, knowledge or culture. These assumptions draw on the legacy of coloniality and modernity which confers value to standard forms of literacy over other forms, such as oracy or non-alphabetic writing (Mignolo, 1992). As such, EAL students' literacy in another language and prior knowledge in other subjects are often overlooked in schools. Despite a breadth of research pointing to the contrary, bilingualism or multilingualism are often seen as a barrier to children's cognitive development, perceived as leading to 'delays in language acquisition' and lower attainment (Michael-Luna, 2013). In worse case scenarios, EAL students with little English are placed within Special Educational Needs groups without proper diagnosis (Evans et al., 2020; Peer & Reid, 2014). This shows that it is not 'language' itself that is oppressive, but the institutional '*dispositif*' of language in the educational system (Mbembe & Mabanckou, 2018, p. 65, *our translation*). There is thus an urgent need to critically examine the set of beliefs and misunderstandings around language which participate in these forms of Othering for EAL children in England.

In this article, we view a decolonial approach to language and education as intrinsically linked to an anti-racist perspective. There are multiple understandings of the idea of 'anti-racism', which cannot be fully addressed in this article. Our interest here is to adopt a theoretical perspective located at the intersection of decolonial and anti-racist approaches to examine practices and perceptions around language in relation to EAL children in England. In the last decade, 'race' has emerged as a central focus of critical scholars on language and education, for example in Critical Race Theory (Bradbury, 2020; Welply, 2018), in LangCrit (Morita-Mullaney, 2018) and in the field of raciolinguistics (Cushing & Snell, 2022; Charity Hudley et al., 2020). Because it is inherently inscribed within the legacy of coloniality, 'race' also features centrally within a decolonial lens on language education (Fanon, 1952; Mbembe & Mabanckou, 2018; von Esch et al., 2020). Within postcolonial theory, upon which much critical decolonial scholarship on language and education has drawn, the notion of 'race' is understood as a socially constructed concept, created to justify colonialism. As argued by Mbembe and Mabanckou, it is essential to understand that racism lies at the core of the imposition of colonial languages and the way in which such languages exert forms of invisible domination (2018, p. 60). In this article we draw on postcolonial scholarship and Critical Race Theory, to develop a decolonial and anti-racist lens that can help examine the ways in which forms of epistemic injustice and systemic oppression are experienced through everyday encounters of discrimination and racism by EAL students in schools in England.

DECOLONISING RESEARCH?

The recognition of colonial legacies and forms of domination in the production of knowledge calls for innovative and alternative research methods that can challenge hegemonic prac-

tices, established power relations and interrogate the historical context in which specific research methodologies and methods came to dominate the social sciences (Smith, 2021; Zwiener-Collins et al., 2021). Decolonising research methodologies require a critical examination of dominant, colonial, 'Western', ethnocentric paradigms in research. This can be particularly challenging in research-scapes which are still constrained by academic systems and structures: 'Western' practices of recording and reporting research; a reliance on academic scholarship published predominantly in English[2]; the publishing process itself, in which the format of research articles (for example word count), might limit the extent to which the words of participants can be featured in their own right. However, within these restrictive *dispositifs* of the academy, a deeper reflection on the processes and practices of research can be a helpful start towards decolonising research and developing a 'counter-story to Western ideas about the pursuit of knowledge' (Smith, 2021, p. 6). For example, drawing on decolonial theory and exemplars from the literature, Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021, p. 2) suggest four practices that can be fostered by researchers aiming to conduct 'anti-oppressive research (…) grounded in decolonial theories' (p. 2): (1) exercising critical reflexivity, (2) reciprocity and respect for self-determination, (3) embracing "Other(ed)" ways of knowing; (4) embodying a transformative praxis. These are reflected upon in this section.

Within a decolonial lens, there is a need to overcome traditional approaches in which the researcher operates in extractive ways, 'collecting', analysing and writing up data without including participants (Smith, 2021). In an attempt to break traditional divides between academic research and pedagogical practice in this area, this article adopted a collaborative perspective between an academic member of staff working in university and an EAL practitioner with extensive experience of working with primary and secondary schools. This article draws on extended dialogues between the two co-researchers and ten EAL practitioners working for local councils in the South West and South East of England. These included a number of EAL roles, which varied across localities: EAL coordinators, EAL advisory and support teachers, bilingual officers.[3] Dialogues were carried out over a period of a year, under different forms: recorded online semi-structured interviews as well as informal conversations around EAL practitioners' experience of supporting EAL students and teachers in schools. The process was iterative, and included a process of co-analysis in which interpretations by the two co-researchers were discussed and re-interpreted with the EAL practitioners. This allowed the two co-researchers to check the relevance and accuracy of their analysis and ensure that it did justice to the views shared by the EAL practitioners. Suggested revisions to the paper as part of the peer-review process were also discussed and shared with the EAL practitioners, who agreed with them.

However, as the writing of the paper progressed, this collaborative approach encountered unforeseen ethical challenges. Although great care was put into ethical considerations before undertaking the research, these unexpected issues highlight the tension between formal, institutionalised approaches to ethics and the more complex ethical questions that might arise in decolonial research that seeks to interrogate and critique those very institutions.

Before starting the research, the proposed study received official institutional approval through the relevant ethics committee at the researcher's university. The proposal submitted to the ethics committee was written by the academic member of staff and checked by the co-researcher. All participants consented to take part in the study, after being informed clearly of the nature of the research and its future dissemination. It was made clear to all participants that they had the right to withdraw at any time. Because of the potential sensitive nature of the research, participants were involved throughout the research, writing and revision process, and had the opportunity to see multiple versions of the transcripts and draft articles. Throughout the research, the ethics of this research were carefully discussed, emphasising the need to protect all participants involved. One key ethical issue which emerged was related to the reporting of the study, stressing the need for multiple layers of anonymity

and confidentiality for the participants and the stories they told, to ensure that no school or student were recognisable in any way. Whilst dialogue extracts with EAL practitioners are presented verbatim in this article, the age, names, nationalities and sometimes gender of any students that they mentioned were changed. To further mitigate any risks of events or individuals being identified, the participants and researchers made the collective choice to use vignettes as a way of reporting some of the findings. All quotes and vignettes presented were checked and approved by the participants before publication.

The unforeseen ethical issues which arose were related to co-authorship. Although the initial plan was to include all participating EAL practitioners as co-authors, for anonymity reasons, they did not wish to be named on the paper, although they were clear about wanting the views they had shared to be published. Similarly, whilst the co-researcher (an EAL practitioner) initially had their name listed as a co-author on the paper, they subsequently chose to remove their name from the authorship after the first round of peer-reviewed revisions to the manuscript. This decision was made for confidentiality reasons, because they were uneasy with being publicly associated with the 'decolonial lens' of the paper. Whilst they agreed privately with this decolonial perspective and the analysis developed in the paper, they feared that the strong critical tone might lead to repercussions on their professional role if their name appeared on the paper. This led to long deliberations between the two co-researchers about the nature of the collaborative research, and whether it was worth publishing the paper under one name only. Whilst the academic researcher was uneasy with the idea of publishing the paper as sole author, the EAL practitioner-researcher was keen for the paper to be published, as they felt that the key ideas in the paper were important and would benefit teachers and practitioners in the field. In the end, it was agreed to still progress with the publication of the paper without their name as co-author. This unanticipated challenge raised a number of ethical considerations related to the nature of decolonial/collaborative work outside the realms of academia and how to best include researcher-participants, whilst keeping them safe and free from potential harm, which will hopefully help inform our future research in this area and shape new modes of collaboration. This experience made us realise that co-authorship can be both empowering and alienating and requires a deeper reflection on the nature of the publication and the reporting of the study. This raises important questions about decolonising research in education and bridging gaps between academia and practice, as well as the unpredictability of the research and publication process.

Whilst this collaborative perspective helped challenge an academic-centred approach on the education of EAL students in England, and fostered cooperation and trust in the expertise of those who work with EAL students everyday, we do not claim that this approach constitutes in itself a decolonised research approach. The two co-researchers remain in positions of privilege, as white, English-speaking, academics or teachers. However, our view is that from this position comes the responsibility to dismantle white linguistic supremacy by critically interrogating hegemonic linguistic practices and the ways in which these are embedded within discriminatory discourses of the 'linguistic Other'. The first step towards this was to reflect on our assumptions, practices and relationships in our work, in an attempt to decolonise our research processes and exercise 'critical reflexivity' (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). We were aware, however, that although critical reflexivity allows researchers to examine their situatedness and power dynamics in research, it is imperative that this continues to be exercised throughout the research process, to avoid forms of de-responsibilisation or what Sara Ahmed terms the 'non-performativity of Anti-Racism' (Ahmed, 2006), through limited 'unhappy confessions of privilege' (Lockard, 2016, p. 19).

The approach adopted in this article aims to be a step towards decolonising the field of research on EAL and education, through the three axes of *reflection*, *recognition* and *reparation*, developed in previous work (Welply, 2022a), which echo to some extent the principles of other decolonial methodologies (Smith, 2021; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). *Reflection*

on practices, academic and educational, to interrogate modes of reproduction of forms of linguistic, racial or cultural supremacy and exercise critical reflexivity throughout the research process. *Recognition* of the mechanisms (societal, institutional, individual) of privilege at play in everyday educational work and the systemic hierarchies that frame the experience of EAL students in schools in England; as well as recognition of those that are Othered, as acts of 'self-affirmation' and validation, which allow for reciprocity, self-determination and embracing 'Other(ed) ways of knowing' (Ricoeur, 2004; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021, p. 3; Welply, 2022a). To achieve this, extended dialogues between researchers and practitioners helped unearth aspects that would not have been evident in a traditional research approach, or in every day educational practice. This dialectic between research and practice helped critically examine the dominant discourses and ideologies that shape educational provisions and approaches to EAL students in schools. In this sense, we hope that this article contributes to the decolonising movement in academic work and helps drive new perspectives and interrogations about how best to support and include EAL students in schools in England. Finally, our view is that in order to be transformative, decolonial and anti-racist research is aimed at *reparation*. As we have explained elsewhere:

> Reparation is central to the transformation of educational systems inscribed within processes of othering, discrimination, and the domination of a single language and culture. (Welply, 2022a, p. 239)

The notion of reparation carries transformative and emancipatory potential, and aims to be a starting point for educational systems to deeply engage with the legacy of colonialism, white privilege and other forms of domination. This notion was central to our research endeavour, and shaped our decisions in the presentation of the findings, their accessibility for a wider audience and wider forms of dissemination with teachers and EAL practitioners.

STORYTELLING AND DIALOGUE AS RESEARCH

Central to the methodology adopted in this paper were the notions of *narrative* and *storytelling* as embedded within the principles of *reflection*, *recognition* and *reparation*. Narrative and storytelling approaches have gained prominence in research fields that seek to disrupt, transgress and challenge traditionally dominant forms of research strongly embedded within colonial, Eurocentric or Western thought and forms of knowledge production. Postcolonial or decolonial research, as well as Critical Race Theory, have promoted narratives and storytelling as ways of challenging epistemic dominance and fostering critical voices and alternative perspectives that can help disrupt the status quo in research and situate it within wider historical, social and political contexts (Gillborn, 2010; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Smith, 2021). These methodological approaches aim to transcend the gap between academia and practice, by making the ideas and findings more accessible to people outside of academic spheres, which is what this article hopes to achieve, offering the possibility for *reparation*.

Although well-embedded in a number of fields and disciplines, for example legal and educational research, narrative research and storytelling have been subjected to a number of criticisms around their legitimacy. In the UK, the strong emphasis on evidence-based research and 'what works?' in education has encouraged a narrowing focus in educational research, which has tended to frame other research perspectives as 'unrigorous' or lacking in evidence (Gillborn, 2010). This delegitimisation of alternative forms of research, in particular, those than privilege narrative and storytelling, is to be deplored, in that it reproduces the dominance of a single form of knowledge, inscribed within a rationalist, Eurocentric perspec-

tive on social science research (Biesta et al., 2022), which contributes to the 'datafication of injustice' (Benjamin, 2019). Narratives and storytelling have in fact been shown to be robust and rigorous critical research approaches, which build on a range of significant 'evidence', albeit in different, often more accessible, forms (Gillborn, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2005).

The notion of narrative helps recognise that the ways people tell stories as individuals are inscribed within wider contexts and connections to the world around them (for a deeper discussion see Welply, 2022a). In this perspective, the analysis of the recordings and notes from the dialogues with EAL practitioners was initially thematic, looking for broad themes and how these were narrated. Particular attention was paid, whilst identifying themes from these dialogues, not to fragment what was being said. Sixteen themes initially emerged. After analysis of these dialogues by both researchers, seven main themes were identified as particularly salient for understanding the experiences of EAL students from a decolonial perspective. These themes were then presented to the EAL practitioners in a process of co-analysis and reflection. This was an opportunity to further reflect upon and refine the themes, as well as highlight any misinterpretations or nuances in what the EAL practitioners had said. It also led to a reflection on how to best present the data within the constraints of a published research article, in ways that could be disseminated amongst EAL practitioners in the future. From these discussions with EAL practitioners, three main, interrelated themes emerged as particularly relevant for this article: (1) critical reflection on inclusion and main-streaming; (2) anti-racist work and (3) decolonising assessment. These are examined in the next section.

Following discussions, it was decided that in order to best represent ideas shared by the participants whilst at the same time ensuring anonymity, this article would draw on narratives in two forms: the *stories* told by EAL practitioners and *vignettes* that showcase archetypal situations EAL practitioners encountered in their work with EAL students. The aim of these vignettes is to illustrate some of the recuring challenges faced by EAL students in school in a fictionalised form, in order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of EAL practitioners and students. These vignettes also allowed us to develop storytelling as an alternative narrative that would be more accessible to lay readers and educators. A number of vignettes were written up based on dialogues with EAL practitioners, and then presented to the practitioners for comments. The vignettes that were viewed as the most illustrative of EAL practitioners' experiences were retained for this article, whilst others that were deemed less illustrative were discarded.

CRITICAL REFLECTION ON INCLUSION AND MAINSTREAMING

One aspect that emerged strongly from dialogues with EAL practitioners was the need for more critical questioning of taken for granted notions of 'inclusion' and 'mainstreaming'. Whilst all of them affirmed their belief in the need for inclusion and the benefits of main-streaming for EAL students, they pointed to the need to question the conditions of inclusion and mainstreaming, namely: who it benefitted and how. These interrogations were linked to the nature of the curriculum, the availability of support and resources, and the place of EAL in initial teacher education.

One issue that came to the fore was the difficulty of carrying out 'truly' inclusive practices and mainstreaming for EAL students in an educational system that was overwhelmingly anglocentric, privileging whiteness and English culture across the curriculum.

> Language, of course, is the main barrier, and we can support as much as we
> can. But there are added difficulties that go beyond language. One of the really
> difficult things for mainstreaming to work and for EAL students to feel included is

the curriculum in itself. Especially in secondary schools. Because the secondary [school] curriculum is so colonial, I guess, and so traditional, based on 19th century texts, which are very removed from the students' experiences. There is nothing there, say in the English curriculum, to which they might relate. It builds on so much prior 'English' knowledge that they don't have. There is this idea for GCSE that the important things are knowing quotes and quotes and quotes, which are very difficult to understand if you don't have the context or prior knowledge, either via schooling or family. And so it feels that because of this disconnect with this very English traditional curriculum, there is very little chance of them ever gaining meaningful grades, however bright they are, and however good their English is. If they arrive in the country past Year 9 or above, there is little chance of them getting good qualifications. It's so complex, and teachers don't know how to mediate the gap for them. (EAL support teacher)

What emerged strongly from dialogues with practitioners was that perceptions of inclusion and mainstreaming were often restricted to linguistic considerations, with a focus on language proficiency, acquisition and attainment. This points to the challenges of promoting meaningful inclusive practices within an educational system in which funding cuts have made support for mainstreaming more difficult to provide and led to narrowing concepts of inclusion (Costley, 2014; Welply, 2020). Whilst EAL practitioners were all in agreement that language was the overwhelming factor in being able to access the curriculum, and that targeted support did help, they stressed the need to consider the less visible barriers, in particular the lack of relevance of a strongly anglocentric curriculum for young people who did not have prior schooling in England. This went beyond a monolingual ideology in which standard English was the norm, to considerations on the domination of a monocultural ideology in which only certain types of knowledge were deemed legitimate. These views echo long-standing critiques of the English curriculum being too narrow, ethnocentric and fundamentally white (Iffath, 2020; Tikly, 2022; Tomlinson, 2019) and wider calls for a more diverse, critical and inclusive curriculum in England (see for example Arday, 2020; Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). The following vignette illustrates these issues further:

Vignette 1

Emre is a young boy who recently arrived from Turkey and started his schooling in Year 9 in an English school. He is a motivated and able student and has made quick progress in learning English, which has been praised by teachers. He was excited to hear that they were studying poetry in English, because he loved studying poetry in Turkey. However, after a few lessons, although he understands the text and enjoys the poetry, he is disconcerted by the work he is asked to do and struggles to perform the tasks required by the teacher. The teacher is frustrated with his results, and assumes that it must be due to language difficulties. During a session with the EAL support teacher, Emre explains his difficulties differently: 'I really like poetry, and I like reading and thinking about English poetry too. But I do not know what they want me to do here. The way they ask us to work on the poem, it is not like in Turkey. In Turkey, we would work hard to understand the meaning of the poem, the images it evoked, the themes and the ideas. Here they say 'analyse' this poem, but when I do it like in Turkey, it is not right. They want us to look at the poem differently. Why? I don't care about 'enjambment, it does not tell me anything about what the poem means'.

This vignette highlights the multiple barriers, often hardly visible, that EAL students might face in accessing the curriculum in a new educational environment. Although language plays a central part in how well students can access the curriculum, these barriers are not solely linguistic. Rather, they stem from a multiplicity of practices and forms of knowledge that are taken for granted, deemed 'normal' and thus established as the sole legitimate knowledge and ways of learning, when in fact they carry assumptions and values that are historically and culturally embedded in a given time and space (Iffath, 2020; Mignolo, 1992; Spaëth, 2020). As in the case of Emre above, this makes the curriculum difficult to access for students who do not share this prior knowledge. Emre's own knowledge and multiple forms of literacy are not taken into account as they do not correspond to the standardised norms of the English curriculum. As such, he is not recognised as a 'legitimate learner' within the frames of 'anglo-normativity' (McKinney, 2017).

Calls for decolonising the curriculum have been met with scepticism in some circles, branded as 'anti-white' or threatening the idea of 'valuable knowledge'. However, the examples above show how processes of domination of knowledge participate in tacit forms of exclusion, which can marginalise EAL students, and offer very little possibilities for meaningful inclusion. Academic research has stressed the need for good inclusive language practice for EAL students in schools and the classroom, which includes, for example, specialised language support and resources or a targeted use of technology (Murphy & Unthiah, 2015). Whilst this is of course necessary, the above discussion shows that good practice cannot be abstracted from a deeper reflection on wider structures and curricular requirements: in a system that implicitly privileges a white, English and middle-class form of anglocentric knowledge, there are limited possibilities to create inclusive practice in which the curriculum is meaningful for *all* students (Thompson-Sharpe, 2020). These tacit forms of exclusion participate in forms of Othering of EAL students, who might experience a disconnect from the content of the curriculum and the pedagogical practices it promotes.

The above points to one of the challenges created by educational policy, which aims to move away from 'particular' needs or groups, to promote a curriculum that is available to 'all'. There is only a very brief mention of provision for EAL children in the 2013 National Curriculum, where the emphasis is on the 'universalism of English education and an emphasis on mainstreaming' (Evans et al., 2020, p. 27). There is a risk that this focus on making the curriculum available to 'all', regardless of linguistic, cultural or racial background in fact privileges certain groups over others, under the guise of 'universalism'. The above shows how at a micro-level, subtle mechanisms of domination that underpin the assumption of an English curriculum accessible to all present challenges to mainstreaming and the development of meaningful inclusive practices. This is further compounded by a neoliberal context in which the onus is put on immigrant communities to 'manage diversity' in order to successfully 'integrate' (Barnard, 2020). In terms of education, this is often expressed by an emphasis on the responsibility for students and their families to achieve successful inclusion in schools, both academically and socially. Within this context, removing support for specific groups through a policy of 'universalism' of the English curriculum shifts the blame onto individual students and their parents to engage with the curriculum, regardless of linguistic or epistemic barriers. For a number of the EAL practitioners, a lack of recognition of wider factors and systems that led to difficulties towards inclusion for EAL students and their families was a problem which they felt was very difficult for them to address in their practice.

Beyond issues related to the whiteness and anglocentric nature of the curriculum, the lack of focus on EAL support teacher education provision and continued professional development was seen as one of the major barriers to successful inclusion and mainstreaming. For the EAL practitioners, a combination of limited training, lack of time, resources, expertise and an over-emphasis on attainment were deemed responsible for creating situations that were non-inclusive and made mainstreaming for EAL students difficult.

> The sessions we offer for teacher training at university are, I would say, good, but one of the challenges is time. When you only have a few hours, maybe half a day training on your entire teacher training course, what are you going to learn? It makes it difficult for us to decide on what the core message should be. Should it be to get future teachers to understand that it takes a very long time to learn a language, especially at an academic level? Or should we focus on practical tips by showing that it helps to give a few visuals, some translated documents. Sure, visuals help at some level, but they are rather limited when the concepts become more complex. I was working with a student and they were studying ocular degeneration. A visual will account for some of that. More is needed to really delve deeper into understanding the concepts. But there is no time for that. And very limited resources. The question is, does the training we give teachers actually provide them with enough understanding about language development? No, it doesn't, but actually, that would be what they really need if they are going to support EAL learners. And we are in a system where these future teachers might have hardly ever had to learn another language. Maybe they didn't study a foreign language for GCSE. It's a system where English is seen as the only language that counts, and teachers do not have experience of what it's like to learn another language and nor do they know the techniques for learning a new language. (EAL coordinator)

The above shows the complex interplay between policy, curricular choices and monolingual ideologies. Budget cuts towards support for EAL students, a curriculum which downplays learning foreign languages, and the symbolic domination of English as the only legitimate language in schools participate in creating a context that is far from inclusive for EAL learners. Paradoxically, educational policy has shifted the responsibility onto schools and teachers to develop provision for EAL students, yet curricular changes with regard to the place of language learning in the English educational system[4] mean that teachers are generally ill-prepared for supporting EAL pupils in the classroom. From a decolonial perspective, this has a number of implications that could help re-think research and practice on inclusion and mainstreaming for EAL students. First, a recognition of dominant linguistic ideologies and the ways in which they shape attitudes towards linguistic Otherness and create hierarchies of desirable languages (Mbembe & Mabanckou, 2018; Mignolo, 1992) is necessary if we are to think more critically about the experiences of EAL students. The EAL practitioners' comments show their sense that language is culturally situated, and stress the need to look at the needs of EAL students beyond a sole focus on linguistic proficiency, acknowledging the historical colonial legacies inscribed within the curriculum. Whilst support of students' linguistic proficiency is evidently of central importance, thinking of the ways in which language is intertwined with other cultural and social dimensions can help better address the needs of EAL students in schools. Little attention has been paid to the ways in which dominant linguistic ideologies create forms of monolingualism and monoculturalism that participate in forms of Othering, which can create a disconnect for EAL students (Cushing & Snell, 2022; Welply, 2022a). This makes it more difficult to engage with the curriculum, regardless of linguistic proficiency. Dominant models of monolingualism participate in creating 'deficit models' of linguistic Otherness, in which EAL students are de-valued, seen as less competent and socially inapt by teachers and peers. These beliefs are often tacit, inscribed within wider imageries of the 'immigrant Other', inherited from the interplay of colonial history and current neoliberal ideals of performance and what makes a 'good pupil' (skilled, performant, academically successful, socially 'integrated') (Devine, 2013).

ANTI-RACIST WORK IN SCHOOLS AND TEACHER EDUCATION

Following on from these considerations, the second main theme that emerged was the urgency in developing anti-racist work in schools and teacher education. Forms of institutional discrimination tend to be reproduced through a lack of awareness of the deeply rooted imageries and legacies inherited from discourses of superiority and white supremacy that are still powerful in shaping understandings of the 'immigrant Other'. Whilst there is a growing awareness of how these forms of discrimination might operate around race or religion, there is still very limited recognition of how these might intersect with language and participate in forms of othering, discrimination and racism in school. With a few exceptions (e.g., Cushing & Snell, 2022; Creese, 2003; Peer & Reid, 2014), much research on EAL students in England has tended to not engage deeply with considerations around race and racism. One reason for this could be that the large umbrella-term of EAL masks a huge heterogeneity of students and experiences.[5] Another reason is that the overwhelming focus of research has been on language proficiency and good practice, which is often abstracted from wider social or political contexts.

Racism was a recurrent theme in dialogues with EAL support teachers and bilingual officers. In many cases, racism took the form of 'microaggressions'. Microaggressions, an important concept in Critical Race Theory, can be defined as pervasive, subtle and everyday forms of racism, which are cumulative in nature. Their tacit form makes them difficult to identify and to contest without being deemed 'oversensitive' (Atwood & López, 2014; Welply, 2018). Forms of microaggressions reported by EAL practitioners ranged from institutional or pedagogical practices to discriminatory attitudes from peers. Whilst it is not possible to cover all of these in depth, the following vignette offers a strong illustration of the mechanisms of racial microaggressions and the ways in which these are embedded within institutional structures and wider discourses.

Vignette 2

Two EAL students had recently arrived in the same year at school (Year 10). Kamdi had moved from Nigeria with his parents. His father was an oil engineer and he had grown up in a position of relative social privilege. Bashala had arrived as an unaccompanied refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo and was living with a relative. His family had suffered violent conflict in the DRC. The two boys had been made to sit together in class. When working with the EAL support teacher, Bashala voiced the fact that he did not know why he had to sit next to Kamdi, as they had nothing in common, and did not speak the same language. Kamdi was proficient in English and Bashala was not. In another encounter, Kamdi said that he was keen not to be seen as a non-English speaking 'Other' by being associated with Bashala, and Bashala was keen to engage with other students with whom he might have more in common. When the EAL support teacher raised this with the teacher, she was told that she had not thought about that, she thought they would get on well 'as they were both from Africa'.

The above vignette shows how colonial imaginaries and lack of knowledge about EAL students' linguistic, cultural and social background can lead to forms of microaggression that are located at the intersection of race, language, immigrant status and a 'colonial gaze' on 'Africa' (Fanon, 1952). Here the teacher made a decision that was, in her eyes, well

intended, without a critical awareness of the assumptions that underpinned the decision to sit two Black 'African' students together. Microaggressions are pernicious in that they are often manifested in implicit forms. The example above shows how a possible implicit 'colonial gaze' and imaginary construction of the 'Black Other' (Mbembe & Mabanckou, 2018) participated in a decision that could perpetuate forms of Othering and overlooked any linguistic or social dimensions. These considerations are complex, in that identifying subtle forms of racism and microaggressions all too often result in a simplistic blaming of a 'racist teacher', without further acknowledgement of the role of institutional structures and wider systemic inequalities in perpetuating these practices. Although EAL practitioners insisted on the amount of tacit racism they witnessed in their roles, they were keen to emphasise that in most cases this stemmed from lack of resources, support and training rather than the responsibility of individual teachers. They insisted on the fact that most often teachers reported feeling unprepared to deal with the linguistic or cultural diversity in the classroom and were unsure how to address racist incidents when they emerged. This uncertainty stemmed from a fear of dealing with antagonism and conflict as well as inconsistent institutional structures, which offered little support, as shown below.

> **Vignette 3**
>
> A school introduced a new reporting system for racist incidents. At an internal teacher training session, this reporting system was presented and praised as a sign that the school was taking racism seriously. Teachers were encouraged to actively use it to tackle racism in school. A teacher who had been unsure how to report a number of racist incidents he had witnessed welcomed this new system, and used it to report racist incidents. After a few months, it emerged that he had been one of the only teachers to use the reporting system, and that his reports amounted to 75% of all incidents reported. The senior management team asked him to use it less, as it was not possible to respond to all the incidents. The reporting system soon stopped being used altogether.

The example above shows the tension between institutional structures and individual initiative, and how forms of legitimacy (what is valued in educational systems) might discredit anti-racist actions attempted by individuals. In an educational context where attainment takes priority over other aspects of EAL students' experiences, anti-racism often takes the form of an afterthought, or in some cases an inconvenience, as illustrated by vignette 3. This context, combined with a lack of training and pedagogical skills to address racism in schools can result in discouraging individual action and perpetuate a colour-blind approach to the education of EAL students, dominated by a focus on linguistic proficiency and attainment and a reticence to engage in difficult conversations.

Opening up difficult discussions in class is not an easy task, and is not easily achieved without providing teachers with the training and confidence to engage with possible antagonisms and conflict. However, this is seldom addressed in teacher education or professional development. A recent Runnymede research report on race and racism in English secondary schools in England revealed that many teachers do not feel 'prepared to teach in ways that promote anti-racism' and highlighted the need for more 'racial literacy among teachers' (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020, p. 2 and p. 7). This is not a new phenomenon. In her book *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks showed how—in US schools- the absence of skills to deal

with conflict, and an emphasis on multiculturalism as 'harmonious diversity' can actually be disempowering for teachers:

> Many professors lacked strategies to deal with antagonisms in the classroom. When this fear joined with the refusal to change that characterized the stance of an old (predominantly white male) guard it created a space for disempowered collective. backlash. (hooks, 1994, p. 31)

The narratives of EAL practitioners strongly echo the situation described by bell hooks, in which a reluctance on the part of the institution to support meaningful anti-racist practice, combined with a lack of training and confidence in doing so, disempowers individual teachers from taking transformative action in their support of EAL learners. This frustration in the ways in which the system reproduced forms of privilege and racism was voiced by a number of EAL practitioners.

DECOLONISING ASSESSMENT

The reproduction of forms of domination through institutional systems was particularly acute in dialogues around assessment for EAL students. There has been markedly little research in this area for EAL students, due to the complexity of integrating 'first language assessments' within mainstream assessments (Bradbury, 2020; Leung, 2016). Whilst there is not the space to cover all aspects of what forms decolonising assessment for EAL learners might take, a few salient points will be discussed in this final section.

One aspect which strongly emerged from the views of EAL practitioners was the fact that current forms of assessment in mainstream education negated EAL students' forms of prior learning and other non-English forms of literacy and oracy. Some of this was discussed earlier in relation to the anglocentric nature of the curriculum (see vignette 1) which showed how monolingual and monocultural pedagogical practices can act in subtle, exclusionary ways, which are often interpreted as a lack of linguistic proficiency. Although EAL students were given first language assessments, EAL practitioners reported that teachers did not always know how to interpret these assessment results or integrate them within their own practice to support children. One notable area was the difficult relationship between EAL and Special Educational Needs (SEN). Academic research has shown how EAL students' low proficiency in English was often interpreted as learning difficulties, which would result in EAL pupils being placed in Special Educational Needs without proper diagnosis (Evans et al., 2020). Such practices have shifted in recent years, with more awareness of the negative effects on students of associating not speaking English to learning difficulties, and a recognition that these practices are situated at the intersection of language, racism and ableism (Adjei, 2018; Tikly, 2022). Recommendations by EAL teams are now to place newly arrived EAL students in higher sets. Whilst this practice was welcomed by most as a way of overcoming a deficit approach towards EAL students, a number of EAL practitioners commented that it was double-edged.

> To be honest, yes there might be some awareness, but in practice, there really is not much acknowledgement of the relationship between SEN and EAL. In particular in cases where EAL students might actually have special educational needs, schools tend to think 'well we can't really tell if that pupil is 'SEN' because they are also EAL' so they drag their heels with a diagnosis that might actually help that child. They would not take that long with a native English speaker. So yes, I would say there is an element of racism because they stop at the idea

that 'their language is not good enough, we can't tell if they are SEN'. Even if we provide a first language assessment, they don't know what to do with this. The truth is, the whole system is underfunded. There is very little budget or funding for pupils, so ultimately it's down to whether schools can afford or not afford to do anything or if the SENCOs [SEN coordinators] will do anything to help that child. (EAL coordinator)

The general feeling that emerged from dialogues was that the lack of funding in schools, and lack of guidance and research into Special Educational Needs for EAL students meant that those with Special Educational Needs were often overlooked and let down by the system. Similarly, children's trajectories, interrupted schooling or schooling in a number of different educational systems, via different languages and scripts were generally not taken into account, due to lack of time, support, knowledge and understanding.

Vignette 4

Amira, a Syrian refugee, had experienced serious disruptions to her schooling due to conflict. As such, her mastery of written Arabic was below what could be expected for her age. Her family had first gone to Turkey, where she received education in Turkish, learning a new language and script, before moving to England at age 13. Assessments in English and first language (here defined as Arabic) showed very low levels of literacy in both languages, and teachers concluded that Amira should be put in lower sets in all subjects. Whilst working with Amira, the EAL support teacher noticed that she had very good levels of oracy, and was very quick to grasp complex concepts in different areas of the curriculum whilst working on a one-to-one basis. However, the school was reluctant to revise their assessment of Amira's abilities, as they were not evidenced by written assessments. Amira remained in lower sets where she reported behaviour by other pupils was very poor and she did not get to learn anything new.

The overall emphasis on attainment and the pressures put on GCSE assessments [exams at the end of secondary school] were also viewed by EAL practitioners as hindering a deeper engagement with the specific learning and linguistic support needs of EAL students. Despite evidence from the Department for Education (DfE) that EAL students tended to perform better than their peers at GCSE level (2018), EAL practitioners commented that their experience did not support this view.

Maybe that's the case [higher attainment for EAL students at GCSE levels] in London, in schools that are used to working with linguistically diverse populations. But here, where there are spread out EAL learners and not so many of them, I think what we see is that if a student arrives after Year 9, they are thrown in the deep end. They have to study a curriculum that is not relevant for them, very complex knowledge and a massively overwhelming amount to learn for GCSE, that is true for native English speakers and more so for EAL pupils who just don't have the language to cope with it or the support to get them there, and that puts them in a cycle of failure. If you can't get GCSE English or Maths, it is very difficult to move on to anything else these days. But we don't talk about these students who just arrived, were mainstreamed and then let down, who were failed by the system. (EAL support teacher)

It emerged from our dialogues that in some cases, recommendations from EAL teams to allow EAL students to take practical exams instead of GCSE were ignored by schools who were under pressure to enter all students for GCSE exams. Students were entered for heritage language GCSEs when these existed and were available, but EAL practitioners felt that these were often considered tangential and not always valued. They also commented on how being able to navigate the assessment system successfully was strongly dependent on parents' knowledge and understanding of the system and the capacity to mobilise what many EAL practitioners referred to as 'their cultural capital', which privileges certain social groups over others. This was also important for post-16 Further Education, as some EAL practitioners commented on the fact that many EAL students were placed in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes after 16 because they had not achieved sufficient grades in their GCSEs.

The above shows the hindering effects that standard forms of assessment can have on inclusion and mainstreaming for EAL students. Approaches to assessment are strongly embedded within monolingual and monocultural curricula and normalised forms of standard language, which do not account for the multiple forms of literacy or oracy that EAL students might have acquired in their educational trajectory prior to joining an English school. The views and experiences of EAL practitioners and the pupils they support show how assessment systems reproduce forms of marginalisation and exclusion, through monolingual and monocultural ideologies, inherited from colonialism and modernist ideals of the nation-state (Mignolo, 1992). It shows the urgent need for decolonising assessment in ways that can promote deeper inclusion and equity for EAL students within mainstream settings, recognising multi-literacies and different forms of oracy.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown the multiple, intersecting barriers faced by EAL students and the educators who seek to accompany them towards an inclusive educational experience. The complex interplay between educational policy, the curriculum, practices, teacher education and forms of assessment participated in shaping a challenging landscape for the work of EAL practitioners and the students they were meant to support. Whilst most EAL practitioners were fervent supporters of mainstreaming, their narratives highlighted the need for further critical reflection on the notions of 'inclusion' and 'mainstreaming', which are often put forward uncritically in relation to provision for EAL students. In an educational context marked by a predominantly, white, anglocentric curriculum, the domination of standardised English as the sole legitimate language in school and a restricted view of what constitutes 'valuable' knowledge, it was often difficult for EAL practitioners to foster meaningful inclusion for EAL students. This was further compounded by a dearth of specific policy for supporting EAL learners, an emphasis on the 'universalism' of English education and dwindling resources and funding for schools and EAL practitioners. The views and experiences of EAL practitioners show that there is a pressing need to look more critically at what underlies general notions of 'inclusion' and 'mainstreaming' and how these might perpetuate forms of oppression and inequalities. A decolonial lens has allowed us to begin to question such practices, although much work remains to be done in this area. This article has drawn attention to the need for further support for teachers -from initial teacher education through to continued professional development- which actively engages with anti-racist action and the idea of decolonising pedagogical practices with regard to EAL students. This echoes other scholarship in the area which has highlighted the need for further engagement with anti-racist practices in teacher education and professional development (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020; Tikly, 2022). Such training would allow teachers to better engage with the complexity

of experiences, social and academic, that are tied in to speaking a language other than English in school. It would also help teachers develop critical awareness, the capacity to engage with antagonism and conflict and help empower teachers to challenge everyday forms of racism and microaggressions that are too often experienced by EAL students. New, more integrated forms of partnership between schools and universities around decolonising linguistic practices can constitute a step forward in that direction. Continuous support and training in developing anti-racist practices and 'racial literacy' amongst educators (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020 p. 7) are also crucially important at school leadership level. There is a long history of multicultural and antiracist projects in Britain (Tikly, 2022) from which much can also be learnt with regard to supporting EAL students in English schools. Research has shown that successful anti-racist initiatives in school build on whole-school approaches and clear anti-racist policies (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020; Tikly, 2022). This requires a commitment to anti-racism from those in positions of leadership in schools, and the skills to implement these initiatives and support staff in doing so.

Finally, this article highlighted the need to decolonise assessment. This might seem like a tall order within increasingly competitive neoliberal education systems in which attainment, rankings and international comparisons predominate and underpin an understanding of education built mainly on performance and skills. However, dialogues with EAL practitioners showed that there are many areas in which schools and teachers can start to actively decolonise assessment: through valuing the multiple forms of literacy and oracy of EAL students; by integrating different forms of initial assessments (written, first language, oral) within teaching practices to better support EAL students; by offering support and information for parents to navigate complex assessment systems (in pre- and post-16 education). This goes hand in hand with opening spaces that can encourage educators to critically reflect on their own assumptions, value systems and privilege. This is particularly important in relation to language, where colonial assumptions and forms of linguistic hegemony generally remain unquestioned, even with the best of intentions. This was best put by one of the EAL support teachers:

> Only just recently did I realise that despite my best efforts, I still held deeply embedded colonial assumptions in my work with EAL students. The media, politicians, the domination of English as the main global language, they all give this impression that migrant children really want to learn English, that they are grateful to learn English, as if it was the best language in the world, and England the only place you want to be. But I was speaking with a girl from Afghanistan who simply said to me: 'I don't want to stay here. I want to go back to Afghanistan'. Even though she'd experienced conflict, her family had to flee … It seems quite simple but it was a lightbulb moment for me. Learning English and living here isn't always the students' end goal, yet the entire system makes us believe that it is. (EAL support teacher)

Decolonising EAL provision and practice requires fundamental structural and systemic changes as well as 'decolonising the mind' and ways of thinking about EAL teaching and learning. It also calls for changes in the way we carry out research in this area. There is much work left to be done, yet our hope is that through new forms of collaboration and partnership in teaching and research we can amplify the voices of those who often remain unheard, and encourage transformative change.

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Data for this research is available upon reasonable request to the author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

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ENDNOTES

[1] The ideological implications of the term 'Western' and the risk of homogenisation and normalisation of such a term are recognised in this article. The term is used here in a critical sense, as concept which acknowledges hegemonic processes of domination as a result of colonisation and capitalism. In this sense, it refers to Spivak's notion of 'worldling' of the world: the ways in which countries or cultures situated outside of the 'West' are fixed in notions of distance or exoticism, thus naturalising the dominance of the West as the only 'normal' (Spivak, 1985, p. 243).

[2] In an attempt to decenter from English only, the work of some of the postcolonial authors were read in the original French in which they were written (Fanon, 1952; Mbembe & Mabanckou, 2018; Spaëth, 2020). This afforded access to some scholarship that has not been translated into English. However, it is recognised that French is also a colonial language and its widespread use contentious (see Mbembe & Mabanckou, 2018).

[3] For ease of writing, EAL coordinators, support teachers and bilingual officers or support assistants will at times be referred to as 'EAL practitioners'.

[4] The learning of a foreign language became non-compulsory in England for Key Stage 4 (students aged 14 to 16) since 2004.

[5] The EAL umbrella term includes migrants from a number of different geographical regions (Western, Eastern and Central Europe, South Asia, South East Asia, Western Africa, Central Africa, Northern and Southern Africa) who will likely experience different forms of racialisation and racial identifications.

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