

Committee for Linguistics in Education (CLIE) Meeting 97

1.30 – 4.45, Friday 11th February 2011

Room UG9, British Council, 10 Spring Gardens, London, SW1A 2BN

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/new/Images/home-spring-gardens-map.gif>

Present:

Graeme Trousdale (Chair, LAGB) Dick Hudson (LAGB), Willem Hollmann (LAGB), Vivienne Rogers (LAGB), Caroline Coffin (BAAL), Eddie Williams (BAAL), Esther Daborn (BAAL, CLIE secretary), Agneta Svalberg (ALA Deputising for Richard Aplin), Therese Comfort (CILT, guest speaker & deputising for Kate Board), Jo-Ann Delaney (NATECLA), Jonathan Gibson (ESC), Keith Davidson (NATE), Melissa Cudmore (BC), Mahendra Verma (co-opted), Catherine Walter (co-opted)

1. Membership and apologies

The Chair welcomed those present and opened the meeting with thanks to Dick Hudson for chairing the previous meeting. He noted apologies from

Ben Rockcliffe, (TDA), Charlotte Franson (NALDIC), Guy Cooke (BAAL), Ian Brinton (EA), Jonnie Robinson (BL), Kate Saunders (BDA), Kersti Borjars (LAGB), Patricia Ashby (LLAS), Richard Aplin (ALA), Sue Ellis (UKLA), Sue Holley (DofE), Terry Lamb (ALL and LDDP), Urszula Clark (BAAL), Kate Board (CILT), Tim Shortis (co-opted).

2 Minutes of Meeting 96

Accepted, subject to minor changes of wording.

3. Matters arising

It was agreed that Minutes will be sent out as soon as possible after the meeting so that members can refer to draft Minutes if needed before the final version is agreed at the next meeting.

3.1 TDA website for new tutors of PGCE English (CLIE 96, minute 3.1)

DH reported that there is nothing to say at present on this topic.

Action ED include on next meeting agenda .

3.2 Audit of grammatical knowledge: letter to schools minister (CLIE 96, minute 3.3). DH has received no reply.

3.3 PGCE database (CLIE 96, minute 5) (MC, JG, TS) JISC email list is on offer but request has to come from PGCE staff. JG not able to take this further. TS could assist.

Action GT contact TS to see how this might be taken forward.

4. Reports from member organizations for information (CLIE members)

4.1 BAAL: EW reports that BAAL experts on testing have been told by UKBA that their services are not required. ED reports a similar story for assistance offered by BALEAP.

4.2 NATECLA: Government cuts in ESOL provision mean that 60-80% of students currently eligible will not be able to attend classes from September 2011. It was agreed that CLIE could draft a statement that BAAL or LAGB might like to endorse.

Action: JAD and GT to draft a text for CLIE approval that could be offered to BAAL or LAGB Chairs for endorsement

Action: CLIE members might like to send the campaign around other professional lists available to them.

4.3 MC passed round a British Council flier on current project activities

5. New GCSE requirements for the Study of Spoken Language: materials, quality of guidance. TS not available.

Action ED, item to be carried forward to next meeting agenda. TS or GT to report.

6. Ethics and confidentiality in language investigation for A Level English language fieldwork (TS).

Action ED, item to be carried forward to next meeting agenda. TS or GT to report.

7. DfE proposal for phonics screening test in year 1 for 6 year olds

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/schoolswhitepaper/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching/curriculum/early-years>

CW reported on main BAAL member points regarding the Phonics screening test consultation:

7.1 'Both the reward and central purpose of [reading and] learning to read are to make sense of text.' This test will obscure this vital point and give a misleading message to children, parents, schools, teacher training institutions and educational publishers. For over 25 years, the emphasis on reading for meaning has encouraged effective teaching of reading for meaning to young children: for example, there are dozens of simple reading books which contain no more than ten letters of the alphabet (plus 'the') but tell a story. Reading for meaning encourages a virtuous circle. The risk of this test is a return to an emphasis on 'barking at print'.

7.2 Decoding texts is not a valid test of children's progress as readers. Those who do poorly on these tests may perform much better on real tests, or in other languages. Success on the decoding of isolated words and non-words does not predict success in reading for meaning; fluent decoding can mask an inability to make meaning from text.

7.3 There are substantial problems with using non-words in the test.

7.3.1 The child will inevitably look for meaning – that after all is the point of reading. This threatens the validity of the test.

7.3.2 It is impossible to ensure that the non-words do not have a meaning in any of the English dialects or other languages spoken by the children tested; and even if it were, it is impossible for a single assessor to hold all the legitimate pronunciations of a non-word in mind.

7.3.3 Time spent on learning to parse non-words is lost to other reading activities

7.4 Type and timing of tests: it is not the detection of struggling readers that is missing in the system at the moment; it is the resources to address their problems. Further, the readers who are struggling are not always struggling because of decoding problems. On the basis of available research, we would predict much better results from relying on teachers' diagnosis of struggling readers, based on their skills, training and knowledge of pupils; and on resources being applied to helping these struggling readers catch up.

However, if there are to be standard tests, these should include *both* a test of decoding *and* a test of comprehension. As for timing, it is neither useful nor necessary to wait until June for this assessment: it could be made mid-year, with the rest of the year then available for addressing the problems of those who are found to be struggling.

7.5 We note that the document is framed so as to give an impression of validity and reliability. The omission of a comprehension element means that the proposed test is not a test of reading, nor a predictor of reading skill. The measures proposed for reliability will in fact threaten validity as well: for example, limiting attempts at decoding to ten seconds will penalise the learner who may read most words unproblematically, but when faced with a word that is difficult not only self-corrects, but persists, tries different strategies, and engages cognitively with the task: all predictors of success. In addition, the good decoder may be a poor comprehender,

and the decoder who stumbles and falters may be an excellent decoder – cf. Yuill & Oakhill (1991).

Members agreed with the above points and added the following comments

KD: children of mixed linguistic backgrounds do not have equal phoneme inventories at aged 6. The test appears to be a strategy to force teachers to follow a phonics practice. It also appears to favour standard English pronunciation with little acknowledgement of regional variation.

The suggestion of adding a test of meaning making as well as phonics was supported by VR and EW, although it was acknowledged that provision of different versions for different populations was unlikely. Multi-lingual classrooms mean that a test looking at reading in English does not necessarily provide a result that equates with a child's overall literacy skills. However, the DfE interest will be in testing whether students can deal with English.

GT: Current proposals on phonics testing are not acceptable for the 5 reasons that CW mentions. However, we must avoid the negative and make a positive suggestion.
Action: CW & GT to work on a response and ask BAAL and LAGB to both sign up to the same points

Action GT will update on any proposal that goes forward

8. Guest speaker on Primary languages: Therese Comfort, CILT, see below**

9. Government consultation on the National Curriculum

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/nationalcurriculum>. (DH/KD)

DH / KD reported that this is evidently an attempt to slim down the curriculum with a focus on content and knowledge, rather than skills. There is a perception that hard subjects remain and soft subjects have become peripheral.

The general view is that GCSE English should assess general language competence: however, even the TDA does not accept a C at GCSE as a guarantee of competence, and imposes its own literacy test on trainee teachers. If subject specialists are asked to mark language competence, standardising will be impossible. It would also require a change in GCSE marking criteria.

The requirement for assessing spelling, punctuation and grammar in all subjects was removed in 2007. The criterion to be used this year is 'quality of written communication' of which spelling and grammar is an element. If the element of specific assessment of this aspect of the exam is a small proportion, say 5%, it becomes tokenism. If it is more than 10%, it distorts the subject. Ofqual has set up a sub group to inform Michael Gove.

There is a choice as to whether to send a response to the first call for evidence on English, Maths, Science, & Physical Education, which are to be submitted by 14th April, or wait till public consultation on recommendation in early 2012. It was felt that a response by April would be advisable

Action: GT and DH to draft a response and consult with CLIE members by e.mail

10. UKLO (United Kingdom Linguistics Olympiad)

DH reported that the entries for 2011 at advanced level have risen from 400 last year to 800 this year. The numbers for Foundation level have risen slightly from 250 last year. There are around 1000 who have now heard about linguistics and taken part, some for the second time, some from year 7. Participation offers a particularly good challenge for talented children. Round 1 is now being marked. Round 2 will take place in Pittsburgh

The Patron is Christina Ohuruogu who also has a BA in linguistics from UCL

The Olympiad has been received with enthusiasm by the independent sector, e.g. the City of London school for girls has submitted 90 candidates. In the state sector, the same number of schools has entered, but with smaller teams who are more cautious. It appears that the teacher is not always supported by the Head. Entries come typically through a Foreign Language teacher. GT is trying to work with Scottish CILT to encourage Scottish schools and those of northern England.

VR suggested Paul Harrison should be a hub.

The venue for IOL 2012 will be in Slovenia. If the UK hosts the international one in 2013, we will be looking for funding of £40-50,000

The meeting congratulated all involved. Bravo!

11. Report on November 2010 meeting of English Language academics to discuss writing an 'unofficial benchmark' for English Language degrees .

GT and DH in working group. First draft of benchmark statement is almost complete. It will perhaps be ready to be looked at in May and should be useful for those drawing up degrees in English language. There is already an unofficial benchmark for Creative Writing degrees.

12. Plans for meeting Number 100 of CLIE (February 2012)

Based on suggestions already made, GT proposed a 1 day conference or workshop covering past present future contributions of CLIE. As a showcase event it could include 3 x10 minute talks by prominent people highlighting the impact of linguistics. The event would close with an evening celebration.

Where: somewhere like The British Academy?

When: Wednesday 29th Feb 2012?

Who: invitees to include journalists, linguists, chairs of BAAL and LAGB, articulate students, politicians, teachers, Christine Ohuruogu? Eddie Izzard?

The standard CLIE committee business could be covered 9.30 – 11.30 before the day's events.

Action: working group of GT & DH to contact The British Academy

Action CLIE members: contact GT with any further ideas before May

13. Date of next meeting: May 20th 2011, British Council, 10 Spring Gardens, London, SW1A 2BN

14. AOB

GT reported on a workshop arranged by Department for Education on the new A levels in English. Ofqual and DfE were looking for ways to encourage discussion between HEIs and those involved in setting up new A levels as the link between A Levels and HE expectations is currently weak. The different kinds of English at A level feed many degrees or none. Ofqual and DfE were looking for sources of clarification from bodies that could be said to represent the view of what is required to study English at HE generally. NATE and the English Subject Centre were also present. NATE has an HE committee and has done work on the interface.

GT presented the view that CLIE will be willing to engage in any discussion as it has links with a number of other relevant bodies and could assist with this clarification.

Action: GT to advise DfE of CLIE's willingness to be consulted on matters regarding reforms to A-levels in English.

The meeting ended at 4.45pm

****Notes on Languages in Primary Schools: Therese Comfort, Guest Speaker.**

Therese Comfort worked for many years as a class teacher and Special Needs Co-ordinator in primary schools in Hertfordshire and North Yorkshire, teaching all age groups in Key Stage 2. In addition to teaching the full range of subjects in the primary curriculum, she has taught languages since the early nineties. In 1999 she was asked to be involved in the DfES Good Practice Project which was set up to find out about and disseminate best practice in planning, teaching and learning of languages in the primary school. In 2000 Therese became an Advanced Skills Teacher and worked to further support and develop languages in the City of York. Since 2003 she has worked for CILT, the National Centre for Languages and is currently Head of Primary.

National Languages strategy of 2002 set out the intention of introducing languages as an entitlement to all children above the age of 7 in primary schools by 2010. 35% of schools did it at the end of the day in clubs etc.

In 2005 substantial funding became available. It paid for 6 specialists in CILT and the writing of a Key stage 2 framework for languages to give a national point of reference for language learning. This offered 3 core strands of skills that students should be developing: oracy, literacy, intercultural understanding, together with 2 cross cutting strands: knowledge about language (KAL) and language learning strategies.

Funding is now stopping, but there is a website functioning as a one stop shop for primary teachers with material from across the country: www.primarylanguages.org.uk It has Audio files in 6 languages Japanese and mandarin, French German Spanish Italian, plus transcripts, advice on exploitation, and ideas for age appropriate methodology. Importantly there is support for teachers concerns over their own language skills, with modules of around 30 hours for up skilling Primary Teachers, including pronunciation and intonation. CILT aims to put this course on the training zone.

92% of Primary schools teaching a language across Key Stage 2 as part of the curriculum. French, Spanish, German, and a few community langs. Assessment for learning is used to monitor progress.

A longitudinal study carried out by the OU and Canterbury has produced an Ofsted report that indicates encouraging strengths in speaking and listening. KAL is seen to develop well in many schools, and links with literacy work in English. Many heads say this FL work is supporting literacy in English, and is encouraging more active listening.

Intercultural understanding is going beyond a tokenistic approach, as interest in lives of children living in the countries they are learning about flourishes in areas such as food (what snacks do you bring to school?) and games. It broadens the interest in heritage languages.

The process is supporting closer links between primary and secondary schools as Secondary teachers work along side Primary teachers. This supports the transition to year 7, where the secondary school needs to build on prior learning, especially in skill areas and teaching approach. There was significant discussion in the area of transition.