

Hope Challenge Case Study: EAL Initiative

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INTRODUCTION

The Challenge

In September 2012, a group of educators at Liverpool Hope University came together with representatives from partner Local Authorities to support two primary schools in the North West of England in strengthening their provision for pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Over the last decade the rapid of EAL children entering the UK has represented one of the most significant changes to the education system, with the numbers almost doubling (Morrison, 2014). In 2014 over one million children were identified as learning English as an additional language (Bell Foundation, 2015), with this group forming a majority of pupils in 8.4%, or 1 in 12, British schools (Strand, Malmberg & Hall, 2015).

The Department for Education (DfE) defines a child with EAL as one “whose first language is known or believed to be other than English... who was exposed to this language during early development and continues to be exposed to this language in the home or in the community” (DfE, 2013, p. 7). Given the broadness of this definition, EAL children could belong to well-established ethnic minority communities or to first generation labour migrants. They may have entered the country with their families as asylum seekers, as unaccompanied refugees or victims of trafficking (Arnot et al., 2014).

The diversity of this group brings with it a broad range of needs and abilities but should not be taken to reflect a wholesale lack of proficiency. EAL children may have been well educated in their home country and have high level English skills. However, others may enter the country with poor academic ability and limited English having had little, or disrupted, schooling (Arnot et al., 2014). To meet the learning needs of EAL children with knowledge gaps and little or no English language ability may require specific resources and particular expertise amongst school staff.

► Key Point

Meeting the learning needs of EAL children may require specific resources and particular expertise amongst school staff in order to accommodate their strengths and respond to their needs.

In its **Brief Summary of Government Policy for EAL Learners** (DfE, 2012) the government stipulates that local authorities have a legal duty to ensure that

"education is available for all children of compulsory school age ... irrespective of a child's immigration status, country of origin or rights of residence in a particular area" (p.1). Similar principles are reflected in the new Teaching Standards, which came into effect from September 2012. Teachers must now "adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils" (DfE, 2011, Standard 5, p. 11) and "have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those ... with English as an additional language... and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them" (ibid).

Across the primary years, research suggests that the extent to which EAL pupils can access the curriculum is directly related to their progression in learning English. Therefore, a key policy goal is to encourage them to start speaking English as soon as possible:

The Government's policy is to promote rapid language acquisition and to include them within mainstream education as soon as possible with class teachers hav[ing] responsibility for ensuring that pupils can participate in lessons (DFE, 2012, p.1).

Enacting this policy goal is a complex, difficult task given the diversity of the EAL population; however, a growing body of evidence indicates aspects of good practice that can lead to improved outcomes. Particular attention is placed on developing pupils' academic vocabulary and word-level skills/knowledge so that they can develop an appropriate school-based language (Arnot, et al., 2014). This focus reflects research indicating that a lack of academic vocabulary places one of the most significant constraints on EAL pupils' comprehension of written and spoken language in the classroom (Burgoyne et al., 2009, 2011), with these pupils continuing to struggle, relative to their non-EAL peers, into their secondary years.

Indeed, in a recent major review of 12 intervention studies aimed at improving EAL pupil's English language and/or literacy, Murphy (2015) identified English vocabulary and word-level skills as the most promising areas in literacy learning. Importantly, effective interventions did not involve the explicit teaching of individual, detextualised words, almost an impossibility given the 7000 word families that fall into the category of academic vocabulary (ibid). Rather, vocabulary learning grew out of text-based activities that focussed predominantly on learning strategies for developing word knowledge¹. More specifically, EAL pupils who struggled with reading words were found to benefit most from interventions that focussed on alphabetic knowledge, phonics, phonological awareness and other word-level skills. Those with good decoding skills who

¹ "Shared storybook reading, for example, has been proposed as a meaningful, naturalistic context that facilitates vocabulary learning by exposing children to new words" (Lugo-Neris, et al. 2010, p. 316).

performed poorly on measures of reading comprehension, benefited most from explicit vocabulary instruction to enhance their ability to analyse words through their morphological structure².

In addition to interventions that directly target vocabulary learning, research suggests that second language acquisition can be enhanced by supporting the child's first language and culture (Arnot, et al, 2015, p. 89; Lugo-Neris et al. 2010). In doing so language learning may occur in at least two ways. First, the learner can use the skills acquired in the first language to build knowledge in the second (Cummins, 1981). For example, Lugo-Neris et al., (2010) found that a bridging programme, which incorporated Spanish into a shared storybook reading activity, enhanced students English word learning. Although vocabulary bridging to the child's strongest language, is not always feasible, given the diversity of the EAL population, it is a potentially useful strategy to promote the learning of novel words (Arnot, et al., 2015; Lugo-Neris et al., 2010).

▶ **Key Point**

Vocabulary building and integrating the cultural identity of EAL pupils into the classroom are crucial to successful second language learning.

Second, integrating the cultural identity of EAL pupils into classroom literacy activities and encouraging them to share their first language and culture has been recognised as key to successful learning (Arnot, et al., 2015). As Purdy (2008) points out: "Some researchers suggest that EAL students do poorly at school because their home language and culture is excluded from school programmes" (p. 50). Creating an inclusive and welcoming learning environment can help build EAL pupils' self-esteem in a new, potentially intimidating, cultural context. With increased self-esteem, EAL pupils are more likely to participate in conversations with peers and engage in other forms of classroom discourse, which has been found to improve their verbal performance (Kalanzadeh et al, 2013).

²Phonological awareness refers to an ability to identify the phonological characteristics of a word as distinct from the meaning. Morphological awareness refers to the ability to recognise, understand and use different meaningful word parts (i.e., understanding that adding the suffix [-er] on to the verb "teach" (teacher) changes the word to refer to the agent of the verb).

THE STUDY

Participating Schools

School A is a small primary school located in a socially disadvantaged area in the suburbs of Liverpool. The proportion of children at the school known to be eligible for pupil premium is much higher than average (Ofsted, 2012). The school is located in purpose-built premises and serves children from nursery to Year 6 (ages 4-11). In its last Ofsted report it received a “Good” overall rating, an improvement since its last inspection when it received a “Satisfactory” (ibid).

Historically, the number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those learning English as an additional language has been below the national average. However, over the last two years the school has seen a steady increase in the number of children from Eastern European countries. The school aims to provide a welcoming, safe environment for these children irrespective of their national/cultural origin. This is reflected in two values in the school’s mission statement:

“To provide, a vibrant, welcoming, secure environment for all children.”

“To provide a broad, balanced, carefully planned curriculum which delivers a quality education regardless of race, gender, culture, religion and disability.”

Six EAL pupils from year 1 were the focus of the Hope Challenge. Some were from settled Eastern European communities and had an intermediate level of language proficiency. Others were from recently arrived labor migrant families and came to the school with very basic English. The school adopts an “immersion” or “mainstreaming” approach, integrating these pupils into the regular class upon entry. All teachers are regarded as teachers of EAL and work with support staff to facilitate these pupils’ learning.

School B is a small suburban primary, serving just over 200 children from nursery to Year 6 (ages 3-11). The school is located in a socially disadvantaged area, with the number of pupils supported by pupil premium almost double the national average (OFSTED, 2015). The school received a “good” overall rating in its latest Ofsted report (Ofsted, 2015), a marked improvement since its last inspection when it was judged “inadequate”.

Most pupils at the school are of White British heritage, and the proportion of pupils for whom English is not their first language is well below the national average (OFSTED, 2015). However, over the past few years there has been a small, but steady, increase in the number of children from ethnic minority backgrounds. As a consequence, each class throughout the school has 1-2 EAL pupils.

The school has a stated commitment to “provide an inclusive and caring environment in which to develop trust, confidence and self-esteem” based on Christian values. Active efforts are undertaken to help pupils understand a range of cultures through activities such as diversity week and displays throughout the school with slogans such as “Different Families: Same Love” (Ofsted, 2015, p. 4).

Four EAL pupils were the focus of the Hope Challenge initiative, three from year 3 and one from year 5. These pupils were from Eastern European communities and had varying levels of English language proficiency, ranging from very basic to intermediate. Upon entering the school the pupils received language support from NASSEA³, an organisation of language specialists funded through Warrington Council. Here, specially trained teachers assessed pupils’ language capabilities and matched their needs with a programme of work designed to facilitate rapid language acquisition. During this period, the pupils were fully integrated into the mainstream classroom and received weekly sessions with an intervention teacher.

THE HOPE CHALLENGE EAL INITIATIVE

Working Together to Improve Learning and Teaching

The Hope Challenge, EAL Initiative involved the creation of partnerships with schools through a programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that embedded effective EAL pedagogy within a school environment that both accepted and valued diversity. The core focus was to ensure that all teaching responded to the needs of the pupils and supported their language development while fostering their integration within the school community.

► Key Point

Hope challenge initiatives are collaborative partnerships grounded in sound pedagogy and based on a shared reflective process involving students, teachers and trainees to respond to the needs of individual pupils’.

There was a specific focus on enhancing the pupils’ oral communication in the classroom. Developing pupils’ spoken language skills was considered crucial to help them acquire the necessary academic word knowledge for understanding and participating in classroom discourse in order to access the curriculum.

³ Northern Association for Support Services for Equality and Achievement.

Developing Trainee Teachers' Competence through a Coaching Model

Teacher trainees completing the third year of their BA QTS at Liverpool Hope University took responsibility for working closely with target EAL pupils over an eight-week period. Trainees were guided by University tutors who were specialists in the area of additional language learning. Both trainees and tutors collaborated with class teachers, drawing on the teachers' knowledge of target pupils and their pedagogical expertise.

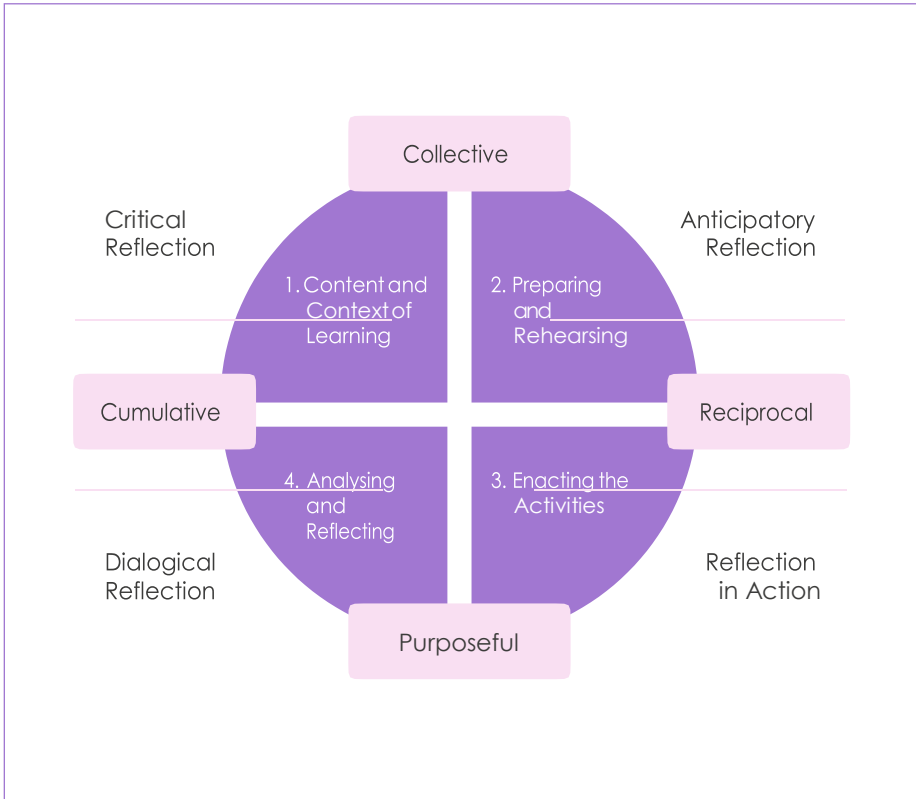
The team used the NASSEA and NALDIC steps to identify the skill level of each target pupil⁴. In this way, teaching strategies grew from the needs of the child while also taking into account appropriate future learning goals. Based on these individualised learning trajectories, the team developed an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for each child to progress with their language development through the curriculum. Teaching strategies were drawn from effective EAL pedagogy - a set of systematic principles and practices informed by theory and research (Davies, 2009). These included:

1. Activating pupils' prior knowledge.
2. Providing a rich contextual background to make the input comprehensible.
3. Actively encouraging comprehensible output.
4. Drawing the learner's attention to the relationship between form and function.
5. Developing learner independence.

This collaborative process was embedded in a reflective and evaluative cycle of learning outlined in Figure 1. Here tutors, trainees and teachers analysed the teaching and learning in each session and used this as a basis for forward planning.

⁴The NASSEA and NALDIC EAL Assessment systems describe the knowledge and skills of the early stages of pupils' English language acquisition, moving from those who are developing their English language skills but have very significant EAL needs (Step/Level 1) to those who have the range of literacy skills necessary to participate fully in the curriculum (Step/Level 7).

Figure 1. The Hope Cycle for Ambitious Teaching



Enhancing Social Integration and Self Esteem as a Precursor to Language Acquisition

The Hope Challenge EAL Initiative was grounded in an effort to foster the target pupils' integration into the working life of the school. The goal was to create a sense of belonging within the school community (i.e. in the classroom and playground and at school events such as assemblies, plays and trips, etc.) by acknowledging and considering the pupils' home culture (Arnot, 2014; Purdy, 2008). This ethos of inclusion would build the target pupils' self-esteem, which was considered a crucial factor in enhancing their participation in classroom discourse (Kalanzadeh et al, 2013).

► Key Point

Social integration and enhanced self-esteem considered crucial factor in inclusion and improved communication skills .

Making Explicit Links to Assessment Criteria

Trainees and teachers worked with University tutors to explore how the cultural identity of EAL pupils could be meaningfully integrated into school and classroom activities. Learning resources were developed that positively reflected the child's cultural and linguistic identity and experiences (e.g. posters, books, and labels, as well as role-play equipment such as newspapers and food packets, etc.) Collaborative tasks were planned to give EAL pupils opportunities to interact with peers, teachers and trainees through text-based activities such as storybook reading (Arnot, 2014). Target EAL pupils were supported in sharing their "cultural selves" through participating in a role play activity where they assumed the role of teacher, instructing peers in their home language and culture (Purdy, 2008, p, 50).

▶ Key Point

Enhancing social intergration and building self-esteem are considered crucial to improving EAL pupils communication skills.

These opportunities to share valued aspects of their identity and demonstrate pride in their culture were designed to build self-esteem. Engaging in dialogue in a classroom context also allowed EAL pupils to develop academic vocabulary and language structures.

Data collection

A range of data was gathered to evaluate the effectiveness of the Hope Challenge EAL Initiative.

The impact of the initiative on students' oral communication was measured by comparing the agreed assessment of the target pupils' pre-post levels on the NASSEA/NALDIC descriptors. Further evidence was gathered from three short questionnaires administered to participating class teachers, trainees and target pupils. EAL pupils were asked to share their perceptions of the eight-week initiative, both in terms of their ability and self-esteem. Pupils' comments were supplemented by those of the class teacher, who assessed the impact of the training on the target pupils' communication, self-esteem and class participation. Trainee teachers considered the impact of their participation in the initiative on aspects of their professional development, specifically in relation to their ability to understand and respond to the needs of a diverse range of pupils.

IMPLICATIONS

Impact on Students

At the start of the project the pupils' oral communication skills were assessed against the schools' preferred EAL assessment system (School A used the NALDIC Assessment Descriptors in Understanding and Use of Spoken Language; School B used the NASSEA Level Descriptors in Listening and Understanding). Table 1 shows the pupils' range of competence. In School A, most of the six participating year 1 pupils were performing at Level 1-2. These pupils could engage in very basic exchanges and follow simple instructions. However they were only able to recognise everyday vocabulary and tended to rely heavily on an interpreter to predict their meaning from gestures and context. In School B two pupils were performing at Steps 3-4, indicating that they were developing their English language skills but had very significant EAL needs. Most others were performing at Steps 5-6. These pupils were socially fluent in English but were underachieving because of a lack of full academic English competency.

Just two months later, at the conclusion of the project, the majority of pupils had made gains of at least one NASSEA step/NALDIC level, with some improving two steps/levels or more.

The majority of pupils in School A were approaching Level 3 and above. They were able to participate in a greater range of activities and take increasing risks with language (i.e. longer turns), with appropriate support. Those at Level 6 were becoming increasingly independent, confident users of English, with a bank of specialist technical vocabulary relating to specific subject.

All pupils at School B were approaching Step 6/7. These pupils had developed a range of communication skills necessary to understand most social and academic interactions delivered at normal speed and to participate fully in the Curriculum.

Table 1. Pre/Post Initiative NASSEA Levels: Understanding and Use of Spoken Language

| School A (Year 1) | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | NALDIC LEVELS | |
| | Pre-Initiative: January, 2015 | Post-Initiative: March, 2015 |
| Pupil A.1 | L1 | L1 |
| Pupil A.2 | L2 | L3 |
| Pupil A.3 | L2 | L3 |
| Pupil A.4 | L1 | L1 |
| Pupil A.5 | L2 | L3 |
| Pupil A.6 | L3 | L6 |
| School B (Year 3-5) | | |
| | NASSEA STEPS | |
| | Pre-Initiative: January, 2015 | Post-Initiative: March, 2015 |
| Pupil B.1 | S4/5 | S7 |
| Pupil B.2 | S3/4 | S6/7 |
| Pupil B.3 | S3 | S6 |
| Pupil B.4 | S6 | S7 |

In addition to rapid progress in Listening and Understanding, qualitative data revealed concomitant gains in pupils' self-esteem. In the words of one pupil; "I don't feel shy anymore." Another noted: "I feel now I can have a go and not be scared of making mistakes."

Pupils particularly mentioned the benefits of sharing aspects of their culture with other class members:

"I enjoyed teaching our class about my country. I felt proud."

"I enjoyed teaching maths in Hungarian."

► **Key Point**

Progress monitoring revealed gains in EAL pupils' self-esteem and linguistics.

Comments from teachers supported the pupils' perceptions of increased self-esteem:

"Confidence has been on an all-time high with all pupils involved. Pupil A.6 is willing to lead more and doesn't get upset over small things he may get wrong."

"Pupil A.5 now enjoys reading and is willing to join in class discussions."

"In all the children there has been a noticeable difference in their communication – saying things clearly and more fluently."

Impact on Trainees

Through participating in collaborative reflective and evaluative activities, and using knowledge of best practice to facilitate learning events for EAL pupils, trainees reported increased knowledge and skills relating to second language learning.

“I now realise there are many ways of communicating to help children develop their language skills.”

“I have increased my knowledge of assessment with EAL children – we could see progression over the weeks of work.”

Trainees gained increased confidence in their ability to respond to the needs of diverse pupils. Before participating in the project, all trainees stated that they lacked confidence in “adapting teaching to respond to, the strengths and needs of pupils.” (Teaching Standard 5). After the project trainees reported that they had a much clearer understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with English as an additional language. Further, they noted increased ability to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support EAL pupils: “My confidence with EAL children has massively increased after having very little prior experience.”

Summary

The pedagogy promoted through the Hope Challenge EAL Initiative is based on current best practice. It builds upon with the diverse backgrounds and experiences that EAL pupils bring to the classroom to support the kind of vocabulary learning that facilitates the development of a school-based language, improves pupils' perceptions of themselves as learners and facilitates their integration within the classroom community. Concomitant gains were also evident in trainees confidence in their ability to respond to the needs of pupils.

These outcomes illustrate the potential of a School-University partnership that engages tutors, teachers and trainees in a collaborative cycle of learning - drawing upon existing areas of expertise and developing new understandings of effective strategies for student achievement.

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⁵ Any aspects of the report title and URL that indicated the identity of the school have been omitted to protect the school's anonymity.

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