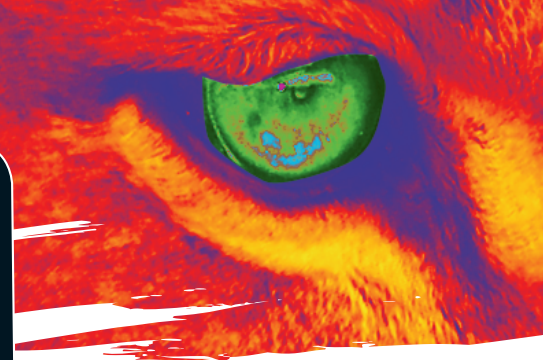


NALDIC guidance for teaching EAL students



Introduction

A growing number of schools and teachers are now supporting students with English as an Additional Language (EAL). More than one in ten secondary students is, or is becoming, bilingual and over 240 languages are spoken by students in UK schools, the most widely used being Panjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Somali, Polish, Arabic, Portuguese, Turkish and Tamil. This Teacher Guide is designed to help your lesson delivery and to give suggestions on how to differentiate materials for your students.

Students learning EAL will vary in their proficiency in their first language *and* in their proficiency in English. Some, but not all, will be fluent in their first language and have age-appropriate academic literacy skills in that language. Some will have age-appropriate skills in English similar to their peers. Others will be at very early stages. Others may be fluent in certain uses of English, but have less secure skills in other areas, for example written academic English. Similarly, students will use their first language skills for different purposes at different times.

For the purposes of this guide, three terms are used to describe students' English language levels:

- **new** to English language and literacy (likely to be new to the UK and unable to successfully participate in curriculum studies without further assistance and support)
 - **exploring** English language and literacy (likely to be able to communicate in everyday and some written English. They may have arrived in the UK during KS3 and their English is likely to show shortfalls in relation to both academic and social activities)
 - **consolidating** English language and literacy (likely to be competent in spoken English in the classroom and in informal situations but this fluency may not be reflected in academic reading and writing).
- (RBKC, 2006)

Attainment for all of these students is likely to vary significantly between speaking and listening, reading and writing, but they often make faster progress than English-speaking peers assessed at the same levels in National Curriculum English.

Broad principles

When faced with the linguistic challenges of a multilingual classroom, you will need to take a broad view of the language development of EAL students. It's not just about developing students' knowledge of bits of English vocabulary and grammar, nor of teaching these through 'extra' activities. EAL students will be learning about English as a subject at the same time as they are learning about and through English as a language. They will also be at different stages in this process. Learning a new language requires time, exposure and opportunities to understand meanings through interaction and independent reflection.

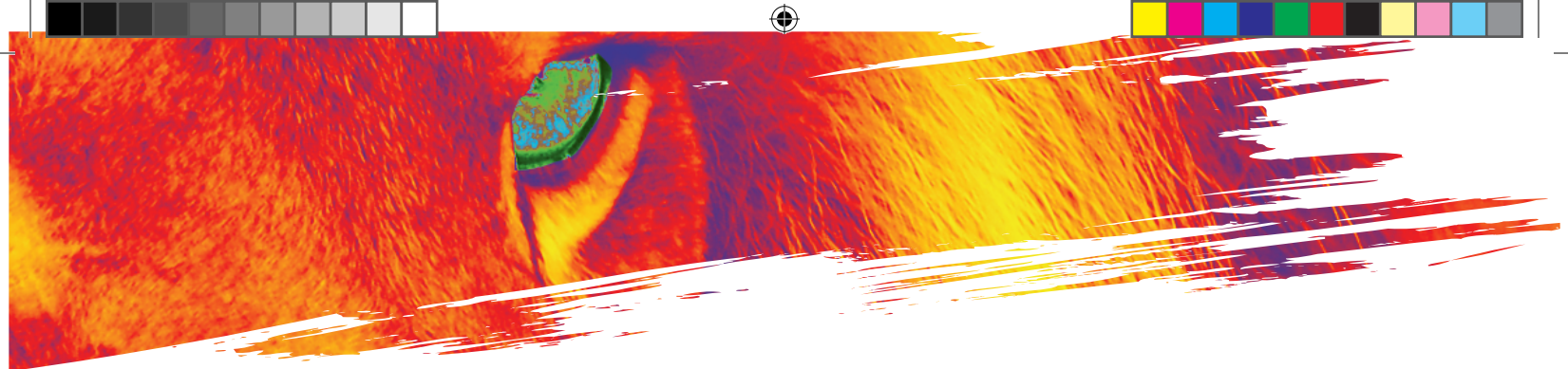
Context

Language does not occur in a vacuum, but in a context, and this context affects the way things are written and said. First of all, there is the 'context of culture', where users share common assumptions in relation to the way things are done, whether this is buying some bread or delivering a physics lesson. Secondly, language is used within a 'context of situation'. This means the language used varies according to the relationship of those involved, from speaker to speaker, from topic to topic, according to purpose and situation.

All speakers are instinctively aware of these differences in their first languages. There are also variations in language according to social class, region and ethnic group. In schools, language also varies from subject to subject. For example, the language used in Maths is very different from that used in English or History. EAL learners need to become familiar with the variations in written and spoken language that are used in subjects, schools and local communities, as well as understanding the cultural expectations, beliefs and practices associated with the language.

Communication

Language is essentially a means of communication. We use language to interact with one another and to express our feelings or viewpoints, our needs and to learn about the world. The functional nature of language in the classroom means an EAL student cannot focus



solely on the mastery of grammar or the understanding of vocabulary. Research indicates that language learning is most effective when learners are involved in meaningful situations. Learners acquire language through social interaction but also through activities that offer intellectual challenge.

Aim to give learners the opportunity to engage in social interaction while undertaking activities that offer cognitive challenge. Just as students are marked on the content of their work, EAL students also need to receive feedback on their language use.

Another key principle is the interdependence of speaking, listening, reading and writing. These are often presented as 'four' skills, but in real-life contexts they are naturally interdependent. In real life, students acquire the ability to use them simultaneously and interdependently. Their language processes develop as they use multimodal technologies such as film, video and ICT.

You will need to provide EAL learners with opportunities to develop their language abilities in ways which recognise the interdependence of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Language learning is not short term. It takes place over time and individual learners acquire language at different rates. There are many contributing factors, such as linguistic or educational backgrounds. Learners' thinking and learning styles, motivation and personality also play a role. You may have seen that EAL learners frequently acquire informal conversational skills more quickly than academic language skills (which may take five to seven years to develop). In order to plan appropriately for the linguistically diverse classroom, it is essential to understand the progression of language from spoken (e.g. playground talk) through to written (e.g. exploratory talk).

It is widely acknowledged that bilingualism is an asset and enhances learners' linguistic and cognitive skills. However, in order for students to benefit fully they need to be very proficient in both languages. This implies that the most effective school environment for EAL learners is one in which the development of the first language for both academic and social purposes is promoted alongside the learning of English. EAL learners who are literate in their first language have many advantages. Literacy in another language helps them to make sense of academic texts in English as they have an understanding of how different kinds of texts work.

Importantly, learning a new language also offers them insights into their first languages.

Implications for teaching and learning

The principles above have many implications when it comes to planning for and teaching your students. They underpin many aspects of successful teaching in linguistically diverse classrooms, such as:

- making the most of a student's prior knowledge and understanding in their first language and English
- encouraging learners to seek meaning through communicative and independent activities
- helping a student to understand source materials and supporting them to reflect their understanding in their own writing in English
- paying attention to culturally and contextually specific ways of using language
- activities which focus on specific aspects of English at word, sentence and text level which EAL students may find more difficult.

Some detailed practical suggestions are given in the table on the next page.

Rationale for suggested approaches

Reading: Structuring texts

The conventional ways of selecting and structuring information, presenting it in specific formats for different purposes and expressing it with specific features of language, often seem 'natural' to fluent and experienced first-language users of English. Students have had many years of exposure to these ways of using language at home and at school before they reach your classroom.

EAL students with limited exposure to different types of text in English are at a disadvantage, especially if the practices in their first language are quite different.

Reading: Reading for meaning

Many EAL learners will also be at a disadvantage when trying to interpret clues to predict meanings in texts. This may be because the text describes something which is beyond their current experience.

It is important to remember that most bilingual learners will have been exposed to a range of learning and literacy practices before they come into a UK school. The challenge is to build on these experiences pragmatically.