



# **NALDIC response to the Rose review of the teaching of reading and the NLS**

## **Summary**

Learners of English as an additional language in schools in England have specific and distinctive needs and rights. These are covered in the main part of this response with respect to literacy and language development. For EAL learners literacy learning needs to be viewed as a holistic process comprising all language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) which has to take place across and through the curriculum as well as in literacy sessions. For EAL learners the social and cultural context of the literacy learning is as important as the aspects taught and the knowledge and understanding of teachers and teaching assistants of second language learning and the use of appropriate pedagogic approaches is of critical importance. Children's language and literacy experiences in home and community, their knowledge and use of other languages, and how their learning experiences in school are mediated will impact on their ability to make meaning from these experiences. Phonics teaching and the development of phonological awareness will contribute to EAL learners' English language development but this must not be viewed as an isolated activity. The ability to decode, a skill which many EAL learners develop rapidly, is often not accompanied by the comprehension skills necessary for achievement within the educational system. The review of the National Literacy Strategy provides an opportunity for the specific and distinctive needs of EAL learners to be carefully considered and reflected in any revised guidance.

## **Professional knowledge and understanding**

1. The unique and distinctive situation of children learning English as an additional language (EAL) in English schools is worthy of special consideration. Educationalists and policy makers in the UK have been slow to acknowledge the substantial body of international literature and research which identifies the advantages of bilingualism for the individual and society in general (Edwards, 2003) but there have been encouraging signs of late of moves in that direction. Specific guidance on supporting learners of EAL has been included in frameworks and guidance documents for the early years and school curriculum and for the teaching of literacy in recent years. However, the majority of teachers and teaching assistants still do not receive sufficient support through initial teacher education or continuing professional development to equip them with the knowledge, understanding and skills to effectively support the language development and learning of bilingual pupils and specifically those who are learning EAL in schools.

2. NALDIC has been working closely with the TDA over the last three years as part of its initiative to develop web based induction packs and programmes for IT educators in a variety of subject areas. This has led to the establishment of a substantial body of web based literature and guidance on the teaching and learning of EAL (see [Naldic.org.uk/ittseal](http://Naldic.org.uk/ittseal)). NALDIC has welcomed the references to teaching pupils learning EAL contained in the DfES/TTA (2002) Qualifying to Teach: Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status

and Requirements for Initial Teacher Training as a significant recognition for all teachers to be adequately trained to teach children learning EAL. NALDIC has also identified and published (Franson, 2002), in collaboration with the DfES and the University of Birmingham, descriptors of good practice for EAL specialist teachers.

3. The introduction and implementation of the National Literacy Framework since 1998 has served as a means of improving teacher knowledge and understanding of the processes involved in learning to read and write and influenced the approaches and methods teachers use in supporting children's learning in these areas. It has also supported the development and use of an associated common language, underpinned by increased knowledge and understanding, for all those involved in supporting children's literacy development in schools in England. EAL professionals have welcomed this development. This knowledge represents a firm foundation on which teachers are able to make appropriate choices about the exact content of their teaching and the pedagogical strategies they will use to meet the needs of learners. However, we would argue that a corresponding knowledge and understanding of EAL learning and development and specific and appropriate pedagogic strategies is also necessary if EAL learners are to be enabled to acquire and develop literacy skills in common with their monolingual peers.

4. Teachers need to understand the nature of the challenges inherent in learning a second or additional language, and the ways in which they can develop mediational tools to support bilingual pupils in facing these challenges. They need to become skilful in analysing the language demands of the content they are teaching, and be aware that these demands are not simply to do with an understanding of vocabulary, sentence structures or text types, which all children will need to become familiar with, but also how language is related to the context in which it is being used, the purposes it is used for and the ways in which it is constructed in different social situations which are taken for granted by native speakers. The multi-faceted nature of this challenge for bilingual pupils in English schools has been conceptualised as 'Learning Language, Learning Through Language, Learning About Language' (Gibbons 2002).

### **The holistic nature of literacy development and the development of oracy**

5. The more recent introduction of Excellence and Enjoyment, the Primary National Strategy and associated materials and guidance clearly reflect omissions in the NLS in terms of the importance of oracy in the development of literacy, the need for teachers to view and integrate literacy across the curriculum and the impact of new technologies and multi-model literacies in children's lives in the 21st century.

6. The fundamental importance of the development of oracy for learners of EAL cannot be emphasised too highly. We all use spoken language to explore meaning, to express our ideas, opinions and feelings, to make sense of and confirm our understandings, to question and test our assumptions. Children who have been learning English since birth will have developed and honed their speaking and listening skills in English through their contact with trusted adults and peers and learnt to use English to support their developing understanding of the world. They will have learnt to use spoken language to interact with others for different purposes and have begun to develop their understanding of different registers, tones and the use of expressive language. Children who have learnt another language from birth will have done all the same things but in a different language with different conventions and within a different cultural context.

7. At whatever age children begin to learn English in school, they need to learn quickly how to convey their knowledge and understanding in English and to engage with new learning through English. Developing their speaking and listening skills in English is a key to

their success. This is clearly acknowledged with the development of materials such as the SureStart/DfES/PNS publication 'Communicating matters'. For many children developing spoken English for social communication inside and outside the classroom will be relatively unproblematic. There will be plenty of opportunities to listen to language, non-verbal support such as gestures or facial expressions, contextual clues to meaning and interactions which in turn will provide opportunities for negotiation, rehearsal and experimentation. Cummins (1984) referred to this as Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS). The language for basic social interaction will be heard often in the playground and learnt because it is needed to establish relationships, satisfy basic needs and get on with life. It is also likely to be the language that it is directly taught by teachers and other pupils through constant repetition and prompting when children first start learning English.

8. The language that learners need in order to develop their knowledge and understanding and participate fully in learning in classroom contexts is much more demanding and complex. Cummins (1984) refers to this as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Children learning EAL are less likely to hear this language in the playground or in their own homes. In classrooms complex language is used for teaching purposes and pupils are expected to be able to use and reproduce a range of language forms and functions for different purposes. However, there will be few opportunities for the learner to practise and consolidate this type of language. Learners of EAL, therefore, need considerable exposure to the different forms and functions of language in classroom contexts. Teachers need to be aware of the vocabulary, syntax and semantics of the different discourses they use and introduce and of how learners can be supported in acquiring them. An understanding of subject specific vocabulary, sentence structures and text types will help but teachers also need to be aware of the messages the language they use conveys and the different ways of constructing meaning in different contexts and curriculum subjects.

9. The publication 'Speaking, Listening, Learning, working with children in Key Stages 1 and 2' (DfES/QCA, 2003) is designed to provide guidance for teachers in an area that was neglected in the introduction of both the National Literacy Strategy and the original Primary National Strategy. There are many useful suggestions for teachers in the publication but little explicit guidance on supporting children learning English as an additional language. One general comment 'Most children try out ideas in talk long before they are able to pin them down in writing' is of critical importance for teachers to consider in their planning for children learning English as an additional language. However, for bilingual pupils the socio-cultural context for the talk is equally important. EAL learners will only be able to make meaning if teachers take account of the cultural context and the situation in which the talk is to be carried out and are aware of what learners bring to the situation in terms of their cultural knowledge and understanding and their language proficiency.

### **Learning through English**

10. The language demands of the curriculum can be understood at a variety of levels – at the level of vocabulary, syntax and discourse, as well as the demands of interpreting embedded contextualised meanings. Linguists such as Halliday (1975) have argued that language is always used within both a 'context of culture' – where users share assumptions about the way things are done within a particular culture – and a 'context of situation', i.e. the occasion on which the language is being used, which will vary according to the relationship of those involved, the subject of the interaction and whether it is spoken or written language. Thus, in acquiring new vocabulary for example, the second language learner's task is not a simple one as words have multiple meanings and are used with different emphases. Native speakers of a language acquire knowledge of variation in word meanings through their use in different contexts. For example, the word 'match' has three

common meanings in English, calling upon different schemata: a sporting game (Did you see the match?), something to light a candle with (Be careful with the match), and a verb which instructs pupils to find similar objects (Match the pentagons). A second language learner has to have all three schemata available to make sense of the word in context.

11. The learner also needs to develop an understanding of how language is used in discourse. Meaning conveyed through words may be much more than 'the sum of the parts'. McWilliam (1998) sets out the challenge for EAL learners in acquiring control of lexical items: 'Words change their meanings according to the context in which they occur and EAL pupils must develop the "semantic agility" – the propensity actively to seek meanings to cope with this' (p.75). Teachers must help in this process by encouraging children to be enquiring and to develop 'positive "meaning-seeking" attitudes' (p.75). She suggests that:

children's success in curriculum learning depends on active involvement in building a complex network of linguistic meaning. Children's vocabulary development is not just a matter of acquiring more colourful adjectives for story or poetry writing, or a collection of technical terms for science and mathematics, important as these are. It is more to do with developing a mental lexicon that is powered by semantic curiosity and the confidence to share ideas about the world. The development of vocabulary is linked both to cognition and to cultural experience: words always mean more than we think (p.xi).

12. Acquiring this richness in language use is part of what it means to be a member of a 'speech community'. Understanding meaning in context therefore requires, among other things, background experience which gives access to the full range of language use within a speech community. Developing a second or additional language to native speaker level requires time, exposure and opportunities to understand meanings through interaction and to internalise them. For example, many EAL learners will be at a disadvantage when trying to use semantic cues to predict meanings in texts. This may be because the text describes something which is beyond their current experience. Learners interpret the meaning of new input by drawing on information based on experiences stored in their minds and new information that they have understood. Schema theory offers an explanation of how information is stored and used to make sense of new experiences. Difficulties may also be based on much more complex differences between literacy practices and views of learning. As Gregory (1996) points out in a number of case studies of EAL learners as readers, the view of 'learning', 'reading', 'play', 'work' etc. and the role of the learner are conceived differently by different cultural groups, and she poses the question 'If views of home and school are very different, how will home/school reading programmes take account of this?' (p.79).

### **Literacy and EAL learners**

13. In considering literacy development for EAL learners, it is important to remember that they will almost certainly have had access to a range of literacy practices before they come into the school situation, and the challenge for the teacher is to build on these experiences without taking a deficit view of the differences. In the EAL context, it is more helpful to think of multiple 'literatecies'. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) coined the term 'Multiliteratecies' to counter the view that language is simply a 'stable system based on rules such as mastering sound-letter correspondence' (p5). 'A pedagogic interpretation of Multiliteratecies, includes modes of representation much broader than language alone. These differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural and social effects' (ibid).

14. In her study of the writing of EAL learners at Key Stage 4 and post-16, Cameron (2003) concludes that even high achieving EAL learners have difficulty in judging nuances of

style, and still experience some of the same problems as their less proficient EAL peers with the use of articles, choice of the correct preposition in fixed phrases, and subject-verb agreement. A further area of difficulty is with what Cameron calls 'delexical' verbs, i.e. verbs that are 'so frequently used and in so many different contexts that the link between the verb and its meaning become quite weak' (p34), such as put, do, have, make, go. Examples from students' writing include sentences such as 'make a stop to this', instead of 'put a stop to', and 'they will do more fun' instead of 'they will have more fun'. Cameron identifies a range of difficulties in the use of sentence grammar by EAL learners, often shared by underachieving mother-tongue English speakers. Most of these relate to length of clause constituents and use of adverbials and sub-ordination to develop more complex sentence structure.

15. We have outlined some of the challenges facing EAL learners and their teachers in some detail because the view of language and literacy expressed in national guidance does not take this complexity into account. Rather it is based on the notion that there is a linear progression to learning and that language can be compartmentalised and perceived at the word, sentence and text level, with a corresponding emphasis on the building blocks that make up language – phonemes, graphemes, common words, etc. - rather than on discourse in context. The assumption in this model is that literacy is neutral and culture-free rather than being made up of 'socially constructed conventions, developed within specific social traditions' (Street 1984, p4). Street calls this the 'autonomous' model of literacy, which 'generalises from what is in fact a narrow, culture-specific literacy practice' (p.2) and fails to recognise the culturally-embedded nature of literacy practices.

16. The distinctive nature of the task for EAL learners in developing their language and literacy skills in English and in using English to learn across the curriculum and the need for teachers and teaching assistants to understand and use effective pedagogic practices to support pupils' learning will be enhanced by the introduction of the PNS EAL initiative. The PNS EAL programme materials reflect the positioning of the EAL learner within a socio-cultural context and their learning as being related to and dependant on socio-cultural processes. Cognition, academic learning and language development are viewed as inter-related and inter-dependant. This multi-dimensional and holistic view of the task the learner is faced with and the context within which learning can be achieved is critical to understanding EAL learners in schools and the pedagogic approaches necessary to support learning. A holistic approach to the development of literacy (listening, speaking, reading and writing) is therefore crucial in order for EAL learners to develop, not only the skills involved, but the-ability to construct meanings from their experiences.

### **Learning to read in an additional language**

17. Pupils learning EAL come from a range of background experiences. The way they learn to read in English will be partly influenced by their previous learning, partly by their individual learning style and partly by their response to the current learning situation. The developmental pathways for pupils learning to read in EAL, particularly from a teacher's standpoint, are likely to be highly individualistic and variable. This is because these pupils, as individuals and as groups, may have different levels of English language knowledge and skills at any one time, first (and other) language competence (parts of which may be transferable to the new language), motivation, maturation and different kinds of background knowledge and life experience.

18. For children learning EAL learning to read and being taught to read cannot be viewed in isolation from the development of other language skills, confined in the early stages to the teaching of phonics or as an activity which only happens in school. Children are exposed to a wide variety of print material in the environment both inside and outside

school and are likely to be already using one or more languages for a variety of purposes when they start to learn English. A narrow 'building blocks' approach negates the influence and value of other affective factors in children's learning and literacy development including other contexts and situations; the home and languages other than English. It makes assumptions about previous knowledge and experiences in and through English and so does not take account of individual children's needs.

19. The current framework reflects the research evidence that phonological and phonemic awareness are essential in learning to read in English. However, the emphasis given to phonics (and one particular kind of phonics) in the terms of reference of this review may lead to teaching approaches which do not take into account the holistic nature of the reading process or the variety of skills EAL learners need to develop to become effective and confident readers. . Whilst phonics is an essential component of reading, a much broader conception of literacy should guide the teaching of reading and writing. Reading for EAL learners needs to involve much more than proficiency in decoding if comprehension and engagement are to be the end result.

20. Phonics is an element of the current provision for early reading in schools. However, we do not consider that this should be the only approach with young children learning EAL or for older children who are new to English. The ability to successfully identify and decode the 44 identified letter-sound correspondences in the English language should not be viewed as a precursor to engagement with continuous texts through which children will begin to develop their knowledge and understanding of the other essential skills in learning to read in a second language. Such an approach would disregard the need to integrate word recognition, clause/sentence level grammar knowledge, a knowledge of text types or genres and the development of curriculum and other relevant background knowledge for example, all of which are necessary to aid comprehension and learning in school (Leung, 2004).

21. The development of a high capacity for automatic word recognition is an essential early skill EAL learners need to acquire. Automatic word recognition operates at the level of both visual and phonological processing and is therefore part of a wider language development in English. First language speakers of English will have heard, orally used and perhaps even seen many of the words in print by the time they start to learn to read. They are already familiar with the sounds and meanings of many of the words that they may encounter in print. Pupils learning EAL, particularly very young children from minority language backgrounds entering school at Reception or Year 1, may not have had similar experiences in English.

22. EAL learners need to begin to develop their knowledge of clause/sentence level grammar early on. First language speakers of English generally have developed a tacit knowledge of how the language works by the time they start school. This knowledge includes, for instance, how different words are put together in sequence within a clause/sentence (word order), how time is marked (tenses) and how events and actions are sequenced (conjunctions). Although this knowledge is not necessarily conscious a fluent first language speaker of English can use this knowledge to slot words into meaningful units as part of the rapid processing. Because learners of EAL may have little or a limited knowledge of these aspects of English grammar reading comprehension may be held up at the clause or sentence level, even if the individual words have been recognised.

23. EAL learners need to develop knowledge of text types or genres. The conventionally established 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 some fluent and experienced first language readers. This kind of

knowledge, however, is not readily available to the EAL learner, partly because it is a matter of exposure and induction into established practices and partly because formatting/layout features of a text are a property of written communication. EAL pupils with limited exposure to different types of text in English are at a disadvantage in this aspect of text processing, especially if the practices in their first language are quite different.

24. EAL learners need to develop their knowledge of the school curriculum and other relevant background knowledge. Fluent readers do not simply follow the text to recover meaning in the words and sentences; they have to know how to make use of the information for different purposes. The ability to go beyond the text cannot be cultivated by just studying the language itself, it has to be supported by increasing familiarity with culturally established ways of seeing, knowing and understanding. The choice of a particular interpretation of a text from a range of possibilities reflects a reader's perspective and relevant background knowledge. EAL learners with a limited experience of dealing with written texts may find this aspect of reading an invisible but constant problem.

25. The teaching of reading needs to combine all the above elements.

a. The most effective approaches to developing initial reading are those that combine extensive and varied exposure to meaningful print with explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondences;

b. Just as children who are immersed in a literate environment in the home are capable of acquiring initial reading skills with minimal explicit phonics instruction, immersion in a literate environment in school is a crucial supplement to phonics instruction for strong literacy (and ideally, biliteracy) skills to develop.

c. Systematic phonics instruction can enable second language learners to acquire word recognition and decoding skills in their second language to a relatively high level, despite the fact that their knowledge of the second language is still limited. These decoding skills, however, do not automatically generalize to reading comprehension or other aspects of second language proficiency. (Cummins, 2001)

26. There is no conclusive evidence that an approach based on teaching synthetic phonics as an isolated activity in the early years will enable children to develop word recognition and comprehension skills or to develop or employ the range of literate practices needed for learning across the curriculum and throughout life. Such an approach does not take account of the need for learning to be applied in real contexts and a wide variety of contexts in order to embed understandings. 'Phonics teaching is a means to an end not an end in itself' (Adams, 1990)

27. Many pupils learning EAL develop the ability to decode words and even texts but do not achieve their potential in the education system because they have not developed their comprehension skills. Academic and practitioner research studies in the UK and USA (Frederickson et al., 1997, August and Hakuta, 1997, Cline and Cozens, 1999) consistently highlight a lag in comprehension for EAL learners and many EAL practitioners are involved in intervention initiatives to raise children's comprehension levels which do not rely on a phonics based programme (Watson, 2005).

28. We are concerned that the evidence for an approach based on the teaching of phonics in isolation and synthetic phonics in particular appears to be derived from a relatively small, in terms of numbers of schools, and largely monolingual study. In practice it is impossible to only teach phonics, the learning environment, both in the classroom and

community and the other activities taking place in the classroom will all be and should be contributing to children's literacy development.

29. In some ways the intense focus on phonics, the understanding and application of which is but one element in the process of learning to read and write, diverts attention from the holistic nature of both learning to read and write and how to support children in applying this knowledge in order to facilitate other learning. It serves to compartmentalise the process and to create barriers between disciplines and teaching approaches. It also serves to move the focus away from the needs of individual children and encourages 'a one size fits all' approach. This approach appears to view the child in isolation from his or her environment, including their family and home, socio-economic circumstances or socio-cultural context. At the same time it would appear to view knowledge as discrete from understanding and the processes of knowledge acquisition as linear.

30. The current guidance in the NLS does not appear to adopt a narrow view of the reading process or the teaching of reading as exemplified by the 'searchlights' model. A multi-dimensional approach reflects the heterogeneous nature of any group of learners and the complexities of the reading process. If EAL learners do not develop a range of strategies, and most importantly learn to make sense of the texts they encounter, they are unlikely to develop the ability to apply these processes to new situations and experiences across the curriculum or develop the enjoyment of reading which will be fundamental to their life long engagement with literacy.

31. Any review of the NLS must look at the development of literacy as a holistic practice to be realised in learning and teaching across the curriculum. It must ensure that the critical place of talk as a component of literacy and literacy development is recognised and enhanced in guidance. It must avoid being drawn into a disproportionate focus on technical aspects of literacy development including the role of phonics in teaching. It must recognise the distinctive nature of learning English as an additional language in schools (NALDIC, 1999). It must see the aim as being to develop engagement and enjoyment with talking, reading and writing at school as fundamental to the development of adults who will continue to engage with literacy and evolving literacy practices in the 21st century.

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