

Conference Reports:

TALKING PARTNERS – IS AN INTERVENTION PROGRAMME NECESSARY FOR EAL LEARNERS OR SHOULD GOOD CLASSROOM PRACTICE BE ABLE TO MEET EVERYONE’S NEEDS?

Angie Kotler and Jan Hilditch

Aim: To familiarise participants with 'Talking Partners' and set the programme within the context of good classroom practice.

Angie began the session by discussing the current context of 'Talking Partners' work in Education Bradford and introduced the outline of the session.

She explained that TP, was developed in response to what was perceived to be missing when the NLS was first developed. Reading and writing took precedence- speaking and listening appeared to have been forgotten.

She then described the most recent work, which Education Bradford developed last year, in response to the 'Speaking, Listening and Learning' guidance brought out by QCA and the Primary Strategies.

'Speaking, Listening and Learning' was a very welcome arrival and put speaking and listening back at the top of the agenda as the lynch pin for learning however the materials did not reflect the local context Education Bradford wanted to provide further specific support and guidance for local schools many of whom have a significant number of pupils speaking EAL. The QCA/PS materials did not provide clear guidance about developing the

materials effectively with EAL pupils, or others with non standard English.

Using the model used in the guidance additional teaching sequences were added; examples of practice in a range of classrooms and contexts in the Bradford district were used: e.g. schools where all pupils have EAL; schools with rapidly changing populations and schools with populations who have low aspirations, particularly of white working class boys.

The notes accompanying the sequences were more specific, set the context of the schools and included teacher reflections on teaching and learning.

Angie introduced the footage of one teaching sequence. The example used was of a year 2 Science lesson in a school where the majority of pupils spoke EAL.

After the video participants were asked to discuss key points about the footage and give feedback. Possible points for discussion e.g. use of first language, planning for teaching and learning and the role of parents, were displayed on the powerpoint.

Jan Hilditch then asked the question 'if that was an example of two teachers working to create an effective classroom environment what happens for the few children who still can not access the learning effectively. She asked participants to consider which children might be targeted for additional support and why?

Jan led the rest of the session and considered the place of 'Talking Partners' to support targeted pupils in developing effective speaking, listening and learning strategies

She explained that TP has been used successfully to target:

- children who lack confidence
- children who need support at wave 2 or wave 3
- children with specific SEN needs
- gifted and talented children to extend their learning
- children targeted by Learning Mentors

TP provides additional opportunities for children to hear, use and develop language meaningfully – in a context

TP can also provide a manageable route for teachers and teaching assistants to develop their awareness and understanding about EAL needs and opportunities for interaction in the context of a small supportive group. It can be a useful starting point and be in effect a microcosm of good practice

As a programme TP has developed much further than was originally anticipated in terms spread, application and demand.

Jan described the rationale behind the programme; it's purpose and design. Key points were as follows:

- TP is about targeted focused support
- It is a 10 week programme
- 1 adult works with 3 pupils
- It is applicable from reception through to Y6
- It provides opportunities to develop purposeful talk which builds on prior experience; both cumulatively through out the programme and feeding back into the context of the classroom
- It aims to improve children's competence both as speakers and listeners and language users
- It provides a supportive environment with an emphasis on specific praise
- Children are clear about expectations and next steps
- It supports literacy learning and learning across the curriculum
- It works best when the content embedded and reflects classroom learning

Jan then explained how the programme had been proved to increase attainment by describing qualitative and quantitative measures used.

The participants then had an opportunity to watch a very short section of part of a Talking partners session.

Participants were asked to reflect if this was effective practice and if so why.

A question was raised about the specific children targeted in the video clip. All three of the y6 children observed had

particular SEN needs, one of the children also spoke EAL. The group were peers who were taught in a nurture group. There was no confusion about the needs of EAL pupils and SEN however this point was clarified because of the clip chosen.

Jan finished the session by reiterating that TP is dynamic programme which changes and develops constantly. There is now a growing body of good practice with programmes in other authorities.