

Case Study 2

X Primary is situated on the western side of Coventry about 2.5 miles from the city centre. The school is nearly 50 years old and has 500 children on roll from 3-11 years. There are two classes in each of the seven year groups and a morning and afternoon nursery.

The percentage of EAL children in the school at present is 8% and rising. The percentage of children from minority ethnic backgrounds is 13%. The largest ethnic minority group are from Pakistan making Urdu the most prevalent language other than English.

I have been working as EAL co-ordinator at X School and a second primary school for about the last 10 years. In that time there have been many changes particularly to do with the number of hours work I have been given, which has dropped from 0.6 to 0.4 this is directly due to a fall in grant awarded to Coventry. Unfortunately as the grant falls the number of EAL children coming into the city is rising, particularly from Eastern European Countries such as Poland.

The QCA website states that 'Difficulties might arise in science for EAL children because of the use of words that are common both to science and everyday usage but have different meanings in both of these contexts, for example control, cell and force.' It goes on to suggest strategies for remembering the words such as building up a wall chart shared files on computer networks etc.

I chose to work on this project with student G who is presently in Year 4 at X Primary School.

Student G has been a pupil at the school for 8 months since arriving from Poland last September. He arrived at school with no previous knowledge of English.

The project.

To translate key words from the science curriculum from key stages one. If a word is unknown to use an online dictionary and if the word still is unknown to find a picture to support learning. The dictionary chosen can be found on line at www.poltran.com

We began by looking at the Life and living processes strand as I thought that student G was likely to know words from this strand and I wanted to build his confidence with the translation process.

Session 1

I explained what we were going to do. We immediately found a problem as the English keyboard didn't carry the Polish alphabet ie many of the letters in the Polish alphabet carry an accent. I decided to use the Polish dictionary and copy the word straight across from there if accents were required.

We did find that the pace of this online dictionary was very slow. It was difficult to keep student G on task, he was much more interested in looking for images to copy even when he knew the word.

Session 2.

Had to explain again to student G what I wanted him to do. To try and translate the given English word into Polish with no assistance first and then if the word was unknown to translate using the dictionary. If the Polish word was not known or as in a few cases there was no translation given on the dictionary to download an image. G knew many of the words from Year 1 and 2 Science Key words. At one point he considered for a while and then told me that he was forgetting quite a lot of Polish. I asked him if he was speaking Polish or English at home and he told me that he was speaking both languages, though an emphasis was put upon the English as his mum was keen to learn English.

Session 3

G was quite keen to come to the session though he is often more interested in using the computer than staying on task. We did find a number of words during this session that he could not translate, however when we looked at the translation on the online dictionary he did know the word. I did have a few problems with some translations when the adjective or verb was required such as the translation for change and fat. G insisted on giving me the noun for these words. I did try to explain the difference. Where this has occurred I have made a note by the entry.

Session 4

We looked at the science key words from year 3. These are mostly to do with eating and teeth and G knew most of these words even the more specialised words such as canine, incisor etc.

He stayed on task very well during this session. He is taking a break to Poland for one week to take his first communion.

Session 5

This was an afternoon session which is not usual. G was very tired and though not exactly awkward was rather incommunicative, this was not helped by the fact that the English to Polish on line dictionary was very slow often over three minutes to translate one word.

We progressed onto the Year 4 Key words which were basically to do with the skeleton and its functions. G knew the Polish word for skeleton once it was translated and this

was the case for most words in this section. He did not recognise or understand the English word but he did understand the key word once it was translated into the Polish.

Session 6

Due to the speed of the on-line dictionary and because most of the words now are becoming technical I have decided to continue with Years 5 and 6 keywords by translating into Polish before working with G. Hopefully this will keep him on task as there will not be as much waiting around. I will then check the English word and the Polish translation with him and note his response accordingly.

This method worked quite well as it cut down on time. From year 5 onwards G needed to see the Polish word, he was then able to tell me that in most cases he knew the word and understood. Where he didn't recognise the Polish word or where there was no translation in the dictionary we have used an image.

Summary

It became evident that because child G is not using his first language in an academic context he has already started to forget some Polish. This is obviously sad and perhaps teachers should be aware of the need to encourage parents to ensure that there are opportunities to continue development of first language alongside English.

The online dictionary was straight forward to use but sometimes was excessively slow and for some words there were many different translations given obviously depending upon the context of its use. On a couple of occasions G gave me the translation in noun form rather than verb where this occurred I have made note. G also gave me alternative translations for a couple of the words following my use of the dictionary in session 6.

The sessions took place out of class on a withdrawal basis. This work has prepared G for when he meets the key words during science over the next couple of years. I intend to continue the work for the other areas of the science curriculum by translating the words in advance and getting student G to check. He will then be given a print out for use during lessons.

There are issues about using this approach during lesson time as the online dictionaries are rather slow and whilst waiting for a word to be translated other parts of the lesson would be missed.