

Case Study 3

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 in the same district 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 City Council. Unfortunately as the amount of grant money available falls the number of EAL children coming into the city is rising, particularly from Eastern European Countries such as Poland.

I chose to work on this project with student N who is presently in Year 6 at X Primary School and is an Urdu speaker.

N arrived at the school in Year 5 after moving from another local Primary School. She is part of an extended Pakistani family and arrived with her younger brother, presently in year 4. There were already cousins in the school who were well integrated. N and her brother experienced difficulties fitting in and there have been family pressures on the other side of the family. When N entered year 6 another set of cousins came to the school newly arrived from Pakistan, these children have also experienced difficulties in integrating into the school mostly due to the pressures exerted on them by N. I felt that N would benefit from 1:1 work. She is confident in this kind of situation and relishes adult company however she does not always understand the teacher/pupil relationship probably due to being in a position of authority at home. I also felt that putting her into a position of strength would further increase her confidence and self esteem. We decided to work from the year 6 Key Words for Science. Science is an area that N finds difficult and we decided to see if we could translate the words into Urdu to help her.

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.

Session 1.

We looked at two Urdu dictionaries to see if we could translate the keywords into Urdu. The online dictionaries we chose were <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/platts> and <http://biphost.spray.se/tracker/dict/>

There were problems with <http://biphost.spray.se/tracker/dict/> as it was only partially available on line so we often could not access the word we wanted. Another big problem with the Urdu dictionaries was that unlike English where we have one word that can be used in several contexts there appeared to be several translations for a particular word depending on the context it was used in. N couldn't help me with this so I'm sure that some of the Urdu words we have found in the dictionary are incorrect. The two different dictionaries also disagreed with translations.

We started with the Microbiology section, many of the words appeared to be much too technical to be included in the dictionary. As N didn't understand any of the keywords in English, we discussed the meaning of the words and sometimes used an English dictionary to get a detailed definition. If there was a word in the Urdu dictionary we put it into our table but N found that looking for images helped her remember what the word meant and often the word given in the dictionary was not known to her.

N took a list of words home to see if her mother could help but she told me the next day that her mother couldn't but that she had a cousin visiting from Pakistan and she would ask him.

Session 2.

N came back with some words though she thought that others could not be translated such as organism and microbe and that these were the same in Urdu.

We progressed to Plants.

N was able to come up with quite a few of the keywords and showed a little more understanding of this topic though not in any depth. We cross referenced some of the words back to the 2 sites previously mentioned and the word N gave us was rarely the one in the dictionary. Again N found that downloading the images helped her understanding the most. We completed the list of words for the plant topic and I asked N to choose another topic to work through for next week and to maybe ask her cousin for help before the session.

N absent for the next session but on arriving back at school was eager to continue as she enjoyed working on this project. I asked N if she thought her cousin also in year 6 but newly arrived from Pakistan would know more Urdu and she was sure that he would. I decided that at some point I would ask N's cousin to work through the project and see if he had any further knowledge of Urdu.

Session 3

The key words we looked at were from the Electricity strand. We completed this strand very quickly as N seemed to have a good knowledge of the English words here. She thought that in the majority of cases the Urdu word was the same as the English. She also required very few images in this section.

Session 4

In this session we looked at the Forces in Action topic. N understood many of the words but did not know the Urdu translation. It was becoming clear that the Urdu N spoke was purely of a social kind and is probably Mirpuri.

N picked up the list of science Keywords that we were working from and told me that she knew all of the year 1 words. I decided to look at one strand of words with her and work right through the year groups to see when the keywords became too technical and specialised for her to be able to translate.

Session 5

We looked at the Life Processes and Living Things strand of the science curriculum right across all six year groups. N found most of the words very easy to translate across the first 4 years. There were gaps in the dictionary which I found personally interesting for collective nouns such as fish, vegetables, fruit, I have always had to teach these in the past to Asian children even where there was some English spoken.

For the final session I am bringing in a second student Ns cousin M who has recently returned from Pakistan and I thought it would be interesting to check Ns translations with a student newly arrived. Before bringing in M we looked at the key words for the strand on forces.

M lived in this country as a small child and completed his Nursery and Reception education in Coventry. He returned to this country this year. His reading is fairly fluent but his comprehension and spoken language is far behind. His uncle told me that M had been educated in Pakistan and that there is a great emphasis put upon reading English but very little emphasis put upon comprehension. This was later remarked upon following a home visit that I made to Ms home with an Urdu speaking welfare officer. She told me that she thought that the education that M had received in Pakistan was probably not much more than equivalent our reception level. She agreed with Ms uncle that tremendous pressure is put upon the children to learn to read English rote fashion

M went through all the science key words for the Life process and Living things strand and the Forces strand. Where M disagreed with his cousin or thought he knew another word than the word chosen from the dictionary, I have given his alternative. N was present when I worked with M and there was a good deal of first language discussion about some of the words.

Where the children were unable to give me a translation for the word I have had to use my own judgement in choosing the correct word from the dictionary. I apologise if these are incorrect but in some circumstances there was a choice of many words given which were used in different contexts. I hope that I have not chosen any translations that may cause offence.

Summing up then, firstly, I was unable to find a good Urdu dictionary online. Secondly, the language spoken by the children was a social language, probably Mirpuri, so that the technical language was unknown to them in their home language and also unknown from the online dictionaries. Hopefully some of the translation and image work will be useful for other children in a similar position to N. Carrying out this project has helped me to understand that when pupils come into primary school at an early age they may have had very few opportunities to develop their first language in an academic context. It was interesting to hear the first language exchanges that took place when pupil M joined the sessions and this may be a way forward for some children to work.

- Allow time for thorough research into on-line dictionaries available.
- The use of google images supported learning in the event that the dictionary failed.
- Children working in pairs brought the added bonus of first language discussion.