

## ***Vignette 2: Literacy in a Year 1 classroom***

### **Subject and topic**

These activities took place within Literacy and were linked to a Science topic in which pupils explored the properties of materials.

### **Key Stage**

KS1

### **Focus pupils and school**

A multicultural primary school with approximately 400 pupils. Pupils come from a wide range of linguistic and cultural groups with 47% from bilingual backgrounds.

The lesson took place in a Year 1 class which has 9 pupils with EAL who are competent in social English. Some of these children are making good progress in the acquisition of literacy skills but need support to comprehend and produce the vocabulary and linguistic form required for science.

### **Context**

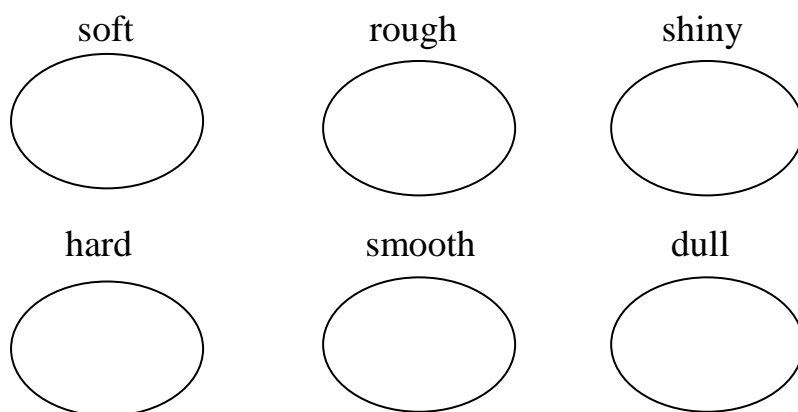
A partnership teaching situation. The focus for the week was a non-fiction text. Part of the word level focus for the term was '...to make collections of personal interest or significant words or words linked to particular topics' (DfEE, 1998, *The National Literacy Strategy: Framework for Teaching*. Page 23.)

### **The lessons**

The text chosen for the whole class session described the properties of materials (Finlay, T. and Finlay, J., 1999, *Materials*. Scholastic). The teachers used real examples to illustrate the properties that were being described in the text: for example the difference between a solid and a liquid was shown by demonstrating the pouring properties of water.

The EAL teacher then worked with a group of mixed EAL and monolingual pupils. The children were given a sheet (see Worksheet 1) with six adjectives that describe the properties of materials: *soft*, *hard*, *rough*, *smooth*, *shiny* and *dull*. These words were chosen because they represent concepts that might present problems for many children within this age group. The children, working in pairs, had to select some objects that they felt had these specific properties.

## Worksheet 1



The teacher then led a group discussion on the choices that the children had made and encouraged the children to present a range of objects that had the required properties. Each pair had chosen the aluminium foil to illustrate the shiny property. The teacher then asked if any of the other objects were shiny. The children quickly picked out a plastic spoon as also being shiny. One child picked up a polystyrene cup saying that this was also 'a bit shiny'. It was agreed that all these objects had some degree of shine on their surfaces. One child observed that they were all a bit shiny but that the aluminium foil was 'more shinier' than the spoon or the polystyrene cup. Thus an opportunity occurred to model and use the comparative form of the chosen set of adjectives.

The children returned to working in pairs and stuck their chosen objects (sandpaper, cotton wool, tin foil, small stones, plastic spoons etc.) next to the appropriate adjectives. The children described their work during the plenary session and the EAL teacher asked the pupils to explain the problems they had had, and to justify some of their definitions.

In further sessions, also during the Literacy Hour, the children took part in a whole class session in which they passed objects around a circle and each child gave a one-word description of the object: the children were allowed to repeat what another child had offered previously as this not only validated the accuracy of the description but also enabled less confident EAL pupils to use language modelled by other members of the class. One teacher led the circle discussion whilst the other wrote down the children's descriptive contributions.

For example, the children described a magnifying glass:

[Key: ( ) indicates a pause; (.) = a very brief pause; (number) = length of pause in seconds]

*Pupil 1* smooth  
*Pupil 2* it won't bend  
*Teacher* it's not bendy (0.5) does anybody know the word that describes something (.) that won't bend or is not bendy (3.0) well something that won't bend is rigid...I'll write that word down next to 'won't bend' or 'not bendy'

- Pupil 3*     *soft*  
*Teacher*    *I'm not sure if its soft - this is soft do they feel the same(1.0) [pupil 3 shakes head] (.) do you mean smooth (.) because it's very smooth (.) is that what you mean (.) smooth [pupil 3 nods head in agreement]*
- Pupil 4*     *you can see through it (.)*  
*Teacher*    *yes you can it's see through (.) it's transparent (.)*
- Pupil 5*     *it's hard*  
*Pupil 6*     *the glass can break*  
*Teacher*    *yes (.) the glass is breakable*

At the end of the circle session the children regrouped to look at the list of adjectives that the class teacher had written down. The EAL teacher used this opportunity to introduce or reinforce more academic vocabulary: for example, ‘rigid’ for ‘not bendy’ and ‘flexible’ for ‘bendy’.

These words were collected on a large display sheet. Afterwards the teachers in discussion with the class drew attention to additional scientific vocabulary relevant to the properties that the children had described: for example, ‘transparent’ for ‘see-through’. The adjectives were then transferred to printed sheets (see list below \*). The children used these prepared sheets of adjectives during a group work session. They worked in pairs, competent readers working with less competent readers. They made a selection from a collection of objects made from a variety of materials and highlighted the adjectives on the list that described that object. The children were then encouraged to use the target language to discuss their findings with the rest of the group.

**Strategies for teaching/learning EAL used in the lesson**

- Task designed to focus on language and content
- Joint planning of work by both teachers ensured that EAL pupils’ English language development needs were built into the overall language and literacy objectives for the whole class
- Introduction of specific vocabulary to describe the properties of materials in a contextually supportive environment.
- Peer and teacher modelling of language
- Language learning integrated with the content. The properties of materials are principally expressed in terms of adjectives
- Pupils required to use target language (comprehensible output)

**\* material words**

metal, plastic, wood, wooden, glass, stone, solid, liquid, rough, smooth, hard, soft, shiny, dull, bendy, flexible, not bendy, rigid, see through, transparent, not see through, opaque, breakable, unbreakable, sharp, blunt, waterproof, and not waterproof.