

Teaching EAL in the mainstream secondary curriculum – Secondary Classroom Vignette 1

Subject and topic	Science: Plant and Animal Cells
Key Stage	KS 3
Focus pupils and school	An 11 - 19 Catholic boys school, with an intake of approximately 1000 students, approximately 18% of which are bilingual. The composition of the class includes a mix of native speakers with developing bilingual learners of English - one pupil from Iraq who arrived in Year 6 and two from Sri Lanka who joined at the start of Year 7. These three pupils are developing well in their use of social English but are in need of increasing their range of English for more academic tasks. Two more pupils, from Poland, join the class during the teaching of the topic. Both pupils are literate in Polish but speak virtually no English. They join the class at a moment when pupils are following a set of instructions in order to carry out a practical activity. The two new arrivals from Poland need to begin engaging with the language of instruction (e.g. imperatives).
Context	Year 7 Science Topic: 'Cells and cell functions'. NC: Sc2 Life Processes and Living Things. The aims are for pupils to realise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that plants and animals are made up of cells • name the parts of a plant and animal cell • know the function of the cell membrane, cytoplasm and nucleus in both plant & animal cells. At this point in the lesson, pupils are making up an onion cell slide for observation.

The example

A partnership teaching situation. Both teachers have had one of their regular short planning meetings. The focus for the discussion has been on the sequence of instructions for the carrying out of the practical: the pupils are to make up a slide of an onion cell. The pupils are arranged in small groups or pairs as an opening activity, with each group given a set of 8 picture cards which invite them to work out the order of steps for the carrying out of the practical. The two Polish beginners are split up and placed with English-speaking peers. The groups take no longer than 5 minutes in completing this initial task.

After a brief, general whole - class feedback where a common sequence is established for the diagrams, each group is given a set of 8 written instructions which they then match to each picture.

Instruction Matching activity

Hold the onion as shown. Gently break the piece in half.

The halves should be joined together by a thin skin. This skin is only one cell thick.

Gently peel one of the halves away from the skin. Be careful not to twist or fold the skin.

Cut off a small piece of skin with the scissors.

Lay the small piece of skin flat on a microscope slide.

Place a drop of stain on the skin.

Place a cover slip at one side of the drop of stain. Hold it up with a mounted needle.

Gently lower the cover slip down so that there are no bubbles of air trapped underneath it

The pupils then proceed to carry out the practical.

At this point the EAL teacher realises that a golden opportunity is at hand to model and demonstrate key language features relevant to the task. The teacher takes both non-English speakers and via techniques similar to Gattegno's Silent Way (1972), runs through the instructional sequence represented in sheet 3 (below) with a clearly chosen focus on imperatives. Both pupils are actively encouraged to *look*, *listen* and *respond* (both physically and verbally), via routines such as:

'take the...'

'cut the....'

'scissors..what are these?'

'give him the....now hold the...'

Thus, during the practical, both pupils work with the EAL teacher in order to ensure opportunities for focused input from the teacher *and* highly focused feedback to pupil responses.

Cut	Break	Put	Hold	Peel
1.	_____	the piece of onion.		
2.	_____	the piece in half.		
3.	_____	one of the halves away.		
4.	_____	a small piece with the scissors		
5.	_____	the small piece of skin on the slide.		

In this example, the learners are being exposed not just to comprehensible input from more than one source, such as their peer group during the opening sequencing activity, but also to opportunities for comprehensible output (eg. production of language by the pupils). The EAL teacher has found an opportunity to set the language learning / teaching agenda, and develop certain aspects of grammatical competence of the pupils. In this case the focus chosen by the teacher was on imperatives/instructional language, as exemplified in sheet 3. The specific classroom procedures beneficial to the EAL learners demonstrated here are:

- building in opportunities for controlled teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interaction
- ensuring that there is space for highly-focused feedback
- allowing for planned repetition and practice of the relevant language structures

By using these principles, the teacher has explicitly added a language dimension and has been able to assist in the development of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

References

Gattegno, C., 1972, *Teaching Foreign Languages in Schools: The Silent Way*. New York: Educational Solutions.