

## Supporting more advanced bilingual learners in Key Stage 4 Geography lessons

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*Chris Kelly and Amanda Gay have been working together with year 11 Geography students at Charles Edward Brooke School. They have devised an array of practical activities to promote reading and improve the ability to write explanatory discourse with a view to successful exam preparation.*

Although having different specialisms, both of us have been interested for many years in how to improve the teaching and learning of subject specific language. As noted by the National Oracy Project over fifteen years ago now (Norman, 1992) and still highlighted by Steve Cooke (Cooke, 2003, Cooke 2005), Stuart Scott and the Collaborative Learning Project, giving pupils frequent opportunities to read and talk over work together is essential if they are to become fluent speakers and writers of English. Explicit speaking and listening programmes such as Talking Partners are now firmly embedded at primary school level but this is not the case in secondary schools.

The target group for our research was a Year 11 Geography class which included a high proportion of advanced bilingual learners, speaking more than ten different first languages between them.

Over the year we tried a number of activities designed to foster discussion and improve reading and subject specific thinking skills (see Leat, 1998) Three of these are described below:

- Exam review exercise
- Global Warming task
- Case studies cards

### 1. Exam-paper Review: evaluating answers

Analyses of exam scripts and student evaluations have shown that many students find it hard to write good explanations which specifically address the question asked. In addition, questions requiring interpretation of graphs and charts are often badly answered.

Following the mock exams in January, one question was selected for the whole class to try again as most students had found it difficult.

#### The activity:

Students were all given the same exam question, worth four marks, plus the Resource Booklet. They then worked in pairs to:

- Read through the question together;
- Locate the relevant reference materials in the resource booklet;

Following this, each pair was given an envelope containing four possible answers. The instructions explained that these could be graded in value from 1-4 marks. They were instructed to:

- Discuss each sample answer;
- Decide where they would award points within each answer;
- Rank the answers;
- Prepare to talk about their decisions to the class;
- And finally write their preferred answer on the question sheet

The effectiveness of physically sorting through and then discussing short statements known to be true but not necessarily relevant to the task in hand has been explored by Christine Counsell (Counsell, 1997). To an observer, the most rewarding part of this exercise was the class discussion following group work, when pupils were able to give convincing explanations to each other of what needed to be included in the 'perfect' answer and were able to pinpoint what was lacking in the other possible choices.

### 2. Global Warming exercise

Year 11 Pupils study this topic as part of a course item that comprises 10% of the total marks. In this particular group, although several new arrivals had entered the school at the start of Year 10, most had previously undertaken a study of global warming in Year 9.

The coursework has been designed to cover aspects of two modules of the GCSE syllabus: 'Climate Environments & People' and 'People Work & Development'. The Avery Hill syllabus requires candidates to study an 'Issue of Global Concern' and coursework involves the production of three documents: two of which put forward the viewpoints of organisations with contrasting opinions on the issue of global warming, and a further document in which candidates give their own opinions.

**The activity:**

The activity required pupils to work in small groups of three or four to ascribe prepared statement cards to different organisations and then to further classify the statements under headings related to aspects of the issue e.g. causes, responsibility, solutions etc. The students were instructed to:

- Take turns reading the cards aloud
- Discuss each statement and decide the appropriate box in which to place it on the matrix grid outline.
- Any statements considered relevant to two boxes could be copied onto blank cards provided and added to the grid

After an agreed period (about 30 minutes) the teacher read out the reference numbers on each card. The groups could use an answer sheet to check on their own but class discussion is the preferred strategy here as it gives pupils an opportunity to challenge the 'correct' answer, put forward their own choice and justify their opinions. Experience indicates that building in time for small group discussion work at the start of the activity prepares pupils for later whole class discussion. Knowing that other members of the group agree with them makes them feel more confident when speaking to the whole class.

The prepared statement cards may then be recycled by passing them out as *aides memoires* for use when producing the final leaflets, although care should be taken to emphasise to the pupils that high marks in coursework are usually obtained where candidates use the *ideas* expressed in the statements to write in their *own* words.

**3. Case studies for the GCSE module: People Work & Development**

In the period immediately before the final examinations, pupils undertake a variety of revision activities intended to consolidate their knowledge about various case studies they have previously studied in Years 10 or 11. Many pupils find detailed factual recall of real places or organisations they have studied to be very difficult. They can feel that they know a lot of 'stuff' but do not know where and when to write it. Scaffolding (Gibbons, 2002) activities like the one described here allow them to read a short piece, specific information, reflect on its significance, and classify it.

**The activity:**

In the activity, pupils are dealt a hand of playing cards on which are printed factual statements pertaining to three different case studies. The pupils have to identify from their hand which cards refer to which case study and then play the cards correctly. The other players have to check that the card played is relevant to the same case study as the previous player's. If they consider it is not, they declare 'Cheat' and the player has to pick up the card again. The winner is the first person to lay down all their cards on the table.

**Rules of the game:**

- Three of the cards must be Case Study Name cards. They act as trump cards. All the others are information cards about one of these three case studies.
- All information is correct.
- One of the Name cards is placed face up in the middle of the table.
- The remaining cards are shuffled and dealt equally to four players (Alternatively, increasing the number of players, or limiting the number of cards dealt to each player increases the need to 'cheat' and so creates more opportunity for discussion of any challenges that are made).
- Taking turns clockwise, each player puts down their chosen card abutting either the left or right end of the cards already played, and reads it out loud to the rest of the players. Allow a set time (e.g. 10 seconds) for other players to challenge.
- Players who haven't got a card to follow-on legitimately either 'cheat' (see above), pick up a card from the left-overs, or miss a go.
- After the game is over, the teacher gives each pupil a copy of the statements to use as the basis for revision notes of three different case-studies.

As an extension task after the game, cards pertaining to one case study only may be used in conjunction with two past-paper questions. Pupils have to decide which statements are best suited to which question, and which statements are not relevant to either question.

Experience has shown that pupils invariably want to replay the game and this can only deepen their understanding and improve their recall of the information at a later date- hopefully in the examination hall!

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