

# EAL learners and dyslexia

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## 1. An audit of the skills and knowledge associated with reading proficiency

In the table on page 4 there is a list of the skills and knowledge that are associated with reading proficiency in English (from Cline and Shamsi, 2000, p. 14). Please write a cross in the relevant column if you would expect a particular skill or area of knowledge to be weak in children who are described at the top of the column. Leave other cells blank but put a question mark if you are not sure.

## 2. Identifying dyslexia in a child who is learning EAL and reading in English

- a) In what circumstances may weak phonic knowledge indicate an underlying reading difficulty?
- b) In what circumstances can we ascribe weak reading comprehension to anything other than limited understanding of English?
- c) What value can be attributed to computer-based test batteries, and what limitations may there be?

## 3. Basic strategies in teaching pupils with EAL who show learning difficulties in literacy

The list below outlines some suggestions that have been made for teaching pupils with EAL who need support in developing literacy skills.

- How far do those suggestions seem to you to measure up to the challenges posed by pupils with significant learning difficulties whom you have taught or are now teaching, and in particular those faced by pupils who are thought to have dyslexia?
  - What other suggestions would you make?
- A) Build on strengths and achievements. Examples might include:
- A.1 Competence in other languages, including literacy knowledge and skills
  - A.2 Breadth of cultural experience
  - A.3 Phonological awareness and skills
  - A.4 Motivation
  - A.5 Self-esteem
- B) Compensate for areas of comparative weakness when developing *reading skills*. Examples might include:
- B.1 Offer consistent, predictable routines and demands in the reading curriculum as well as in other classroom practices
  - B.2 Ensure that, when teaching focuses on isolated words during word-level teaching, pupils who are learning EAL are given the opportunity to see and hear the words in meaningful contexts so as to help them make links with the use of the words in continuous text.
  - B.3 Offer culturally appropriate choices of reading material to enhance motivation and self-esteem
  - B.4 Provide practice (and, where necessary, explicit instruction) in metacognitive and cognitive strategies
  - B.5 Activate/introduce appropriate schema through pre-reading discussion and retelling
  - B.6 Help pupils to develop the habit of organising in advance by skimming or previewing headings, pictures, summaries and text

- B.7 Undertake constant checks on oral and reading comprehension, making clear the teacher's concern for comprehension and engagement rather than simply for accurate reading aloud and speed
- B.8 Help pupils to develop the habits of slowing down their reading rate to aid and check comprehension, using context to sort out a misunderstood segment, and using key visuals and mind mapping to organise information during reading
- B.9 Employ multi-sensory approaches
- B.10 Stress the value of over-learning (e.g. for spelling) - but in meaningful contexts
- B.11 Modify tasks to enable pupil to show comprehension of what is read in a way that does not place heavy demands on expressive language or writing skills
- B.12 Use collaborative approaches through pair and group work that will enable peers to scaffold emerging skills and knowledge with a struggling reader

[Adapted from Deponio, Landon & Reid chapters in Peer and Reid (2000),  
from McCarthy (2004) and from Ofsted (2005)]

C) Compensate for areas of comparative weakness when developing *writing skills*.

Examples might include:

- C.1 Analyse the writing of children learning EAL closely so as to identify any specific difficulties they face when writing in English.
- C.2 Draw learners' attention to the ways in which adverbs and adverbial phrases in familiar text give a reader information about time, manner, place and purpose.
- C.3 Give EAL learners extensive opportunities to encounter and work with different genres of written English, so that they not only encounter a rich reading repertoire but also have opportunities to write for a range of purposes and audiences across the curriculum. During this work it may be important to continually reinforce key points about differences in writing styles and writing "rules" between genres.
- C.4 Draw learners' attention to the ways in which writers develop plots and characters, link ideas, bring stories to an end and use features of grammar and give them direct (explicit) teaching in these aspects.
- C.5 Provide direct instruction about specific features of writing and give detailed feedback to children on their writing.
- C.6 Build on children's cultural and linguistic experiences by encouraging them to talk about writing done at home and by forging closer links with families to understand the ways they try to support their children with writing at home.

[Adapted from Cameron and Besser (2004), Ofsted (2005) and DfES (2007a)]

## Further reading and references

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### An audit of the skills and knowledge associated with reading proficiency

In this table write a cross in the relevant column if you would expect a particular skill or area of knowledge to be weak in children who are described at the top of the column. Leave other cells blank but put a question mark if you are not sure.

	A child who is monolingual in English and has dyslexia	A child who is in the early stages of learning EAL and has some reading difficulties associated with that	A child who is learning EAL and has dyslexia
a) Automatic perceptual/identification skills at the level of the visual features of print, the letter and the word, e.g. pattern recognition, letter identification			
b) Phonological awareness			
c) Knowledge of the structure of the language that is being read, including its syntax & morphology			
d) Knowledge about the uses, purposes and conventions of literacy and of how texts in different genres are organised			
e) Vocabulary knowledge			
f) Ability to access lexical memory			
g) Content and background knowledge			
h) Activation of relevant concepts and prior knowledge			
i) Synthesising information in the text and evaluating it against other sources of information/knowledge			
j) Metacognitive knowledge ("knowledge about our own thinking processes and the ability to adopt appropriate strategies to achieve particular goals")			
k) Monitoring own response to the text, e.g. recognising problems of comprehension			