

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## EAL and English: subjects and language across the curriculum

### Other

How to cite:

Safford, Kimberly and Collins, Fiona (2007). EAL and English: subjects and language across the curriculum. National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum, UK.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© NALDIC

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://www.naldic.org.uk/Resources/NALDIC/Initial%20Teacher%20Education/Documents/English.pdf>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

# EAL and English

This guidance is aimed at initial teacher education tutors and trainee teachers in Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. It will also be of interest to secondary school trainee teachers and ITE tutors of English. This guidance will support trainees in beginning to understand how the dimensions of English - as a core subject, as the oral and written medium of curriculum instruction and as language learning - relate to teaching and learning with pupils who use English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the mainstream classroom

## QTS Standards

Q1 Q2 Q10 Q14 Q15 Q18 Q19 Q22 Q23 Q25

## English and EAL: subjects and language across the curriculum

English is a core subject of the National Curriculum, and English is also the oral and written medium of instruction for the whole curriculum. The three strands of subject English are Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening; 'English across the curriculum' conceptualises pupils applying their knowledge of these strands to other domains of subject knowledge. Subject English is highly politicised and contested. No other curriculum area undergoes such continuous scrutiny and revision, such as the new Primary National Strategy framework for the teaching of English and the parliamentary hearings into the teaching of reading which concluded that synthetic phonics be taught universally 'first and fast'.

English as an Additional Language is, in contrast, a 'diffuse' curriculum area (Leung 2001) which is not articulated as a distinct subject or a controversial domain of learning although, like English, EAL crosses all curriculum subjects. Pupils learning EAL apply their developing knowledge of English as well as their other languages in all subject areas. Whilst each subject area makes different demands on all pupils as language users, the curriculum in English can create additional linguistic and cultural demands on pupils learning EAL, making subject knowledge and understanding more challenging. In spite of these linguistic and cultural challenges, statutory assessment in English for pupils learning EAL is the same as for native-English speaking pupils. Policy and official guidance focus mainly on very young learners at beginner stages of English language development (e.g. QCA, 2000). The National Curriculum proposes that all pupils, at any stage of language development, will 'naturally' access the curriculum as they learn English.

*The whole curriculum is an ideal language-learning syllabus providing learners get opportunities for speaking as well as listening and use the new language with peers as well as adults.* (DfES Standards Site)

Effective teachers do provide pupils with frequent and extended opportunities to interact with peers and adults in a learning context. It is tempting therefore to subsume the needs of pupils learning EAL in 'good practice for all pupils', where, as many teachers regularly observe, pupils learning EAL rapidly 'pick up' English in order to communicate and participate in routine classroom situations. However pupils with English as their first language perform better than pupils learning EAL at every stage of education, and the 'value added' scores in English for EAL learners in Key Stages 1 and 2 are considerably worse than those for native-English speakers (DfES 2005, DfES 2006). It would seem that more than universal good practice is required to address the needs of pupils learning English as an Additional Language in the mainstream classroom.

Attention to the language demands of subjects and how curriculum content is taught and learned through language (Mohan 1986) enables mainstream teachers to plan for these needs. Within any activity or topic, teachers can consider the ways in which English language structures, as well as specific vocabulary, convey curriculum content and develop pupils' thinking skills. This practice also supports teachers in planning for English across the curriculum. How is reading, writing, speaking and listening in Science different to reading, writing, speaking and listening in History? Moreover, what are the associated thinking skills that underpin the language structures of different subject areas? In certain curriculum contexts such as Science, language and literacy may be exploratory and hypothetical; in other areas such as History, language and literacy may be sequential or descriptive. Physical Education may feature language that emphasises instructions and adverbial phrases; in subject English, language may focus on literary language featuring metaphors and similes, and the structures of narrative and other genres.

Planning frameworks (e.g. Gibbons 1991, 2002) which take account of language structures within an activity or a topic, and the thinking skills which language supports, are useful ways forward for teachers in considering the needs of pupils learning English in the mainstream classroom. Below, a teacher is organising a History topic and planning for language structures which will support pupils' thinking skills in the learning activities.

| TOPIC | ACTIVITIES OR COMPONENTS | LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS/ THINKING SKILLS | LANGUAGE STRUCTURES | VOCABULARY |
|-------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|
|       |                          |                                     |                     |            |

| The topic<br>↓                      | includes these activities<br>↓                                | which require these<br>language functions<br>↓ | which will be<br>modelled using these<br>structures<br>↓   | and vocabulary<br>↓              |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Children in<br>Victorian<br>Britain | Describe life for Victoria's children from portraits          | Describe, compare, infer                       | In Victorian times..... nowadays.... it looks as though... | rich, servants, expensive        |
|                                     | Empathy for poor children from contemporary reports           | Narrate, report                                | First person narrative                                     | work, hard, poor, hungry         |
|                                     | Understand the work of significant philanthropists            | Evaluate, cause and effect                     | If...then because...                                       | improve, poverty, charity, laws  |
|                                     | Schooling in Victorian times from illustrations, museum visit | Compare, converse                              | Simple past, used to...today...but then..., because...     | desks, learn, punishment, recite |
|                                     | Attitudes to childhood  | Recount, hypothesise, express possibility      | People thought... If they had...then they would..          | children, adults, play, games    |

(adapted from Mobbs, M, EMA Project, Lancashire in NALDIC News 13, November 1997)

### Speech communities, social and academic English

Pupils learning EAL come to school with a wide range of language experiences and histories. Pupils may code-switch between English and other languages, with family and bilingual peers, selecting words or phrases that communicate effectively depending on the social context. They may be new arrivals, low-key British bilinguals or high-achieving multilinguals (Harris 1997); all are at different linguistic starting-points in relation to English as a subject as well as using English across the curriculum.

Teachers can encourage pupils to become aware of language variation and their own different speech communities: how, when, where and with whom they use oral and written language (including different accents and dialects of English) in a range of contexts. Pupils can explore their families' language histories and create their own language profiles, as Carolyn Boyd illustrates in the following example:

Akif: You have to say 'thank you' to big people.

Aftab: I say 'arp' [polite form of 'you' in Urdu] at the temple.

Teacher: Would you say 'arp' to your friend?

Aftab: No. 'Toom'.

Sandeep: I say 'satsriacal' [greetings] to the old people. My papaji lives at my sister's house and I always say 'satsriacal' to him.

Lee: This is Chinese. I can write it.

Vijay: I can write my name in Gujerati.

Leroy: I can't. That's good.

(Boyd 1992 in Bain, Fitzgerald and Taylor: 156 – 158)

Pupils learning EAL may quickly develop a competent level of informal, social English, but to succeed in school they need to develop academic language and literacy, particularly in writing. In school, these two strands of language, social and academic, can develop together. For example, if pupils are discussing football they will be engaging in 'social' talk, but they will also be displaying and exchanging subject knowledge, using technical vocabulary which may not always be valued in the school curriculum. Below, for example, is a piece of writing by Halil a Turkish pupil in Year 6, on his favourite footballers in the 2006 World Cup, where he uses comparatives and extends his understanding of the uses of adjectives:

*Brazil won the World Cup five times and only lost it twice. With Ronaldinho's skills and dribbles the team is good. With Ronaldo's skilling-up and close shooting it is better. With Adriano's blasts and speed the team is excellent.*

Likewise, Dita, a pupil from the Czech Republic, calls upon her football knowledge and expertise to predict and hypothesise about the 2006 World Cup matches:

*I think Brazil might win because they have really good players. In the final I want it to be Czech v Brazil, so that Czech can win and show everyone how good they are. I think that England are going to lose straight away against Paraguay on Saturday because they don't have Rooney, and Rooney is a big boost for England and I don't think he will recover so fast.*

Halil and Dita are literate in Turkish and in Czech. They already understand oral and written language structures in their first languages, and they are using this knowledge to develop their English language in school as they learn

curriculum content. Calling upon pupils' interests and enthusiasms is an effective starting point for language learning which can be social in nature but can also involve learning language structures that support pupils' thinking in English and in other subject areas.

### **Texts and language learning**

Pupils learning EAL may enter school with an already-developed knowledge of story and narrative through storytelling and being read aloud to at home. Below is a snapshot of Eric, a very young pupil:

I shared 'Elmer' [a picture book] by David McKee with Eric, a four year old from Albania in a London nursery class... it was evident that Eric was familiar with how books worked. He laughed along with the story and pointed out the elephant's features: "his nose" "he's blue"... Through the reading he made comments but at times I found it difficult to decipher them... I found out that his mother was a keen reader and enjoyed reading daily aloud to Eric, but she was concerned because these books were not in English. However, this seemed to make little difference to his enjoyment. His knowledge of narrative... carried him through reading in another language.  
(Collins & Svensson 2005)

Pupils who have experiences of texts and reading in their first languages will have an advantage in learning to read in English; they will understand how to make meaning from the marks on the page and how to match sounds to symbols. Such pupils learning EAL will also understand the purposes of reading, for learning and for pleasure.

Books and reading however are culturally specific. Pupils learning to read in an additional language may not be able to use their own background knowledge in order to predict and gain meaning from a text. As a result, early readers who are learning EAL may place more emphasis on the grapho-phonetic aspect of reading, and if they struggle to decode individual words on a page the overall meaning may become less clear. Such early readers may read in a slow and monotonous manner and will focus more on blending the sounds together rather than understanding the meaning of the sentence.

Even as second language learners develop as readers the complete meaning of the text may be misunderstood because of the constraints of their vocabulary. Pauline Gibbons (2002: 83) cites the following example where a child does not understand a particular word within a sentence and as a result predicted the rest of the sentence incorrectly:

The sentence read: *Although the light was red the car...*  
We would then expect to read: *...the car continued or the car kept going.*  
The child read: *...the car stopped.*

This is just one example where a misunderstanding of one word affects the understanding of the complete text. It is not just the single words on the page which may be difficult for pupils to understand. For pupils learning EAL cultural references to characters, events, places, foods, festivals, collocations or colloquial phrases may impede their ability to make meaning from the story.

In this light it is important to consider the choice of book provision for pupils. Books will extend and develop a young reader's English vocabulary and knowledge of both British culture and history, but it is important that the teacher supports these readers through discussion and other pre-reading activities, so that pupils will be aware of any unfamiliar vocabulary and specific cultural knowledge which may be taken for granted within the text. Activities such as discussing the title and images on the cover in order to predict the story support the developing reader of English.

Teachers are powerful models of language use, and can make explicit the meanings of vocabulary and phrases. Teachers can make reading aloud more comprehensible to pupils learning EAL by using props, gestures and images. Texts with repetitive language and a cumulative story support pupils in understanding narrative and recognising words and phrases. Traditional tales often follow this structure and deal with universal themes in many cultures around the world, and dual language versions are available from The Refugee Council. For Key Stage 2 pupils who are learning to read in English, texts with stimulating visuals can encourage active responses. Books, such as those by Anthony Browne, Peter Collington and Raymond Briggs, as well resources such as the British Film Institute's animated 'Story Shorts', offer depth and detail which generate comment and discussion to support reading. Opportunities for role play, drama, text enactment and other forms of talk and discussion support the reading development of pupils learning EAL (Gravelle 1996, 2000).

### **Form, function and writing in English**

Pupils learning EAL are supported by extended work around interesting oral, written and visual texts, where teachers draw continuous connections between macro (context, audience, purpose) and micro (sentence, grammar, spelling) levels of language. By exploring different contexts and language choices that make-up written and spoken genres, pupils will begin to understand and use a range of informal and formal structures and develop awareness of audiences for speech and writing (Riley, J. & D. Reedy 2000).

Pupils will also acquire and use English by watching television, listening to music and reading on the internet, and these are all meaningful forms of language learning. Teachers and pupils can examine different forms of English in a range of media, using newspapers, websites, TV and radio. The National Gallery's *Take One Picture* programme and the Tate's *Visual Paths to Literacy* project provide opportunities to use visual texts in order to generate different kinds of language: comparison, opinion, hypothesis, description or narration. This can also lead to writing in role, where pupils take on the vocabularies and language structures of other, imaginary or real, personas.

Texts can teach specific aspects of sentence grammar. Young beginners can learn prepositions in *Rosie's Walk* (Pat Hutchins) adjectives in *Handa's Surprise* (Eileen Brown) and verbs in *Trouble in the Ark* (Gerald Rose). For older learners, sophisticated picture books such as *The Rabbits* (Shaun Tan) or *ZOO* (Anthony Browne) offer simple written narratives but subtle, disturbing meanings in the images which can be a springboard for extended oral or written pupil responses. Vocabulary work can explore the links between language and culture (McWilliam 1998) where pupils make collections of homophones (e.g. there, their and they're), homographs (e.g. bark – a dog's or a tree's) synonyms, prepositions, phrasal verbs (e.g. turn off, turn on, turn up, turn down) and explore the different meanings and uses of words (such as 'face' or 'round'), idioms, collocations (flesh and blood, sugar and spice), proverbs, slogans and advertising – as well as the ways in which pronunciation alters meaning (for example 'entrance' and 'read').

Pupils learning English will continue their cognitive development through writing in their first languages. Classroom provision should include dual-language texts and audio tapes or CDs. Writing resources should include bilingual dictionaries and pupils should have opportunities to write in their first languages. In this example, two Year 5 Bosnian girls, Selma and Semra, who are new to English, living in a hostel near their school, describe their weekend. Although they had been in school only a few weeks, they were using their knowledge of Serbo-Croat/Bosnian to generate writing in English:

Na vikendu proveli smo se lijepo.  
Igrali smo se dobro.  
Isli smo na cirkuze.  
Mnogo smo ucili.  
Igrali smo I bagminton u parku.  
Lijepo smo se zabavljali.  
Igrali smo fidbala sa odraslima.

At the weekend  
On weekend we play badminton.  
We play dolls and football.  
We are going in the circus and plays be byutyful.

(Eyres in Bearne 1996: 186)

Writing such as Selma's and Semra's reflects pupils' oral language. If pupils are insecure about word order or the meaning of certain prepositions in spoken English, this may be reflected in their writing. Teacher modelling in shared and guided writing activities will support pupils learning to write in EAL. It is also important to demonstrate examples of non-narrative genres, such as report, explanation and procedural writing, so that writers learning English will understand both the linguistic and structural aspects of these genres.

Barrs and Cork (2001) found the exploration of quality narrative texts through drama, discussion and reading aloud supported and extended all pupils' narrative and poetry writing, whether they were writing in their first or additional languages. Drama also encourages pupils new to writing in English to write in role, taking risks in the content and length of their writing. The following piece of writing is by Yossif in Year 5. His mother is from Spain and his father is from Sierra Leone. Yossif speaks Spanish and Catalan and is an experienced reader in these languages, but he had little experience of English when he arrived in Year 4. Here, he demonstrates his ability to express his experiences in a poetic form, using the language structures of the class novel *Fire, Bed and Bone* by Henrietta Branford:

I know my hostel, behind my door where I sleep, all cozy and warm in the winter dreaming.  
I know the market, at the beginning of the street – it's busy, with strong smells of different foods.  
I know the street of Old Kent road they are busy all the time,  
I know the cab drivers which are always busy.  
I know the car park of Tesco which there's a lot of cars.  
I know the coach park near my hotel.  
I know the sweet shop where every thing is cheap behind my house.  
I know the Royal Mail car park behind the football pitch.  
I know the Royal Mail post Office where you can send packages to Africa, Europe and the wild world,  
the office is in the park.  
I know the old dirty laundry.  
I know the school in Peckham queens road.

I know the clean neat mosque where to pray to God.  
I know the telephone boxes.

(Barrs and Cork 2001: 148)

Pupils like Yossif, Selma and Semra enter school with experiences and knowledge of oral and sometimes written language. They need opportunities to utilise these resources and to express themselves in a range of modes of representation (such as drawing, drama, photography, blogging and online publishing) using English in a range of contexts, formal and informal. In addition to high-quality texts, the use of visuals, open-ended situations, discussion and problem-solving activities offer effective starting points in drawing on pupils' linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Using talk as a 'language bridge' to the more formal registers of writing (Gibbons 2002) and making explicit links between talk, reading and writing enables pupils learning EAL to use texts as models for their own writing and to begin to understand how literary language differs from spoken language in structure. This approach also supports learning across the curriculum, where pupils examine and use different spoken and written language structures in other subject areas.

### **The distinctive nature of learning and teaching with EAL**

Our aim in this paper has been to develop teachers' understanding that good practice for pupils learning English as an Additional Language is good practice for all pupils. We would emphasise however that the reverse is not necessarily the case. Pupils learning EAL have distinctive needs which arise from their different linguistic and cultural starting points to native English speaking pupils. Teachers can support pupils learning EAL by focussing on the continuum of pupils' language development in the context of a challenging curriculum, by taking account in planning and in practice of how diverse curriculum content is expressed and understood through language. Teachers can make explicit the connections between English as a subject and English as the medium of teaching all curriculum content in order to help pupils learning EAL to access and use the full range of technical and cultural domains of language. Teaching which reflects the distinctive nature of learning with EAL is also underpinned by relevant texts and resources which promote inclusion and anti-racism by enabling pupils actively to use their cultural and language experiences for learning.

#### **Contributing Authors**

Kimberly Safford and Fiona Collins  
Roehampton University

#### **First published**

20 April, 2007

#### **Last updated**

2 May, 2009

## **References**

Bain, R., B. Fitzgerald, & M. Taylor, (1992) (eds) *Looking into Language*  
London: Hodder & Stoughton

Barrs, M & V. Cork (2001) *The Reader in the Writer*, London: CLPE

Collins, F. & C. Svensson, (2005) *Bookstart: Planting a Seed for Life Final Report*, London: Roehampton University & Bookstart

DfES (2006) Ethnicity and Education The evidence on minority ethnic pupils aged 5-16 (0208-2006 DOM-EN)  
London:DfES, Retrieved 2 May 2009 from: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/0208-2006DOM-EN.pdf>

Eyres, I. (1996) "'Snjezana I Sedam Patuljaka' developing language through writing bilingual texts' in E. Bearne, (ed) *Differentiation and Diversity*, London: Routledge

Gibbons, P. (2002) *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning*, Portsmouth NH: Heinemann. Available from [NALDIC publications](#)

Gibbons, P. (1991) *Learning to Learn in a Second Language*, Newtown Australia: PETA

Gravelle, M. (ed.) (2000) *Planning for Bilingual Learners: an inclusive curriculum*, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books

Gravelle, M. (1996) *Supporting Bilingual Learners in Schools*, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books

Harris, R. (1997) Romantic Bilingualism: time for a change? Ch.2 in Leung, C. & Cable, C. (eds) *English as an Additional Language: Changing perspectives*. Watford: NALDIC Available from [NALDIC publications](#)

Leung, C. (2001) 'English as an additional language: distinctive language focus or diffused curriculum concerns?' *Language and Education* 15, (1), pp.33-55

McWilliam, N. (1998) *What's in a Word? Vocabulary development in multilingual classrooms*, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books

Mohan, B. (1986) *Language and Content*, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley

QCA (2000) *A Language in Common: assessing English as an Additional Language* London: QCA

QCA (2006) *Reading Differences*, London: QCA <http://www.qca.org.uk/16008.html>

Riley, J. & D. Reedy (2000) *Developing Writing for Different Purposes; teaching about genre in the early years*, London: Paul Chapman

Copyright NALDIC 2011