

Theme: Learning and development

Key principle

Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and interconnected.

Commitments

4.1 Play and Exploration: Children's play reflects their wide ranging and varied interests and preoccupations. In their play children learn at their highest level. Play with peers is important for children's development.

4.2 Active Learning: Children learn best through physical and mental challenges. Active learning involves other people, objects, ideas and events that engage and involve children for sustained periods.

4.3 Creativity and Critical Thinking: When children have opportunities to play with ideas in different situations and with a variety of resources, they discover connections and come to new and better understandings and ways of doing things. Adult support in this process enhances their ability to think critically and ask questions.

4.4 Areas of Learning and Development: The EYFS is made up of six areas of Learning and Development. All areas of Learning and Development are connected to one another and are equally important. All areas of Learning and Development are underpinned by the Principles of the EYFS.

Effective practice

A good EYFS setting is the ideal environment for children to learn English as an additional language.

The role of the practitioner

The expertise of the practitioner is vital to the successful learning of EAL. The positive and welcoming ethos and attitude within the setting are crucial for underpinning success. Practitioners build on this in their observation, assessment and planning for children's play, active learning and creativity across all six areas of Learning and Development.

In the EYFS practice guidance you will find specific references to the needs of children learning EAL. The following general points also apply:

- Second language learners will acquire much of their language incidentally through interacting with peers and adults in meaningful contexts.
- Close observations of those interactions and the resulting language used will enable you to decide what aspects of language you might plan to teach in a more structured way. In this way the social language children acquire can be built on and will inform your planning.
- Knowing something about the different languages the children speak at home can help you to understand some of the typical errors children learning EAL will make. For example, you notice a child either doesn't use he or she, him or her, or mixes them up; this is common for children whose home language contains no personal pronouns. So you could help them by inventing a game or tell a story with puppets in a small group which involve perhaps a Mr and Mrs, or boy and girl. The story could involve a repetitive refrain such as 'She said "yes" but he said "no"' to a list of suggestions or possibilities you or the children put to them. Later you might want to

consolidate the idea by sometimes saying 'He said' and sometimes saying 'Yusef said', so the child understands 'He' and 'Yusef' are interchangeable in this context.

- Modelling is important for introducing children to new language structures and vocabulary. Children need to hear language used in a meaningful context before they can rehearse and use it themselves. Much of this is what practitioners and parents will do naturally to encourage children's language learning.
- It is important to be encouraging without being demanding and to use modelling to correct mistakes rather than tell children they are wrong – this will only serve to inhibit their attempts and damage self-esteem.
- Questions should be used with great care – avoid using questions such as 'What is this?', or 'What colour is this?' too often. If they know the answer and can express it in English, it may boost self esteem, but overuse of closed questions limits learning and, if they do not know the answer, it increases the sense of failure. Such questions do not lead to an extended use of language.
- Open ended questions such as 'Why is he crying?' provide opportunity to use language extensively.
- Talking to children as you play alongside them, for example saying 'Can you give me the scissors please?', 'Yes those are what I need', or 'Oh, that's the stapler, I don't need that yet, here are the scissors', is a more effective way of finding out if a child has understood you and supplies children with the information they may not have known.
- Recasting or remodelling language provides a positive way of dealing with errors children make as they try out new language. For example, if a child says 'I goed to the park', the practitioner acknowledges the successful communication of meaning and models the correct form of language by saying 'You went to the park...did you go with your brothers?'
- Careful enunciation of words and phrases is important, speech should not be exaggerated or amplified but delivered clearly and not too fast, with appropriate gesture and expression.
- Repetition is important, not only in stories, songs and finger plays, etc., but repeating and confirming children's own attempts at speech. By showing your interest in this way you will encourage children to continue in their attempts to speak. By repeating and adding to the child's spoken language you will be scaffolding their language learning, consolidating and adding to their knowledge of language structure.
- Practitioners may 'self-talk' through activities with which they are engaged, so that they are giving children a commentary on their actions, for example 'I'm putting the banana on the plate, now you can help me cut it', or 'parallel talk' where the practitioner provides a commentary on what the child is doing. Both strategies can be very helpful for short periods but should not be extended to the point where they become intrusive or inhibiting.
- Children need time to think, reflect and quietly absorb language around them. Practitioners need to be as ready to respond as they are to initiate conversation and interactions, taking their lead from the child's needs or interests.
- Language is always best used in a meaningful context; talk about the sand, the water or the bricks while you are playing with them; talking about what children might have done at home, for instance, out of context can be confusing.
- Remember how tiring it can be to be in an unfamiliar language environment.

Grouping and organisation of learning opportunities

- Young children will learn English from their peers as well as adults and will often be more ready to practise and rehearse language in play and away from the gaze of adults. Interactive activities that encourage child-to-child conversations will support all children's language development.
- Bilingual children should be placed in the appropriate age group. Don't be tempted to place children with very little English with younger children as they are less likely to make friendships and develop age-appropriate social skills.
- Likewise, when working on small-group activities, ensure that children learning EAL are placed with children who have developed a good age-appropriate level of English. Children should not be withdrawn to learn English; this is neither necessary nor appropriate and can be counter-productive.
- All areas of learning and development are interrelated and interdependent, and offer rich opportunities for developing children's use of language. Activities in your setting which you plan specifically to support all children's language and communication skills should need little adapting for children learning EAL. Enhancing activities inevitably benefits all children in the setting.

First-hand experience and daily routines

- First-hand experiences provide the most effective context for learning language. A cooking activity or a trip outside the setting, whether a full-scale excursion or a visit to a local shop, will provide excellent opportunities to introduce or confirm language which children can recreate and rehearse in role-play with a supportive adult. Adults who are able to do so should give further support by supplying relevant vocabulary in home languages.
- Daily routines can be supportive, or they can be a missed opportunity for learning. For example, if you discuss the weather on a daily basis are you sure children learning English know what you are doing? Are the weather pictures and symbols adequate? Do children know the words for different types of weather in their home language?
- Illustrated time lines of daily routines and sequences of everyday activities can be used very effectively to support language learning alongside concept development. Opportunities to take copies home to share with families can support language learning and extend home to setting links. Parents can extend the home language learning by supplying verbal or written captions to the pictures. Photographs are particularly effective.

Games

- Language can be acquired and taught very effectively through playing games; the focus is on participation and enjoyment in a non-threatening and relaxed situation. Because children learning EAL are used to tuning in to different speech sounds they will usually enjoy and succeed at games based on auditory discrimination. These will support their speaking and listening skills and have the potential to enhance self-esteem through providing a vehicle for successful interaction. Games that do not require a verbal response allow less confident children to participate.
- The Phase One guidance of the Letters and Sounds programme offers practitioners a wealth of ideas for planned adult-led and child-initiated small-group activities which will encourage and support children learning EAL.
- Remember to ensure that children have grasped any rules, have had an opportunity to rehearse any responses necessary and are not asked to respond first in a turn-

taking game or group activity so that they are able to watch, listen and learn from the responses of others.

- Barrier games can be very effective. In these games, children have to listen very carefully, usually in pairs, to instructions varying in complexity, in order to complete a task with pictures or objects to match a task performed or set behind a simple barrier. Once these games are mastered, children often enjoy inventing their own versions, rehearsing and teaching activities to their peers.
- Guessing games are important for helping children to practise the skills of formulating questions; varying in complexity, such games can be easily adapted to be age and stage appropriate.

Music

- Musical activities are particularly valuable for supporting language learning. Simple songs, rhymes and refrains chanted in a rhythmic way are often the vehicle for children's first attempts to articulate an additional language.
- Sharing songs and rhymes in home languages reinforces similarities in patterns of languages and fosters home to setting links. Music is a wonderful medium for sharing cultures, languages and benefits, and enhances language learning. Parents and bilingual staff can help translate favourites such as 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' and 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' as well as sharing traditional rhymes and songs. These are also available via various websites, both LA and commercial.

Stories and books

- Stories and books constitute a vital part of worldwide cultural and linguistic heritage. The well-planned use of stories, read and told, traditional and new, contributes greatly to children's understanding and developing use of language.
- Stories based on personal experience can be a powerful medium for supporting children's personal, social and emotional development as well as their communicative and linguistic skills. Listening to Young Children documents the development and use of children's own stories to express their ideas and opinions. Communicating Matters training materials, Module 1 Focus 6, explores the 'child as a story teller'.
- Story sessions bring pleasure and enjoyment, develop the imagination and help children to explore a range of ideas and feelings; they help organise their thoughts and link ideas to knowledge.
- Illustrated sequences, photographs, puppetry and wordless picture sequences give children the opportunity to formulate ideas in their home language which can then be translated into English with appropriate support.
- Opportunities to experience story telling in home languages greatly advantage children learning EAL.
- Familiarity with the language and structure of stories is transferable to a second language and prior knowledge of stories greatly enhances and facilitates learning. Dual text stories can be a good resource where home languages have a written text and parents are literate in that language.
- Planned stories can be an excellent medium for language learning. Choose stories with a clear story line, written or told in simple direct language. Those with repetitive texts are particularly useful as they give children the opportunity to hear language sequences they can tune into and rehearse.
- Clear illustrations and other visual support, artefacts and props should be used. Story sacks can be a wonderful resource.

- Home made books, particularly about familiar settings or objects are a very valuable resource and give hours of pleasure to young children who delight in the familiarity of the pictures, especially where they, and other people they know, are in them.
- Telling, rather than reading, stories enable practitioners to more closely adapt them to individual needs. Persona Dolls (see www.persona-doll-training) make a particularly powerful story-telling medium which can be a vehicle for learning on many levels and can be particularly effective for supporting cultural identity.
- Careful consideration should be given to the choice of story, particularly in illustrated books, to ensure positive images of diverse cultures and an avoidance of negative stereotyping.

To conclude

Give children space and time; your patience and support, thoughtful provision, and acknowledgement of their skills in their home language will give them the confidence to achieve in English. Children are natural linguists. With your support children learning EAL will have the best foundation for becoming truly bilingual, with all the intellectual and social benefits this confers.

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