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Good practice for pupils learning English as an additional language: Lessons from effective literacy teachers in inner-city primary schools

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Abstract This article presents observations and discussion of the successful teaching of English to pupils, in English primary schools, for whom English is an additional language (EAL). It draws on research in Year 2 (6–7-year old) classes in three inner-city primary schools carried out in 2003 and 2005. Three recognized, effective teachers of literacy were selected for case study; all worked in successful schools where results for literacy, measured by national tests, were in line with or better than national averages. Following analyses of lesson observations and interviews with the teachers, their head teachers and the EAL coordinators in the schools, a number of common elements in their practice emerged. Discussion centres on how these pedagogical features supported effective learning environments for the early literacy development of bilingual children, and on the implications for the practice of teaching English to all pupils.

Keywords classroom practice; English as an additional language (EAL); Literacy Hour; National Literacy Strategy (NLS); Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED); subject knowledge; theoretical understanding

Background

The National Literacy Strategy's Framework for Teaching (NLS) has been the main tool for teaching English to pupils in English schools since 1998. It has recently undergone a review following some criticism of its original composition (Earl et al., 2003; OfSTED 2005a) such as the need to support

curriculum guidance with secure subject knowledge and to move away from prescriptive, objective-driven teaching that loses sight of individuals' progress. The research in this article studied teachers who had managed to retain a child-centred curriculum for literacy while embracing the rigour introduced by the NLS. It is argued that the teachers had perhaps retained this sense of the individual in their delivery because they were planning for pupils whose home language was not English. The literature review presents a range of research that draws together the issues for multilingual pupils and the issues for teachers in English schools using the NLS.

There is a mixed picture from research and professional commentary of the experiences of ethnic minority pupils in English primary schools. Some of this is found in empirical studies made as the NLS was introduced, while other commentary comes from inspection findings, chiefly from the inspection body for English schools – the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED).

On the one hand there is widely expressed concern at the underachievement of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). Among the reasons cited for this ongoing failure of some ethnic minority pupils to succeed in the English school system are a lack of specialist teachers with sufficient understanding of how to develop literacy skills in pupils with EAL (OfSTED, 2002a: 22); poor teacher expectation that can depress the performance of pupils from all social and ethnic backgrounds, including those who are white and working class (Gilborn and Mirza, 2000); and too much variation of funding and type of provision for supporting EAL at schools and colleges nationwide (OfSTED, 2005b). Thus, a most vulnerable section of primary school children are subject to the vagaries of an uneven playing field and are more likely to fail at reading and writing.

On the other hand there is also evidence that some inner city primary schools do very well by these same pupils and manage to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum while attaining literacy results in line with or better than national averages. In some cases, schools with very high numbers of EAL pupils obtain better results than schools in less challenging circumstances (OfSTED, 2000). Furthermore there is clear evidence of the benefit to children who learn in more than one language; this is identified as a heightened understanding of the structure of language or 'metalinguistic awareness', through which bilingual children develop greater understanding of writing systems, meaning and genre (Bialystock, 1997; Gregory, 1996; Helavarra-Robertson, 2002; Kenner and Kress, 2003).

The success, or otherwise, of schools in ensuring that their EAL pupils succeed as well as their monolingual peers hangs potentially on their understanding of the possible barriers to language development in

bilingual learners. While children with a home language other than English may have the potential for higher attainment that is locked in to learning in more than one language, their teachers need to unlock that potential through delivery that avoids inhibition of linguistic development. Verhoeven (1994) identified the crucial need for bilingual pupils to develop the spoken form of their new language before being asked to operate as readers and writers in it. In addition to this, EAL pupils need time to develop their understanding of the nuances of spoken and written English (Kotler et al., 2001); they may acquire playground English quickly but true bilingualism can take up to seven years to develop. A surface confidence with spoken English may disguise a lack of knowledge about technical and idiomatic English that will hinder development in reading comprehension (Hutchinson et al., 2003). This underlying deficit about the detail of English will become apparent in writing that may display confused use of prepositions, verb tenses and plurals and misuse of formulaic words and phrases (Cameron and Besser, 2004). However, conversely, higher-achieving writers with EAL will demonstrate a confident fluency and use of figurative language that may be richer than their monolingual-speaking peers; possibly because their operating across more than one language gives them an enhanced metalinguistic awareness that supports high-quality text production (Cameron and Besser, 2004). Finally, Long (2002) identifies that teachers must give a clear context for their lessons in order to engage EAL pupils. Experiences must be relevant and meaningful for the children in order that both spoken and written language can develop.

Thus, the crucial role of oracy for developing reading and writing in EAL learners, meaningful contexts for learning and overt teaching of the conventions of spoken and written English are identified across research related to EAL pupils. However, it could also be said that both oracy and teaching of genre and register are crucial to all pupils' proficiency in English. Looking at research related to the development of both reading and writing we can see some common threads. It is widely recognized that children in the early years need lots of opportunities for speaking and listening in order to develop their vocabulary and their knowledge of grammar and syntax. In being taught how to read all children will need access to a wide range of texts and overt teaching of the skills required for text comprehension and identification of genre (Mason and Allan, 1986; Van Kleeck, 1990). Work by Oakhill et al. (1986) identified that children may read text but be poor comprehenders; they recognize the words but are unable to infer meaning. Their findings mirror those of Hutchinson et al. (2003) who identified comparable problems for pupils for whom English is an additional language.

Research that identifies how children develop as writers also carries resonances with the research looking at children writing in a language that is not their home language. Berninger and Swanson (1994) described a model for children's writing development that is detailed and complex. They identified the overarching roles of affect, motivation and social context on pupils inclination to write at all and showed how the process of text production involves planning based on prior knowledge of subject and text type, translation to a first draft which involves knowledge of discourse style, and subsequent editing that will again draw on long-term memory and the development of the writer's thoughts throughout the process of composition. It is the necessary prior knowledge of language conventions, which can perhaps present the most obvious barriers to children writing in either a first or a new language. Derewianka (1990) demonstrated how seven-year-olds can be taught text production in a way that encourages higher-order speaking, thinking and writing. In an action research project she observed the ways in which a class teacher immersed her seven-year-old pupils in their subject matter, and then in the conventions and register of non-fiction writing, before children produced their final compositions. Similarly Kenner (2000), working with young bilinguals, found that providing a clear purpose for composition promoted successful early writers and engaged children. Furthermore, Cameron and Besser (2004) highlighted the need for detailed instruction in the conventions of written English in bilingual 7 to 11-year olds.

Thus there are some commonalities between the research relating to models of how EAL pupils need to develop their spoken and written English and models of how first language speakers develop towards the comprehension and production of text. It could be said therefore, that, in order to succeed in teaching EAL pupils, teachers need subject knowledge relating to how literacy develops partnered with a detailed understanding of the specific needs for pupils learning in another language (Flynn and Stainthorp, 2006). Moreover, it could be said that, as we focus our attention increasingly on learning rather than teaching, the skill of the teacher in providing an appropriate learning environment for literacy has been identified as pivotal to teaching all children well (OfSTED, 2005a). There is a growing bank of research identifying the characteristics of effective teachers of literacy. A number of reports have set out to identify the key features of pedagogy common to practitioners in monolingual classrooms who both actively engage their pupils in their learning and foster high levels of attainment in literacy lessons.

Wray et al. (2002) found that effective teachers of literacy were more likely to link the teaching of word and sentence-level objectives into

meaningful text-based experiences for their pupils. In shared text work – either reading or writing – these teachers were anxious to make connections between text, sentence and word functions explicit in order that children assimilated the purposes for reading and writing across genres. Lessons were conducted at a brisk pace, using extensive modelling and careful differentiation. Matching the findings of Hay McBer (2000), these teachers were ‘assessment literate’ (Black et al., 2003) and they demonstrated comparative depth and confidence in their subject knowledge. Furthermore they believed that the creating of meaning in literacy was fundamental to success in teaching reading and writing; they also shared a background in and a passion for their subject.

Wray et al.’s (2002) findings are further supported by Hall and Harding’s (2003) synthesis of research into effective teachers of literacy. In addition to Wray et al.’s key features they concluded that these teachers were unlikely to follow any one set of curriculum guidance:

The ‘effective’ teacher of literacy uses an unashamedly eclectic collection of methods, which represents a balance between the direct teaching of skills and more holistic approaches. This means that they balance direct skills teaching with more authentic, contextually grounded literacy activities. They avoid the partisan adherence to any one sure-fire approach or method. (Hall and Harding, 2003: 3)

In 2003, the NLS had been in place for five years and *Excellence and Enjoyment* (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2003) was just around the corner. This document was, among other things, to exhort schools to move away from the prescription of the NLS and towards a more motivational approach to the teaching of English. Reports from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) (Earl et al., 2003) and from OfSTED (2002b), as well as empirical studies from research (Dombey, 2003; Fisher et al., 2000; Hardman et al., 2003; Hargreaves et al., 2003; Wray et al., 2002) drew a disparate picture of success with NLS in some schools but weak and sometimes misguided practice in others. Added to this there was a growing feeling that some parts of the Literacy Hour – the prescribed pedagogy for teaching English in primary schools – might need review (OfSTED, 2002b).

This study set out to observe how at that time some schools were making very good progress with NLS while teaching large numbers of pupils with EAL. The focus for the study was to explore what it was that teachers did in the classroom that promoted high levels of attainment, combined with motivation to learn, when language might be a barrier to both. The observations were made just as these teachers started to offload the perceived straitjacket of the NLS and move towards what the DfES was to describe as

'creativity' in their planning and delivery. Unlike earlier research relating to effective teachers of literacy, the observations were of effective teachers using the NLS in settings where the majority of pupils had English as an additional language. Thus, the observations have the potential to add evidence to a relatively under-researched area of classroom practice and to identify the core strengths in teachers for whom EAL pupils are the majority.

Sample

Three recognized effective teachers were selected from inner-city schools where results showed not only an improvement trend, but also where results were in line with or better than national averages. The schools were all in East London; an area of the capital that has some pockets of affluence but which is most commonly associated with high levels of poverty and a well above average percentage of ethnic minority families. However, it is important to note that, although the areas they served were among the poorest in the country, the local education authorities (LEAs) in which these schools were situated were widely recognized by inspection and performance data as being very effective. Thus the schools were operating in a climate of high expectation and success for all, regardless of social and economic background. In all the schools, the pupil population was at least 50 per cent EAL, and at least 50 per cent of pupils were eligible for free school meals; each of these benchmarks puts the schools among the most socially disadvantaged when measured nationally. Anderson Primary and Ballard Primary had very high numbers of Sylheti-speaking Bangladeshi children,¹ whereas Campbell Primary had approximately 50 per cent of its pupils with EAL but from a wide range of linguistic and ethnic backgrounds.

The schools were selected using performance data over several years, supported by the commentary in recent OfSTED inspection reports. It was decided to make Year 2 teachers the focus, because this is a year in which children start to make rapid progress in their reading and writing and also one in which they are tested by the national standardized assessment tasks (SATs). The selection of the teachers was based on the head teachers' recommendations. A lack of measurable criteria for selection is cited as problematic when studying 'effectiveness' (Hall and Harding, 2003), thus we were dependent on the identification of the head teachers' excellent leadership skills in inspection reports, as well as the schools' test results, and needed to trust their judgement based on their rigorous monitoring of staff performance.

The teachers selected were Aidan, Bridget and Clare. Aidan's class was made up of 29 children, of whom 28 spoke Sylheti and 1 was Somali. Bridget's class of 30 had approximately 70 per cent Bangladeshi children and the remaining 30 per cent were white indigenous East Enders or Somali. Clare's 30 pupils were from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds; about 40 per cent of the class were white indigenous children, while the remaining majority were from families with ethnic and linguistic backgrounds across the globe. All three were experienced teachers – Clare having the least experience with 12 years teaching – and all three held, or had held, senior management positions. Their head teachers identified them for their excellence because they demonstrated a confidence with the teaching of English that fostered pupil motivation and enjoyment during lessons and which, not coincidentally, had supported the schools in driving up standards of attainment in literacy.

Method

Semi-structured observation pro-formas were designed and a pilot lesson observation carried out with each teacher in the autumn term of 2002. The lessons were observed using revised pro-formas during nine literacy lessons, three per teacher, in the spring term of 2003. The lessons observed were at that point referred to as The Literacy Hour; this was the name for the structured approach to literacy teaching supported by the NLS and its Framework for Teaching (DfES, 2001). The focus was on the teachers and their planning and delivery, thus they wore radio microphones and their teaching was recorded on audiocassettes. The lessons were analysed in two ways; first by their structure – how the teachers had chosen to select objectives, introduce material and set up activities for the children; second, by analysing the range of dialogue the teachers engaged in with the children. A number of types of teacher–pupil interaction were identified: recap of prior learning; explanatory talk including modelling of tasks; giving instructions; questioning and discussion; and the language associated with general classroom management. The micro detail of analysis of teacher–pupil interaction is not included in this article, but the categories identified earlier were considered to be significant and they appear in the commentary related to the findings.

Interviews were carried out with the teachers and with their head teachers in order to uncover the systems in place in the schools that might support effective practice and to investigate the teachers' and schools' attitudes to the NLS. Questions were devised using a combination of those employed by the OISE study (Earl et al., 2003), which had observed the

implementation of the NLS nationwide, and other questions arising from the lesson observations. At return visits in January 2005 interviews were carried out with the EAL coordinators – the staff members responsible for coordinating support for ethnic minority pupil attainment – and with the head teachers, to explore any differences in approach since the observations of the teachers. It was felt that 2003–5 had been a period of considerable potential change in English primary schools and that ongoing dialogue would be useful for meaningful analysis. During these years a range of both research (Dombey, 2003; Hardman et al., 2003) and professional commentary (DfES, 2003; Earl et al., 2003; OfSTED 2004, 2005a) had highlighted a need for pedagogical change that schools were moving through at different rates. Furthermore, analysis of the lesson data had highlighted commonalities that seemed to be consistent with a model that might address the linguistic development needs for EAL children; thus it was felt that a further investigation of the schools' systems for supporting EAL pupils might provide evidence to support this hypothesis. None of the schools had made significant changes to their pedagogical approach for literacy, other than to embrace even more fully the signals for independence and creativity flagged up by *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003). Findings and discussion centre on the significant characteristics of the teachers' lessons that supported the development of their young bilingual learners.

Findings and discussion

There were a number of features of the three teachers' practice that were effective for the teaching of pupils with EAL. These qualities were identified as common to all of the lessons observed: the planned use of oracy to develop both spoken and written English; the skilful combination of word, sentence and text level objectives into meaningful literacy experiences; and the overt teaching of the conventions of written English. Interestingly, they also reflect some of the features of effective teachers of literacy for indigenous pupils. The following discussion uses three of the nine lessons observed as exemplars. It also draws on the interviews with the EAL coordinators. Figures used to amplify the discussion show a précis of the plan for the lesson observed. Each includes links to research related both to the teaching of EAL pupils and to the features of effective literacy teaching for all pupils in the consideration of planning and delivery.

The use of oracy

One of the most striking features observed was that all three teachers gave considerable emphasis to the development of oracy in their planning and

classroom delivery. They used role-play, paired talk and their own carefully considered interaction with pupils to foster a talk-rich environment. They all demonstrated awareness of the need for their pupils – both EAL and monolingual English speakers – to develop spoken language that would support later reading comprehension and written text production. Across all the lessons observed each teacher was engaged in open-ended discussion and dialogue throughout the lesson; either with the class, with groups, with pairs or with individuals. This dialogue demanded a great deal of the children while also keeping them focused very clearly on the lesson objectives. Furthermore it was characterized by a sense of fun that kept children engaged and motivated. Moreover this was genuine dialogue; not the weaker interpretation of interactive teaching identified by Hardman, Smith and Wall (2003) as problematic in perceived effective pedagogy for the literacy hour.

Looking at an example from Aidan in his second lesson (Figure 1), we see how he developed one idea that carried children through their learning using the traditional tale *Zomo the Rabbit* (McDermot, 1996). In this lesson his children, an entire class with EAL, were working on dialogue between characters and were to write, following role-play, small amounts of speech between the characters of Zomo the Rabbit and Wild Cow who were hurling insults at each other. Zomo, a trickster rabbit, is sent to retrieve milk from Wild Cow. He succeeds in getting her to ram her horns in to a tree

Combining reading and writing skills, children supported in making the links through use of one key objective. Harding and Hall (2003)

Section focus	Objective	Activity
Word Level	Final phoneme –ll	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do it like a robot • Phoneme counting • 2 letters one sound • Writing words using –ll ending
Text and sentence level	To prepare and re-tell stories individually and through role-play in groups, using dialogue and narrative from text. (Year 2, term 2, T 7)	Shared text <i>Zomo the Rabbit</i> (part read) Role play in character Creating spoken sentences in speech bubbles
Independent and Guided groups	To prepare and re-tell stories individually and through role-play in groups, using dialogue and narrative from text. (Year 2, term 2, T 7) (Used in writing)	Writing insults from Zomo to Wild Cow on to speech bubbles
Plenary	As above	Performing dialogue between Zomo and Wild Cow Discussion of effective dialogue Introduction to homework, word with –ll ending

The text is already known. Work starts with the familiar. The task is in a meaningful context. Wray et al. (2002)

Extensive use of talk for writing. Verhoeven (1994), Kotler et al. (2001)

Match of introduction and main activity. Wray et al. (2002)

Consolidation, and learning made explicit. Black et al. (2003)

Figure 1 Aidan, Lesson 2

and they become stuck for long enough for him to milk her. In terms of prior subject knowledge the children had already heard the story and had already looked at speech marks to demarcate dialogue in printed text. Thus they had a sufficient grounding in the setting for their writing and some understanding of the conventions for writing dialogue (Verhoeven, 1994); they were immersed in the subject matter in order to promote success in writing (Derewianka, 1990).

For this lesson, Aidan wanted the children to write engaging dialogue; this in itself was interesting because his objective, 'To prepare and re-tell stories individually and through role-play in groups, using dialogue', was a reading objective from Year 2 term 2 of the NLS that does not ask for this level of sophistication. Thus we quickly see evidence of high expectations combined with an understanding of the need to make the conventions of written English explicit. Furthermore we see how this teacher understood the role of motivation for writing, and how reading and writing experiences and objectives can be interwoven. During the introduction, children engaged in role-play as either Zomo or Wild Cow. They practised insulting each other with increasing sophistication and appropriate levels of rudeness. This meant that when they came to write they had a sound grasp of appropriate vocabulary and of what they wanted to say. In this way, they were dealing with the many-faceted parts of text production in turn and were less likely to be overwhelmed by the need to think, spell and transcribe simultaneously (Berninger and Swanson, 1994).

The following transcript (Figure 2) demonstrates how Aidan responded to pupils in ways that supported their use of English and ensured they understood the subtle nuances of insults that were appropriate in a children's book.

The level of subtlety the children were being asked to consider was exactly that identified by Kotler et al. (2001) as missing from many EAL pupils' repertoire of spoken English. It also reflected a level of engagement with appropriate tone and register that is reminiscent of Derewianka's (1990) research with native English speakers.

During guided writing the children worked at writing their dialogue on to pre-prepared speech bubbles. The activity grew naturally from that modelled in the introduction (Wray et al., 2002), involved writing dialogue that had first been considered orally through role play (Verhoeven, 1994) and involved direct teaching of the conventions of spoken and written English (Cameron and Besser, 2004; Hutchinson et al., 2003). Aidan's feedback as the children wrote included attention to details such as whether speech marks are used in speech bubbles and the difference between direct speech in the present tense and reported speech in the past tense.

I'd like you to have a little think. If you wanted to tease Wild Cow, to taunt Wild Cow, to make Wild Cow angry, what would you choose to say to her? It can be a little bit rude, not too rude because it's a book for children remember.'

Child offers his example

'Your nose is too big?' Repeats it in taunting voice – 'Your nose is too big! I don't think wild cow would like that at all. Well done. that's a really good insult'

Another child struggles to form a sentence in which he wants to say that wild cow's milk is made of grass as his insult. Teacher says, 'Well how could we say that? How about "Your milk is all grassy!"'

Once child goes too far and presents a rather lavatorial example.

'Oh, that's a bit on the rude side, I don't think we'll use that one. It's important to know what to do here, because you want to be a little bit rude, but you don't want to be too rude. Can you see that?' Child acknowledges.

Figure 2 Transcript from sentence-level work in Aidan's second lesson

An important point to note is that the quality of the written dialogue that was shared in the plenary session was superior to that articulated during the introduction. They had not only had the opportunity to express what they wanted to say through their role play, but also to consider better ways of saying it. In this way pupils with EAL were supported both in developing spoken English and in considering the nuances of speech used in dialogue between fictional characters. The result was that the children demonstrated that they had genuinely advanced their level of performance as a direct result of the teaching they received.

Comments from Alan, the EAL coordinator from Anderson Primary, set Aidan's practice in a school context. The school had a long history of well-resourced support for its mostly EAL pupils and a highly trained support team who understood the language needs of bilingual learners. Most importantly, Alan felt, the team understood the crucial role of developing oracy before reading and writing in English. The children's home languages were valued and celebrated through their use in class by the children and their bilingual support assistants, and through the use of dual-language texts. The development of talk was supported from entry into the Nursery unit through use of the Paley technique of story telling (Paley, 1990). The children's own writing was used extensively in lessons to model the correct

form and content for specific genre. Alan saw this as part of a 'continuous teaching of language strategy' that drew links between spoken and written English. Perhaps most importantly, this commitment to oracy by the EAL team was reflected in conversations with the head teacher. Thus, the school as a whole had retained speaking and listening in its curriculum for English at a time when the NLS was perceived to have obscured oracy's central role by concentrating only on literacy.

Providing meaningful settings for literacy development: Combining word, sentence and text

A second feature that became apparent from the observations was that these teachers had significant subject knowledge for literacy. This meant that they were able to deliver lessons that combined word-, sentence- and text-level activities in meaningful literacy-based experiences (Wray et al., 2002). While this is a feature identified as one that is relevant to literacy teaching for all children, the need for a clear context is also highlighted as a specific need for pupils with EAL (Kenner, 2000; Long, 2002).

Bridget had developed her pedagogy well beyond the NLS 'clock face'. This was a prescribed organizational strategy that required teachers to split their literacy lessons into strictly timed sections reflecting separate objectives for word, sentence and text level. However, she was using the NLS objectives for planning her overall input for literacy across each term. Her lessons combined NLS objectives in a seamless way that meant children were unaware of any conscious divisions in their learning time. Bridget's school, Ballard Primary, had also taken the decision to take all phonics work and guided reading out of the literacy lesson. These two important areas were given dedicated time at other points during the day. In this way, the planning and delivery of literacy was freed up for lessons that focused on different aspects of written English, particularly on the writing of good quality fiction. Moreover, Bridget would most commonly plan for this writing to take place over a fortnight; each lesson would concentrate on one aspect of the composition so that children were given a rich sense of how effective text was created, time to their develop ideas and time to truly understand the often implicit conventions of written English. In this way her practice modelled the teaching for EAL children called for by Hutchinson et al. (2003) and Cameron and Besser (2004).

Taking the example of Bridget's second lesson (Figure 3), the objective for this lesson had been adapted from the NLS objective, showing how this teacher too had the confidence to offer children experiences that she felt were valuable, rather than follow the guidance verbatim. In the NLS the objective for fiction writing reads, 'to use story settings from reading; e.g.

Exploration of language before writing. Verhoeven (1994)

Section focus	Objective	Activity
Pre-lesson activity	To identify vocabulary related to a the park	Using word maps, the children thought of words relating to events, feelings, sounds and activities in the park.
Picture stimulus introduction – a busy park scene.	To use story settings from reading; e.g. re-describe, use in own writing, write a different story in the same setting. (Year 2, term 2, T 13) To prepare and re-tell stories individually and through role-play in groups, using dialogue and narrative from text. (Year 2, term 2, T 7)	Talking about the activity in the picture. Choosing cameos and predicting what the characters are saying or what might happen to them. Role-play in pairs, using starter sentences, to think of dialogue between characters and to imagine events.
Speed writing	To use story settings from reading; e.g. re-describe, use in own writing, write a different story in the same setting. (Year 2, term 2, T 13)	Writing some lines of the mid-point of a story from a given starter sentence.
Plenary		Reading of some stories. Discussion related to vocabulary choices. Indication of how today's work will feed the next few lessons' story composition.

Use of own objective. Combining NLS reading and writing text level objectives. Hall and Harding (2003)

Extensive use of talk for writing. Verhoeven (1994), Kotler et al. (2001)

High expectations in discussion of word choice, Cameron and Besser (2004)
Appropriate scaffolding ensures focus on the objective. Black et al. (2003)

Plenary consolidates learning. Purpose of activities made explicit in wider context of week's work. OfSTED (2002), Black et al. (2003)

Figure 3 Bridget, Lesson 2

re-describe, use in own writing, write a different story in the same setting'. Bridget had decided simply to get the children to write a story using a familiar setting. This choice was supportive of the many EAL children in her class because they were likely to have visited a park and therefore more likely to be familiar with the vocabulary of the park. As she frequently said herself, 'without talk there would be no writing'. However, in addition to this, the writing activity lent itself to writing dialogue, as did the role-play beforehand. Therefore, the lesson also covered the objective 'to prepare and re-tell stories individually and through role-play in groups, using dialogue and narrative from text' (Year 2, term 2, Reading objective 7). Interestingly, Bridget, like Aidan, had chosen to tackle this objective through speaking and writing rather than through reading.

This lesson was preceded by an activity during registration that allowed the children to consider some of the vocabulary they might need for their stories. All three teachers used pre-lesson activities, which were literacy-based; however, Bridget had developed this into simple activities that were always linked to the objectives for that day's lesson, and which the children were familiar with. In this way children were engaged with their learning, given a clear context for their work and scaffolded for success as soon as they came in to the classroom. For this lesson the children worked on word

maps that asked for vocabulary related to the events, feelings, sounds and activities there might be in a park.

Starting the lesson, Bridget referred to the craft of the storyteller, and gave a characteristically detailed account of what they were going to do and why they were going to do it. She used a large and attractive poster of a busy park scene that was to be the stimulus for the children's story writing. To start the children thinking about their park story Bridget got them to tell her what they most enjoyed at the park. If they offered one-word answers, she would engage them in a dialogue that demanded more complex sentences. Where they had difficulty expressing themselves in English, she would model the sentence for them. For example one child wanted to tell her two things, but was unable to string them together coherently. Bridget, in saying to him 'I would like to get some ice cream first and then I would like to go for a swim in the pool', was demonstrating for him the use of ordinal language and of simple connectives. As identified earlier, it is those small, 'everyday' type words that provide a sizeable obstacle to fluency in a new language (Cameron and Besser, 2004).

As the lesson moved on, Bridget developed the activity by focusing on one small aspect of the picture. An acetate with a peephole allowed children to choose cameos within the scene. First, children worked together on identifying the dialogue taking place between a mother and her daughter on a see-saw. Bridget worked with them at hypothesizing as to how each character was feeling and what each was saying to the other. This provided a clear template for the second choice of cameo; a woman sitting on a park bench eating her sandwiches and being annoyed by birds trying to steal her lunch. This time children had to role-play what the woman would say after one of the birds had landed on her head. Bridget spent time getting children to identify vocabulary that was appropriate and demanded that children's word choices were precisely matched to the feelings that they wanted to project.

These children were thinking in highly sophisticated ways about their use of language. Interestingly, in several of the lessons observed they were able to produce much higher quality written output than their spoken English suggested they were capable of. These children were unlikely to mature with the disadvantages in their writing observed by Cameron and Besser (2004) among 11-year-old EAL pupils.

Rather than divide the class into the traditional groups for independent activities, Bridget moved the children on from role-play to what she called 'speedwriting'. This was simple, but unusual in the context of the classroom practice for literacy at the time. For one thing, it did not involve ability grouping of any kind, and for another, it did not last the required

20–25 minutes of the NLS's proposed arrangement for independent work. Children simply wrote independently, mostly in silence and for a very short period of time – perhaps 10 minutes. They were given a starter sentence 'Suddenly I heard . . .', following which they had to compose a sequence of plot, including dialogue, that matched the expressions and actions of a child running towards the woman on the bench in the park picture. The idea behind it was to allow children to write down their thoughts without interruption straight after their role-play and discussion. This meant that thoughts emerging from the speaking and listening period could be committed straight to paper. The writing was only ever a small amount of text – in this case, part of the story following on from a starter sentence – and children were encouraged to focus on their choice of language rather than worrying about spelling or punctuation. This tight focus on producing small amounts of high-quality text, following talk for writing, mirrors the practice of Aidan in his second lesson where children were also writing dialogue. It also demonstrates a deep understanding of the full range of processes involved in text production, thus working towards some aspects of Berninger and Swanson's (1994) model of developing writing.

In giving children feedback as they wrote short sections of dialogue related to the cameo, Bridget noticeably varied her conversation with individuals in relation to their response to the task, the level at which they were able to operate and according to their personal targets which might be either word or sentence level. In this way she was ensuring that the children were connecting all the different parts of their learning as they wrote, rather than narrowly focusing on the objectives of setting or of using dialogue. Her aim was for her children to write well, and in order to do this she knew that they needed to see the coherence between features of written text. This capacity to make connections for children when teaching reading and writing, as recognized by Wray et al. (2002) and Hall and Harding (2003), was key to motivation and high achievement in her lessons.

The standard of written work at Ballard Primary was generally very high. More than 90 per cent of the Year 2 pupils, 70 per cent of whom had EAL, gained a level 2 b – the grade for an average 7-year-old – or above, when tested by nationally standardized assessment tasks for writing. Ms Bradshaw, the head teacher who also acted as EAL coordinator, felt that this was in part related to the rich understanding of literature that her bilingual pupils developed as a result of exposure to storytelling in two languages and two cultures. She had observed that among the most able pupils in the school it was the EAL pupils who were the most gifted story writers; perhaps because their metalinguistic awareness gave them a more detailed insight than their monolingual peers into how language works.

Success in writing was also attributed to her insistence that her staff always present children with whole texts. A criticism levelled at the NLS had been that teachers began to use parts of texts in order to teach children about particular technical aspects of writing; thus classes were deprived of the enjoyment of getting involved in a book. At Ballard Primary children were encouraged to engage with plot, character and setting through the reading of the whole book. Ms Ballard felt that in this way the children were introduced to the language of argument and expression in ways that were grounded in a highly motivating context for them. Significantly, she felt that this was as much of an advantage to the bilingual pupils as it was to the school's monolingual English pupils who needed support with developing their use of Standard English.

Overt teaching of the conventions of written English

A third significant feature of the teachers observed was their understanding of the need to teach the conventions of written English. For this the NLS has perhaps provided a very useful focus for teachers of EAL pupils as it actively promotes teaching children about genre and the variety of forms in which text might be presented (Cameron and Besser, 2004). Teaching children about the subtleties of difference in presentation, tone and register improves the written English of all children, but it is recognized as crucial for the successful literacy development of EAL children. It has been cited as a possible reason for considerable improvement in current EAL children's performance at 11 years of age compared to that of 16-year-olds who were not taught using the NLS (Cameron, 2003; Cameron and Besser, 2004). This attention to conventions of written English, in order to support both reading comprehension and text production, was apparent in much of the teachers' practice. One clear example of it was observed in Clare's third lesson (Figure 4).

Clare's overarching objective was to teach the children how to use a glossary for a non-fiction text. However, she wove a range of other smaller objectives in to the lesson in order to generally enhance the children's understanding of how a non-fiction text works for the reader. Thus children were introduced to the common features of a non-fiction text; to the use of bold type; to the use of pictures with captions; and to the purpose of the glossary. Rather than focus on one narrow objective, Clare had chosen to weave several together in order that the lesson experience was embedded in the meaningful context of the whole text. Furthermore, Clare made it clear to the children that they were learning to read from non-fiction texts and to use a glossary in order to help them in their Science lesson later that week. If we consider the overarching objective for non-fiction for Year 2,

Combination of text and sentence level objectives that support overall understanding of the features of an information book. Choice of activities takes this support further. Wray et al. (2002), Hall and Harding (2003)

Combination of objectives and activities put together to support children's written composition later in the week. Gradual acquisition of necessary knowledge for writing Derewianka (1990)

Section focus	Objective	Activity
Text level	To understand that dictionaries and glossaries give definition and explanations (Year 2, term 2, T17)	Labelling different parts of a non-fiction text including the glossary. Justifying why we think this is an information book.
Elephants	To use dictionaries and glossaries to locate words by initial letter. (Year 2, term 2, T16)	Identifying words in the text in bold type. Using the glossary to find their definitions.
	To recognise a range of ways of presenting text. (Year 2, term 2, S7)	
Group work	To understand that dictionaries and glossaries give definitions and explanations. To make class dictionaries and glossaries of special interest words. (Year 2, term 2, T20)	Creating own glossary of elephant words from a list of mixed up words and definitions.
Guided reading	To recognise a range of ways of representing text. (Year 2, term 2, S7)	Reading an information text and identifying its features. Discussion around the book's use of key words in bold but lack of a glossary.
Pleanry	To use dictionaries and glossaries to locate words by initial letter. (Year 2, term 2, T16)	Putting a range of words in to alphabetical order using first or second letter.

Direct teaching of conventions of written English. Cameron and Besser (2004)
High expectations of children. Hay McBer (2000)
Discussion closely matched to objective, while also teaching children the need to be discerning as readers. Hall and Harding (2003)

Opportunity taken to identify and correct misconceptions. Black et al. (2003)

Figure 4 Clare, Lesson 3

term 2 – ‘to use dictionaries, glossaries and other alphabetically ordered texts’ – it is obvious that it has an application well beyond an English lesson. Through her planning, Clare was using the Literacy Hour to give children the skills they needed to use this type of text, but the newly learned skills were to be applied through other curriculum areas. Such cross-curricular thinking might be more apparent post *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003), but at the time of the observations it was relatively rare.

In the introduction to this lesson Clare got the class to identify and label the features of a big book about elephants, in order to investigate whether it was fiction or non-fiction. As each label was attributed to part of the cover or pages, children were asked to judge which sort of book it was and to justify their answers. In this way Clare's high expectations of children's responses mirrored Bridget's. She also allowed them time to think about their answers and to present them in carefully constructed sentences. Such attention to detail will have enhanced her class's ability to formulate an argument, to revise effective sentence structure and to rehearse spoken thoughts in order to support later writing. Thus we see another clear example of delivery that was used to support the linguistic development of EAL pupils.

Following introduction to the features of a non-fiction text and the purpose of a glossary, the class worked independently at activities involving glossary construction. Clare worked with a guided reading group who had the task of judging the effectiveness of the non-fiction text they were given to read. Thus, although this example has been included as one that demonstrates how effective EAL teachers teach the conventions of written English, it also highlights the way in which Clare, like Aidan and Bridget, ensured a very close match of introduction to main activity in order that children's learning was placed in a meaningful context and tightly scaffolded for success. This grew from confidence with subject knowledge, from knowledge of how to support children learning with EAL and from understanding the bigger picture: that today's small objective was part of a sequence working towards a broader learning outcome (Hall and Harding, 2003).

Children read all together, page by page – another departure from the recommended guided reading practice of the NLS. This organizational choice was a useful one because it was then easy for the teacher to stop the children where she needed to make a teaching point about text presentation or definitions, and thus support her objectives for the lesson. Words in this text were printed in bold, but finding their definitions became problematic when the children discovered that there was no glossary for them to look up the word 'hibernate'. The conversation with the children turned to how they might add a glossary to this book, and how they might define the word hibernate.

Through her teaching Clare was making explicit the conventions of non-fiction texts, while exploring how the children might use their understanding to improve on the models presented to them. She encouraged her pupils to read critically and analytically and to make informed decisions about choices for the presentation of their own non-fiction writing.

Observations at Campbell Primary were significantly different from those at Anderson and Ballard. In Clare's class, there were a greater number of monolingual English-speaking pupils and a much greater number of languages among the pupils with EAL. This meant that teaching had to combine support for the language development of EAL learners with the teaching of monolingual pupils who came from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It was in this school that the common ground between good teaching of literacy and good models of teaching for EAL pupils became most apparent. This is not to say that Campbell Primary, or Anderson and Ballard, saw the instructional strategies for EAL and monolingual pupils as the same, but that they were aware of the critical commonalities between the two and used these to the advantage of both sets of children.

Caitlyn, the EAL coordinator for Campbell Primary, summed up this marriage of different facets of subject knowledge in her comment, 'EMA (Ethnic Minority Achievement) practice is good practice'. By this she meant that there were features of the teaching for literacy at Campbell Primary that were used because the staff recognized them as important for the development of second language acquisition. An example of this would have been the school's use of speaking frames; these work like writing frames by giving children a clear structure for managing a task, but the tasks are talk-based to support language development prior to writing. However, the principle of starting with the language needs of the children also benefited the language development of the monolingual pupils by modelling Standard spoken English.

Standardized writing test results for 11-year-olds at this school revealed the complexity of language acquisition for monolingual and bilingual pupils where both are socio-economically disadvantaged. Caitlyn drew attention to the fact that those EAL pupils who had been at the school since the normal school starting age of 5 were more likely to gain at least the average grade expected for an 11-year-old, in national tests, than their indigenous peers. In fact 90 per cent of the EAL pupils in the school attained this, while results for 11-year-olds in the school as a whole were nearer 75 per cent. Caitlyn surmised that this had a great deal to do with parental influence. The families of the EAL pupils, particularly those who had come to England as refugees or asylum seekers, saw English as their passport to success and set great value by their children's school experience. The fact that this aspiration was perhaps not always reflected in the homes of monolingual pupils, who subsequently attained less than their bilingual peers, is an area of important further research.

Conclusion

It would be easy, and probably accurate, to conclude that these teachers were simply very good teachers of literacy. Their practice demonstrated many of the features identified by research as key to the practice of effective teachers (Ferguson and Topping, 2005; Hay McBer, 2000; Wray et al., 2002). However, it also matched research identifying how teaching might overcome the barriers to attainment in literacy for EAL pupils (Cameron and Besser, 2004; Hutchinson et al., 2003; Long, 2002). What seemed significant about their practice at the time that they were observed was the extent to which their lessons were driven by pupil need; their pedagogy for literacy was child-centred. Observations in other settings (Dombey, 2003; Hardman et al., 2003; Hargreaves et al., 2003) revealed a more

objective-driven and teacher-led classroom practice that suggested a failure to take account of individuals. It is this difference in interpretation of the NLS that suggests the possibility that teachers of EAL pupils might have much to show teachers of pupils in any setting (Flynn and Stainthorp, 2006). This is not to suggest that the teaching of monolingual and bilingual pupils is the same, but that there may be considerable strengths in the practice of teachers of EAL pupils that point to the need for heightened subject knowledge for all teachers of literacy.

There was evidence that these effective teachers had considerable confidence and experience with teaching reading and writing and that they were very aware of which pedagogical models worked best for their children. They planned and delivered at a metacognitive level, starting from what they wanted the children to learn and what they knew of the children's learning needs, and working towards the best possible model for delivery. Their planning was based on their knowledge of what worked and why it worked. This knowledge base included what was necessary for children learning English as an additional language and what was necessary for early literacy development in all pupils. This marriage of understanding created learning environments that benefited both bilingual and monolingual pupils.

Their confidence and precise subject knowledge meant that they were not afraid to adapt the prescribed pedagogy for the NLS. They had already analysed its potential weaknesses, particularly for their EAL pupils – a lack of speaking and listening, insufficient time for writing, and possible problems with the proposed model for guided reading – and adapted their teaching models to circumvent these. They also appreciated its strengths: a concentrated focus on word-level work and a rigour in the objectives that enabled them to plan for a wider range of writing opportunities than they might previously have done.

Thus they were meeting the needs of their EAL pupils by putting learning in context (Kenner, 2000), providing plenty of opportunities for talk (Verhoeven, 1994) and modelling Standard English in its spoken and written forms (Cameron and Besser, 2004). They were also meeting the needs of all their pupils because their teaching grew from their understanding of the complex needs of the developing early writer (Berninger and Swanson, 1994) and the need to create meaningful literacy-based experiences (Hall and Harding, 2003; Wray et al., 2002). Their practice combined excellence in teaching with a deep subject knowledge of literacy development and high expectations for their pupils. Many aspects of their good practice for their EAL pupils would underpin good practice in the teaching of literacy for all pupils.

Notes

1. All names are fictitious.

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