EAL
putting it in writing!

Articles focussing on developing listening and speaking skills, and supporting reading acquisition for children with EAL were featured in the November and December issues of *InTouch*. This final article of the series concentrates on developing writing skills using visual stimuli. The suggested activities are differentiated, where appropriate, to cater for varying levels of language proficiency.

Developing writing skills

Writing experiences for children with EAL need to be well-planned with differentiation and scaffolding as vital components of this planning. The use of visual stimuli is an effective way of structuring such experiences because it helps to contextualise the language for children and allows the teacher to differentiate the task required. This type of differentiation is useful in the language support setting because each child can begin with the same stimulus – pictures. Any picture cards, sequencing cards or photographs can be used for these activities.

Writing

Labelling This involves writing labels to describe various elements in the picture. The child with less language proficiency or limited literacy skills can be scaffolded through teacher modelling, whereby the teacher models the writing of the labels. After some time a shared writing approach can be adopted where the child helps the teacher to decide on the phrase to be used and the teacher then writes it on the label. This may lead to guided writing, where the children write the labels in pairs or groups. Eventually this will result in independent writing. This task can be differentiated for children who are more literate and/or have increased language proficiency by inviting them to:

- use sentences instead of phrases;
- elaborate on existing sentences;

Example of EAL labelling

- include a conjunction;
- write connecting sentences for two pictures.

It may be useful to laminate the pictures so that young children can write their phrase on the picture with a white board marker. These phrases can then be wiped clear and the pictures can be re-used.

Teacher-modelled and shared descriptions The teacher models the use of good language by describing the picture in detail and then writing this description. It may be useful for the teacher to 'think out loud' when writing in order to clarify thought, justify decisions and explain reasoning, for example, "I think that sentence is too long so I am going to put a full stop there and start a new sentence here by using a capital letter." This can progress to shared descriptions where the child is encouraged to contribute to the description. These descriptive texts can then be used for a variety of reading exercises including shared reading, paired reading or choral reading.

Teacher-modelled spoken language and shared spoken language This is similar to the previous activity. However, here the teacher models and writes spoken language, that is, conversations that the

characters in the photos might have. The task can be scaffolded and made more accessible for the child by introducing props. For instance, the teacher could wear a hat/glasses to signify one character and hold a book/pen to signify a different character. The teacher can use facial expression, tone, gesture and voice projection to aid meaning. This is a basic introduction to the 'teacher-in-role' strategy and these pictures can later be used as a stimulus for improvisational drama. Such an approach can develop into a shared task where the child contributes suggestions. Using spoken language is particularly appropriate for children with EAL because it is grammatically simple and it takes place in the here and now, requiring only the present tense and use of the first person. These dialogue texts can then be used for a variety of reading exercises such as paired reading, choral reading or readers' theatre.

Early writing In this task the child attempts to communicate on paper and is particularly useful for the younger child with EAL or for those who may not be literate in either their first or second language. The teacher invites the child to 'write' about the picture. Such an attempt at writing is underpinned by the same principles as early writing:
ı scribbling or drawing will be accepted;
ı approximate spelling is encouraged;
ı a 'have a go' attitude is cultivated;
ı the child is encouraged to write simple words and phrases.
This activity can also be used to affirm the child's first language by providing an opportunity to write in the first language.

Sentence dictation Sentence dictation involves the child writing sentences dictated by the teacher. This task can be scaffolded for the EAL learner by recycling language that is familiar to the child. For instance, phrases and/or sentences that were created in shared descriptions and shared spoken language, labelling and early writing activities can be used along

with sentences from big books and other familiar texts. This writing can be used to inform future teaching and learning (assessment for learning) by determining which spellings need to be taught; which phrases need to be re-visited and what language needs to be consolidated and/or taught.

Narrative genre Narrative writing tells a story or part of a story. The child writes a story based on a picture or a series of pictures. Scaffolding can be provided through teacher-modelling, through the use of the narrative framework (title, setting, problem, resolution), or by using a story bag to act as a further stimulus. This writing can also be used as a stimulus for improvisational drama.

Free writing In free writing, the child writes 'freely', and in doing so, writes independently for the sake of writing and purely for pleasure. The pictures can act as a stimulus for this writing but equally, this writing can be based on the child's own stimulus. It is a similar concept to that of silent reading. The writing is not formally corrected by the teacher but can be used to create teaching points (assessment for learning). Free writing provides an invaluable opportunity to affirm the first language as the child can choose which language s/he wishes to write in. This also gives the child some 'time-out' and 'head-space' from the pressures of speaking a second language continuously and relentlessly throughout the day.

Dual-language books The children write collaboratively in pairs or groups to create a dual-language book based on pictures or a sequence of pictures. A wide range of children can work on a whole-class project in this way. Dual-language books also allow for the first language to be continually developed at home. This is a vital component in cognitive development as it facilitates critical thinking, problem-solving, and the use of higher-order thinking skills in

Page from a dual-language book

the first language. It also affords the opportunity for such critical discussion to take place with grandparents, parents and siblings.

Sentence expansion The child chooses a word from the picture such as 'dog' and writes various sentences based on that word. The teacher can scaffold the learning by modelling this task initially. The teacher thinks of two or three words that describe dogs, for example, "big dogs", "hairy dogs", and "pet dogs". The teacher then suggests two or three things that dogs do, for example, "big dogs bark", "hairy dogs bite" and "pet dogs lick". The child can also swap these words around to create other phrases, for example, "hairy dogs lick", "pet dogs bark" and "big dogs bite". This can be further developed where the teacher provides prompts to expand the sentence further such as "where do they do this?", "when do they do this?" and "why do they do this?" The child can then choose his/her favourite sentence. For example; "pet dogs lick before breakfast in the kitchen". This can be differentiated for the child with increased language proficiency by asking them to write his/her favourite sentence in as many ways as possible. For instance, "before breakfast, pet dogs lick in the kitchen"; "pet dogs lick in the kitchen before breakfast"; and "in the kitchen, pet dogs lick before breakfast". This task benefits children with EAL because they are provided with an opportunity to recycle the language a number of times and in a variety of ways.

Photostory 3 This involves using ICT as a means of presenting any of the above texts. The pictures are scanned and imported to *Photostory 3*, which is a free download from Microsoft. Written and spoken text can then be added to each picture. This can be differentiated for a child who is literate in English by inviting him/her to input this text, and for a child with increased language proficiency by asking him/her to do the voiceover.

Improvisational drama Pictures can be effectively used as a stimulus for improvisational drama. A still image using the characters in the picture can be created, and this can be further developed into improvisational drama. This drama can then be used as a springboard for writing in a number of ways:
ı The recount genre can be used to detail what happened in the drama by using the framework who, what, where, when, and how.
ı The narrative genre can be used to establish the setting, characters, problem and resolution in the drama.
ı Questions can be prepared and written in advance of hot seating. This is very beneficial for the child with EAL as it provides opportunities for language to be recycled a number of times.
ı Role-on-the-wall charts can be used to create a character profile, for example, what we know about the character and what we want to find out.
ı The persuasive genre can be used when writing an argumentative letter based on the drama.

Over the last few issues of *InTouch* we have addressed all four literacy skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing for children with EAL. It is recommended that these skills are taught in an integrated manner and that the language is contextualised. Teaching and learning approaches should be interactive and collaborative groupwork should be used as much as possible.
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