

# Children Learning EAL in the Early Years Setting



Produced by the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service and the Foundation Stage Advisory Team, Somerset County Council, in line with the EYFS document "Supporting Children Learning English as an Additional Language" and the EYFS Framework.

## The Unique Child

**More and more children in our Early Years Settings are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL).**

- Some will be bi-lingual from birth, because their parents use both languages
- Some will speak some English at times, but are not fluent
- Some will speak conversational English, but are not able to express more complex thoughts
- Some will be at a much earlier stage of learning English

**A child may have been born in England, yet have had very little exposure to English.**

### Remember:

- All children are entitled to equal access to the curriculum - providers must promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice
- Partnership with parents/carers is vitally important to a child's progress
- Bilingualism is an asset, and an opportunity for everyone to celebrate

## Effective Practice

### Meeting the Family



If possible meet the family before the child begins pre-school. (An effective way of doing this is a home meeting, because it often leads to greater understanding of what the child is used to, but this is not always possible). Find out whether you need an interpreter with you. The family may have a friend who can help, or visit our website for a list of translators:

During the meeting, find out how to pronounce the child's name, and what languages the child speaks. Ask which language the child is strongest in. Use lots of gesture if you need to.

Ask about the child's religion, customs and diet, and explain that you will respect these. Ask about celebrations the family might observe, and whether they would like the setting to share the celebrations.

Find out about the child's experiences, siblings, likes, dislikes, worries and difficulties.

Make sure that parents/carers know the times and days their child will be attending, and discuss fees and grants.

Complete the registration form together.

Explain what drinks and snacks will be provided, and what the child will need to bring, eg for lunch. If you need to, use props to help you explain the lunchbox, suitable shoes for outdoor play, book bag, PE kit etc

Explain the activities the child will be involved in. Use a picture book to help if you like.

Discuss bringing a coat for outdoor play.

Encourage the family to share stories and other books at home, to join the library, use the park, swimming pool etc.

Explain how valuable it is to keep speaking the home language. Explain that research shows that a child will learn English better if they go on developing the language they know best, and have a strong foundation in this language. Give them the Somerset leaflet "**Keep Talking**".

Ask the family if they have any questions or worries.

Explain that they can talk to you (or the child's key worker) about anything concerning their child.

Let them know that you welcome and celebrate the different languages and cultures in your setting, and that all the staff will help your child have a happy experience.



## Positive Relationships

### Effective Practice:

Make sure that parents/carers feel welcome, even if they can't speak any English yet. Let them know they are welcome to talk to you about anything, including worries.

Let them know that racism is not tolerated, and will always be dealt with sensitively.

Use a link book, with cartoon picture sketches if necessary, to help tell parents about successes and interests, and to give messages. For some communications a translation may be needed, especially if there are concerns. For simple phrases use one of the many free internet sites, such as Babelfish.

If you are sending a note home to all families, speak to the parents as well, to check they understand. There are free translated letters available in many languages about outings, unhappy child, meetings etc, which you can easily customise. See website list for details.

Involve the parents if possible - successful projects have included storytelling, cooking, craft, music, showing pictures and photographs, sharing rhymes and writing/labelling in two languages, assisting on outings, dressing up etc. You may find that a parent is lacking confidence at first, but will feel able to get involved a few weeks later, so do ask them again. You might like to start by asking a parent to play alongside a child.

Value and draw on the parent's knowledge of the child and her experiences, to activate prior knowledge.

Make reports clear and jargon-free, and give parents the chance to talk about them for more clarity.

Continue to reassure parents that using their strongest language at home is beneficial to general learning and English learning - give them the Somerset leaflet: "**Keep Talking.**"



## Enabling Environments

### Effective Practice:

The good pre-school setting is an excellent place for a young EAL learner, and will already, for example:

- make sure that all staff have read and understood your policies on anti-racism and inclusion/equalities.
- use resources and displays around the setting to reflect the cultural diversity and experiences of the children and beyond: books, posters, role -play resources, printed fabrics, puzzles, musical instruments, food, cutlery etc. Buy or borrow some dual language story books and audio books. Make sure you have paints and crayons with a range of skin tones. Dolls and puppets should have a range of skin tones, facial features, clothes and hair textures. Glade has some good resources. See the list of websites below for good sources.
- use STC signs or other visuals around the setting to help the child navigate, and know where to find things.
- have a "Welcome" sign in many languages, including those languages spoken in the setting.
- use the EMAS/Foundation Stage Advisory Team poster **"I don't speak much English - how can you help?"** and make sure all staff have seen it.
- where possible, make links with community groups, and invite visitors, musicians, storytellers from a range of cultures to visit.



- provide plenty of opportunities for outdoor play (research has shown that this leads to 5 times more utterances, and so is particularly beneficial to language development)

In addition, there are some more specific preparations for a setting receiving a new EAL learner:

- If appropriate, prepare the children for the new arrival - ask them for ideas of how they could help. Let them ask questions they may have about ethnicity and language openly, and discuss them sensitively, perhaps using some books and pictures.
- Find out about special celebrations or festivals which may be coming up for the child, and how you could help celebrate too, but please don't assume that all children from a country will wish to celebrate the same (or any) festivals.
- Make sure all staff in the setting know the child's name, language strengths, needs, likes, dislikes and other relevant experiences.
- Use some extra dual language books and other resources in the particular languages spoken by your EAL learners



## Observation, Assessment and Planning

### Assessing Children who are learning English as an additional language

Useful information for practitioners can be found in the "Guidance Notes: assessing children who are learning English as an additional language" on the National assessment agency website ([www.naa.org.uk](http://www.naa.org.uk)). This document aims in particular to support practitioners who are working with reception age and Year 1 children who are learning English but the principles outlined are useful for **all** those working within the early Years Foundation stage. It is noted, for example, that:

- Good practice in the observational assessment of children who are learning English is good practice for the observation of all children
- Assessment must distinguish between a child's English language acquisition and their development of knowledge and concepts across the six areas of learning

The guidance emphasises the importance of observing self-initiated activities, as a greater variety of communication skills are likely to be observed in these situations. It is also important to develop trusting relationships with parents and to involve them as appropriate in building up a picture of their child's interests and achievements.

The document also contains information on which areas of learning and development can be readily assessed through the medium of the child's home language and which areas must be assessed in English. It is also acknowledged that some areas, in particular knowledge and understanding of the world, are more challenging to assess without knowledge of the child's home language. Practitioners are advised to "moderate their provisional judgements with colleagues, bilingual assistants if available and talk to parents if possible".



Overall, the most meaningful assessments for children learning EAL take place in:

- an exciting learning environment
- an environment which celebrates and respects cultural diversity
- an environment which provides plenty of opportunities for child initiated learning

## Learning and Development

### Effective Practice:

Remember that some children need to go through a "silent period" before they feel ready to talk. This can last for weeks, or even months. Let them listen and observe, look for signs that they are ready to join in, and praise every attempt to join in, however small. Check body language for signs of distress. Remember that personality plays a great part in language development.

Use lots of positive expressions and gestures, with STC if you can. Try repetition, or, if that doesn't help, vary the way you explain. Continue to include the child in talk, even if they are silent themselves.

Babies may find English sounds strange at first - gestures and tone of voice will help them to feel reassured. They may relax well at sleep times if they can hear songs and stories in their home language, perhaps recorded by a familiar voice.

As with any child, observing their actions and interactions will help you plan the next steps in learning.

Use lots of visual support, pictures and objects to help show what you are talking about, eg puppets, role play items, dolls, story props...

Pair the child with a variety of caring "buddies" - remember, the job is too much for one buddy - a "team" can have special times and activities to help with. Adult support may be needed at whole group times.



Make sure the child has a little tour of the setting, and is introduced to all the staff.

A digital camera could be used to make a personal book, picturing the child hanging up her coat, playing in the sand etc. This can be used daily to help develop the vocabulary of the environment.

Provide the child with a set of pictures or STC symbols, perhaps joined like a fan, to show when they need the toilet, are thirsty, feel sad etc.

Use stories with clear illustrations and repeated language patterns. Let the child take the book home to look at again - if it is a dual language copy, they can hear the story read in their home language, and make links between languages. During story time, consider giving the child a related task to help keep them focussed when the language is difficult - perhaps they could

hold up a toy bear every time they hear the word bear, for instance. Sometimes give the child the opportunity to see and hear the book in advance of the session, or at home.

Use pre-teaching groups to familiarise children with new vocabulary in advance (eg before a group story, trip, cooking etc), then re-visit the vocabulary afterwards.

Provide opportunities for all the children to hear and participate in music from other cultures, and see scripts, taste foods etc. Use ICT resources to enrich this, and use CDs and websites with vocabulary/sound files (eg. A selection designed for Early Years available from Mantra Lingua).



Use picture sequencing, matching games, puzzles, "feely" games, Simon Says and Kim's Game. Turn taking board games also provide good language opportunities. Encourage social language and provide motivation to talk through interesting games and pictures. Barrier games encourage talk between partners. Play games to enhance listening skills. such as Sound Lotto.

Make sure that the child has plenty of opportunity for physical play and quiet rests - it is mentally very tiring to be surrounded by an unfamiliar language. Blowing bubbles is often soothing and relaxing.

Model lots of talking as you play alongside the child: "I'm putting the hat on." "Here are the scissors" etc.

When a child is ready to join in with talk, they may like to "practice" their contribution with a trusted adult or friend before speaking to a bigger group, then eventually the whole group. Make sure there is plenty of opportunity to build confidence gradually. When a child uses non-standard English, give lots of praise, and model back the simplest standard form.

Closed questions - "What's this colour?" etc - may be helpful at first, but do not get stuck on them - once a child is ready to join in, you can gradually move to more open questions - "Why is he happy?" etc. This will help extend the language development.

If you have other children in the setting who use the child's language, let them help to explain activities and tasks, and also encourage home language discussions and play. Be flexible and varied with the groupings.

If you have bilingual staff who share the child's language, you will be able to do many of the above ideas more easily, including links with the home.





## Some extra things to remember

Once a child is settled and happy, and is using conversational English, do not assume that they do not need extra support. It takes several years to catch up completely in a new language, as the child has a "moving target" - her peers are developing too! An EAL child who is not truly bi-lingual will continue to need support to develop more complex language related to cognitive development throughout Foundation and KS1.

Record a child's progress in English and generally - at the early stages this will involve observing body language. However, remember that sometimes body language varies between cultures:

- Some children prefer to avoid physical contact - for example Muslim children may feel particularly uncomfortable about having their heads touched, as the head is considered sacred.
- Some children are only used to eating with their families, and may not be accustomed to knives, forks and spoons.
- Sometimes children avoid eye contact as a mark of respect for those in authority - this is often the case with Chinese and Thai pupils.
- Some children are used to speaking only to offer a "correct answer", and need encouragement to make a guess or have a discussion.
- Sometimes children may seem aggressive, especially outside, because they are frustrated at blocks to verbal communication.
- Some children will nod and smile to please you - it does not mean they understand.
- Sometimes children are overwhelmed by the freedom and abundance of exciting activities, and do not understand the boundaries of behaviour and co-operation.
- Children are likely to become tired - it is exhausting being surrounded by an unfamiliar language.

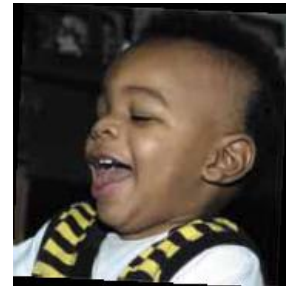


# Building Futures: Believing in Children

## Provision for Black Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The National Strategies Early Years Team has produced a new guidance booklet which addresses issues regarding Black children, and offers practical and refreshing guidance, and highlights issues which may affect young children.

It is available to download at [www.foundationyears.org.uk](http://www.foundationyears.org.uk) Ref 00008-2009BKT-EN



Here are some particular points which are important to bear in mind:

Keep expectations of black children high. Make sure that the families of children understand that you believe in them.

Walk around your setting and try to look at it as if you were the parent of a black child - do you see your child represented?

It is important that the multiple influences on our children's lives are recognised and acknowledged and that children are not defined by their religion, culture or ethnicity alone. ...as children develop they may try out different aspects of their identities, switching from one to the other as necessary in their daily lives.

Practitioners should enter into genuine partnerships with parents of black children by creating a space for dialogue - listening to the voices of black children and their parents. Remember that some black parents might have had a negative experience of the British education system. Providing opportunities for friendly face to face contact is a helpful approach.

Practitioners should challenge negative attitudes and practice within the setting...for example, discussing any issues of stereotyping with children using Persona Dolls.

Creole or Patois speech patterns may be strong - to give a name to a language is to recognise and accept its use; this a key part of a child's identity. Schools will benefit from finding ways to explore and celebrate their use in the learning environment.