

**Primary**

*National Strategy*

# Supporting children learning English as an additional language

Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years  
Foundation Stage



department for  
**children, schools and families**



# Supporting children learning English as an additional language

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## Note

Both parents and carers of children are included in the term 'parent' where used in this booklet.



## Introduction

There are increasing numbers of children entering Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) settings for whom English is not the dominant language in the home. Many practitioners in settings across the country already work successfully with children and families who speak languages other than English. For some there will be one or two language groups represented in their setting; for others the population may be linguistically and culturally very diverse. For growing numbers of settings, providing care and learning opportunities for children and families new to English, or at various stages of proficiency, is a new experience.

Practitioners in every setting want to ensure that their provision matches the development and learning needs of all their children. This advice and guidance booklet is drawn from existing good practice developed by practitioners working with babies, young children and their families.

This guidance is set within the themes, principles and commitments of the EYFS and should be read in conjunction with the Principles into Practice cards.

Following the introductory key messages the booklet is set out under the four themes offering extended 'Effective practice', 'Challenges and dilemmas' and 'Reflective practice' sections for:

- A Unique Child
- Positive Relationships
- Enabling Environments

For the theme of:

- Learning and Development

the 'Effective practice' section is further broken down into sub headings.

The principles of good practice for children learning English are the principles of good practice for all children. Effective practitioners include all children by meeting their needs. However, the skills, knowledge and understanding of children learning English as an additional language (EAL) are often underestimated. This makes it more likely that they will be vulnerable to poor Foundation Stage Profile outcomes and some may find it more difficult to achieve the *Every Child Matters* outcomes than their monolingual peers.

Although many children from EAL backgrounds who have poor outcomes at the end of the Foundation Stage go on to become among the highest achieving children, there are also many who do not catch up.

The children learning EAL who are most vulnerable to poor outcomes at the end of the Foundation Stage and beyond are usually those with the least experience of being in an Early Years or Foundation Stage setting. Some of these children will be newly arrived to England, but many more will have remained at home because – for whatever reason, either through choice or lack of appropriate and accessible information – parents have not taken up the offer of free education for three- and four-year-old children before statutory school age.



The EYFS framework requires all settings to ensure that there is equitable and inclusive provision for all our children. To enable practitioners to meet this requirement local authorities (LAs) will need to carefully and thoroughly plan, deliver and monitor the impact of all training and support.

Before children and families can benefit from the high quality provision being developed within each LA they have to be accessing that provision. It is for LAs to ensure not only sufficiency of places, but accessible information that reaches those most in need of support. For those families who have previously found access difficult, and have therefore been in some way excluded, it is vital that potential barriers are recognised at every level so that they can be overcome.

The Early Years Outcomes duty, placed on all LAs as part of the Children Act, requires them to address the gaps in achievement between different groups of children at the end of the Foundation Stage, measured by the Foundation Stage Profile outcomes. For many LAs, children for whom English is an additional language form an increasing percentage of the lowest achievers at the end of the Foundation Stage and these LAs will need to take specific action to support them in order to close the gap.

All LAs should have a policy for community cohesion and engagement, part of which will address the needs of young children and their families for whom English is an additional language. The Inclusion Report, *Sure Start for Everyone*, suggests strategies that LAs could adopt to improve the engagement of families who might feel excluded from early education opportunities. This report, in common with the practice guidance for Gypsy Roma Traveller families, and the Children's Centre toolkit, stresses the importance of cultural relevance for all families to ensure that they feel that settings are places where they can feel comfortable, respected, valued and included. It is recommended that this guidance is read within the context of these other materials supporting practitioners to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

The guidance will give a breadth of advice and support for practitioners working with children from birth to the age of five. It is to be remembered that children within this broad developmental span can be anywhere along the continuum of language development in one or more languages, from babies who are experimenting with sounds, to sophisticated and articulate children who can converse in one or more languages. Some will be beginners in one language but proficient in another; others will be at varying stages of fluency in one, or more than one, language.

Key messages in the document echo and complement the National Strategies guidance for supporting the learning and teaching of bilingual children in the primary years.

The term EAL recognises the fact that many children learning English in settings in this country are already developing one or more other languages and are adding English to that repertoire.



## The importance of home languages

### Key principle

**Bilingualism is an asset, and the first language has a continuing and significant role in identity, learning and the acquisition of additional languages.**

It is widely accepted that bilingualism confers intellectual advantages and the role of the first language in the child's learning is of great importance. Children need to develop strong foundations in the language that is dominant in the home environment, where most children spend most of their time. Home language skills are transferable to new languages and strengthen children's understanding of language use. Developing and maintaining a home language as the foundation for knowledge about language will support the development of English and should be encouraged. Insistence on an English-only approach to language learning in the home is likely to result in a fragmented development where the child is denied the opportunity to develop proficiency in either language. The best outcome is for children and their families to have the opportunity to become truly bilingual with all the advantages this can bring.

Home languages are also vital for maintaining positive family connections. It is therefore very important to maintain the language of the home, particularly where older family members who care for children do not speak English. Otherwise this may mean that eventually they are no longer able to have proper meaningful conversations with each other.

Parents who cannot share thoughts and ideas with their children will inevitably lose the ability to shape, guide and influence their lives. Situations where this has happened have been documented, and shown to have negative social outcomes for communities because children have lacked the guiding hand of their elders.

Practitioners have a key role in reassuring parents that maintaining and developing their home language will benefit their children and support their developing skills in English.

## About learning English as an additional language

### Key principles

- **Supporting continued development of first language and promoting the use of first language for learning enables children to access learning opportunities within the EYFS and beyond through their full language repertoire.**
- **Cognitive challenge can and should be kept appropriately high through the provision of linguistic and contextual support.**
- **Language acquisition goes hand in hand with cognitive and academic development, with an inclusive curriculum as the context.**

Research over the past two decades into the language development of young bilingual learners has resulted in a number of theories and principles about children learning EAL in settings and schools.



Theories that underpin approaches to supporting children learning EAL emphasise:

- the importance of building on their existing knowledge about language;
- the impact of attitudes towards them personally and their culture, language, religion and ethnicity on their learning and their identity.

Some important issues are as follows:

- English should not replace the home language; it will be learned in addition to the language skills already learned and being developed within the language community at home.
- Children may become conversationally fluent in a new language in two or three years but may take five or more years to catch up with monolingual peers in cognitive and academic language.
- Children learning EAL are as able as any other children, and the learning experiences planned for them should be no less challenging.
- Additional visual support is vital for children learning English and using illustration and artefacts will also support and enhance the learning experiences of their monolingual peers.
- Many children go through a 'silent phase' when learning a new language; this may last for several months but is not usually a cause for concern and is not a passive stage as learning will be taking place. Children will usually understand far more than they can say.
- Understanding is always in advance of spoken language and it is important that children do not feel under pressure to speak until they feel confident. It is, however, essential that adults continue to talk to children with the expectation that they will respond.
- Adults and children should respond positively and encouragingly to children's non-verbal communication. As they observe, listen and explore the setting, children will be applying the knowledge they already have in their new context. As they start to echo single words and phrases, joining in with repetitive songs and stories, their attempts should be sensitively encouraged and praised.



## Bilingual support

### Key principle

**Secure and trusting relationships with a key person are vital to a child's development in all areas. Bilingual support is a highly desirable resource but it has to be accepted that appropriate first language support may not be available for all children in all settings all the time.**

An increasing number of maintained schools and settings, particularly children's centres, have outreach teams which may include bilingual practitioners, community officers or assistants. LAs may also have teams offering support in home languages from staff with appropriate Early Years qualifications who are able to work effectively with young children and their families across a range of settings. These teams are typically part of Ethnic Minority Achievement Services or Inclusion teams within Children's Services, Early Years or School Improvement teams.

Even where there are not yet dedicated Early Years staff there will usually be interpreting and translation services within the LA, which families and practitioners in all settings can access. Practitioners should find out what support is available to them and their children's families; LAs should ensure that they are providing sufficient and appropriate support. Early Years advisers will be able to signpost practitioners to the appropriate services.

As the population becomes more linguistically diverse so the profile of bilingual teachers and other professionals in Early Years and childcare increases at all levels of qualification and professional development. Many experienced practitioners in settings across the sectors in maintained and non maintained provision will themselves be bilingual and will bring their own personal and professional experience to supporting the achievements of young bilingual learners.

Sharing a language with a child or a family does not by itself qualify someone to be the most appropriate person to support a child or a family. Practitioners should do everything they can to ensure that appropriate support is found by consulting with community groups and support services such as Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) teams, Traveller Education Services (TES) and Refugee and Asylum Seeker (RAS) support groups.

The following key points summarise why, where possible, it is important to seek bilingual support:

- Children who speak little or no English at home may be at a disadvantage when they enter an Early Years setting without some support in the language with which they are most familiar.
- To deny children the opportunity to express themselves and to learn through their home language is to disregard their home language development and skills.
- Support in home languages can help you find out essential information about a child's competency in the home language which will inform your expectations of their learning needs.
- For a child who has limited understanding of English, opportunities to use their home language can be like turning on a light in a dark room; the setting and all its possibilities are opened up.
- For parents it may be a real relief to be able to communicate with practitioners via first language support, to have an opportunity to inform practitioners about their child's care, learning needs and achievements, and to find out about the aims and values of the setting.



## Theme: A Unique Child

### Key principle

**Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.**

### Commitments

**1.1 Child Development:** Babies and children develop in individual ways and at varying rates. Every area of development – physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual, social and emotional – is equally important.

**1.2 Inclusive Practice:** The diversity of individuals and communities is valued and respected. No child or family is discriminated against.

**1.3 Keeping Safe:** Young children are vulnerable. They develop resilience when their physical and psychological well-being is protected by adults.

**1.4 Health and Well-Being:** Children's health is an integral part of their emotional, mental, social, environmental and spiritual well-being and is supported by attention to these aspects.

*Use the Principles into Practice cards for 'A Unique Child' to think about your provision in relation to children learning EAL.*

### Effective practice

All children and their families are unique. Developing effective practice for children learning EAL requires practitioners to consider circumstances and situations which may be unfamiliar to them. Working to ensure that practice is truly inclusive requires practitioners to really examine what they do, to ensure that all children and families receive equitable services and have opportunities to participate, to be heard and to feel a sense of belonging within the setting.

Children learn at different rates, in different ways and will vary in their home and family background experiences; great care should be taken not to make any assumptions about them due to their particular linguistic, cultural, social or ethnic background.

Working together as a whole staff, and genuinely seeking to improve practice for children and families for whom English is an additional language, requires time and effort in order to examine attitudes and feelings, as well as knowledge about language development and bilingual language development.

Children learning EAL are not an homogenous group; their needs will be individual and, at all ages and stages, it is important to work closely with parents to share information about all aspects of children's development.

Personality plays a great part in language development, some children go through an extended period of silence when entering an unfamiliar language environment; others may continue to speak the language they know best, regardless of who can understand them. Each child must be carefully observed so that, when their situation begins to change, parents and practitioners can support their next steps.



There are specific skills that can be taught effectively through scaffolding, modelling and planned interventions following observations to assess need; there are, however, no 'magic' answers to supporting children learning English. Like all children, those learning EAL thrive and learn best where practice is excellent; key factors include the inclusive attitude and ethos set by leaders and managers and required of all practitioners in the setting, an understanding that bilingualism is an asset, genuinely reflective practice and an adherence to the belief that every child matters.

## Challenges and dilemmas

*Refer to the Challenges and dilemmas on the Principles into Practice cards for 'A Unique Child' and consider these in light of working with children and families for whom English is an additional language.*

- Access to interpreting and translation services.
- Ensuring that all families feel included and are able to participate in their children's care and learning experiences in the setting.
- Keeping children safe when they may not understand your verbal instructions.
- Ensuring that all practitioners in the setting receives training on EAL, and equality and diversity; ensure that it impacts on practice.
- Making all staff and children feel comfortable and unselfconscious about hearing and using languages other than English.
- Making sure names are correctly pronounced.
- Giving children 'time out' from English and space to think their own thoughts.
- Understanding that many children will go through a 'silent' period at some stage, sometimes for an extended period; being patient during this time and continuing to expect that children will respond.



## Reflecting on practice

*Refer to the Reflecting on practice notes on the Principles into Practice cards for 'A Unique Child' and consider these in light of working with children and families for whom English is an additional language.*

How would you and your colleagues answer the following questions about your provision?

Do you:

- record detailed language background and home language use, preferences and skills on admission to the setting?
- check spelling and pronunciation of children's and parent's names?
- reassure parents that use of home languages in the setting will support their child's overall learning and developing use of language, including English?
- work effectively with bilingual staff, wherever possible, to provide positive role models; raise self-esteem; raise language awareness of all children and support home-school links?
- seek religious or cultural advice and support from relevant experts in the community?
- ensure effective two-way communication of information via interpreters, written translation or the Internet?
- reflect on your provision for children and families for whom English is an additional language, challenging your own knowledge, skills and understanding?
- look closely at your practice and find it to be equitable for all families?
- genuinely welcome all families and children without prejudice?
- openly discuss emotive and difficult subjects such as racism or the effects of religious, cultural or economic intolerance in our community?
- seek training, advice and support in order to improve your provision for children learning English where necessary?
- have policies that include provision for working with children and families learning English?



## Theme: Positive Relationships

### Key principle

**Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.**

### Commitments

**2.1 Respecting Each Other:** Every interaction is based on caring professional relationships and respectful acknowledgement of the feelings of children and their families.

**2.2 Parents as Partners:** Parents are children's first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in Early Years settings, the results have a positive impact on children's development and learning.

**2.3 Supporting Learning:** Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adults support children's learning more effectively than any amount of resources.

**2.4 Key Person:** A key person has special responsibilities for working with a small number of children, giving them the reassurance to feel safe and cared for and building relationships with their parents.

### Effective practice

From the moment a baby or young child becomes your responsibility you begin to notice their individuality and personality. If you do not share a common language with a baby your speech sounds may be strange initially but babies are able to tune in quickly to other languages. Your gestures, expressions and tone of voice will reassure and comfort.

Likewise, with toddlers and older children who may already have well-developed skills in their home languages, body language, gesture, expressions and tone of voice will convey important messages and be a key part of your shared communications.

Where languages other than English are dominant in a child's home it is important to find out about the language experiences of the child and talk to parents about how you can mutually support the child to develop their language skills at home and in your care. Parents' views must be respected and their decisions made in light of sound information about language development and the benefits of bilingualism.

Very young children, especially babies, may be comforted, particularly at rest or sleep times by songs or stories recorded in their home language by their main carer. It may also be helpful to be able to tune in to the home language at other times during a long day of unfamiliar speech sounds.

Children sharing the same first language should not be discouraged from sharing that language together in play; rather, this should be facilitated where possible, perhaps with the help of parents.

Children new to a setting and new to English can be greatly supported by empathetic peers who can act as a 'buddy' to them even if they do not share their home language. This will be supportive for settling in, forming relationships and learning English from their peers.



If you, or any of the practitioners in your setting, share a child's home language, or if you are able to access bilingual support, children should be helped as soon as possible to understand that they are learning to speak more than one language and that those languages have names. This is an important part of their identity.

## Challenges and dilemmas

*Refer to the Challenges and dilemmas on the Principles into Practice cards for 'Positive Relationships' and consider these in light of working with children and families for whom English is an additional language.*

- Sharing knowledge and understanding about a baby or young child's needs with their parent or carer when you do not share a common language.
- Finding a way to have meaningful contact with parents if older siblings usually bring the child to your setting.
- Finding mutually acceptable solutions when culture or religion conflicts with policy, for example babies are not allowed to wear jewellery in your setting, but a baby wears a talisman around their neck for cultural or religious reasons.
- Approaching parents about toilet training or eating habits, which can be very emotive subjects if you are having difficulties, for example toilet training a child who never wears nappies at home and will not let you put one on at the setting.
- Understanding and responding to culturally diverse child-rearing practices.
- Trying to learn a few phrases of a child's home language to show your respect and interest.

## Reflecting on practice

*Refer to the Reflecting on practice notes on the Principles into Practice cards for 'Positive Relationships' and consider these in light of working with children and families for whom English is an additional language.*

- How do we value, draw on and record parents' knowledge about their child including the full range of language skills and experiences?
- Do we try to find ways to listen to children's voices when we cannot understand what they are saying to us?
- Do we appreciate the level of trust parents must have in us if they cannot always make their day-to-day needs and anxieties known to us?
- Have we considered what our setting must sound like and feel like to young children and their families if they cannot understand much of what is being said?
- Do we appreciate how tiring it is to listen to a language we cannot understand for long periods?
- What do we actively do to make families who do not speak English feel truly welcome?



## Theme: Enabling Environments

### Key principle

The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.

### Commitments

**3.1 Observation, Assessment and Planning:** Babies and children are individuals first, each with a unique profile of abilities. Schedules and routines should flow with the child's needs. All planning starts with observing children in order to understand and consider their current interests, development and learning.

**3.2 Supporting Every Child:** The environment supports every child's learning through planned experiences and activities that are challenging but achievable.

**3.3 The Learning Environment:** A rich and varied environment supports children's learning and development. It gives them confidence to explore and learn in secure and safe, yet challenging, indoor and outdoor spaces.

**3.4 The Wider Context:** Working in partnership with other settings, other professionals and with individuals and groups in the community supports children's development and progress towards the outcomes of *Every Child Matters*: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being.

### Effective practice

Whether or not you share the family's language when you become the key worker for a child learning EAL you will become an important language role model for that child and, perhaps, the family. If you share the family's home language you are uniquely placed to have an overview of the child's bilingual development and you will need to discuss with parents which language will be used, by whom and when. Children need a consistent approach, it is better for adults to use one language at a time rather than try to operate in both at once; this is likely to be confusing.

If you are caring for a baby you have a fascinating journey to share; those early words will take on a special significance as you and the family observe and discuss developments together, sharing progress at home and in the setting, and carefully planning next steps together.

It is important to find out about a young child's abilities in their home language when they first come to your setting so that you can build on their prior learning. Do you know which language they hear or speak, with whom and in what context? For example, they may hear and/or use their home language or dialect with older relatives, English with siblings or from TV, another formal or standard language for TV and perhaps another for worship.

Understanding young children's daily routines, particularly around meal times, toileting and sleep are essential in order to meet individual needs. Parents are almost always ready to discuss what is best for their children and will therefore appreciate your interest.



The physical learning environment should give all children the opportunity to make independent choices; this will enable you to observe what interests a child has and begin to develop the language which will support those activities.

The physical environment should also include play and learning resources that positively reflect the children's cultural and linguistic identity and experiences; for example books, posters, labels, role-play equipment including community language newspapers and food packets, displaying a variety of scripts to support language awareness.

Opportunities to play outside are often particularly beneficial as most children tend to be less inhibited in their language use in an outdoor environment. Practitioner observations have shown that children commonly make at least five times as many utterances outdoors as they do inside. This has clear implications for ensuring that the potential for outdoor spaces as learning environments is maximised.

## Challenges and dilemmas

*Refer to the Challenges and dilemmas on the Principles into Practice cards for 'Enabling Environments' and consider these in light of working with children and families for whom English is an additional language.*

- Ensuring your setting really does say 'welcome' to one and all.
- Building bridges where misunderstandings have arisen because of difficulties in communication.
- Having a professional dialogue about the potentially emotive issues surrounding children and families who speak languages other than English at home.
- Ensuring that children learning EAL understand routines and know what they can access independently and when to seek adult support.

## Reflecting on practice

*Refer to the Reflecting on practice notes on the Principles into Practice cards for 'Enabling Environments' and consider these in light of working with children and families for whom English is an additional language.*

- Have we created a learning environment where linguistic and cultural diversity are visibly celebrated?
- Do we record cultural and religious information at admission, including customs, and are we sensitive about diet, festivals, worship, etc.?
- Do we actively seek to inform ourselves about the languages, culture and circumstances of the families we work with?
- Have we thought about what additional support EAL learners may need in order to access routines, activities and equipment?
- Do we have a common understanding about EAL development with our partner agencies, particularly health, including speech and language therapists and health visitors?
- Do we work with partners in adult and family learning to signpost or provide opportunities for parents to learn or improve their English skills? This enables parents to access resources and participate more fully in the wider community as well as their child's learning journey.



## 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 enables practitioners to more closely adapt them to individual needs. Persona Dolls (see [www.persona-doll-training](http://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.**



## References and further reading

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*Together for Children: Toolkit for reaching excluded and priority families* (Together for Children 2007)

*Working Towards Inclusive Practice* (Save the Children 2006)

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### Other useful publications

Bolloten, B. (ed.) (2004) *Home from home: a guidance and resource pack for the welcome and inclusion of refugee children and families in school* (Save the Children ISBN 1841879838)

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*Letters and Sounds* (2007) (DCSF publications, Ref: 00281- FLR-EN)

*Listening to black and minority ethnic parents about childcare* (Daycare trust 2007)



*Promoting Race Equality in the Early Years* (Surestart 2004)

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*Sure Start – Communicating Matters Trainers Pack* (2006) (DfES publications, Ref: 2026-2006PCL-EN)

## Useful websites and organisations

Resources lists for supporting equality and diversity can be accessed through the EYFS under Research at: <http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs/site/1/2>

EYFS

<http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs/>

The Communication, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD) programme

<http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/phonics/clld/>

Sure Start publications

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/>

National Refugee Integration Forum

<http://www.nrif.org.uk/Education/>

Literacy Trust

[www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

National Association for language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC)

[www.naldic.org.uk](http://www.naldic.org.uk)

Save the Children

[www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

Portsmouth Learning and Achievement Service (Ethnic Minority Achievement)

[www.blss.portsmouth.sch.uk](http://www.blss.portsmouth.sch.uk)

## Acknowledgements

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Page 4 exemplar taken from *Foundation Stage Booklet 2005/2006*, by Sir James Barrie School, 2006. © Wandsworth Council 2006. Used with kind permission.

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