

# Reading more deeply into EAL!

The article submitted by the PPDS to last month's *InTouch* focused on speaking and listening for children with English as an Additional Language (EAL). This follow-on article looks at the development of reading skills using visual stimuli. The suggested activities are differentiated, where appropriate, to cater for varying levels of language proficiency and any picture cards, sequencing cards or photographs can be used. A follow-on article will feature in the January/February issue of *InTouch* relating to writing skills for children with EAL.

## Developing reading skills

**Reading fluency and reading comprehension** are fundamental skills in ensuring children become effective readers. This is due to the fact that if a fluent reader can recognise words efficiently, they are then able to concentrate on understanding the text while reading.

## Reading fluency and the EAL learner

If a child is literate in their first language, then many of the skills from this language will transfer when learning English. For instance, the child may be familiar with the conventions of print and/or have a similar phonetic base. The extent to which this transfer of skills aids reading fluency will be determined by the language features in the child's first language. Chinese or Arabic scripts, for example, have few commonalities when compared to English.

**Phonological awareness** is a specific oral and aural skill. It progresses to phonics when a visual dimension is introduced, such as inviting the child to make the corresponding sound when shown a particular letter of the alphabet. Phonological awareness is a vital component

of reading acquisition for children with EAL. Even though they may be literate in their first language, they will need opportunities to manipulate and play with the sounds of the English language thus enabling them to master the sounds of a different phonetic system. Phonological awareness training, therefore, can be viewed as a pre-cursor to phonics training.

Picture activities are effective resources to use as a basis for phonological awareness training. One element of phonological awareness is *syllabification* or the ability to divide words into syllables. This skill is very important in supporting reading and spelling. Using a picture, the teacher chooses an item in the picture, for example, *library* and asks the child to identify the number of syllables in the word. The child can also be asked to choose a picture. This can be differentiated for a younger child where the teacher models pointing to his/her head, shoulders, and hips for each syllable. The child can join in with the teacher (shared syllabification) which will eventually lead to the child performing the task on his/her own. This can be differentiated for children with more language proficiency by including more sophisticated forms of phonological awareness training such as phoneme transposition. This involves the child deleting a sound from the word and putting a different sound in its place, for example, *light* becomes *lot*.

**Phonics** This activity involves identifying an item in the picture as a basis for comparing and contrasting sounds, for example, if *bread* is chosen then the child can list words that also begin with /br/ or words that rhyme with *bread*. If *sheep* is



chosen, s/he can list words that have an /ee/ sound in the middle. The teacher can then write these words and encourage the children to highlight the similarities, either by underlining the letters or by colouring them in. This is referred to as *analogy* training and is a very useful in developing decoding skills. The activity can be differentiated for children with

literacy skills by inviting the child to list the words and highlight the analogies. It can be further developed by setting up a 'word hunt' where the children are encouraged to list as many words as they can find with a specific sound, such as /ee/. The children can be divided into groups and the group with the most words win. This 'word hunt' can take place by identifying words at their desk (in books and copies), in the classroom (on posters, labels and games) or in the corridor (notice boards, signs and displays). The teacher can differentiate the task the child with more limited language



proficiency by scaffolding. An example of this would be role reversal where the teacher is on the 'word hunt' and the child assists where possible. Similarly, a child in the silent phase can participate in a group by pointing out words and/or writing the list.

## Word recognition

involves the child matching words, phrases or sentences to the appropriate picture using pre-prepared flashcards. This can be differentiated for the younger child or the child with limited language proficiency in a variety of ways. For instance, using familiar sight vocabulary on the flashcards, using a limited amount of words in the phrase or sentence, limiting the amount of pictures the child has to choose from and so on. The child with increased language proficiency can be challenged by using jumbled sentences on the flashcards, using incomplete sentences on the flashcards, or providing several flashcards and several pictures.

**All of the following activities begin with the teacher and children creating texts based on a picture or a series of pictures**

**Choral reading** involves children collectively reading the text aloud. This is particularly useful for improving reading fluency as it allows the child with EAL to hear the correct pronunciation while attempting to pronounce words and decode sounds. It is a safe environment as it is not obvious if the child reads something incorrectly or fails to

decode a word. A child in the silent phase can also benefit greatly from this activity as it allows him/her to mimic and play with the sounds in a safe environment while experimenting with the sound-symbol code of the English language.

## Paired reading

involves two children reading together. They can have similar language proficiency or one can assist the other in a peer-tutoring setting. It is also useful if a child with limited language proficiency is paired with a child who has the same first

language but has increased proficiency in English. The 'buddy' can help the less language proficient child to decode the text and also to discuss the meaning of the text, possibly in their first language. This affords valuable opportunities for language awareness training where the children can compare and contrast words, phrases and meanings from their first language to those in English. This is an example of scaffolding using a skilled peer.

**Rehearsed reading** In this approach, the children are afforded rehearsal time to practice this reading before they read it aloud. This is particularly useful for the child with EAL as it provides opportunities to clarify pronunciations before reading the text for an audience. The teacher can scaffold the task for the child with limited literacy skills by initially reading the text for the child. The teacher and the child can then read the text together, or a group of children could practice reading the text by choral reading.

## Reading comprehension and the EAL learner

As was the case in reading fluency, being literate in a first language can also assist in reading comprehension. For example, skills such as skimming, scanning, summarising, predicting, creating images and using semantic cues can be transferred to reading in English.

## Modelled and shared reading

The teacher can use these texts as a basis for teaching comprehension strategies. Modelled reading involves the teacher 'thinking out loud' and demonstrating the comprehension strategy through questioning, clarifying thought and justifying decisions. One strategy called '*sensory impressions*' involves the teacher clarifying what s/he can see, hear, smell, touch or taste at particular stages in the text. This is particularly useful with fictional texts. '*Sensory impressions*', is very constructive for the child with EAL as it can be used to enhance comprehension but also to augment language development. This can be followed by shared reading where the child contributes to the depiction that is being created by the teacher.

**Text shuffle** The text is cut up and the children have to re-assemble the text using the pictures as prompts. The teacher can scaffold this activity by modelling the process involved. The activity can be differentiated and made more accessible for the child with less language proficiency by limiting the amount of text used or

limiting the amount of chunks to be re-assembled. It can be differentiated for the child with increased language proficiency by cutting the text into smaller chunks so that there is more text to re-assemble and by removing the pictures so that the child has to re-assemble the text from memory and/or meaning.

**Dual-language books** Children with the same first language can then write the text in their first language and read it for a variety of audiences, including the language support teacher, the class teacher, children with



different first languages, the mainstream class, parents, siblings, grandparents, and children from other classes with the same first language. This approach is an effective way of affirming the child's first language. It is interesting to note that research suggests that children whose first language and culture are affirmed in school make more rapid progress with second language acquisition.

**Photostory 3** Pictures and text can then be used in *Photostory 3* to create an ICT based literacy activity. The children can read this text individually, in pairs, or in groups, as in, choral reading. Scaffolding is in-built in this activity as the pictures will provide prompts regarding the meaning of the text. A tutorial for *Photostory 3* is available in the EAL section of [www.ppds.ie](http://www.ppds.ie).

Submitted by the members of PPDS team. [www.ppds.ie](http://www.ppds.ie)