

AN INTRODUCTION TO CATERING FOR EAL/D STUDENTS

Extracts from: "An EALD Handbook", H. Harper & S. Fez; "Scaffolding Learning & Teaching in Language & Literacy Education", J. Hammond (Ed) and "Teaching EALD Learners in Australian Classrooms", 2012, PETAA

Teachers in Australian schools are more aware than most of Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity. Students in Australian classrooms are drawn from the many different cultural and language backgrounds woven into the fabric of Australian society. This diversity is captured in the Australian Census (ABS, 2017):

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the original Australians by tens of thousands of years and represent 2.8% of our population.
- Australians born overseas come from nearly 200 different countries and make up 49% of our population.
- Across Australia 21% of the population speak a language other than English at home.

Every day, in their families and communities, children and young people all over Australia – in urban, regional and remote areas – are using a rich array of languages and dialects to interact with others, and to engage with and make sense of their experience and the world around them. When they arrive at school, many students are already using multiple languages and dialects. This expertise enables them to adapt their language use to a variety of contexts, including school contexts, whether they have been identified as learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) or not. Recognising the cultural and linguistic expertise of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is the first step towards ensuring they successfully add Standard Australian English to their existing linguistic and cultural repertoires.

Standard Australian English (SAE), the dialect of English needed to access the Australian Curriculum, is an additional language or dialect for many students in Australian classrooms. Over many decades, Australian educators have been expanding their knowledge about how best to meet the English language learning needs of EAL/D learners. This work has produced insights that have enhanced teaching and learning for all students in Australian schools.

WHO ARE EAL/D STUDENTS?

In the Australian Curriculum, students for whom English is an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) are defined in the following way: *EAL/D students are those whose first language is a language or dialect other than English and who require additional support to develop proficiency in Standard Australian English (SAE). (ACARA 2010)* The term EAL/D is an acknowledgement that, while these students may not have yet learnt SAE, they nevertheless bring to school a wealth of linguistic and cultural resources.

On average, a quarter of all students in Australian primary and secondary schools are learning SAE as an additional language or dialect. In some schools, up to 90% of the student population may be EAL/D learners. Consequently, whether or not they have specialist training in EAL/D education and related pedagogies, almost all Australian teachers will teach EAL/D learners during their career.

For EAL/D students who start school in Australia, it can take all their primary school years for them to develop knowledge and skills in SAE, and more specifically, academic English, to a level commensurate with their Year 7 English-speaking peers. EAL/D students who enter Australian schools in later primary school continue to need specialised EAL/D support beyond Year 9 in order to develop academic English and engage with 'an increasingly abstract and complex curriculum'.

Contrary to what might be expected, by Year 7, EAL/D students often achieve higher test scores than their peers who use English as a first language. There are a number of reasons for this success. It may be due to the demonstrated academic benefits of bilingualism. Sociocultural and economic status may also play a role, along with the level of their parents' education and parental expectations, as well as an initial level of proficiency and experience of educational success and literacy in their first language. At the same time, many EAL/D students in Australian classrooms, such as those from refugee backgrounds, may be at risk because they have experienced dislocation, deprivation and trauma.

In Australia, the level of English EAL/D students have achieved, no matter their age or year of schooling, is usually aligned with one of the four levels in the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority EAL/D learning progression (ACARA, 2015):

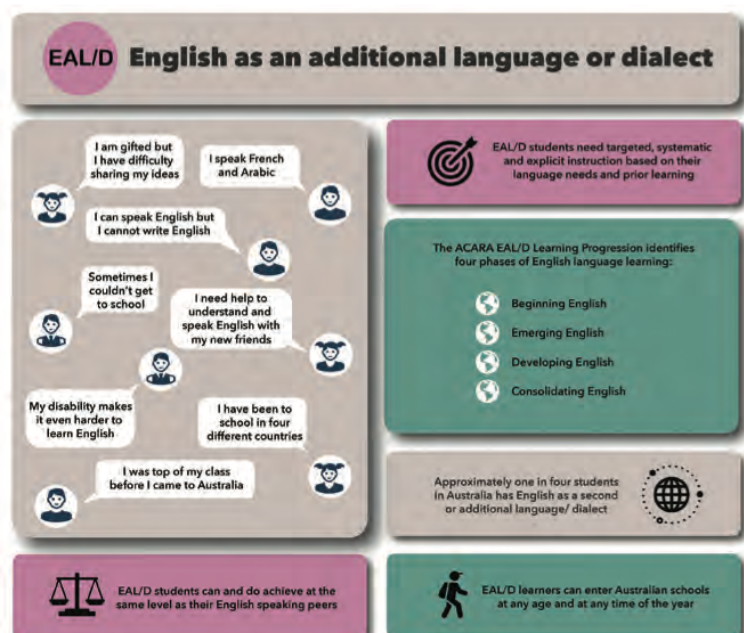
1. Beginning English
2. Emerging English
3. Developing English
4. Consolidating English

Knowing who your students are and how they learn aligns with Standard 1 of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2017). In the elaboration of the standards, showing how they apply to teaching EAL/D students, Standard 1 has been expanded to include (ACTA, 2015):

- recognising EAL/D students' 'social and intellectual development' (page 6), even when students are not able to demonstrate this development through English or in relation to curriculum content
- having empathy and being responsive to the 'diverse linguistic, cultural and socio- historical characteristics of EAL/D learners' (page 8)
- understanding EAL/D learning and how it relates to culture, wellbeing and curriculum access.

Teachers can come to know every student in their class by preparing a profile of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds, in collaboration with the student, their family, their peers, and with bilingual support as needed. Each profile can be presented as a multilingual, multimodal and multimedia text or portfolio, with information about each student's birthplace and heritage; the highpoints and challenges of their journey to this classroom; their achievements to date, both personal and academic; and their aspirations and goals.

Spoken language recordings and short texts written by the teacher or family members, and the students themselves, can showcase the students' everyday use of language/s, their current level of proficiency in the languages they use, and their English language learning needs. Class profiles can reveal how much the experiences of students newly arrived in Australia might have in common with the experiences of earlier generations for those students whose families have lived in Australia for longer. It can become a celebration of some of the 300 different ancestries with which Australians identify, while also addressing content from across the curriculum.



WHAT DO EAL/D STUDENTS BRING WITH THEM TO SCHOOL?

Most people in the world speak more than one language or dialect. Nevertheless, too often in Australia, as in many countries where English is the dominant language, a 'monolingual mindset' that sees 'everything in terms of a single language' is evident. This results in a failure to make the most of the wealth of linguistic and cultural resources hiding in plain sight in our community and in our classrooms.

For many EAL/D students and their families, engaging with a new culture and language is part of everyday life. Teaching and learning that is customised to the needs of EAL/D students is critical if these students are to achieve educational success in the initially unfamiliar linguistic and cultural setting of an Australian classroom. Pedagogies designed to support the educational success of EAL/D students are pedagogies that are 'also good for the wider student body as a whole' because 'in one sense, *academic English* is nobody's mother tongue'.

When the cultural and linguistic resources EAL/D students bring to school are valued as an educational resource in the mainstream classroom, all students can '*learn to value their own cultures, languages and beliefs, and those of*

others' (ACARA, 2010), and build the general capability of *intercultural understanding*, as defined in the Australian Curriculum.

All students experience enhanced educational success when social and academic expectations are clear, and instruction is systematic, explicit, interactive and responsive to language learning needs and to current levels of achievement in any language, across all learning areas and skills – interpersonal and intellectual.

HOW DO TEACHERS CREATE & MAINTAIN SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR EAL/D STUDENTS?

Many EAL/D teachers and classroom teachers across Australia already know more than one language and culture, either through their own heritage or because they have learnt an additional language and experienced another culture firsthand through travel or study. These teachers bring their own understanding of knowing or learning another language, and their experience of immersing themselves in another culture, to enrich the cultural and linguistic resources of the school as a whole.

Preparing learning environments that support EAL/D learners includes maintaining 'respect for languages and knowledges that EAL/D students bring' and the use of 'culturally and linguistically inclusive strategies' that enable EAL/D learners to participate meaningfully in all activities in the classroom and school community (ACARA, 2014). It also requires knowledge about the complex challenges many EAL/D learners must overcome in order to meet the social & academic expectations of school. These challenges may be reflected in some of the following behaviours:

- silence or unresponsiveness because students do not understand, or if they do understand, they lack the confidence to respond in English
- reluctance or inability to participate in activities because:
 - students are still in the initial listening phase that begins the process of learning an additional language
 - students are not familiar with Australian culture or the education system
 - classroom behaviours, groupings or activities cause discomfort and/or clash with cultural expectations or personal experience
 - students are fearful based on personal experience of disrespect, bullying, racism or trauma
- refusal, defiance, opposition or aggression because:
 - students cannot engage with classroom tasks nor meet the teacher's or parents' expectations
 - students learnt these behaviours as their only means of surviving or withstanding conflict or trauma
 - classroom behaviour management techniques clash with cultural expectations.

Helping students to learn more productive behaviours can require the same amount of preparation, scaffolding, time to respond and practice as learning a new language. While expectations should remain high, students will not always meet those expectations immediately. Drawing on the knowledge of parents, as well as bilingual and intercultural expertise in the school, can also help, as can culturally responsive restorative practices.

Learning new content in an additional language doubles (at least) the cognitive load. For this reason, in order to participate effectively in age-appropriate, intellectually challenging and engaging classroom activities, EAL/D students sometimes need:

- more time to respond, or wait time.
- preparation and practice. This involves orienting students to both the academic purposes of the curriculum content, as well as the learning behaviours expected at school. Examples of this include working in home languages or dual language resources, working with visual and concrete modes, and building meanings in non-idiomatic and non-technical English before introducing more curriculum-specific language.

In a supportive learning environment for EAL/D learners all students will have opportunities, and the teaching and learning required, to participate, perhaps initially at the periphery, to interact meaningfully with others and to contribute to both the community of learners in their classroom and the wider school community. In a supportive and inclusive language learning environment, EAL/D students become enthusiastic about expressing the cultural and linguistic identities of their home, community and heritage in interactions both inside and outside of school.

APPROACHES TO EALD TEACHING

FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

This approach has been used since the 1970s. The emphasis is towards students learning to use language to communicate. Communicative language teaching methods are used where students learn language by engaging in authentic, meaningful communicative tasks. These methods, however, can leave some students stranded in an *interlanguage* good enough to complete classroom tasks, but not adequate to achieve curriculum goals.

In Australia, the functional approach to language teaching is based on the work of Professor Michael Halliday. This approach foregrounds the ways language is used for meaning-making in social contexts, and the way language use varies from one social context to the next. Teaching methods based on this approach use language, and other meaning-making resources, to make knowledge visible to students and to help students make that knowledge their own, through interaction with teachers and shared experiences with classmates.

A functional approach underpins the Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA, 2010) and the EAL/D Learning Progression (ACARA, 2015). This approach has led to the development of genre, or text-based, teaching methods

TEXT-BASED TEACHING METHODS

Text-based teaching methods are mixed methods that integrate ‘all the possible elements of a program – traditional and progressive, structural and communicative – in a principled and cohesive way’. Learning is the outcome of meaningful, collaborative and cumulative interactions between teacher and students, and among students themselves as they gain more knowledge. The teacher initially controls what is to be learnt and how it is to be learnt, and learning expectations are made explicit to the students. Target knowledge and skills are mediated using language and other meaning-making resources, such as concrete and visual representations. As teaching and learning unfolds, the teacher strategically hands over control of the meaning-making to the students.

Increasingly, teachers are expected to base their programs on teaching methods that evidence shows promote learning. What counts as evidence of effective teaching and learning remains contested (Feez & Cox, 2017). Nevertheless, Hattie (2009) has provided evidence that suggests ‘natural’ language teaching methods based on immersion are less effective than explicit and systematic methods, such as text-based teaching methods that feature the following:

- clear learning intentions about what students will learn to do and understand, reflecting student learning needs
- high expectations and explicit criteria for success
- student engagement, commitment, and focused attention
- a guide to how the teacher should present the lesson and model expectations for students
- guided practice and strategically scaffolded support so students can engage in challenging activities
- key points reviewed and consolidated, ‘tying them together into a coherent whole’
- opportunities for ‘independent practice once students have mastered the content or skill’.

INTERCULTURAL APPROACHES

As the 21st century unfolds, English language teaching is being re-evaluated through a critical lens. This, according to Kumaravadivelu (2012), is a post-method era, in which many unpredictable, sometimes competing, variables impact the teaching of an additional language. These variables include the knowledge, beliefs, cultures, practices and identities that both teachers and learners bring to the classroom. In particular, teachers of English language need to be aware of how widespread use of English has too often impacted negatively on other languages and cultures in the past (as the language of colonisers) and in the present (as an international *lingua franca* in a globalised world). With this awareness, teachers are more easily able to re-orient EAL/D teaching towards intercultural approaches, that is, teaching English through a multilingual and intercultural lens.

An intercultural approach applies culturally and linguistically responsive and inclusive language teaching methods. These methods are designed and implemented from the perspective that all students have 'a story about language waiting to be told' and that 'student and community knowledge and skill' is 'a starting point for learning'.

Using all languages in the classroom to build shared knowledge, both everyday and academic, helps EAL/D learners expand and re-situate the meanings they can already make, and the concepts they already have, to engage with the curriculum. In other words, when students' existing cultural and linguistic knowledge and resources are valued and applied in the classroom, they shift from being academic outsiders to intellectually-capable insiders.

A challenge facing teachers who wish to apply an intercultural approach to their programming is the extent to which educational achievement in Australia is measured against standards and through high-stakes testing that are largely oriented to monolingual literacy. There is concern that the requirement to teach to standards and to prepare students for high-stakes testing can override the complex and extensive 'teacher knowledge required for effective program design and implementation, and ... could actually work against educational achievement'. This a matter of particular concern when standards and testing fail to 'reflect the educational needs and achievement' of EAL/D students.

TOOLS FOR THINKING IN PRINCIPLED WAYS ABOUT EAL/D LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

To help us think about EAL/D learning and teaching, it is useful to draw on theories about the sociology of education, theories about learning and development, and theories about how we use language to make meaning. Notably, we can look to the work of three 20th century thinkers: Basil Bernstein on the sociology of education, Lev Vygotsky on the sociocultural theory of learning, and Michael Halliday. Language is placed at the centre of each of these theories as essential for negotiating culture, and for learning.

All three theories help us to think about how we teach EAL/D students, and particularly about how we orient students to new cultural meanings. When we work with learners from other cultures, we do more than just teach them English; we are also helping them to take on new cultural meanings and practices. We may first need to orient students so they know how to 'do' school in our culture, including how to attend in the classroom, and what counts as valued activity: for example, collaborating with peers, and writing a text using your own words rather than copying from the board. At the same time, we also need to apprentice students into the behaviours, motivations and values that underpin the various disciplines of the school curriculum: for example, science, history, geography, or the study of literature. Each curriculum discipline represents a community of practice that exists in the wider world, and within these communities (of scientists, historians, mathematicians and so on) there are valued ways of speaking, writing and making meaning.

Many EAL/D learners will not be familiar with the ways of using language that are valued at school, especially if they come from families where world views, educational motivations and topics of conversation differ from those valued at school by the teacher and other students in the class. Teachers therefore need strategies for orienting EAL/D learners to ways of viewing the world that align with the purposes of schooling in Australia. The aim is not to devalue or replace home knowledge or language, but rather to expand learners' linguistic and cultural repertoires, so that they have the power to choose the language they want to use in a given context.

Sociocultural theories of learning, inspired by Vygotsky, also help us to think about the teacher–student relationship when teaching language. A Vygotskian perspective on pedagogy recognises the roles of teacher and learner as intertwined. The Russian word *obuchenie* is useful for characterising pedagogy because it represents teaching and learning as complementary elements of the same process, or two sides of the same coin. Just as parents support their children to learn through everyday interactions, so teachers have an essential role in designing, sequencing and pacing interactive learning activities.

When providing students with the specialised type of pedagogic support known as scaffolding, the teacher has a high level of control at the start of a given teaching sequence. As students appropriate new knowledge and language, the teacher gradually hands over responsibility for language use and learning interactions.

A dynamic, evolving teacher–student relationship – from student dependence to student independence – is a feature of the *text-based approaches* to teaching language and literacy, described above. Text-based approaches

give teachers a powerful organisational structure, or ‘designed-in’ scaffold, for explicitly teaching language in context. Typically, during the early stages of a teaching sequence, more spoken language is used. This allows students to ground their learning experiences in familiar language, either everyday English or their home language or dialect, at the same time as they are given opportunities to listen to and practise unfamiliar technical or subject-specific language. Teachers can then introduce written language in ways that support both understanding of the topic and students learning to use language to talk and write about the topic.

As well as the big picture scaffold provided by the text-based teaching sequence, research also gives us insights into the moment-to-moment, or contingent, decisions that teachers need to make as they progress through a topic. To accommodate handover, teachers make nuanced and dynamic language choices, changing their talk over time. Ideally, a teacher will provide just the right level of support to keep children learning: not so little support that students flounder, nor so much support that students remain disengaged because the work is too easy.

Much of this contingent scaffolding at the ‘micro’ level can be seen in the way teachers ask questions. Teachers can ‘cue’ or share their own thinking about the questions they are about to ask, and in doing so set students up to be successful in answering conceptually challenging questions. When the students answer those questions, the teacher can then reframe, or elaborate the students’ answers, taking their thinking to the next level. As teachers revisit complex language and ideas in later lessons, they are able to ask more open-ended questions, with fewer cues, creating more opportunities for students to offer extended answers. Through such purposeful dialogue, teachers create possibilities for students to make sense of new language, as well as opportunities for talk that allows students to practise and ultimately to appropriate the language for their own purposes.

Vygotsky’s theory of learning also leads us to understand the importance of imitation in language learning. Teachers today often equate imitation, or copying, with old fashioned teaching methods involving mindless rote learning, ‘parrotting’ or regurgitating memorised facts in ways that students experience as meaningless. But imitation of someone else’s language is the first, essential step in learning new language: there is a difference between rote recitation and active, intentional, meaningful imitation.

In Vygotsky’s model of child development, purposeful, goal-oriented imitation in a shared social space is the first sign of learning, the first step in the active collaboration that leads to children learning a new language and making it their own. This process can be called *appropriation* (Gray, 2007). Teachers have an important role to play in setting up opportunities for students to imitate – ‘trying on new words for size’ – by making sure that the language they are teaching is meaningful to students and not mere mindless repetition.

Student understanding is built during classroom talk – not the type of talk dominated by the teacher, nor student talk that lacks focus and direction. It is built by exchanging knowledge and ideas in classroom talk that engages students, shapes and extends their thinking, and advances ‘their learning and understanding’. Teachers can think about, and plan, this type of classroom talk in principled ways, by using the dialogic teaching model. This model addresses both how the talk in the classroom is conducted and how the talk is used to represent educational content. When dialogic teaching principles are applied, interaction in the classroom is conducted in ways that are:

Collective	The teacher and students work on tasks together
Reciprocal	The students and teachers listen to each other, and consider different points of view
Supportive	Students share their ideas and help each other, without worrying about being right or wrong

At the same time, educational content is represented in ways that are:

Cumulative	The teacher and students build on ideas contributed by others and “chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry
Purposeful	The teacher plans the talk and guides the dialogue towards a specific educational goal

This type of classroom talk can be organised in a range of ways already familiar to teachers, including whole class, groups, pairs, and one-to-one talk between the teacher and individual students. For EAL/D students to gain the confidence and skills needed to participate productively in classroom talk, and to overcome any reticence linked to

cultural expectations, they may first need to be offered observer roles and opportunities to imitate their more interactive classmates, while being explicitly taught the language needed to participate meaningfully and purposefully.

In dialogic teaching, teachers can implement the full repertoire of *teaching talk*, not only talk for instructing and explaining, but also talk for sharing ideas and solving problems, as well as dialogue to build shared understandings. At the same time, EAL/D students will need step-by-step support to build and master *everyday talk* for interacting, recounting, questioning, exploring ideas and expressing feelings and opinions, as well as *learning talk* to use in the classroom. Learning talk includes narrating, explaining, instructing, asking different questions, acting and building on answers, solving problems, speculating and imagining, exploring and evaluating ideas, discussing, reasoning and justifying, and negotiating. The learning talk repertoire can be expanded to include *exploratory talk* used to reason, engage critically with other people's ideas and to reach conclusions and agreement.

In practice, planned, interactive and cumulative classroom talk based on the dialogic teaching model tends to be spread across extended teaching sequences. As EAL/D students learn the language needed to participate in this type of interactive classroom talk, they are also using the talk to gain educational knowledge. The talk itself underpins the scaffolding that enables them to shift between making meanings about their everyday shared experience and the more specialised meanings used to achieve educational goals. For EAL/D students learning English, teachers also need to integrate the teaching and learning of knowledge *about* the language into these teaching sequences.

MORE ABOUT SCAFFOLDING

Extract from "Scaffolding Learning & Teaching in Language & Literacy Education", J.Hammond (Ed) PETAA

Vygotsky defined scaffolding instruction as the *"role of teachers and others in supporting the learners' development and providing support structures to get to that next stage or level"*.

It is important to emphasise that scaffolding is not at work in *any* form of teacher support. Rather it is specific help that enables the learner to achieve a task which would not be possible without support. There is a finite goal, and scaffolding is a way of supporting a learner to achieve that goal. That goal should be to develop deep knowledge – knowledge that is internalised and connected to other knowledge to build understanding of new concepts or ideas.

There are two distinct types of scaffolding: *"designed-in"* scaffolding and *"point of need"* scaffolding

"Designed-In" Scaffolding

The first kind of scaffolding is designed-in to a unit of work, learning trajectory or lesson. In this kind of scaffolding, the teacher considers the outcomes (knowledge, skills, understandings) to be assessed in the planning stage and the students' previous experience. This consideration occurs in the light of the cognitive demands and language demands of specific educational goals. The teacher then sets out a sequence of learning experiences designed to support the students as they develop new understanding and skills.

Experiences that support students to develop new understandings can be located at any point in a teaching-learning sequence. At the beginning of the learning trajectory, for example, specific scaffolding can be *"designed-in"* when the teacher is building field knowledge. These activities might include:

- Building word banks (critical for EAL/D learners)
- Sharing stimulus experiences, for example photos or artefacts. For example, the teacher might make connections by reminding students of a shared experience – *"Remember when we went to the museum"* Or provide students with relevant experience, for instance simulating a seaside environment by creating a sandy beach in a corner of the classroom with shells, starfish and other marine artefacts to introduce learning about the marine environment.
- Completing written worksheets on *"What I know"* and *"What I'd like to know"*

Later, in modelling and joint-construction phases, the teacher might “design in” opportunities for students to engage with others eg through “Think-Pair-Share” or through specific activities such as communicative games that can be used to support students’ understanding. Throughout the learning the teacher should ensure that there are planned opportunities for students to make explicit connections, both backwards to previous experiences, and forward towards the ultimate learning goals.

“Point of Need” Scaffolding

The second type of scaffolding arises in the immediate context. Here the scaffolding takes place “at the point of need”. This contingent scaffolding relies on the teacher being able to identify a “teachable moment” and maximise the learning potential at that moment. It involves talk, mostly in the form of questions and answers.

However carefully lessons may be planned and sequenced, it is very likely that in the course of any particular lesson, the opportunity will arise to take the students along a path in their thinking which helps them to establish key concepts or ideas. This scaffolding is usually achieved by asking certain types of questions, listening carefully to students’ responses and then using a variety of strategies to clarify and extend their thinking.

Teachers can provide this kind of scaffolding in the following ways:

- Set particular themes and elicit responses that draw students along a particular line of reasoning
- Cue responses through the form of a question (eg “a term that starts with ‘a’”)
- Elaborate and go on to refine the requirements of an activity
- Use “we” to show the learning experience is being shared.

Point of need scaffolding is commonly used to support students in developing technical vocabulary. The strategies that build this scaffolding are:

- Repetition of student remarks
- Recasting – acknowledging the student’s remark and then modifying it so that it is more technically appropriate
- Appropriation – transforming the information offered by the students. This works at a deeper level than recasting. In this strategy, the teacher takes up the idea behind the student’s remarks, offering it back in a more technically appropriate way.

THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY FOR COMPREHENSION FOR EAL/D STUDENTS

Extract from: Teaching EALD Learners in Australian Classrooms, 2012, PETAA

It is quite possible to read aloud fluently in a new language with minimal comprehension: the problem for many EAL/D learners is not that they cannot decode or read the words on the page, but that they cannot comprehend.

Vocabulary knowledge and comprehension are crucial in developing the ability to read meaningfully and to learn through meaning, and research shows that there is a strong reciprocal relationship between the two. That is, vocabulary development is both an outcome of comprehension and a precursor to it, with word meanings making up as much as 70-89% of what learners understand from text. In fact, the proportion of new words in a text is the single most reliable predictor of its difficulty for learners. Therefore, the relationship between vocabulary and comprehension is two-way and dynamic, with one proviso – lower primary learners rely on oral language and words they are familiar with through speaking to scaffold their reading development, but as they progress, more vocabulary is learnt from written text.

Students arrive at school with vastly different vocabulary due to their home backgrounds. EAL/D learners may arrive with minimal English vocabulary, so the explicit teaching of vocabulary becomes critical, as it is the best predictor of both reading and listening comprehension across all years of schooling. If new words are not consistently taught and learned in all subject areas, then the problems EAL/D learners face are compounded, and their ongoing underachievement becomes more likely.

Direct instruction in vocabulary influences comprehension more than any other factor. Although wide reading can build word knowledge and also knowledge about the world, students need thoughtful and systematic instruction in key vocabulary. This requires careful planning by teachers. Direct instruction means that new or difficult words in the text are first predicted by the teacher, and then activities are devised to define, practice and recycle the new vocabulary.

Teachers should ensure that texts are comprehensible for students. If EAL/D students cannot comprehend at the literal level of understanding, they cannot progress to deeper levels of critical, interpretive or creative meaning-making. Research has demonstrated that for students to comprehend a text without assistance from the teacher, they must already know 98 per cent of the words. In the middle years, this requires a vocabulary of 8000 or 9000 words.

For instruction, where the teacher scaffolds or supports students' comprehension, 90-95 per cent coverage (existing word knowledge) is still required. If texts are harder than 90-95 per cent coverage, they will not work as instructional texts, and students will become frustrated and give up. Low literacy EAL/D learners in particular require an explicit and continuing focus on building sight vocabulary and comprehension skills.

Note that there is a difference between receptive vocabulary (ie words that students recognise) and expressive vocabulary (words used in speaking or writing). Research indicates that students may need to encounter a word up to 15 times to acquire it as part of their expressive vocabulary (hence the need for recycling). For direct or explicit instruction, teaching fewer words well is more effective than teaching many words in a cursory way. Teachers should also focus on high frequency words in texts rather than more obscure terminology. That is, teach the words students are definitely going to encounter again in other contexts.

As a final suggestion, recent research on middle school EALD learners suggests that teachers sometimes have little precise idea of their students' vocabulary knowledge and levels of comprehension. Simple diagnostic testing will provide a baseline for knowing where your EAL/D learners are in their word knowledge, and for developing a program that is linguistically responsive to their needs and their progress in language and literacy learning.

VOCABULARY

STRATEGIES

Word walls

Mini flipbooks

Designated vocabulary notebooks

Class-generated glossaries (using computer images where relevant)

Flashcards

Vocabulary games (commercial or hand-made)

Spelling tests and competitions

Fun homework activities on new words

Word chains

Word maps

Crosswords

Scrabble

Online vocabulary programs