



Celebrating children’s linguistic and cultural diversity in the

Early Years Foundation Stage

A toolkit for Early Years practitioners

April 2017

**Introduction**

In recent years there has been a rise in the number of children entering early year’s settings in Suffolk for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL). Some of these children may already be bilingual or multilingual learners. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is a critical stage in children’s language development as the early years of life are the optimum time for any child to learn additional languages and to become properly bilingual or multilingual.

It is good practice for settings to actively engage parents and families as equal partners in supporting children to achieve their potential when learning through English as an additional language, despite the challenges which this presents.

**Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, DfE 2017, p9**

*1.7. For children whose home language is not English, providers must take reasonable steps to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home. Providers must also ensure that children have sufficient opportunities to learn and reach a good standard in English language during the EYFS: ensuring children are ready to benefit from the opportunities available to them when they begin Year 1. When assessing communication, language and literacy skills, practitioners must assess children’s skills in English. If a child does not have a strong grasp of English language, practitioners must explore the child’s skills in the home language with parents and/or carers, to establish whether there is cause for concern about language delay.*

**Article 30** of the **‘United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’** states:

*‘Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, regardless of whether these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.’*



**A Unique Child**

‘Every child is a unique child who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured’

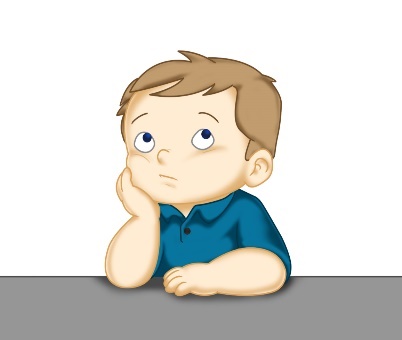
This section includes:

* + What might it be like in your setting/school for a child who is learning EAL?
  + The do’s and don’ts when welcoming a child who is learning EAL into your setting.
  + The language acquisition stages a child might experience in the EYFS.
  + Stages of speaking and listening flow-chart.
  + Audit to review your support for children learning EAL.

**What might it be like in your setting/school for a child who is learning EAL?**

I don’t speak English like the others, I don’t want to answer questions in case people don’t understand or laugh

It is tiring trying to understand this language



Everyone knows where to go and what to do except me

Some people ignore me. Don’t they like me?

This is very different to home

I miss my friends back home and these children don’t play with me

How do I ask for help?

**Do’s and don’ts when welcoming a child who is learning EAL into your setting**

Children who are learning EAL may be at risk of underachievement due to some commonly held assumptions and mistakes that are often made, usually with the best of intentions. By following the **Do’s** and **Don’ts** below you can minimise this risk.

The first basic principle is to recognise that children learning EAL **do have** language skills, they just don’t happen to be in English. These skills are transferable to second and subsequent languages.

Learning EAL is not a special educational need. There will be some children learning EAL who have a language delay or disorder but this will also show itself in the child’s home language. For this reason, good liaison with parents is crucial before referring a child for Speech and Language Therapy.

**Do:**

* **Do** group children learning EAL with children who are strong language models – they will learn from their peers.
* **Do** ensure children learning EAL are placed in their appropriate age group.
* **Do** acknowledge and value children’s home languages.
* **Do** reassure parents that maintaining and developing their home language is important and will support learning English.
* **Do** actively encourage and support peer interaction through play.
* **Do** accept that children learning EAL are likely to have developed skills in other areas of

learning, so ensure activities are age appropriate.

* **Do** accept that children need to copy – it is a way of learning.
* **Do** accept and value any attempts to communicate, whatever the language children choose to use and quietly praise even minimal efforts.
* **Do** speak to children as they play, commenting on what they are doing and giving them the words they need in context.
* **Do** ensure the child is placed at least third or fourth in turn taking games so s/he can hear repeated phrases and have time to rehearse.
* **Do** expect children learning EAL to switch off frequently. It is very tiring listening to a language you don’t understand.
* **Do** be patient. Children have different ways of learning and progress at different rates.

**Don’t:**

* **Don’t** be surprised if children learning EAL find it hard to settle at first.
* **Don’t** withdraw children learning EAL for 1:1 sessions to “teach them English”. This is almost always counterproductive.
* **Don’t** encourage parents who have limited English to teach their child English at home.

Languages are best learnt from native speakers.

* **Don’t** suggest English should replace the home language - children will need to communicate with their extended family.
* **Don’t** assume that children are being deliberately difficult if they don’t always comply with your expectations; there may be cultural differences.
* **Don’t** assume children learning EAL understand what you say and that they are being difficult if they don’t do as you say. They may have developed strategies for appearing to understand by copying others and learning the routines.
* **Don’t** refer to children as ‘jabbering away’ in their own language or talking ‘gibberish’; this is disrespectful.
* **Don’t** continually ask children questions such as ‘what’s this?’, ‘what colour is that? If the child knows the answer you have taught them nothing and if they don’t know they will feel they’ve failed.
* **Don’t** be discouraged if the child learning EAL doesn’t want to speak very much, or even at all for a while (this ‘silent period’ can go on for about several months). Concentrate on building a relationship with the child and laying the foundations of English – the language will come later.

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**The language acquisition stages a child may experience in the EYFS**

Language acquisition is a cumulative process. There will be individual variations in the rate of development due to environmental, personal and social factors.

Remember, children learn language first by hearing, then by using it in context, and that language develops over several years. The Early Years Foundation Stage nursery or pre-school environment provides opportunities for planning good quality speaking and listening experiences, and hands-on activities which provide a context for learning English. Children learning English as an additional language may be silent for several months. Ensure that you involve them in all activities and help them understand classroom routines and instructions. Be aware that it can be very tiring to process information in another language. It takes up to two years to learn the social English needed for conversations, and several years longer to develop the full academic understanding and use of a new language.

When young children who are unfamiliar with English enter a predominantly English-speaking environment they may decide to continue using their home language as a means of communicating. This should be respected as if they have not experienced English previously then this may be their only option. If the child receives the message that the use of languages other than English is not acceptable then they may choose not to communicate at all. It is therefore important that staff are willing to accept other languages and try to provide opportunities for children learning English as an additional language to use and hear their home language, by:

* using bilingual speakers if possible
* developing an environment that reflects the children’s culture and language
* speaking to the child in their own language (learn a few key words)
* providing dual language books and games
* learning songs and games in other languages
* celebrating festivals and important milestones in the child’s life.

## Use of non-verbal communication:

All young children use non-verbal communication – nodding or shaking their head, pointing and touching (including tugging clothes), hand movements, use of facial expressions and maintenance of eye contact - allowing them to communicate long before they are able to use the appropriate verbal forms. **It is important that adults acknowledge the messages children are trying to send and, where possible, carry out their requests.**

It is important that children should not feel pressurised to speak until they feel confident enough to do so. However, it is essential that adults continue to talk to the children, pick up their non-verbal responses, support their understanding and involve them in activities.

These strategies will help children to internalise the language they hear and develop a sense of the patterns, meanings and range of language functions in their new unfamiliar environment.

English-speaking children may ignore the child learning EAL due to the difficulties of communicating – encourage them to interact. The child learning EAL may be waiting for the other children to initiate play, or relying on adults to draw them into interactions. Be aware of the risk of children learning EAL spending all their time alone and becoming isolated from their peer group and the main opportunities to understand and use spoken English. So:

* provide gentle assistance to allow the child to understand the routines and activities of the setting
* introduce them into small groups
* encourage other children to include them in their play
* try to make the child feel comfortable in activities with other children
* be sensitive, spontaneous and follow the child’s interests and needs
* assist them in establishing friendships with other children.

**Remember - repetition is an important strategy in the early phases of second language acquisition, both as a way to practise the new language and as a social strategy.**

## The use of formulae, routines and single words:

Phrases (chunked language or formulae) used repeatedly in routine situations as part of everyday social interactions assist learners to develop self-confidence and to interact with others. Children may use chunks of language to show that they are ready to enter into conversation. Initially these phrases may be grammatically more advanced than the language the child is using at other times. Phrases may include memorised sequences such as in singing and counting, swear words, exclamations, greetings, social control phrases, expressions of approval or disapproval, checks for confirmation, and small talk.

* use interactive exchanges that involve predictable words and actions such as “What does the dog say?” and praise the child’s non-verbal or verbal responses
* use books such as **The Hungry Caterpillar** with repetitive sentences to develop interactive patterns and expand vocabulary.

**Becoming more familiar with English:**

Children will then begin to generate their own telegraphic sentences using two or three word utterances. Function words are likely to be omitted, the main concern being the communication of meaning, for example ‘me book carpet’. Non-verbal gestures will often accompany speech and holistic phrases will continue during this stage. Children may use quite long chunks of book language or nursery rhymes.

**Becoming more confident as a user of English:**

As children’s confidence in using English grows, the variety of words and phrases used increases, however ‘errors’ are still common.

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| |  | | --- | | **Stages of speaking and listening**  As with all children, it is important to gauge the stage of development a child learning ‘English as an additional language’ is at and adopt the appropriate teaching strategies to scaffold the next levels of learning.  **Observations** **Strategies**   * Self-talk and parallel talk * Visual timetables, picture books * Teach staff names * Play games with repetitive language * Action rhymes, songs, poems and stories, practical activities * Appears to speak no English * Appears to understand no English * Speaks in home language to adults and peers * Watches others * Understanding more English than able to use * Communicating by gesture and facial expression * Responding to instructions accompanied with gestures * Joins in with repeated phrases in songs and action rhymes * Continue to involve the child in activities and use the above strategies * Use real objects and pictures to provide extra visual support * Lotto games, bingo games * Extend the child’s speech. “*cars.”, “Would you like to play with the cars?”, “I’ve got a yellow car. I’m driving it down the road.”* * Stories with repetitive language and clear pictures * Using single words or phrases to communicate e.g. Toilet or Drink * Uses gesture to extend talk * Echoing words/phrases “*tidy up time” “sit down”* | |  | |  | |  |  * Continue to extend child’s speech and model correct grammatical structures “*I goed outside*.”, “*You went outside? What did you play with outside?*” * Encourage pupil to respond by asking closed questions, either or questions and one-word answer questions * Generating own words and short phrases * EAL ‘errors’ such as word order or mixing languages are still very common |
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Ask yourself and colleagues how your setting is in relation to the following questions and grade yourself as Beginning (B). Developing (D) or Secure (S), and then consider how you could improve practice.

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| **Audit to review support for children learning EAL** | **B/D/S** | **What could we do differently?** |
| Do we find out where the child is from, which language(s) they speak and to whom and what their competencies are in these languages? |  |  |
| Do we check what the child likes to be called and the pronunciations and spellings of the child and their parents/carers names? |  |  |
| Are all parents/carers, regardless of their home language, able to share information about their child’s routine such as sleep times and comforters? |  |  |
| Do we support children to use their home language in the setting/school? |  |  |
| Do we show children where everything is in the setting/ school such as toilets and snack? |  |  |
| Do we provide a ‘Welcome to our Setting’ pack? |  |  |
| Do all staff welcome all children and families without prejudice and assumptions? |  |  |
| Do we use a photographic visual timetable - including photos of adults in the setting at the beginning and the end of the day? |  |  |
| Do we gently encourage the child to participate – using lots of gestures and expression? |  |  |
| Do we spend time with all children to develop their skills in language? |  |  |
| Do we encourage and respond to non-verbal communication? |  |  |
| Do we continue verbal and non-verbal communication with a child who is silent? |  |  |
| Are we actively teaching the vocabulary a child will need to access the curriculum in a developmentally appropriate way? |  |  |
| Are our expectations for bilingual children realistic and sufficiently high? |  |  |
| Do we ensure we find out each child’s cultural and religious information such as diet, festivals observed, important events and customs? Do we ensure all staff have this information? |  |  |