

Supporting children with EAL in the early years

by Judith Harries

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bewildering to be faced with the demands of a second language. There is debate as to whether children benefit from being completely immersed into the second language or encouraged to use both. This will depend on the provision at your setting. I feel that they should be encouraged to retain and develop their first language and many basic concepts will already have been learned and processed in the original language that can be applied to learning English.

Many of the activities in this book encourage children to share their home language as they go along. Remember to start with what each child already knows and are interested in, and use that as a way to develop their learning.

The first stage that many children with EAL go through is a 'silent' period, when they will use gestures, signs, and possibly some words in their home language. This is not a passive time as they will be actively listening and

watching as they explore this new environment and often will be able to understand more than they can speak. It is important not to pressure them to speak at this time and be patient as it can last for up to six months. They may begin to echo particular words or short phrases such as 'drink' or 'toilet' and then go onto using small chunks or phrases with meaning such as 'My turn', 'Home soon' or 'Mummy come now?' They may start to join in with refrains in stories, songs and rhymes and lots of group singing at this stage can encourage them to 'have a go' without worrying about being heard. Imitation is a key part of learning and they will enjoy copying the other children's words and actions.

Correct intonation and prosody can emerge before meaningful sentences. Basic question words are some of the first to be used along with independent phrases such as 'I like...' or 'I want...'. Encourage 'scaffolding' when the listener sympathetically supplies any missing words or phrases to support emerging conversation.





Chapter One:

EAL in the early years

Positive relationships

Setting and home visits

Most settings will encourage children and their parents to visit on at least one occasion prior to their starting date so that the children are familiar with some adults, the layout of the building and other practicalities. Starting at a new setting is a scary time for both the child and the parents/carers, and not being able to communicate, understand what is being said, or read letters and notices can make it worse. Put up welcome signs in multiple languages, introduce key workers and set out a mix of familiar, favourite, and fun activities for children to explore.

Many settings also offer a 'home visit' and these can be invaluable for establishing a partnership between home and setting. The key worker can meet the child

in his or her own environment and find out about toys, interests, pets, and siblings, as well as key pointers about their cultural background. It's a good opportunity to get to know parents and try to help them feel they can approach the key worker with any concerns.

Home visits should always involve two members of staff including one who knows some of the child's home language if possible. Take along photos of the setting to talk about and a puppet or toy to help interaction with the child. Use this opportunity to help parents fill in any paperwork, including medical and dietary requirements and fill in an information sheet with details about the child's name (spelling and pronunciation is really important), their main likes and dislikes, the language the parent uses with the child, and any religious and cultural beliefs. Some families will not want a home visit and this view should of course be respected.



Chapter Six: Exploring colour and patterns



Children can express themselves through a variety of visual art activities without begin restricted by any limitations through their emerging language. Start with simple activities using strong contrasting primary colours and patterns.

How to help children with EAL: As children with EAL are absorbed in different visual art activities they will gain in self-confidence and begin to talk about themselves as they play.

You can:

- explore primary colours in absorbing detail
- organise colour days at your setting for children to share colour activities
- enrich their world by opening their eyes to colour.

Black and white

Start by exploring and talking about specific colours with children with EAL. Use the strong contrast of black and white colours to create some exciting artwork with the children.

What you need:

- White paper and black felt pens
- Black paper and white chalks
- Black and white paint
- A selection of paint brushes
- Black and white paper
- Newspaper
- White art straws
- Scissors, glue
- Snow white play dough
- Camera, tablet

What to do:

1. Introduce the colours black and white to all the children and explain that you are going to try some expressive arts activities using these two colours. Invite children with EAL to share the words for black and white in their home language.
2. Pencils and pens: Start by encouraging children to use different thicknesses of black pens on small pieces of white paper to draw penguins, zebras, pandas, dalmatian dogs, cats and any other black and white animals they can think of.
3. Chalks and pastels: Let children experiment with white chalk on black sugar paper drawing figures, patterns and shapes.
4. Painting: Set up easels with black sugar paper and provide children with white paint and lots of different sizes of paint brushes. Invite children to paint a skeleton figure (see 'Heads, shoulders, knees and toes', page 15).
5. Collage: Use black paper and white art straws to create different cut and stick pictures and patterns.
6. Look at images of newspaper collage on the internet. Let children experiment with tearing or cutting strips and shapes out of black and white newsprint and creating their own collages.
7. Modelling: Make a papier maché zebra/pig using small strips of newspaper stuck in layers onto a plastic bottle, using wallpaper paste or flour and water glue. Stick on bottle tops or egg box cartons for legs. Apply several layers of papier maché and finish off by sticking on some black sugar paper stripes or spots. Use PVA glue to varnish the finished model.
8. Photography: Encourage children to use the camera or tablet to take some black and white pictures of your setting, inside and outside.

Whatever next

- Show the children some images of artwork by Bridget Riley who produced a range of paintings using black and white in the 1960s called Op-art. How do the children feel when they look at these paintings?
- Let them use black sugar paper, plain white paper, scissors, rulers and glue to cut and stick their own Op-art pattern pictures.

All rounders

PSED: Organise a 'Black and White Day' at your setting. Make sure invitations to special days are available in home languages for parents of children with EAL. Invite children and staff to come wearing black and white clothes, and set out lots of black and white dressing up clothes. Make some black and white badges to wear for those who forget. Decorate the walls with black and white paper chains and black and white fabric or curtains. Play draughts and other games using black and white boards. Display lots of the black and white artworks around for visitors to admire and enjoy.

