

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Speaking and Listening	21
3	Images	43
4	The Teacher	59
5	Words, Reading, and Writing	79
6	Conclusion	105
	Bibliography.	109

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Book

Welcome to *How to Teach EAL Students in the Classroom*. This book is your one-stop reference point for working with English as an additional language (EAL) learners. It has been designed with whole-class teaching in mind, but it can be adapted to suit one-on-one and small-group teaching as well.

I have divided the book into four sections, each focussing on a certain theme. This means that strategies, activities, and techniques are grouped into smaller collections, making the book easier to navigate. I have provided a rationale and explanation for each section.

The book contains a wide range of classroom tools which you can take and use immediately with little or no alteration. That said, nothing in here is set in stone, and you can easily adapt the contents to suit your needs, the needs of your pupils, or your style of teaching.

Suffice to say though, if like many of us there is a high premium on your time, the resources contained in the following pages will allow you to support your EAL learners quickly and effectively, whatever the lesson. You could pick nearly any strategy in here, go into your classroom tomorrow morning, and start using it without any further ado.

Thinking Carefully about Learners and Language

When working with EAL learners it is worth remembering these three words: Eyes, Speech, Body. They provide a simple means by which to consider the experience of the EAL learner in the classroom. By keeping them in mind, you can continually check whether what is happening is helping students or hindering them.

Ask yourself whether what the EAL learner can *see* will help them access and understand what is going on.

Ask whether what they can *hear* is helping them understand what is going on and what is expected of them.

Ask if you are using *your body* to support your spoken communication. Are you mirroring or supplementing the meaning of the words you are using? Are you remaining open? Are you physically modelling ideas? And are you modelling what it is that you want students to do?

Referring to these key words – using them as lenses – also causes the teacher to sympathise with the position of the EAL learner. It encourages them to view what is going on in the classroom from the perspective of someone for whom the main mode of expression is not fully accessible. This may sound obvious, yet it is easy to lose sight of such an important point amid the clamour for attention made by students, colleagues, and parents.

The following section looks at language and the experience of EAL learners in more detail. It also reflects on the role of the teacher in the classroom and thinks about student-teacher relationships. General suggestions are offered which supplement the specific activities and strategies explained in the rest of the book.

Praise, Emotion, and Individual Differences

Students who have English as an additional language (EAL) are, in many ways, no different from the rest of your students. They are still young people, they still have feelings, they still desire to do well, and they still have family or carers whom they go home to every night. As such, like everyone else, they will respond well to sympathy and praise, although any hint of a patronising manner must be avoided.

Sympathy should be used to indicate the teacher's understanding of the game – the knowledge of what is at issue for the learner and how they and the teacher are working together to try to overcome it: sympathy as shared understanding rather than tea and biscuits.

Praise must also be given out with care and thought. Never scrimp on it; do not treat it as a limited resource. Do be mindful, however, of the potential that exists for diluting its impact. There can be a temptation to praise a student who has English as an additional language for myriad minor things. The hope is that this will dissipate any anxiety or frustration they might be feeling due to their difficulties with communication. The learner may view this as patronising, though, or they may dislike the extra attention they are receiving.

Identify specific things for which to give praise, and make it clear to the learner (with gestures and modelling if necessary) precisely what it is you are praising. Such an approach smacks of honesty. It is difficult to see it as being anything other because it shows a clear thought process on behalf of the teacher. The approbation is directly tied to something the student has done, with an explanation as to why it is good. An argument is being advanced, with evidence to support it.

Emotion can play a significant role in any classroom. Managing it is a key part of ensuring good progress among learners and an atmosphere in which all feel safe and secure.

There are two things to say about emotion and EAL learners. The first is that one ought to expect periods of frustration, annoyance, or irritation. Anybody who finds themselves in a situation where the expectations are unclear or it is not apparent what one is supposed to be doing can feel awkward and ill at ease. If the situation continues, these feelings can grow. I can recall losing my cool when someone who I was interviewing continually evaded the questions: it was frustrating to feel my own language being disempowered. Whilst this situation is not identical to that of an EAL learner, it still points to how disruption or dissonance in communication can draw out negative feelings.

In addition to this, it is important to remember that learning an additional language is, for most people, hard. Consider that an EAL learner is doing it 'on-the-go' and may have few (if any) native speakers around them, and one can see a hard task getting harder and harder. What is

more, frustration can be made worse by students' difficulties in communicating their feelings to peers or to the teacher.

One of the fundamental facets of language is that it allows us to make others aware of our internal states. Knowing how to do this in one's first language yet not being able to do it in an additional language can be deeply frustrating. It is as if a barrier has been erected and one's own self has had to withdraw from the surroundings. Sharing our internal states helps us say who we are and signal our existence to others, as well as our independence. So, after all that is temporarily taken away, do not be surprised if EAL learners display some negative emotions at times!

The second point regarding emotion concerns the teacher. We are all used to communicating seemingly at will with our classes. We modify our language so as to ensure everyone follows what is being taught, but we work from a premise that simple alterations are all that is required to guarantee understanding. This comes from the fact that we know our students are versed in the English language. We know as well that a major part of our job is to continually develop and refine that understanding, but this begins from a vast shared pool of vocabulary, syntax, and grammar.

Working with EAL learners can be frustrating for the teacher. It can cause them to feel inept or powerless in the face of what sometimes appear to be insurmountable barriers. If one is used to providing help and support for learners, the loss of this ability can be difficult to deal with. It is easy to feel disoriented or helpless when all the tools which we would usually use to assist a child are no longer any good (or, at least, not as good as they would usually be).

If you find yourself in such a situation, I advise taking a three-pronged approach. First, do not despair. The decreased efficacy of your usual tools and techniques is not a reflection on you or the student.

Second, use this knowledge to imaginatively draw yourself and the student together. Acknowledge that the issue (not the problem) is for both of you and that it exists separately to the pair of you. By doing this, one avoids tying emotions to the issue. Also, you will create an external focal point which you and the student can bond over. It is akin to saying: 'At present we cannot communicate that well with each other. Let's work as a team to overcome this.' Such a mind-set may be impossible to express

explicitly to the student, but holding on to it and letting it inform your behaviour ought to be enough.

The third point is to build activities and strategies from this book (or elsewhere, or ones you think up yourself) into your teaching. Doing this means you are being positive and proactive. You are working from the premise that the issue is transitory and that it can and will be overcome. You are doing your duty as a professional and as a person. You are helping your student(s) and need not accept any feelings of frustration, powerlessness, or anxiety which may creep up on you.

It is worth remembering that learning a new language can take a while. Do not expect dramatic changes or overnight successes. In rare cases these may come, but in general the student's development will be gradual. They will be feeling their way into the language, testing out its possibilities, trialling the meanings of words and identifying how far they can be pushed and in what circumstances.

If, at some point in your life, you have learnt a new language, reflect on that experience. Ask yourself how you made progress and what sort of timescales accorded with your increasing mastery. It may be that you too found the process difficult. If this is the case, do not remember it and then stop. It may be useful for sympathising with an EAL learner, but what would be better would be for you to analyse why you found it difficult and to learn from this. You may find that your own experience provides you with pointers on how to adapt your classroom or your teaching.

Individual differences will play a part as well. As we said before, EAL learners are just like the rest of your students in many respects. This includes the varying cognitive abilities, prior schooling, and life experiences they bring with them. While the inability to communicate in a given language will most likely mask the true cognitive capabilities of a student, it can still be assumed that any population of EAL learners will include a range of abilities. This will have consequences for the speed at which pupils pick up English.

So too will the motivation students possess. It is often worth speaking to pastoral leaders (or, if your school has one, an EAL coordinator) to find out a little about the backgrounds of your EAL learners. There are many reasons why a family, or in some cases an individual child, may move to live in another country. These could range from the highly desirous – a

parent is promoted to a prestigious head office position in an English-speaking city – to the truly awful – a family is forced to flee its country of origin so as to escape persecution during a civil war. Even within these two situations there is room for variation. A child in the first case may have no interest in their parent's good fortune and wish only to stay with their friends. A child in the second case might be relieved to be living in a safe country, even if the uprooting was beyond their control.

Each EAL student who you encounter will be different. Try to find out a little about their backgrounds so you can understand where they are coming from (literally and metaphorically). This will help you to help them. Be sure to assimilate the information they provide during lessons: how they interact with others, the personality they project, the manner in which they respond to you, how they appear to apply themselves in an unfamiliar environment. Build up a picture of them and use it to aid your teaching. Do be prepared for it to alter though. As students become more confident in the language of the classroom, so their personalities might change. Your assumptions, whether made unwittingly or not, may well be challenged.

Much of what I have said so far has presumed that EAL learners are homogenous in their relationship to English, if not in other areas. They come to learn it as an additional language, their development progresses and, finally, they master it.

This is true in a general sense. It is logically sound to assume the following: First, a person comes into contact with something they did not previously know. Second, they spend a period of time engaging with and experiencing that thing. Third, providing they persist in the process, they eventually become capable of using the thing on their own terms. This is a rough, overarching model for learning.

Yet, when we are teaching, we will not by necessity encounter EAL learners in this way. They will arrive in our classrooms already at a point in the process. Consider the following shape: a long, thin, double-ended arrow; a continuum. At one end are learners who are encountering English for the first time, at the other end are learners who are highly skilled in every aspect of the language.

We could place all of our students, whether they are EAL learners or not, on this continuum. In fact, we could place everyone we know on it.

We could stretch it further and include a whole range of criteria by which to determine where precisely different individuals fit.

Its use for us, though, is simpler. Conceive of your EAL students as being on the continuum. Once you have spent some time teaching them, look to place them in your mind roughly where you think they are at. The more experience you have, the more accurate these judgements will become.

Most schools will assess EAL learners and indicate to which of the EAL stages their present abilities correlate. These are nationally agreed criteria, each one of which tallies with certain skills and abilities. It will be useful for you to get hold of this information, but I would counsel against using it in favour of your own judgements. See it as a supplement instead.

The advantage of the continuum approach is that it provides you with a mental model that is continuous rather than discrete. The EAL stages are discrete because a continuum would be unwieldy at national level. It would also rely on subjective judgements and therefore lose its standardising capacity.

So, take note of the EAL stages and familiarise yourself with what each one refers to, but do not write off your own judgement in favour of them. Remember that you spend five days a week with students and are constantly assessing their abilities, including the extent to which they are able to manipulate language. Call on these skills when working with EAL learners.

Assume that when they first arrive in your lesson they will be at some point on the continuum. Find out what EAL stage they are at and any extra information which is available and may be of help. Make a judgement. Be prepared to alter this judgement as you spend more time with them. Your interactions will alter accordingly. Initially, you may judge student A to be further along the continuum than student B. As such, you will use more developed language when speaking to student A. Given a couple of months, student B might have caught up, while student A has plateaued. You will refine your judgements and adjust your use of language accordingly.

Thinking with the continuum model is also helpful because it allows you to see EAL learners in relation to native speakers. It encompasses

all students in the class and so avoids putting EAL students to one side as a separate and distinct group. It promotes equality while recognising that learners have different needs. It also signals the potential for using native speakers to help new language learners develop their communication skills.

The Four Elements of Language: Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing

Let us now think about the four elements which go to make up the English language: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

While all of these share similarities, including certain prerequisites that lead to success, they are nonetheless different. Here are some activities you might like to try which make this point clearer:

- ◆ Have a conversation with a friend. Go away afterwards and write a short piece about the same topic. Observe what is lost and what is gained through writing.
- ◆ Listen to a play on the radio. Get hold of the script and read it yourself. Consider how these two experiences differ.
- ◆ Hold a discussion with your class concerning an interesting question. After, ask them to write an answer to the same question. Compare these. (It would be fruitful to make an audio recording of the discussion and make a direct comparison.)
- ◆ Pick a topic at random from the dictionary and write about it, without stopping, for two minutes. Read what you have written. Ask yourself whether it makes sense, if someone else would understand it, and how the act of reading it compares to the act of writing it.

The four elements of language make different requirements and have different effects.

Listening

Listening comes first. Babies can listen before they can speak. It is through listening that they learn language. The same is true of older children and adults. Many of the most effective language training programmes are centred on listening to native speakers and trying to imitate the sounds which they make. This is because, of course, any language

is initially *just* sounds. Meaning is attached to the sounds, but we must learn this meaning as well.

When children are developing speech, they can physically indicate things they want by, for example, pointing or grabbing. Therefore, they know in some sense that these things are there, and they believe they have the capacity to interact with them (a baby *could* reach for a rainbow). These things, and let us take an example of a toy bus, have no linguistic meaning for the child as yet though. The child does not think 'I want the toy bus.' It sees something, yes, and it wants that thing, yes, but beyond this there is nothing to say.

As the child grows it comes to be aware of the particular sounds which parents and carers attach to the toy bus. This happens through the child listening. The attachments are arbitrary – a bus could be called a boogly-gloop – and so must be learnt. They are not innate to either the object or to the human species.

Think back to the first time you heard a piece of music which you immediately fell in love with. The chances are that, having listened to it again and again, you now hear it with great acuity. You can pick out key changes, the arrival of new instruments, and the modulations in the singer's voice (if there is a singer). It is unlikely you understood the song in this manner when you first heard it. Repeated listens have helped you to remember the song. This, in turn, has provided you with the capacity to analyse it. When you first heard it, it was all new. You were taking everything in. Your brain was immersed.

Listening, as such, can develop. The more familiar one becomes with sounds, the more one is able to deal actively with those sounds. This includes identifying the meaning which is attached to them. It also includes 'reading' the intonation with which they are said. 'Stop!' can carry many different meanings, all of which are dependent on the stress, pace, volume, and tone of the delivery.

Speaking

While listening comes first, it is not long followed by speaking, and, once that arrives, the two remain inseparable.