

Speaking and listening

– the EAL context

Second language acquisition

Second language acquisition mirrors the developmental stages in learning a first language and so it is essential that children are provided with opportunities to constantly interact using this target language. As teachers we are aware that the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are inextricably linked and language teaching approaches should reflect this, so that the four skills are taught in an integrated manner. For ease of reference this article concentrates on developing the skills of listening and speaking using visual stimuli. The suggested activities are differentiated, where appropriate, to cater for varying levels of language proficiency. Some activities refer to the silent phase, Total Physical Response (TPR) and scaffolding (see glossary). Follow-on articles will feature in the December and January issues of *InTouch* which will focus on the skills of reading and writing.

Developing listening skills

The following listening activities are particularly useful for children in the silent phase or those with limited English language proficiency as they all involve TPR. Please note that any picture cards, sequencing cards or photographs can be used for the following activities.



Picture recognition The teacher, or another child, describes the picture and invites the child to identify it from a selection of four or five pictures. This activity can be differentiated by increasing the number of pictures in the selection or providing a partial description of the picture, for example, omitting the obvious description.

Auditory memory A selection of pictures are placed face-down on the table. The teacher, or another child, describes one of these pictures in detail and the child has to turn over the pictures and identify the correct picture. This activity can be differentiated by increasing the number of pictures in the selection or describing two or more pictures so that the child then has several descriptions to retain and recall. The child can be further challenged by inviting them to identify these pictures in the correct sequence, that is, in the order in which the descriptions were given.

Draw a picture barrier game A barrier is placed between the children or, alternatively, they can sit back-to-back. The teacher, or another child, provides detailed instructions on how to draw a picture. The other child, or group of children, draws this picture without seeing it, that is, solely from the instructions given. There is an 'information gap' present and so collaboration is required to complete the task. This task can be completed in pairs or groups and is particularly suited to children in the silent phase who may understand the instructions but are not yet comfortable speaking out loud.

Developing speaking skills

In developing children's listening skills, it is crucial to

afford equal emphasis to developing children's speaking skills also. These suggested activities are experiences that can be provided for the EAL learner to develop his/her speaking skills in an enjoyable way.

Sorting and classifying This involves the children in a TPR activity initially, after which they can be invited to explain and justify their decisions, thus introducing a spoken dimension. Children can sort and classify the pictures for several properties, for example, colour, number of people, age of people, shapes, animals, types of activities, types of objects, and themes. This can be differentiated by limiting or extending the number of properties depending on the language proficiency of the child. Peer-tutoring or a buddy system can be used for those who are in the silent phase or for those with limited language proficiency. This activity can be used for the development of the language needed for logical reasoning, for example, comparing, contrasting, justifying and persuading.



Scavenger hunt This involves the children searching for similar items to those in the pictures either in the classroom, school or



In listening, speaking, reading and writing are inextricably linked and language teaching approaches should reflect this

playground. This can be completed in pairs or groups. The teacher hides items similar to those in the pictures around



the classroom and the children are divided into groups with each group receiving an equal number of pictures. The group who finds all of the items first and can name these items wins. This allows children in the silent phase to participate as someone else in their group can provide the feedback.

Story building This involves the child creating a story based on a picture. It may be useful to encourage the child to use the narrative framework, as a scaffold, when devising this story – the setting (who, where, when), the characters, the problem and the resolution. This task could be differentiated for children with limited language proficiency by allowing them to rehearse the story first, to work in pairs or groups, or to use aids such as props or



pictures to support the retell. It can also be differentiated for the child with increased language proficiency by introducing a story bag as well as the picture.

In addition to this, the child could be asked to use one picture as a stimulus for the beginning of the story and another picture as a stimulus for the end of the story, thus creating a story around two unrelated pictures. The teacher could model this type of story building as a form of scaffolding. This task is also suited to sequencing cards.

Questioning skills The teacher asks a variety of questions about the picture. The teacher should attempt to ask as many open-ended questions as possible in order to encourage interaction. This may be easier if the teacher poses a variety of question types to the children, for example:

- 1 *Literal* questions are found directly in the picture, for example, 'who', 'where', 'what' and 'when'.
- 1 *Inferential* questions may be found in the picture but are not as obvious, for example, 'how' and 'why'.
- 1 *Interpretive* questions require the viewer to make connections between the picture and his/her own life experience.
- 1 *Critical/evaluative* questions require the viewer to express an opinion and make judgements.

It is important that the children are encouraged to ask the questions as this is a

vital communicative skill. The teacher can scaffold this task for the children by prompting them regarding what type of question to use, for example, 'ask a what question' and 'ask a where question'



Logical reasoning The child identifies an anomaly in a picture, explaining the reason why this is unusual and suggesting a more acceptable alternative. This involves logical reasoning. Pictures with missing elements or obvious mistakes, such as, a man eating his dinner with a pencil, allow the children to engage with this activity at a more cognitively advanced level. The child is still encouraged to develop language and extend vocabulary, but in a more stimulating and challenging manner. This is particularly useful for the older child because it is more age-appropriate than some of the oral language activities.

Improvisational drama This involves using pictures as a stimulus for improvisational drama. Children who have increased language proficiency will probably lead the drama and those who are in the silent phase will perhaps just mime or imitate the others. This improvisational drama



can be frozen to form a freeze-frame. The teacher can then randomly tap children on the shoulder inviting them to verbalise the characters' thoughts at that

particular moment (thought-tracking). Thought-tracking is very appropriate for EAL learners with limited language proficiency because it is grammatically simple, that is, it takes place in the here and now and so requires the present tense and use of the first person only, for example, 'I am cold and hungry' and 'I do not want to go'.

Making connections This involves the children making connections between the activities in the pictures and their own life experience. This is a higher-order thinking skill and may need to be modelled initially by the teacher, for example, 'this picture reminds me of...' and 'when I see this I think of...' It can be differentiated for younger children by asking them to make connec-

tions with stories they have read, for example, 'when I see this basket of food, it reminds me of the Little Red Riding Hood story'. This task also lends itself to making connections with the child's home culture and first language.

Draw a picture barrier game

This activity is described above and could be varied as follows:

Spot the difference barrier game:

In this activity both children have similar pictures but with some differences. Through questioning the children work collaboratively to identify the differences.

Where is X barrier game:

In this activity both children have the same pictures but one has Xs or small post-its on it. Through questioning the children work collaboratively to identify where the Xs are placed.

These tasks can be differentiated by asking the child with increased language proficiency to ask all of the questions and the child with limited language proficiency to answer 'yes' and 'no'.

Conclusion

This month's article provided an overview of a variety of activities which can be used to enhance listening and speaking skills. In the activities described in this article, children are encouraged to actively engage with the learning and to develop their listening and speaking skills in an interactive manner. In upcoming issues of *InTouch* we will explore some tried and tested activities which can support a child with EAL in developing reading and writing skills.

Glossary

TPR is a Total Physical Response activity that enables children with limited oral proficiency to participate in classroom activities without necessarily having to speak. It requires children to physically respond to a command or instruction.

The Silent Phase is the starting point for most learners when they are acquiring a new language. It is a phase in which the child may speak very little, if at all. The duration of this phase varies lasting from a few months up to a year.

Scaffolding refers to the support required for a child to complete a task successfully. This support can be provided in many forms, for example, the teacher modelling the language required for a task; using prompt cards or concrete materials to contextualise the task; and encouraging children to work collaboratively.

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