Part 4: Supporting English language development (video transcript)

00:13 [Anne Stonehouse]

Children learning English as an additional language have differing experiences of English before starting in an early education and care service or school. For some children, this will be their first exposure to the English language. Whatever their degree of competency in English, children can learn effectively and competently when they have strong support from educators and teachers.

In schools, TESOL-qualified teachers and Multicultural Education Aides provide targeted programs to support English as an additional language learners with the acquisition of English. Some children are also eligible for intensive English language support through the New Arrivals Program (NAP) before they enroll in a mainstream school.

In early education and care services, bilingual early childhood educators and a language-rich curriculum support children’s acquisition of English.

01:08 [Nora Liang – Kindergarten Teacher, Springvale]

I would start with Mandarin or Cantonese with the families and let them understand. But for the children, I would do Mandarin, Cantonese and English as well, to slowly get them to speak more English and encourage them to speak more English in their environment. So, for example, I will say ‘let’s now go to wash our hands’, some children may not understand what is washing hands, so I’ll say ‘sai sau’ which means washing hands in Mandarin.

01:48 [Georgina Dearnaley – Preschool teacher, Kingsville Kindergarten]

It’s a lot of physical and non-verbal, I mean we do verbalise but a lot of non-verbal, you know like instructing and showing, and taking them over to say, the painting and sort of demonstrating.

02:01 [Anne Forbes – Leader Education, Kingsville Kindergarten]

And it’s just using, especially children with little English, using simple terms and using gestures and pictures to help describe what we’re wanting. We have learnt different sayings in different languages for some children.

02:19 [Amy Found – Part-time EAL teacher, St. Albans Primary School]

Part of my role is performing arts, and I have found in my experience that it’s a wonderful way to get the very younger children to move and speak and sing with confidence. It’s very important for children that are very young to play, and a lot of play includes role-playing and drama and dressing up and pretending to be, you know, playing with kitchens, doctor surgeries, and we might set up a hair-dressing salon for them to take money and practice those kinds of interaction skills. So they’re talking to each other all the time and practicing those communication skills that they need in real life.

Also, I feel that singing gets some of the phrasing nice and smooth. So some of the words that children learn, tend to be, as a new language, it tends to be a bit choppy. Singing kind of gets it a nice flow in the phrasing, so I always start the lesson off with a bit of singing. So then I might move into a game, so we might play a barrier game, so two children sitting back to back with blocks, one will make a pattern and then they will have to describe it to the other student, while the other student tries to make it and then they compare. Kids love those sorts of games, even the drawing one - so you give one student a picture, then there’s a barrier between them and they have to describe the picture to their friend and their friend has to draw it. So it’s getting a lot of the directional language, colour, shape, those really basic words that they need.

04:06 [Sian Malcher – Kindergarten Teacher, Springvale]

So, like, the other day they found a jellyfish toy, and we were talking about jellyfish, and we were saying ‘three jellyfish’. But I like to do it in more of an informal setting, because I find if you’ve got 30 children sitting on a mat and you’ve got two thirds of them that speak limited English or no English at all, then you’re sitting up there singing a song in a language they don’t understand or reading a book in a language they don’t understand and they’re just… that doesn’t engage them and doesn’t sort of help them. But if you can do it in a small setting, sing some songs together in a small, sort of two or three children in a context of what they’re playing at the time. So, that sort of really helps simple stories - that they can then be up close engaging with the book, helping turning pages, lifting flaps.

04:55 [Debbie David – Foundation Teacher, St. Albans Primary School]

I have quite a few Punjabi students, and they’re all different proficiency of English. So sometimes just to be comfortable they’ll interact in Punjabi just to start with. But one of them I actually encourage to speak in English to her friend, and she’ll start naming and pointing to things in the classroom. So although they’ve got the commonality of the language, she’s actually supporting her friend and it’s a comfortable way for her, there’s no pressure. The number one thing is routine. So at the start of the year you establish routine. So we use lots of visuals, gestures and a lot of repetition.

05:32 [Lisa Taverna– Foundation Teacher, St. Albans Primary School]

If there’s a child who English is their second language, and they’re perhaps, maybe a little, I don’t know if confused is [the right word], they’re not understanding your instructions or what the task has to do, and other children at the same, roughly the same level are, and you think OK that’s, you know that you have to dig a little deeper and think ‘is it EAL, or is it something else’. And that’s when we ask other people to come and observe, can you have a look, it might be just another staff member. Is it me or is it the way I’m speaking? We often evaluate ourselves and think ‘OK, is it the way I’m speaking, do I need to change what I’m doing?’

06:14 [Rachel Morgan– Foundation Teacher, Wilmot Rd Primary School]

I have a class aide in my class who speaks Arabic, so sometimes I find if I can’t talk to them in English, she’ll talk in Arabic and then we’ll try and bridge that confusion from Arabic to English.

06:27 [Mim Filippo– Literacy Coach, Wilmot Rd Primary School]

We have, of course, students start with varying needs. We assess them when they come in at the very beginning of the school year, so we already have a picture of the student. We know where they’re at in terms of their literacy level. We base the programs around their needs, so in order to develop their literacy skills what we’ll do is we’ll target group work. For example, if they don’t know any of the alphabet or the sounds we’ll target that as a whole class, and then further break it down to students who need that further assistance into small groups, to also further again into one-to-one assistance as well. So what we do in Prep and across the whole school, on a Monday we have Marvellous Monday, which, it’s an enquiry based focus and it’ll be hands-on. At the moment the children have been learning about their local community. So for the Prep’s it’s just the school basically at that level. So what we’ve done is we’ve taken them out for a walk, and we build the vocab from that, and then from that they’re able to talk about their experience, then write about their experience, and then use that to be able read about their experience.

Communication between myself and my colleagues is paramount, for example, with a student that I assessed this week, that student had no English, had virtually no understanding of what anyone was talking about. So, once I made that assessment I went back and I actually communicated that to all of the teachers in that building and told them that there is a very vulnerable student here who basically will not be able to understand what you are telling him. So, it’s one word utterances to him, or commands, and you virtually need to show him.

08:31 [Anne Stonehouse]

Assessment of children’s progress as they acquire skills in English is very important. The English as an Additional Language Developmental Continuum is one tool that teachers can use to assess children as they learn English. Educators in early education and care services can use the ‘Stages of English as an Additional Language’ developed by Dr Priscilla Clarke.

08:54 [Tracie Quigley – Assistant Principal, St. Albans Primary School]

But all the assessment, even in Prep, the assessments all done with every Prep child, no matter what their background whether it’s come from Refugee, so many of them have been in detention camps. So we can’t assume that they don’t have any skills or don’t know anything even though they can’t speak in English. In the Prep class classroom it would range from quite informal assessments, which are observations. Also, checklists, or crosschecks we call them. A requirement of the Department of Education is English Online. Every Prep child is assessed using that. So that’s a tool, online tool that we use to assess children’s pre-literacy skills, phonological awareness, things like that.

We will look at intervention. So, if there’s a language delay that we find in the first and second language, then Leanne our speech pathologist will start to see them. It’s not a very formal program, though, it’s more a play program just like in their… the children will develop their language skills through play, so it’s more like that.

09:57 [Sharon Thompson – Literacy EAL coordinator, Wilmot Rd Primary School]

The cohort of students we have at our school come from backgrounds where often the parents aren’t literate themselves, in their own language. So, education is something so exciting for these parents, and a lot of the time the parents learn alongside their children. They don’t have the confidence to even try to do English as such, but, you know, the kids can even give it back to them in their home language. So, they’re boosting their strengths both ways - they’re learning it in their own language and they’re learning a little bit of English along the way as well.