How technology can be used to promote academic use of language across the curriculum for more advanced learners of EAL at primary and secondary phases.

Introduction

Over the last two years, EAL specialist teachers from The Hampshire Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) have been involved in a partnership teaching programme with local primary and secondary schools. Throughout the project, EAL specialists worked alongside class-based practitioners to embed strategies for raising the achievement of more advanced learners of EAL within the mainstream curriculum, as well as in out-of-hours courses. A report by Ofsted (2005) confirmed growing evidence of the under-achievement of advanced bilingual learners as they progress through their education.

Whilst many of the approaches developed throughout the partnership teaching programme built on known good practice, there was a particular emphasis on encouraging the use of more formal types of thinking and talking as a prelude to writing. In a review of research around EAL teaching and learning, Kotler, A., Wegerif, R. and LeVoi, M. (2001) note that 'the importance of developing academic registers specific to academic success for EAL pupils must be recognized' (in Andrews, 2009).

Hampshire EMTAS practitioners are particularly worried about the reduced significance of speaking and listening in current governmental thinking. This concern has been identified by The National Association for the Teaching of English in its response to the draft reform of the National Curriculum, stating that in their view the proposal to remove speaking and listening from the primary English POS are 'in opposition to all the evidence and research which has shown the key role which speaking and listening plays in learning' (NATE, 2013).

Another significant element of this work related to the role of technology in providing a route into the curriculum for some learners as well as how digital devices can be used to stimulate, capture and replay oral

contributions. Wegerif (2004) comments that computers are endlessly patient and provide a focus for exploratory talk.

Initial impetus for the focus on more advanced EAL learners came via the 2009 DfES National Strategy materials entitled 'Ensuring the attainment of more advanced learners of EAL : CPD Modules.' These training materials feature many ideas for developing academic talk in the classroom.

We were mindful of the need to offer activities that represented the full range of challenge across Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002). Whilst some activities required learners to internalise and remember key vocabulary, others required pupils to use their analytical skills and to become creative through oral presentational talk and writing within particular text types. In response to 'message abundant' teaching (Gibbons, 2008), we were keen to make meaning explicit by offering a variety of tasks, effective modelling and utilising multi-modal approaches (audio, visual, kinaesthetic learning).

Setting up the partnership

The first step involved the identification of potential schools, year groups and teachers to be involved in the work. We invited senior managers along to an introductory training session and modelled a range of activities and strategies to illustrate the purpose of the project.

A typical partnership involved joint planning sessions between class teachers and EMTAS teachers, team teaching and occasional modelling of activities by the EAL specialist, whilst being observed by the class teacher. At the end the partnership both practitioners evaluated the effectiveness of the work and in many cases the findings were fed back to the school via a whole school staff meeting.

Alongside this, secondary advanced bilingual learners were invited to join after-school Language in the Curriculum (LinC) courses where the teaching of the formal academic language required to meet the demands of the classroom, was reinforced by EMTAS specialist teachers once per

week for 90 minutes. The use of ICT in addition to relevant content and a fun working atmosphere contributed to enthusing pupils to return week after week and helped to maximise the impact of this optional additional provision.

An example from a year 4 class

This sequence of lessons aimed to teach learners how to write 'explanation texts' and we decided to base the work on amazing contraptions.

To start the sequence of lessons we introduced the class to the children's game mousetrap and gave them the opportunity to put the game together and have a go at playing it in groups. We also obtained an explanation of how to play the game off *Wikipedia* and ran the text through *Wordle*. This provided an authentic word cluster that we used as a starter activity. We asked the children to pick out words that indicated what the topic was about and to predict the specific text type. They were able to comment on the tense, use of specific technical vocabulary as well as grammatical constructs such as active verbs and connectives that feature heavily in this type of writing.

Note that when practitioners use the Internet to source texts, practitioners should carefully consider whether the sophistication of language might be a barrier to some pupils, even those who at an advanced stage of learning EAL. Therefore, it is worth considering using alternative sources such as *Simple Wikipedia* which offers high content articles using simpler English.

Vocabulary building is a recurring theme for equipping learners with 'chunks of language' to support reading and to apply in their oral and written contributions. An explicit focus on vocabulary development,

where words are taught in context, will help pupils to 'secure the command of language that they require for high achievement, particularly at upper primary and secondary school' (Washbourne, 2013). *Formulator Tarsia* is powerful free software that allows a user to easily make card-based collaborative word games. One such activity we prepared using *Tarsia* is called 'Follow Me'. Played orally, each child is given a card containing a word and a definition that do not match each other. One pupil starts by reading a definition from their card and another child in the room who has the matching word calls it out, subsequently reading the next definition on their card. This continues till all words have been defined.

We also reinforced these same pieces of vocabulary by using the animation feature in *Power Point* to make a game we colloquially called 'Brucie's Generation Game'. Words and images are animated across the slide one by one and the pupils try to remember as many as possible. Learners reported that the association of word and image combined to aid memory. Using *Power Point* in this way it would also be possible to link in sound effects to reinforce learning.

Another activity required learners to sequence images taken from the breakfast scene in the Wallace and Gromit short film entitled 'The Wrong Trousers'. This was easily prepared by playing the video on a computer and pressing the 'print screen key' at various opportune moments. On each occasion a screenshot is saved to the clipboard which can then be imported into another application, such as a word processor or graphics program.

We also sourced an image of a wacky contraption called 'Patryck's Plentiful Pop-making Machine' which we enlarged to A1 size using free software called *PhotoRazor.* We placed this huge resource onto an accessible wall in the classroom. Using Mantra Lingua's *PENpal* technology and *Talking Stickers* we encouraged every child in the class to record an explanation of how each

particular part of the machine worked. Since it is easy to overwrite recordings using *PENpal*, every child was able to produce a good quality oral recording. This activity promoted the use of a more academic, presentational, style of talk than might have been achieved just through unstructured group work. Before recording, each child needed to listen to the previous recording in order to provide an appropriate connective to ensure a natural flow of dialogue. It also naturally modelled other conventions such as use of present tense, technical vocabulary and imperative language. At the end it was possible to play back the whole sequence of recordings which enabled everyone to hear the overall cohesiveness of the explanation text.

We found a range of Heath Robinson contraptions through *Google Images* and asked pupils to work in groups to informally decide what they were for and how they worked. We then asked each group to choose one of the Heath Robinson contraptions or to create their own unique design. Using a photocopier the contraptions were enlarged, cut up into different sections, annotated and sequenced inside the pages of a *Talking Photo Album.* Next, as a 'Talk for Writing' approach, we asked the pupils to record an explanation of how the machine worked onto each page of the *Talking Photo Album*. The opportunity to replay recordings, along with the visuals and snippets of text, acted as a bridge to the writing process, enabling pupils to be relatively more successful than they would have been through unsupported, independent writing.

An example from a LinC session

The LinC courses consist of units of work planned especially by the EMTAS teaching team. These units are based around central themes which are current and likely to interest the young people for whom they are planned. As students embark on units entitled 'Mobile phones' or 'Travel and Tourism' they reinforce skills such as writing to explain, presenting a balanced argument and much more through the use of academic talk. Recently, the introduction of an iPad meant that students were able to approach their learning in a new interactive way.

One particular unit of work where the iPad was an integral part of the teaching and learning was based on the theme of the Olympics. By the end of this unit, students were required to write a newspaper article on a budding athlete interviewed at the local college. The whole unit provided the scaffolds and modelled the sophisticated language with a view to enable students to confidently write a detailed piece in an appropriate genre and using interesting varied vocabulary.
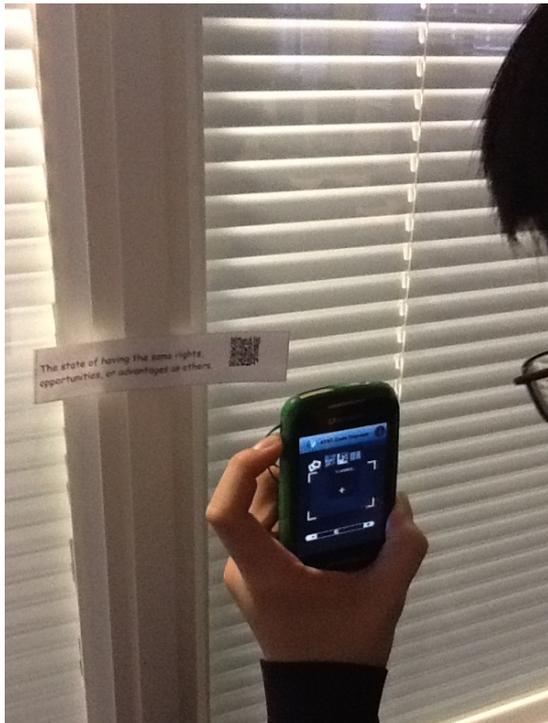
As with the series of Year 4 lessons detailed above, *Wordle* played a crucial part in helping students to not only predict the theme for their unit but also to identify the recurrent subject specific language of the scheme of work. To this end, a whole newspaper article on the Paralympian Ellie Simmons was pasted into *Wordle*. The result triggered a conversation (using Think-Talk phrases) not only on the subject of our work but also on some key vocabulary.

This exercise was crucial in uncovering important language and its meaning. Whilst paper dictionaries were previously used for this kind of task it quickly became apparent that they took away the fun element of the exercise in a class where students must be kept on their toes if they want to attend regularly. Therefore, the use of D*ictionary.com Dictionary & Thesaurus* app provided a quicker and more attractive format for students to look up the meaning of key words. This was especially true of the boys for whom using a dictionary was no longer a chore. Note that the same app is also a thesaurus and translator and can therefore be used in a range of situations, including supporting learners to use more varied and exciting language.

Wordle and dictionary apps were not the only means used to help students access more sophisticated language at word-level. One popular activity at the course is word races whereby students are given a card showing key terms that are important to comprehend in order to easily access the rest of the session or indeed the unit. Hidden around the classroom are slips of paper with definitions of these key words. In pairs, students find the definitions and write them on their card by the appropriate word. This activity has always been one of the students' favourites because of the element of competition and the need to be out

of their seats. However, in classes with students of varying abilities, the need to provide support quickly arose because whilst most students could perform the task unaided, others found the task of matching definitions with certain keywords challenging. As a result, the use of QR codes (square bar codes most often seen on adverts) was trialled.

QR codes can easily be created online and for free. The codes can be scanned using a QR code reader app on the iPad or any other mobile device, and allow access to text, visuals and websites. For the purpose of the word races and in keeping with the idea of providing students with clues whilst remaining fun and enjoyable, a QR code was created for each definition. To do this, multiple choice answers were entered in a QR code creator online. This triggered the website to generate a code which was then copied and pasted next to the appropriate definition. This was repeated for each definition. During the exercise, students who found particular definitions difficult simply used the iPad and sometimes their own mobile devices to scan the code, read the suggested clue to finally attempt to match it to a specific key term.

Following word-level activities, students moved on to rehearsing phrases to use for their final written task. These are often modelled through activities such as Dictogloss where pupils hear a piece of text several times (3 normally) whilst listening actively by making notes of the language used for specific purposes. For example, students may listen out for and note down connectives, the language used to give examples, the language used to involve the listener and much more. The aim of the activity is for groups of students to then recreate a cohesive text using the phrases used in the model as examples.

This strategy comes from the National Strategy materials which inspired the primary and secondary projects as well as the LinC courses and is one of the EMTAS teaching team's favourites. As ICT is also a favourite at Hampshire EMTAS, it naturally became an integral part of this Dictogloss strategy – specifically for oral work. Indeed, one essential element of Dictogloss is the oral work which needs to take place after the listening and before the writing. The idea is that before being able to write in the tone and register of the model, students need to be able to speak it hence pair work is always planned in to allow learners an opportunity to rehearse the language and a chance to 'talk as writers'.

To support this during the LinC courses, a range of recording devices were trialled to provide students with a platform for their oral work. This meant that students could listen to their pair work time and time again, either to refine their thoughts or to remind themselves of ideas generated during their conversations. *PENpal's* can be used to this end and they worked surprisingly well with older students. iPad apps can also be used as voice recorders. For instance, Dictaphone apps can be downloaded for free. However, what was eventually favoured at LinC was the *Book Creator* app which not only allows students to record themselves but to also make notes and create a book to open in *iBooks*. Another added advantage of this app is the fact that LinC tutors were able to scaffold students' oral work by entering suggestions on the area where they would eventually record their work. This proved particularly helpful as visual support since pupils could solely focus on the iPad rather than having to look on the board or a piece of paper and back to the iPad.

Book Creator is a great app for students to eventually generate writing, however, *ComicLife* also proved to be extremely popular, thanks to its capacity to include photos as well as fun templates, speech bubbles and stickers. Just like Book Creator, *Comic Life* can be prepared in
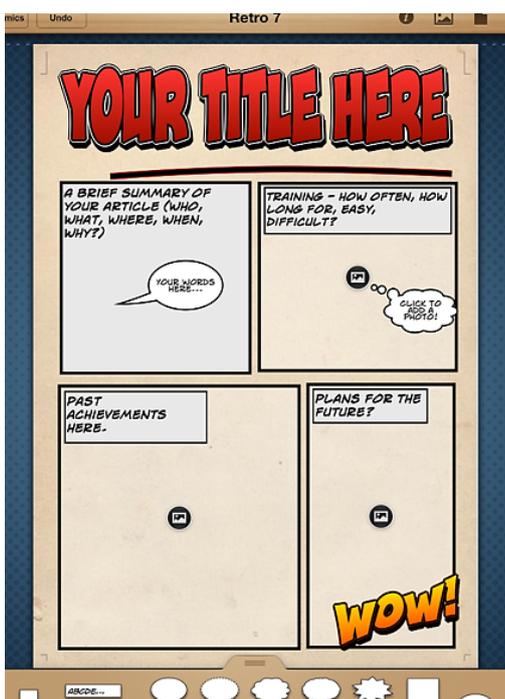
advance by teachers who can scaffold pupils' writing by suggesting the content of paragraphs.

Overall, using ICT during LinC meant that the sessions felt that little bit more special as students were able to use devices they may not necessarily have access to in school. In addition, students felt more enthused about writing which they found more enjoyable when able to perform on a tablet such as the iPad. This was particularly true of students who were understandably tired after a day at school and who would perhaps have preferred to solely engage with word races and been more reluctant to write by using a pen and paper.

Resources

PosterRazor - http://posterazor.sourceforge.net
TalkingPEN (PENpal) and Talking Stickers -
http://uk.mantralingua.com/products/penpal-penpal
Formulator Tarsia -
http://www.mmlsoft.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=9&Itemid=10
Simple English Wikipedia - http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page
Wordle – http://www.wordle.net/create
Talking Photo Albums - http://www.talkingproducts.com/recordable-cards-gifts/talking-photo-albums-gifts.html
Book Creator –
https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/book-creator-for-ipad/id442378070?mt=8
Comic Life –
https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/comic-life/id432537882
QR Codes - http://www.qrstuff.com/
Electronic dictionaries –
https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/dictionary.com-ictionary/id308750436

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