Module 3

Understanding additional language acquisition

Introduction

The process of learning an additional language

This is a summary of some key points about learning in an additional language. More information can be found in the *Introduction* booklet of the *English Language Learning Progressions (ELLP).*

- Learning an additional language is a long process. It can be seen as having two main areas, social and academic. Social language is for communicating with people in both everyday and educational contexts. Academic language is for learning in the curriculum areas. These two types of language are sometimes called Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS usually take less time to acquire than CALP.

- It is very important to support and encourage the use of the first language when students are learning an additional language. Learners who maintain their first language and continue to develop their CALP generally achieve better in the additional language than students who have not maintained their first language. Accessing prior knowledge, such as concepts already understood in first language, helps students to learn language and content in the new language. Encouraging thinking and discussion in first language and providing bilingual support where possible will also help learners.

- In the early stages of additional language acquisition, most learners will go through three phases. Firstly there may be a "silent period", usually only a few weeks at most, in which they try and soak up the sounds of the new language and assign meanings to these sounds, but will not produce any of the target language themselves. Secondly, they will mainly produce "chunks" of language either heard as one "item" (such as 'How are you?' heard and understood as an intact phrase used to greet people), or chunks based on learned sentence patterns, e.g. "My mother's name is …, My father's name is…., My brother's name is….." Thirdly, learners will produce original chunks of language, but use simplified structures and vocabulary.

- In the later stages of additional language learning, learners will gradually develop a bank of vocabulary and understanding of the syntax or grammar of the language and rely less on using learned patterns and models. As time goes on, learners need ongoing teaching of language patterns and vocabulary for each subject area.

- It is natural for learners to use "interlanguage" as they acquire an additional language. This means that they will blend words and structures from their first language into the language they are learning. They are likely to switch between one language and another, a process sometimes described as "code-switching". Learners who have access to bilingual support and who are encouraged to process ideas in their first language, especially in the earlier phases of learning a new language, are likely to make faster progress in the new language.

- Learners of different ages bring different concepts, knowledge, experience and learning strategies to their language learning. It is important to help learners become aware of different cognitive (thinking) and metacognitive (thinking about

thinking) strategies to assist their own learning. Each *ELLP* booklet has a chart explaining these types of strategies, in the section *Developing Independent Learners.* Each learner has a unique set of cultural and personal knowledge and experiences, so we should use these to develop their learning.

Different kinds of language learners and factors affecting their learning

There are many different kinds of language learners, and many different factors that affect the way they learn and how well they learn (see *ELLP Introduction* pp 6-10).

Each learner's starting point and rate of progress will be determined by a number of factors, including the following:

- the strength of the English language learner's oral language and literacy in their first language
- the age of the learner
- the learner's previous education and language learning experience
- the match between familiar and new approaches to teaching and learning
- the similarities and differences between English and their first language
- how much English they have used before and how many English speakers they have been in contact with
- what type of person they are (e.g. outgoing or shy).

Module 3   Task 1   Note Grids

Purpose: Note Grids are a useful information transfer task (changing information from one source to another, in a different form). They encourage learners to focus on the key messages of the text.

Working with young learners

Teacher aides/bilingual tutors can use words and pictures to help young learners use note grids, and can help them record and read back ideas.

Individual task

Use the **Note Grid Task Template Resource 3A** to record how the some of the learners you work with are affected by some of these factors.

Write down the learner's name and underneath, in the same column, write briefly what kind of learner they are (see *ELLP Introduction* pp 8-10). In each Factor column, write down one of the factors that applies to this learner and how it affects their learning. What can you do in your teaching to try and ensure it has no negative impact on their learning?

Workshop task

Complete the grid and then discuss it with a colleague. How will this information impact on your ways of working with this student?

These factors could also be analysed by using a **Diamond Grid** (see below).

Module 3   Task 2   Diamond Grid

Purpose: The Diamond Grid is a useful oral language tool as it encourages **turn-taking** in oral interaction. It also encourages learners to rank informatoin in order and explain the order of their choices. Information is recorded in each square or "face". Each person takes a turn to say something about one face of the diamond.

Working with young learners

You could place pictures and single words on the grid in English, first language, or both languages, to support young learners, e.g. topic – what's most important about cats – catch birds, funny, catch mice, friendly, cuddly, make you sneeze.

Individual task

Use the Diamond Grid to reflect on how these factors affect the learners you are working with and how you might change your ways of working with these students.

Workshop task

In pairs, work your way through the grid with each person taking a section and briefly discuss how this factor impacts on a learner you are working with and what solutions are available.

The 13 small diamond shapes shown in Resource 3B contain factors that affect individual language learners, e.g. previous education. There are two diamonds marked as "Own idea" so that teacher aides and bilingual tutors can add in specific points about the students they work with.

- Cut out each factor square in Resource 3B.
- Rank the factors, placing the most important at the top on the blank diamond grid, Resource 3C.
- There is only space for 9 factors on the blank diamond grid.
- Working with your coordinating teacher, decide which 4 factors to leave out, e.g. those that are least important for the students your are working with.
- Discuss with your coordinating teacher why you placed certain factors at the top of the grid, e.g. Why did you consider these as most important?

Good practice

Being an effective teacher aide/bilingual tutor means taking the time to find out the educational background of each learner you work with, and taking the time to observe what sort of learner they are. Knowing this information will help you discuss this student's background effectively with classroom and mainstream subject teachers and develop ways to focus on the student's learning strengths and weaknesses.

Resources

The key document for guidance about additional language acquisition is the *English Language Learning Progressions.*

Next steps

1. Make sure that you have gathered the information on each of your learners about their educational background, their level of first language education, their attitudes to learning and other information. One school uses an exercise book for each of their English language learners as a portfolio to record observations and information and to keep work over a year. These portfolios include information about the learner in mainstream classes, not just the ESOL class/group. These portfolios form part of the teacher appraisal system in the school as the teacher is expected to comment on them during the appraisal process, to show how well they know their students' learning needs.

2. You can use the table, Knowing the Learner, page 4, Section 2 of the *Refugee Handbook for Schools* to guide your information gathering. Record this information in a portfolio for each student that you see at each school.

Module 4 is about effective teaching and learning, self-access learning and vocabulary development.

Preparation: Discuss briefly with your coordinating teacher what they understand about these terms and how they are incorporated into their programmes.

Module 3 Task Template   Note Grid

Learner's name	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Learner 1 Kind of learner			
Learner 2 Kind of learner			
Learner 3 Kind of learner			

Strength of oral language and literacy in first language(s)

Age

Previous education

Match between familiar and new approaches to teaching and learning

Similarities between English and the L1

Learner's language learning experience

Learner's exposure to English

Opportunities to interact with native speakers of English

Affective factors, shyness, previous trauma, etc

Cognitive learning ability

(Own idea)

Physical disability

(Own idea)