

Meeting the Needs of Young Children with English as an Additional Language

Research Informed Practice



A **David Fulton** Book

Malini Mistry and Krishan Sood

Meeting the Needs of Young Children with English as an Additional Language

Drawing on the latest research into how young children learn, this book considers how early years practitioners can best meet the needs of children with English as an Additional Language. It examines the factors that influence children's learning including parents and the family, the environment, health and well-being, curriculum, play and relationships and aims to challenge misconceptions, assumptions and stereotypes.

Featuring case studies and reflective questions, the chapters explore a range of important topics including:

- Language learning for children with EAL
- The historical concept and modern reconceptualisation of EAL
- How to develop and use Culturally Appropriate Pedagogy
- Regulation and performativity, and their implications for children with EAL
- Leading learning for children with EAL

Meeting the Needs of Young Children with English as an Additional Language is essential reading for students and practitioners wanting to promote an inclusive culture where different languages, cultures and religions are accepted and celebrated.

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Malini said to me one summer day, ‘I need to do something’ ... – after this book, you must be joking!

‘Life is a song – sing it. Life is a game – play it. Life is a challenge – meet it. Life is a dream – realize it. Life is a sacrifice – offer it. Life is love – enjoy it.’

(Sri Sathya Sai Baba (Brainy quote, 2013))

Introduction – structure of the book

Introduction

Rising immigration to England since the 1960s, particularly from the commonwealth countries, has led to an increased number of children in Early Years settings and primary schools, many of whom come from a range of backgrounds with a plethora of different languages other than English. The 2018 school census clearly shows consistently rising numbers of immigrant children since 2006 with 21.1 per cent of children exposed to a language other than English as their first or home language (DfE, 2018: 10). In this context, English as an Additional Language (EAL) can be defined as those children who speak English in Addition to their home or first language(s) (Mistry and Sood, 2015). Furthermore, the DfE (2018) emphasise that children with EAL consistently have access to, and regularly use a language other than English at home or with their family. This implies that other language(s) are used instead of English as the main form of communication outside the setting. It also suggests that many of these bilingual and multilingual children are well immersed in different languages and have what we call the three C's, capacity, capability and competencies of good communication skills, which settings should be aware of. Therefore, settings need to capitalise on these rich living experiences such diversity brings to them regardless of whether they are mono-cultural or multicultural.

Children with EAL can also be referred to or labelled in different ways such as: bilingual children, plurilingual children, multilingual children, and children with English as a Second Language (ESL). Each of these labels has a different meaning (defined and discussed in Chapter 5) which needs to be understood in relation to the Early Years context. The number of children with EAL varies between Early Years settings depending on their geographical location (Strand *et al.*, 2015). We consider Early Years settings to include: toddler groups, nurseries, sure start centres, and reception classes in primary and infant schools. Generally, these Early Years settings follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework (DfE, 2017) guidance for children aged

birth to five to help support children's learning experiences. To aid transition, in some schools this Early Years phase extends to Year 1 classes within the National Curriculum.

What this book is about

We believe that this book is the first of its kind that looks critically at the roots of provision and practice associated with children who have EAL. This book goes beyond identifying a range of quick fix strategies aimed at short term solutions in meeting the needs of children with EAL. Rather, it is about focusing on a deeper philosophical and theoretical understanding of how children learn and more importantly how learning needs to be adapted for young children with EAL. This is because all children with EAL do not have the same needs all the time. It explores controversial, contested issues like categorising children by labelling them and the effect of this on children's learning and willingness to learn when they also have EAL. There are also references to policy contexts, various educational acts, and documentation that have influenced changes in the Early Years sector and therefore provision and practice. We believe that with a strong foundation of understanding how children with EAL grow, learn and develop, practitioners are much better placed in meeting the needs of this diverse group of children without relying on random strategies for a short term solution.

What this book covers

This book covers two key concepts. First, children with EAL and second, the Early Years phase. A range of philosophical and theoretical understandings associated with these concepts are presented to heighten awareness of what it means to meet the needs of children with EAL in your setting regardless of personal and societal assumptions (Mistry and Sood, 2010). More importantly, this book focuses on the context of Early Years and how this context has changed over time to become a distinct learning phase in its own right, alongside government intervention and control which has an impact on provision.

A multitude of issues are deconstructed and explored within the chapters, such as philosophy and theory related to school readiness, theory associated with language learning and how this is applicable to children learning EAL, and the impact of categorising children through labelling them whilst they try to assimilate and learn in a socially just environment. Additionally, this book covers how theory can link to current practice in order to better understand the roots of learning. This book is a deeper and more rooted version of our previous book *English as an Additional Language in the Early Years: Linking theory to practice*.

Structure and organisation

This book is organised into ten chapters which are progressive in time and nature. Chapter 1 is the introduction which sets the structure for this book.

Chapter 2 sets the scene through a brief historical context which mentions a range of issues that are discussed in later chapters in more detail.

Chapter 3 starts at the beginning in terms of looking at what philosophers and theorists perceive about the way in which children learn best, and how their ideology can be linked to meet the needs of children with EAL to ensure they make progress.

Chapter 4 explores the educational regime that children with EAL have had in the past and currently have, and the factors that have influenced this. This chapter also looks at the impact of various policies and educational acts that have informed the way in which education for children with EAL is perceived and translated into provision and practice.

Chapter 5 aims to reconceptualise what is meant by the term EAL and the associated debate with terminology. This chapter investigates various terms associated with children who have EAL and the notion that these terms are used interchangeably to suggest that they all mean the same, implying that all children with EAL have the same needs.

Chapter 6 investigates a range of language learning theory which is essential for all practitioners working with young children. How these theories are translated into practice can be debated, especially if evidence suggests fluency in one language can support learning in a new language. We argue that transference of skills from different languages with different sounds and symbols to the English language may not happen.

Chapter 7 investigates the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy and how this is particularly relevant for children with EAL to ensure they make progress.

Chapter 8 charts the historical changes that have taken place within the Early Years sector from no government intervention to a culture of control and surveillance to ensure children achieve certain targets in core areas of learning, regardless of their well-being.

Chapter 9 looks at the notion of performativity in the Early Years. This is particularly important with Ofsted (Office of Standards in Education) continuously monitoring standards and targets in settings which are used to illustrate how effective practitioners are in relation to improving children's outcomes.

Finally, Chapter 10 brings together the themes of this book by looking at being an effective strategic Early Years leader because they have the power to change and make a difference for children with EAL through leading by example.

Who is this book for?

This book is aimed at all those who work in the Early Years and the primary sector. It is particularly useful for leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, nursery nurses, key workers, bilingual assistants, students, trainee teachers, and parents working in settings. Additionally, it can be a set reader for students studying at undergraduate and post graduate level on a range of different courses that involve working with children both QTS and non QTS. This book is also aimed at all those who support children with EAL within and beyond the Early Years phase.

What this book aims to achieve

We have written this book to give a deeper conceptual understanding regarding not only the roots of learning, but also how children with EAL can be different in terms of their learning needs (especially if they have language learning needs). We want to encourage our readers to move away from the notion that because Early Years is developmental, no effort needs to be made to help children access learning as they will eventually assimilate and learn. Rather, it is about seeing each child as a unique, special human being with a range of strengths that inform their character and personality regardless of their English language skills. More importantly, we hope this book helps to support the reader in terms of how practice and provision can be adapted to meet the different needs for children with EAL for long term gain. Finally, we hope to give readers a depth of understanding and critical reflection in addition to some suggested strategies.

The inspiration and passion for this book stemmed from the various perspectives and experiences of the authors who are multilingual practitioners themselves and want to share their knowledge from different cultural perspectives to support the practice of others for their EAL children.

In summary

In summary, this book aims to show that philosophical and theoretical thinking should inform practice for all children. Children with EAL in Early Years do not require one single strategy that will be the golden thread to enable them to become fluent in the English language overnight or to open up access to learning. It is many different strategies that all pull together over time to encourage children to make connections in their learning to broaden their understanding of the world to help them be successful. The emphasis here is on the importance of good teaching based on research informed practice regardless of

whether a child has EAL or not, through having a secure theoretical foundation of how children learn, develop and grow.

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Historical context

When you have finished reading this chapter you will

- be aware of how the changing historical and political climate has had an impact on the provision for children with English as an Additional Language within the context of Early Years
- understand the impact of categorising and labelling children with EAL

Chapter outline

This chapter will set the scene for the rest of the book by beginning with a historical overview of children with EAL followed by a short discussion on the impact of rising numbers of children with EAL. There will then be an overview of the context of children with EAL and how increased immigration has led to categorisation and labelling. The focus then moves onto how Early Years education in England has gone through a complete change from non-existent intervention from the government to current regulation with key emphasis on marketisation and performativity (discussed in Chapter 8) through a goal orientated curriculum. The current inclusion agenda implies that the needs of all children should be met including those children with EAL, but how and to what extent these needs are met can be contested and debated. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief overview of some of the challenges associated with meeting the needs of children with EAL.

Historical overview of children with EAL

Children who have EAL can come from a variety of different backgrounds ranging from asylum seekers to economic migration, as well as migration for other reasons. It is important to note that children with EAL can also include those children who are born and raised in England with a different first language(s) other than English. For example, a family could fluently use a

different language at home other than English, especially if a child is part of an extended family or the family decide that they would prefer to use their mother tongue rather than English.

After the end of World War II the rebuilding of the British economy required immigrant workers, but this appeal for workers was directly aimed at white migrants from Europe who had generally dominated migration to Britain. Post war migrants from the commonwealth countries like India, Pakistan and the Caribbean also began to increase especially from the 1960s. This was partly due to the British Nationality Act of 1948 which enabled people of commonwealth countries to have the right to live and work in the UK implying they were not subject to the same rules of immigration controls as those from outside the commonwealth (BBC, 2014).

After Britain joined the European Union in 1973 there was greater freedom of movement between European countries. Hence, migration to England from these countries increased and therefore different first languages became more evident. According to Drummond (2014) some of the most common first languages today include: Polish, Romanian, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and French in addition to Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, and Mandarin Chinese. Historically, this variety of first or home languages was not as evident as it is today suggesting the group of children now termed as having EAL has become very diverse. Therefore, the misconception that children with EAL generally come from a few selected countries around the world, has now been dispelled.

Rising numbers of children with EAL

The number of children with EAL in English settings is over one million and rising (Drummond, 2014). This means that with approximately a fifth of the child population speaking a different language(s) (as indicated in the introduction), practice in Early Years settings and primary schools need to adapt to the changing needs of children especially in relation to strategies used for English language learning. In Early Years practitioners need to make sure learning is cognitively demanding but not linguistically demanding to enable children with EAL to participate in order to help them access learning to make progress.

Children with EAL come from a different range of backgrounds and situations each with their own particular ways of life. For example, a child with EAL could be a new arrival from employment associated migration, to a child from a refugee camp, to a child from a war-torn country seeking asylum. Although in the 1960s migration to England was mostly from the commonwealth countries, from the late 1990s onwards, this trend was taken over from Eastern European countries. Reasons for migration to England are varied and, in some cases, complicated. Today, the pattern of migration is dynamic and changing and children with EAL do not just come to England from a only few

select countries around the world anymore, and the trend is more localised in that there is no set pattern across England as to which countries migration is dominated from. This means that as different languages and cultures resulting from migration began to increase in Britain, the non-white population also began to increase and become more visible in society. This increase in different people in society has led to categorisation, labelling and even racism.

Context of children with EAL in Early Years

Early Years is a crucial phase of learning for children because in this stage the foundations are set for building future learning. Early Years (EY) is the age phase for pupils aged birth to five. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework (DfE, 2017) is government guidance for registered EY settings in England. These settings include young children's groups, play groups, nurseries, sure start centres, and primary schools with nursery and reception classes, all of which play a critical role in shaping pupils' identity as learners (Bruner, 1996). Starting in Early Years, high quality education (DfE, 2016) can open up learning opportunities and enhance life experiences. How children learn is often influenced by the home and setting culture, thus knowledge of this is critical for leaders and practitioners in ensuring planning and provision is effective in meeting needs including for those children with EAL.

With rising migration to England, some children with EAL can have very little, or no English language fluency when starting Early Years provision. This does not mean that these children have no language skills at all, or that they do not understand, it simply means that they can be perceived to be at a slight disadvantage compared to their monolingual peers in terms of accessing the opportunities created from the EYFS framework because these are in English. Therefore, children with EAL need extra effort and support to help them catch up to their peers especially in terms of early English vocabulary associated with speaking. According to Hulstijn and Bossers' (1992) young children's vocabulary can be a good predictor of reading comprehension but we know that this may not always be the case as some children with EAL can read English fluently without actually understanding meaning. Furthermore, early experiences through play with phonological awareness can have an impact on children's decoding skills (whereby print is translated to sound). For children with EAL this means that they will need time and adjusted learning to catch up to their monolingual peers in terms of the English language. Gregory (1996) argues that phonological skills from home language(s) in the pre-school can transfer to learning English in the setting environment. However, we argue that this may not always be the case as this can be dependent on the home language in use. For example, languages like Mandarin, Urdu and Arabic have very different letter shapes and sounds and therefore there is no direct comparison or correspondence to letters and sounds in the English alphabet, meaning

phonological skills transfer can be problematic. This is further supported by Brisk and Harrington (2000) who suggest that although vocabulary development is important within Early Years, children with EAL may not have the background knowledge that gives clues to the meaning of text especially if the same words can be used in different contexts with different meanings.

Most importantly, just because children with EAL are not speaking much (or any English) it does not mean that they are not absorbing the language and learning taking place around them. In this respect, the knowledge and experiences provided in an Early Years setting are crucial in ensuring young children have access to learning English in a variety of different ways especially through play and modelling.

Why and how children with EAL are categorised

All young children, including children with EAL have the same right and entitlement to access a broad, balanced and varied curriculum regardless of their proficiency in the English language. In many settings today children can be grouped according to ability especially for literacy and numeracy to aid differentiation in learning. This can also be evident within the context of some Early Years settings for group activities in areas of learning like early number and phonics. Although we can argue that grouping ideally should not take place in Early Years, we are aware that even discreetly, some form of grouping may take place in relation to children's ability.

One assumption that can be made about children with EAL is that these children do not understand or that they do not have any language skills especially if they are not fluent in English (Mistry and Sood, 2010). If this is the case, then children with EAL could be placed either in the lowest ability group or the special needs group suggesting a disregard for the knowledge and skills they already have and placing these children at a direct disadvantage. Furthermore, there could be a situation whereby practitioners have so much pressure from Key Stage 1 in terms of key skills that young children need to acquire by the end of the reception year that they do not have time to make the effort to meet the needs of children with EAL, who may require personal adaptations in learning.

The key point here is that children with EAL should be grouped according to their cognitive ability and potential rather than their proficiency in the English language including reading, writing, speaking and listening. A number of suggestions are offered for this:

- Adults in the setting need to model aspects of language correctly especially spoken language including tense and grammar
- Young children need good role models to observe and learn from and this may be more evident with more confident and more able children

- Use of words and pictures to help support connections in children's thinking
- Making the context of learning clear so that children with EAL can see how similar words can have different meanings in different contexts
- Promote higher order thinking skills such as the use of gentle effective questioning to understand children's reasoning

The strategies above need to be carefully thought through in relation to how groupings or pairs for learning through play are constructed. Perhaps it may not be effective to withdraw young children with EAL for intensive phonics or number interventions just to meet the required Early Learning Goals (ELGs) all the time (DfE, 2018). We also agree that, as suggested by Vygotsky (1978) the social nature of learning through play in the Early Years needs greater emphasis to ensure that children with EAL do not feel excluded from their peers in relation to learning.

In addition, it is important to recognise that children with EAL do not form one homogenous category (discussed later) and therefore there are differences within the EAL group which need to be first, recognised and second, understood so that provision is matched accordingly. Each sub group under the umbrella of EAL has different characteristics and needs which in turn influence how this group of children is categorised and even labelled.

Labelling of children with EAL

Children who speak a different language or languages can be labelled in different ways like bilingual, multilingual, plurallingual, and EAL. Sometimes the issue here is that all these terms are assumed to have the same meaning, when in fact they are all very different, as discussed in Chapter 5. As mentioned earlier, EAL is defined as children learning English in addition to their own language(s), but the issue here is that by labelling children as EAL immediately implies that these children have a learning problem associated with the English language. Here, labelling a child as having EAL focuses our mind on the issues associated with helping them to learn or acquire English rather than looking at the child as a human being and everything positive they bring into the setting. Additionally, the implication here is that before any labels are applied, we need to be aware of what individual children are capable of, because sometimes children with EAL can be very fluent in all aspects of English but they do not want to share this knowledge with practitioners yet.

This theory of labelling stems from Becker (1963) and is associated with social constructivism which aims to explain the reasons for certain types of behaviour by individuals in society towards others. In the context of education, this theory is about how practitioners can apply labels to their children in terms

of their academic ability, educational need or behaviour. Furthering the labelling theory is the theory of regenerative shaming by Braithwaite (1989) which explores the difference between the individual being stigmatised and regenerative shaming without being labelled. Although these theories have the clearest links to the field of criminology, they can also be connected to children who are labelled as having EAL in education as these children can be made to feel ashamed of being different so all they want to do is to be the same as their dominant monolingual peers. This is illustrated by the following case study.

Case study 2.1

Ram was a 3-year-old boy in a nursery with Bengali as his first language. Although he was not a new arrival, he only knew a few limited words in English as English was not used at home. However, with word picture cues, he was rapidly picking up key words in the nursery like toast, jam, apples – the words used during snack time. In addition, he was also picking up a range of other words like play time, snack time, choosing, reading time which determined a particular routine.

Despite his rapid English language development, he was labelled ‘the EAL boy’ by the practitioners in the nursery and was also referred to as ‘the EAL boy’ by practitioners when discussions took place. During a play activity in the water tray he was referred to by other children as ‘Ram the EAL boy’ because they had overheard Ram being addressed in this way by staff. One child asked Ram ‘what does EAL mean? does it mean brown?’ Ram had no idea or the English language skills to formulate an answer so he just shrugged his shoulders. As the year progressed, Ram tended to copy what others were doing rather than choosing activities himself because he did not want to be different from the others.

Key point

- The terminology applied by practitioners towards the child has also transpired to being used by other children without understanding exactly what it means, leading to shaming the child or the child feeling embarrassed about their differences.

Although the application of labels can be useful in determining the support required for particular needs of children in the context of education, the continued use of labels can be contested. One implication of labelling is that once a label is applied to a child, they may be treated in accordance with the label by others. Furthermore, as suggested by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) children with EAL may also associate themselves with the label in terms of their identity

and self-worth as they may feel that they will always have issues with the English language.

In Early Years if a child is labelled, then there is a danger that the label can stick regardless of the growth and development of the child. This means that early labelling can be harmful and in some cases children can have a label attached to them throughout all of primary education. Sometimes, this EAL label can be used as a reason for children with EAL not achieving in line with the rest of their peers. Children with EAL could be fluent in one or more other languages, therefore at times it takes them time to process in their mind how to translate what they want to say, or how to say what they want to in the correct way in English as illustrated by the following scenario:

Case study 2.2

Ria was a 4-year-old girl in a reception class. She was fluent in Gujarati at home and knew some words and phrases in English. After starting school her mother noticed that during their conversations at home, Ria would use English words for anything she did not know a Gujarati word for. Ria would use the same strategy at school whereby she would use Gujarati to gain the teachers attention. After being told by the teacher to only speak in English, Ria became quiet and reserved, only choosing to speak with other children during play and away from the teacher's earshot. This meant that every time the teacher asked Ria to speak, she would clam up trying to think about how to say what she needed to in the correct way in English so that her teacher would not be angry with her. As a result of this thinking or processing time that Ria took, she was labelled as an underachiever as she was slower in her communication.

Two years later, Ria was one of the most able children in her class in all subjects and was noted as one of the top achievers in the school.

The danger of attaching a label to a child without really knowing their needs is that different kinds of needs could be overlooked such as issues with hearing or a disability. However, it can also be argued that attaching a label means that practitioners may find it easier to differentiate learning. The important point here is that if children are labelled, then this needs to be used in a positive way to support them rather than the case of Ria.

Key points

- Find out what children can do first rather than focusing on the problems or extra effort associated with teaching them English.
- Not all children require support for learning English, therefore, for these children the term EAL is simply as per the definition.

Norwich and Koutsouris (2017) argue in favour of replacing the language of labelling with the capability approach, which is more positive. They suggest the need to focus on the capability of individuals not on their identity, which is a much more ethical way to behave and act. So, language can be a powerful ideological tool that can express assumptions, stigmatise people and can also exclude people.

How Early Years has changed

Education is constantly changing and Early Years is no exception to this. For many years Early Years education in England has been ignored by government intervention with the assumption that young children should be seen and not heard. Historically, little government intervention in Early Years education has existed. Hence, regimes of truth were originally dependent on individual philanthropists until regulation following the 1988 Education Reform Act, whereby the introduction of a focused market-orientated approach to education led to a greater degree of central regulation focusing on performance and on-going debates between key founders who favoured a more child centred approach and policy makers focusing on school effectiveness through directed learning (Woodhead, 1989), measurement of progress, targets and competition between institutions.

However, with the aim of improving quality and raising standards the British government began to intervene in the Early Years sector through first, the introduction of the desirable learning outcomes in 1996 (SCAA, 1996), which was a set of learning goals to help gain some consistency in the Early Years sector. Those desirable learning outcomes were later revised several times to what we now know as the seventeen Early Learning Goals (DfE, 2017) which implies a goal orientated curriculum that young children must achieve.

Since its introduction, the Early Years framework has been in constant debate between policy makers who believe that education is about school effectiveness and standards, and those philosophers, theorists and pioneers who believe that Early Years education should be child centred and should focus on children's well-being and development rather than a performing towards a goal orientated curriculum (discussed in more detail in Chapter 9). As Early Years provision in England is rooted in the socio-political context of any one point in time, this may mean the diversity of children such as those with EAL poses a challenge to provision and practice when, for example, there is a one size fits all approach to policy in terms of the EYFS framework with the emphasis on early number and early reading and associated practice in education, as is at present.