

Research Briefing N° 18

Developing a Strategy for English as an Additional Language for the Teaching Workforce

This research reviews the evidence available on teaching English as an Additional Language (EAL) in classrooms, and particularly at training for teachers in the field. It draws mostly on research published in the USA, Australia and the UK.

Key words: writing; teaching; USA; Australia; continuing professional development



Key findings

- There is a need for a policy framework that sets out curricular and assessment standards and requirements for EAL development.
- The importance of oral communication in more than one language must be recognised.
- There is plenty of evidence of the use of first languages, but insufficient status accorded to them so that they do not get embedded into school-wide practice. Mainstream teachers need to become aware, at least, of the presence and power of first languages in learning.
- Assessment frameworks for EAL development and achievement are needed with:
 - distinctions between summative and formative assessment clearly made;
 - more sensitivity to context;
 - awareness of the potential for assessment models and classroom encounters as a resource for language learning;
 - distinctions between language learning needs, special educational needs (SEN) and curriculum content needs; and
 - lessons learnt from successful models in the USA and Australia.
- There is a lack of specialist staff working with children with EAL. Most contact is currently with teaching assistants.
- There seems to be a worrying lack of clarity in the distinctions between EAL and SEN.
- There is mixed evidence of the strength of links between local authority EAL teams and schools.

- EAL materials are varied, and there is little sense of an EAL pedagogy (methods and approaches to teaching). Weaker schools tend to depend on (often, inappropriate and poor) published materials when they lack expertise in EAL.

What we did

In recent years the population of EAL learners in England has increased due to changing demographics linked to new patterns of immigration. The presence of large numbers of EAL learners in schools is set to continue into the future.

Experts in the field have expressed concern about how best to support the diversity of languages, especially in London schools, and have called for a review of policy and standards to reflect changes.

Although there has been research to investigate these issues, evidence from research has been patchy to date.

This research was part of a larger project commissioned by the Training and Development

Agency (TDA) to devise a strategy for the EAL workforce in schools in England. The research took place in 2009 at the beginning of the overall project.

The research was submitted to and accepted by the TDA, but did not lead to a major revision in EAL teaching for the teaching workforce.

How we did it

The research took the form of a full and formal systematic review of literature in the field. A set of inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to provide the parameters for the research review, which covered the period 2000-09. Research published in English was accessed, most of it emanating from the USA.

Further information

The research was published as:

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Contact

Principal Investigator: Professor Richard Andrews, Department of Culture, Communication and Media, Institute of Education, University of London

Email: r.andrews@ioe.ac.uk

Phone: +44 (0)20 7612 6524