

Resources to support children's language development



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Task 1

An annotated resource list detailing stories, books, rhymes, songs, finger-plays, story props, puppets, resources and classroom contexts which can be used to support and extend literacy for real life purposes in their setting. You must take into account the particular needs of bilingual learners.

In doing this you will realise that what you are doing is describing what you will provide in the role-play context and why. This amounts to a very basic plan together with a rationale for the resourcing.

Resource List

Following much discussion about poor standards of English teaching, the *Literacy Hour* was introduced into all English primary schools through the National Literacy strategy during the school year 1998/99. The daily literacy hour is divided between 10-15 minutes of whole class reading or writing; 10-15 minutes whole-class session on word level work (e. g. phonics, spelling) and sentence level work; 25-30 minutes of directed group activities; and a plenary at the end for pupils to revisit the objectives of the lesson, reflect on what they have learnt and consider what they need to do next. The resource list that has been compiled has been designed to support activities that take place during the literacy hour.

The educational resources market is huge and there is a great deal of choice available. There are many new publishers. For example, *Badger Publishing Ltd* ([www. badger-publishing. co. uk](http://www.badger-publishing.co.uk)) was established in 1989 and provides a range of books, which are designed to improve children's literacy skills. The company's publications are divided into three categories.

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Badger History for Foundation and Key Stage 1 uses bright and colourful images to stimulate the interest of children in historical concepts. Badger History uses nursery rhymes, changes in everyday life, stories and legends, and significant people and past events drawn from the history of Britain and the rest of the world. Each year of Foundation and KS1 has its own Big Book and Teacher Book. Each Big Book has 10 themes. Details of the book for nursery / reception classes are listed below.

Big Book 1 for Nursery / Reception

1. Old Mother Hubbard
2. 12 days of Christmas
3. London Bridge is falling down
4. Boys and girls come out to play
5. Miss Polly had a dolly
6. Ride a cock-horse
7. Mary had a little lamb
8. Sing a song of sixpence
9. Oranges and lemons
10. Rats

Badger Nursery Rhymes introduces the first sight words for reception classes. They also provide a literacy course, which aims to fulfil the early learning communication, language and literacy goals and the National Literacy Strategy. The publication contains - 24 popular nursery rhymes, coverage of all 45 high frequency words and a range of objectives (word, sentence and text level work).

Badger also has another range of publications, which are called *Storyteller*. This is a new series which uses 36 familiar stories to support the writing, speaking and listening objectives of the National Literacy Strategy in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. This publication allows children to hear and learn about traditional stories, develop comprehension skills, develop speaking and listening skills, use drama to explore themes and characters, and increase their experience of the language and structure of stories. Each book has its own focus. For example, the publication for Reception uses stories, (The Gingerbread Man) with rhyme and repetitive phrases.

Fingerplays are a fun way of introducing poetry to children. Fingerplays are also useful tools for practicing fine motor skills, following directions and introducing concepts. They also provide the opportunity to strengthen children's language experiences and improve their literacy skills. The following fingerplays can be added to the list of resources:

- Balls (size, counting)
- Grandmother's Glasses
- Choo! Choo!
- Two Little Blackbirds (counting)
- Funny Bunny
- Up, Up, Up (spatial concepts)
- Jack in the Box (spatial concepts)
- Unwind the Thread
- Riding in a Wagon
- A Teeny Weeny Spider
- Pat-a-cake

- Hickory, Dickory, Dock
- Grand Old Duke of York

Literacy Connections (www.literacyconnections.com) is an American based organisation, which provides a vast array of information on reading, teaching and tutoring techniques, ESOL literacy, and adult literacy. Whilst, its resources etc, obviously cater for the needs of the American educational market, many of the items can be readily adapted to meet the literacy needs of children in the UK. A variety of songs can be accessed from this website. They can be used to promote and develop a range of literacy skills. A selection of these songs is shown below.

“*Alphabet*” is an interactive rap song. It targets the comprehension and manipulation of the alphabet and various words in the English language. Using this rap for Reception classes, challenges the children’s abilities to listen, respond, and demonstrate awareness of language patterns and sounds.

The “Alphabet” Song

A, B, C, D, E, F, G

H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P

Q, R, S, T, U, and V

W, X, Y, Z

A Boy Caught Danny Eating Father’s Groceries

A like ant,

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B - boy....

The “ *Alphabet Animals at the Zoo*” song allows children to develop the following skills and gain a greater understanding of a number of concepts. Notably - identifying letters of the alphabet, learning the order of the letters of the alphabet, recognising symbol sound correspondence, and increasing vocabulary movement. The children stretch, shake and bounce to warm up during the opening verse. Next, they create motions which go with a word for each letter of the alphabet.

For example, arch, reach up and bend backwards, bend, bend forward, clap, clap hands, droop, let head, arms and spine sag forward, expand, make the body tall and wide. After completing the alphabet, each child faces someone and does the motion that goes with the first letter of his / her name.

Alphabet Animals at the Zoo

Learn the abc's with ease

While getting fit and having fun

Aphabetise your exercise

And do your moves one by one

At the store or in the car park

You'll cause a small commotion

If you suddenly stand and start

The alphabet in motion

Scholastic, the global children's publishing, education and media company, provides a wide range of resources, which can be accessed from its website (www.teacher.scholastic.com). It provides information on how children can create pet puppets and use them interactively in their play.

Pet Puppets

The creation and use of pet puppets in their play, helps children to develop their social, language and literacy skills. The following materials are required: socks (one for each child), fabric markers, children's safety scissors, white craft glue, materials to decorate puppets (e. g. feathers, buttons, fabric scraps etc), chart paper and marker. The children work together to create sock puppet pets.

In making the puppets the children will be engaged in the following activities:

- Read stories to children about pets or animals and then engage them in a conversation about different types of pets.
- Do they have pets? What types of pets do they have?
- What types of pets do they have? What types of pets do they wish they had?
- Tell the children that they make sock pet puppets out of socks.
- When the puppets are complete – the children should be encouraged to participate in activities to develop dramatic-play and language skills.

The Role of Parents In Developing Their Children's Literacy Skills

The most important benefit that parents can give to their children is their undivided attention. In a classroom situation a teacher will have to deal with 30 or more children. Therefore, the scope for a teacher to work one-to-one with a pupil is highly restricted. Thus parents play a crucial role in developing their children's language, literacy and social skills.

Adams, M, (1990), estimated that by the time her son was six, he had received 1700 hours of stories being read to him. He had also spent 1000 hours watching the literacy-focused television programme “*Sesame Street*”. By contrast, she calculated that in the first year of schooling he would have received 360 hours of literacy instruction, and less than 18 hours were given in individual attention.

Toomey, D, (1993), reported studies, which demonstrated that, without help and guidance, parents were much less likely than teachers to praise, and pause and therefore encourage guesses or self-correction, or to give clues if children were hesitant. He suggested that careful thought, and appropriate resources, needed to be given to ensure that this invaluable potential support was channelled effectively. To deal with this issue the government has launched a number of initiatives e. g. *Sure Start* . This is designed to encourage parents to play a proactive role in their children's learning.

Resources For Bilingual Children

There is a huge selection of resources available for developing the language and literacy skills of bilingual children. The use of such resources in the

Literacy Hour depends heavily upon the make-up of the Reception class. For example, let us assume that a reception class contains 24 children. If the class contained 20 bilingual children and four native English speakers, this would clearly need a completely different teaching strategy, if the numbers were reversed. In both situations the literacy needs of the two groups must be accommodated.

This is why the role of Teaching Assistants has become very important in terms of helping Reception Class teachers deliver a teaching strategy that meets the learning requirements of the children in a specific set. In *Task 2*, this issue is revisited - as the observation of the children entails analysing the effectiveness of the teaching and resources used in the delivery of the Literacy Hour. In the activity that was observed a specialist bilingual resource was not used. A *First Experience* book was used *Tidy Up* - this introduces children to the everyday activity of tidying up. A list of household objects (e. g. coat hanger etc) are involved.

No matter how good the teacher, the support and resources are, bilingual speakers are always going to have major problems, if their parents do not make a significant contribution towards developing their children develop their English language and literacy skills. Young children have the monumental task of learning their native language. However, more non-English speaking children are now entering UK schools and are required to develop skills in English as well. Many teachers are now finding that some pupils are not proficient in any language. This is because children are pushed into learning a second language without continuing development in their native language.

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According to *Fillmore, W*, (1991), this is happening because children are pushed into learning a second language without continuing development in their native language. Research has shown that children that develop adequate language skills are more likely to experience success when they begin reading (*Lieberman*, 1983; *Roth, Speece and Cooper* , 2002; *Snow, Burn and Griffin*, 1998). Early language acquisition begins at home and occurs somewhat naturally, through interactions with friends and family members. Children need these opportunities to develop their native language before they can master a second language.

Summary

An extensive resource list has been developed. The source and purpose of the items in the list has been explained. If children are going to learn - they must be encouraged to participate. In other words they need to be *engaged* in a positive and progressive. The contents of the resources list are designed to become fully involved with *role play*. For example, a teacher can read a short story to group of children. The children will become completely in tune with the experience, when they dress up and act the storyline themselves. Resources provide the opportunity for children to use their imagination.

Literacy skills do not sit in isolation. Reading, writing, speaking and listening all interact with social interaction and new learning experiences. Further to this, as highlighted, is the importance of parents becoming actively involved in developing their children's literacy and language skills. For bilingual children different teaching strategies are required to facilitate their particular learning needs. Specialist resources do exist - but more often than not - the

key to success, is using readily available learning resources in new and imaginative ways to meet their needs.

Task 2

The second piece of coursework is an evaluation of how well the planned activity meet the intended outcomes - i. e. did the role play area, support and extend the reading, writing, speaking and listening of all the pupils, including bilingual pupils.

Introduction

This task involves the observation of a number of activities that took place during place Literacy Hour. The children that were observed are in a Reception Class. Communicative competence provides a theoretical framework within, which these observed activities will be reviewed and critically evaluated. Also research findings relevant to the areas under investigation will also be considered.

Educational Theory Underpinning Literacy Skills

Communicative competence is a concept introduced by *Dell Hymes* and discussed and redefined by many authors. Hymes' original idea was that speakers of a language have to have more grammatical competence in order to communicate effectively in a language; they also need to know how language is used by members of a speech community to accomplish their purposes. There are eight aspects of communicative competence. They are grouped together into two groups of four:

Linguistic aspects:

- Phonology and orthography- Phonological competence is the ability to recognise and produce the distinctive meaningful sounds of a language, including; consonants, vowels, tone patterns, intonation patterns etc. Orthographic competence is the ability to decipher and write the writing system of a language.
- Grammatical competence -This is the ability to recognise and produce the distinctive structures of a language and to use them effectively in communication.
- Lexical competence- This is the ability to recognise and use words in a language that speakers of the language use them. Lexical competence includes understanding the different relationships among families of words and the common collections of words.
- Discourse competence- This is used to refer to two related, but distinct abilities. Textual discourse competence refers to the ability to understand and construct monologues or written texts of different genres, such as narratives, procedural texts etc. Learning a language involves learning how to relate these different types of discourse in a way that is coherent to the readers and listeners.

If you like, the *linguistic aspects* of learning a language are the *theoretical aspects* that have to be mastered. In terms of learning how to read and write, the starting point is *phonology*. Mastering *phonetics* is at the very heart teaching Reception Class pupils how to read. The other three aspects are developed over a longer term period. Although by the end of the Reception Year - the children must have made some progress towards becoming effective in terms of the grammatical and lexical competencies.

Pragmatic aspects:

- Functional competence- This refers to the ability to accomplish communication purposes in a language. For example, the ability to use language to greet someone.
- Sociolinguistic competence- This is the ability to interpret the social meaning of the choice of linguistic varieties and to use language with the appropriate meaning of the communication situation.
- Interactional competence- This involves knowing and using the mostly-unwritten rules for interaction in various communication situations within a given speech community and culture.
- Cultural competence- This is the ability to understand behaviour from the standpoint of the members of a culture and to behave in a way that would be understood by the members of the culture in the intended way. Cultural competence therefore involves understanding all aspects of a culture, but particularly the social structure, the values and beliefs of the people, and the way things are assumed to be done.

Practice makes perfect - is a phrase that all school children will be familiar. If a child is going to become a proficient reader, writer and speaker of English, then they must be provided with endless opportunities to practice their skills and knowledge of the language. Herein lies the real importance of *role-play* in learning - it provides children with the opportunity to master the pragmatic competencies. As already stated, in Task 1, parents must become actively involved in developing their children's literacy skills.

Observation Of The Literacy Hour

This was a Reception Class in a primary school. The class has 24 pupils. 20 of who are native English speakers. The other 4 are bilingual. The literacy hour is spread throughout the day and is covered in a number of sessions.

Session 1 – Whole Class Reading (15 minutes)

Session Objectives:

- The pupils will extend their vocabulary, exploring the meanings and sounds of new words
- Hear and say initial and final sounds in words and short vowel sounds in words
- Read a range of familiar and common words and simple sentences independently
- Know that print carries meaning and, in English, is read from left to right and top to bottom
- Show sufficient understanding of the elements of stories, such as main character, sequence of events, and openings, and be able to answer questions about where, who, why and how.

This session involved using the story (*The Gingerbread Man*) from the *Storyteller* range of books produced by *Badger Publishing Ltd*. The teacher read a line from the book and asked the whole class to read the line aloud. For those children who struggled with a line they were assisted by the teacher or the teacher's assistant to complete the task. This process lasted for about five minutes. The teacher then asked questions to help the class to recap on what they had read so far. The children were then put into pairs and were asked to read alternate lines to their partners. For those pupils who

struggled with this task - they were aided by the teacher or the teacher's assistant to complete their sentence.

The teacher then moved the session beyond the book and asked the pupils to consider what materials they would like to be made of. This generated a wide range of interesting and amusing responses - ranging from rubber to chocolate. The children were asked to consider what special power they would like to have and why, in their new characterisation. The repetition of the reading aloud of sentences from the story book did not really motivate the pupils.

However, when they were allowed to use their imagination and develop their own characterisation in a new format, the majority of the group found this stimulating. The reading aloud and repetition of the sentences was designed to allow the pupils to further develop their lexical competence. The relaxation of the structured rigidity, that is a by-product of reading aloud, provided the pupils with much greater freedom to use their imaginations and consequently develop the pragmatic aspects of the *communicative competence* framework.

As with everything in life, the educational system suffers from two major constraints. That is, a lack of time and a lack of resources. As outlined, in Task 1, there is very little scope for offering individual pupils a sufficient amount of one-to-one contact with the teacher. The average size of Reception Classes in the UK is greater than 24. The bigger the class size and the greater the diversity in language skills (i. e. how many bilingual children are in the class?) then more pressure is placed on the teacher.

The Literacy Hour has been in operation for nearly 8 years and its impact has been extensively researched. According to researchers from the *University of Newcastle* - whole class teaching has not encouraged opportunities for pupils to question or explore ideas to help them regulate their own thinking. The researchers have identified the problem of teachers adapting to the new curriculum without changing their old teaching styles or patterns. Consequently, many of the innovations of the National Literacy Strategy are not implemented as a result.

Session 2 – Fingerplays – Directed Group Studies (25 minutes)

Session Objective -Show sufficient understanding of the elements of stories, such as main character, sequence of events, and openings, and be able to answer questions about where, who, why and how.

The class was divided into six groups of four. Each group was presented with a different fingerplay (e. g. Unwind the Thread, Riding in a Wagon, Hickory Dickory Dock etc). The teacher was assisted by a teacher's assistant and a volunteer worker. Working their way round the groups - the children were instructed on how to participate in the fingerplay and were encouraged to work as a group to generate ideas on what they thought the words contained in the rhymes, actually.

The children were then asked again to work as a group and think of a storyline that could be developed using a fingerplay. This session was adequately staffed and this meant that no group of children had to wait long for assistance, in terms of getting answers to their questions. This *role-play* element of the session proved to be very successful and the children on the

whole worked well within the groups to which they had been allocated. This session provided opportunities for the children to develop their proficiency with regard to the pragmatic aspects of the communicative competence.

Session 3 – Developing The Language Skills Of Bilingual Pupils (20 minutes)

Session Objective - By the end of the session the pupils will show sufficient understanding of the elements of stories, such as main character, sequence of events, and openings, and be able to answer questions about, where, who, why and how.

Two of the bilingual students have only recently joined the school. Both of them are new to the UK and to English. Although their parents read to them in Urdu, they are used to a different writing system and print which goes from right to left, rather than from left to right. The TA (Teacher's Assistant) is using a book which the teacher used at the beginning of the academic year (ie *Tidy Up*). It is a picture story with no words. The TA had been working with the two new pupils for two weeks and had established a good rapport. She worked her way through each picture and explained to the children what was happening in each scene. A volunteer worker, who was fluent in English and Urdu was on hand.

The TA had a number of items (e. g. a clock, a coat hanger, a drinking mug, a torch etc) which featured in the story. As she produced each object she encouraged the children to handle it and say its English name. She asked questions about the objects - what they were for, where might you find them, and so on - and asked the children to find them in the pictures. She talked about the each item's part in the story. The volunteer remained silent

throughout and only interjected when the children did not understand what was being asked of them.

Speaking briefly in Urdu to clarify and issue, and then allowing the TA to resume contact with the children. She then asked the children to take on roles of characters in the book, and she also took on a role. Together they acted the story out, using the household objects as props and she encouraged the “ characters” to talk about what they were doing. She then asked the children to “ read” the book in English, and supported (with help from the volunteer worker when appropriate) them individually as they did this. At the end of the session, she reviewed the session, the progress the two children had made. Overall the session was a positive experience for all of the concerned parties.

The volunteer worker is helping the children to develop literacy skills within their first language i. e. Urdu. The parents of the children are attending ESOL classes at the school and are actively involved in helping their offspring develop their language skills in Urdu. This is having a positive impact on their ability and willingness to learn English. The use of *role-play* both at school and at home is increasing their proficiency in both languages. Thus in this instance the use of *role-play* has generated positive benefits. The objective for the session was achieved.

The successful completion of this activity reinforces the factors which are at the heart of the educational theory stated at the beginning of this task. It is counterproductive to *fast track* the two new arrivals into the class. They need to be helped to master their native language as well as being slowly

introduced to English. Their confidence with regard to speaking their own language and becoming more exposed to English, will be increased by the use of *role-play* activities as observed and by being positively engaged by their parents and extended family, within their home and domestic surroundings.

The results of this observation provide a clear link to the previously stated research of several authors (i. e. *Fillmore, W*, 1991; *Lieberman*, 1983; *Roth, Speece and Cooper* , 2002; *Snow, Burn and Griffin*, 1998)that early language acquisition begins at home and occurs somewhat naturally, through interactions with friends and family members. Children need these opportunities to develop their native language before they can master a second language.

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