English as an Additional Language: The Early Years

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ECEC in England

• Increasing numbers of children spending time in ECEC environments in England
  – 2.2 million received some form of childcare or early years education in 2012/2013 (Huskinson et al., 2014)

• Children come to these settings with a wide variability of (linguistic) skills
  – Many have varied understanding of English and are less able to fully participate in the early years classroom
  – And of course, many are EAL
### EAL achievement gap by age – England 2013

**Strand, Malmberg & Hall, 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>EF %</th>
<th>EAL %</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>EYFSP</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>At least expected level</td>
<td>SFR 2013-47</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>At least expected level</td>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Good level of Development (GLD)</td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>KS1</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Level 2A+</td>
<td>SFR 2013-37 (Table 14)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>Level 2A+</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Average Re + Ma (2A+)</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>KS2</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Level 4B+</td>
<td>SFR 2013-51 (Table 8b)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>Level 4B+</td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Level 4B+ in RWM</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>KS4</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>GCSE A*-C pass</td>
<td>SFR 2014-05</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>GCSE A*-C pass</td>
<td></td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MFL</td>
<td>GCSE A*-C pass</td>
<td></td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>5+A*-C Incl. En &amp; Ma</td>
<td></td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>EBacc achieved</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**By end of Reception, 44% EAL achieve ‘good level of development’ on EYFSP relative to 54% (i.e., odds of achieving a ‘good’ are 33% lower for EAL)**

**WHY?** What is happening before the child arrives at school, and what can we do to improve their experience in preschools?

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**Notes**

Source = DFE Statistical First Release (SFR) from which the data is drawn. RWM = Reading, writing and mathematics. MFL = Modern foreign Language.
The importance of literacy

• Literacy is the building block upon which most other learning depends (Wood & Caulier-Grice, 2006)

• Literacy development in the early years serves as crucial foundation for later years (in formal educational settings and beyond)

• Children’s vocabulary (receptive and productive) is a critical variable in literacy development (National Reading Panel, 2000)

• Quality of literacy experiences in ECEC make a major difference re: child’s literacy development overall
Emergent Literacy

• ‘emergent literacy’: earliest signs of a child’s interest in and precursor skills for reading and writing (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998)
  – includes phonemic awareness; letter recognition; awareness of print; early writing development; and oral language development

• Studies show that performance on a range of emergent literacy skills reliably predicts children’s later literacy achievement (Justice, Chow, Capellini, Flanigan, & Colton, 2003; Levy, Gong, Hessels, Evans, & Jared, 2006; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002)
The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project is the first major European longitudinal study of a national sample of young children’s development between the ages of 3 and 18 years.

Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart & Elliott, 2014
EPPE Sample

• **3000+** children recruited across England from **141** pre-schools and homes

• Sample followed through primary school with data collection at **age 5, 7 and 11**, and then into secondary schools

• 11% of the sample at school entry had English as an Additional Language (**more than 300 EAL**)
EPPE - Method

• Parents interviewed at recruitment on family demographics and the frequency of home learning/play activities (coded on a 7-point scale)

• 141 pre-school centres observed using the Early Childhood Quality Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) and its British curricular and pedagogical extension (ECERS-E)
Specific Tests
Outcome Measures at Age 5

• Code-related skills:
  – *Letter recognition*: lower/upper case alphabet letters
  – *Phonological Awareness*: rhyme and alliteration

• Oral Language Skills:
  – *BAS-II Verbal Comprehension*: receptive language; understanding oral instructions involving basic language concepts ‘Give me the (toy) dog’
  – *BAS-II Naming Vocabulary*: expressive language; knowledge of words pictures in the test
• EAL children perform **significantly better** than their native speaking peers on **code-related skills** (ES=0.34), but **significantly worse** on **oral language skills** (ES= -0.24).

• Home learning alphabet activities, and other adult-led play with letters and numbers, predicted **code-related skills**.

• Book reading with parents, visits to the library and singing songs predicted **oral language-skills** at age 5.
Quality characteristics of preschool that led to better literacy scores at school entry

• Specific pedagogical practices (resources plus structured teaching) predicted children’s code-related skills.

• No indicators of preschool pedagogical quality predicted oral language skills.
  – Does the EYFS focus too heavily on sounds and letters such that pre-schools (even those of high-quality) fail to provide sufficient scaffolding for vocabulary and comprehension development?
Summary of EPPE

• EAL pupils do better than NS on code-related skills, but worse than NS on oral language skills.

• Different aspects of the home environment led to different child literacy outcomes.

• The pedagogical aspects of pre-school measured on the ECERS-E predict children’s code-related skills, but do not predict oral language.
Questions raised by EPPE

• Should oral language be emphasized more?

• A possible intervention? Classroom based interventions aimed at training teachers about ways to improve pedagogical practice to promote oral language (e.g., story reading and discussion)
Ready to Read Intervention

• Professional Development Programme aimed at enhancing literacy support in order to improve young children’s literacy skills (Karemaker et al.)

• The training delivered through four 2-hour sessions over four weeks. It focused on supporting practitioners to develop knowledge and skills for implementing effective emergent literacy activities for 3-4 months before post-testing

• The literacy skills measured were:
  – Naming Vocabulary
  – Verbal Comprehension
  – Phonological Awareness
“Ready to Read” intervention

Sample

• Four settings in the professional development programme and four settings were in the comparison group.

• 70 children (41 intervention, 29 comparison) aged 3-4 years

• 41% of the intervention group (17 out of 41) and 21% of the comparison group (6 out of 29) were EAL children.
“Ready to Read” Intervention

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Children in the Intervention group showed significantly better performance at post-test on the Naming Vocabulary measure compared to children in the comparison group.
However, EAL children did not benefit from the intervention on the Naming Vocabulary measure as the native speaking children.

**Red** = intervention, **Yellow** = comparison
**Solid line** = EAL
“Ready to Read”

Summary

• ‘Ready to Read’ intervention (only 4 sessions/8hrs) on CPD for ECEC practitioners can have manifest benefits on children’s vocabulary

• EAL children did not benefit from the ‘Ready to Read’ intervention and scored almost half a standard deviation below the average score on naming vocabulary

• Why?
  – both intervention and comparison group EAL children lagged behind NS peers on naming vocabulary [just like the children in the EPPE study]
  • Consistent with previous work showing EAL have smaller vocabularies in English (e.g., Cameron, 2002; Murphy, 2014).
  – Children require a minimum threshold vocabulary knowledge in order to benefit from specific pedagogical strategies aimed at developing English literacy?
  – Implicit learning of vocabulary learning through stories is a slow process – and may be slower for many EAL
“Talking Time” Intervention
Dockrell, Stuart & King, 2010

- **Talking Time** (Dockrell et al., 2010) is an oral language intervention comprising of three activities in small groups
  - Acting out: a series of dramatic activities using target vocabulary.
  - Story Talk: supported children in talking about the pictures in a book they were looking at and drew parallels with their own experiences.
  - The Hexagon Game: provided children with a visual stimulus to support construction of narratives.

- 15 minute activities, twice a week, (over 15 weeks, a total of 7.5hrs intervention for each child).

- Teachers used open questions and expanded or recast children’s utterances.

- Teachers modelled language structures that the children were not yet using.
“Talking Time” Intervention

Sample

- Participants attended three inner city nursery schools for 3-5 year olds.
- The Talking Time intervention group (n=46, 91% EAL) was compared to a control intervention group (n=37, 100% EAL)
“Talking Time” Intervention

Results

- **Talking Time** improved children’s language skills on:
  - Verbal Comprehension (BAS II subscale)
  - Naming Vocabulary (BAS II subscale)
  - Sentence Repetition (GAPS subtest)
Why was “Talking Time” successful for EAL children?

- Small group structured activities in which each child had ample opportunity to speak.

- Staff modelled language to support children’s activities which consisted of discussion, acting out, games and visual resources.

- There were many, planned opportunities for children to produce oral language, providing practice but also opportunities for staff expansions and feedback.
Fricke & Millard, 2016

An RCT evaluating an oral language intervention

- Investigated whether an oral language (OL) intervention targeting listening, vocabulary and narrative skills could improve the OL skills in nursery-aged EAL children
- 96 children (50 boys/46 girls) randomly allocated to intervention or waiting control group
- Pre-test/Post-test:-
  - New Reynell Developmental Language Scales (NRDLS) Production (object naming, comprehension, verbs)
  - CELF expressive vocabulary and sentence structure
  - three-picture story retelling task – transcribed and analysed using CHAT/CLAN
  - Random selection of target words from intervention tested expressively and receptively
Fricke & Millard, 2016

Intervention

15-week OL intervention in nursery (3 x 20 mins group sessions/week) delivered by TA or EYP who had received 1 day of training from researchers

Table 1: Breakdown of content and structure of an intervention session (20min)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Time (min)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Greet and settle children into session, revise the days of the week and the listening rules</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening Game</td>
<td>Improve listening skills through interactive games and encourage active listening</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Introduce new vocabulary or consolidate vocabulary from previous session using a multi-contextual method</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Improve storytelling skills such as sequencing and knowledge of story elements</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plenary</td>
<td>Revise overall session to foster sequencing skills, reinforce taught vocabulary and award ‘Best Listener’</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Figure 2: Comparison of the intervention and waiting control groups at t2 (controlling for covariates) on language outcome measures [with 95 per cent CIs, effect sizes (d, difference in progress between the groups divided by pooled SD at t1)] and significance levels.

- significant intervention effects for taught vocabulary – rich and robust vocabulary instruction providing multiple encounters and practice in a variety of contexts can be used successfully with children with EAL
- lack of effect on standardised measures, and narrative (also true of Dockrell et al 2010).
The good news 😊

- EPPE study shows EAL pupils do better than non-EAL on code-related skills

- ‘Ready to Read’ intervention (only 4 sessions/8hrs) on CPD for ECEC practitioners can have manifest benefits on children’s vocabulary

- ‘Talking Time’ and Fricke & Millard interventions shows it’s possible to improve EAL pupils’ oral language (vocabulary) through appropriate pedagogical support
The less good news 😞

- CPD intervention (Ready to Read) was not successful for EAL pupils
- Talking Time and Fricke & Millard (2016) not uniformly successful (lack of effect on narrative in both, and lack of effect on standardised measures in F&M)

Why?
- Interventions too short?
- Need a threshold-level of ability to benefit?
- Need a whole school approach?

What are the implications here for training and support for EYPs and TAs in early years settings?
Summary & Implications

- Code-related and oral language skills are important aspects of emergent literacy
- Code-related skills are an area of strength for EAL
- Code related skills are those further supported by phonics

- Phonics is good, but not sufficient for any child, and specifically for EAL pupils (Murphy & Franco, 2016)
  - Do we spend so much time on phonics that there is little left over for supporting oral vocabulary?

- Harder to find facilitative effects of CPD interventions than those aimed directly at children
  - Need to do a better job with teacher training for ECEC

- Urgent need to develop greater understanding of the linguistic needs of pupils with EAL, and appropriate training and support for practitioners working with EAL pupils
  - particularly as numbers of EAL children in English preschool settings are on the rise and it is a critical point in a child’s education
  - Evidence shows EAL in early years matched on English proficiency are = or > than nonEAL on a range of linguistic and cognitive variables (Whiteside et al., 2016)
  - We can influence the development of English language proficiency in ECEC settings
Future Directions

• The well-worn assumption that children pick up language knowledge easily as long as we start early enough is not adequate (and indeed is misguided)

• We can do far better in supporting the linguistic and educational achievement of all of our pupils, regardless of their linguistic background

• More research on effective CPD and development for children in ECEC settings, with a particular focus on children from linguistically diverse backgrounds

• Phonics is not a panacea – we need more explicit focus on vocabulary and other aspects of oral language
Thank You

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