

Case study 14

School: A comprehensive school in London

Focus: Supporting new arrivals with GCSE design and technology coursework

Background

This high school is an average size (1060), mixed, 11–18 comprehensive. It has a diverse student intake: 60% of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, with just over half speaking English as an additional language (EAL). Students speak a wide range of languages and a significant number are at early stages of learning English. Asylum seekers account for 15% of pupils and there is higher than average mobility. The proportion of students on free school meals is well above average, and above average for those with special educational needs.

Some years ago, curriculum leaders attended a short training course offered by local authority (LA) ethnic minority achievement (EMA) consultants on 'Literacy across the curriculum'.

One element of this training, a lesson given in Turkish to demonstrate what it felt like to be a new arrival, had an enormous impact on the curriculum leader for design and technology (D&T). He felt strongly that he did not want pupils with little or no English to suffer in his classes because they could not follow what was going on. He recognised that many late-arriving students, who were keen to do D&T and had good cognitive levels, nevertheless faced two challenges: lack of cultural knowledge in terms of British pedagogical approaches to the teaching of the subject and a language barrier. He therefore resolved to review his teaching and learning strategies to make his subject more accessible for developing bilingual learners.

He was given further help by the EMA team, when one of the EMA consultants came into the school and worked with him in class on the language of technology. This was valuable and influenced the way he approached the task he had set himself.

What was done?

The curriculum leader for D&T decided to focus initially on the 'situation to specification' element of the D&T (resistant materials) GCSE coursework – an area that presented significant challenges to pupils learning EAL. While only counting for 9% of the overall marks

it was, in his opinion, crucial for success in the exam, serving to 'hook students into the project' and motivate them. It could be fun and was an essential first step before the practical work was started, but it did require students to carry out, and write up in appropriate academic language, a number of investigations. Students had to:

- write out the needs/situation for their chosen coursework project;
- carry out a task analysis and write a design brief;
- research and write up a project analysis;
- carry out and report on a target market survey;
- finish with a written specification for their project.

At first his approach was to produce additional materials when he saw students struggling with an aspect of the course. So for one student he broke down the needs/situation task into a number of simple steps (describe the problem you are faced with... explain who else ... identify (choose) your target market group, etc) and he also supplied her with a writing frame. For another, he developed a matrix to present the findings of the project analysis. This additional material dramatically improved the quality of the students' work in these areas.

Over time, he realised that he needed to take a more global view of the demands of this element of the coursework, so he gathered together all the additional resources that he had developed and constructed a complete coursework guide that took students from start to finish of the process. The booklet includes:

- models of writing in appropriate register
- writing frames
- examples of different market survey tools
- question prompts to guide students through the complexities of product analysis.

This guide is now made available to all pupils on this course. Although he had been prompted to produce this comprehensive guide in recognition of the needs of a student (a Tigrinya and Italian speaker from Ethiopia) who had arrived late in Year 9 with little English, but who was very keen to do the course, he calculated that it could be of use to a wider range of pupils.

He believed that the guide would support the majority of pupils, while creating and developing all aspects of the first section of their design folder for the GCSE coursework. Able and literate students would be able to use it independently and produce original work. Students learning EAL with additional educational needs would need additional support from the teacher, bilingual teaching assistant or their peers and would need to lean more heavily on the exemplars and frames provided.

His assumptions have proved correct. All pupils have found the guide useful and the work of the late arriving student, whose language support needs had prompted the teacher to develop the work further, has improved dramatically over the period of the course. But the teacher comments, *'This is only the first draft and I recognise that I need to further refine the language and layout of the guide to ensure maximum accessibility for everyone. Some of the language I use is still too complicated.'* With the help of an EMA consultant, he intends to rework the guide. He is considering, for example, a drop-down menu so that key words and some of the exemplar material can be provided in a range of languages, with greater use of visuals, using more back-up materials and breaking up some textually dense sections.

There are a number of other school initiatives that support the work that the curriculum leader for D&T is currently engaged in. 'Expert pupils', something that started in physical education as 'mini-leaders', is a strategy that seeks to recognise students who excel in certain areas and enable them to pass on their knowledge and skills to other students. This has been enormously successful. If pupils carry out a design task really well (such as completing a switch), they will be invited to teach the skill to the whole class. Apart from boosting self-esteem, another side effect, according to the curriculum leader for D&T, is that students no longer use the term 'boff' as a negative label. There will be many 'expert pupils' in a wide range of areas, making the notion of peer support acceptable – a bonus for early-stage learners of English. Equally there will be opportunities for them to be 'experts' too, perhaps in terms of their linguistic knowledge or alternative technological solutions based on their own cultural experiences.

Another aspect of school organisation that is supportive of late-arriving EAL pupils (and indeed was developed because of the increasing number of such students), is the school's 14–19 'Pathways to success' programme, in effect, a vertical curriculum. This enables students from Years 10, 11 and 12 to follow the same course in mixed age groups. So a late-arriving pupil with limited English might follow a level 1 course while learning English, then move into a level 2 course to obtain a good GCSE grade (or equivalent). The curriculum leader for D&T welcomes mixed-age classes, saying there are several benefits: the Year 10 students are determined not to be outdone by their elders and so work hard – as do the

Year 12 students who do not want to be unsuccessful a second time; the Year 11 students find themselves between these two motivated groups and take on a positive approach themselves. In addition the Year 10 students can begin by focusing on the curriculum area in which they feel most confident and then move on to more challenging areas in Year 11. And sixth-formers can go back into a Key Stage 4 programme to get the qualifications they need for their chosen career.

The final initiative that is of considerable importance for late-arriving pupils and their teachers is the excellent student profile completed by the EMA coordinator when a student arrives at the school. This includes a section identifying the student's strengths as well as the current barriers to learning. It sets out clear targets for the student and the strategies (both school and outside agency) that will come into play to support him or her. The student's parents are also invited to contribute as much information as possible. In the case of the Ethiopian student referred to above, information about his education firstly in Ethiopia, then Italy and then (briefly) Canada was elicited from his mother. This information, which included details of his literacy levels, allowed the D&T curriculum leader to place him on a GCSE course, confident that with the right support he would be able to cope. The student subsequently attained a C grade at GCSE, demonstrating his grasp of the subject and ability to make use of all the support provided.

Outcomes and feedback

The D&T curriculum leader comments:

'I was so pleased with the outcomes of the Key Stage 4 GCSE coursework guide (even though I know it needs further refinement) that I decided to develop something similar at Key Stage 3. I made this available to all staff in the department and now it has really taken off.'

'The guide helped the student from Ethiopia to overcome the language barrier. He has made excellent progress and is likely to achieve Level 2 at the end of Year 11.'

'All students on the course have really appreciated the coursework guide and the quality of their situation to specification work has improved significantly.'

An LA EMA consultant comments:

'The head of department's real strength is his understanding of how to scaffold lessons and schemes of work so that pupils really understand the component parts of a task before they put them all together. He exemplifies good teaching for students with EAL by structuring materials very carefully. In practice, as with all teaching and learning approaches that support bilingual pupils, what he has developed is valuable for all pupils. His obvious desire to do the best for each and every pupil at whatever cost, in terms of adapting his teaching style and the materials he uses, is most impressive.'

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