

STRATEGIES TO INCLUDE EAL STUDENTS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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BACKGROUND

Klaudia is a Polish speaker who moved to England at the age of 11. She was enrolled at a secondary school and found communication to be the greatest challenge. The beginning of the journey was intense, with no social connections with her peers and no rapport with teachers, but physical education (PE) lessons became her social interaction. She was able to understand the task by looking at pictures, diagrams and visual demonstrations and, more importantly, built a teacher-student relationship with her PE teachers. Within 18 months, she started to put 'broken words' together, her confidence increased, and her PE teachers enabled her to believe in herself. Klaudia has just gained a first-class degree in physical education from the University of Chichester and dedicated her dissertation to those PE teachers who understood her silence and used a variety of pedagogic strategies to help her achieve her potential.

This article is extracted from Klaudia's dissertation. It investigates how a variety of strategies used in PE lessons aided the inclusion and socialisation of students who speak English as an additional language (EAL) and who are considered to have a special educational need due to language barriers.

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN SCHOOLS

Language diversity in schools sparks a debate as English is considered a source of pride and the lack of its use is seen as an indicator of weakening national unity amongst the native English population (Banks, 2015). While immigration is not the only source of language diversity in the United Kingdom (UK), it is believed that continued immigration remains a significant source of language diversity in English schools with native English students

avoiding socialising with students who are identified as speaking English 'less than very well' (Krezmien, Leone and Achillies, 2006). However, Miller (2004) stated that the level of language spoken should not exclude anyone and the more languages that surround the English nation, the better.

There are over one million students in UK schools who speak English as an additional language, with the proportion of EAL students in secondary schools being above 19 per cent (British Council, 2016). In a school environment, students whose English language ability limits their access to a variety of learning opportunities are considered to have a special educational need and, therefore, have access to English language support during mainstream lessons. However, as the number of EAL students rises, the support has become more limited. One of the key subjects that lacks individual support is PE, as the subject is often considered 'too practical' to be prioritised (Wright, 2010). Yet, according to Gibbons (2002), PE is the only subject that naturally brings students together by visual task communication and teamwork, thereby reducing the use of language.

Engstrom and Tinto's (2008) research found that students who arrive at school with little or no English acquire immediate additional support in all mainstream classes. EAL students in lessons without additional support are often dependent on their native peers when it comes to task translation and on their non-native peers for visual demonstration of the skill or activity. Students are frequently provided with visual resources but lack the help of their class teacher on a one-to-one basis, meaning the teacher must influence group work to avoid exclusion. Therefore, to increase inclusion of all EAL students during PE, teachers must apply lesson-specific strategies.

TEACHING EAL STUDENTS IN PE

The literature review revealed divergent views on the most effective strategies for teaching EAL students in PE, reflecting a variety of teaching styles. Levy (2008) suggests teachers should spend more time on a practical approach by visually demonstrating activities and interacting with students on a one-to-one basis. Van Roekel (2008), however, suggests that verbal explanations allow students to gain a better understanding of the English language and that working within a diverse group of people allows EAL students to interact with native students and pick up basic English catchphrases.

Tonts (2005) believes that teaching in PE is more effective in promoting empathy and mutual understanding among young people, whereas Chalip (2006) states that students who lack understanding of the English language often stick together and isolate themselves from the activity simply because they are unable to understand what is going on. Therefore, they never consider themselves to be 'playing an individual role within a team' as they are unable to communicate with their peers. Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity and Payne (2013) go further, stating that where teachers struggle to control lessons, often resulting in them prioritising the needs of badly-behaved students, EAL students are being excluded, primarily through lack of understanding. Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000) specified that PE teachers who implement inclusive programmes during lessons achieve more positive attitudes from EAL students, leading to increased participation. Their findings showed that EAL students learn by seeing, doing and repeating a skill through the replication of small-sided games.



Effective teaching appears to develop students' competence in both English and their native tongue, as knowledge developed in the first language can be easily transferred to the second language. However, there is much debate about whether PE teachers need specific EAL-teaching strategies. Some teachers encourage participation through visual peer cues, diagrams, pictures and demonstrations and, on occasion, through verbal communication and/or the use of an electronic device for translation purposes. Florian and Linklater (2010) contradict those findings, stating that practical lessons should be delivered through visual peer cues, demonstrations and diagrams, with verbal explanation only being applied when teaching on a one-to-one basis and not through electronic devices. De Cohen (2007) supports the use of visual peer cues, pictures and demonstrations but highlights alternative support resources such as key words translated in the student's native language. Brooks, Adams and Morita-Mullaney (2010) support this suggestion, stating class teachers are not trained in language minority education so practical lessons should consist of non-verbal teacher-specific approaches. Karathanos (2009) states that EAL specific training is not compulsory and believes that the more teaching experience the class teacher has the easier the inclusion of EAL students becomes.

RESEARCH STUDY

The participants for this study were selected from two diverse secondary schools: an urban school and a rural school, both in the south east of England. For the interview process, three participants were selected from each school: a class teacher, a teaching assistant and an EAL student who was selected by the class teacher.

Every lesson observed as part of the study identified a different strategy for the inclusion of EAL students, with all teachers simplifying lesson-specific activities to suit the needs of their students. Some activities were broken down into stages and students had access to individual resources which included translated key words. The teachers adapted their learning objectives to suit each EAL student's understanding, resulting in full participation. Observations showed teachers were building relationships with their students and taking into consideration that no two students were the same.

One of the teachers commented on how they engage EAL students:

"I find a way of communicating whether that would be through drawing pictures or through hand signals, body language etc. like visual demonstrations, anything that they can see."

Students who lack understanding of the English language learn by adapting to visual demonstrations, pictures and resources. One teacher suggested you must apply visual strategies to enhance the learning of those students, saying:

"It's really just breaking it down to the core fundamental things to remember... having your key words and just making sure you've always got some form of visual aid, whether it be a diagram or whether it be... something visually set up."

Although some teachers encourage participation and teamwork by using more visual demonstrations, others believe they can achieve the same outcome by applying a more verbal approach. One teacher preferred to communicate through words not actions, and there were no visual demonstrations for the students. It was an additional teacher who was able to go over to the EAL students and visually demonstrate the key phrases of the task, using explanations with hand gestures and body language. The class teacher continued to explain the task verbally with no consideration for the rest of the students. However, all other observed lessons reinforced the use of non-verbal strategies, increasing the participation and understanding of the EAL students. There

were no verbal explanations carried out in these lessons, as the teachers believed that verbal explanations are not inclusive. One teacher commented:

“ Verbal explanations... if you just talk and talk and talk to them... it's like... when you go to a foreign country and someone speaks to you, it's almost impossible. ”

EAL students learn by doing, not by listening or reading. Verbal explanations have the potential to lead to misunderstanding and incorrect interpretation so one teacher adopted:

“ Using translators... students that are able to translate for me... that is my biggest go to... ”

Teachers who use bilingual students for translating purposes create an inclusive environment and increase social interaction for those students who speak little or no English. Students who can translate the key teaching points of the lesson give the teacher additional support and increase their peers' participation. When students work alongside their bilingual friends, they can express their needs



and preferences during lessons. The communication between the teacher and the EAL student becomes easier, which has a positive effect.

On the other hand, not all teachers are fortunate enough to have more than one student from the same country in their class. As there is often no additional support from the school, the teachers tend to use more accessible strategies, such as Google translate, and often introduce them to their students. However, some teachers only use this to translate the lesson's key words and this is often insufficient as they interpret different meanings of those words (Papastergio, 2010):

“ Sometimes there are issues, where students try to use Google translate but it translates it wrong... like in gymnastics, the 'pike' position translates into 'fish' position and in badminton 'shuttlecock' becomes 'dart'. ”

When applying verbal strategies through native peers and Google translate, it is important for teachers to provide resources or diagrams to further students' understanding and improve their basic English. One teacher suggests:

“ It's just making sure you always have diagrams, always have pictures, maybe translate the key words to allow them to gain that understanding. ”

Students who have access to resources that are translated into their native language respond to activities faster, resulting in increased participation (Wintergest, DeCapua and Verna, 2003) with some teachers printing worksheets or diagrams in that language.

Stein (2000) believes that non-verbal strategies aid the learning of those students who want to learn, but, the more the EAL student depends on visual resources, the less chance they have of wanting to learn English and socialise with their peers. However, it is often difficult for EAL students to acquire information in a language they do not understand. As a pupil mentioned:

“ I learn by seeing it. So if the teacher shows me I will do it but not when they explain it, because I struggle to understand them sometimes. ”
(translation)

Therefore, teachers must use visual demonstrations when explaining verbally any activity or when working alone with EAL students, regardless of the level of English spoken.

Verbal and non-verbal communication combined enables students to overcome their learning barriers and encourages social interaction, when working in a student-centred way (Pawan, 2008). One-to-one strategies allow teachers to work with students individually to enhance their understanding of the English language and supporting students in a smaller environment allows them to gain better understanding of what is expected; it also allows the teacher to build a relationship with the student. As a teacher commented:

“ I have a Portuguese student who started about three weeks ago now and he loves playing football. He started talking to the other students during the game and tried to show what he wanted them to do by drawing it on his hand at half-time... he used to stand by my side... he wouldn't leave so I started to buddy him up with different students so he could start communicating and this week I haven't seen him. He is off at the astro-turf playing football with the boys. ”

When the teacher starts to know the students and what they prefer, delivery of lessons often becomes much easier, resulting in students forming social bonds with their peers. However, as there is often no additional support during practical PE lessons, teachers' options are limited and they tend to put students in small groups instead. As a teacher stated:

“Often I had to do either one-to-one or small groups if they all spoke the same language because some of them are going to pick up on something that another might not but then they can talk about it in their tongue and be able to transfer it around quicker.”

Students who speak the same language may work better together but they may have different needs and learning capabilities. Therefore, students often learn better when they can interact with their teacher, especially on a one-to-one basis, as this student stated:

“Working alone with the teacher helps us understand more.”
(translation)

It is apparent that working one-to-one with EAL students allows students to think for themselves and be more involved in the decision-making, often resulting in a better understanding of the activity or skill.

This strategy requires students to assume more responsibility for their learning, with more direction and more structure offered by the teacher (Pawan, 2008). Teachers who lead a class with a high number of EAL students are unable to support those students individually if there is no additional provision. However, students appear to gain more knowledge by working alone with the teacher. Another student commented:

“Spend more time with us one on one because it's better when you can actually understand clearly what the teacher means.”

When teachers apply one-to-one learning strategies during their lessons they accomplish greater participation and social interaction of EAL students (Curtin, 2005), but one teacher highlighted the reality:

“Working with them one-to-one is necessary but, then again, that never happens because there are so many of them that need the same help.”

CONCLUSION

Although there is no one agreed approach to supporting EAL students' learning in PE, from both my experience as an EAL student and from this research study, the use of non-verbal, one-to-one strategies does appear to challenge individual capabilities, enhance performance, improve social skills, develop basic English and provide personal reassurance of acceptance in the class. Furthermore, EAL students felt that, by applying non-verbal strategies throughout their lessons, teachers were able to form a trustworthy relationship with their EAL students, resulting in enhanced participation, social inclusion and interaction with the native English peers. It is for this reason that teachers must ensure their teaching approaches are adapted to suit the needs of their EAL students. ■

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