

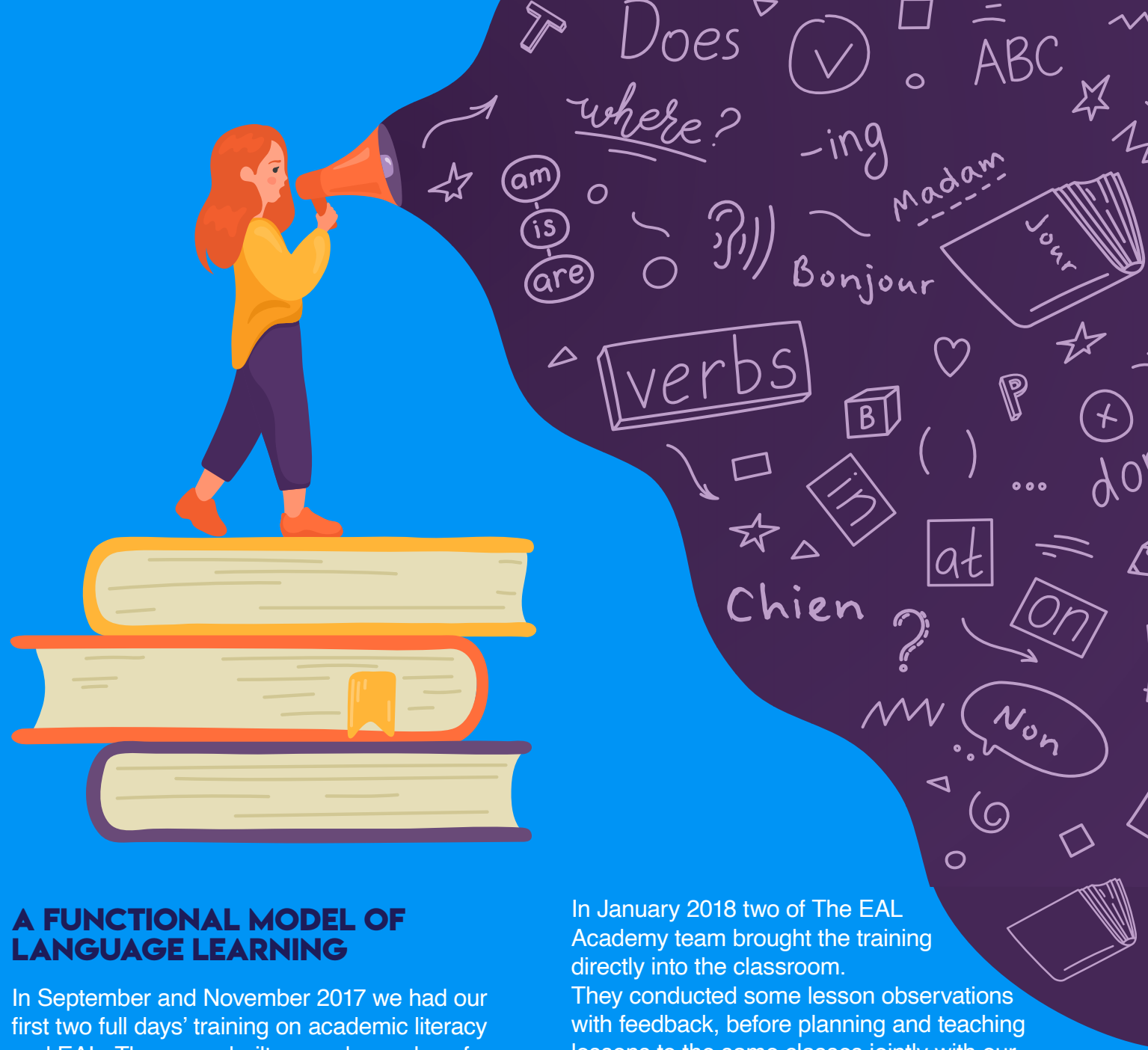
One of my deputies had a chance meeting over lunch at a Practical Pedagogies Conference in late 2016 with Graham Smith of The EAL Academy, who seemed to understand the nature of our issues: the point where EAL crosses over into advanced academic literacy.

Over the next month we talked to our staff. The EAL academy gave us a range of options and provided an academic literacy training questionnaire for our staff. Its purpose was to build on previous CPD by checking what we already knew about teaching academic language and to identify the knowledge, skills and understanding we would need to drive a long-term initiative forward. Initially, we chose a one year package that gave us a combination of whole staff training and direct work in classrooms coaching teachers and students, applying the teaching strategies covered in the training.

In September and November 2017 we had our first two full days' training on academic literacy and EAL. They were built around samples of our students' writing and the type of texts they have to read and produce. These very interactive days introduced us to a pedagogy built on the linguistics of Michael Halliday and J. R. Martin and the application of their work in classrooms popularised by educationalists such as Pauline Gibbons, with many examples from the teaching of our trainers. Underlying this approach is a functional model of language and an explicit focus on how language works to make meaning. The impact was immediate and tangible: for weeks afterwards staff were telling me how delighted their students were to learn how easily they could make their writing more formal by turning verbs into abstract nouns, and that they knew the name for this process: nominalisation.

They conducted some lesson observations with feedback, before planning and teaching lessons to the same classes jointly with our teachers. This provided the opportunity to reflect on what we had learnt and to support staff with emerging questions as their understanding developed.

We continued to talk regularly to our staff (in staff meetings and informally) and to our trainers about what was changing and what we needed next. The EAL Academy returned in September 2018 to push our professional development to a further level, looking at literacy from a plurilingual perspective and going into more detail about how texts work. This was important for our school. All our students are plurilingual – they can communicate in English,



WE KNEW THAT THERE WAS POTENTIAL FOR THIS TO BE TRANSFORMATIONAL AND WE NEEDED TO GET IT RIGHT.

French and often other languages, frequently switching in mid-conversation between them (translanguaging). We want our students to use all their language skills in their learning. This session also covered theme and rheme (the technical way in which a text flows by adding information), which our Head of History called “a game changer”.

Effective professional development leads to new ideas. We came up with the idea of a handbook for History/Geography teaching that provides classroom resources to match the pedagogy we had been developing through the training. These approaches have now been extended to the middle school to embed academic literacy throughout the curriculum and we can already see the results in pupils’ work and common assessments.

Most recently we have turned our attention to our primary team, where largely remote training and consultancy over the past year is helping us to revamp our primary curriculum, building it around the kind of writing we want pupils to produce, clarifying learning objectives and scaffolding learning.

BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP

We had some unexpected outcomes too from our long-term relationship with The EAL Academy. In 2019 Graham and one of my deputies, David Jackson, made a joint presentation to the [ECIS Multilingual Learning in Education Conference](#) on the work with our secondary staff. We have also been able to share this work with our wider community of schools. ASIBA brings together schools like ours where pupils learn in French and English. The EAL Academy has run training for the ASIBA school leaders and launched our handbook for History/Geography teaching at a training day for teachers from all ASIBA schools.

What are the key lessons from this process? When you are commissioning CPD:

- take time to think through what you really want to achieve and what’s getting in the way;
- research your potential providers thoroughly;
- marry research with practical pedagogy;
- demand genuinely bespoke training; and
- build long-term relationships with CPD providers.

This initiative has given us an approach to literacy rooted in theory and practice and customised precisely to our circumstances and requirements.

THE AUTHOR

James Cathcart is the Director of the British Section at the [Lycée International in Saint-Germain-en-Laye](#). You can connect with him directly on [LinkedIn](#)



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