MANAGING CHANGE

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP FOR EAL CPD

BY JAMES CATHCART

We are part of the Lycée International in St-Germain-en-Laye, a 25 minute train ride from central Paris. Our sixth form students study the international version of the French Baccalauréat, the Option Internationale du Baccalauréat (OIB) – not to be confused with the IB. The unique feature of the OIB is that A-Level standard examinations in English Language and Literature and History/ Geography are added to the full syllabus of the traditional French Baccalauréat. Our younger secondary students do English and History IGCSE alongside the French national curriculum. We also have a primary section.

In 2015 and 2016 we had spent time thinking about why our EAL students might have an excellent grasp of what they were studying for the OIB, but still have persistent difficulties in writing. As we did so, we realised that some of our native English speakers, many of whom have spent much more time learning in French than English, experienced similar difficulties. Add to that the need to use formal, spoken English in oral exams and we knew we needed some help. Our students, like many in international schools around the world, struggled not just with how to use formal language, but also when to use it. The rules differ between languages – French can be very formal where English is not.

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

UNDERSTANDING OUR NEED

We knew that there was potential for this to be transformational and we needed to get it right, so we invested time and money to fully understand the challenge, the best solution, the research underpinning it and existing evidence of impact. This drew us to the highly regarded London Challenge project and the EAL provision by The EAL Academy. Taking the time in this research phase helped our senior leadership team to think more deeply about the issues our students face and how we could help them through a sustainable schoolwide initiative.

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.



A FUNCTIONAL MODEL OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

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.

In January 2018 two of The EAL Academy team brought the training directly into the classroom.

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.

PLURILINGUAL LITERACY

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,

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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

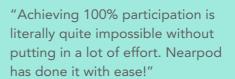
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