

Chapter 7 Supporting Writing

Introduction

Writing in a new language holds a range of challenges for children with EAL, not least because in English primary schools a considerable amount of assessment is through writing, and there is considerable pressure on children to make rapid progress. There is often a timed aspect to writing – for example the teacher will often say that the children have 20 minutes to write the opening of a story and that they expect a certain amount to be completed in this timeframe. This can be very daunting for any child, but if you are writing in your second language, the idea of putting something permanent on paper within a short space of time and having it judged can be enough to halt the flow of ideas. It can also be very frustrating, as the child might have innovative and exciting things to write, but not have the vocabulary in English to record them. Unlike conversation, writing does not offer an immediate context and clues within what others are saying. The genre or text type might be unfamiliar, the necessary vocabulary elusive and a writing task might be expected to be completed individually without consultation with others. You can imagine that the blank page might appear very daunting at this stage!

An ethos is required that provides opportunities for children with EAL to develop their understanding of vocabulary, grammatical rules, spelling, sentence structure and all the technical elements of writing, whilst allowing them to draw on their experiences, their imaginations and their knowledge and understanding of the world. This chapter aims to provide some ideas as to how children with EAL might be supported with their writing, within an ethos that values all contributions and acknowledges that all children will have ideas, but that support might be needed to get these onto page or screen. The chapter begins by describing a sociocultural approach to writing, as this is the theoretical underpinning for

all the ideas and suggestions in this book. I then look at writing in context before exploring how modelled, shared and guided writing can support children with EAL. The chapter goes on to examine writing frames and their uses, before discussing marking and feedback in relation to writing. The final section suggests ways by which more advanced bilingual learners can be supported with their writing.

A sociocultural approach to writing

A sociocultural approach to teaching and learning is based on the concept that effective learning takes place within social interaction. This, I believe, is particularly relevant to children with EAL learning to write in a new language. Many opportunities need to be provided whereby children can discuss, share, question, argue, listen, repeat and generally communicate about the subject matter and the tasks to be completed, before attempting to write. Flynn (2007) found that one of the key features of the planning of effective teachers, was the emphasis on oracy and their awareness that this foundation in spoken language would support children's reading and writing. This collaborative dialogue is essential before, during and after the writing process, so that children have the opportunity to articulate their ideas and to hear ideas articulated by others:

'Through talking, we can formulate ideas for the first time, crystallising inner thoughts into substance and shaping our ideas into existence..'

(Myhill and Jones, 2009: 266)

In their study into oral rehearsal for writing, Myhill and Jones (p. 274) differentiate between talk to generate ideas and what they term 'presentational' talk where children rehearse exactly what they are going to write, using the style and vocabulary appropriate to a written text, before writing. For the purposes of their research, they divided the types of writing-

related talk into three areas – idea generation, oral rehearsal and reflection on writing. These three aspects of talk relating to writing have the potential to inspire and support children with EAL with their writing and could be seen as underpinning pedagogies when planning lessons which include writing, whatever the subject. From their findings, Myhill and Jones (p. 276) noticed that the distinction between oral rehearsal and other types of talk was that ‘the prosody altered from the rhythms and intonations of natural speech to a slower, more deliberate delivery which was more like reading aloud than conversation’ and this style of talk would benefit children with EAL preparing to write in L2.

Writing in any language – whether it is your L1 or L2 – is very different to speaking a language and poses other challenges. This is in terms of structure, style, tone, vocabulary use, formality and so forth. The contexts in which speech and writing are produced are very different; during talk there are contextual cues, facial expressions, gestures for example, whilst with writing there is the pressure of its permanence and the lack of instant feedback which might occur during oral exchanges. Writing also involves ‘both transcription and text generation’ (Myhill and Jones, 2009: 271), as well as, for children with EAL, the whole issue of writing in a new language. Oral rehearsal can ‘reduce the cognitive demand’ (p. 272), of a written task because the ideas have been articulated in a form which is specific to the writing required.

Collaboration does not need to stop at the talking stage either. Evidence suggests that when children work together to produce a piece of written work, the standard of the writing improves as does the children’s self-esteem (Myhill and Jones, 2009). Together, children can scaffold each other’s use of particular vocabulary; they can discuss what is needed for a

particular piece of writing and the style that is needed; and they can share what is potentially the burden of transcribing their ideas. If two children who both share a language other than English are encouraged to work together, they might choose to discuss ideas in their L1, before writing them in English. De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) found that, in a task where two students revised and edited a piece of writing written by one of them, they chose to employ their L1 to discuss their ideas throughout the activity. The authors found that use of L1 allowed the students to reflect effectively throughout, to complete the task successfully, and to move their L2 forward.

This supports Kenner's (2007: 26) research with second and third generation Bangladeshi children which found that, when the children were encouraged to use both Bangla and English and combined this with their extensive knowledge of different cultures, they 'developed deeper understanding of concepts, activated metalinguistic skills and generated new ideas which enriched their learning.' These metalinguistic skills can be developed as children recognise how grammatical constructions and sentence building depends on the rules of the language being used. By thinking and talking about word meanings in different languages, children become more aware of the fact that language can be used in different ways for different purposes. Similarly, Jimenez et al (1996: 93) found that the children in their study benefited from discussing English texts in their own language, before going on to write in English.

Another important consideration when supporting children with EAL, is that cultural implications for writing can emerge through collaborative endeavours. Children might have had very different experiences of writing and the expectations of the teacher. In previous learning settings there might have been more of a focus on handwriting and presentation; or

children's writing may have been more focused on copying from the board or a text; or dictation might have been the main context for writing. Children need to know what the expectations are and the purpose of the writing they are being expected to do. The next section examines writing in context which can support children with EAL with these expectations.

Writing in context

All children need a context for their writing but this is even more essential for children with EAL who may not have the language context as a starting point. One way to provide a context is through the sharing of high quality texts, followed by extensive discussion before writing. Barratt and Wheatley (1998) undertook a project where the underpinning idea was that children's writing in L2 can be improved through the use of literature – both narrative writing skills and the more technical elements. Specific texts were chosen to support different aspects – narrative structure, the use of speech for example. Grammatical elements were taught through these texts using shared reading and discussion:

'The emphasis was on verbal interaction between teachers, pupils and texts. Pupils were not required to do grammar and punctuation exercises. They were encouraged to use the texts as models for their own writing.'

(Barratt and Wheatley, 1998: 3)

The study found that most children with EAL made considerable improvements with their narrative writing skills. In particular the use of figurative language improved – explicitly modelled through the texts used – as did accurate use of grammar and punctuation.

The following case study provides an example from my own experience of how a text was used effectively within a Reception class (age 4 and 5) to help children to contextualise their own writing. I had the good fortune to observe a number of lessons based around this text.

CASE STUDY 1

The traditional tale 'The Gingerbread Man' was used as the basis for a topic for three weeks. I was able to observe in the classroom for several days within this time, and each day had activities linked to the story. The teacher began the topic by asking the children if they had heard of the story and they all looked at the cover of the book. A few of the children were familiar with the tale (none of whom were children with EAL). The teacher read the story from a large version and the children were able to take time to look at the illustrations. The story was then repeated using an online version of the tale:

<http://www.topmarks.co.uk/stories/GingerbreadMan.aspx>. This time, the children were encouraged to join in with the refrain, 'Run, run as fast as you can. You can't catch me I'm the gingerbread man!'

Over the three weeks, many activities evolved from these initial readings of the text. Process drama was one of these. The children enacted freeze frames to represent different scenes from the story and the teacher and teaching assistant photographed these. The next day the photographs were displayed on the interactive whiteboard and the children retold the story using the images. Hot seating was included in several lessons – not just hot seating the gingerbread man, but other characters in the story. The children engaged in a 'conscience corridor' or 'decision alley' activity whereby the class was divided in half and one half had to take the side of the fox and praise him for his initiative and the other half had to condemn him for his treachery.

On another occasion, the children made gingerbread men and decorated them with sweets. They were all able to make two – one to eat that day and one to take home, forging a connection with their lives outside school.

The children were also encouraged to access an animated version of the tale on the class computers during reading time:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U89dkGrsYZY>

Throughout the three weeks, short pieces of writing were completed by the children. One such was to list the characters in the story. Another was the completion of group 'role on the wall' illustrations. This is where an outline of a character is drawn on a large piece of paper and the children use crayons or any writing implement they choose, to write words to describe the character either within the outline (the character's personality) or outside the outline (the character's outward appearance).

As this topic drew to a close, the children were asked to choose one section of the story to write in their own words and these were then put together to form the whole story and added to the ongoing display (see Appendix 2a, b and c).

END OF CASE STUDY

Now consider the following questions:

- In what ways did the pedagogies and strategies described above support children with EAL with their writing?
- Why does drama support writing so effectively for children with EAL?

- What did you notice about the writing samples in Appendices 2a, b and c?

In the example above, these young children were immersed in a particular story for three weeks. They listened to and watched different versions, retold the story themselves, acted it out, played with it and then wrote it. This repetition of language is invaluable for all children but particularly children with EAL. Hearing the language in context, utilising the words for their own purposes and hearing and seeing the vocabulary in many different ways enabled them to feel confident when it came to their own writing. Gooch et al (2005: 22) write that ‘our written voices are intimately linked to the oral voices of others’ and the activities relating to The Gingerbread Man were promoting this intimate link. The text was used as both a model and a scaffold and, without even realising it, the children were developing an understanding of the rhythms and cadences of a traditional tale and were able to use some of the peculiarities of this genre in their own writing. Myhill et al (2013: 107) believe that the use of models and encouraging children to imitate and reuse words and phrases is ‘a powerful learning tool in helping to embed new structures cognitively within the student’s writing repertoire.’ It was clear from my observations that this embedding was occurring and the children had ample opportunities to further develop their range of vocabulary and their understanding of writing within a specific genre. Barrs (1998: 114) writes that:

‘The roots of writing lie in the other forms of symbolising (drawing, modelling, play, drama) that children engage in before they come to the abstract symbolic system of writing’

Planning for time to engage in these ‘other forms of symbolising’ is vital.

The children with EAL in this class were Nepalese and it would have been interesting to have found out if there was a parallel story in their culture. This might then have been shared with the class and perhaps a parent or child could have read or told the story in the Nepali language. I remember a time when I was reading 'Cinderella' to a class and all of a sudden one of the children with EAL leapt up and said, excitedly, 'I know this story! But we call it....' and she said the title of the version with which she was familiar. The next day, the child brought in her version to share with the other children and they enjoyed finding the similarities and differences. In a study into rural Zimbabwean classrooms, Ngwaru (2011) found that pedagogies and practices, resources and texts did not reflect the children's lives and much of what they read and wrote was alien to them. The texts used to support writing need to be diverse and, where possible, reflect the cultures, traditions and practices of the children in the class.

Another way of facilitating writing in context, besides using high quality texts, is through the use of personal experiences as a starting point for writing. In this way, children with EAL are starting with the same advantage as children with English as their first language in terms of ideas for writing. They know and understand the experience they have had better than anybody else and this can empower them even if finding the words in English requires some effort. Myhill and Jones (2009) point out that producing a written text requires the writer not only to think about the content but also the writing process itself. For children with EAL who have the added challenge of writing in L2, knowing the content in advance because of its personal and particular nature, removes one of these challenges and enables them to focus on the language to be used.

Shared, modelled and guided writing

In the section above, discussion was included relating to oral rehearsal. This rehearsal can take place when children work together in pairs or groups, but may need to be modelled first by the teacher. Time spent engaging in modelled, shared and guided writing is valuable for all children but particularly so for children with EAL. Modelling writing enables the teacher to discuss the language choices he or she is making and to articulate the thinking that is occurring each step of the way. Modelling also allows the teacher to ‘share the pleasures and challenges of composing’ (Cremin, 2015: 92). This can provide children with EAL with the realisation that writing for everyone is an evolving process; that mistakes can be made and that editing and re-writing, finding new vocabulary, trying out spellings and so forth, are all part of this process.

Sometimes it might be more appropriate to engage the children in shared writing, where they take a more active role and the teacher acts as the scribe (Swartz et al, 2001). In this way, it is the children’s ideas which lead the writing, but the act of transcription, which can at times be inhibitive, is transferred to the teacher. For children with EAL, this removes one aspect of writing and frees them to focus in on the language that is required. Both modelled and shared writing enable the language demands of the lesson to be overtly explored.

Guided writing gives the teacher the opportunity to work with a small group of children and engage in extended discussions about language and how it might best be used. There is the opportunity to expand children’s sentences, discuss specific terminology, and encourage the children to notice subtleties in language use and the effects of these. Explicit teaching of common written errors can occur and in this way:

'the explicit teaching of language at the word, sentence and text level empowers learners in a way that enables them to make real progress. In this way, the focus shifts from teaching to learning.'

(Pyle, 2008: 10)

When you plan for guided writing, think carefully about your groupings. Dependent on the task and your intended focus, it is sometimes useful to group children according to their writing ability, whilst with other tasks and in different subjects, mixed ability groupings can work very well. In this way, your groups are likely to include children with EAL and children with English as their first language working together, although at times you might find it useful to provide specific language input for children with EAL which is not needed for native English speakers. The main thing here is to remain flexible and think carefully about the cognitive and linguistic demands of the writing tasks.

Often teachers talk to me about their concerns with guided writing in terms of the remainder of the class having to work independently whilst they are focused on one group. The next section looks at one solution to this which is the use of writing frames.

Using writing frames

Writing frames are often seen as exclusive to writing non-fiction texts, but I would argue that they can also be utilised to scaffold any types of writing providing they are carefully planned and constructed. Writing frames have a number of purposes and can be particularly useful for children with EAL. Firstly, they can provide support with a task to enable children to

write independently or semi-independently. This, as stated above can be very beneficial if you are engaged in guided writing with one group of children and the remainder of the class need to complete their tasks either independently or with a partner. Writing frames can be designed in such a way as to motivate and inspire children to write, sometimes by providing the vocabulary needed to complete a writing task or by helping the children to organise their ideas. A well-designed writing frame can give children the opportunity to become accustomed to a particular genre or text type. They are also a way of differentiating tasks, so that everyone is achieving a particular objective, but some are more supported than others.

Dufficy (2004: 242) notes that children with EAL learn social everyday language relatively rapidly, but that the linguistic level needed to succeed in more and more difficult academic tasks is not so easy to acquire. He notes that they receive little support with this and 'are frequently required to use language in demanding ways with little or no assistance', suggesting that 'content-based communicative tasks' need to be planned for. Writing frames and similar tools can provide this support. Although not strictly speaking a writing frame, Dufficy suggests a specific task which he found particularly useful when supporting children with EAL with their writing. The activity is similar to a crossword in that the children have answers to fill in but they have to do it from their partner's description. This is what he refers to as an 'information gap task' (Dufficy, 2004: 241) and is useful for a number of reasons:

- The children have to make meaning;
- They have many opportunities to practise relevant vocabulary;
- Support is built in because of the way the children work together on the task and scaffold each other linguistically and cognitively;
- Questions are integral to the task;

- Visual support is part of the task (in this case, there were pictures of some of the nouns which the children had to describe).

Dufficy analysed patterns in word use and found that the activity promoted particular patterns and collocations. This meant that the children were getting sustained practice of relevant vocabulary and linguistic structures. The children were using words such as ‘this’ and ‘that’ and ‘it’s’, replacing the referent because they had the visual clues.

The children had clearly defined roles to play in the task and it afforded the opportunity to describe particular objects in some detail and to find the relevant vocabulary to help their peers. Even if the children were not able to fully participate orally, they were listening to their peers and engaging in the task.

Dufficy’s idea is just one example of how you might develop creative ways to use writing scaffolds for children with EAL. A note of caution however; writing frames and similar resources need to be used with care. Some activities do not need a writing frame and can inhibit children in terms of the vocabulary they want to use or the style they wish to adopt. Children can become reliant on them and begin to lose confidence in writing without this support. There is also the danger of writing frames being used as worksheets – just handed out for children to fill in – rather than ensuring that modelled and shared writing has been engaged with first, before using the writing frame to enable children to work independently. As with all teaching and learning, it is about assessing the cognitive and linguistic demands of a task and deciding which resource or pedagogy will provide the most effective support.

Another key form of support in terms of writing is providing appropriate and useful feedback to children with EAL. The following section examines issues around marking and feedback.

Marking and feedback

All children need to receive constructive feedback on their writing in order to develop their style, vocabulary use, syntactic and grammatical awareness, spelling and so forth. For children writing in a new language, this feedback needs to be timely and well thought out in order that they continue to make progress but do not feel daunted by the challenges of writing. It is important not to over-correct, either orally or in relation to written work, as this might inhibit future attempts and affect children's confidence and self-esteem. As teachers, we need a strong subject knowledge in relation to linguistic structures and how to make the best use of language. We also need to be aware of typical errors that children with EAL will tend to make in their writing and be able to analyse children's writing effectively in order to provide useful and relevant feedback.

The following list aims to provide some ideas in relation to this subject knowledge and some issues about language which you might encounter when you mark written work undertaken by children with EAL:

- Children might use brief sentences because they are unsure of appropriate conjunctions to extend their sentences or because they lack the vocabulary to write about a particular subject or within a specific genre;
- They may not be aware of how to use determiners. There are many types of determiners in the English language - articles such as 'the', 'a' and 'an' –

demonstratives such as ‘these’, ‘those’ and ‘this’ – and possessives such as ‘his’, ‘hers’ and ‘our’ to name but a few;

- Children may be confident writing in one grammatical tense but not others or there may be difficulties with subject/verb agreement;
- Sentence structure might reflect their own language and therefore the word order might be incorrect in English;
- Comparatives and superlatives can prove difficult, for example ‘big’, ‘bigger’ and ‘biggest’;
- Pronouns – children might write for example, ‘I gave the cake to he’ or ‘Her is naughty’;
- Prepositions are always difficult to learn in a new language. Children might write ‘My book is in the table’ or ‘I am going in France’.

Cameron and Besser (2004) found that explicit attention to certain features of language such as modal verbs, adverbials and prepositional phrases is especially important for lower achieving EAL writers, who seem less likely to discover the grammatical patterns by themselves than higher achieving EAL learners. Because of the spelling, punctuation and grammar test (SPaG) which was introduced as a national assessment for Year 6 children in 2013, there is much more of a focus in primary classrooms on grammatical elements of writing. Much care needs to be taken here for all children, but particularly children with EAL, as, if decontextualised writing exercises intended to focus on grammatical structures are used, they are more likely to confuse than enlighten. It is crucial that any discussion about sentence structure, grammatical tenses, use of adjectives, adverbs, verb and so forth take place within a context. This can be through the use of a text or a child’s experience; it might be connected with a film or a picture book; linked with specific genres such as

procedural writing or informational writing as found in an encyclopaedia. There is little point in teaching subordinate or relative clauses for example, if this is not conducted through a context. Children with EAL need to see a particular rule in an appropriate context and you as the marker of their work need to see that they can use that rule appropriately in a range of different contexts.

Rather than a second case study in this chapter, I have chosen to include an example of written work by a 9 year old child with EAL, to illustrate some of the issues that might occur and to discuss how you might respond to this with your marking and feedback.

^{2c}
My Special Place ^A Monday 8th October
Last year I went ^{on} ~~to holiday~~ ^{holiday} I saw lots of people.
I heard Crowded people getting Excited.
I ^{small} Small lot's of food like Cake, breakfast, Chocolate.
I like about ^{My holiday} ~~holiday~~ is the people. Slave you well and
give you food's. they ^{have} ~~were~~ swimming place.
~~It~~ I it have lovely bed room a enormous bath tub.
Because it was mostly ~~to~~ the brilliant place you can be.
it was Caring place too. they had generous people. And
had Outstanding people who was friendly
I Share my bed room with My brother
I got in a 1-hour, 25min

This piece of writing was undertaken towards the end of a two week unit of work about Special Places. There had been much discussion about what makes a special place and the teacher had used modelled and shared writing to work through examples with the children. The children had been encouraged to bring in photographs of places that were important to them and these were displayed with annotations. These all built up to the final piece of written work entitled My Special Place.

As you can see from the writing sample above, Suresh has a good understanding of many aspects of writing in this new language. He is willing to try out ambitious vocabulary such as 'generous', 'excited' and 'brilliant' and is conscious of including these adjectives in his writing. He is clearly aware that writing needs to be structured and that paragraphs are necessary. His spelling of common words is generally accurate and he makes plausible attempts at spelling more difficult words. He uses cursive script and his writing is legible. The overall message of the text is clear and Suresh manages to convey a sense of excitement within his writing.

There are however a number of errors and, as a teacher, assessment needs to record these for future reference. Marking and feedback need to reflect the fact that Suresh has made a valiant effort here, whilst selecting two or three areas he might immediately improve. So, what are the key issues with this piece of writing? Before reading the next paragraph, re-read Suresh's writing and analyse in as much depth as you can.

Analysis of Suresh's writing: The text is not really a description of a special place; it is more a recount of his holiday. This could be for a number of reasons. Suresh may not have understood the task or the genre he was expected to embrace. He may have been influenced

by wanting to write about his holiday and was going to do this whatever the task demanded otherwise! It might be that, for him, his special place *was* his holiday destination and, because of this, his writing then followed this tangent. However, Bearne (2002) argues that, more important than the transcriptional elements of a piece of writing is the writer's ability to fulfil the purpose of the writing, and more support for Suresh on this aspect would be needed.

There is some inaccurate use of prepositions – 'went to holiday'; limited use of conjunctions to link sentences; lack of agreement between some pronouns and verbs 'it have...'; and some lack of agreement between subject and verb 'people who was...' There are a number of spelling errors – some expected (crowded) and some unexpected (swimming), although it is clear that he is using his knowledge of the link between letters and sounds to make sensible approximations. There are issues with the use of a consistent tense, and verb endings do not always agree. At times there is omission of definite articles – 'they have swimming place' and throughout, apostrophes are used incorrectly. Suresh also uses some unusual expressions – 'slave you well' and 'mostly the brilliant place you can be'.

This analysis might seem highly critical but it is essential that we are able to analyse writing in this depth. It is also crucial to remember all the things that Suresh is doing well in his writing and to celebrate the fact that he was happy and confident to attempt this task independently. As a teacher, our job would be to consider the most important feedback at this stage – perhaps choosing one or two areas which Suresh could easily address in his next piece of writing. What would you choose?

Providing effective support for children writing in a second language is a real skill and can only be developed over time. Continually developing your knowledge about language will help with this and will enable you to provide useful feedback for all learners. Sometimes it is more difficult to support and challenge more able children with EAL and the final section looks at this in more depth.

Advanced bilingual learners

There is evidence to suggest that children with EAL who have acquired a good level of spoken and written English receive very little support to move them to even higher levels. Archer and Francis (2007: xiv) believe that children from ethnic minority backgrounds with EAL who are academically successful are ‘often ignored and overlooked within the prevalent concerns with ‘underachievement’’. In terms of reading and writing, many children with EAL soon achieve a level comparable to their peers and it might be deemed therefore that they do not require additional or different support. Because their writing often makes sense and they fulfil set tasks, specific and recurring errors in their written work are overlooked and never overtly addressed. It might be that the specific language-related knowledge is not available to the teacher to enable support for the more intricate aspects of linguistic development (Ofsted, 2005). Sometimes errors might occur because of the children’s use of oral language which might also go uncorrected because they are seen to be able to make themselves understood. Spelling, for example might be an issue because of how the child hears the word inaccurately, pronounces it inaccurately and then writes it in the same way.

Cameron and Besser (2004), in their study into Key Stage 2 children's writing found that higher achieving EAL learners could benefit from exposure to and focused teaching on the following areas:

- More advanced tenses that show the relative times of events, and more advanced subordinators to create more varied sentences;
- Exposure to a wide range of different stories which have alternative endings, so that children have models for their own story endings;
- An increased awareness of the reader and how to develop characters, plot, setting and so forth in narrative writing, in order to engage the reader;
- Developing rich and varied language use, appropriate to a range of genres;
- Developing understanding of figurative language and how this might be used effectively.

This kind of focused teaching is ideally undertaken in small group work, perhaps in guided reading and writing sessions as described earlier. In this way, children with EAL can receive feedback contingent upon their immediate needs and errors and misunderstandings in their writing will be less likely to go unnoticed.

Cumbria County Council has a guidance booklet entitled Working with Advanced EAL Learners which has more excellent ideas and strategies. This can be found at:

<http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/537/955/6075/6263/6425/40995135050.doc?timestamp=4248482232>

Practical ideas for the classroom

- ✓ Use activities which are directly related to the genre and text type. For example, if the class are studying instructional texts, ask the children to work in pairs to identify all the adjectives/adverbs/imperative verbs which are typical of this text type. Provide different colour highlighter pens so that children can physically record the features of the text and then compare with others;
- ✓ Provide word banks specific to the subject or the genre. For example, in science or geography there will be precise vocabulary that needs to be used and if children with EAL do not have this in their linguistic repertoire, it can inhibit their ability to write up an investigation or describe a setting;
- ✓ Encourage children to create their own bilingual dictionaries – for each subject perhaps – which will enable them to write more independently where needed;
- ✓ Use mind maps and encourage children to create their own bilingual mind maps. This might be for story writing, scientific vocabulary, language related to a topic and so forth;
- ✓ Develop vocabulary acquisition by exploring texts and encouraging children to extract particular words and phrases which they can use in their own writing;
- ✓ Use matching activities to explore different grammatical tenses – for example, draw two columns on the board. In one column have different instructions – ‘First, fetch a spoon’, ‘Then stir the soup’ and so forth. In the other column have a list of what was done – ‘I fetched a spoon’, ‘Then I stirred the soup’. These would be in a random order and the children could draw lines between the matching sentences. In this way they see how words change according to the tense required;
- ✓ Introduce writing journals where children can write what they like, when they like choosing the language they wish to write in. They can take these home with them,

share them with friends and have autonomy in terms of writing content. Writing journals are not marked and are not looked at by the teacher unless the child invites this;

- ✓ Promote collaborative writing. Children could work in groups to produce story openers. Each child could have a job to do – one child might present three or four ways that the story might start – Once upon a time...One day...Three years ago – another child might put together a description of the scene – a dark, mysterious forest...an enchanted castle hanging in the mist....the constant sound of engines revving and horns tooting – and another child might focus on a character who is introduced in this first scene and place them in the setting – Nervously, Patrick approached the dark, mysterious forest...once there was a young girl who dreamt of an enchanted castle....
- ✓ Plan for small pieces of writing each day – this might just be a word list around a topic; a ‘phrase of the day/week’; an idiom which the children have to try to use in their oral or written work; a mind map to explore a new topic; or an ongoing KWL grid which children can add to.

Conclusion

Writing is rarely easy for anybody. It is certainly not straightforward when you are writing in a new language and having to expose yourself to the judgement of others. I recently completed an evening course to develop my Portuguese language skills and I found, to my dismay, that I was very reluctant to submit my written homework as I knew that there were likely to be many errors. I dreaded having it returned and when it duly was – covered in red pen corrections – I was mortified. Writing is something I usually

enjoy and can complete at a reasonable level, but writing in another language was daunting and frustrating. I had to keep my sentences short as I was unable to create interesting and complex constructs, and my creativity was inhibited by my lack of essential vocabulary and syntactic and grammatical knowledge. If you want to improve the way you support the writing of children with EAL, I would strongly recommend learning a new language yourself (further discussion of this in Chapter 9). Not only will you have a real empathy with the children you teach, but you will raise your awareness of the complexities of language, particularly the written form.