Whole School Approach for ESL Learners

By

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Margaret Gray studied ESL Learners in the Mainstream school setting and the development of an effective whole school approach as well as professional development strategies to inform staff at Meadowbank Primary School and Campmeadows Primary School. Margaret believed that a joint approach between the two school settings would develop valuable links and a shared expertise.

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1. Title

Whole School Approach for ESL Learners

2. Type of activity undertaken through Teacher Professional Leave.

The main activity undertaken was an investigative study using research by an individual teacher with links to a base school and a neighbour school to share findings into the provision of an effective program for ESL Learners in the Mainstream setting.

The leave also involved undertaking study through the “ESL in the Mainstream” course.

3. Context of school or schools.

The study was based at Meadowbank Primary School with contact links to Campmeadows Primary School to share findings and develop common understandings for common issues. The schools are neighbour schools that share the common issues of low socio-economic clients, low literacy levels in the home environment and a large and varied ESL population. The schools are small schools with enrolments under 200, in the Like Schools Group 9, and are located in the Northern Metropolitan Region in Broadmeadows.

4. Area that TPL addresses.

The study addresses ESL Learners in the Mainstream school setting and the development of an effective whole school approach as well as professional development strategies to inform staff at both schools. It was believed that a joint approach between the two school settings would develop valuable links and a shared expertise.

5. What are you trying to improve?

The study developed from informal surveys conducted in 2004 with parents, teachers and students. Quality tools were used to assess common issues with regard to the provision and delivery of an effective ESL program. The main opportunities for Improvement that became apparent were:

- Lack of relevant background information on students and families with regard to languages spoken, previous schooling and relevant history.
- Lack of effective identification of ESL students.
- Teachers were not familiar with the ESL Development Stages of the ESL Companion to English.
- Lack of effective assessment tools for ESL students.
- Ineffective reporting to parents by using the CSF II outcomes.
- Lack of common understandings and strategies to address the needs of New Arrivals and P–6 students in the Mainstream setting.
6. What has been achieved?

Many of the main issues have been addressed and others are in draft form or part of ongoing research. Personal Professional Development outcomes have been extremely rewarding and promise to continue to develop in the future. The main areas addressed to date have been:

- The development of a new enrolment process in flowchart format with additional categories and responsibilities clearly defined. A distinction was made between English Speaking Background (ESB) and Non – English Speaking Background families (NESB) and separate processes were developed, the main difference being – an MEA (Multicultural Education Aide) would be available to spend time with parents to complete a Sociolinguistic Profile to gain relevant background information and build rapport with families.

- New assessment tools are being trialled with ESL learners to develop more authentic assessment to inform teachers.

- New reporting formats are being trialled to gauge suitability for our school, feedback from teachers from the June Reporting Process to parents will assist in developing a specific format for Meadowbank Primary School and Campmeadows Primary School.

- Checklists related to ESL Companion to English developed by Collingwood English Language School and Western English Language School for New Arrivals have provided a guide for developing a format for our students to monitor progress in a more relevant way.

- Links to experienced ESL personnel have been extremely valuable for advice.

- Links with the Best Start program and the Pre School Coordinator at Meadowbank Primary School have assisted the implementation of a Development Play Program with Pre–school and Prep to Year 2 students at Meadowbank Primary School starting in Term 3, 2005.

- A Bilingual Story telling program using trained story tellers from the community will be implemented in Term 3, 2005 for Pre–school and Years Prep to 2 students at Meadowbank.

- A whole school policy is being developed to incorporate all the new initiatives.

- A process for identification of “at risk” students provides additional data to assist the program.

- Professional development sessions have been implemented and will continue at both schools. A whole school Curriculum Day to develop ESL common understandings was conducted in Term 2.

- Implementation of the VELS in relation to ESL students is currently being conducted to make links to student learning that will be incorporated into whole school policy.
7. What has been learnt?

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<tr>
<th>Key Learning</th>
<th>Learning activities that most promoted learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Need to collect relevant background information at the point of enrolment</td>
<td>• ESL in the Mainstream – (10 week course)</td>
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<td>• Provision of suitable interpreters to improve communication with families</td>
<td>• Whole Day PD session at LMER for ESL teachers to develop a Whole School Approach and strategies to implement</td>
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<td>• Development of common understandings amongst staff of ESL issues and specific cultural considerations</td>
<td>• PD at Western English Language School (WELS)- 3 sessions</td>
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<td>• Need for a collaborative approach amongst all staff working with students</td>
<td>• Visit to Collingwood English Language School</td>
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<td>• Understand the appropriate strategies and approaches to implement with ESL students</td>
<td>• Visits to Debney Meadows Primary School to discuss ESL approaches at that school with experienced staff and principal</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Need for authentic assessments and data to inform teaching and gauge student progress</td>
<td>• Visit to Meadow Heights Primary School to discuss approaches with ESL teacher and Principal</td>
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<td>• Don’t assume cognitive development is reflected by English proficiency</td>
<td>• Critical friends –Daina Coles and Janet Saker at the ESL Branch</td>
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<td>• Involvement of families to assist learning and develop rapport</td>
<td>• Cheryl McCashney – Assessment and Reporting - at DE&amp; T</td>
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<td>• Need to continue professional development and readings</td>
<td>• Languages and Multicultural Education Resources Centre.</td>
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<td>• Pam Luizzi at LMER</td>
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8. How have you applied (or intend to apply) the learning to practice?

Learning will applied by the continuation of the development of improved practices in:
• Information gathering during interviews with parents
• Data collection aided by authentic assessments
• The implementation of programs to identify and address specific needs of students eg. *Bridging the Gap* using Pre and Post. Testing for Years 4 to 6 ESL students
  - ESL Language Assistance Groups P-6, related to identified ESL Developmental Stage.
  - Literacy Intervention Groups for P–4 Students
All groups were selected based on data collected using:
- an informal oral language interview
- writing sample analysis
- running records
- formal assessment tools where appropriate.

- Improved reporting formats and processes.
- Programs that involve community families and show value for First Languages eg. Bilingual Storytelling and Bilingual Borrowing Kits
- Collaborative approach with class teachers to make Curriculum Culturally Inclusive
- Consultation with ESL consultant, Norma Murray and ESL Branch to begin a Draft Policy for Whole School Approach to ESL Learners.
- Involvement in a trial project of Children’s Portfolios to provide a link between Pre-School and School settings

9. How the application of the new knowledge/skills has impacted on student learning outcome?

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<th>Impact</th>
<th>Measures used</th>
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<tr>
<td>Improved information gathering process avoids previous misunderstandings eg. disrupted schooling, country of birth, refugee status and background details, relevant family issues.</td>
<td>New enrolment process (still being trialled).</td>
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<td>Use of ESL Stages of Development to allow a better understanding of student progress rather than the use of inappropriate and often irrelevant CSFII outcomes</td>
<td>Sociolinguist Profile</td>
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<td>Assessment tools are still being trialled but they are giving more valuable information about the communication skills of students and highlight areas for improvement.</td>
<td>New checklists to monitor student progress based on ESL outcomes.</td>
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<td>Formats from other schools are being trialled and reviewed to assist the development of formats to suit our school. Informal feedback has been positive from teachers.</td>
<td>Assessment tools to identify Speaking and Listening Skills eg: - Renfrew Language Scales – Action Pictures (ACER) -“Literacy Probe 7-9” (ACER) -“Assessing and Teaching Phonological Knowledge” – John Munro (ACER) -Language Disorder Program developed by Dr John Munro -ESL Course Advice assessment formats</td>
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<td>PD sessions have assisted the development of common understandings amongst staff and identified the need to implement a</td>
<td>Reporting Formats to parents and DE&amp;T</td>
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<td>Professional development sessions surveys</td>
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<td>Implementation of Development Play and Bilingual Story Time Programs</td>
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### Collaborative Approach to Planning and Program Development for Students

- The implementation of the Bilingual Storytelling and Development Play programs will establish links with families as well as the development of communication skills for students. Pre-school students will be identified earlier for additional assistance programs. The programs will be extended to years 3–6 to assist cooperative play, social skills and behaviours, as funding becomes available.

### 10. What you hope to achieve in the next six months, drawing on Teacher Professional Leave learning?

- The School will formalise and document all new strategies and formats that have been trialled to produce *A Whole School Policy and Program for ESL Learners* that will provide common understandings and guidelines for teachers, parents and students.
- Ongoing PD will be offered to staff based on a PD survey.
- Links with both schools will continue to provide support to develop, implement and monitor programs.
- Develop strategies to make learning experiences more culturally inclusive.
- Purchase resources and literature that caters for cultural inclusiveness.
- Continued evaluation of policies and strategies developed using quality tools.

### 11. Further Information on Leave

This information will be available on a DVD to be produced by Northern Metropolitan Region and the Meadowbank Primary School website.

**Additional Resources:**
- References and Websites
- PowerPoint Presentation ‘Best Start for ESL Students’