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<CT>Drawing on teachers' professional expertise to develop an impactful EAL policy

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<A>Introduction

Developing local school policies and implementing them is never easy. School leaders who aim to do this quickly may provide teachers with policy texts in the hope that this leads to the actions that they envisage. However, policies are much more than the texts we write. Policy comprises messy social interactions that draw on teachers' passion, creativity, judgement and interpretations of the context in which they are to be applied (Ball et al., 2011). Teachers are not just objects of policy but also have varying roles in bringing policy about. Thus, their values, interests, beliefs and attitudes towards new policy initiatives must be considered (Farrell and Kun, 2008). Furthermore, given that schools have differing histories, buildings, student intakes, local communities and staffing profiles, what may work for one school may not work for another.

At Kings Education Oxford, an international sixth form with a student population that is almost 100 per cent EAL, we had to consider all the above recently when developing an EAL policy. Upon reflection, we realised that we could be doing more to help students to overcome the linguistic barriers that they face when studying GCSE or A-level subjects. Equally, teachers would often note that a student's English may not be 'strong' enough for their subject but were unclear about what strategies they could use. To address this, we developed and enacted an EAL policy that outlines its aims, a positive language ethos and classroom strategies. It is this process of development and enactment, which relied heavily on teacher input, that we report on here.

<A>The policy development process

Through the first author's MSc in learning and teaching dissertation at the University of Oxford, the latest research on second language acquisition (SLA) was consulted and assessed against the school's provision for EAL students. This led to the conclusion that four central themes would be beneficial for EAL students: treating a student's majority language as a fund of knowledge; planning for language input; the promotion of reading; and planning for language output (**Table 1**). These formed the theoretical underpinnings from which the policy was developed throughout the academic year.

<TC>Table 1: EAL themes from the literature upon which the classroom strategies are based

Theme	Description <i>Examples of strategies</i>	Example of supporting literature
Treating a student's majority language as a fund of knowledge	This will help all students to access the curriculum; help students to develop conceptual understanding; help them to develop an understanding of the cultural differences between their majority language and English; maintain and extend students' majority language; and ensure that students' identity and culture are not diminished due to English hegemony. <i>e.g. Use technology for translation, pair students who share their majority language, ask students to read Wikipedia entries (where available) in their majority language in preparation for their next lesson</i>	Bailey and Marsden, 2017
Planning for language input	Vary the language input received from teacher talk, the selection of texts and other media. <i>e.g. Use synonyms, paraphrase information and questions, provide both written and oral instructions</i>	Lindahl and Watkins, 2015
The promotion of reading	Acquisition of academic English happens more efficiently through reading than direct instruction, hence promote reading in the classroom and beyond. <i>e.g. Create a popular reading list for your subject, set work that requires reading a few paragraphs</i>	McQuillan, 2019
Planning for language output	Plan for language output in lessons in such a way that students are stretched and will learn to notice the gaps in their understanding. <i>e.g. Ask questions that require at least a sentence to answer them, increase your wait time to at least five seconds before offering help, be mindful of 'forcing output' as this can lead to language anxiety</i>	Uggen, 2012

In the first term, 15 teachers took part in workshops discussing these themes and further attended a brainstorming session to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of three different EAL policies from schools in the UK. This was done to expand teachers' understanding of SLA processes and to determine teachers' criteria of what makes effective policy. Data collected through questionnaires, collated in **Table 4**, predominantly revealed that teachers value practical classroom strategies that can easily be implemented into their lessons, but that these should reflect and suit the demands of their subjects. This led to the first iteration of the written text of our policy, which included 30 suggested classroom strategies for EAL provision – a complete compendium of these strategies is available online through the Oxford University Research Archives (van der Meer, 2021).

In the second term, teachers attended departmental meetings to discuss these strategies and select which they felt were pertinent to their classrooms. The data from these meetings was collated and showed that each department chose at least 18 strategies from the 30

offered (**Table 2**), with mathematics adding six and humanities adapting the wording of strategies to better suit their needs. The themes where departments selected a majority of strategies (less than 50 per cent) were not universal, although planning for language output came close. This bespoke selection by departments demonstrates how teachers can draw on professional expertise when enacting a new policy, allowing leadership to understand teachers' potential creative responses to new initiatives. The written policy text was subsequently revised to reflect these bespoke selections and adjustments for each department.

<TC>*Table 2: A summary of the number of strategies chosen (out of the strategies available) for each theme by each department*

Theme	Art	English	Humanities	Mathematics	Science
Promoting reading	4/5	4/5	5/5	2/5	4/5
Language as a fund of knowledge	5/7	5/7	3/7	7/9	3/7
Planning for language input	4/10	8/10	10/10	12/12	7/10
Planning for language output	8/8	8/8	8/8	8/10	4/8
Total number of strategies	21	25	26	29	18

<A>Observations of strategies

During the third term, our focus was on enactment, which saw teachers practising using their chosen strategies before reflecting, in cooperation with English language teachers (ELTs), on their usage. Towards the end of the term, eight 45-minute peer observations were conducted by ELTs using research observation sheets. The aim was to investigate how teachers were applying these strategies in their classrooms, to foster closer links with ELTs and to offer teachers feedback.

Table 3 illustrates the most common EAL strategies, collated by theme, that were observed across all departments. The themes of planning for language input, planning for language output and first language as a fund of knowledge were well represented. The theme of promoting reading, however, was only observed in two out of eight lessons. Given the lifelong benefits of reading, such as increased attainment across subjects and significant increases in vocabulary gains (Tankersley, 2003; Sullivan and Brown, 2015), there is further opportunity to regularly integrate the promotion of reading.

<TC>*Table 3: Summary of the commonly observed EAL strategies across the four themes (the promotion for reading theme is missing, as this was rarely observed in the classroom)*

EAL provision theme:	Commonly observed EAL strategies in all departments:
Actively plan for language input in lessons	The teacher avoided automatically simplifying language or immediately suggesting a translation when a student appeared stuck. Instead, the language was paraphrased, and any unknown words were written on the board.
	The teacher rephrased using synonyms where possible.
	Longer English sentences during teacher monologue were used to help to develop students' English repertoires.
	Multimodal teaching strategies, through simultaneously providing oral and visual input, were used.
Actively plan for language output in lessons	Simple questioning where output results in yes/no or one-word answers was avoided.
	The wait time of teachers was at least five seconds before offering help when asking students questions.

First language as a fund of knowledge	Students were allowed to use technology to draw on their majority language when they required it.
	'English only' was not used as a behaviour-management tool. Instead, phrases akin to 'please get back on task' were observed.

<A>Teachers' experiences with policy development and enactment

At the end of the academic year, teachers were asked to scrutinise the latest version of the school EAL policy text and comment on their experiences of policy development and the EAL strategies. Questionnaires used teachers' own criteria, as determined from surveys at the start of the year, to assess the effective implementation of the policy. **Table 4** outlines these criteria, which can broadly be divided into clear communication, formal implementation and being applicable to the local context.

<TC>Table 4: Teacher criteria to enable the effective implementation of an EAL policy

An effective EAL policy should be...		
clearly communicated:	formally implemented:	applicable to the local context:
Teacher-friendly	Followed by all	Distinguishing between the needs of subjects/departments
Providing clear definitions and guidance	Developed through consultation with all affected	Research-informed
Setting clear aims	Trialled	Practical
Providing strategies for classroom practice	Reflected in observations and appraisals	Flexible
Addressing all stakeholders	Reflected in schemes of work	Improving the status quo
Explained through training	Offering collaboration between English and academic teachers	Considering the varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students

Questionnaire data, elaborated extensively in the full thesis (van der Meer, 2021), showed that participants felt that these criteria were met throughout the year. They agreed that they had a better understanding of second language acquisition processes (75 per cent) and that their experiences with policy development (77 per cent) and collaboration with their peers (92 per cent) were positive and educational. Teachers reported feeling more confident in providing for EAL students (64 per cent). However, 57 per cent of teachers requested further collaborative and educational experiences (e.g. practical workshops on EAL provision and timetabled opportunities to work with ELTs) and dedicated time set aside for this, illustrating a value for continuous professional learning on EAL provision. Furthermore, 47 per cent of teachers highlighted the need to increase the clarity and memorability of the policy text by using more colloquial language, including a few 'buzz' points, and reducing the amount of information provided. This data resulted in further alterations to the policy text that should allow our school to move into the implementation phase, which seeks to formally implement the policy through schemes of work, observations and appraisals.

<A>Conclusion

This study demonstrates how teachers can be considered as professional partners when it comes to policy development and enactment, rather than only being considered as simple implementers of policy. Providing teachers with choices and integrating their feedback during the policy-development process actively values their input and narrows the creative responses that teachers may otherwise have to policy. In terms of a specific EAL policy,

providing teachers with choices as to which strategies to adopt in their departments was most valued by the teachers in our school. Additionally, the variation in our data further confirms that the local context and microcultures of each classroom, teacher experiences and personal perspectives, and the demands of each subject play a role in how teachers enact policy.

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