

RAISE project case studies – Derby

Talking Partners

The implementation of the Talking Partners Project,
September 2002—July 2003: a strategy to raise the achievement of
Pakistani heritage pupils in a Derby inner-city infant school

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This paper was contributed in 2004 to the RAISE Project. There is background information about the project at www.insted.co.uk/raise.html.

Context and problem

There may be little profit in attempting to compare today's standards with those of the past, but we underline our conviction that standards of writing, speaking and reading can and should be raised. (Bullock Report, 1975)

These words written more than twenty-five years ago still ring loudly in the collective educational ear. The issue of raising standards and, in particular, raising the achievement of ethnic minority pupils is high on the educational agenda. The DfES publication 'Aiming High' (2003) identifies Muslim children of Pakistani heritage as one of the underachieving groups in this country.

The Talking Partners Project is a one strategy that has been identified as a means of helping to raise the achievement of young Pakistani heritage pupils. It was piloted in Derby at an inner-city infant school. The need for this intervention programme arises out of the realisation that many EAL pupils are not successfully accessing the curriculum and the language of the Literacy Hour is especially highlighted. The National Literacy Strategy (first introduced in 1998) involves a focus on reading and writing at word, sentence and text levels. The National Literacy Strategy highlights the importance of oracy (speaking and listening) but the emphasis, nevertheless, remains on the acquisition of literacy skills (reading and writing).

Researchers have long argued that the role of language, particularly spoken language, is fundamental to learning. Cummins (1996) differentiates between two different types of spoken English: BICS (Basic, Interpersonal, Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive, Academic Language Proficiency). He maintains that developing bilingual pupils can take up to two years to acquire basic, social everyday English but between five and seven years to acquire cognitive academic English.

Cummins's research is highly pertinent for teachers who are teaching and supporting EAL pupils. Children who arrive in Nursery with little or no English

become more fluent in basic, social English by the time that they reach Year 2—the year in which they take their end of Key Stage 1 standardised tests. Yet the demands of the Literacy Hour even at these early stages necessitate a level of cognitive, academic proficiency. The Talking Partners Programme aims to accelerate language learning in order to lessen this gap.

Background

Talking Partners is a short-term intervention strategy that was initially developed by Bradford LEA to support pupils who speak English as an additional language. The focus is on accelerated learning to improve speaking and listening skills. It is a ten-week programme which consists of three twenty minute sessions a week, the equivalent of one hour a week intensive, structured language input in small group sessions. The recommended ratio is one adult to three pupils.

In April 2002 two Derby colleagues attended a three-day course in Bradford to become Talking Partner Trainers: Tania Sanders Primary Achievement Coordinator for Derby City Access Service (Ethnic Minority Achievement Service) and Fiona Lingard (Key Stage 1 Literacy Consultant).

It was agreed that the programme should be piloted in seven Derby primary schools from September 2002. This small-scale pilot study was designed to measure the results of the Talking Partners Programme in one of the proposed pilot schools. Results are discussed and implications for good practice are drawn. The focus of this report is on one group of Year 2 pupils at an infant school with a predominantly Muslim roll.

Design of the Investigation: Small-Scale Experimental Pilot Study

The fieldwork undertaken in conjunction with this study sought to answer the question:

To what extent is the progress made in speaking and listening by EAL pupils (as a result of the intervention programme) 'Talking Partners' sustained?

It was necessary to collect data using the nationally recognised Renfrew Action Picture Test (Renfrew, C. 1966). There were five phases.

Phase 1

A group of six Year 2 pupils was selected to take part in the Talking Partners Programme. The six pupils are British born of Pakistani heritage. They are learning English as an additional language and Mirpuri-Punjabi is their home language. Each pupil was tested individually using the Renfrew Action Picture Test on 14 September 2002 prior to commencing the programme. The results were analysed and appear in Tables 1a and 1b.

Phase 2

The school introduced the Talking Partners Programme to the group in the Autumn Term 2002. Each pupil in the group received three twenty-minute sessions a week for ten weeks.

Phase 3

In December 2002, at the end of the ten-week programme, each pupil in the group was retested using the Renfrew Action Picture test. These results were analysed.

Phase 4

The results of the pre-Talking Partners Programme were compared with the results of the post- Talking Partners Programme. The gains were measured and appear in Tables 2a and 2b on page 00.

Phase 5

Six months after the pupils had completed the programme, the Renfrew Action Picture test was administered again to establish whether the gains made at the end of the ten-week programme had been sustained.

Phase 1:

Discussion of Pre-Talking Partners Programme Results

The first set of results was evaluated in terms of information given (vocabulary) and the grammar structures used. The results indicated that all the pupils were operating below their chronological age in terms of both content and grammar, as shown in Tables 1a and 1b. A closer examination of the responses revealed that specific items of vocabulary needed in order to respond to the pictures were unknown by some of the pupils. Nouns such as 'post-box', 'mouse' and 'stick' all caused difficulties. In response to the question 'What has the cat just done?' one pupil said, 'Caught the squirrels to eat'. This pupil substituted the word 'squirrel' because she did not know the word 'mouse'. Grammatical errors included a lack of both future and past tenses. In response to the same question ('What has the cat just done?'), one pupil answered 'Cat have two mouses' and another replied 'Catching the mouse'.

It is interesting to note that three of the pupils used the regular form of the past tense ('-ed' ending) in this question and produced 'caughted' and none of the pupils used the correct form of the irregular past tense 'caught'. These findings are consistent with the view that EAL pupils are more concerned with expressing meaning than with grammatical accuracy. Nevertheless the apparent limited range of semantic fields in these Mirpuri-Punjabi speaking EAL pupils is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Phase 3 and Phase 4: Discussion of Post-Talking Partners Programme Results (10 weeks)

In order to ensure consistency of approach, the second set of results was evaluated using the same procedure as for the first set of results. The two sets of scores were compared and the gains measured, as shown in Tables 2a and 2b.

The gains made in the information scores ranged from 0—42 months, an average of 14.5 months. The gains made in the grammar scores ranged from 6—24 months, an average of 12.8 months. These findings are consistent with those of Bradford: In 10 weeks pupils make a gain of over a year on a test of oral language competence. (Talking Partners Co-ordinators' Pack)

An analysis of the responses for semantic content shows an increase in average length of utterance. For example, in pre- Talking Partners Pupil 5, in response to

Question 1, "What is the girl doing?" said, "Cuddling the bear." There was an absence of subject and auxiliary verb. However, after ten weeks of the Talking Partners Programme, the response to the same question was: "The girl is cuddling her nice bear." The responses were generally more detailed and contained more connectives, including 'and', 'because' and 'to' (meaning 'in order to').

The gains in language cannot be attributed to coaching the pupils because the Renfrew Picture cards were not used at any point during the ten-week Talking Partners Programme. Nevertheless the question remained: would the progress be sustained over a period of six months without any further intervention from the Talking Partners Programme?

Phase 5: Discussion of Post-Talking Partners Programme Results (6 months)

The final set of results was evaluated in terms of both syntactic and semantic content using the Renfrew Action Picture Test, and they appear in Tables 3a and 3b.

The **information scores** indicated that five of the six pupils (83%) had either maintained their progress or had continued to make further progress. Two pupils had gained an additional 18 months, one pupil had gained a further six months and two pupils had sustained the progress that had been made at the end of the 10 week Talking Partners Programme.

The **grammar scores** indicated that all six pupils (100%) had either maintained their progress or had continued to make further progress. Three pupils sustained their progress, two pupils gained a further twelve months and one pupil gained a further six months.

One pupil (Pupil 5), however, had regressed six months in her information score. Some of her responses over the period of the programme have been compared and are shown in the chart below.

Renfrew Action Picture Test Questions Pupil 5.	Responses Pre-Talking Partners	Responses 10 weeks Post Talking Partners	Responses 6months Post Talking Partners	Information Analysis 6 months later
3. What has been done to the dog?	Tie. Can't move. Score:0/3	Fastened up on log. He wants to get off from the log 'cos he's got belt on. Score: 2/3	The dog has been tied up with a rope on the log. Score: 2/3	Score sustained but the word 'log' is still substituted for stick/post/pole/wood
4. Tell me all about what the man is doing.	He's sitting on the horse and the horse is jumping around the fence. Score 4/4	The man is sitting on the horse and he's keeping on jumping over the gate. Score: 4/4	The man is sitting on the horse and riding off. Score: 2/4	Score has decreased 2 pieces of information omitted: fence/gate and jump/jumping over
5. What has the cat just done?	Catched the squirrels to eat. He ate the squirrels.	The cat is catching the mice for his dinner. The mice are trying to run away.	The cat is picking the two mice for his dinner. Score: 1/2	Score has decreased Irregular plural 'mice' retained but verb 'catch' not used

	Score: 1/2	Score: 2/2		
6. What has happened to the girl?	She wasn't looking. She fell off the stairs and her glasses broke. Score: 4/5	She fell down the stairs and her glasses broke and she couldn't see and she was shouting and screaming. Score: 5/5	The girl was running down the stairs and broke her glasses. Score: 4/5	Omitted: verb 'fell' Score has decreased

The analysis revealed that this pupil had maintained the progress in terms of grammar but that some regression occurred in information content. At the end of the ten- week Talking Partners Programme, this pupil was using vocabulary such as 'gate' and verbs including 'jumping' and 'catching'. But six months later—without the intensive language programme—these items of vocabulary were not reproduced. Were these vocabulary items too specific and not embedded in this pupil's long-term memory? Or was this pupil having a 'bad' day and was not very co-operative and possibly distracted? The reasons as to why this pupil did not maintain the progress remain inconclusive. Nevertheless it should be re-iterated that for 83% of this group either progress was maintained or further progress was made.

Conclusion

This small-scale experimental pilot study sought to answer the hypothesis: To what extent is the progress made in speaking and listening by EAL pupils as a result of the intervention programme 'Talking Partners' sustained? The results indicate that after the ten-week intervention programme an average of 14.5 months is gained in terms of information scores and an average of 12.8 months is gained in terms of grammar scores. Furthermore six months after the completion of the intervention programme 83% of the pupils had sustained the progress that had been made in terms of the information scores and 100% of the pupils had sustained the progress that had been made in terms of the grammar scores.

Implications

Raising the attainment in multi-ethnic schools with particular regard to Muslim pupils of Pakistani heritage is a collective responsibility both at LEA and at individual school level. The following points need some consideration:

1. As this research is a small-scale pilot study, it is necessary to replicate this research with a much larger group of pupils. This has implications at an LEA level.

2. The impact of the Talking Partners Programme needs to be monitored both at LEA and at school level. In this way, the work would become an established part of an LEA commitment to raising the attainment of ethnic minority pupils, particularly Muslim pupils of Pakistani heritage.
3. There are clearly implications for professional development both at national and at LEA level. There is an ongoing need for short-term professional development (Talking Partners Training) and there is also a need to incorporate this training into long-term training for specialist teaching assistants of English as an additional language.

Bibliography

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Table 1a
Renfrew Action Picture Test Results:
INFORMATION SCORES

Name of pupil, gender and DOB	Age (14.09.02) in years:months	Pre - Talking Partners Programme Renfrew Action Picture Test Information Score (September 2002) with performance age in years:range of months	Operating at +/- years:months, in relation to chronological age
Pupil 1, boy 26.7.96	6:1	Score 26.5 Age 4:0—5	- 2:1
Pupil 2, girl 05.2.96	6:6	Score 28.5 Age 4:6—11	- 2:0
Pupil 3, boy 24.8.96	6:0	Score 30 Age 5:0—5	- 1:0
Pupil 4, girl 04.1.96	6:8	Score 32.5 Age 5:6—11	- 1:2
Pupil 5, girl 05.7.96	6:2	Score 29.5 Age 5:0—5	- 1:2
Pupil 6, boy 26.2.96	6:6	Score 33 Age 6:0—5	- 0:6

TABLE 1b
Renfrew Action Picture Test Results:
GRAMMAR SCORES

Name of pupil, gender and DOB	Age(14.09.02) in years:months	Pre - Talking Partners Programme Renfrew Action Picture Test Grammar Score (September 2002) with performance age in years:range of months	Operating at +/- years:months, in relation to chronological age
Pupil 1, boy 26.7.96	6:1	Score: 20 Age 4:0—5	- 2:1
Pupil 2, girl 05.2.96	6:6	Score: 20 Age 4:0—5	- 2:6
Pupil 3, boy 24.8.96	6:0	Score: 13 Age 3:6—11	- 2:6
Pupil 4, girl 04.1.96	6:8	Score: 20 Age 4:0—5	- 2:8
Pupil 5, girl 05.7.96	6:2	Score: 18 Age 4:0—5	- 2:2
Pupil 6, boy 26.2.96	6:6	Score: 20 Age 4:0—5	- 2:6

**TABLE 2a: Results after ten weeks of the Talking Partners Programme
INFORMATION SCORES**

Name of pupil, gender and DOB	Age	Pre-Talking Partners Programme Renfrew Action Picture Test Information Score (September 2002) with performance age in years:range of months	Post-Talking Partners Programme Renfrew Action Picture Test Information Score (December 2002) with performance age in years:range of months	Progress
Pupil 1, boy 26.7.96	6:1	26.5 Age 4:0—5	32 Age 5:6—11	18 months
Pupil 2, girl 05.2.96	6:6	28.5 Age 4:6—11	28.5 Age 4:6—11	No gain
Pupil 3, boy 24.8.96	6:0	30 Age 5:0—5	33 Age 6:0—5	12 months
Pupil 4, girl 04.1.96	6:8	32.5 Age 5:6—11	34.5 Age 6:6—11	12 months
Pupil 5, girl 05.7.96	6:2	29.5 Age 5:0—5	33 Age 6:0—5	12 months
Pupil 6, boy 26.2.96	6:6	33 Age 6:0—5	34.5 Age 6:6—11	6 months

**TABLE 2b: Results after ten weeks of the Talking Partners Programme:
GRAMMAR SCORES**

Name of pupil, gender and DOB	Age	Pre - Talking Partners Programme Renfrew Action Picture Test Grammar Score (Sept. 2002)	Post- Talking Partners Programme Renfrew Action Picture Test Grammar Score (Dec. 2002)	Progress
Pupil 1, boy 26.7.96	6:1	Score: 20 Age 4:0—5	Score: 25 Age 5:6—11	18 months
Pupil 2, girl 05.2.96	6:6	Score: 20 Age 4:0—5	Score: 22 Age 4:6—11	6 months
Pupil 3, boy 24.8.96	6:0	Score: 13 Age 3:6—11	Score: 18 Age 4:0—5	6 months
Pupil 4, girl 04.1.96	6:8	Score: 20 Age 4:0—5	Score: 22 Age 4:6—11	6 months
Pupil 5, girl 05.7.96	6:2	Score: 18 Age 4:0—5	Score: 23 Age 5:0—5	12 months
Pupil 6, boy 26.2.96	6:6	Score: 20 Age 4:0—5	Score: 25 Age 5:6—11	18 months

**TABLE 3a: Results after six months of the Talking Partners Programme
INFORMATION SCORES**

Name of pupil, gender and DOB	Pre- Programme Information Score (September 2002)	Post- Programme Information Score (December 2002)	Post- Programme: after six months Information Score (July 2003)	Progress after 6 months interval
Pupil 1, boy 26.7.96	Score: 26.5 Age 4:0–5	Score: 32 Age 5:6–11	Score: 31 Age 5:6–11	Maintained/ sustained.
Pupil 2, girl 05.2.96	Score: 28.5 Age 4:6–11	Score: 28.5 Age 4:6–11	Score: 33 Age 6:0–5	Further. 18 months gained in 6 months.
Pupil 3, boy 24.8.96	Score: 30 Age 5:0–5	Score: 33 Age 6:0–5	Score: 36 Age 7:6–11	Further. 18 months gained in 6 months.
Pupil 4, girl 04.1.96	Score: 32.5 Age 5:6–11	Score: 34.5 Age 6:6–11	Score: 35 Age 7:0–5	Further. 6 months gained in 6 months.
Pupil 5, girl 05.7.96	Score: 29.5 Age 5:0–5	Score: 33 Age 6:0–5	Score: 31 Age 5:6–11	None. 6 months lost.
Pupil 6, boy 26.2.96	Score: 33 Age 6:0–5	Score: 34.5 Age 6:6–11	Score: 34.5 Age 6:6–11	Maintained/ sustained.

**TABLE 3b: Results after six months of the Talking Partners Programme:
GRAMMAR SCORES**

Name of pupil, gender and DOB	Pre- Programme Grammar Score (September 2002)	Post- Programme Grammar Score (December 2002)	Post- Programme: after six months Grammar Score (July 2003)	Progress after 6 months interval
Pupil 1, boy 26.7.96	Score: 20 Age 4:0–5	Score: 25 Age 5:6–11	Score: 25 Age 5:6–11	Maintained/ sustained.
Pupil 2, girl 05.2.96	Score: 20 Age 4:0–5	Score: 22 Age 4:6–11	Score: 24 Age 5:6–11	12 months gained in 6 months.
Pupil 3, boy 24.8.96	Score: 13 Age 3:6–11	Score: 18 Age 4:0–5	Score: 20 Age 4:0–5	Maintained/ sustained.
Pupil 4, girl 04.1.96	Score: 20 Age 4:0–5	Score: 22 Age 4:6–11	Score: 24 Age 5:6–11	12 months gained in 6 months.
Pupil 5, girl 05.7.96	Score: 18 Age 4:0–5	Score: 23 Age 5:0–5	Score: 23 Age 5:0–5	Maintained/ sustained.
Pupil 6, boy 26.2.96	Score: 20 Age 4:0–5	Score: 25 Age 5:6–11	Score: 26 Age 6:0–5	6 months gained in 6 months.

