Newly Arrived Children – factors that may interfere with learning

Newly arrived children usually settle into school quite happily and cope well with the task of learning a new language. However, normally happy and confident children can become frustrated or angry in situations where they cannot make themselves understood.

- After being competent language users and language learners in their home country they suddenly find themselves not understanding simple tasks and instructions.

- Listening to and trying to concentrate on a new language is very tiring, even for adults and even for a short time. Such concentration hour after hour, day after day, can make a child feel very tired.

- May be missing friends and relatives that they have left behind, their home and all the known routines that have been part of their lives until now.

- Families may have few support networks and may be experiencing emotional and or financial difficulty – especially true in case of Asylum Seekers who may have left home because of political upheaval
  - may not have chosen the country
  - have usually minimal belongings and few tangible reminders of home e.g photos/momentos

- New school maybe very different from any they have known before and they may be expected to learn in totally new ways.

- Script or orientation may be completely different.

- Children have little control over their new environment and experience. Sometimes their frustration and deep unhappiness may lead to difficult classroom behaviour and a few children become aggressive and disruptive, constantly restless, tearful or very withdrawn.

- It is important to be aware that disruptive and disturbing behaviour may be caused by what the child is experiencing and not necessarily indicative of their usual behaviour.

- Newly arrived child must be expected to observe the same classroom rules and behaviour as the rest of the class and as far as possible follow normal classroom procedures.

- Teachers can do little about many of the stresses on newly arrived families – it is vital that in the classroom the child feels accepted and given many opportunities to be successful.

Ideas for confidence building :-

- Allow the child many opportunities to do what he or she is best at

  - allow extra time

- Pace activities during the day so that the child does not become exhausted

  - activities which do not require new arrival to produce language i.e. listening to tapes stories interspersed with activities which require speaking and writing
  - Class : allow children a quiet time during the day so they can choose what to do and switch off from classroom demands

- <u>Set up situations where the new arrival is the expert :</u>

    - reading or writing in their own language or script
    - if happy to talk about their own experiences or culture

- <u>Remember that responding to what a learner is trying to say is more important in the early stage than how he or she is saying it</u>

    - correct gently by accepting, expanding or completing partially correct or incomplete utterances
    - don't interrupt the normal flow of communication
    - be prepared to wait a little longer for responses

- <u>Give the new arrival opportunities to hear and practice social language</u>

    - asking for something
    - asking someone to do something
    - saying thank you and expressing disagreement politely
    - (sometimes children appear to be rude and aggressive when it may be that appropriate language has not been learned)

- <u>Make the child feel a useful member of the class</u>

    - he or she expected to perform most of the classroom jobs that other children do – giving out paper/collecting rubbish, tidying/cleaning jobs
    - accompany other children taking messages to other teachers/classes

A Checklist – The Inclusive Classroom

The following checklist is to help you ensure that the needs of the second language learner are being met.

In Your Classroom :

- Is there a comfortable and stress-free environment?

- Is language being used purposefully, for real learning tasks?

- Do learning activities allow for a range of language functions?

- Do you have language objectives in all curriculum areas?

- Do these reflect the learning needs of the children?

- Is the language you use comprehensible?

- Does the language you use sufficiently extend and challenge the children?

- Are children given an opportunity in learning activities to *use* language which has been modelled?

- Are children given opportunities to use language with different audiences – with each other, with teachers, with other adults?

- Are children encouraged and given opportunities to work with peers in problem solving and collaborative learning situations?

- Does the classroom organisation (e.g. types of groupings) give bilingual learners adequate support in all learning tasks?

- Is the first language of the children clearly acknowledged?

- Are the resources to be used within the capabilities of the children?

- Are your expectations of the learning outcomes for bilingual children sufficiently high?

- (If there is an ESL teacher in school, has there been consultation or joint planning of the programme)

Ideas for Games and Activities

All the games and activities suggested here are *communicative* : that is, there is a genuine need to use language in order to get something done. The aim is the create a situation where ther is a reason, opportunity and a purpose for using language.

These games are best introduced by the teacher playing with a pair of children or with a group, or by two teachers demonstrating the game to the class. This gives an opportunity for the particular language of the game to be modelled.

The games are intended to be used as part of regular small group or pair activities. As far as possible provide at least one good language model within the group, or as one of the pair.

Barrier Games – The barrier in these games may be physical, such as a sheet of cardboard between the two children but the children may sit back to back. Child A has a complete set of information which Child B needs in order to compete the task. Child A may give the relevant information to Child B.

1. Describe and Draw (Barrier Game)

You need two sheets of paper and pencils and textas. **A** describes to **B** what he or she had drawn (or is drawing). **B** reproduces the drawing according to **A**'s description. The drawings may be of real objects or shapes, such as triangles or squares.
possible language : describing position (*beside, next to, under, on the left of, on the right of, draw a, put the*)

2. Describe and Arrange (Barrier Game)

You need two identical sets of pictures: for example, two sets of houses, two sets of cars, or two sets of butterflies. **A** describes to **B** how to arrange them on a grid. If some of the pictures are very similar, the children will need to describe them clearly and in detail in order to distinguish them.
possible language : as for Game 1; also describing (*put the one with the red spots next to the blue and red one with pointed wings*)

3. Find the Difference (Barrier Game)

You need two pictures, which are identical except for a number of minor differences. (Draw a simple picture, photocopy it, and make the minor changes by using white-out on the copy and then redrawing. Finally photocopy both versions). The task for the children is to find the differences. They may ask questions or describe their own picture. They should be told how many differences there are.
possible language : questioning (*have you got a….? is the boy….?*); describing (*the boy with spiky hair*); expressing position (*next to the boy on the floor, just under the window*)

4. Map Game 1 (Barrier Game)

You need two identical maps. **A** directs **B** from an agreed starting point to a destination which is unknown to **B**.
possible language : giving directions (*go along X Street, cross over the second road and then turn left*)

4.   Map Game 2 (Barrier Game)

You need two maps of the same area with incomplete information about names of streets and buildings. Map A has different information from Map B, but together they give all the information. The task if to complete both maps by sharing information.
possible language : asking questions (*what's the name of the building opposite the post office?*); expressing position (*opposite, beside, around the corner from*)

5.   Find My Partner (*group game, four to six children*)

You need four to six pictures, depending on how many children are playing. Two of the pictures are identical, but the others have minor differences. One of the two identical pictures is marked with a cross or with "Find my partner". The child who gets this card must find the partner by questioning other members of the group.
possible language : questioning (*has your cat got…?*); describing (*this one's got a stripey tail*)

6.   Kim's Game (Group name)

You need a selection of real objects which can be placed on a table. Children look at them for a few minutes and then the objects are covered with a cloth. Children attempt to remember them.
possible language : names of objects; describing (*a cup with a broken handle*)

7.   Jigsaw Pictures (Group name)

You need four or five magazine pictures, depending on how many children are going to play. Cut each picture into five or six pieces, in such a way as to make clear what the adjoining piece might look like or contain. Label the back of one piece from each picture with a cross. Shuffle and deal the pieces to the children, ensuring that each child has one piece with a cross. This identifies which picture that child is to make. Without showing their pieces to the group, the children must each reconstruct their own picture by taking it in turns to ask anyone in the group for the pieces they need.
possible language :questioning (*have you got a piece with ….?*); describing (*a piece with green leaves and sky on it*)

8.   Make a Story (Group name)

You need four to six pictures which tell a predictable story. Give one picture to each child, who must not show it to the rest of the group. Each child describes his or her picture, and the group works out a possible order for the story.
possible language :describing people and processes (*there's a boy looking at a monster in a cage, the monster is bending the bars*); ordinal numbers (*this one must go second*)

9.   Classification Game (Group name)

You need a set of cards showing a variety of animals or objects. The group must classify them in as many ways as possible. There are no right or wrong answers as long as appropriate reasons are given.
possible language :classifying and giving reasons (*these go together because they are all insects, the fish and the crab both live in the sea, the spider and the crab both have eight legs*)

10. Guess the Animal (enquiry and elimination group game)

Choose a large picture showing a range of members within a set – for example, a picture showing many different kinds of animals. One member of the group silently chooses an animal and the others must guess which one it is by asking *yes/no* questions only. Restricting the number of questions the group can ask encourages the children to ask questions which will elicit the maximum amount of information. For example, the answer *yes* to the question *does it live on land?* will allow the elimination of all animals which live in water. With younger children it may be necessary to cover up with blank cards what has been eliminated.
Possible language :name of animals / objects; questioning and generalising (*does it live in water?*)

11. Desert Island Game (Rank-ordering group game)

In groups the children must decide, perhaps from a given list, what would be most useful to have if they were shipwrecked on an island.
possible language :expressing the conditional (*if we take this we'll……., if we had this we would ……*); comparing and giving reasons (*the knife would be more useful because…*)

12. The Gift Game (Group game)

You need a sheet of cardboard and a selection of small picture of objects. Junk mail advertising catalogues are ideal! Make a game board with the pictures stuck around the edge of the cardboard. These represent 'gifts', so be creative and include a range of things from pens to yachts, plus a few bizarre items such as castor oil or zinc cream. On small cards write some characters : e.g. your best friend, your teacher, a three day old baby, a rich uncle who has everything, an eighty year old etc.
Each member of the group is dealt three or four character cards. In turn they throw a die, and as they land on a 'gift', they must justify the choice of that gift to one of their characters. The group must decide if it is an appropriate gift. If they decide it is, the player discards the character card. The first person to have discarded all his or her character cards is the winner. This is a lively game and gives great opportunity for imagination.
possible language :giving reasons (*I'm going to give the blender to an eight year old because he hasn't got any teeth*); disagreeing (*I don't think that's a very suitable gift because…..*)

13. Collaborative Crossword Puzzle (Barrier Game)

Both children have the same basic crossword. The clues have not been given, but all the 'down' words have been filled in on one crossword and all the 'across' words on the other. Working collaboratively, the children must both complete their own crossword from clues made up by their partner. They must not say or spell the words.
possible language :vocabulary related to theme or topic work; definitions (*this is something which ….*); describing (*it has six legs and three parts to its body, it is used for ….*)

<u>A checklist for selecting communicative activities</u>

To decide how useful an activity may be, consider to what extent you could answer *yes* to the following questions.

- Is talking *necessary*?
- Is interaction *necessary*?
- Are content areas of the curriculum being reinforced?
- Is at least one child using 'stretches' of language?
- Is thinking involved?
- Is the pace right, with enough variety within a given time span?
- Are all children in a group involved, either in speaking or in listening?