

PENpal Ideas

Key Stages 1 - 4



Disclaimer:

EMTAS has no stake in any commercial product or resource. However, since Mantralingua's PENpal has met with pleasing resonance in Essex schools, we felt that the following collection of 'PENpal ideas' might be useful to EAL practitioners and others.

We cannot hope to present comprehensive coverage as both PENpal and its various uses appear to be developing continuously. In the words of one colleague,

'Plus a host of other uses - I think once people have a go with this resource, they see more and more opportunities for the pens to be used. Hope some of these ideas help persuade your schools. Sometimes, I have had to give a demo before people really start to understand the concept and see the possibilities!'

The ideas described below represent examples of good practice shared with us by EAL practitioners nationwide via the web forum, eal-bilingual@googlegroups.com. EMTAS cannot claim credit for most of the suggestions in this booklet but would like to say a warm thank you to all colleagues who contributed to this collation.

We have kept editing to a minimum, aiming instead to preserve the authentic voices of colleagues as they described their PENpal ideas and experiences. Although this may create an 'uneven' overall style, we felt that individual practitioners' personal touch was an important aspect of bringing the following ideas to life for the reader.

Angelika Baxter
EMA Adviser
Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service
Tel: 01268 531291
Email: angelika.baxter@essex.gov.uk
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Using Penpal - Key Stages 1-2

Independent Learning - Making resources

In small groups, Year 2 children were invited to create some games or activities that could be used/played by their peers. Some of the materials that were created included:

- Interactive globe in Geography
- Interactive treasure hunt with directions for mathematics an outdoor adventure;
- Interactive mathematics board games
- Interactive stories, glossaries and quizzes in literacy and science.

It was very good for EAL children in particular as it allowed them to independently listen to vocabulary as many times as they needed. The children were very motivated to hear their own voices, and it enhanced speaking and listening as it emphasised the need to talk clearly.

Over and above EAL provision, the above activity was also used to boost the self-esteem of SEN children, as they could create interactive mathematics and literacy games without the need to write. It was easy for the teacher to assess speaking as the pen recording is repeatable, and it does not require a PC to listen to it.

To make your own dual language talking books, perhaps you may wish to involve parents to speak and record their voice onto PENpal stickers.

Creating Story, developing Drama

Working with small groups of KS2 ethnic minority and 'White British' children, an EAL advisory teacher used the PENpal to focus on improving grammatical and writing skills. The children were given a story box - 6 objects related to a theme - in this case, 'the sea'. They used the story mountain to orally devise a story collectively to include these objects. The pen was initially used with individual children to record each part of the story and then show/perform to the rest of the class and school staff. When the story was performed, the device was plugged into the IWB connection for a louder audio output. The sound was clear and during the plenary many of the children who hadn't participated in the original activity were able to give quotes from the story to back up their responses.

Many of the children who used the pen showed their excitement by usual phrases like -'It's so cool', 'It's extraordinary' 'It's magic' etc. From a learning skills point of view, the children said that hearing back their reading clearly showed them how they needed to improve their expression/tone and also speak clearly.

Producing a booklet for parents

Year 3 and Year 6 children in two different classes were asked to produce a booklet about bullying for parents. They used digital cameras to take freeze-frame photos of bullying scenarios and then added narrations recording onto the recordable sticky labels that come with PENpal.

All children found the activity fun and were able to join in. EAL children were allowed to use their home languages. One Lithuanian girl in Year 6, who was too embarrassed to record her own voice using the pen, taught two other boys how to say some Lithuanian words and then

record them. All three of them were laughing and having a lot of fun at the time and the boys appreciated some of what she had to do to learn English. One boy even remembered some of the Lithuanian words. In Year 3 some quite under-confident children with EAL were able to show off and participate in new ways and their peers were able to see them in a new light and realised they were actually perfectly capable!

Over and above EAL provision, there was very little writing involved so SEN children were also able to carry out this activity unhampered.

Oral recording ideas

A Year 5 pupil with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Dyslexia had all but disengaged with the curriculum and was essentially refusing to produce written work. Using a small notebook and a set of labels, pupil R was encouraged to use the PENpal device to record his thoughts, ideas and answers regarding class work as frequently as he wanted. The transformation in this pupil has been huge, describing the pen as "the best gadget ever." He is now far more positive about school, more engaged with the curriculum and has started to write for himself, which is a major breakthrough.

Key Stage 3 and above

School/Induction PENpal was used to support guided tours of the school in various languages. Key areas of the school were identified and the school's Young Interpreters recorded the audio to explain to prospective parents/students a bit about the science block, reception area, library etc.

Access to class text

A teacher used PENpals to record audio versions of texts to be used in class for students who couldn't access text-based materials easily (e.g. late-arriving students, GRT pupils). The talking pen meant they could listen to a text as many times as they wanted and it allowed them greater independence in their learning. They were also able to record their ideas/responses to texts etc prior to writing, thus giving the teacher a better idea of students' conceptual understanding, especially if students were still struggling to express their ideas in writing. This kept them on task for longer and meant that activities could be tailored to suit their cognitive abilities rather than their levels of writing, hence their self-esteem and belief in themselves as learners was improved.

Supporting reading comprehension and vocabulary building

Some of Mantralingua's dual language books worked really well for new arrivals in Year 10, including e.g. 'Beowulf', 'Pandora's Box', 'Isis and Osiris', 'The Children of Lir' and 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves'. I used Farsi/English books with a small group of Persian speakers (some with first language Farsi, some with Dari), supporting their reading the relevant PENpal audio files. In learning to develop comprehension skills in English the students found it particularly helpful to be able to listen as they read. We built up vocabulary and grammar skills from here, partly around the stories but also around English language and literacy generally. Two gifted and talented students used Beowulf as a starting point to talk about Persia's national epic and the way in which this has influenced the early literatures of a range of European countries.

Making reusable resources (for learners of EAL and others)

The pens can also be used by students/parents to make dual-language audio books and by teachers to record homework instructions, develop audio-supported home-school journals, give a dual-language audio dimension to displays.

'If you can't yet write up, relax and speak up!'

An EAL specialist teacher worked with new arrival EAL learners at KS3. The PENpal and labels were used to record a shy Filipino student with limited English talking about what she had done in a Food Technology class. She had prepared various dishes (pasta salad, fruit salad) and had been given a picture sheet with the vocabulary on it, showing the equipment and the specialist verbs needed e.g. rinsing, chopping, mixing etc. She gave a full response, which she would not have managed had she needed to write it all down in the time.

In another context the technology was used for recording a speaking assessment for a Humanities topic on Civil Rights. The student used her bilingual dictionary and writing frames or matching exercises to prepare the topic, and while the rest of the class had to give a talk up at the front this Polish student recorded her answer on the PENpal in a separate room, so the teacher could then give her a grade. She was unwilling to do the activity in front of the class, which was understandable.

Commercially produced Key Stage 3 resources for use with PENpal include the following:

The manufacturers of PENpal, Mantralingua, produce a wide range of sound enabled dual language books in English and over 50 languages – details on www.mantralingua.com.

KS 3 Key terminology posters e.g. Maths terms, Geography terms, English terms. Explained with 23 audio languages available on PENpal. The terms are defined in Bengali (really Sylheti) but then, since there are no space limitations, they are also explained, compared and sometimes have examples. Each subject has about 43 terms on one A3 poster with illustrations and there is over 2 hours of audio content on each.

Chemistry CD Rom: "High quality animations and explanations of ten KS3 Chemistry concepts... Provides an excellent teaching resource with sections all containing keywords, animations, questions and revision notes." *TEEM evaluation, June 2004*

Talking Science Pack: This pack is for KS3 and includes the Chemistry and Biology CD ROMs, along with talking charts of science concepts and the Science Investigation Talking Guidelines. These are not in dual language but the charts integrate with the animations in the CD ROMs. Here is where PENpal becomes a community tool.

For those who know the PENpal, on blue light mode you will hear the author's comments. Switch to red light mode and the class teacher or the Bengali speaker could record their own version of an idea. A student could also record his understanding in his/her own language. If the teacher feels that they have created a Bengali version for instance of any or all the posters, they could then share this with others. So Talking Science could be made into Bengali.