In the very early 1980s Susan Hart and I wrote an article on collaborative learning and EAL pupils. It was published in a collection of articles around linguistic diversity, reading and urban classrooms. The curriculum topic that drove our approaches to structured group work was integrated humanities, and as a consequence, we entitled our article “The Attractions of the North Pole”. As a result nobody has ever quoted from or referenced this bold essay into what were then fresh pastures. We chose a title that effectively hid our ideas so that they would only be occasionally rejected by polar explorers. This title does exactly the opposite. It contains so many keywords that search engines will discover it over and over. However, a title as predictable as this, fails to tell you how different this book might be from any other which might use these keywords in a slightly different combination. For those of us familiar with research in, and up to date with the issues, political and pedagogical, around work with English as a Additional Language, this book contains no surprises. I do, however, believe this book is very special, and will be very useful for all of us who want to influence schools and colleagues.

The book is not written for us NALDIC folk. It is written for those individuals who ring us up and say “Help, there is a child arrived in class/school who doesn’t speak English.” The book keeps this individual focus throughout and as a result is direct, fluent, often humorous, always engaging and can be read as a narrative.

The first chapter sets the tone of the book. The writers tell a series of stories in which many of us have been involved: stories of individual pupils, the story of Jim (yes, the Jim we all know!), of partnership teaching, and of the authors themselves. The following chapters also base their work on the stories of different children to illustrate language progress, assessment, working with beginners and moving children on into the higher CALPy foothills. I cannot resist a quote here to provide a lively example of the many accessible ways in which ideas are presented:

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