

CATS

Children and Teenagers

The Young Learners  
SIG Newsletter

Spring 1999

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Literature

and the

Young Learner

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# Letter from Denise Clenton

## Joint SIG Co-ordinator

As this is the first CATS newsletter for 1999 I'd like to wish everybody a very happy new year. This year promises to be an exciting one as we count down to the new millennium and wonder what the future will bring for young EFL learners and their teachers all over the world.

1998 saw many exciting events in the Young Learners SIG calendar, held in places as diverse as Madrid, Istanbul, Gdansk and Cambridge. The joint event with the Literature SIG at Eurocentre Cambridge prompted us to devote this issue of CATS to the theme of Literature and Young Learners and I hope you are looking forward to reading it as much as I am. It promises to inspire us to look at Literature in much broader terms when teaching children and teenagers.

Certainly something that the YL SIG committee noticed in 1998 was the assumption by many people that Young Learners means children up to the age of 12! Contrary to popular belief the Young Learners SIG has always included teenagers and so we look forward to receiving articles of interest for future inclusion in our newsletters. Let's not leave out teenagers in the new millennium!

We had a very enthusiastic response to requests for proposals for the Edinburgh conference this spring and look forward to a varied and interesting range of presentations. As we are limited to the number we can list in our SIG track, don't forget to look in the main programme too, or you may miss out on something exciting! Equally, you may find the pre-conference event a useful place to network and exchange ideas. The joint event of the YL and Teacher Training SIGs is the ideal place for you to attend a variety of talks and take part in discussions. Many of the YL SIG committee members will be at the Edinburgh conference so we look forward to seeing you there.

One of our committee members who may not be joining us in Scotland is the other joint co-ordinator, Sarah Burwood. Sarah moved to Canada last autumn and so for the moment Chris Etchells, the YL SIG web site manager is standing in for Sarah as joint co-ordinator. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Sarah for all her support as joint co-ordinator and to thank Chris for standing in at such short notice!

Enjoy this issue of CATS and see you soon.

Denise

# Let's read - and write - a poem!

## Using Poetry with Young Learners

A workshop at the YL/Lit & CS day conference, Cambridge, October 1998

Joanne Collie

Like many parents whose children have grown up, I remember the pleasure of reading poems with them when they were young. Small children so often delight in the sounds, colours, and images of poetry, they positively revel in the rhythm and love beating it out with their whole bodies - the more 'thumpity' the better. There is such a wealth of good poetry for children in English that parents are simply spoilt for choice. But what about a classroom situation, when the close one-to-one bond of parent reading to child is absent? And what, more particularly, if the poem is in a language with which the youngster is not yet completely familiar? Can that enjoyment still be retained and used to further both language learning and appreciation of poetry?

I believe that poetry provides ideal material for learning a language, because it simultaneously does two apparently contradictory things. First, it allows perceptions, emotions and feelings to be expressed very directly, thus making language into a 'transparent' vehicle. At the same time, however, it places an unusual spotlight on language itself, bringing it out of its invisibility. It does this by emphasising the sounds of language through rhyme, repetition, assonance, melody, all of which act as excellent mnemonics when sound is associated with sense; by disrupting the conventional shapes of written language on the page; and finally by playing with levels of meaning, taking words out of their usual contexts, making familiar words suddenly strange and exotic, pulling out unexpected, often amusing ideas from everyday situations.

For the learner of a language, and especially for the young learner, those two aspects are both extremely important. If language is to become an intimate, active way of communicating, learners must be able to associate their own emotions and life experiences with it. The goal is therefore that their new language, ultimately, should indeed become a direct, transparent conduit. But equally and contradictorily, the learning process necessarily emphasises the shapes and forms of language, making it into a highly visible material. Playing with the new means of expression, trying it out this way and that, testing the limits of its potential, all can be ways of reconciling the personal with the formal, and can thus be just as important and rewarding as the experimentation with other visual or tactile materials that allows young people to apprehend and understand the world around them. Poetry is linguistic plasticine: its malleability promotes creativity and stimulates the imagination, the precious faculty that youngsters possess in abundance and that makes working with them so enriching for adults.

From this it seems to me clear that reading and writing poetry are very closely connected in the language classroom. Both with adults and with students from about the age of eleven upwards, I have always found that besides being a very satisfying activity in itself, writing a poem provides a springboard for interesting comparison and discussion, and it also makes reading poems easier. Poetry is a genre that is too often considered difficult. But it need not be, especially as there are so many examples available of simple, satisfying, moving, provocative, wonderful contemporary poems for both young people and adults. When learners write a poem, even a very simple one, the whole process is demystified. They can approach poetry as the product of a practitioner who is probably more experienced and skilful, but not intrinsically different, from themselves.

There are many ways of encouraging classes to enjoy creating their own poems. When I first started writing and reading poetry with learners, I found much inspiration in the work of Sandy Brownjohn and Maley and Moulding, and also in sharing ideas with Gillian Porter Ladousse and Stephen Slater, to whom I remain very grateful<sup>1</sup>. The main aims are to stir the imagination, appeal to a sense of fun, play with and take pleasure in words, colours, and shapes, make people look more closely at the world around them and shine a new spotlight on the familiar. It is certainly not necessary to emphasise the 'technicalities' of formal poetry, especially rhyme. Occasionally learners in workshops do use rhymes spontaneously, as part of the process of playing with words, but the main thing is to allow the expression of insight and feeling in a genuine, direct, unconstrained way. Here are two activities which I have found quite productive in various classes or small seminars. The first is my adaptation of a guided writing exercise I learnt in a workshop led by the poet Carol Ann Duffy.

## Activity 1

Choose one of your favourite colours. Close your eyes and try to see it in your mind's eye. Talk about it with your partner - can you describe the exact shade that you are seeing in your mind? Is there anything in the room that is close to it? Now we are going to write about it. Write the title: your chosen colour. 'Look' at it again in your mind. I'm going to give you some words, which are the beginning of a sentence (this can be done orally, or by writing on the board). Write the words that I give and finish the sentence.

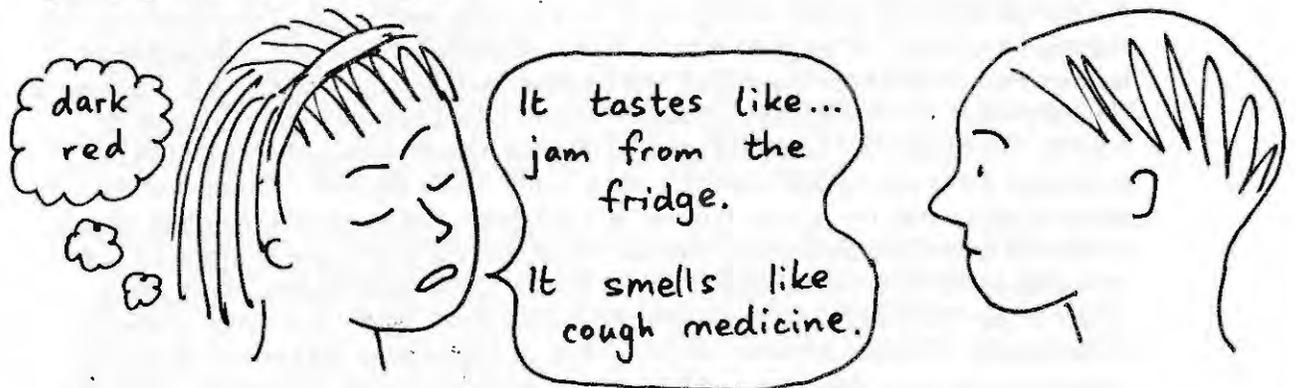
*It tastes like...* (Imagine what your colour tastes like. Write it down. Start the next sentence under the first.)

*It smells like....* (Imagine... and write. Next sentence:)

*It sounds like...* (Imagine... and write. And finally:)

*It feels like...* (Imagine... and write).

Show or read your poem to your partner. Talk about it with others around you. Pin all the poems up so that you can compare.



Sharing poems just written is often a genuinely engaging part of the exercise for learners, generating a lot of talk and interest. This can easily be extended by looking with the class at poems on the theme of colour. One of the 'germs' of this adapted activity was my examining a range of anthologies of poetry written for younger readers and being struck by the sheer number of evocative poems on colour that they offered. The aim of the activity is obviously to compare the sensual experience of colour with the experiences of the other senses, and associate all of them with words and feelings. It is an invitation to react personally and creatively to colour, and the second activity extends this by asking learners to imagine a world without the sense of sight.

## Activity 2

What if you couldn't see? What would the world be like? How could you tell what it was like? (You could feel things.... you could hear... you could smell, taste...) Shut your eyes. What are the sounds that you can hear? (Traffic noises from outside? Heating, air conditioning sounds from inside? Somebody coughing? Your partner breathing? Rustling of paper? Shuffling of feet on the floor? Tapping of pens on paper? ...) What are the sounds like? What do colours sound like? ... feel like?

Try to imagine what the colours feel like or sound like.... Write the words that I give you, and finish the sentence. Think of green.

*Green is ...* (Imagine... and write. Now think of red.)

*Red is ...* (Imagine... and write.)

*Purple is ...* (Imagine... and write.)

*Yellow is ...* (Imagine... and write. And finally ...)

*White is ...* (imagine... and write).

Show or read your poem to your partner. Talk about it with others around you. Pin all the poems up so that you can compare.

This activity was prompted by the anonymous poem, *I asked the little boy who cannot see*:

### I ASKED THE LITTLE BOY WHO CANNOT SEE

*I asked the little boy who cannot see,  
'And what is colour like?'  
'Why, green,' said he,  
'Is like the rustle when the wind blows though  
The forest; running water, that is blue;  
And red is like a trumpet sound; and pink  
Is like the smell of roses; and I think  
That purple must be like a thunderstorm;  
And yellow is like something soft and warm;  
And white is a pleasant stillness when you lie  
And dream.'*

Anon.

from *The Poetry Book*, ed. Fiona Walters, Dolphin Paperback, Orion Books, 1997

After writing and discussing their own poems, learners often find reading another poem on the same theme interesting and doubly meaningful. I have found this to be successful with learners from early adolescent upwards, but I have never had the opportunity of working with younger people. I'd like to end by thanking one of the participants of the Cambridge seminar, Alan McLean (a wonderful poet himself) who afterwards tried the activities out on two classes of six to eight-year-olds and nine to eleven-year-olds, and kindly wrote to tell me about the children's enthusiastic response. My hope is that the shared experience of writing will encourage learners of all ages to continue reading and enjoying poetry in their new language.

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<sup>1</sup> Brownjohn, S. (1980) *Does it Have to Rhyme?* and (1982) *What Rhymes with Secret?*, Hodder and Stoughton; Maley, A. and S. Moulding (1985) *Poem into Poem*, Cambridge University Press; Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater (1987) *Literature in the Language Classroom*, Cambridge University Press; Joanne Collie and Gillian Porter Ladousse (1991) *Paths into Poetry*, Oxford University Press.

# WRITING CHILDREN'S STORIES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Kay Green

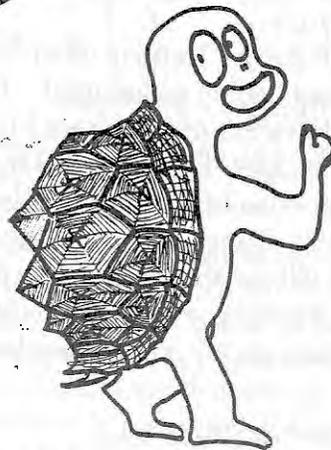
This project arose from the desire to do something creative with a mixed ability closed Japanese group over a period of three weeks in twelve afternoon sessions of one and a quarter hours. The inspiration came from a colleague who had done some similar work with another Japanese group and had had a very positive response.

The group consisted of twelve Japanese girls from the same college in Japan but with very different levels of English competence; they were in the final stage of a year-long course in England. Several of them had said to me that they wanted to be primary school teachers or teachers of English. Therefore I thought there would probably be enough intrinsic interest in the idea of writing children's stories to carry the project through. I was also able to set up a visit to a local primary school for the students to read their stories to English children and also to listen to the children reading their favourite stories and talk to them about their favourite books. This was definitely the highlight of the project for many of the students.

In the planning stages I wanted to be sure that there was sufficient useful practical work for all the students regardless of level and that there would be plenty of reading, pronunciation and intonation practice if they were going to read successfully to critical English children. This article outlines the general approach of the project.

*The front cover of one of the stories produced as a result of the project*

THE LOST SHELL



STORY

IKIKO & MAYUMI

PICTURE

AYAKO

### Session 1

We started with a general quiz on genre in which the students had to match up various pieces of writing with types such as *postcard, business letter, crime story, travel brochure, young child's story, older child's story* and so on. From this we began to focus on the characteristics of children's stories based on their own experiences and the samples I had brought into the class. [These included *The Enormous Crocodile, The Magic Finger, The Twits and Revolting Rhymes* by Roald Dahl, several Shirley Hughes books, two *Frog and Toad* books and some classic fairy stories.] In groups of four the students discussed the important features of children's stories and in the feedback we began to draw up a list including things like:

*large print, short sentences, repetition, alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme, interesting subject matter for children (animals, real families, mythical characters, talking animals, adventures, babies), a moral ending, lots of adjectives, detailed pictures, pop-up pictures, looking for things in pictures, bright colours.*

From this list the students seemed drawn towards writing for the younger age range. This first session finished with watching some of *The Enormous Crocodile* on video whilst looking at the script and trying to recognise some of the features we had discussed.

### Session 2

The next afternoon we visited the children's section of the Central Library in Cambridge where each student chose a book. This book would be used for pronunciation work and as the basis for a short presentation by each student. The afternoon was also a chance for me to offer some guidance on choice based on the difficulty of the language. Some of the students chose very simple books but with interesting presentations e.g. pop-up pictures. Others went for more complex text and pictures, but in general there was a close correlation between ability and the type of book chosen. The students were each asked to read their own books and to choose their favourite pages.

### Sessions 3&4

The next two sessions looked at pronunciation and intonation, starting with the first page of *The Enormous Crocodile* which was written out on a sheet of A4 paper using different colours to show sentence stress and *oo* symbols to indicate word stress. Students were then asked to do the same for their favourite page in their own book and practise reading it out to each other. The second part of this session and the second session were devoted to compiling a questionnaire to ask other students and local children about the stories they used to read or read now. It asked questions like:

'What was your favourite book when you were a child?'

'What is your favourite book now?'

'What kind of books do/did you like best?' (fairy stories, stories about animals and so on)

People were asked to tick choices about types of story, important features of children's stories etc. The questionnaires were compiled in the present tense for use with local children and in the past tense for use with adults and other international students. Each student took ten of these away to interview host families and other students over the weekend.

### Session 5

The students had been asked to read their own books from the library and they had done some work on reading out loud. This session therefore gave them an opportunity to present their book to the others and talk about the story using the pictures in the book. This was done in groups of four so that each person had the opportunity to present a book three times. This was seen as a confidence builder, particularly for the weaker students.

### Session 6

The next step involved analysis of the questionnaires and presentation of the results. This was done in poster form and reinforced the ideas about popular themes and criteria for children's books. Students were then asked to write the main conclusions from the questionnaire for homework.

### Session 7

This session began with the main conclusions of the questionnaire and revision of the important characteristics of children's stories. These were incorporated into a poster illustrating each point with an example from the books they had studied e.g.

- a. onomatopoeia 'bang', 'squish', 'crunch', 'splash'.
- b. alliteration 'biggest, brownest' and 'greedy, grumptions'
- c. things to look for 'Can you see .....?'

This was followed by a brainstorming session in groups of three. Each group was asked to come up with three different ideas for a story. They were allowed to speak in Japanese initially to get the flow of ideas going and could draw on their own childhood reading as much as the books we had looked at together. Each person in the group then noted down the main ideas of each story and when ready they moved into three groups of four with each representative presenting the group's ideas. The groups then voted on the best idea for each group.

### Sessions 8, 9, 10, 11

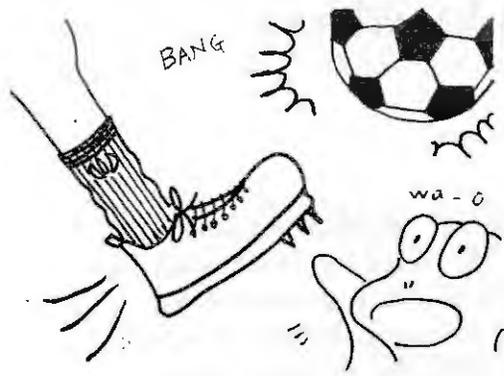
The next four sessions were then devoted to writing, illustrating, compiling and printing their stories. Luckily each group had a skilful artist and some of the illustrations were of an exceptionally high standard. The quality of the writing varied enormously but it was evident in all cases that the students were writing for a target audience of young children and tried very hard to adhere to the principles they had learnt. The involvement of most of the students was very evident when on several occasions I returned to the classroom an hour after leaving to find them still there drawing and discussing the layout, the story line or the ending. Production of the final stories generated a huge amount of English as we grappled with working out the number of pages in each book and what therefore needed copying on the back of what. We found the easiest way was to make a mock up from rough paper, number the pages and then pencil the numbers on the originals to ensure the correct page sequence. We made copies for each student, one for the primary school and one for the record.



( 2 )

He took a short nap.  
When he woke up,  
his shell had gone !!  
"Oh dear! Where is  
my shell? It must have  
stolen." He was upset  
, and he decided to  
search for his shell.

( 3 )



Suddenly, he saw it flying up into the air. Someone had kicked it. "Oh no, my shell..." But he noticed it was not his shell, it was a football !!  
( / 0 )



He went up to the boy and said, "Have you seen my shell?" "No," said the boy, "Have you looked on the beach?" "No, O.K. I'll go and look."  
( / / )

#### Session 12

Finally we took the books to the local primary school where the Japanese students really enjoyed meeting the local children, had some success reading their stories and talking about the pictures and loved listening to the children read.

In retrospect, I felt that the motivation had really come from the students and through the project they had practised all their language skills in the different parts of the project. They had finished up with a product of which they could be justifiably proud. Children's literature is a rich source of vocabulary and in a project like this it is seen as useful rather than something to be rejected as too juvenile for adult students. I have no idea how this would work with a mixed nationality group but I suspect the variety of cultures would probably add to the discussion.

In conclusion I would like to acknowledge that the idea for this project came from Wendy Mackintosh who went through a very similar process with an earlier group of Japanese students and produced very similar results.

**Kay Green** has taught at Cambridge Academy of English since 1995. Prior to this she was living in Hong Kong and Singapore where she taught some EFL. Her original training was as a geographer and she taught geography in state schools for many years before switching to EFL in 1995.

## Poetry: From reading to writing

Eleanor Watts

It saddens me that for many language teachers “literature” has become a dirty word. I understand why this has happened. For generations, the classics were force-fed, like bitter medicines which did good, to students who were neither linguistically nor emotionally ready for them. When those students were reading literature in a second language, the pill was doubly bitter. So it is not surprising that nowadays many teachers avoid classic literature like a discredited, even dangerous, potion of the past.

Yet the classics were not classics when they were written – just good books that moved their readers. They became classics because they gave so much pleasure that they remained important to successive generations despite the passing of time. One of the greatest pleasures in my own life has come from engaging with exciting, but demanding books which some call classics. As a teacher, I have always found that I teach best when I myself am interested in my material – and I don’t get much of a buzz from pulp fiction. I fear that we patronise youngsters when we feed them with literature we would not want to read ourselves.

Reading is like mountain climbing. The more difficult the climb, the bigger the thrill of reaching the summit. It may take more energy to struggle up a rockface than to lie on the grass at the bottom, but the rewards (for me at least!) are greater. Reading can make our minds grapple with the big questions of living or drug us into escaping from them. While we all need to escape occasionally, we’d have dull lives indeed if we always opted out of hardship. There’s a dizzying pleasure that comes from engaging with difficulty and I wouldn’t want to deny it to my students. In my experience, they are not bored by a challenging text so long as their teacher a) communicates a conviction that the climb is worth the effort and b) points out where to find hand-holds for understanding.

In this article, I’d like to look at a lesson on *Fern Hill*, a poem by Dylan Thomas, with a class of thirty-four eleven-year-olds in Britain. About half speak English at home; about half speak Punjabi or Urdu. Eight of the bilingual children in the class have very limited English vocabulary and poor command of English structure. It might be argued that a poem of this sort is too difficult for any eleven-year-old, let alone one with a poor command of English. I would reply that children do not have to understand everything in a poem, and that so long as a few lines make sense and inspire, the child’s language store is enriched. After all, although I love this poem, I don’t understand much of it myself! Some of the pleasure of poetry comes from the music of the words; some comes from picking out meaning from apparent chaos, some from the joy of playing with words that do not have to make sense at a rational level.

At the beginning of the lesson, we talked about how things can happen in dreams that don’t happen in life – and how dreams can seem very real because of their detail. Yet we can’t understand quite what they mean. I said the poem we were going to read was like a dream and was written by a man remembering his happy life as a child in Wales. He grew up on a farm near the sea and in the poem he remembers the animals, birds, plants and colours there. I drew the following table on the blackboard:

<i>animals</i>	<i>birds</i>	<i>plants</i>	<i>colours</i>

We talked about words my pupils already knew that would fit into each box. Then they were given copies of *Fern Hill*. I read aloud Stanzas 1, 2, 3 and 6 and asked them to note, as I read, the names of animals, birds, plants or colours in the above table.

**Fern Hill** by Dylan Thomas

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs  
About the lilted house and happy as the grass was green,  
The night above the dingle starry,  
Time let me hail and climb  
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,  
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns  
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves  
Trail with daisies and barley  
Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns  
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,  
In the sun that is young once only,  
Time let me play and be  
Golden in the mercy of his means,  
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves  
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,  
And the sabbath rang slowly  
In the pebbles of the holy streams.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay  
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air  
And playing, lovely and watery  
And fire green as grass.  
And nightly under the simple stars  
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,  
All the moon long I heard, blessed among the stables, the nightjars  
Flying with the ricks, and the horses  
Flashing in the dark.

...

...

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me  
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,  
In the moon that is always rising,  
Nor that riding to sleep  
I should hear him fly with the high fields  
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.  
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,  
Time held me green and dying  
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

Though the poem is complex, it is full of such brilliant images that even the least able bilingual children managed to write something in each column, if only *fox, horse, owl, grass*.

apple, green, white and golden. They learned more complex vocabulary such as *calves*, *lambs*, *swallows*, *nightjars*, *daisies* and *barley* from their classmates as we discussed how they completed the table.

After we had talked about the meanings of individual words, I asked the children to listen to me reading the poem again and to pick out the unusual ways Dylan Thomas uses language. (Judy Baker from *Pilgrims* long ago introduced me to the idea of reading a short, difficult text several times, looking for something different at each reading.) Afterwards, one of my least self-confident pupils was able to pinpoint the wordplay on the traditional opening to a story in the words, *Once below a time*. Another child with poor English said, "It is strange he says, *I sang in my chains*, because people with chains feel sad. They don't want to sing." A third (using the poetic form *golden* from the poem) said, "Fire is not green. It is golden. But in summer the green grass goes golden." To which another child added: "And sometimes fire is green when you put salt in it." They were able to identify many of Dylan Thomas's other games with words and were therefore prepared to play with words themselves when they came to write their own poems.

The previous week, the class had been for a walk up the hill behind the school, Windmill Hill. This has a stunning view of the Thames Estuary (replacing the sea in *Fern Hill!*). I asked them each to write a "dream poem" about the hill and its view. I told them not to worry if their poems didn't make sense – as dreams don't. My only stipulation was that they should include at least two animals, two birds, two plants and two colours. I warned them against trying to rhyme as they would be forced into saying things they didn't really want to.

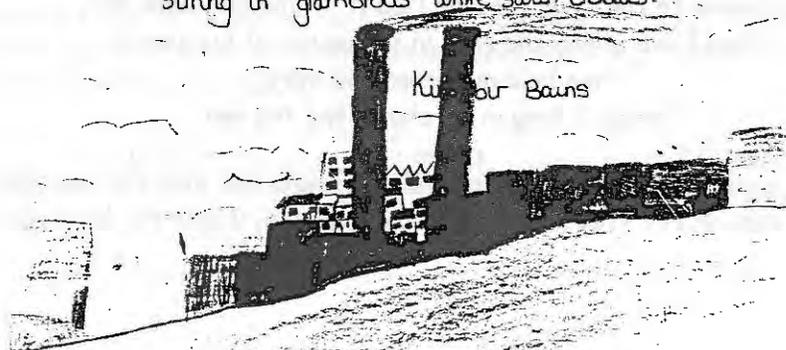
I was amazed at the quality and variety of the poems the children wrote. Here is one of them. (It is a second draft after spelling and grammatical errors were corrected.)

### Windmill Hill

Now I was young and easy under the  
apple boughs  
Clouds were like white swans,  
The wind was howling like an owl.

And smoke out of the power stations  
like horse's hissing,  
The fields like yellowy golden waving hair,  
The river calm as ever like fluff  
flowing peacefully.

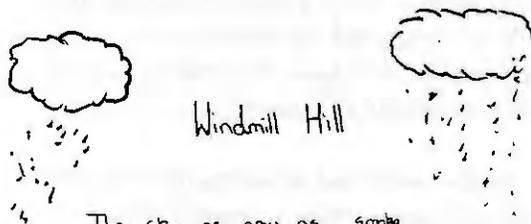
Foxes and lambs running  
like a bonfire sparkling  
like a cooker  
daisies dancing on glittery golden green grass,  
Though I sang  
sitting in glamorous white swan clouds.



Kiranbir's poem illustrates how much an L2 learner can gain from reading a difficult text with the rest of the class, listening to their ideas and then writing her own. She has clearly taken a great deal from the original poem – the structure of the first and penultimate lines, the singsong rhythm, many of the words. One of her two birds (owl), all her animals (foxes, lambs, horses), three of her four colours (golden, green, white) and both plants (grass and daisies) are taken directly from *Fern Hill*, perhaps because she knows few other bird or plant names. Yet these building blocks have given a nervous girl the confidence to make a very individual poem.

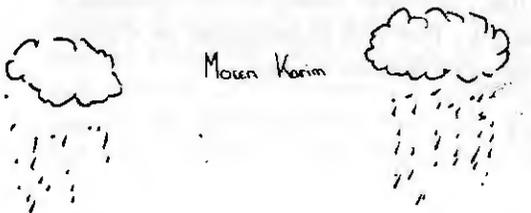
Windmill Hill looks over the River Thames to Tilbury and Kingsnorth Power Stations and the yellow rape fields of Essex beyond. Dylan Thomas's horses reappear, but now they hiss out the smoke from the power stations. The owl that bore Thomas's farm away now sounds like the howling wind that often whistles at the top of the hill. Kiranbir has not simply re-used the poet's images. She has also created her own: The fields of Essex are "like yellowy golden waving hair." The foxes and lambs run "like a sparkling bombfire (sic), like a cooker."

The next two poems, written at the same time and using similar vocabulary, are completely different from each other: Moeen's Windmill Hill is grey and frightening – a place where a carnation closes like a slamming door, where the rain and the human race both die out. Aminoor's Windmill Hill is a sunny place where the grass is happy and the people are shouting for joy.



Windmill Hill

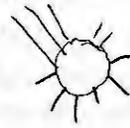
The sky as grey as smoke  
coming out of the chimney of the  
power station.  
Rain throwing it self like an  
American football flying in the sky.  
The red carnation colouring like  
a door slamming.  
Dogs hissing like the wind and  
yellow grass flying around as  
the owl flies.  
The rain dies out and  
humans are dying too.



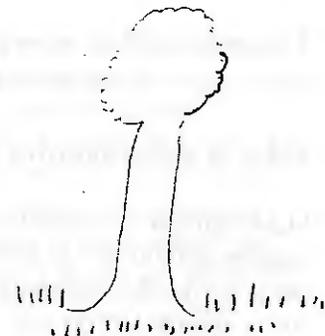
Moeen Karim

1st July

Windmill Hill



The wind was blowing  
The trees were calm  
The green grass was still  
Just like that white sky  
The owls were flying  
Leaves were chasing,  
The lambs and the horses  
Facing down the hill



Leaving behind the golden foxes  
Looking for their food  
The daisies were still when the foxes went by  
The foxes were barking as the apples were quietly passing by.  
Birds were flying as they preyed the grass was happy the foxes were sad  
People shouting for joy

Aminoor Ahmed

The original poem, far from defeating these children, seems to have given them confidence to write. They have taken what they can from it and made it a part of their own expression – which is what should happen when students are led from reading to writing. They have revelled in the cadence of one of the finest poems of the twentieth century and proved that, despite their limited language, they can create something lovely themselves.

# Children's literature as a means of developing metacognitive awareness

Gail Ellis

This article is a summary of the plenary talk given at the IATEFL Young Learners and Literature & Cultural Studies Special Interest Groups Symposium in Cambridge, October 1998.

I have been using authentic children's literature in my teaching for several years now. I never cease to be enchanted by this approach and convinced of its value as I discover new titles to use or new ways of exploiting old favourites. Like many other teachers in mainstream primary education or in the EFL classroom for young learners, I am an avid supporter for the use of existing children's literature. The educational value of using real storybooks and the technique of storytelling is undisputed throughout the world. It develops pupils' imaginative, cognitive and linguistic competence and, in particular, listening for meaning, inferencing, predicting and vocabulary strategies. A storybook can provide the starting point for a wide range of related activities which enable the teacher to focus on specific aspects of language presented through the story and to extend and personalise these in relation to her pupils' level, interests and needs. By creating a programme of work around a storybook, pupils are involved personally, creatively and actively in an all-round, whole curriculum approach. Above all, it is very enjoyable and motivating for a child to understand a story in the foreign language.

This article shows how children's literature can provide an ideal context for developing metacognitive awareness which has also been a great interest of mine for many years.

## What is metacognitive awareness ?

Metacognition is a term that was coined by Flavell in 1970 and there has been much debate over a suitable definition. In a language learning context this means knowing about oneself as a learner, in other words, the knowledge and self-awareness learners have of their own language learning processes, and is regarded as the key to successful language learning.

## Metacognition and children

What about metacognition and children? Research has shown that even quite young children possess a considerable degree of metacognitive knowledge. I recently asked my five-year old daughter on a visit to the countryside in Spring how she remembered the names of the wild flowers we saw:

- Mother: *How do you remember the names of the flowers?*  
Child: *I think in my head.*  
Mother: *What do you think?*  
Child: *I think of the flowers.*  
Mother: *What do you think about the flowers? For example, what's different about them?*  
Child: *The colour.*  
Mother: *Yes, so can you remember the names of two flowers we saw that are the same colour?*  
Child: *Periwinkle and violet.*  
Mother: *That's right. What colour are they?*  
Child: *Purple.*

- Mother: *Yes. But they are not the same are they? How do you know which is the periwinkle and which is the violet? What's different about them? Do you remember when we looked at them carefully?*
- Child: *The size.*
- Mother: *Which flower is bigger? The periwinkle or the violet?*
- Child: *The periwinkle.*
- Mother: *Yes, that's right. What else is different about the flowers?*
- Child: *The leaves and where we found them.*
- Mother: *And what did we do to help us remember the flowers when we got home?*
- Child: *We thought in our heads.*
- Mother: *Yes, we thought about them and then we found them in Mummy's book didn't we and then we ....*
- Child: *We made a book and I coloured them.*

The next day ....

- Child: *Mummy, can we talk about the flowers again?*

The interaction between mother and daughter shows that through a series of probing questions which required the child to introspect, she was led to a conscious statement of the strategies she used to recall the names of the flowers. In addition, it seems that this process was enjoyable -proved by the fact that the child requested to speak about the same subject the next day.

However, it is often thought that children are not capable of expressing their opinions or views about how they learn, of understanding the strategies they use, or of understanding instructions or explanations about learning. The following quotation unfortunately reflects the resistance many teachers show when asked to address this crucial aspect of learning: "To tell a classroom of 8 year-olds what the aims of a lesson are is, in my opinion, pointless." Consequently, many teaching situations and materials do not contribute to the development of metacognitive awareness. However, it is generally agreed that the learning purposes, strategies and the possibility of strategy transfer to other tasks must, at some point in the learning process, be made explicit to the learner. The learners should not be left to uncover the implicit without some kind of prompt or help. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the concerned, individual teacher to add this missing dimension.

My own classroom practice has shown that children are capable of understanding and benefit from being given information about classroom procedures. Furthermore, asked the right questions, they are capable of expressing an awareness about their own learning that they are rarely given credit for, and that this awareness can be developed. The kind of awareness or knowledge that children do have about their learning is the comparative difficulty of different types of tasks, knowledge about themselves as learners and of the ways in which they generally operate strategically. What does not develop either as fast or as inevitably is the ability to use that knowledge spontaneously in pursuance of a cognitive goal.

### **Metacognitive awareness in a language learning context**

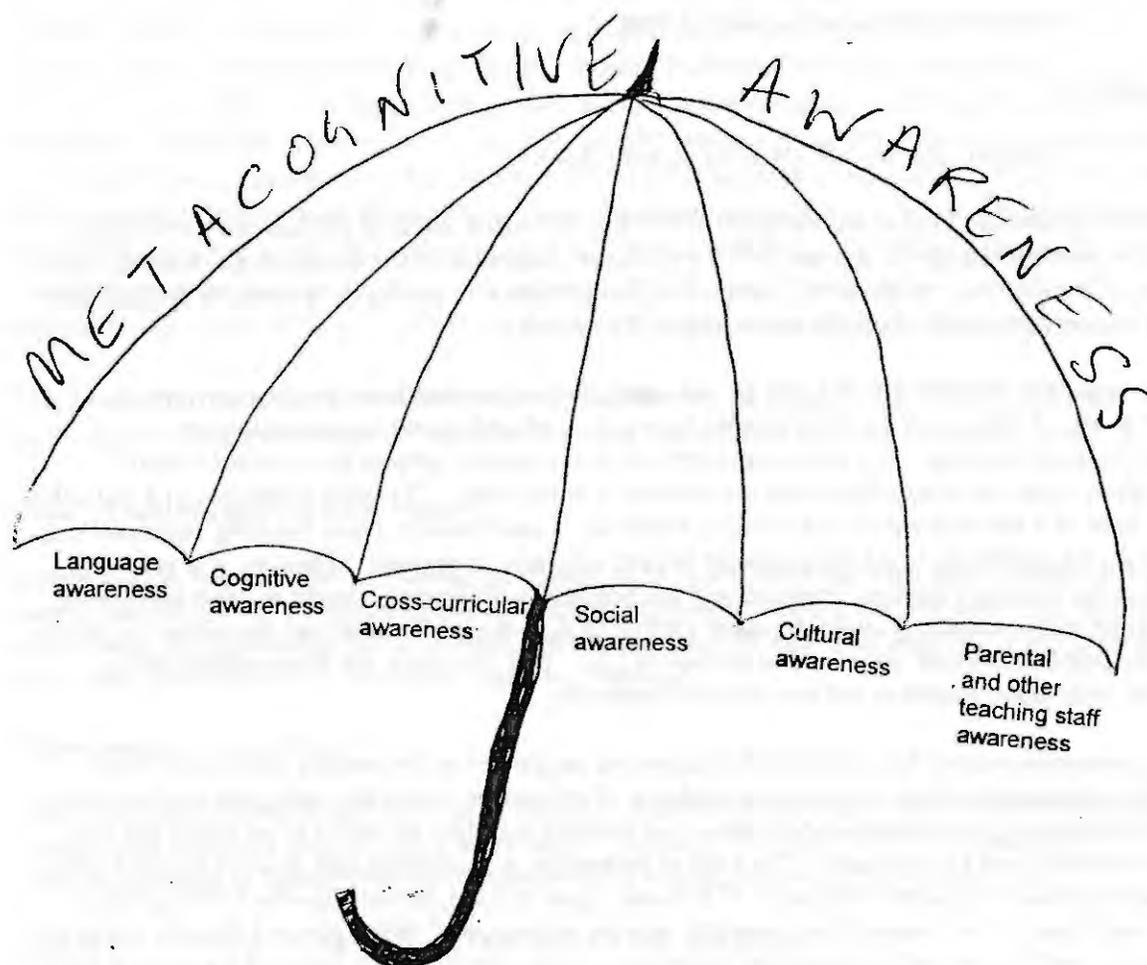
In a language learning context with young learners I see metacognitive awareness as an umbrella term which incorporates the following areas. These overlap to some extent and all involve the development of positive attitudes, self-confidence and self-awareness

**Language awareness:** The aim here is to stimulate children's interest and curiosity about language "to challenge pupils to ask questions about language" (Hawkins 1984) in order to develop understanding of and knowledge about language in general, including the foreign language, the mother tongue and, if appropriate and depending on the context, other languages. This would involve using metalanguage

(the mother tongue or target language) for explaining classroom procedures, for describing language, for analysing language, and for making comparisons to find similarities and differences between the L1 and L2.

**Cognitive awareness:** The main aim here is to help children understand how they are going to learn a foreign language in class, the type of materials they are going to use and the activities they are going to do; getting them to think about what and how they learn, which strategies they use to help them to remember, to concentrate, to pay attention; how and when to review, how to monitor their learning and to decide what they need to do next.

The authenticity of children's literature offers a cognitive challenge which Shelagh Rixon (1995) defines as "something that is not easy but that can be overcome, given outside support and encouragement, in addition to the learner's own hopeful attitude to the outcome. It is the teacher's responsibility to help pupils develop a positive attitude and be hopeful and robust in the face of challenge and to become aware of and use strategies to deal with 'difficulty'."



**Cross-curricular awareness:** Many storybooks stretch naturally across the curriculum allowing links to be made with other subjects. This would also involve developing pupil's appreciation of literature and of personal taste including an awareness of different genres, formats, literary styles such as cumulative, repetitive, rhyming, wordless, question/answer stories, illustrative styles and so on. We are also hoping to develop children's desire to read not only in the foreign language but in the L1 too. Most importantly, as John McRae (1994) stresses "We've got to get students into the idea of stories and the richness of stories at as early an age as possible. Storytelling ..... is encouraging reading even before words; what we are talking about ... is text awareness, the awareness of telling a story."

**Social awareness:** This will involve children in collaborative activities which, in many contexts, may involve a new understanding of how to behave in class, towards the teacher and towards each other; to establish a working consensus which will contribute towards building class, peer, teacher and individual respect; and to learn to interact and cooperate together. Storytelling provides an ideal context for the development of social awareness "Listening to stories in class is a shared social experience ... storytelling provokes a shared response of laughter, sadness, excitement and anticipation. In this way, a natural communicative situation is provided where pupils interact with the story, the storyteller and each other." Ellis and Brewster (1991).

**Cultural awareness:** Girard's (1991) definition of this important area "to develop understanding and openness towards others" would involve children in activities which would enable them to discover similarities and differences between themselves and other people and to see these in a positive light. The development of tolerance and positive attitudes to the foreign language culture and people will draw children away from a mono-cultural perspective and into a broader view of the world. Storybooks reflect the culture of their authors and illustrators, thereby providing ideal opportunities for presenting cultural information and for making cross-cultural comparisons.

**Parental and other teaching staff awareness:** The introduction of foreign language learning and its accompanying methodologies into an existing primary system, may have great reverberations throughout the school. Such learning may be perceived by children, other teaching staff and parents as 'less formal', 'not serious enough', 'less disciplined' and its value may be questioned. It is very important that other teaching staff, parents and, of course, the children themselves, receive "methodological preparation" as defined by Dickinson and Carver (1980) so they are informed about methodological approaches and materials in order to understand what is going on in the classroom and why.

#### **Why is the development of metacognitive awareness important?**

As already stated, the development of metacognitive awareness is considered to be the key to successful learning.

Children get lots of implicit practice in the classroom in experimenting with different cognitive strategies, for example tasks that get them to sort or classify, to compare, to match, to select, to predict, to guess, to sequence, etc., but most classroom situations and materials rarely inform children explicitly about why they are using certain strategies or get them to reflect on what or how they are learning. In other words, the metacognitive dimension is missing so children are not helped to understand the significance of what they are doing. Although some published materials now include activities which get children to review what they have learnt, (see Sinclair and Ellis 1992) these are in the form of self-tests or check lists which focus solely on the product or the linguistic content of a learning unit and not, in any way, on the processes involved. The emphasis here is "on learning something rather than on learning to learn" (Wenden 1987). The inclusion of simple instruments for self-assessment is also a welcome addition to published materials, but again these rarely encourage any reflection on the learning process, and the accompanying teacher's notes rarely offer any guidance on how to do this. Research by O'Malley et al (1985), Ellis and Sinclair (1989) has shown that without the combination of metacognitive and cognitive strategy development learners are unlikely to be able to transfer strategies to other tasks. As O'Malley et al (op.cit) state: "Students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction and ability to review their progress, accomplishments and future learning directions."

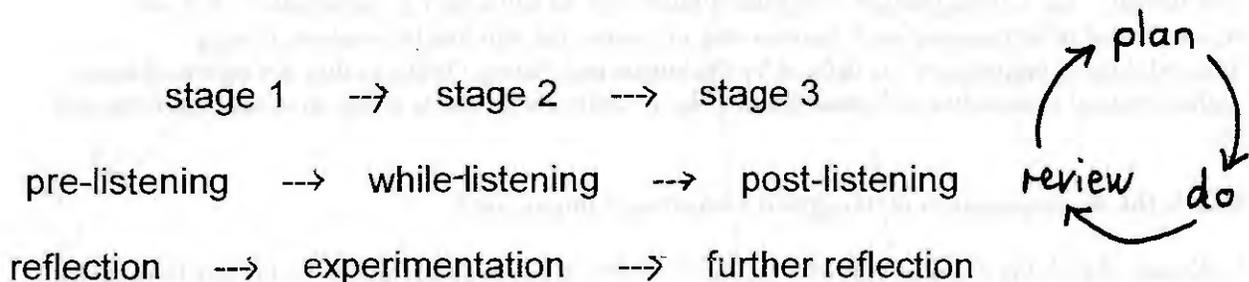
In other words, pupils need activities which incorporate **reflection**, thinking about what they are going to do and why, **experimentation**, doing a task and manipulating the language to achieve a goal such as listen and colour, listen and draw, listen and sequence, etc., and **further reflection**: *What did I do? Why did I do it? How did I do it? How well did I do? What do I need to do next?* In this way, the implicit becomes explicit – pupils become aware of what they are doing and why. We can assume that "the more informed (and aware) children/learners are about language and language learning the more

effective they will be at managing their own learning and at language learning" (Ellis and Sinclair 1989).

### A methodology for developing metacognitive awareness

I would like to propose a methodology for developing metacognitive awareness which could be applied to existing classroom contexts with little disruption. Most lessons consist, more or less, of three principal stages: revision and presentation of language items and planning and preparation for an activity; doing an activity or a task to practise the language items and to develop skills areas; further practise to consolidate, extend and review the language practised. Children's literature and the technique of storytelling offers an ideal context for developing metacognitive awareness and the technique of storytelling, where the initial focus is to develop pupils listening skills, allows these stages to be referred to as the familiar pre-, while and post-listening or storytelling. These stages provide the teacher with a framework in which to incorporate **reflection, experimentation and further reflection** as mentioned above representing the on-going cyclical nature of learning in which children **plan, do and review**. This general strategy for learning is important because it can be used as a framework for learning any subject, including language learning.

### A methodology for developing metacognitive awareness



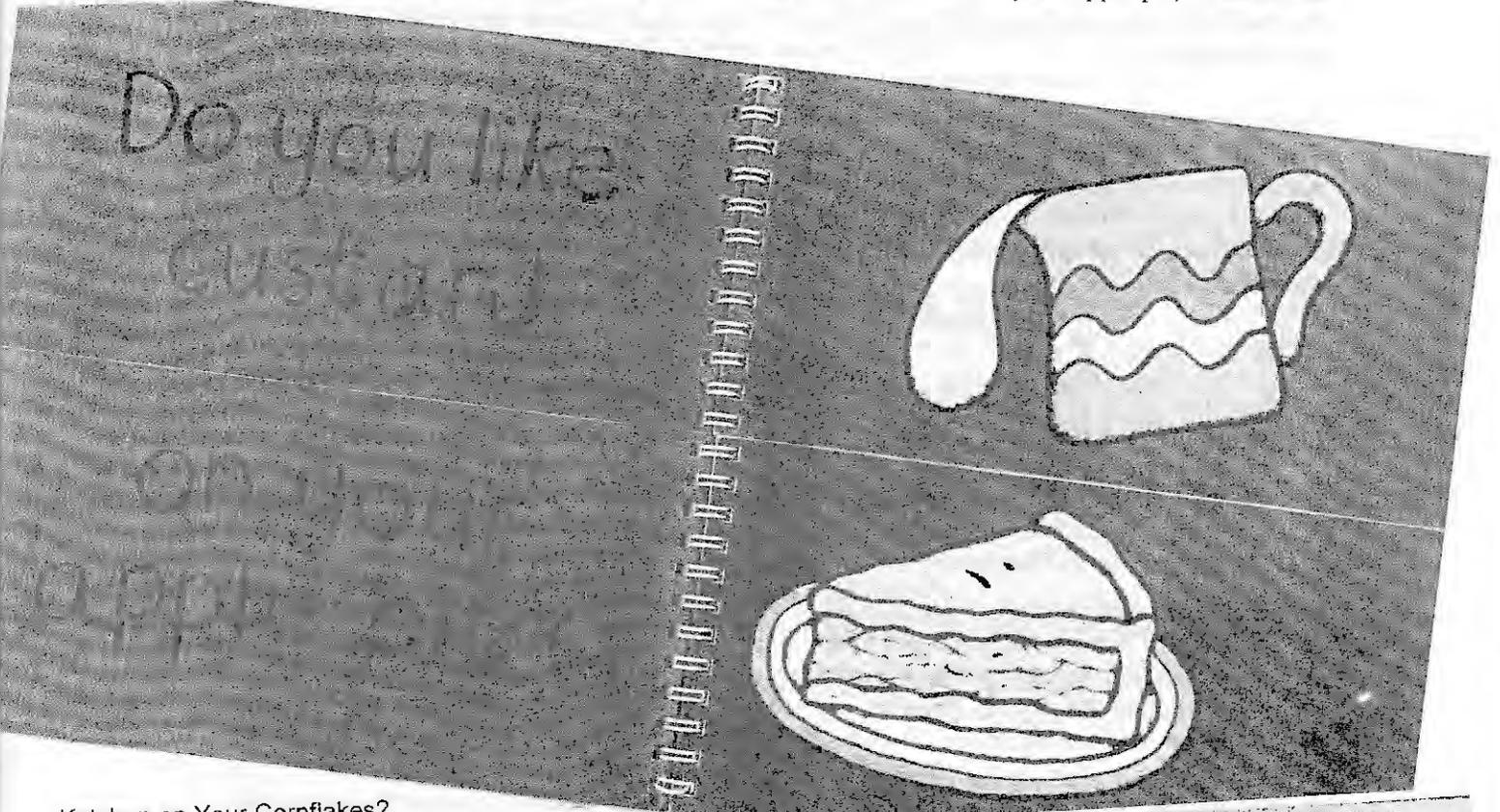
In order to do this, teachers will need to expand their role (Wenden 1985) by taking on a guiding, questioning role which will involve informing children about language learning and what they are doing and how they are going to do it. They can do this by prompting, modelling questions and strategies, demonstrating, discussing learning and helping children reflect on what they have done, how they did it and how well they did. This is an approach I have used regularly with children in France. Working in this way with beginner or low level learners naturally requires the use of the mother tongue and a little extra time. The extra time can easily be found if the teacher is prepared to take a few minutes away from the content of the foreign language lesson to focus on the process. Getting children to focus on the process of what they do will be a new experience for most. At first their replies to questions will be vague and they will need to be pushed to think and justify their responses. Such an approach needs to be built up gradually over a period of time but, little by little, children become more aware of how they are learning the foreign language.

### Asking the right questions

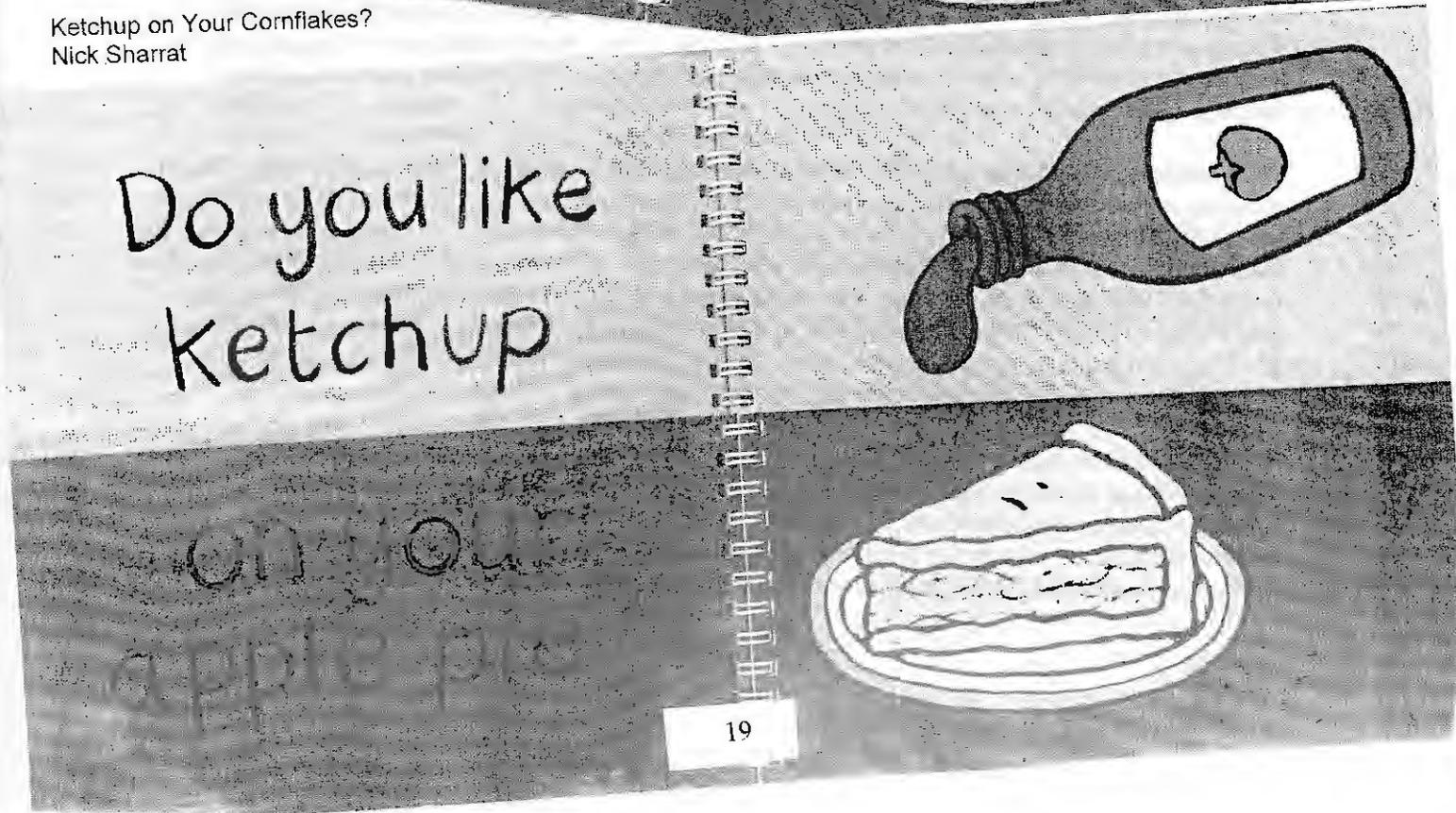
Reference has been made to the teacher's expanded role which includes taking on a questioning role. What are the right questions to ask to encourage active reflection? My experience has shown that the questions we ask children about their learning have to be extremely clear and directly related to a learning experience. We are inviting children to think about an aspect of their learning that is abstract and, for most, will be new. Unless the questions are well-formulated and concrete, in language accessible to the children, they will be confused and will not be able to reply in a way that helps them, or their teacher, become aware of their learning processes. A good question then must be probing and an invitation to think so that it makes children justify their responses, it must focus their attention and encourage observation, invite enquiry and stimulate because it is open-ended. It should be productive and seek a response and generate more questions.

### Applying the Plan Do Review strategy

It is the responsibility of the teacher to create a context and purpose for learning, and I would like to demonstrate an example of how I applied the **plan do review** strategy to develop the different aspects of metacognitive awareness in Fig. 1, with a class of 10 – 12 year-olds at the recently opened Young Learners Centre at the British Council in Paris. I chose a storybook called *Ketchup on Your Cornflakes?* which like any good storybook provides a flexible resource that can be used with a variety of pupils of different ages and levels. Although at first glance the book looks simplistic, the use of the split page technique allows many amusing and crazy combinations of words and images based on the structure *Do you like (ketchup on your cornflakes)? Do you like (custard on your apple pie)?* and so on.



Ketchup on Your Cornflakes?  
Nick Sharrat

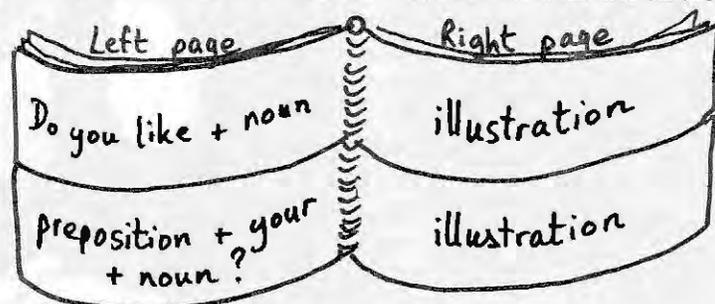


Linguistically, it provides an ideal context for introducing and revising the question *Do you like ...?*, food and body-related vocabulary and prepositions. Grammatically, children are provided with a pattern (*Do you like ..*) which allows them to generate all kinds of other questions. However, it takes children further than the basic question form *Do you like cornflakes/apple pie?* as it requires children to think about combinations of things that are both grammatically and culturally appropriate *Do you like custard on your apple pie?*

The planning stage involved children in revision and practise of the question *Do you like ...?* prepositions and related vocabulary.

The story was then read aloud and pupils invited to turn pages to create strange and unexpected combinations.

The review and extension stage involved children in making their own book using the same basic idea. In order to do this, the pupils first analysed the text and structure of the book. By questioning the pupils, *How is the book structured? Where's the text? Where are the illustrations? What's on the right/left page? How is the text divided, What type of word is this? How does the text begin? How does the text end? What about the text in the middle?* we created a model on the board of how the book was constructed.



Coloured paper was distributed and collated, and then the children started to think about their own combinations of words and images and to drafting the first version of their books. Suggestions were tried out, evaluated, selected or rejected, and modified and corrected as necessary. Pupils then produced the final version of their book. The next step was to try the books out on their classmates and invite them to make crazy combinations: *Do you like coffee on your camembert?*

Another good storybook is *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin Junior and illustrated by Eric Carle of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* fame, a well-known story which is ideal for introducing or revising colours and animals, and structured around the popular question/answer technique.

A programme of work was designed to take children through the three stages **plan do review**. This structure enabled the children to perceive a clear progression of work from pre-storytelling activities to post-storytelling activities in the form of a concrete outcome – the creation of their own class book. The planning stage in which colours and animals were pre-taught and revised, allowed children to participate in the story with ease at the do stage. The children were enchanted by the beautiful illustrations and their ability to predict the storyline and join in with the storytelling. Here are some comments from my 8 – 9 year-old pupils to the question *How well did you understand the story? Why?* Pupils all gave themselves a *good* or *quite good* rating and the following reasons to justify their evaluation:

- Because we had already revised
- Because we had learnt the colours and animals
- Because we had revised the key words
- Because the colours were on the pictures and I had learnt the names of the animals.
- Because we had learnt the words which were in the story.

The **plan do review** strategy can be applied in a way that it does not disrupt classroom procedures or interfere with the syllabus. The extra time needed to question pupils or to get them to complete a questionnaire is considered a necessary and worthwhile investment. It also allows the type of questions to be modelled that children will be able to ask themselves independently on other occasions. Overall, children develop a greater understanding of themselves as language learners, become more actively and personally involved and develop strong motivation and positive attitudes towards language learning which are valuable and worthwhile outcomes.

To conclude, I would hope that the teaching profession will be able to move to a position where there is a recognition of the benefits of and a purposeful move towards the development of children's metacognitive awareness. As can be seen, children's literature can provide an ideal context for developing this crucial aspect of learning, and can easily be integrated into the teacher's general day-to-day classroom procedures. Teachers need to reflect on the different aspects of metacognition, so they are developed as naturally and as systematically as putting up an umbrella when it rains!

*Gail Ellis* is Manager of the Young Learners Centre, The British Council, Paris, and Special Lecturer in TESOL, School of Education, University of Nottingham. Her main publications include Learning to Learn English, CUP, The Primary English Teacher's Guide and The Storytelling Handbook, Penguin, The Snowman: the original storybook with activities for young learners of English, OUP, We're Kids in Britain and Pebbles, Addison Wesley Longman



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# REALBOOKS – additional materials in the classroom?

Opal Dunn

## **What are REAL picture BOOKS? Why buy them as well as course books?**

REAL picture BOOKS are different from course books. They are written for children's enjoyment and enrichment with no specific language teaching aim. The language that accompanies the pictures is authentic to native speaker children. Artists, authors, editors and designers, all specialised in children's picture books, spend hours working together on books combining and honing text and illustration to make each page or spread into a unit. In the UK they are published in what is called the Trade market, not the EFL or Education market. Hundreds of picture books are published each year. New products are shown by publishers at book fairs. The two most important for which new products are prepared are the Bologna Children's Book Fair in the Spring and Frankfurt Book Fair in the Autumn.

REAL picture BOOKS reflect the culture of their authors, artists or photographers. Many stretch naturally across the curriculum. They can be used to introduce new language and ideas or to consolidate language, introducing a new aspect and giving rise to creative ideas and activities. REALBOOKS should be used differently from course books. If they are over-used as a teaching tool, their magic for the child can be killed. Many children treasure a REAL picture BOOK; they even take it to bed with them. How many children do the same with a course book?

REALBOOKS provide a different, and what seems to be an essential, component to a foreign language learning programme. This is vital for children's understanding and all-round developmental needs. REALBOOKS can also help to lessen the frustrations that some children encounter through being incapable of expressing their thoughts and feelings in the foreign language during the initial stages of learning. *Literature provides meaning in our lives. Finding of meaning is the greatest need and the most difficult achievement for any human of our age.* Bruno Bettelheim.

Through enjoying REALBOOKS together, teachers, parents and children often find out more about how each feels and thinks. Through REALBOOKS children can encounter multi-layered experiences, which touch their senses and emotions, feed and challenge their thoughts, provide them with information and even spark their humour.

## **Introducing REALBOOK NEWS**

REALBOOK NEWS grew out of my awareness of a change in Primary and Nursery classrooms in Europe, where many official curricula now allow some choice of activities: these can include using REALBOOKS. As a result of this change, I saw that teachers needed up to date information on Story and Reference picture books linguistically suitable for beginners. Not every REAL picture BOOK suitable for

native speaker children is suitable for foreign learners. The linguistic content may be too complicated for foreign beginners and this could prove demotivating.

Since I am an author of EFL books as well as REAL picture BOOKS and have worked with REALBOOKS in Bunko (Mini-Libraries) for bilingual children world-wide for over 21 years, I decided to share my experience. The result was the creation of REALBOOK NEWS available through the post free or on Website.

## **What is REALBOOK NEWS?**

REALBOOK NEWS is published twice a year in November and May and is distributed free.

REALBOOK NEWS is a resource for parents, teachers, teacher trainers and administrators interested in introducing REAL picture BOOKS to children learning English as a foreign language or additional language.

REALBOOK NEWS reviews books from all British publishers - big and small - which are considered suitable for young beginners. Future Issues plans to review books from foreign publishers in translation.

REAL BOOKS for beginners are classified by their linguistic content. For general guidance classification is divided into the following divisions:

1a Beginners

1b Post-beginners

2 Early Readers

Books classified as Beginners Books can be used within the very first lessons even if exposure to English is very limited each week.

Apart from reviewing books and giving guidance on language level content, a Feature Article discusses the use of picture books in the classroom and beyond.

Feature Articles in previous issues of REALBOOK NEWS included:

*Art Books for Children - International cultural icons?* Issue 2

*Selecting REAL BOOKS - a skilled task?* Issue 3

*Mini Treasures or Big Books - which shall I use? - which shall I buy?* Issue 4

## **How do I get a copy of REALBOOK NEWS?**

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The Editor, REALBOOK NEWS Opal Dunn,

23, St Peter's Street, London N1 8JP, UK FAX + 44-171- 359-8893

# Using Story CD ROMs in the Primary EFL Classroom

Wendy Superfine

This workshop was given at the British Council IATEFL Istanbul Conference in November 1997. It examined the use of story with the help of C.D.ROM in the Primary E.F.L. classroom and explored the following questions:

## **Why?**

Theoretical reasons for using story

## **How?**

Demonstration of *Winnie the Witch* (O.U.P.) and (*The Fish Who Could Wish*) O.U.P.

## **What?**

Criteria for selection

An overview of storybooks suitable for E.Y.L.

There are many publications which have studied in great detail the use of story with young E.F.L. learners. J.Morgan and M.Rinoluceri describe story telling as "that most compelling and ancient of all human activities". Andrew Wright, an experienced storyteller and author, says, "We all need stories for our minds as much as we need food for our bodies: we watch television, go to the cinema and theatre, read books, and exchange stories with our friends. Stories are particularly important in the lives of our children: stories help children to understand their world and share it with others. Children's hunger for stories is constant. Every time they enter your classroom they enter with a need for stories." (A.Wright *Storytelling* O.U.P.)

When teaching English through story we enable the child to hear the language in context and immerse the listener in the language in a meaningful way.

Story can be used to supplement and extend the course book by linking it to topics or themes within the E.F.L. curriculum.

## **Why?**

It is important to look at the reasons for using narrative in the E.F.L. classroom. Storytelling is a powerful teaching tool because it can:

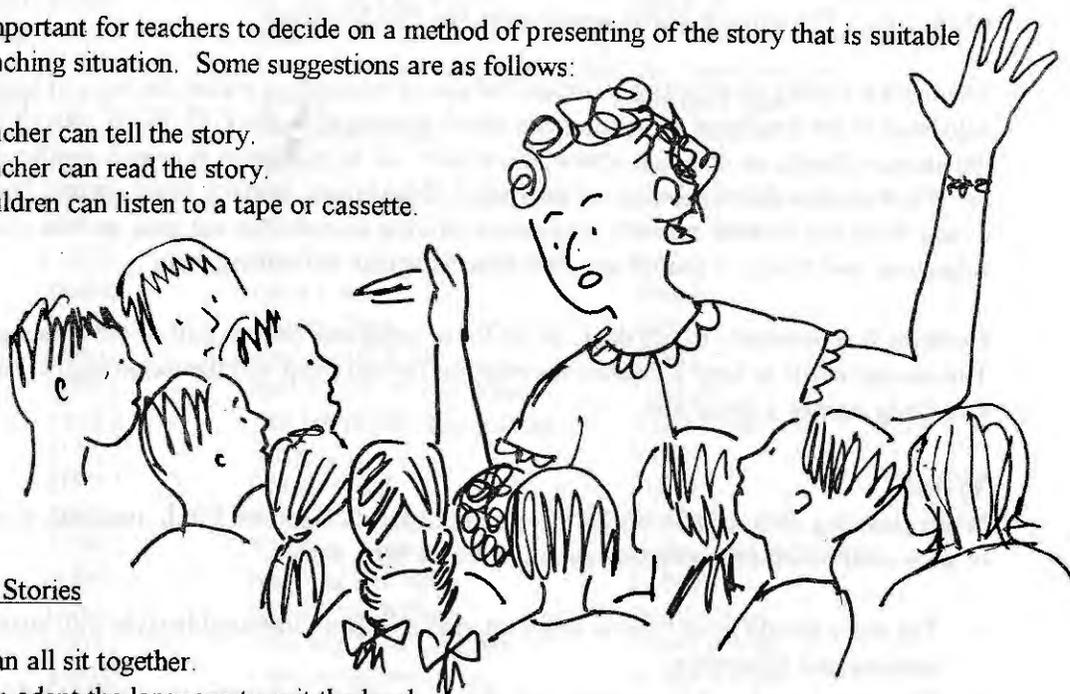
- give enjoyment and relax the learner,
- help learners towards meaning by creating a context for a new language,
- allow learners to make hypotheses about new language,
- give experience of new ways to use familiar language,

- expose learners to a wider range of language,
- help learners focus on phonology and intonation, on the sounds and rhythms of language,
- recycle and repeat language in a natural way,
- give access to new ideas and knowledge,
- help learners make sense of their experiences,
- develop feelings and imagination.

## How?

It is also important for teachers to decide on a method of presenting of the story that is suitable for their teaching situation. Some suggestions are as follows:

1. The teacher can tell the story.
2. The teacher can read the story.
3. The children can listen to a tape or cassette.



### 1. Telling Stories

Children can all sit together.

- You can adapt the language to suit the level.
- You can repeat parts of the story.
- You keep eye contact most of the time.
- Create a story with the children – you tell their story – they make up the beginning, the middle and the end.

### 2. Reading Stories

- Don't change the story.
- Use interesting facial expressions and gestures.

### 3. Listening to a Cassette

- Have a listening corner.
- Use books with cassettes e.g. Ladybird Books.
- Use different voices.

The additional use of modern technology in the form of C.D. ROM can enable the teacher and the children to explore some stories in greater depth. Good examples of stories on C.D. ROM are *Winnie the Witch* (K. Paul & V. Thomas 1987 O.U.P.) and *The Fish Who Could Wish* (J. Bush & K. Paul) 1991 O.U.P. C.D. ROM can supplement a topic or theme in the course book and extend a story with activities which can be used with groups of two or three children or as individual practice. It is important to give all of the class an opportunity to have "hands on" experience when operating the computer. For use with a large class, the screen can be projected on to a larger screen and speakers can amplify the sound so that the story can be heard by the whole class. For individual use, headphones are also necessary.

There are a variety of activities to extend the use of vocabulary within the story. These are explained in the handbook of instructions which accompanies the C.D. ROM. By clicking on to the various objects on the main screen, the stories can be explained in greater depth e.g. *Winnie the Witch* teaches the vocabulary of the rooms of the house, colours, furniture etc. *The Fish Who Could Wish* can be used to teach vocabulary relating to under the sea such as *fish, sharks*. Adjectives and nouns of shapes are used in an imaginative rhyming story.

However it is necessary to use the C.D. ROM or computer only as part of the language lesson. The teacher needs to keep a balance between the human input and the technological input within the young learner's classroom.

### **What?**

When choosing picture story books for use in primary E.S.L. and E.F.L. teaching, it is necessary to have clear criteria for selecting suitable picture book stories.

- The story should be enjoyable and written in a natural, memorable style with strong rhythm cadence and alliteration.
- The story line should be simple – suitable to the language proficiency of the children.
- The learners should be familiar with 70-90 % of the vocabulary and grammar structure in the text.
- It should be an action story with the description left to the pictures.
- The story should contain short dialogue exchanges to stimulate speech activity and to provide for drama activities.
- The story should be cumulative and contain a lot of repetition.
- The story should be short enough to be told in one session.
- The illustrations should be clear, attractive, colourful, relate to the text and support the children's understanding and appropriate to the age of the pupils. They should depict life in the target culture.
- If possible, the story should be accompanied with a rhymed action song or verse. e.g. *Old Macdonald had a farm* with *Mr. Gumpy's Outing*.

The following list of books is suitable for use with Young Learners and has a list of stories which have "cumulative repetitive" language where the vocabulary is collected and repeated. This gives reinforcement to the story and meaning and therefore assists the learners in retaining the ideas and language in an enjoyable way.

### Picture story books recommended for primary E.S.L. / E.F.L. teaching

J. & A. Ahlberg (1973)	Burglar Bill	Heinemann
J. & A. Ahlberg (1978)	Each Peach Pear Plum	Viking Kestrel
J. & A. Ahlberg (1986)	The Jolly Postman	Heinemann
J. & A. Ahlberg (1989)	The Jolly Xmas Postman	Heinemann
R. Briggs (1978)	The Snowman	Hamish Hamilton
J. Bush & K. Paul (1991)	The Fish Who Could Wish	O.U.P.
J. Burningham (1977)	Come Away from the Water Shirley	Jonathan Cape
J. Burningham (1989)	Oi, Get Off Our Train	Red Fox
J. Burningham (1991)	Aldo	Red Fox
J. Burningham (1984)	Time to Get Out of The Bath Shirley	Jonathan Cape
J. Burningham (1984)	Grandpa	Jonathan Cape
N. Butterworth (1984)	One Snowy Night	Picture Lions
Campbell (1982)	Dear Zoo	Puffin
E. Carle (1970)	The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Picture Puffin
E. Carle (1975)	The Mixed-Up Chameleon	Picture Puffin
E. Carle (1977)	The Bad Tempered Ladybird	Puffin
L. Cousins (1993)	Noah's Ark	Walker
E. Hill (1980)	Where's Spot	Puffin
E. Hill (1981)	Spot's First Walk	Puffin
E. Hill (1993)	Spot's Walk in The Woods	Penguin
E. Carle (n.d.)	The Secret Birthday Message	MacMillan
P. Hutchins (1971)	Titch	Puffin
P. Hutchins (1970)	Rosie's Walk	Puffin
P. Hutchins (1991)	Tidy Titch	Red Fox
M. Inkpen (1989)	The Blue Balloon	Hodder and Stoughton
J. Kerr (1980)	Mog and The Baby	Collins
E.J. Keats (1966)	Whistle for Willie	Bodley Head
A. Lobel (1973)	Frog and Toad Together	World's Work
R. Lopshire (1969)	I am Better Than You	World's Work
C. Moon (1982)	The Three Little Pigs	Ginn (From Once Upon a Time-set)
D. McKee (1980)	Not Now Bernard	Anderson Press
J. Murphy (1982)	Peace At Last	MacMillan
H. Nicol & J. Pienkowski (1979)	Meg and Mog Books	Puffin
J. Prater (1996)	Once Upon a Time	Walker Books
D. Pelham (1990)	Sam's Sandwich	Jonathan Cape
K. Paul & V. Thomas (1987)	Winnie the Witch	O.U.P.
D. Seuss (1996)	The Cat in the Hat etc.	Random House
M. Sendak (1967)	Where the Wild Things Are	Bodley Head
M. Sendak (1981)	Outside Over There	Bodley Head
B. Wildsmith (1984)	Daisy	O.U.P.
N. Wilcox Richards (1992)	Farmer Joe's Hot Day	Hippo Scholastic
R. Craft & E. Blegard (1974)	The Winter Bear	Collins
M. Waddell (1990)	Farmer Duck	Walker Books

### Cumulative repetitive stories

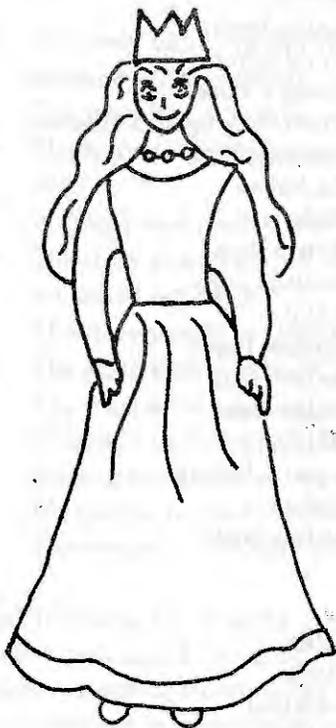
John Burningham (1970)	Mr Gumpy's Outing	Puffin
Arnold Lobel (1970)	Frog and Toad are Friends	Puffin
Vera Southgate (1981)	Chicken Licken	Ladybird
Helen Oxenbury (1968)	The Great Big Enormous Turnip	Collins
Margaret Zemach (1983)	The Little Red Hen	Puffin

## The Princess in the Tower: Activities for 3-11 year olds

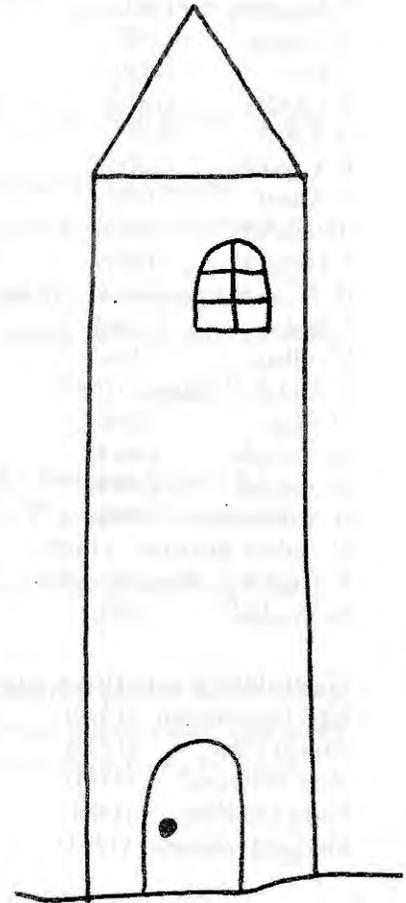
Carol Read

Few teachers need convincing of the value of using stories to develop language with young children learning English. Among some of the main benefits are that stories provide a natural, relevant and enjoyable context for exposure to language. The discovery and construction of meaning is supported through things such as visuals, voice and characterisation. Stories provide a shared social experience and classroom event and help children to develop concentration skills as well as their imagination. They also allow for the expression of personal, divergent responses, not always easy to achieve in English when children's own language repertoire is at such an initial stage. Last, but by no means least, stories provide a springboard for a wide range of activities designed to develop language, thinking skills and positive attitudes, not only in English but across the whole of the primary curriculum.

Among the types of stories with the power to engage children's interest and enthusiasm in class are traditional stories or fairy tales with which they are already familiar in their own language. One of my favourites is the story of *The princess in the tower*. Here is a simple version of it:



Once upon a time there was a princess. She lived in a tall tower. One day a witch cast a spell. The princess fell asleep. A big forest grew. One day a prince came riding by on his horse. He cut the trees with his sword. He took the princess by the hand. And everybody was very happy.



This has all the classic ingredients of a universal fairy tale and lends itself to a wide range of multi-sensory activities which can be adapted to suit children of different ages and levels. Part of the attraction and magic of doing the story of *The princess in the tower* in class is that it can also be linked to singing and acting out the traditional primary school song *There was a princess long ago*.

There was a princess long ago,  
Long ago, long ago;  
There was a princess long ago,  
Long, long ago.

And she lived in a tall, tall tower,  
Tall, tall tower, tall, tall tower  
And she lived in a tall, tall tower  
Long, long ago.

A wicked witch she cast a spell ...

The princess she fell fast asleep ...

A great big forest grew around ...

A handsome prince came riding by ...

He cut the tall trees with his sword ...

He took the princess by the hand ...

And everybody's happy now ...



### There was a princess long ago



To make flashcards, photocopy and enlarge the pictures and stick them on coloured card. To make the pencil puppets or story mobile, draw an oval shape around the pictures before photocopying in order to minimize time spent cutting them out.

Some practical ideas for using *The princess in the tower* (and the accompanying traditional song) with children spanning the ages of three to eleven are given below. Although these suggestions are categorised according to approximate ages, this is not intended to be arbitrary or inflexible but rather to reflect general developmental processes in children during the infant and primary years. The suggested activities are designed to develop a range of language, thinking, social and motor skills as well as to provide a suitable level of challenge for each age band. They also aim to show how very often teaching materials for young children, in this case a story and a song, can be exploited in different ways, using different techniques and procedures, in order to make them appropriate to use with children whose general stage of development is very different.



## **Ideas for using 'The princess in the tower' with 3-5 year olds**

- Tell a very simple version of the story, using pictures or flashcards (see above). Use voice and mime to highlight the names of the main characters and other key items e.g. pretend to hold a mirror and comb your hair for the princess, hold your arms up high, joining the tips of your fingers for the tower etc.
- Tell the story again. Point to the pictures and encourage the children to join in doing the mimes with you.
- Assign children in groups a picture and word from the story. Point to the pictures, say the words and get the children to respond with their mime. Do this with them at first.
- Get the children to sit or stand in a circle. Tell the story again pointing to the pictures. Children take turns to do their mimes in the centre of the circle when they hear their word.
- Children take turns to do their mimes with you and to join in saying what they are e.g. I'm the princess. / I'm the tower.
- Sing the first verse of the song. Children mime being a princess with you. Repeat this verse, substituting the names of the other characters in the story (witch, prince). Children mime and join in singing with you.
- Children make plasticine models of one of the characters or items in the story of their choice. Use the children's models to tell the story again and encourage the children to join in saying words they know. Use the children's own language if necessary to ask if they like the story and the characters in the story. Do they know any other stories with a prince, princess or a witch?

## **Ideas for using 'The princess in the tower' with 5-7 year olds**

- Tell a simple version of the story using flashcards or pictures (see above). Encourage the children to predict what happens next after showing them each picture (children are likely to make predictions in their own language but you re-model and expand these in English).
- Tell the story again. Re-cap frequently, pointing to the pictures and encouraging the children to join in saying the key words.
- Children make pencil puppets for one of the characters or items in the story in groups (use the pictures in above). Say the words in random order and children respond by holding up their puppets.
- Form new groups so that there is at least one child with each puppet in each group. Tell the story again. Children hold up their puppets when they hear their words.
- Children stand in a circle. Play or sing the song. Do actions with the children to accompany each verse and establish meaning. Repeat the procedure and encourage the children to join in singing the song.
- Children stand in a circle. Assign roles (princess, witch, prince and horse). The princess stands in the centre of the circle. The witch, prince and horse stand away from the circle. Children sing and act out the song. The children standing in the circle pretend to be the tower (hands held high and joined at the tips) and the forest (arms waving like branches). In the last verse, everyone takes a partner and dances together. If you sing and act out the story more than once, it is a good idea to vary the roles to avoid stereotyping e.g. the princess can rescue the prince, the witch can be a troll or wizard.
- Give the children a handout with all the key pictures from the story (see above) and do a colour dictation e.g. The tower is blue, The horse is brown. Children listen and colour the pictures.

## Ideas for using 'The princess in the tower' with 7-9 year olds

- Tell the story twice (as for 5-7 year olds). Elaborate on the basic version in a way that is appropriate to the children's level.
- Play a few flashcard games with the pictures to familiarise children with key words in the story. For example, tell the children to close their eyes. Remove one of the flashcards. Children open their eyes and call out the name of the flashcard that's missing. Stick the flashcards on different walls around the classroom and give instructions e.g. *Point to the princess!*
- Invite pairs of children to match word cards to the flashcards on the board. Play board pelmanism with the pictures and words.
- Give the children a handout with all the pictures in the story (see above). Tell the story again. Children listen and number the pictures in the order they hear them in the story. They then write the words under each picture.
- Play or sing the song once. Children listen and point to the pictures on the handout as they hear them in the song.
- Children stand in a circle and sing and act out the song (as in the penultimate suggestion for 5-6 year olds). It is, however, important to be aware that some children, especially at the top end of this age range, may already feel self-conscious acting out the story in this way or feel that it is too young for them. The boys and girls may also not want to hold hands or dance together. If this is the case, avoid doing the song in the way suggested.
- In pairs children make a mobile of the main characters and items in the story, using wire coat hangers, thread and the pictures in above. On the reverse side of each picture they write e.g. *This is the princess / This is the tower*. The mobiles can then be displayed in the classroom.
- Talk to the children about the story. Children use their own language if necessary and you re-model or expand their answers in English e.g. *Do you like the story? What other stories do you know with a princess / a witch? Would you like to be a prince / princess? Why / why not? Is the story like real life? etc.*

## Ideas for using 'The princess in the tower' with 9-11 year olds

You may decide that *The princess in the tower* and the song are too young altogether for children at the top end of this age range. This will depend on the maturity and interests of the children themselves and the educational and cultural context in which you are working. If this is the case, you may prefer to choose a modern or 'anti' princess story, such as *Princess Smartypants* by Babette Cole (Collins Picture Lions, 1986). If you do use *The princess in the tower*, the following suggestions may be suitable:

- Tell the story twice, elaborating on the basic version in a way that is appropriate to the children's level, and play a few flashcard games (as for 7-9 year olds).
- In groups, give the children sentences from the story on separate pieces of card. Children read the sentences and order the cards. They then compare their versions to check that they have done this correctly.
- Give the children a handout containing the story with missing words (key vocabulary items in the pictures in above). Children work individually and read and complete the story. They check their answers in pairs and then with the whole class.
- Talk to the children about the story. Children use their own language if necessary and you re-model or expand their answers in English, e.g. *Do you like the story? What other stories do you know with a princess / a witch? Is 'The princess in the tower' a modern story? What would a modern version of the story be like? etc.*

- In pairs, children invent and write a new (modern) story using the one they have got on the handout as a model. After a process of drafting and editing with help from peers and you, the children can make books from card, e.g. origami books, and write and illustrate their stories. Children can take turns to read each other their stories in groups. The stories can then be kept in a plastic folder on the classroom noticeboard and used as a reading resource for fast finishers in subsequent lessons.

In conclusion, stories are a wonderful way to develop children's language in a naturally contextualised, relevant and enjoyable way. The classic traditional qualities of *The princess in the tower* combined with the feelings of familiarity and expectations it awakens in even the youngest children make it a story of ageless appeal. By adapting procedures and techniques in the ways suggested above, it is very often possible to devise activities, based on the same core materials, which are appropriate for different ages and levels in the infant and primary range. This flexibility not only allows us as teachers to save time and get maximum mileage from materials we use in class, but also helps to heighten our awareness of the continuum of developing competences throughout the infant and primary years and allows us to respond sensitively and appropriately to the special characteristics and needs of the children we teach.

#### ***Acknowledgement***

I would like to thank all the participants on a recent in-service training course I ran for infant and primary teachers at the Teacher's Centre, CPR Vallecas, Madrid, whose enthusiastic response to a task I set them to brainstorm ideas for additional activities based on the 'The princess in the tower' gave me the idea of writing this article.

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# A Royal Way to Learn Nursery Rhymes

Diana Rosa Morales Rumbaut & Alicia Maria Moya Torres

*In this article Diana Rosa Morales Rumbaut & Alicia Maria Moya Torres from Cuba discuss their experience in using nursery rhymes in an EFL context, both to motivate future high school teachers of English, and to help them enlarge their cultural background. They illustrate this with an activity and also report some students' reflections on the experience of using nursery rhymes during their teaching practice in a junior high school.*

Teaching English in a non-native environment for nine years has acquainted us with the fact that no matter how proficient a learner might become, s/he will always lack knowledge of the culture of the target language.

"Culture has taken an important place in language teaching and learning. It has been widely recognized that culture and language are interrelated and that language is used as the main medium through which culture is expressed." (Montgomery & Reid-Thomas 1994)

But how can we stimulate students' curiosity about the target culture? In order to solve this puzzle, we have made some attempts, but none of them proved to be as successful as teaching nursery rhymes and children's songs.

It all began when we decided to teach English to our own children. We were looking for ways to motivate them to speak and to enlarge their vocabulary. In our search, some of our colleagues, who had studied before the boom of pop music invaded our country, suggested singing nursery rhymes to them; thus they began providing us with all those beautiful songs they had learned such as: *Row your boat, Jack and Jill, Rock-a-bye baby* etc.

We felt very proud because our children learnt the songs very fast, and their improvement in the language was encouraging. We related anecdotes to our students who, to our surprise, asked us to teach them the nursery rhymes, too, and so we did.

We realised the motivation of the students was high. So we thought that by using nursery rhymes we could help students to build up fluency. We selected those songs which could be both meaningful and amusing for them. We designed varied activities which would encourage group work and which could also arouse curiosity about the target culture. The songs were used as warm-ups for other activities, for presenting grammar and vocabulary items, for pronunciation practice and for developing oral and writing skills as well.

The students were so motivated that they prepared their own activities to be taught to the junior high school students during their teaching practice. They tried them and reflected upon their experience. The following are some of the reflections given by the students when they evaluated their results:

"I loved to see how the students learned and began to enjoy the English classes when I started teaching them rhymes." Walkiria

"I had a good experience in high school because there I saw they learn better through rhymes, because they are easy to remember." Barbara

"The adolescents liked the rhymes and they also liked to sing the songs to the other teachers."  
Mariuska.

"Adolescents need affection, and by teaching them rhymes we could get closer to them, and sometimes we could help them more." Kenia

The following is an example of how we worked in class:

Aim To present descriptions

Materials A board and some pieces of chalk

Level Beginners

#### Procedure

Motivate the students by asking about abilities (a topic already studied in class) and tell them that you will select the best student at drawing. On one side of the board, the teacher will copy what is being said in the rhyme, and at the same time, on the other side of the board, the skilful student will be drawing the story told in the song. (The rest of the class will be copying from the board.)

The group will discuss afterwards whether the drawing is a real representation of what is said in the rhyme. This discussion includes new vocabulary, either related to the story or to the descriptions.

Later the students will ask each other questions about what is being described. They will finally sing the rhyme and will begin working with some exercises taken from the coursebook they are using.

Possible homework could be to work with the rhythm by marking all the content words and underlining the stressed syllables, marking the unstressed ones and transcribing the sounds to which they are reduced.

The rhyme used for this activity was Jack and Jill. In the following class the teacher could bring either a recording or a printed text in which the real origin of the story of Jack and Jill is explained.

#### **Conclusion**

There are certainly many ways of increasing the motivation of our students, but the use of nursery rhymes also motivated teachers like us, who did not have the opportunity of learning them when we studied the language. Teachers should never underestimate apparently simple samples of the language since they could be a very good source of motivation. Through the rhymes we can find an endless source to increase our students' interest and improve their language skills while enlarging their cultural background. It is also very important that our future teachers were motivated not only because of the language but also because of the development of their professional skills.

#### **Reference**

Montgomery M & Reid-Thomas H (1994) *Language and Social Life* (London: The British Council)

**Diana Rosa Morales Rumbaut & Alicia Maria Moya Torres** have been teaching EFL for nine years in the Department of Foreign Languages at the Pedagogical University Félix Varela in Villa Clara, Cuba. They teach Integrated English Practice to first-year students.

## *Stan felt sticky* - a new poem

Michael Vaughan-Rees

Back in 1991 I devised and edited a special issue of *SPEAK OUT!*, the PronSig Newsletter, called "Rhymes and Rhythm". (I was greatly helped by members of the Young Learners Sig when working on the final section, which consisted of poems aimed at younger learners.) Many of the poems were my own, and I have been steadily adding to them since, notably in the book version of *Rhymes and Rhythm*, which came out in January 1996.

*Stan felt sticky* is brand-new, however, and this is the first time it will have been seen in print. Like all my poems for classroom use, it has a simple rhyme scheme and a rock-steady beat (rap-style in this case). Both of these factors make a poem more memorable (how many nursery rhymes fail to rhyme, or have an uneven metre?).

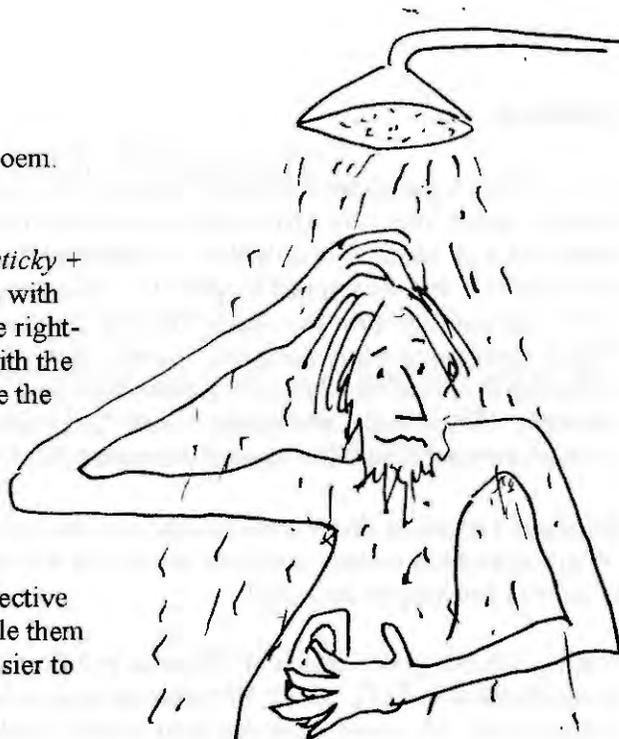
### **Stan felt sticky**

- |     |                            |                                |
|-----|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1.  | Stan felt sticky           | so he went and had a shower    |
| 2.  | Ruth felt like running     | so she jogged for half an hour |
| 3.  | Henry felt hot             | so he had a cold bath          |
| 4.  | Willy felt like walking    | so he wandered down the path   |
| 5.  | Frances felt frozen        | so she went and got a coat     |
| 6.  | Sally felt like sailing    | so she tried to hire a boat    |
| 7.  | Sammy felt small           | so he grew a little higher     |
| 8.  | Cindy felt like selling    | so she went and found a buyer  |
| 9.  | Hannah felt hungry         | so she went and picked a peach |
| 10. | Sidney felt like swimming  | so he ran off to the beach     |
| 11. | Theo felt thirsty          | so he went and had a drink     |
| 12. | Fanny felt like farting    | so she made a dreadful stink   |
| 13. | Freddy felt faint          | so he went and sat down        |
| 14. | Shirley felt like shopping | so she drove into the town     |
| 15. | Sandy felt sad             | so she played a lonely blues   |
| 16. | Susie felt like sleeping   | so she had a little snooze     |
| 17. | Harry felt happy           | so he sang a lively song       |
| 18. | Jacky felt like joining in | so tried to sing along         |
| 19. | Laurie felt lonely         | so she went to see a friend    |
| 20. | Benny went to bed          | so that'd better be the end.   |

## Playing with the poem

There are a number of ways you can exploit the poem. Here are two I have tried.

- 1) Divide each line into two parts e.g. *Stan felt sticky + so he went and had a shower*. Retype the text with the left-hand side as originally written and the right-hand side jumbled up. Help your students with the first couplet so they get the point. To recreate the original,
  - a) both parts of the line have to follow logically, and
  - b) the couplets have to rhyme.
- 2) Print the lines as written, but cut out each adjective and -ing form from the first clause then jumble them up. (The use of alliteration should make it easier to fill the gaps correctly.)



## Word stress

The main reason I use simple metres is that if you hit the beat of the poem you cannot fail to stress the correct syllables. Some 95% of two-syllable adjectives and nouns – names included – have front stress, so it can help to put them in a poem where they will no choice but to say HENry / HAnnah / FRANces / SAlly / THEo / BENny / STICKy / HUNGry / FROzen / THIRsty and so on. And the same pattern is, of course, found when you add -ing to a single-syllable verb: RUNning / WALKing / SAILing etc.

Before getting your class to work on the poem, you could get them to chant or echo single names, pairs of names or groups as a warm-up exercise (paying particular attention to any problem consonants).

## Weak forms

I don't think we should expect foreign learners to produce the very weak forms typical of fast, native speaker speech, but they should certainly give less emphasis to unimportant grammatical words. So you could get them chanting those three-word groups where the middle word is relatively unimportant. e.g.

HAD a SHOver / HALF an HOUR / GOT a COAT / HIRE a BOAT / PICKED a PEACH /  
SEE a FRIEND

(Note how I suggest using CAPitals to help awareness of heavily stressed syllables).

From there you could do the same with longer sequences, such as

WENT an(d) HAD a SHOver / JOG(geD) for HALF an HOUR / WENT an(d) PICKED a  
PEACH / WANder(ed) DOWN the BEACH

## Linking

In the previous paragraph I put some letters within brackets. It can be useful, I feel, to make learners aware from very early on of some of the realities of real speech. The word 'and' rarely has a /d/ sound. Not only that, the sounds /d/ and /t/ are rarely articulated at all if they end a syllable and are trapped between two other consonants. So don't, for heaven's sake, force your pupils to produce 'jogged for' with the three-consonant sequence /g + d + f/. Native speakers certainly don't do it, so why should they? (If this is unfamiliar to you, say the following at normal rapid speed: "I watch television every evening" and "I watched television last night". If you didn't pronounce "watch" and "watched" identically, then you must have sounded very artificial. The same if you pronounced the 't' in 'last').

*Michael Vaughan-Rees* is the founder and co-ordinator of the IATEFL Pronunciation SIG (PronSig) and has written numerous articles as well as six books, half of which have nothing to do with teaching or language.

Copies of the original version of "Rhymes and Rhythm" (complete with tape) are still available from IATEFL for £3.50 + postage and packing (UK 55p, Europe 98p, rest of the world £2.20). The much extended book version, including two tapes, was published by Macmillan and is now available from Prentice Hall.

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Creative materials for creative teachers

# Poetry in a foreign language?

Andrew Wright

In this article, Andrew Wright expresses his deep conviction that poetry is an essential part of the life of children and this is just as important in learning a foreign language as it is in developing the mother tongue. He gives some examples of what can be done in the very earliest stages of learning a foreign language.

## What is poetry?

I must begin by making clear what I mean by poetry.

Poetry is, for me:

- a delight in the sound of words
- a delight in the meanings of words
- a way of saying a lot with very little

## Poetry is not rhyming

Poetry is not rhyming although rhyming can be poetry.

Rhyming is just one way of delighting in the sound of words.

To teach children that poetry is the same as rhyming is wrong: it limits the children's understanding and development and also excludes them from creating poetry because it is not easy to rhyme a longish text. Furthermore, in order to rhyme most people are driven to say things which they don't really mean or care about...just to get the rhyme in!

## Responding to poetry and creating poetry

Children should be given poems and helped to create poems from the beginning of the contact with any language whether it is their mother tongue or a foreign language.

We must help our children to play with words just as they enjoy playing with water and sand. Playing with a medium makes it part of them. Playing with poetry makes it theirs rather than something they learn in order to impress aunts and neighbours.

## Ho! Ho! They haven't got enough English!

Go back to my definition above. If you accept that definition as reasonable, then they probably have enough English before they even come to you!

If you feel it is a problem, it is perhaps because your understanding of the word 'poetry' is based on 'great poetry written by great poets with lots of complicated words'!

My definition above includes great poetry and a much more limited delight in words and their meanings.

## OK Give me some examples of poetry for beginners!

## Listening to single words

Listen to the sound of the word and enjoy it as if it were a little animal.

'Icecream'.

Delight in the way one has to say 'ice' slowly. Delight in the way the 'iiii' contrasts with the 'ccccce'.

Delight in the way, 'cream' is shorter although it has more letters and its sound is so different to the sound of 'ice'.

And doesn't it make you think of icecream?

So the children try saying, 'icecream' with the same emphasis and delight in its character.

Divide the class into halves. One half says 'ice' and the other half adds, 'cream'.

Encourage the children to revel in the sound of any word and to give it to other people to revel in.

## Playing with several words

Two groups perform:

Group A: Ice

Group B: cream

Group A: Ice

Group B: cream

Group A: Ice

Group B: cream

Group A: You

Group B: scream

Group A: Ice (scream)

Group B: cream (scream)

## Another 'playing with several words'

Two groups perform:

Group A: Yes?

Group B: No!

Group A: Yes?

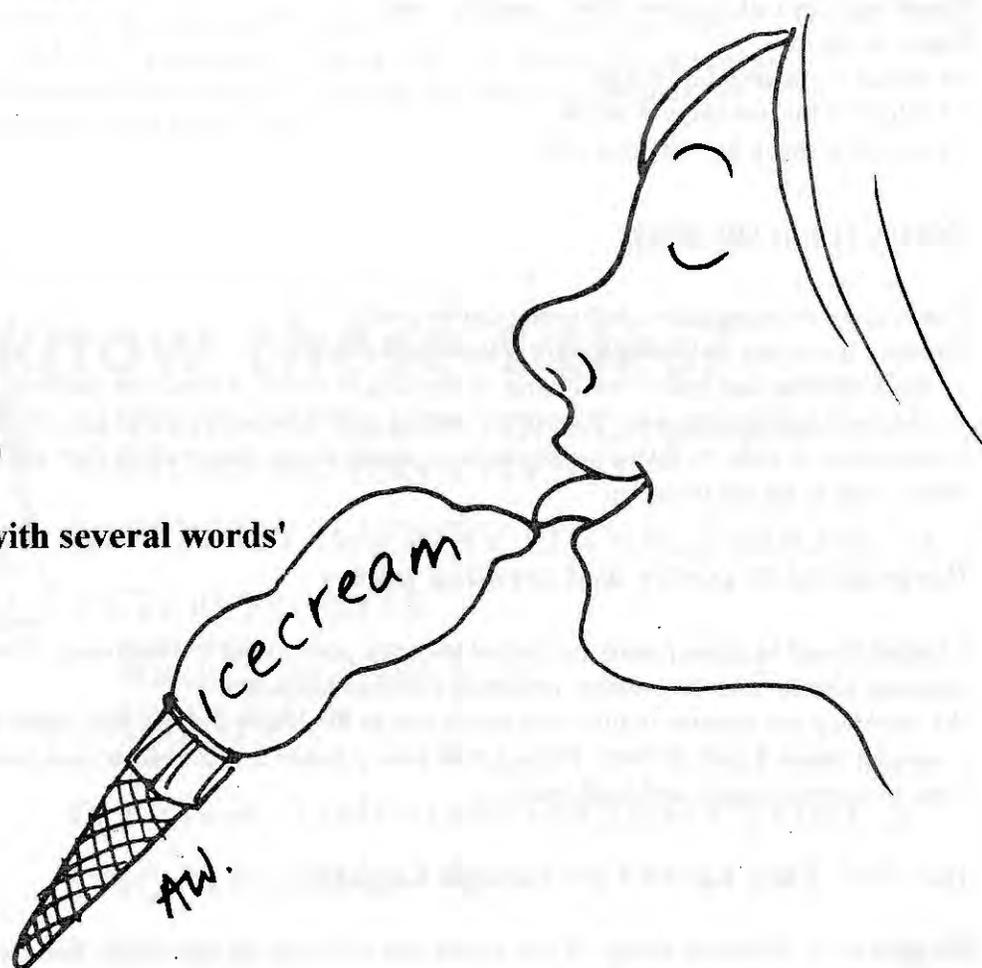
Group B: No!

Group A: Yes?

Group B: No!

Group A: Yes!

Group B: Alright then!



## Revering in the rhythm of simple words

Try saying the sentence, *Revering in the rhythm of simple words*.

Try emphasising the natural rhythm which already lies there. *Revering in the rhythm* is really swingy and saxophoney and then *simple words* becomes more of a single note drum beat.

It's raining! It's pouring!  
The old man is snoring!  
He jumped out of bed  
And bumped his head!  
And couldn't get up  
In the morning!

There is a wonderful change of pace and rhythm in this old poem between lines 2 and 3. I see no reason why children should not learn this poem by heart, acting it out at the same time.

### **My daughter Timmy**

Timmy is four now. She learnt the adapted version below of the old children's playground rhyme when she was two... in her second language.

Little Timmy Wright  
She had a fright  
In the middle of the night.  
She saw a ghost eating toast  
Half way up a lamp post.

### **Summary of the ideas and ways forward**

From the first day you can have moments when the children just enjoy the sound of particular words. You must clearly and convincingly be seen and heard to enjoy the experience of words as well! Your role model is very important!

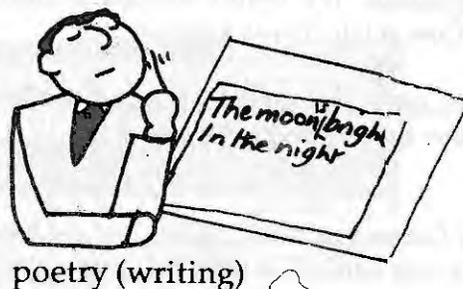
Say, 'Oooh! I really love this word: Icecream! Do you want to say it? It is really nice to say!'

And this is not the same as correcting their pronunciation. Don't you confuse the two aims. If you confuse them, the children won't! They will know it is all just a teacher's trick to get them to pronounce the words better.

Ways forward?

A regular and frequent encouragement for the children to delight in words and their meanings.

Using the words, phrases and sentences from daily life and heightening their rhythm and contrasts of sound.



poetry (writing)

Illustration taken from *1000 Pictures for Teachers to Copy* by Andrew Wright pub. Collins ELT 1984

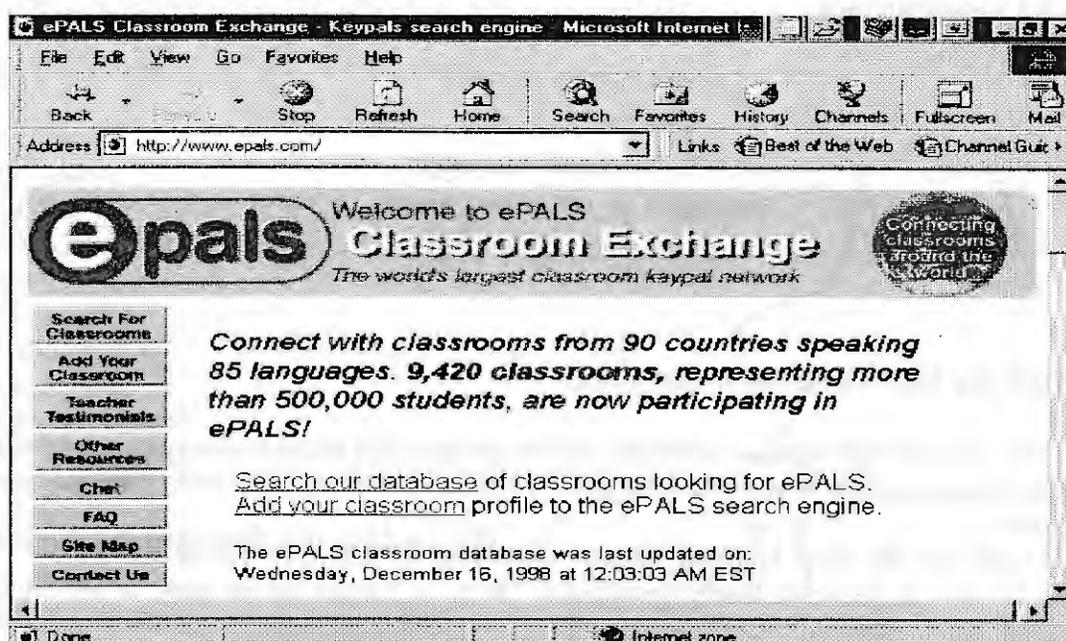
# News from the Net

Christopher Etchells

In the last issue I looked at the Internet generally and introduced readers to the IATEFL Young Learners SIG web site at <http://www.countryschool.com/younglearners.htm> I know many of you have visited since then. Thank you for your comments. I hope you will continue to find it a useful and interesting resource.

In this article I'd like to focus on the use of the Internet for dialogue since this is, after all, the essence of our work as English Language educators.

## Keypals



Keypals are the email version of Pen Friends. There is an immediacy and ease of use in email which is lost in paper correspondence: to reply to a message you simply press a 'Reply' button, type and send it. In addition, database technology makes it easy for students and teachers to find suitable correspondents. Try 'ePals Classroom Exchange' at <http://www.epals.com/> or KidsCom at <http://www.kidscom.com>

Kidworld at <http://www.bconnex.net/~kidworld/bulletin.htm> is another useful keypals site with separate sections for children aged 8 years and under; 9 and 10; 11 and 12; and 13 years and older.

Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connection at <http://www.iecc.org> has a series of mailing lists to help teachers and classes link with partners in other countries and cultures for email partnerships. As well as a list specifically for teachers of young learners (K-12) there is also a general list for discussion about the applications and implications of intercultural email classroom connections.

Before setting up any email links for your students you will need to consider on-line safety. Yahoo!igans! at <http://www.yahooligans.com/docs/safety> offers the following 'rules of the road':

- I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.
- I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
- I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and bring my mother or father along.
- I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.
- I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do, I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the service provider.
- I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.

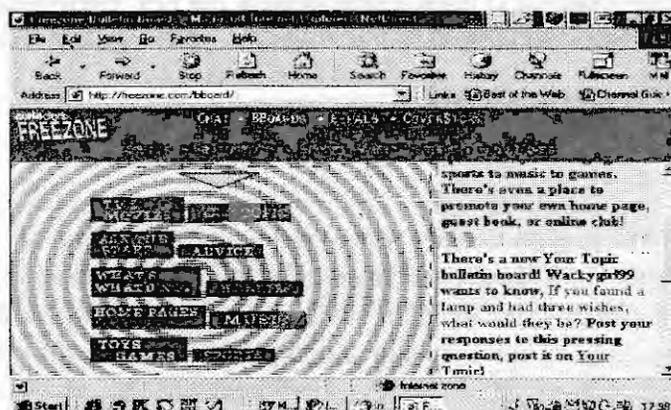
You can also find on-line safety information at <http://freezone.com/safety/> at <http://www.safekids.com> and for teenagers at <http://www.safeteens.com> There are other links to acceptable use policies at <http://www.clark.net/pub/lrschank/web/issues.html>.

Naturally, before your students go on line you'll need to make sure they have an email address. This could be a single school address; if so you will need to distinguish incoming mail so that it can be directed to the right person. For example, you could ask the sender to include the recipient's name in the subject line of the email to help you route it. If your school doesn't provide email addresses for your students, you can sign up for free, Web-based email services such as Hotmail (<http://www.hotmail.com>), Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com>) or RocketMail (<http://www.rocketmail.com>).

### Learning Circles

Learning circles differ from keypals in that they provide more structured email communication based around a theme and integrated with the classroom curriculum. There are full descriptions of learning circles and how to get involved at: [http://www.att.com/education/lcguide/p\\_intro/a\\_intro.html#LC](http://www.att.com/education/lcguide/p_intro/a_intro.html#LC) and at <http://www.learn.org/learn/circles/>

### Bulletin boards



Bulletin boards, also known as discussion groups or forums, are areas where students can read messages on a particular subject and add a follow-up message or start a new topic ('thread'). The advantage over simple email exchanges is that the discussion is 'public': all messages can be read by anyone at any time (unless it is a private discussion group) and it is easy to pick up a thread simply by reading the messages in that thread. You can find examples of bulletin boards for young learners at: <http://www.thekids.com/kids> and at <http://freezone.com/bboard/>

### **Chat**

If keypals are the on-line version of pen pals, then Chat is the equivalent of a telephone call. Judging by the number of chat sites, it's very popular. Users simply type their message into their keyboard and this is viewable immediately by one or more people in the chat room who then answer it. You can find several different chat sites for children and teenagers at: <http://www.yahooligans.com/Entertainment/Chat>

### **CU-SeeMe**

One of the problems with Chat is that students need good typing skills; even then following an on-screen exchange between several different people can be confusing. CU-SeeMe - video conferencing - overcomes these problems and provides a more intuitively interesting experience. You can find out all about CU-SeeMe at <http://www.gsn.org/cu/index.html> At the site you can subscribe to an email list which will put you in contact with other CU-SeeMe schools around the world. The list is also used to announce special events and opportunities for schools to participate in live video conferencing with scientists, authors, athletes, government, business and community leaders. List members are encouraged to use the list to:

- announce events that other K12 schools are invited to participate in
- to share lesson plans and implementation strategies for utilising live inter-active video to enhance the learning environment
- to explore the use of CU-SeeMe to facilitate long distance learning
- identify an audience to view and critique your presentations
- to **DISCOVER** and **DOCUMENT** what works and what does not work!

Both Chat and CU-SeeMe require participants to come together in real time and this introduces the additional challenge of different time zones and school schedules. A video conference is much like any meeting in that it is more effective when there is a moderator and an agenda.

As I hope you will see from the above, the Internet offers many possibilities for young learners of English – both children and teenagers – to use modern technology to practise and extend their communication skills.

We're always interested in the actual applications of these technologies in the EFL classroom, so if you have tried any of the above please write and tell us about it.

In the next issue I'll be looking at the Internet as a source of information for teachers and students of English and how students can access it safely.

*Christopher Etchells* is Director of The English Country School and Joint Co-ordinator of the Young Learners SIG with special responsibility for maintaining the YLSIG web site at <http://www.countryschool.com/younglearners.htm> You can contact him at: [etchells@countryschool.com](mailto:etchells@countryschool.com)

## Book Reviews

### Pictures of English Tenses for Young Learners Mark Fletcher ISBN 1-898295-58-1 English Experience

This book is one of a range of photocopiable resource books with learning cards. It states that it is based on information from Multiple Intelligence Theory, Suggestopedia and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP).

- It is written for young learners of 7 – 14 years of age.
- There are twenty units with pictures for oral practice and written follow-up exercises for consolidation.
- It is similar in format to its predecessor *Pictures of English Tenses* with more examples of grammar for elementary learners.
- It uses a simple colour coding system to differentiate between tenses.
- It has clear illustrations, giving plenty of class and pair practice.

This is another useful resource book which can be used to extend the course book or as material for extra practice. It is flexible enough to be used by dipping into the book and taking the activities in any order. The lessons cover the present simple, present continuous, past simple, future and present perfect tenses. However, it is unlikely that young learners of 7 – 8 years of age in most cultures will have acquired sufficient reading or writing skills to be able to do the follow-up exercises for most of the lessons given. These are suitable for young learners who have a good standard of reading and writing in their own language.

There are some interesting “brain friendly tips” which are given with each lesson. These provide the teacher with imaginative ideas to make the lessons stimulating and fun and are a good disguise for teaching grammar in a different way.

The book is accompanied by *Pictures of English Tenses Practice Cards* ISBN 1-898295-65-4

*Wendy Superfine*

Reviews from REALBOOK NEWS Issue 4 November 1996  
(See the article by Opal Dunn, page 22)

**Harry the Dirty Dog** Gene Zion Ill. Margaret Bloy Graham Level 2  
Random House - Red Fox Mini Treasures ISBN 0-09-972601-7 £0.99p

ISBN 0-09-997870-9 £4.50

Harry hates baths and runs away from his bath and home. As he wanders around he gets dirtier and dirtier. Eventually he gets homesick and goes home but no body recognises the white dog with black spots who is now black with white spots. However, thanks to the scrubbing brush and a soapy bath, Harry returns to his normal colour and is welcomed back home.

**What Do I Look Like? Nick Sharratt**

Level 1b

Walker ISBN 0-7445-66311-9

£3.99

A novelty book      A FLIP-FLAP BOOK      which asks,

*What do you look like? I look like this.**When I'm having fun?**When I bang my thumb?**When I'm ready for bed?*

These simple questions and the rather basic illustrations make for quick understanding. They lead on very easily to expression - dramatically or artistically - of feelings using very limited English. Some children I know copied the book format for making their own books and I was interested to see the very different feelings they expressed. For example -

*What do I look like when I watch football on TV?*

Another class I know made up their own class book copying the lay-out with each member of the class, teacher included, asking and answering their own question and illustrating it.

*What does Ewa look like when she is feeling angry?**What does Mrs Brown look like when she is feeling happy?**What does Mari look like when she is in bed?*

Making this book provided an opportunity for deeper bonding and resulted in the children and teacher feeling they knew and understood each other better.

**I Spy - Numbers in Art      Devised and selected by Lucy Micklethwait**

Level 1a

HarperCollins ISBN 0-00-664298-5

£6.99

This is not an ordinary counting book - many of these are aimed at very young children. This book takes us through numbers 1 to 20 at the same time as looking at great works of international art. This book is ideal for an end of term prize or even a birthday, as the enjoyment of looking at the masterpieces of art will not fade with time.

*I spy eight boats 8 (numbers are written as numerals and also as words)**8 Boats - Boats on the Beach (1888) by Vincent Van Gogh from the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam**I spy four goldfish 4**4 fish - Goldfish (1911) by Henri Matisse from the Pushkin Museum, Moscow**I spy nineteen stars 19**19 stars - The American Dream 1 (1961) by Robert Indiana from the Museum of Modern Art, New York*

Other books in the same series include:

**I spy - Transport in Art      ISBN 000-664-5801**

Level 1a

**Where Are You?** Francesca Simon Ill. David Melling  
 Hodder Children's Books ISBN 0-340-71457-3

£4.99

Level 1a

Grandpa and Harry, his mischievous little dog, went to the Supermarket together. Once Harry smelt the delicious smell of cake, he jumped off Grandpa's trolley and ran away in search of the cakes.

*'Yum .....cake!' said Harry. ZIP! Off he went.*

At first grandpa did not realise he had gone and continued checking his shopping list.

*'We need apples,'  
 We need pizza.  
 We need .....*

Then suddenly he noticed and shouted,

*'Harry? Harry? Where are you?'*

Well Grandpa looked everywhere for Harry and Harry looked everywhere for the cakes! Once Harry had found the cakes, Harry then went looking for Grandpa to tell him his good news. Eventually they bumped into each other.

*'You were lost, Grandpa.'  
 'You were lost, Harry.'  
 'But now we're found.'*

And with an affectionate cuddle, all ends well. The easy-to-understand pictures are culturally loaded which gives plenty of opportunity to compare your own local Supermarket with the one Grandpa and Harry visited. The story, which is told with many simple spoken phrases, makes a good story for acting.

Look out for **What's that noise?** ISBN 0-340-656735 also about Grandpa and Harry.

Level 1a

**World Explorer Atlas** Ill. Tim Hutchinson  
 Dorling Kindersley ISBN 0-7513-5669-7

£9.99

Reference/ Level 2

A fun-filled way for older children to learn countries, continents and a few selected town names in English. Children are asked to help Jack on his travels round the world following a mystery creature who he tries to save from the clutches of Cynthia Sneaker. Jack Tracker flies in a red and blue helicopter; Cynthia flies in a plane.

Jack takes photos - Travel Snaps - of the places he visits and it is fun to check them out on the unusual 3D maps. Jack also draws some pictures in his Sketch Book which you are asked to match on the maps.

Once you have explained how to trail the mystery creature and use the Travel Snaps and Sketch Books, children enjoy dipping into this Atlas at their own level. The different challenges and the fresh way of presenting maps provide excellent and unusual cross-curricular challenges. Older boys love it!

## Young Learner Events in 1998

### Joint British Council IATEFL SIG Symposium Gdansk Poland 18th-20th September 1998

The IATEFL SIG Symposium is held every two years and is a combination of keynote speakers and papers from IATEFL members from all fourteen SIGs. The Symposium attracted 90 presentations and over 300 participants. It was held in the Hevelius Hotel in the heart of the beautiful port of Gdansk on the coast of Poland.

The Young Learners SIG keynote speaker was, very appropriately, one of our founder members, Andrew Wright, who gave another of his captivating talks on *Using Language Creatively*. In his summary of this talk he said, "From the first lesson children can use English creatively and for many children it is vital to their learning the language and indeed, to their general development." In this session he argued the importance of giving opportunities, reasons, and encouragement to children for their creative use of language plus a few activities which he has used.

The SIG track was a very interesting combination of talks and workshops for teachers of young learners from 5-18 years. Donald Sargeant (B.C. Lodz, Poland) gave a workshop on *Young Learners as creative communicators: the creative arts in language learning*. He demonstrated how a variety of art activities can be used to stimulate creative communication in the target language in even the youngest learners. Videos made by children demonstrated how a controlled context can provide playful opportunities for developing linguistic and communicative competence.

Wendy Superfine talked about *Planning and teaching English through a topic-based curriculum*. To support a topic-based curriculum, the primary E.F.L. teacher can adapt and adopt a wide range of materials and methodologies. This workshop gave some practical suggestions on how these materials can be used to extend activities in the course book.

Zbigniew Czaja took us on a *Magical musical mystery tour*. He visited "strange places, situations and people living where nothing was real." Through the music of Paul McCartney he gave ideas for song exploitation with emphasis on the reconstruction of lyrics before music is played for enjoyment and further language practice. This was a theme-related framework for language courses at intermediate and upper intermediate level.

Helen Paul represented the YL SIG and gave a talk on *English for everyone in primary schools*. This talk presented the development of the decision in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany, to make English a part of the syllabus in primary schools. She presented the development of this decision and looked at the context of the syllabus and the training of the teachers.

Hanna Kryszewska gave a workshop on *How songs and drama help in teaching the lexical approach and oral grammar*. Recent developments such as the focus on spoken grammar and the lexical approach can be very threatening. Drama and songs can help us to introduce these elements into our teaching and provide lots of fun. Jackie Holderness also gave a workshop on *Making learning memorable for young English learners*. She considered practical ways to help children remember the target language. She explored ways to use stories, songs, rhythms and rhymes and discussed ways in which teachers can make learning more personal. She also investigated how teachers can make children's writing more purposeful.

Rosemary Scott looked at *The Young Learner, the short story and the right tasks*. She said many teachers today find young learners (11- 16 year-olds) reluctant to read in any language, even their own. How can we, therefore, motivate children of this age to read and enjoy stories in English? One way is to start by finding out what pupils are really interested in – not what adults think they are interested in. During this session she focused on how to choose a short story and demonstrated what to do with it.

Alison Edge finished the YL SIG track with a workshop entitled *Why do all the work yourself?* She asked, “Do you have problems with some children finishing tasks more quickly than others? Do you despair of the time you put into preparing extra worksheets to keep those children occupied?” She gave some answers to these problems through the use of student produced worksheets. She talked through a number of activities which she has successfully used in her young learner classes. These activities involve designing word puzzles that are then photocopied and used for warmers, fillers or homework. The fringe benefits are greater learner-centredness, more student peer teaching and increased learner responsibility.

The symposium was another very successful event in the YL SIG calendar and we plan to print the papers a future edition of the YL newsletter.

*Wendy Superfine*

## Using Literature in the Young Learner's Classroom Cambridge 16-17 October 1998

This will be a short report as many of the talks are written up in this magazine. Many thanks go to Wendy Superfine, Amos Paran and Eryl Griffiths for the splendid organisation of the day.

Vanessa Lee gave us a beautifully illustrated description of the ways she and her colleagues at CfBT have brought literature into the classrooms of Brunei. She looked at ways of: using a graded reader as a basis for guided composition, structuring the study of a novel and moving from the reading of poems about animals to the writing of poems (a process several others at the conference were keen to initiate). She tempered her optimism that teachers can develop the courage to choose their own texts with a realistic understanding of their problems in so doing.

AnnaMaria Pinter shared with us her recent research into ways of bridging the gap between young learners' interests and their language levels. Kyoko Yamashita looked at two sets of students' interpretations of a short story. Both talks demonstrated that the choice of text is crucial to effective use of literature in the young learners' classroom.

Barry Tomalin gave a most enjoyable plenary on the use of video in conjunction with texts. He plummeted us into the modern age with the opening speech of *Romeo and Juliet*, read first by a television newsreader and then voiced over dizzying scenes from a helicopter of riot-torn “Verona Beach” in the recent film *Romeo + Juliet*. We also looked at the opening scene of *King Lear* in three different film interpretations, one of which was translated (both linguistically and culturally) into Japanese by the great film director, Kurosawa. This talk was more than proof that Shakespeare can wow young learners in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Eleanor Watts*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> IATEFL Young Learners Conference Kultur Koleji, Istanbul, Turnkey 7th-8th November 1998

The 2nd IATEFL Young Learners Conference to be held at the Kultur Koleji, in Istanbul was given the subtitle *Multimedia and Multiple Intelligences - Classroom implications for young learners in ELT*. It was attended by over two hundred teachers and teacher trainers and proved to be another excellent venue for a very well organised conference.

The conference started with a thought-provoking plenary talk by Bruce Campell (Marysville School District U.S.A) entitled *The Dance of the Dendrites*. It was an overview of recent brain research and its implications for learning and the classroom environment. The research through all of the intelligences was presented and examples of how we can apply this research in practical ways in the classroom was given by using multimedia. This session was followed by his plenary on *Teaching and Learning through Multiple Intelligences* which was an overview of MI theory, describing the characteristics of each of the intelligences and instructional strategies to teach through each one with an activity for each.

The second plenary speaker was Vaughan Jones whose talk was on *Multimedia and Multiple Choice*. He quoted the Collins COBUILD Dictionary as saying, "A medium is a way of expressing your ideas or of communicating with people." He said that the proliferation of media has opened up multiple choices in the classroom for English language teachers of young children. In this session he looked at the effectiveness of a wide range of media in the YL classroom.

Carol Read opened the second day of the conference with her very appropriate plenary talk *Towards Whole Learning*. This session looked at what makes learning whole for children and ways of integrating the development of a foreign language with children's overall development. A practical framework of organising child-centred, activity-based learning which links English to other areas of the curriculum was presented and the key principles which underpin the teaching - learning process when working with children were discussed.

This was followed by David Eastment's interesting and practical plenary on *Using Computers - Realistically*. He said that the new technologies offer new opportunities and challenges to both the learner and the teacher. Academic papers report in glowing terms on what can be achieved in today's high-tech classrooms. Most teachers, however, do not have access to state-of-the-art computer facilities, with high quality technical support and a computer for every student. More often they will have only a few machines and if they have Internet access at all, it will generally be via a slow telephone line. He looked at what the teacher with limited resources can realistically achieve and highlighted the skills needed to make the most of the emerging technologies.

There was a wide variety of talks and workshops given as parallel sessions. The speakers included Selma Eryildirim, Feride Zeynep Guder, Dr Elizabeth Larose, Dorothy Gwilim, Frances Melling, Erdem Ongun, Jennifer Leonard, Wendy Superfine, Laura Woodward and Jonathan Diesendruck.

There was a very well stocked book exhibition and together with her efficient team of assistants, the organiser, Prof. Birsen Tutunis, helped everyone to enjoy another excellent conference.

*Wendy Superfine*

## Young Learners SIG Future Events in 1999

- 24-28 March**      **Joint Testing, Evaluation & Assessment & Young Learners SIG**  
Malta Conference on Teaching and Assessing Young Learners  
University of Malta
- 28 March**      **Young Learners Pre-Conference Event**  
Training Teachers of Young Learners  
Herriot Watt University, Edinburgh, Scotland  
Speakers to include: John Clegg, Shelagh Rixon and Annie Hughes
- The PCE will open a debate on issues of concern and interest in training teachers for young learners. The day will take the form of discussion arising from plenary, talk and panel input. There will be a poster display and plenty of opportunity to exchange ideas and network. A report on the day's debate will be included in a future newsletter.
- 28 March – 1 April**      **33<sup>rd</sup> Annual International IATEFL Conference**  
Herriot Watt University, Edinburgh, Scotland
- 1-3 September**      **International Conference on Research into Teaching Young Learners** Budapest, Hungary: Details to follow

## Young Learners Creating a Positive and Practical Learning Environment

Edited by Anastasia-Sissy Gika and Wendy Superfine

published by IATEFL and the British Council 1998  
ISBN 1 901195 70 3

Price £10

This user-friendly collection of papers resulted from the Madrid Conference for Teachers of Young Learners in February 1998. The keynote articles are by Carol Read, Sarah Phillips and Maria Felberbauer.

Section 1, *Teaching English to three- to six-year-olds*, includes articles by Clara Mate Cabezudo and Ana Maria Perez Molaguero, Carmen Alario Trigueros, Sally Rees and Piedad Ruiperez Calleja, Robert Seager, Milagros Lopez Rojas, Teresa Reilly and Helena Aiken.

Section 2, *Teaching English in Primary Schools*, includes articles by Anastasia-Sissy Gika and Anthony Green, Eleanor Watts, Malgorzata Szulc-Kurpaska, Jacqueline Johnstone, Maria Georgieva, Ilona Kubrakierwicz, Alison Edge and Sandra Piai and Wendy Superfine.

# YOUNG LEARNERS SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

The Young Learners Special Interest Group was initiated in 1986 and has now evolved into a network of 465 teachers world-wide. It is for teachers in both primary and secondary schools, covering an age range of 5 to 17 years. This is why our newsletter is called CATS (for children and teenagers)

## Aims

- To provide information on recent developments in the education of young learners in the field of English as a foreign language,
- To help teachers and teacher trainers circulate ideas, news etc. and to meet the greater demand for communication in the fast expanding world of teaching EFL to young learners.

## What do we offer?

**The Newsletter** This is a biannual publication concerned with teaching EFL/ESL to children and teenagers. It includes:

- practical ideas for teachers of young learners,
- articles on methodology and theory,
- details of future events such as conferences and seminars,
- reports of recent events
- book reviews.

**Other publications** Joint SIG publications are available from the IATEFL office. These are the proceedings of joint seminars and conferences which have been held recently.

**Conferences and seminars** The SIG organises a Young Learner track at the annual IATEFL conference and other UK and international events which are often organised in conjunction with other SIG groups. The SIG track covers topics which include primary and secondary practice and teacher training issues.

**To find out more about the YL SIG and IATEFL please contact:**

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### Newsletter Editor

**(Spring 1999)**  
*Eleanor Watts*

### Other Committee Members

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*Janet Olearski, Poland*  
*Helen Paul, Germany*  
*Carol Read, Spain*

Members can be contacted through IATEFL.

The newsletter is published twice a year. We welcome contributions or suggestions for future newsletters on any aspects of teaching English to Young Learners from 5 to 17 years. It is edited in rotation by different members of the committee.

### Advertisements Rates

Full page: £100  
Half page: £ 60  
Quarter page: £ 30