



CATS

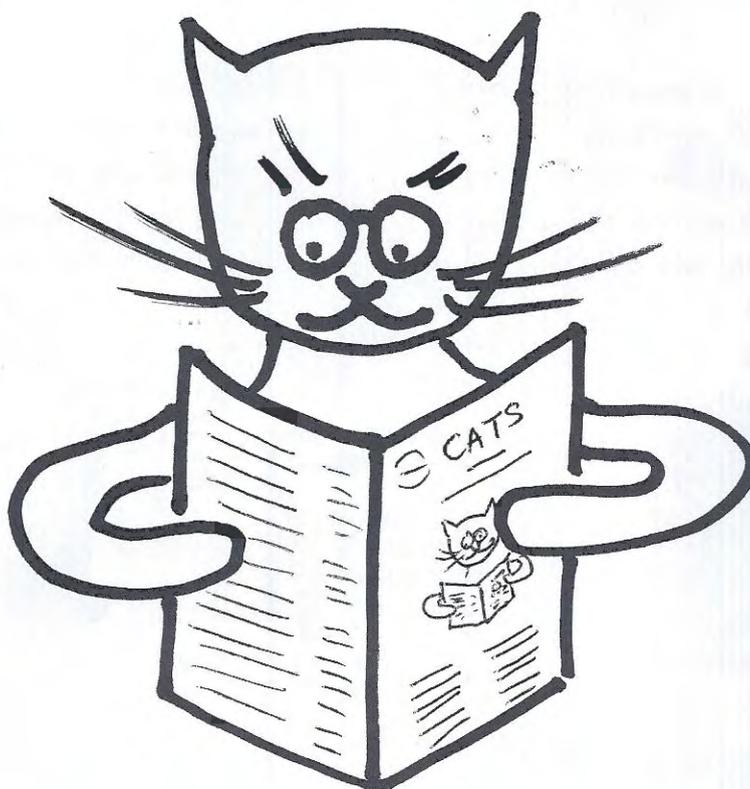


Children and Teenagers
The Young Learners SIG Newsletter

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Editorial

Unlike recent themed newsletters, this issue of CATS has a wide variety of articles for you to enjoy. Most of them are based on talks given at this year's annual IATEFL conference at York.

Andrew Wright has turned his creative mind to arts and crafts in the language classroom. His articles always bring home to me our primary purpose as teachers of children: to educate whole human beings. In this age of quick fixes and easy but trivial answers, it's good to be reminded that we should be "helping the children to develop as thinking and feeling people not merely manipulators of essentially low level techniques."

Bettina Ribes-Gil also stresses the importance of art and crafts in her interesting account of a crèche in Spain where children learn English through crafts, role play and storytelling while their mothers go shopping. Her conviction that language can be learnt through carefully constructed contexts is reflected in **Caroline Linse's** article which gives us some practical ideas for rooting the teaching of grammar in meaningful situations.

Multi-sensory, active language learning is also advocated by Comenius - no, not a bright young non-native speaker, but a 17th century foreign language teacher whose views are discussed in **Simon Smith's** fascinating article. Sadly, we sometimes feel that anything written more than ten years ago is suspect and if it's over twenty years ago definitely not worth a place in a bibliography. Yet we learn a great deal about the roots of our teaching styles if we look back in history. Comenius was a new and exciting find for me. *CATS* would welcome other such articles, especially about thinkers from non-European cultures. How about it, someone?

Assessment is the tricky subject handled by **Andy Jackson** and **Liane Johnson**. Andy looks at the Bell Schools' changing ways of being accountable to their pupils and the parents who pay for their courses. He discusses how young learners can personalise their portfolios and gives some useful practical examples of what the portfolios contain. Liane Johnson suggests that we, as EFL teachers, can learn something from the baseline assessments conducted with four-year-olds in UK and that these can help the teacher to enhance children's learning. **Daniel Droukis** also discusses assessment, focusing on possible problems of sharing assessment with other teachers. His article will be of particular interest to any native speakers thinking of working as language assistants in Japan.

Jean Glasberg gives us a practical and well-illustrated introduction to choosing and using storybooks with young learners. Her article prompts me to remind you to look out for *Storytelling in ELT*, an anthology of stories and accompanying teaching ideas which will be IATEFL's free publication for 2003. Editing it has been a hugely enjoyable experience for Amos Paran and me, though it has been difficult to choose which stories to publish out of a huge number of excellent submissions.

Finally, **Coralyn Bradshaw** considers the pros and cons of doing a distance TEYL MA. She clearly found hers stimulating and well structured, despite the common problem of loneliness for distance learners.

Thank you to the members of the YL SIG Committee who have written reviews and reports - and to all our contributors. Please keep the articles coming!

All the best

Cleanor

Art and crafts in language teaching

Andrew Wright

Language learning and art, craft and design

Children, in particular, learn by doing. Art, craft and design offer a perfect example of activities which must be done and in the doing, language can play a key part.

Broadly, the role of language in art, craft and design comes from:

- listening to instructions and suggestions in order to do the activity
- listening to and giving praise, showing and responding to interest
- using the finished art object as a reference.

The value of art, craft and design at the lower proficiency levels

Art, craft and design are particularly important at the lower language proficiency levels because they make the children's limited range of language part of something bigger which is strong, rich and has material presence. The word 'me' on its own is worth little or nothing but written below a self-portrait of a child is sufficient.

The educational value of art, craft and design

When working with children, we are first of all teachers who are responsible for the development of the whole child in our care. Our role is to introduce activities and materials and values which deepen their sense and understanding of

the world around them and their relationship with it. In my opinion, for example, it is not enough for me to merely help the children to be able to name a colour in English but to help them become aware of the wonderful varieties of colour which we can perceive and make and to deepen their associations with colour.

Art, craft and design activities can contribute:

- awareness and appreciation of the world around them;
- awareness and skill in handling the five senses;
- awareness and skill in: comparing, contrasting, classifying, sequencing, organising;
- awareness and skill, not only in handling artistic form (shape, colour, line, texture, length, weight, movement, etc.) and materials, but in the concepts represented and their value (example: the value of fresh personal vision based on direct and honest response to experience as opposed to the commonplace, the stereotype, the cliché. Contrast the immense range of colours found in the bark of a tree and contrast this with the 'pass-me-down' colour brown used in a million pictures by children);
- awareness and skill in discovering 'cause and effect';
- skill in problem solving;
- a positive attitude to exploring and making a sense of experience;

- a positive attitude to themselves and to others and to working with others. Art is not just a hobby but a fundamental form of human behaviour including intellectual as well as emotional exploration, expression and communication.

Cross curricular responsibilities

I believe passionately in the idea that language development, be it mother tongue or foreign language development, should be experienced as part of the child's overall development. The term, 'cross curricular education' is a signpost for this idea.

However, as with all powerful notions, there is a good side and a bad side! The bad side, in this case, is that as a language teaching specialist I may not be sufficiently informed about and sensitive to the concerns of specialists in the other aspects of the curriculum I aspire to involve.

Is there right and wrong, good and bad in art?

The following represents my view:

Art and design are physical manifestations of thinking and feeling. If this premise is accepted then to evaluate art and design we must understand that we are evaluating thinking and feeling.

So the question is- 'What are good thoughts and feelings?'

Doesn't the answer largely depend on the context?

A cheerful remark may be perfect at one moment but at another moment quite inappropriate because I might urgently need a bit of practical information...at another moment I might benefit more

from an ambiguous comment which stirs my own thinking into being.

Rembrandt drawings, explanatory diagrams and cartoons can all be 'right' in different contexts.

There are forms of thinking and of drawing which I might feel are always undesirable: boastful, deceitful, slick ideas do not help many people. Art, like any other human activity, is full of such things...surely we should give such attitudes and ideas little encouragement.

Clichés may be regarded as sensitive and even profound by the uninformed but contribute little because they are not derived directly from experience but passed on as a phrase or as an image...basically we all know them and they tell us nothing new. To teach children tricks for drawing horses' heads, for example, prevents them from developing a sense of drawing as a whole. This is rather like teaching a few fixed phrases in English and not helping the children to experience how the language works. A few tricks are quite useful to have but the main thrust of our work throughout the curriculum must be on helping the children to develop as thinking and feeling people not merely manipulators of essentially low level techniques.

So, in conclusion, we are left with criteria for evaluating art that we would use when evaluating any other human thinking and communication activity.

Broadly, people who are familiar with art and who give it high value in their lives are likely to judge a picture as 'good' if the shapes, colours, lines and textures are characterful and arranged in a characterful relationship with each other... and if the medium of expression

- a positive attitude to themselves and to others and to working with others.

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is used with sensitivity and delight...but that applies to all thinking!

Publishing, performing and displaying

Traditionally, the only receiver of a child's communication in school was the teacher.

I believe it is most important for the children to learn how to communicate to a wider variety of people and in a broader context than the classroom. Art and craft lend themselves to this wider form of communication.

Art and craft can be displayed in the school lobby, in the local bank or store or community hall. Publishing (making available the children's texts and pictures in book form) can lead to books being put in the school library, the local bookshop or coffee house!

Art and craft can contribute to dramatic performances in the form of make up, masks, costumes, backdrops, etc.

In this way the children can have the pleasure of seeing their work being appreciated. At the same time they can experience the responsibility of trying to do a good job of their communication for other people.

Summarised notes: Examples of activities and key language

(taken from the 50 activities given in *Art and Crafts for Children* OUP 2001)

Making a telescope

A card roll decorated and with cellophane over one end:

Listening to the instructions.

Describing what can be seen through it...particularly an authentic use of the present continuous.

Making a clay animal

Basically inventing an animal but based on broad guidelines given by the teacher: Listening to the instructions.

Describing the individual animals.

Later link with project work.

Making model houses, trees, bridges ..

Making buildings etc out of card and colouring them appropriately:

Listening to instructions.

Asking and talking about what has been made.

Using the places created as a basis for story drama.

Rubbings

Rubbing soft pencils or crayons on thin paper placed on rough or patterned surfaces:

Listening to instructions.

Identifying and describing what has been used. Very genuine use of: *What's this? It's the classroom floor.*

Observational drawing

Looking at animals, objects, etc. and making judgements about their shape, length, width, angles, etc:

Listening to instructions.

Numbers, comparative forms, parts of the body, etc.

Designing picture symbols

Designing picture symbols to show what can be done by visitors to a tourist area:

Language used for describing and enquiring about the picture symbols and their meanings.

Allocating them to a particular town or area and discussing what can be done there.

Shadow theatre

Designing and making figures and scenery for dramatic performances of shadow puppets:

Listening to instructions.

Planning a play.

Devising and acting a script and putting on a show.

Further reading

Wright, Andrew. 2001. *Art and crafts with children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Andrew Wright is an author, illustrator, teacher trainer and storyteller. He was trained as an artist at the Slade School but has spent all his professional life in language teaching, concentrating on creative approaches.

Playing in English while Mummy shops

Bettina Ribes-Gil

In a shopping mall in Valencia, Spain, an enterprising young nursery teacher (*puericultora*) Begoña, runs a crèche (*ludoteca*) where children can play while their parents are shopping. Nothing unusual, you may think. However, three years ago Begoña introduced a special hour every Wednesday when, with a monthly subscription, the children enrolled come to play using only English. Bruce, an enthusiastic American graduate, was engaged to be the facilitator of this group, chosen because of his easy rapport with children, this being Begoña's key criterion.

A maximum of ten children between the ages of four and eight years old form the group. Some of the children are already attending bilingual schools and their parents welcome the opportunity for

them to play in English where the emphasis is placed on creating an unstressed environment thus lowering the level of anxiety for practising what they have already learnt.

Initially Bruce only spoke in English but later found it necessary to give some indications in Spanish. In Valencia many children attend schools where Valenciano (the local "language" - an offshoot of Catalan) is the language of study, with Castellano (Spanish) their second language, meaning, in effect, that English is their third language! This accounts for Bruce's decision, which avoids unnecessary delay in the structuring and sequencing of the games. His familiar voice and accent simplifies the situation as the emphasis is on play rather than any attempt at cross-curricular teaching.

The games take into account the learning abilities at this age - a vivid imagination through their own limited experiences but with only a basic sense of logic. Bruce uses standard nursery activities, facilitated by all the material available in the crèche. Being aware of the extremely short concentration span of very young children, he changes the pace every ten minutes or so to refocus their attention using songs, rhymes and simple language games in which the children participate. For physical activities he organizes touching and chasing games, statues, mimes, etc. He introduces them to animals, which are represented by the soft toys or plastic models available in the crèche. Using flash cards or large cut-outs, which he designs himself, the children learn numbers and letters by colours and the days, weeks and months of the year.

For practical activities there are: small tables and chairs, plus a white board and paper, crayons and paints provided for drawing and colouring; a clothes rail of disguises for role play; a grocer's shop with colourful plastic fruit and vegetables for practising simple greetings and vocabulary; simple jigsaws; coloured balloons, dice and dominos; plasticine; face decoration kits, etc.

He tells stories and fairy tales which have their Spanish equivalent and thus familiar enough to be followed by small children. Sometimes the weekly hour is dedicated to a thematic unit, based on the developmental level of the group, such as the body, clothing, weather, local fiestas or enacting one of the stories. Thus these multi-sensory

activities performed cause the child to use both brain hemispheres, leading to a more rapid absorption of language, and are supplemented by a certain amount of weekly repetition, based on knowledge already acquired.

As children have an urge for activity at this age, the aim of Begofia and Bruce is to foster an environment which focuses principally on the visual, kinesthetic and musical intelligences to ensure that all the children who attend are catered for and have pleasure in learning English through play, an essential factor in furthering conceptual development. The success of the venture is demonstrated by the fact that most of the children are regular "customers", at their own request, as they find it much more fun than being dragged round the shops!

This is an initiative that could be adapted anywhere. In Britain, for example, with Euroland in the making and appropriate personnel surely available, it should be possible for crèches to offer French, Spanish, German, etc. for toddlers. In addition, why not encourage cross-cultural awareness by proposing the same in Gaelic, Gujarati, Urdu, Welsh and additional afro-oriental-Caribbean languages depending on the area in which the crèche is located. Children could then become familiar with other legends, food and customs at an early age, which can only be of benefit to us all.

Bettina Ribes-Gil is a retired international official and freelance EFL teacher. She has taught one-to-one and groups at all levels in Switzerland and Spain. She has had several articles published reflecting her interest in the cultural aspects of the English language.

Was that really grammar?

Fun ways to introduce English language structures to young learners

Caroline Linse

Historically, many of the texts used for teaching English to young children were dry to the point of being downright boring. In recent years, however, communicative and child-centered techniques have been adopted and more games and “fun” activities have been placed into the hands of children. Unfortunately, the activities sometimes place too much of an emphasis on vocabulary loading and not enough on grammatical structures or rather a wide variety of grammatical structures. I have met many children who know dozens and dozens of vocabulary words but only a couple of sentence patterns such as,

“This is a.....” or

“I see a.....”

This is fine when pupils are beginning to learn English. However, when children, later on in their studies, are required to learn formal grammar, they often struggle. The problem is that the basis or foundation has not been laid. With simple preparation, teachers can present children with activities which are both communicative and grammar-based.

There are many different places in a child-centered curriculum where grammar can be infused. With a little bit of thought, most grammatical structures can be introduced through songs and activities which children find to be enjoyable. Children find many songs as

well as art, science, math and social studies activities to be very engaging. Young learners don't have any idea that they are being exposed to a rich repertoire of language.

The first place to look for an interesting and intriguing variety of language structures is the nearest English language children's songbook. Camp songs are especially good to use. One of my favorites is called *I found a peanut* and is sung to the tune of *Clementine*. This song tells the story of finding a peanut, eating it, getting sick, etc. The structures used in the story are the past tense and it is fun. Another song that can be used to introduce the past tense is *I met an old woman who swallowed a fly*.

Art activities can be used to introduce comparatives. Children can be provided with different colors of tempura or poster paint including black and white. Children are told to paint a flower and then make their flower lighter or darker by mixing more white or black paint into their flower. Children enjoy changing the color of the paint and quickly discover what the comparative words *lighter* and *darker* mean.

Science activities can be used to teach negative statements. I enjoy bringing in different objects that will not float and a

large clear glass jar to class. I purposely include some items that look like they will float such as plastic capsules filled with pencil lead or plastic subway tokens with metal weights inside. As volunteers or I drop different objects into the jar filled with water, students chant, *No it won't float*. They quickly learn the meaning of the word float and the meaning of negative statements.

Many social studies activities lend themselves to prepositions. Photographs of your pupils and simple maps illustrating your town or even your classroom can be the basis of language-rich activities. Children practise putting the pictures of their classmates in different locations on the map in

response to instructions, for example, *Put Mary next to the post office*.

The best way to come up with your own activities to introduce and practise a variety of grammatical structures is to think about when and where different constructions are used in the content area curriculum. Whenever you find an interesting construction, be sure to come up with a child-centered activity to accompany it. The ELT classroom should not only be filled with a variety of vocabulary items but a variety of constructions as well.

Caroline Linse works at Minsk State Linguistic University, Minsk, Belarus

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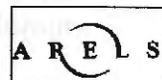
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Comenius and young learners

Simon Smith

Consider the following quotes on children's learning of foreign languages:

1. '...a suitable object should be shown to as many of the senses as possible, until the mind has duly received its image' (in Bowen 1967)
2. 'It is necessary that examples come before rules' (in Rusk 1969)
3. 'A student needs someone to guide him' (in Kelly 1969)
4. 'Plays and games delight...the young, for it is natural to be pleased by freedom...Another reason why it is enjoyed is that it always takes place in company' (in Sadler 1969)

These are not the words of a contemporary writer, but of a Czech bishop, born in Moravia over 400 years ago. Jan Amos Komensky, widely known as Comenius, has been described by Howatt (1984) as 'a genius, possibly the only one that the history of language teaching can claim'. Comenius' life was extraordinarily turbulent, much of it spent in hiding, or as an exile or refugee in other countries. He lost two wives and several children to disease, and had his library burnt in public twice. Nonetheless, he managed to combine his pastoral duties with secondary school teaching and a prodigious written output on child foreign language learning. I myself have read only a small part of Comenius' work, but would like to outline in this article my understanding

of his views on the teaching of foreign languages (in his case Latin) to children aged approximately 6-11.

Comenius' beliefs about young learner foreign language learning

The quotes illustrate four of Comenius' most fundamental beliefs. The first of these is that the child's experiences and senses are a gateway to the acquisition of language. 'The senses are the primary and constant guide to knowledge,' he wrote (in Keatinge 1910). This belief was shown in the production of a bilingual coursebook in 1648. *Orbis Pictus (The World in Pictures)* made use of new printing technology to provide 150 illustrations to a series of connected topic-based texts showing the learning journey of a master and pupil as they travelled through the world.

The book was revolutionary not only in its use of pictures to depict the world of the senses, but also in its concentration on the spoken language. Comenius felt that children needed to use language for a purpose, and that this purpose often involved some kind of social interaction. Up until this time, the focus had been primarily upon the written language. Howatt (1984) observes that these two innovations were more than three hundred years ahead of their time, only resurfacing in the mainstream in the 1960s with the advent of an audio-visual approach in foreign language teaching.

Comenius' views on young learner cognitive development

The second quote demonstrates Comenius' view that the child's knowledge develops if ideas and content are tailored to their conceptual starting place. Nothing should be taught to the young unless it is not only permitted, but actually demanded by their age and mental strength, he believed (in Rusk 1969). He insisted that language learning was not an end in itself to a child, but rather a means of finding out about the world, of forming new concepts and associations.

Comenius on the role of the teacher

Comenius believed that the teacher had a vital role to play in helping the child towards learning independence. This involved guiding the learner, supporting and correcting when necessary, grading input and syllabus, and selecting topics as appropriate. He wrote that 'The teacher should teach not as much as he himself can teach, but as much as the learner can grasp' (in Kelly 1969). He even argued at one point that as the teaching of young learners is such a skilled job, such teachers should be paid more than others!



Comenius' classroom

Comenius and the role of fun in learning

One of Comenius' most famous tenets is his stressing of the pleasure principle in learning. 'The teacher ensures that the learning is thoroughly agreeable, such as to make the school a form of play,' he comments (in Murphy 1995). This seems to reflect a process view of learning, in which children feel they are doing a puzzle, singing a song, or playing a game, perhaps unaware of the fact that at another level they may also be acquiring language and developing non-linguistic skills. This view was also unusual for the time. The orthodoxy of the age was more to give pupils texts which they were expected to study, learn by heart, and then be tested upon. (Kelly 1969).

The relevance of Comenius' work

At first glance, Comenius may seem uncannily modern in his outlook. His stressing of multi-sensory learning, of the use of real objects and visual aids, of children's oral-aural development, of the role of the teacher in scaffolding learning, of the simultaneous development of language and thought, and of language as a vehicle for content all seem familiar. However, it would be mistaken to make too many comparisons with contemporary thinking for three reasons. One is that, unsurprisingly in such a prolific writer, some of his writings are self-contradictory. Another is that for all the apparent modernity, Comenius remained resolutely medieval in other aspects of his thought. He refused to accept, for example, Galileo's theory that the earth circumnavigates the sun. Finally, as Howatt (1984) observes, it may be difficult for some in a more secular age to assimilate a paradigm in

which the child develops knowledge and an understanding of their relationship to God through a study of the natural world.

However hard it is to view Comenius' work through a modern prism, I feel strongly that we should not ignore his work, as it shows that current ideas have developed, however indirectly, from a tradition of values, attitudes, beliefs and experience. It seems to me entirely fitting that the EU-funded Comenius grants for teacher language and methodology courses and student exchanges should be named after a philosopher and educationist who showed such a profound empathy for and insight into children's learning.

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A similar article will be appearing in *It's for teachers* magazine this year.

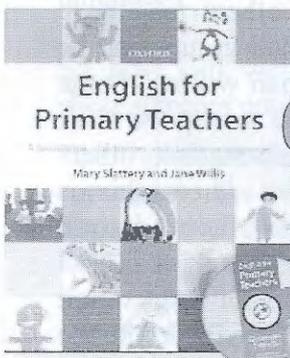
Simon Smith is a freelance teacher trainer. He works as a tutor and supervisor on the University of York's distance MA in TEYL. He is interested in most aspects of young learner teacher education.

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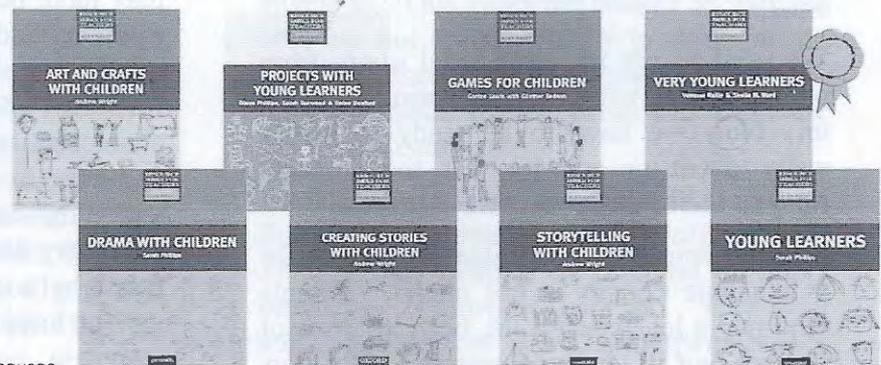


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Was it worth it?

Andy Jackson

I've been working with YL summer course in the UK since 1984, and with Bell since 1990. During this period there have been a number of changes in the nature of the courses.

Initially, we offered mainly four-week courses with just one or two shorter offerings. Today, we offer only two and three week courses (although we have a number of students who take more than one course, and a small hard-core of boys who come back for the whole ten weeks of the season and move from centre to centre!).

Ten years ago, we had waiting lists for the most popular summer courses as early as March. Today, we don't fill until a couple of weeks before the start date and in some cases accept bookings right up to the arrival day.

Most of the enquiries and bookings used to be by post. Now a great deal of the initial work is done by email.

We used to organise rotas to make sure the kids phoned home as soon as possible after arrival. These days they are on their mobile phones as they get off the coaches.

We used to get the students to write a postcard home. These days they send an email.

We used to get the occasional query from parents about what their offspring were up to. Now we have to be ready to justify every event or activity that the students relay to their parents by phone or email.

Sending your son or daughter to the UK for a language course is not cheap. Parents who pay a lot expect a lot, both in terms of welfare and in terms of progress. But how do you measure progress in language over

two to three weeks, and how do you report on it?

We place the students in suitable levels through a placement procedure on the first day. This consists of a test of structure and reading comprehension, writing and dictation, together with a 5-10 minute interview. The grouping criteria are language level, age, nationality and gender – in other words as close together as possible in language ability and age, but with as wide a spread of nationalities and as good a mixture of boys and girls as possible.

The placement procedures take place on the day after arrival, but some of the students may have arrived very late the night before and be suffering from jetlag. For others, it may be their first time away from home on their own and they are feeling home-sick and uncommunicative. They come from a wide variety of cultural and educational backgrounds with widely differing degrees of exposure to English. Some may have been sitting in classes of sixty, chorusing phrases after the teacher and copying sentences off the board; others may have had a native speaker in small groups and be much better at speaking than writing. Some may have been encouraged to express their opinions and volunteer information; others may come from a culture where this is frowned upon. To put these diverse characters into a suitable group of 12-14 and hope to generate a spirit of cooperation and communication is no easy task. If the chemistry doesn't work, the teacher may be faced by a dysfunctional group who don't gel and have no team spirit.

The students are not tested again at the end of the course, although the last lesson will be spent on a review of the course, which

may include a quiz on what the students have covered. The focus of our courses is on the development of fluency and confidence through project work, rather than the acquisition of more structure and vocabulary; to exploit the fact that they are in England with access to authentic environments and not just in another school period in another classroom. It is therefore quite difficult to assess formally the progress they have made. The teacher has to rely on notes made in the initial interview and during the first lessons to compare the student's ability at the end of the course. This forms the basis of the Can-Do Statement, where the teacher, in consultation with the student, lists the things they feel they have mastered since the beginning of the course. These need not all be language-focus items, and particularly with younger learners they may include more general and more personal developmental steps. And the student may identify achievements that were not included in the teacher's aims at all.

The European Language Portfolio is becoming widely accepted as a means of indicating a student's progress in language acquisition. The Council of Europe (COE) has already validated 27 versions for around 14 countries. You can access these through <http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/> They are all in the mother tongue plus up to four other languages.

So how can we contribute to these on a short summer course?

The students take home a portfolio containing the work they have covered during the course and a Can-Do statement written with their teacher. In previous years, they have taken home a ring-binder containing their documentation. This was supplied with a set of dividers for the different sections (Structure/Language Skills, Project Work, Special Interest Materials etc.) with a site plan, welcome letter, timetable, centre rules and some lined paper added at the beginning. This was

have covered.

gradually topped up throughout the course with worksheets etc. Done well, this actually helped the students with their study skills, but on a short course, the result was not always terribly impressive. Most students had messily personalised their files, some even left them behind to make room in their suitcases for other things. So we have gone for a personalised dossier, into which the student clip or stick items. They also personalise the cover, ending up with a record of the course which they feel they have a greater personal stake in. When we do the project presentations to the other groups on the last day, they are proud of their creations and keen to show them off – which was never the case with a standard ring-binder. The teacher creates a parallel dossier which can serve as a model for future courses too.

The Report tells the student what level he/she is at on the COE scales, with a simplified descriptor. This is in English, as we are dealing with 60+ nationalities on the summer courses, and it would be impractical to provide an assessment in the mother tongue. But where a mother tongue portfolio exists, the student/ parent can correlate the grade against this, add the Report to the Passport Section and add selected items to their dossier to illustrate it.

The Report is normally sent under separate cover after the end of the course, together with a Student Satisfaction Questionnaire that the parents return in a pre-addressed envelope. This gives the chance for parents who are not entirely happy to comment on areas of discontent. Fortunately, these are far outweighed by the comments from the satisfied customers!

Andy Jackson is the Academic Manager for Bell Young Learners, which deals with 8 – 17 year-olds coming to England on short intensive, residential courses. He's been with them for ten years, and spent twenty years overseas in EFL before that. His main interest is in project work.

Such a testing time for young children

Liane Johnson and Marianne Jenkinson

Background

The starting age for children learning English as a foreign language is becoming continually lower. In countries such as Italy and Spain, children as young as three are now starting to learn English as an extra-curricular activity. What are the provisions being made for these children in terms of curriculum and syllabus, and how is their progress being measured? It seems as though we are taking a step into the unknown. Often there is very little support in terms of curriculum and syllabus, and guidelines, if they exist, seem to be very hazy to follow. Nevertheless, parents seem to be pushing and paying for their children to learn English, and the demand for classes is on the increase. How can we account for progress with parents? How do we measure the progress that their child is making?

For older children (7-12 year olds), the situation, though not always reflective of actual performance, is slightly easier. Many teachers give students written assessment to measure progress, often under test conditions. Many course books now contain assessment materials for teachers to use. External examinations exist; for example, UCLES have now included young learner exams (Starters, Movers and Flyers for 7-12 year olds) in their suite of existing exams. Since going live, numbers for candidates taking these exams have risen

from 28,500 in 1998 to 128,000 in 2000. An impressive increase!

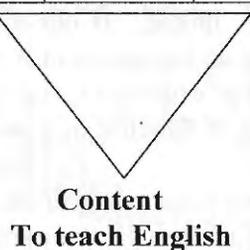
But what about the younger children? Often they cannot read and write, there are very few assessment materials available and external exams do not currently exist for this age group. Parents are continually pushing to see some *evidence* that their child is learning. "Say hello" and "Speak in English" being somewhat familiar. After all, this is what many of them are paying for. Recurring problems seem to include: having no form of written assessment to show parents; children will not speak to their parents in English (unrealistic to expect anyway as it is an unnatural context to use the language); teachers do not relish the idea of parents peering through the window to see what goes on or even asking to sit in on classes. Firstly, before looking at how we can measure the progress of these very young learners, we must turn to what goes on in the classroom and our *aims* when *teaching*.

From teaching to assessment

In the classroom, some children are able to produce a little English even in the initial stages of learning, whereas others do not produce any language even after several months. This non-production of language is referred to as the *silent period* and is a natural process that some children go through. However, even if there is no language production, children

of this age will still benefit from the opportunities of being exposed to English and developing non-linguistic skills. For example, they will be learning how to behave as an individual and in a social group, they will be developing their concentration, and also their fine motor skills: cutting with scissors, holding a pencil correctly, tracing and colouring. They will be learning how to co-operate with both the teacher and other students, and their ideas and concepts will be developing too. If this is what occurs in the classroom, then we suggest learning English is not only a process of teaching *content* ie teaching them English, but also a process of developing non-linguistic skills. It may be represented as follows:

Attitude	Learning to learn	To develop the whole child
to foster positive attitudes to learning English	to foster effective thinkers and learners	to develop social skills and motor skills



If these are our aims when *teaching*, they should also relate to our aims when *assessing*. To clarify what we mean by assessment, Nunan's definition will be used: "The set of processes by which we judge students' learning" (Nunan 1988)

Often when assessing, content is only focused on linguistic skills and not non-linguistic skills. If these skills are considered important in the classroom, then we should also consider them important when assessing progress.

How can we assess linguistic and non-linguistic skills with very young learners? Baseline assessment

As a starting point, we will turn to what is currently happening in British primary schools. To briefly summarize, children who are starting primary school are being given assessment tasks within their first seven weeks of being there.

These assess skills such as maths, language, literacy and personal and social development and are known as their '*baseline assessment*'. Based on this assessment, specific targets are set for each individual child to achieve in the first term of school. Then, during the first meeting with the class teacher, parents are shown these baseline assessments. They show a clear picture of what point their child was at when arriving at school; and what progress has been made. This is an obvious advantage, and can help to strengthen the link between parents and teacher.

Another problem it seems to resolve is that of mixed ability classes. At this age, children are often at very different developmental levels and a few months difference in age may mean a significant difference in skills. "Some children can write their names and sound out letters with confidence; others can barely hold a pencil." (Coulson in Appleyard, 1998)

There are also many other advantages to baseline assessment:

- ✓ It starts from where the child is at developmentally.
- ✓ It allows for personalized goals.
- ✓ It can provide stronger links between teachers and parents.
- ✓ It can measure progress more easily.
- ✓ It allows teachers to see if a child is doing exceptionally well; or if little progress is being made.
- ✓ It looks upon learning in a positive way.

Could this be transferred to an EFL situation?

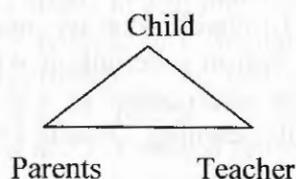
If baseline assessment is successful in Britain, could the principle also be transferred to an EFL situation? We suggest it could. Upon starting a language course, specific tasks could be set to assess each child's baseline. Teachers could use a quick and simple chart tailored to their own situation and needs. An example may look like this:

Skills	Baseline assessment (write comments)
Participates in activities	
Works independently	
Co-operates during group activities	
Colouring	
Using scissors	
Writing	
Others	
Other areas	
Language recognition	
Language production	
Areas to work on	

Comments could be written in the chart rather than giving grades, as this would make it easier for teachers and parents to understand. After the initial assessment during the first week or two, goals may be established either by the teacher alone, or if appropriate in conjunction with the child. These goals may then be re-assessed after the first term/month for example, and a second similar chart may be filled in with the second column entitled *End of term 1 / week 4*

A collection of each child's work may be made (portfolio) as evidence of progress. This may include examples of children's colouring and cutting improving, or examples of their writing progress. Work may be viewed and reviewed according to the needs of the class and its individuals. In this way, progress will be assessed fairly, and children who are not yet producing any language will not be penalised. Relationships between students and teachers, and parents and teachers can be enhanced, and *teaching* and *assessment* will be clearly linked. If our aim is to make learning and assessment a positive and worthwhile experience, we suggest this is one way in which it may be done.

"At this age the most powerful way for a child to learn is through the partnership between parents and teacher." (Coulson in Appleyard, 1998)



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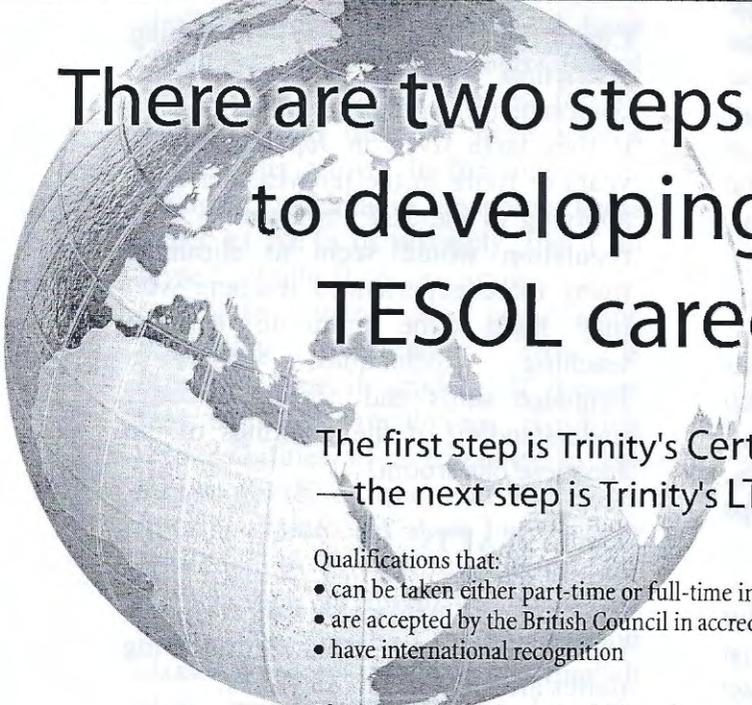
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Liane Johnson has taught EFL to children for over eleven years. She first worked in Italy for nine years, both in the private and state sector. She then worked in Barcelona before becoming a freelance teacher and teacher trainer.

Marianne Jenkinson has worked as an EFL teacher for ten years in Europe and Africa. She was Young Learner Co-ordinator for the British Council in Tunisia and she is currently a teacher of ESL in Shanghai American School, China.



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Teaching assistants in the EFL classroom v. going it alone in Japan

Daniel Droukis

Introduction

In an effort to improve the English skills of Japanese young people, the Ministry of Education initiated the JET Programme in 1987. This program was designed to put native speakers of English into the classroom along with Japanese teachers of English (JTEs). The native speakers (AETs: Assistant English Teachers) or ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) are dispatched to junior and senior high schools to assist the JTEs in the classroom. This became the first time that native speakers of English would be given the opportunity to teach in the public schools. While the entire program actually consists of three positions, it is the AET that occupies 90% of the positions.

Participants and Requirements

The number of JET participants has swelled from 848 in 1987 to over 6000 in the year 2000. The vast majority of the participants come from the U.S., U.K. or Canada with smaller groups coming from twelve other countries.

Among the requirements for acceptance into the program are that the participant have *relevant nationality*. This means that anyone wishing to be accepted into the programme come from a country on a list of approved countries determined by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The countries on this list are: the United States, United Kingdom,

Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Ireland, France, Germany, China, Korea, Russia, Peru, Spain, Portugal and Mexico. This list, provided by the MOE includes those countries that have participated in the past and leaves no clear information as to whether applicants from other countries would be considered for participation in the future. Participants are also expected to possess at least a bachelor's degree. Although it may be favorable, participants are not required to have TEFL/TESL qualifications.

Curiously, there is one interesting restriction, which is difficult to comprehend. Applicants are ineligible if they have lived in Japan for three years or more in the ten years prior to applying to the JET Programme. This regulation would seem to eliminate many more experienced teachers who may have done more to develop teaching techniques, Japanese language skills and acquire a better understanding of the workings of the Japanese classroom.

Duties of AETs

The duties of AETs may vary from one institution to another, but the following duties are expected of all AETs:

- Assistance with classes taught by Japanese teachers in junior and senior high schools
- Assisting with foreign language education at primary/elementary schools

- Assisting with the preparation of supplementary materials
- Assistance with the language training of Japanese teachers of the foreign language
- Assistance in foreign language clubs
- Providing information on language and other related subjects
- Assisting with foreign language speech contests
- Participating in local international exchange activities
- Other duties as specified by the host institution.

(Source MOE website and ALT Handbook)

The Other Side

Those private schools which do not have AETs may be operating a system similar to my own situation. I have been teaching junior high school English conversation classes for 14 years. In that time we have seen a tremendous growth in the number of foreigners teaching in Japanese schools either as AETs or privately, like I do myself. While there are similarities to our jobs, there are also some interesting differences. This is especially true in grading. It appears that there are regulations regarding responsibilities of a foreigner in the classroom. It is true that foreigners teach in classrooms alone but they are forbidden to give official grades for classes such as English. This is the reason why my grades for conversation classes are combined with the English class grade given by the Japanese teacher.

Differing Responsibilities

In my own case, I do give a grade but it does not appear on the transcript of the student. The grade is passed on to

the teacher responsible for the particular class and then that teacher will combine the scores to arrive at a final English class grade. This system allows me to teach my classes on my own without having to coordinate lessons with a JTE. Therefore my duties are quite different from the AET. I determine my own lesson plans, which I must submit to the principal for approval along with every other teacher. I am also required to check attendance and fill out other forms, which are also submitted to the principal. Proctoring tests is another responsibility AETs do not have. This can sometimes be a problem simply because I am not familiar with the contents of other subjects taught at school but this is also probably felt by other teachers who proctor tests outside of their area of expertise.

In the team-teaching situation, the JTE seems to retain responsibility for the control of the class, which would make the task easier for the AET. This is a luxury those of us who teach alone cannot enjoy. The AET would therefore experience little difficulty in language and communicating with students, which can and does occur in my own classes in spite of my experience. Thus, the probability that the class will run more smoothly seems to be higher with the team teaching system if you assume that there is harmony between the two teachers involved. One can imagine that there would sometimes be confusion over roles. I imagine this to be similar to a play without a script unless there is a great deal of planning done between the JTE and the AET before every class.

In both the team teaching system and my own, there is a curriculum to be followed. However in my own case the plans that I have developed are my own. Of course, consideration is given

to the JTE course curriculum when making the plans for the school year. The JTE curriculum will greatly influence what occurs in my class because I do not want to be teaching too many things that students will be hearing for the first time. However, I do not need to follow strict guidelines which allows me to provide more opportunities to play games or do other activities which will be helpful for the students but for which the JTE may not have sufficient time.

The commercial aspect of education is also of some importance. A private school must attract more students to survive and having a foreign teacher who is always at school provides the school with a better image. Unfortunately, this doesn't necessarily mean that we have a better teacher. It may be that I'm just a very recognizable face in a crowd of Japanese faces.

Evaluating Students

One last difference is very important. The AET does not have to submit a grade. Since I must submit a grade I must develop some type of evaluation. When my classes were smaller I could give oral interviews which at least showed me how much the student could comprehend in English. Since class sizes have grown to almost 45 students, this has become impractical and too time-consuming. Therefore, I am forced to give some kind of written or listening test as a major basis for a grade. I do still interview students but I combine this score with their written test scores. It not only allows me to talk to the students individually but also gives me a better image of how much the student is able to use the language. Evaluation has always been a problem at this level and until something is developed that better

meets my needs, this method of evaluation will have to be given consideration every year.

Conclusion

We have seen that in Japan there are some differences in how English is being taught at both private and public schools. It seems clear that the growth of the JET Programme means that this will continue to be the method by which English is taught in Japanese schools while teachers such as myself continue to perform a helpful function in the classroom as well. Hopefully, we will see the growth of programs to put more people like AETs in the classroom long-term. The opportunity for a greater consistency in teaching and further development of the language program would lie with those who have greater experience and not just the youthful enthusiasm which the JET system seems to encourage. Hopefully this does show that native speakers in the classroom should be more than just a novelty but a permanent fixture in Japanese schools. We should encourage a system which allows the foreign teacher to contribute experience and well-learned skills to the classroom in Japan.

Daniel Droukis works in Chinzei Keiai Gakuin and has been a teacher for 24 years. He has taught EFL in Japan for 21 years, teaching at junior high for 14 years. He also teaches at universities in Kitakyushu. He is interested in developing materials suitable for the junior high school classroom in Japan.

Using stories with young learners

Jean Glasberg

It is well recognised that reading storybooks can be a valuable experience for young learners and that 'stories offer a whole imaginary world, created by language, that children can enter and enjoy, learning language as they go.' (Cameron, 2001)

This generation is lucky to be living in a 'Golden Age' when bookshops in many parts of the world, including Britain, are filled with wonderful literature. For us as teachers, this provides great opportunities - but also a real challenge. How can we find the best books and help our classes to get the most out of them?

Choosing Books

Firstly, what are the most important features to look for when choosing books for the language classroom?

- **Quality**

Above all, they should be as attractive in every way as the books children enjoy in their first language. After all, these are stories we hope the children will want to read many times - and that we will have to re-read with them!

- **Variety**

Children like different kinds of books, so choose stories with a wide range of the topics they are interested in and which are familiar to them, e.g. home, school, animals, monsters and fantasy.

- **Careful choice of language**

The structures and vocabulary need to be appropriate for the level of the learners. At the same time, it is

important to ensure texts keep to the patterns of natural spoken English so that they provide a good model, for example using contractions such as 'can't' or 'won't' in dialogue.

- **Rhyme, rhythm and repetition**

These elements are found in many songs and stories. They are fun, but also help the children to develop confidence and internalise the language by making it more memorable.

- **Illustrations**

A high standard is essential, as the pictures are often what most attract the children's attention at first, and can be what decide whether they are interested in the story or not. Good illustrations can also be used to teach vocabulary, encourage prediction, and above all, they will support the text and help understanding. Children can later use them to re-tell the story in their own words.

Reading the story

Having chosen stories that will appeal to your children, it is important to consider carefully how to introduce them in a way that will maximize motivation and learning opportunities. Before reading, lead in to the story with an activity that will engage the class, and enable you to pre-teach or revise key words and structures, using a variety of cues such as pictures, board/OHT drawing and mime. Make this stage as fun and interactive as you can so that the children will be keen to read the book and predict what might

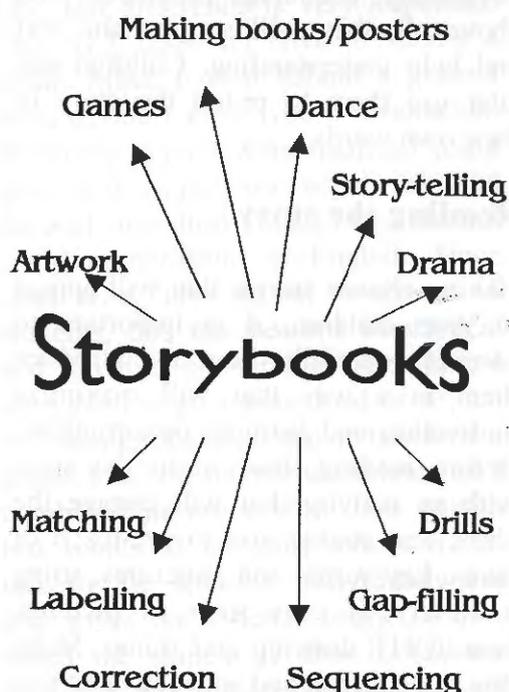
happen in it, building motivation and confidence.

In the early stages, the priority is developing listening and speaking skills, so encourage the children to participate wherever possible as you read the story together. On a first reading, this may just be miming some of the actions, but by a second or third reading, some of the class may be ready to join in with the dialogue or any parts of the story that are repeated several times.

If possible, try using a cassette/CD, as this gives the opportunity to hear English spoken by different voices, and listening to recorded stories alongside text can also be exploited to help predict, reinforce and retell.

After-reading

There are many activities that can be used to follow up reading, and teachers will recognise many of the ideas shown below.



These all cover a range of different tasks. Drama, for example, could involve mime, puppet play, writing/acting dialogues, and situational role-play as well as performance. To maximise learning, it is important for children to carry out as many activities as possible in pairs or small groups. Growing awareness of the importance of multi-sensory learning means we must also try to ensure that tasks appeal to all the senses, especially hearing, sight and movement.

Two key points to remember in connection with every activity are the need to:

- **personalise**
Find ways to relate material to the child's own experience

- **differentiate**
Every child is different, and the teacher's skill lies in matching the nature/level of the task to the child's learning needs. With the aid of a pen, scissors and white-out liquid you can adapt worksheets to give greater support to less confident children or provide a greater level of challenge for the more confident so that they can all experience a sense of achievement.

Whatever the task, in the words of Professor Lilian Katz, 'We are looking for more than a mechanical application of selected techniques. We are looking to achieve success which will encourage confidence and lead to a real eagerness to learn - a disposition for learning.'

Putting ideas into practice

The example below is taken from the *Cambridge Storybooks* series, which I have developed with CUP, and which consists of packs of specially chosen books together with a CD and Teacher's notes.

It demonstrates some of the ways these principles can work in the classroom, and may help you to think of other books and activities you could use with your own pupils.

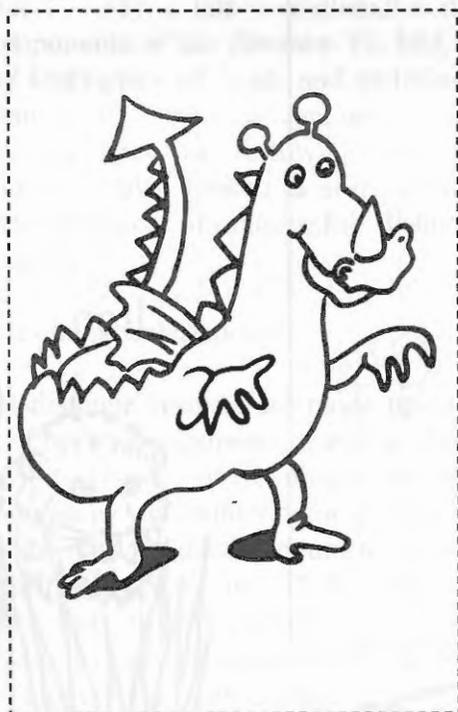
Looking for Dragons (Level 1)

Brown and Ruttle (2001) CUP

This very simple story for 4 - 6 year old beginners involves finding the animals hidden on each page, and has a strong rhythm with plenty of repetition.

Before reading

- Before the lesson, hide some of these dragon picture cards around the classroom.



- Ask, 'What can we do today?' Mime and say, 'Look for dragons.' Ask some of the children to look for the dragon picture cards and count them together.

Reading the story

- Read the book, for each page asking the children, 'What can you see?'
- Elicit the name of each animal, and ask the children to count them.
- Read the book again, encouraging the children to join in.

After reading

- Give out the worksheet on the next page and display a copy.
- Encourage the children to find and point to the crocodile. Repeat with the other animals. Some children may be ready to draw lines to match the words to the pictures, some to trace over the words. You could white-out the words under the pictures for the most confident children, and let them copy the names themselves if they are able.
- As an additional activity, maybe for revision, you could cut up lots of animal picture cards and hide them around the classroom. Let the children play a game, finding and counting them as in the pre-reading activity.

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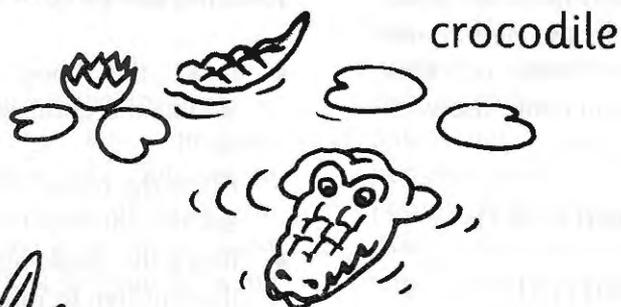
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Jean Glasberg is a teacher and teacher-trainer who has written and edited many books on teaching literacy skills to children, including Passports to Literacy (CUP 1997) Cornerstones for Writing (CUP 2002) Cambridge Storybooks (CUP 2001)

Look for the animals.



dragon



tiger

bear
crocodile
dragon
lion
monkey
tiger



monkey



lion



bear

Thoughts from a distance: MA in TEYL

Coralyn Bradshaw

As a graduate from the University of York's Distance MA in Teaching English to Young Learners, I felt that the IATEFL Conference 2002, held at York, would be an ideal place to share my thoughts and experiences with those who might be interested in pursuing a similar type of course. Whether separated by a few miles, or several continents away from the university, distance courses require a different approach to learning than the more traditional on campus course of study. My talk outlined the components of the distance YL MA at the University of York and examined some of the advantages and disadvantages of following such a course. I also looked at some of the characteristics of successful distance learners.

The course components

All distance courses are made up of a variety of components, ranging from various types of computer-assisted technology, in-country tutor groups, to on-campus residential courses. This is what the MA in TEYL at the University of York consists of:

- A two week Preparation Course is attended at York campus in July, at the beginning of the first and second year of the MA.
- Eight written assignments, to be written over a two-year period. These are of approximately 4,500 words in length each, with the final assignment taking the form of a piece of action research. The total

number of words submitted, therefore, is about 40, 000 and conforms to across the board MA regulations concerning requirements and standards. Each assignment, submitted approximately every three months, is supported by a module pack, which leads the students in an organic fashion through guided reading/ cassette and video tasks. The MA is very much specialised, and deals only with young learners, who are defined as learners aged between six and sixteen.

- Communication with a personal tutor is via email, fax, phone or regular mail. Access to your tutor is guaranteed and unlimited.
- The MA is awarded on the basis of continual assessment.

The Advantages.....?

Speaking from a personal point of view, financial considerations were a very big factor in choosing to do a distance course. The prospect of losing a year's salary, paying fees AND financing living costs had been delaying my decision to pursue an MA. However, with a commitment of between 13 and 18 hours of study per week, no necessity to leave friends, family and job behind, this MA offered me an appealing package!

Further advantages became more apparent as I worked through the assignments. The following struck me as being the most important:

The assignments quickly move from a theoretical focus to an increasingly practical and classroom-based focus. It is essential for students to have access to children's classrooms, although this does not necessarily have to be in the capacity of a teacher. The MA supports a reflective approach to teaching and culminates in a small piece of action research around the student's own working context. Being able to directly link my studies to my immediate working situation turned out to be a big bonus point.

The following are a selection of the eight MA module titles in order to present a flavour of the highly specialised course content: Understanding how Young Learners Learn / How Young Learners Learn Languages / Historical Overview of ELT and TEYL; Overview of Approaches and Methods in LT / Current Approaches to Teaching Young Learners; Curriculum in Practice; Assessing and Evaluating Young Learners; Young Learners Syllabus Design; Materials design and Evaluation.

The assignments are flexible and are designed to meet the needs of students from all backgrounds. Whether students work in EFL, ESL, primary or secondary contexts, as teachers, trainers, inspectors or administrators, the assignments can be interpreted freely to fit individuals' needs.

Students can choose when and how often they want to study during the week. There are no in-country lectures to attend, which can cause problems for those with variable working schedules or frequent travel commitments.

For those working in isolated locations with no library access, this does not

present a problem. A book list and relevant articles are supplied, which provide the core literature necessary to complete the course. Additional reading, where possible, will of course do you no harm!

Tutor access is very supportive, guaranteed and at the end of an email/fax/phone. Getting access to your tutor can be difficult when following a busy on-campus course. It seemed to me that this method of communication was very effective.

The two Preparation Courses were a tremendous help. Meeting the other participants and tutors, exchanging experiences and ideas, and preparing for the forthcoming assignments, helped to put the course into a concrete and enjoyable context. Making study buddies was highly recommended!

Continual assessment: Exams can be stressful events, and travelling to an examination centre can cause considerable inconvenience. A policy of continual assessment is appropriate to young learner methodology and is in harmony with current learning theory ... so let's practice what we preach!

Professional and personal development were the final advantages to become apparent. Students are encouraged throughout the course to explore their own development and examine their professional career paths. On graduating, students are invited to present and publish their action research papers at a Young Learner Seminar, held at York. The skills you use to succeed as a distance learner will serve you throughout life!

And the disadvantages...?

Let's face it...the bottom line is...
YOU DO IT ALONE!

If you are lucky, you may be part of a small group from your organisation, city or country, studying for the MA. However, more frequently, you will not have the face-to-face support offered by other participants, tutors, and on-campus facilities, such as libraries, technicians and leisure facilities. What this means is that a distance learner needs to learn to be resourceful. Anybody who has ever thought that completing a distance MA is less valid than a full-time course had better read the next sentence carefully:

DISTANCE STUDY DEMANDS MORE NOT LESS OF THE LEARNER

So what does this mean...?

It means that distance learners need to ask themselves an important question: "How important is being a student compared to the other things in my life?"

The answer to this question is crucial to being able to prioritise and manage one's time. Setting aside time for goal and priority setting in the form of a time management schedule, and then sticking to it, will reduce stress and allow a place for enjoying the process of learning.

It means making 'study buddies' on the Preparation Courses in York, and then keeping in touch by whatever means at your disposal, even if it's for a social chat. You may find that it's nice to know that some else really understands just how you are feeling and that you are not in fact alone!

It means asking questions. Use your tutor to check if you are unsure. Don't allow the distance to isolate you. Expect support and assistance. Your tutors understand the needs of distance learners.

It means paying attention to your health. There is a direct link between health, stress and performance. Check your diet and routines and see whether you can make any improvements ... Help yourself to help yourself!

Finally, it means having FUN! That means different things to different people, but if we look at the word recreation, it literally means to re-create. It takes self-discipline to study, but it also takes self discipline to stop and relax!

Doing an MA in TEYL can be fun and rewarding and doesn't have to involve the bank manager. If you are interested in reading more about what it takes to be a distance learner, try reading 'The Distance Learner's Guide' (ed. G P Connick, Prentice Hall). If you want to know more about the MA TEYL at the University of York, contact: The Secretary at efl2@york.ac.uk or The EFL Unit, The Language Teaching Centre, The University of York, Heslington York YO1 3DD

Coralyn Bradshaw is an ELT Primary Consultant and Teacher Trainer. She is based in Spain and has written Games and Activities Levels 1-4 in the Penguin Young Readers series: Pearson Education 2002

Email:

coralynbradshaw@hotmail.com

COMING SOON!

Next year, look out for *Storytelling in ELT*, an anthology of stories and teaching ideas edited by Eleanor Watts and Amos Paran. This will be IATEFL's free publication for 2003 and will be packed with exciting ideas for the young learner classroom.

Book reviews

Primary Activity Box
Nixon, C and Tomlinson, M.
CUP 2001

Reviewed by Beatriz Lupiano

Primary Activity Box is a resource book with photocopiable worksheets for teachers of Beginner and Lower Elementary children aged 5-11. It is best seen as a supplement to the coursebook, as a source of extra activities when you need to extend or revise a topic or language point. It is also, however, really useful "on those days when it is not a good idea to start a new topic" and for stand-in teachers, as the authors rightly point out.

The content ties in with any typical primary EFL syllabus; language points, functions and topics include the alphabet, numbers 1-100, colours, clothes, months, the human body, introductions and other basic social language, basic classroom and game language, describing people and places, possession, ability, etc. A feature I particularly like is the encouragement to use basic connectors such as "and" or "but" in some writing activities, and the explicit introduction/awareness raising of some frequent verb+noun collocations.

The book is divided into 9 sections with about 5 activities each. Each section places special emphasis on one aspect or attitude to language and learning: pronunciation, language play, problem solving, evaluation, communication practice...

There is a wide range of activity types, from puzzles and problems through songs, rhymes and games to

crosswords, word-searches and even more traditional types like "make and do", matching, information gap and surveys. There seems to be a good balance between "settlers" and "stirrers", and most activities try to cater for visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners alike.

Sublevels and age subgroups have been created and there is a fairly equal distribution of activities for each. Regarding levels, the authors have devised a three-fold classification: from those with few or no reading skills and knowledge of only basic vocabulary to those with a relatively firm grasp of a wider range of lexical groups and "the ability to use grammatical structures more competently as tools for reading, writing and speaking". Age subgroups tend to include 5-7, 7-9, 8-11, though there are variations depending on the different activities demands.

The activities are motivating and challenging but also straightforward enough so that it's easy for children to carry them out and see what they're learning. This last feature is also made clear to teachers by means of not only clear step-by-step instructions, but also at-a-glance summaries on the margin of each instructions page. As expected, these summaries include details regarding time and preparation needed, type of activity and dynamics involved (most activities fall into either individual or pair work categories), target age, level, language and skills focus. It is always borne in mind that these are just guidelines, since all groups differ in their overall development, interests and language abilities.

Pre-task and optional follow-up suggestions are given, as well as cross-referencing to other activities in the book that practise related language. As most main activities take an average of 20-30 minutes, this provides the opportunity of having one - or even two strung together - lessons at the tip of your fingers. A nice feature is that most activities end with a visible outcome, which probably gives students a clear sense of completion and adds to their awareness of what is being practised. Teachers' instructions also include how to explain the procedure to students, thus making things easier for less experienced teachers. Instructions are laid out in a down-to-earth manner, with potential problems and objections anticipated and explained.

I particularly like the work on pronunciation, which exceeds the section devoted to it. Most work on this area focuses on contrasting and rhyming sounds and has an element of fun. For example, one of the activities asks learners to go from start to finish by following words with the sound /e/. Not as easy as it seems... Rhymes and songs, though not solely devoted to it, also include some pronunciation work.

Some other interesting features include an easily spotted "noise symbol" in the instructions of activities that tend to generate a lot of excitement and noise, some templates for teachers to adapt the activities, and a series of photos illustrating the written descriptions of somewhat intricate rhyme actions.

The introduction is very clear and includes sound and sensible advice for less experienced teachers with respect to classroom dynamics, noise management, material storage, teaching and learning, preparation, competition handling, and use of songs and rhymes.

In short, I would recommend this book to both experienced and less experienced teachers. The activities are fun and varied, effective, easy to follow and explain, they are suitable to the age range and levels suggested and require little or no preparation or materials. Students' crayons are the most often used materials. Access to photocopying facilities is, however, almost a must, though input for some activities can be easily copied from the board by children instead of them being given photocopies.

The book comes with an accompanying cassette which I have not had the chance to listen to, but (from the authors' description) seems worth having: songs and rhymes are recorded in a variety of ways to allow for singing along, chorus repetition, karaoke, etc. It's not strictly essential, however, as tapescripts for dictations are provided, and the tunes are fairly well known.

Activities are suitable for small groups, and most could work with large classes as well, since they involve mostly individual or pairwork settings. Student autonomy is encouraged throughout, especially for the most challenging activities.

To me, this book's best qualities are its attention to pronunciation, the fact that problem solving tasks are sufficiently and adequately challenging, and the all-pervasive playful attitude to language in it: the activities are not just fun to do; they involve handling language for fun, playing with it - which, to me, helps to develop intrinsic motivation, so invaluable in children's future learning.

Beatriz Lupiano has taught English to YLs in Argentina for about 7 years and is currently doing a 3-year specialization course in Phonology. She also maintains the Web Resources section of the YLSIG's web site and is moderator of the YL Discussion List.

Arts and Crafts with children

Andrew Wright

OUP 2001

Reviewed by Christopher Etchells

Arts and Crafts with Children by Andrew Wright is a welcome addition to OUP's *Primary Resource Books for Teachers* series. It is aimed at teachers of 4 – 12 year old beginner and elementary students while "children who are more proficient in English will enjoy doing the activities at a richer linguistic level."

The author has a background in art and English Language teaching and is well known for his humane and creative approach to EFL. As someone who continues to work at the chalk face of language teaching, drawing his inspiration from his pupils and his own children, we would expect to find practical, well-tested activities with universal application. The book does not disappoint.

The book is roughly A4 in size and contains about 50 activities organised into 8 sections: Three-dimensional activities; Puppets, masks and manikins; Drawing by looking; Drawing from imagination; Colours; Design; Technology. Each activity includes level, age, aims, time, materials, preparation, classroom instructions and follow-up. The activities are illustrated with simple line drawings by the author that give the book a homely feel. A helpful Contents section contains the target age, classroom time and linguistic aim of each activity making it easy for teachers to dip into the book as appropriate. There is a very useful 12-page Introduction containing a thorough rationale as well as useful practical suggestions. Wright claims that "the activities require no more skill than is needed to make a cup of coffee, or boil

an egg...It is not so much a personal artistic skill which is required, but an openness to what art is and can be." For this, the Introduction is required reading.

Opening the book at random, the activity 'Clay Animal' promises to practise vocabulary for parts of the body and for proportions and shapes. Materials required are modelling clay, aprons, protective plastic or old newspapers (for the work surface), wet cloths and a bucket of water. Clearly a little more is expected than might be found in a standard EFL classroom, but no more than would be expected in a mainstream junior schoolroom. Each child is asked to close their eyes and play with the material (a nice touch, that, emphasising feel by restricting sight). The teacher asks questions – 'Has your animal got a big head or a little head?' etc. The instructions suggest various ways in which language can be teased out from the activity. They also give simple technical advice on making good joints between the different parts of the body of the animal, using pencils and coins to add design features, etc. Finally the animals are painted and left to dry. Two follow-ups are suggested, a simple 'describe and identify' activity and a guided reading/writing description activity. There is a link to an appendix which gives further advice on the use of clay and other materials.

As a complete non-expert (my eggs usually end up over-boiled) I found the activity wholly convincing with its combination of practical advice, linguistic awareness and solid rationale. Anyone who is interested in educating the whole child rather than just training a class to speak English should enjoy this book.

Christopher Etchells is Director of The English Country School.

Highlights from the YL discussion list

Sandie Mourão

This is my third and final report as group moderator of the Young Learner SIG internet discussion list. By the time we all read this, I will have handed over to Beatriz Lupiano. Beatriz has been doing fantastic things with our YLSIG website, and I am certain she will be able to link both responsibilities and do an excellent job as the new discussion group moderator. So, a warm welcome to Beatriz!

The discussion list has continued to be fairly dynamic, used by many members and non-members as a forum for discussion and also for information and support. Our organised discussions continued from February through to June. Beatriz has made summaries of these discussions available to us all on our website. If you log onto <http://www.countryschool.com/ylsig> you can read the summaries, or check out the following URL address for archived messages:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/younglearners/>

Discussions over the last five months were:

February: Discussion 5
Reading and writing skills
fielded by Wendy Superfine

March: Discussion 6
Designing appropriate curricula for young learners
fielded by Rebecca Tompsett

May: Discussion 7

Use of mother tongue in young learner classes

fielded by Gordon Lewis

June: Discussion 8

Mixed ability in young learner classes

Debbie Smith was kind enough to send input in late June, but there were no responses. I'd like to thank Debbie for taking time to do this and hope that we can maybe revisit this topic?

All themes provided excellent discussion potential and I'd like to regurgitate a couple of points raised by members during these discussions.

Discussion 5, fielded by Wendy, among other things, covered difficulties encountered by children when confronted with a different written script. Teachers, especially native speakers, tend to write in print; the children on the other hand write cursive script. There were a variety of responses from teachers who have worked in different countries, e.g. Portugal, France, Italy, Spain, Japan and the UK. We had examples of the methods used, how to help children using different forms of script and making/using dictionaries with YLs.

Discussion 6, fielded by Rebecca, sadly generated little participation. However, Rebecca's topic was fascinating, questioning HOW we approach teaching. "The question has become not

so much on what basis to create a list of items to be taught as how to create an optimal environment to facilitate the processes through which language is learned" (Tricia Hedge in *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* 2000). One of the very interesting things to arise from this small discussion was a list of children's competencies shared with us by Rebecca Jones working in Spain, which follow:

NON-LINGUISTIC COMPETENCIES

Social

The ability to:

- listen to, support and learn from each other
- concentrate throughout a demonstration or a given task
- collaborate and cooperate with others: taking turns (waiting patiently), sharing ideas and materials, playing fair, encouraging and helping
- organise and order tasks and equipment/materials
- understand and follow a classroom procedure or routine
- show respect for other students/the teacher and their property (ie not pushing, grabbing, taking things without permission)
- take responsibility for actions and property

Affective

The ability to:

- express generosity
- express empathy and use positive problem resolution strategies (ie. make room for a child who can't see the story book or explain the

instructions again to another student who looks confused)

- compromise with a smile
- identify, express and distinguish between different emotions and manage their own emotional reactions within the class
- embrace positivity and enthusiasm in the face of a challenge
- feel confident enough to take risks in order to learn more

Physical

The ability to:

- coordinate movements (including eye movements)
- express meaning and feelings through appropriate body language (and read this in others)
- use their voices to express emotions and intentions through changing intonation, pitch, volume, speed, rhythm etc.

PSYCHO-LINGUISTIC COMPETENCIES

The ability to:

- identify and state their individual and team/class needs (eg *I can't do this because my pencil's broken; therefore I need to ask for a sharpener or a new pencil* - as opposed to doing nothing or just taking another child's)
- asking for permission, help, explanations when appropriate
- evaluate own behaviour, strengths and weaknesses (ie know what they find hard or easy, what they enjoy, whether they have behaved appropriately or not etc.)

- use and develop their powers of deduction, prediction, consequential logic etc.
- be creative, imaginative and flexible in their approaches
- be inquisitive (research suggests that these kinds of positive attitudes can not only be encouraged, they can be taught!)

Discussion 7, fielded by Gordon, was a very energetic week. There were lots of responses and Gordon skilfully directed thoughts and opinions to get the maximum from the contributions. Theories about using MT in the classroom have changed quite dramatically over the last decade or so and Gordon requested that we define a differentiated approach to its use.

Experiences and opinions came from all over - Europe, USA, Japan, India ... We discussed using MT to promote the efficiency of learning, for classroom management purposes and when framing a topic. Opinions were exchanged about code-switching and the importance of Krashen's theories on comprehensible input. We had some comments comparing the native speaker and non-native speaker teacher and the

importance of understanding the influence of the mother tongue on foreign language learning. A very rich discussion.

I'd like to thank all of you who have participated in these discussions. I really enjoy reading what participants have to say from places so far apart. The discussion group provides us with an ideal forum for sharing reflections about teaching and learning.

In a recent YL SIG committee meeting, the continuation of these organised discussions was brought up. General chitchat has diminished, which is a pity, as this too is an important aspect of the discussion group. We unanimously felt that despite this, and the instances of failing participants during discussions, we would all like to continue along similar lines. I hope you all agree that it has been a year of discovery and we have another year to travel through!

Sandie Mourão lives and works in Portugal as a YL teacher and freelance teacher trainer. She is especially interested in the role of the generalist classroom teacher in FL teaching, storytelling and materials design.

FUTURE EVENTS

The coming year promises some exciting events for teachers of young learners. The 37th **International Annual IATEFL Conference** will be held in Brighton from 22-26 April with its usual track of talks and workshops of particular interest to teachers of children.

On 22nd April there will be a pre-conference event focusing on **Issues in Teacher Education for Teachers of Young Learners**. Among the subjects under discussion will be emotional intelligence, learner styles, multiple intelligences and the effect of affect in the training context for teachers of YLs. Details can be obtained from IATEFL at the address given on page 32.

YOUNG LEARNERS SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP (YL SIG)

The Young Learners Special Interest Group was initiated in 1986 and has now evolved into a flourishing world-wide network of teachers of children and teenagers up to 17 years.

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 bi-annual 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. Next year there will be a free publication for all members of IATEFL called *Storytelling in ELT* which should be of particular interest to teachers of young learners.

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 infant, primary and secondary practice as well as teacher training issues. On 22nd April 2003 there will be a pre-conference event on *Issues in Teacher Education for Teachers of Young Learners*.

Internet discussion list A lively forum to exchange ideas, discuss key issues and keep fully up to date with everything that's happening in the world of YL English language teaching.

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

IATEFL

3 Kingsdown Chambers, Whitstable, Kent, CT5 2FL

Tel: +44 (0)1227 276528

Fax: +44 (0)1227 274415

Email: generalenquiries@iatefl.org

IATEFL Website: <http://www.iatefl.org>

YL SIG Website: <http://www.countryschool.com/younglearners.htm>

YLSIG Committee Members

Joint SIG Co-ordinators

Sandie Mourão, Portugal
nettlehouse@mail.telepac.pt

Andy Jackson, UK
Andy.Jackson@bell-centres.com

YL Web Site Manager

Christopher Etchells, UK
etchells@countryschool.com

Newsletter Editors

Carol Read, Spain
c.read@arrakis.es

Eleanor Watts, UK
e.watts@blueyonder.co.uk

Events Co-ordinators

Debbie Smith, UK
Gordon Lewis, USA

Discussion List Moderator

Beatriz Lupiano, Argentina

The newsletter is published twice a year. We welcome contributions or suggestions for future newsletters on any aspects of teaching English to Young Learners up to 17 years.

Advertisements Rates*

Back cover:	£160
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Half page:	£80
Quarter page:	£50

*Please note that there is a 5% reduction in our advertising rates for three advertisements in succession.

MA in Teaching English to Young Learners (by Distance)

The English as a Foreign Language Unit of the Department of Educational Studies, University of York, was the first unit to run this highly specialised MA in TEYL in Britain. The course starts in July of each year (or in-country at other times of the year).

This is a 2-year course comprising 8 multimedia self-study modules, plus participation in an annual 2-week preparatory course at York. Students can choose to focus on one of the following age groups: 6-11 years, 11-16 years, or 6-16 years.

Assessment is by eight module assignments over the course, some of which require the carrying out of small-scale classroom-based research projects. Emphasis is on the linking of theory and practice, making extensive use of material from authentic classes. Students are enabled to gain a full understanding of:

- how foreign languages are acquired by young learners
- how to create the most suitable classroom environment for young learner acquisition of languages
- how to approach curriculum and syllabus design
- how to design and create materials for the young learner classroom
- how to manage professional development in the field of TEYL
- how to design, carry out and interpret outcomes of small-scale Action Research
- how to manage assessment and evaluation of TEYL

"This MA has been extremely valuable for me, especially because of its practical nature. All the modules have directly influenced my day-to-day working practice. I think that the programme structure, documentation and supervision have been excellent"

Recent MA in TEYL Graduate

"This course has enabled me to extend my professional development in an unexpectedly enjoyable mode. Whilst not denying that the course was very rigorous and challenging, because so much of it involves practical application and reflection, it melds theory and practice in a usable and coherent way"

Recent MA in TEYL Graduate

For further information contact:

The MA Secretary, EFL Unit,
University of York, York, YO10 5DD, UK.
Telephone: 44 (0)1904 432483 Fax: 44 (0)1904 432481
e-mail: efl2@york.ac.uk

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/ltc/efl/courses/ma/mateyl.htm>